WRITINGS OF W. W. FEREDAY

by W. W. Fereday

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by W.W. Fereday, compiled for study and devotional reading.

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S. Eternal Punishment

Eternal Punishment.

W W Fereday.

HOW MAN WAS MADE.

We have two things here: First, the formation of the body; then the impartation of life by the inbreathing of God. Man has, in consequence of this, a character of life within him that is not possessed by the lower creatures of God's hand. He holds a very special place in God's universe. Angels are spirits; beasts, etc., have soul and body; man is distinguished from them all by the possession of spirit, and soul, and body (Psalms 104:4; Genesis 1:20-21, Genesis 1:24; 1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Constitutionally, then, man is amenable to the judgement of God, being a creature with great responsibilities. Morally also, man is amenable to judgement because he is a sinner. The fall, as described in Genesis 3:1-24, is no allegory (whatever some perverse persons may say), but a humiliating fact. Who would pretend that man is today what God made him at the first? Do not the experiences of every hour assure us that our race has met with some fearful moral catastrophe? The truth is, that man has revolted against his Creator, and has, in consequence, filled the earth with sin and misery. In Luke 5:31-32 our Lord speaks of sin in a two-fold way — as a moral disease requiring a divine physician, and as a moral offence calling for repentance on the part of the offender. THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD.

We come now to our second question: "What is the judgement of God?" Here we must distinguish between what is called the intermediate state, and the eternal state. Hades describes the one, and Gehenna — the lake of fire — the other. The bottomless pit has nothing to do with men; it is a place of punishment for rebellious angels only. We have a solemn view of the intermediate state granted to us in Luke 16:19-31, in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. I will briefly indicate some of its features. First, there is consciousness there. Memory was lively with the rich man, and he was capable of describing his painful sensations. Second, there is suffering there. If it be asked, how can spirits suffer? I need only draw attention to the fact that Satan is said to be "tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20:10), and he is a spirit, most assuredly. Spirits therefore are capable of suffering. Third, conditions are fixed there. Notice Abraham's words: "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they that would pass hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence." No hint was dropped, either by Abraham or the rich man, that ultimately the sufferer would obtain deliverance, nor even that he would at some future epoch escape from his woe by the extinction of his being. In this connection, how deeply solemn are the words in John 3:36 : "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." Fourth, prayers cannot be answered there. The rich man gave utterance to two simple requests, one for himself, and one for his living brethren, only to get the refusal of both. When he might have prayed to God, he had no desire to do so; in Hades it was

too late for God to hearken to his supplications.

WHAT DOES "ETERNAL" MEAN?

All this relates to the intermediate state; that is, the condition of the lost from the moment of the dissolution of the body until the judgement of the great white throne. Let us now consider their eternal condition. The question is sometimes asked, "What does 'eternal' mean?" 2 Corinthians 4:18 will answer the question for the simplest mind. "The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." "Eternal" is thus the opposite of "temporal." "Temporal" means for a time only; "eternal" refers to that to which no time limit can be assigned.

We will now briefly examine some of the most important passages of Scripture bearing on the eternal condition of the ungodly. Turn first to Mark 9:47-48: "If thine eye offends thee, pluck it out; it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire (Gehenna); where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." One need have no contention with any who claim that this is figurative language; what I desire to impress upon you all is that the conditions described are abiding. The undying worm and the unquenchable fire mean nothing if those upon whom they are inflicted ever pass from under their terrible power. Turn next to Revelation 14:10-11. Concerning the worshippers of the Beast, we read: "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of His anger; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day and night" (R.V.).

Such language is too plain to require much comment. "No rest" suggests eternal consciousness, and reminds one of our Lord's expressive words, many times repeated, "Weeping and gnashing of teeth." Lest any have a difficulty as to the precise force of the words "for ever and ever," I would point out that they occur twenty times in the New Testament: sixteen times they are applied to God, His being, reign, and worship: once they are used concerning the reign of the saints: and three times concerning the punishment of the lost. What the words mean in one passage they must of necessity mean in every other passage in which they occur; thus the very being of God, the blessedness of believers, and the torment of unbelievers, all continue, or come to an end together. Some will perhaps say, "Then immortality is only a curse to many of our race." But is this a reasonable objection against immortality itself? Riches are a curse to some men; education to others; but who would be so foolish as to declaim against these things because some men know not how to use them aright.

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT. (NOTES OF AN ADDRESS.) "As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and Judgement to come, Felix trembled" (Acts 24:25).

BEFORE going to the heart of our subject for this evening, I desire to draw your attention to the faithful dealing of Paul the Apostle with the Roman governor Felix. He had been brought up from his prison in order to have an interview with the governor and his wife. It was a capital opportunity for him to press the injustice of his imprisonment, and to plead for his liberty. Instead of doing so, he used the occasion, as a devoted soul-seeker, in dealing earnestly and pointedly with Felix and Drusilla about their souls' condition. Mark the effect produced. "As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come, Felix trembled." Note this fact well, that judgement to come,

as preached by Paul, was something for a wicked man to tremble at. The Revisers use an even stronger term in their Version: "he was terrified." Is it always so at the present time? Or is it not a fact that God's judgement of sin is frequently presented to-day in a fashion that is rather soothing than alarming to the consciences of the wicked?

I propose to deal with three questions this evening. First, "Is there that in man which renders him amenable to the judgement of God?" Second, "What is the judgement of God?" Third, "What is the way to escape from the judgement of God?"

MAN NOT A BEAST. To the first of these questions the answer must be, "Yes, there is that in man, both constitutionally and morally, which renders him amenable to God's judgement." I should reply differently if the question were put as to a dog. The dog has no existence apart from the body, nor is he a moral being, with responsibilities concerning which he must give an account to his Creator. Scripture everywhere assumes that man has that within him which does not die when the body dies. Look at Matthew 10:28. The Lord Jesus, in His charge to His disciples, said, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." No one can well misunderstand this language. Enemies, in their hatred to the Gospel, might kill the messengers of Christ; but, though the body be thus destroyed, there still remained the soul, altogether beyond the reach of creature harm. Look also at Luke 16:19-31. There three men are shown to us, holding conversation together in the unseen world after earthly conditions had been left behind for ever. Abraham, Lazarus, and the rich man were all dead persons as far as this world was concerned; but they had by no means ceased to exist. To these passages let us add Ecclesiastes 12:7 : "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it? Here body and soul are carefully distinguished the one from the other. Matthew 22:31-32 is a very striking passage in this connection. In replying to the quibble of the Sadducees about the resurrection, our Lord said: "As touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." The allusion is to the incident of the burning bush. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had long been dead as regards this world, when Jehovah said to Moses, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." The Lord hangs His whole argument on the divine use of the present tense, reasoning that God could not proclaim Himself the God of men who had altogether ceased to be. Though dead, they were yet living, "for all live unto Him". I would remind you also, that Peter, in a much-discussed passage, speaks of the men of Noah's day as "spirits in prison," though some 2,500 years had elapsed since the deluge (1 Peter 3:19-20). Those who suffered under that divine visitation had plainly not passed out of existence when Peter wrote his first epistle.

MAN'S CONSTITUTION.

Man's constitution is defined in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 as "spirit, and soul, and body." (Observe the order, for careless folk frequently reverse it when making use of this text). Our English word "spirit" represents the Hebrew word "Ruach," and the Greek word "Pneuma." The spirit of man is the seat of his intelligence and judgement, and for this reason "Ruach" is sometimes rendered "mind and understanding." "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" (1 Corinthians 2:11). These words show plainly the proper quality and functions of the human spirit. Our English word "soul" is the translation of the Hebrew word "Nephesh," and the Greek

word "Psuche." The soul, as distinguished from the spirit, is the seat of the affections and desires. Various Scripture passages show that the soul loves, hates, and lusts. The body is, of course, the outer vessel by means of which the spirit and the soul manifest themselves. The word "mortal" is frequently applied in the Scriptures to the body (Romans 8:11; 2 Corinthians 4:11, etc.); but the body is the only part of men to which the term is ever applied by God. What is the significance of the divine inbreathing recorded in Genesis 2:7? The birds, fishes, and beasts were called into being by the word of God, but when the moment came for the creation of the man, something very different appears. "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

THREE SOLEMN TEXTS.

Suffer me now to link together three exceedingly solemn passages in the closing chapters of the Book of Revelation. Some principles of great importance are contained in them. Let us read first, Revelation 19:20. This verse speaks of the doom of the two great leaders of the coalition that will confront the Lamb at His public appearing. "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone." This is very terrible, without passing through death and resurrection as other men, and without any manifestation before the great white throne, these arch-enemies of Christ are dispatched to the lake of fire. Having signalised themselves in wickedness, the Lord signalises them in judgement. But turn now to Revelation 20:10. A thousand years have passed since the awful incident described in Revelation 19:20, during which the kingdoms of the world have been in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now see what happens. "And the devil . . . was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." Observe, please, that though various Scripture passages speak of the false prophet as "consumed," "destroyed," and "slain" (2 Thessalonians 2:8; Isaiah 11:4), both he and his associate, the Beast, are still existing in the lake of fire, a thousand years after being sent there. To be "consumed," "destroyed," etc., is clearly not extinction of being. Observe also the word "they," added by the Revisers in their translation. The meaning is, that not only will Satan be tormented for ever and ever, but the Beast and the false prophet also. They will thus never cease to be. Satan is sometimes spoken of as if he were king in hell. This is a complete mistake. Far from exercising any authority there, he will be the greatest sufferer of all, being the greatest offender in the universe of God. To these passages add Revelation 20:1, where it is written, "Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Note the order: First, the Beast and the false prophet; then, a thousand years later, Satan; finally, after the judgement of the great white throne, the lost in general are cast into the lake of fire. Truly, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). THE WAY OF ESCAPE. This brings us to our third question: "What is the way of escape from the judgement of God?" That there is a way of escape divinely provided is unquestionable, seeing that God has said: "Have I any pleasure at all its the death of the wicked?" (Ezekiel 18:23). Has He not also told us that He "desires all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth"? (1 Timothy 2:4) . The heart of God yearns over the erring children of men; fain would He welcome all to His bosom, and imprint upon every cheek the kiss of divine forgiveness. Hebrews 9:27-28 sets before us God's grand principle of salvation and blessing. "And as it is appointed unto men once to

die, but after this the judgement: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many: and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time apart from sin unto salvation." Sins; death; judgement ! Three terrible realities, which are all my own as one born of Adam's ruined race. But over against my sins God has set Christ's one offering. What matchless grace! The costly sacrifice of Calvary has made it possible for God to take every humble and contrite sinner to His heart for ever. The foulest sinner may be pardoned and cleansed in virtue of the Saviour's precious blood. Then over against death and judgement God has set Christ's second coming to complete the blessing of His people, when the body as well as the spirit shall experience the sweetness of God's salvation.

God will not proclaim these glad tidings for ever. Even His long-suffering has a limit. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). "To-day, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7-8). Let no man be mistaken in this great matter. Salvation is proclaimed earnestly to all while in this world; when the border-line is passed, salvation's amazing story of divine love and grace is heard no more.

We commenced with Paul; we will close with him. He could affirm in the presence of those who were familiar with his ministry: "I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27). No one-sided preacher was he. With delight he told men of the love of God, but with all due solemnity he also warned men of the wrath of God. It was this faithful man who penned the words: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3). To such a question there is absolutely no answer.

Chapter 2

God's Glad Tidings (Gospel Addresses)

God's Glad Tidings (Gospel Addresses)

W W Fereday

To the reader

To the reader

The little volume of addresses, entitled "The Old, Old Story," has been so much appreciated that it seems desirable to issue another volume similar in character. If these pages are used of God to help anxious souls into peace and blessing, or if they afford suggestions to those who preach the Word, the writer will be truly thankful.

Chapter 4

THE SWORD OF GOD.

THE SWORD OF GOD.

"He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim and a flaming sword." — Genesis 3:24.

"Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is My fellow, saith Jehovah of hosts." — Zechariah 13:7.

&";Out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword." — Revelation 1:15.

There is a tender side, and there is also a stern side, to the divine character, for God is both light and love. Romans 11:22 bids us "behold therefore the goodness and severity of God." But who is competent to declare either? Who is able to sound the depths of the matchless statement that "God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son? (John 3:16). Or who can adequately gauge the meaning of the solemn warning, "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever?" (Revelation 14:11) .

Men are always apt to think of God with a bias in their minds. Some perceive the tender side of His character and imagine that because God is love there cannot possibly be an eternal hell; others again fail to see the tender side at all, and think of God like the man in Matthew 25:24, who said: "Lord, I know Thee that Thou art a hard man, reaping where Thou hast not sown, and gathering where Thou hast not strewed." Neither the one nor the other really know God in their hearts.

Our theme just now is the sword of God. The first mention of it in Scripture is in Genesis 3:24. The Lord God placed at the gate of Eden, a Cherubim and a flaming sword. This marked the close of the first chapter in the history of man — a sorrowful close surely. The Creator made man for His pleasure. He endowed him richly, placing him in the most delightful surroundings, and granting him manifestations of Himself. It was needful that some test should be imposed, in order that it might be seen whether this responsible being would continue in faithfulness or not; the test took the form of a divine prohibition of one tree. Against this, the man, led by the woman, who was herself deceived by Satan, rebelled, and thus fell from his first estate. He could no longer be suffered to continue in the garden, and was accordingly expelled, though not until words of hope were sounded in his ear in the curse upon the serpent. The Cherubim and the sword were then placed at the cast of Eden to keep the way of the tree of life. Man has thus forfeited all claim to life. Life — eternal life — can only now be had as the gift of sovereign grace. What a moment for the heart of God when He found Himself compelled to draw His sword against His favoured creature man, posting also at the garden gate the administrators of His judgement!

But we pass to Zechariah 13:7 : "Awake, O sword, against My shepherd." Who is the speaker? Jehovah of hosts, the God of the flaming sword. Of whom is He speaking? Of His beloved Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We have thus the sword of God directed against the sinner in Genesis 3:1-24 and against Christ in Zechariah 13:1-9. Mark how this passage speaks of the person and sufferings of the Lord Jesus. Jehovah calls Him "My fellow." He is thus divine. In no

sense and at no time was He ever inferior to Him. "I and My Father are one," said He in the days of His flesh — one in majesty, power, wisdom and glory. But Jehovah of hosts calls Him "the man." He became this in His grace — the seed of the woman, that He might bruise the serpent's head.

We thus think of the Saviour as uniting Godhead and manhood in His one sacred person. But He must needs suffer; for incarnation could not of itself suffice to procure our salvation. So we hear the awful words, "Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith Jehovah of hosts; smite the shepherd." This was at Calvary. There the good Shepherd did not merely risk His life for the sheep, like David when he pursued the lion and the bear, but He laid down His life. Well knowing all that would befall Him in this world, He came from heaven's glory, and did not pause in His downward course until He closed His eyes in death upon Calvary's tree. What a moment it was when God felt Himself obliged to sheath His sword in the heart of the Son of His love! But in the hour that He was thus smitten of God He wrought a full and efficacious atonement for our sin and guilt.

In Revelation 1:15 we have a sword proceeding out of the mouth of Christ. This time the sword is directed against the foes of God and His Son. The language is necessarily symbolical, as occurring in the book of Revelation, but its meaning is plain enough. It is judgement executed at His command. When will this be? When He rises up from the throne upon which He is now seated, and comes forth in His majesty and might. Revelation 1:11-20 gives us a graphic description beforehand of that terrible day.

It is God's way before drawing His sword to sound the trumpet. Turn, please, to Ezekiel 33:4-5, and you will see this plainly. "Whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come; and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet and took not warning;" etc. Thus before God destroyed the earth by water, He sounded the warning trumpet by means of Noah: and in our own time, ere the last stroke falls, His trumpet resounds in the Gospel call. Will you not heed it, and seek salvation while you may? "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid?" (Amos 3:6). Will you not be afraid, and flee from the wrath to come? Does the Gospel trumpet sound in your ears in vain? I conclude by quoting Proverbs 2:1 : "He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." God grant this may not be your doom!

Chapter 5

TWO GREAT QUESTIONS.

TWO GREAT QUESTIONS.

"What hast thou done?" — Genesis 4:10.

"What think ye of Christ?" — Matthew 22:42.

It has frequently been remarked that there are two great questions concerning which God is dealing with the children of men — the sin question and the Son question. Both are before us in these passages of Scripture. With neither the one nor the other do men care to burden themselves. Gladly would they shelve them altogether. It is the business of the preacher to arouse men's consciences both as to sin and as to God's beloved Son.

We have the question of sin raised in Genesis 4:10 : "What hast thou done?" True, the words were addressed to Cain by the Lord God after the murder of his brother Abel. But the challenge comes home to us all. Let us review our lives in the light of God. We have spent so many years in this world — 20, 30, 40 or more, as the case may be. They have been years of responsibility to Him who created us. But what have we done? If it be asked what we should have done, and how our lives should have been regulated, our Lord's words in Luke 10:27 supply the answer. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself."

There is no mistaking such language as this. Every nook and cranny of our moral being should be filled with devotion to God, and from this should flow unselfish love to all others. But "what hast thou done?" Who amongst us would dare to affirm that he has so lived? What then? Romans 3:22 puts us all in our place: "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." As the Prayer Book expresses it: "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us."

Some will doubtless affirm that they are not so bad as others. So said the Pharisee of Luke 18:1-43. But the question still remains, Have you sinned at all? I have lying before me a curious calculation cut from the pages of a magazine. One sin in thought, one in word, and one in deed, committed daily, amounts to 10,950 sins in ten years, 21,900 sins in twenty years, and so on. Thus the youth of 20 has 21,900 sins standing to his debit in the book of God, reckoning upon the low basis of one sin in thought, one in word, and one in deed daily. 21,900 sins! This is a pretty serious matter is it not? Young man, is it not time for you to seek divine pardon?

Someone will perhaps say: "I wish you would change your tune, sir. Why do you so persistently bring forward this question of sin?" Herod doubtless said something of the same sort to John the Baptist. The King frequently sent for the great preacher, but his one text was: "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." The imperfect tense in the Greek of Mark 6:18 shows this to have been John's habitual theme with the wicked monarch. One of Charles II's chaplains, who was wont to sternly denounce sin, is said to have been warned by the King to alter his manner of preaching.

The faithful chaplain replied: "I will, your Majesty; when you alter your manner of living." The guilt of sin is the first divine lesson every man has to learn. Until this has been learnt no other lesson is possible.

We come now to the second great question: "What think ye of Christ?" Observe, please, the context of the passage. Our blessed Lord had been beset with cavilling questions from Sadducees, Pharisees, and lawyers. He had silenced them every one; not only giving direct answers to their inquiries, but making home thrusts at their consciences also. When they had said their last word, His opportunity came, and He turned upon them thus: "What think ye of Christ?"

This is a question altogether out of the ordinary, for every man's eternal future depends upon the answer which his heart gives thereto. The question of the Son is inter-woven in a remarkable manner with the question of sin. We shall see this presently. Some think of Him as a wonderful teacher. They say that if men would only live according to the principles inculcated in the Sermon on the Mount we should soon have an ideal condition of society. Others think of Him as an example. They speak of His life in the highest terms, and express their conviction that all who follow His example can never go far wrong. All this sounds very excellent. Surely men who speak thus must think highly of Christ!

But if the Son of God is no more than a teacher or exemplar, of what benefit is He to me a sinner? I ask the question with all reverence. His life and teaching rebuke, but do not help me in the smallest degree. "What think ye of Christ?" Let us hear John the Baptist's account of Him. As to His person, he says: "He it is who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose" (John 1:27). Truly human, yet truly divine; greater than the greatest of the prophets. As to His character, we hear John saying to Him in Matthew 3:14 : "I have need to be baptised of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" All others who came to John at Jordan had sins to confess, but not this One. As to His work, let us listen to John once more: "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). This means a propitiatory sacrifice. Now listen to Paul as he expresses himself concerning God's Christ. As to His person, he says: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for by Him were all things created; . . . and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" (Colossians 1:15-17). To Paul He was thus the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. As to His work, hear the apostle in 1 Timothy 1:15 : "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

In the eyes of both John and Paul the Christ was thus the divine Son of God, who stooped from Godhead glory to the death of the cross in order to make atonement for human sin and guilt. Only those who regard Him thus in faith have true thoughts concerning Him.

What think ye of Christ? All manner of sin may be forgiven. The blood of the Lamb is sufficient to cleanse the reddest stains. But the rejection of Him is unpardonable. "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the Only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

Chapter 6

THE ASS AND THE LAMB.

THE ASS AND THE LAMB.

"Every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck, and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem." — Exodus 13:13

The instructions here are of a remarkable character, and they are repeated in Exodus 34:20. To call a man "an ass" would be the reverse of complimentary, and yet in these passages Jehovah indicates an analogy between the firstborn of an ass and the firstborn of man, for both had to be redeemed in the selfsame way. So serious a suggestion demands our earnest consideration.

First, let us see how the ass of Scripture is described. We shall then be able to say how far this animal is the representative of ourselves. To begin with, it fell into the category of unclean beasts. To be accounted clean, an animal must divide the hoof and chew the cud (Leviticus 11:26). The ass does not belong to this class! Is man a clean creature, or an unclean in the eyes of God? Long ago Bildad asked: "How can man be justified with God? Or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? "Listen also to Job's pitiful wail: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one" (Job 25:4; Job 14:4). Then hear David's broken-hearted confession: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalms 51:5). These men evidently had a deep sense of their own moral uncleanness. Now notice how Isaiah, speaking representatively, describes the condition of his nation: "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Not only did the prophet thus declare the evil of others; in an earlier chapter he says of himself: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 64:6; Isaiah 6:5). It was the sight of the glory of Jehovah that so filled him with dismay at his own condition. The most frequent type of sin in Scripture is the loathsome disease of leprosy. Let us not deceive ourselves. In the eye of God, man with all his vaunted light and learning is as unclean as the ass that he despises.

In the Word of God the ass is not only represented as unclean; it is also the very synonym for self-will. Read Jehovah's account of him in his expostulation with His servant in Job 39:5-8. And what is sin? It is correctly defined in the Revised Version of 1 John 3:4 : "sin is lawlessness." In other words, sin is doing our own will to the neglect of the will of God. Who can plead exemption here? Who amongst us does not love to have his own way at whatever cost? The life of the natural man is described in Ephesians 2:3 as "fulfilling the will of the flesh and of the mind." In Psalms 12:4 haughty, insubject men are represented as saying: "Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?" Job 11:12 is very pointed when it says: "Vain man would be wise, though man be born a wild ass's colt." Genesis 16:12, correctly rendered, says of Ishmael, "He will be a wild ass of a man."

The analogy is thus complete between the unclean and self-willed ass and our poor fallen race. In one point man has sunk even lower than the ass, as Isaiah 1:3 shows. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass him master's crib; but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider." In other

words, these beasts at least know to whom they belong; man, on the contrary, in the stupidity of his unbelief, fails to perceive that his owner and master is God.

What a wonderful work is conversion! It is a turning right round. Horrified at their previous perverseness and self-will, converted ones humbly acknowledge, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

The law of Sinai was given as a curb upon the flesh. It fenced man about with prohibitions. "Thou shalt not" do this; "thou shalt not" do that. But it was all of no avail. The law only develops the evil of the human heart by provoking it. Its prohibitions wake up all the latent devilry in man. So the apostle argues in Romans 7:7-8. This being true, he calls the law "the strength of sin" in 1 Corinthians 15:56. How hopelessly and incorrigibly evil is flesh if the holy law of God has such an effect upon it! Yet some plead that there is good in every man if only it be looked for!

For both the firstborn of the ass and also of man a lamb must be sacrificed in Israel. The lamb typified Christ. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). In its characteristics the lamb is the very opposite of the ass. Clean, it typifies Him who, though born of a sinful mother like ourselves, yet entered the world unstained in nature. All His ways too, were holy. His very judge had to say of Him: "I find no fault in this man." The lamb is also the symbol of meekness. How suitably do we read in Isaiah 53:7 of the Lord Jesus: "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth." This is the passage that the Ethiopian was quietly pondering in his chariot when Philip accosted him. With charming simplicity he inquired of the Evangelist: "I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man?" (Acts 8:34). With all readiness "Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."

The meek and clean One must needs die for the self-willed and the unclean — even ourselves. God "hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Now He asks nothing from the conscience-stricken sinner but the humble acknowledgment of the mighty fact that Jesus died and rose again. But what of those who refuse to take the place of perishing ones before God? Destruction, as in the case of the unredeemed ass in Israel. Concerning a scornful rejecter of long ago, it was said: "He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, dragged and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jeremiah 22:19). In other words, he was cast out of God's dwelling place as unclean. Of the new Jerusalem it is written: "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth" (Revelation 21:27). Happier far to take the place of the ass here and accept redemption by the blood of the Lamb than be thrust into the ass's outside place for evermore.

Chapter 7

FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH.

FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH.

"To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me. ... Then Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel." — 1 Samuel 28:19-20.

"We are confident and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." — Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5:8.

These passages show us two men face to face with death and the feelings which possessed them at the great crisis. Remarkably each bore the same name, and each had a violent death before him. Death is always a solemn thing. It marks the close of one stage of a man's being, and it is the gateway into the indefinite beyond. It is thus a test for every man. Mistakes made on earth cannot be rectified in eternity. Even the believer in Jesus realises the solemnity of the great change. Whatever opportunities of usefulness have been missed here will never recur again; and they must be accounted for to the Lord whom we serve. But the ungodly man has every reason to quake when death lays its icy hand upon him; for in his case "the last enemy" is the policeman come to bring him up to judgement. It is what comes after death that guilty ones dread (Hebrews 9:27).

Let us briefly consider the circumstances of King Saul. His forty years' reign of self-will and disobedience to God was now ending. The Philistines had declared war against him, and he was to meet them in battle on the morrow. Filled with foreboding, the unhappy King appealed to God, but without avail. Then he inquired for someone possessed of a familiar spirit, and learning that there was such a person at Endor, he went by night in a disguise and asked her to bring up Samuel. Some will perhaps say: "That is somewhat like what Spiritualists do to-day." They do absolutely nothing of the kind. The claim to put the living in communication with the dead is a monstrous fraud. The keys of Hades are in divine hands alone. Neither the just nor the unjust can be disturbed by Spiritualistic mediums. Yet it is not denied that such persons are in communication with the invisible world, but it is with demons they have to do; and it is with demons the mediums link up their miserable dupes.

No one was more astonished than the woman of Endor herself when Samuel really appeared. Never having known such a result from her previous incantations, she at once discerned the hand of God, and concluded that her visitor must be King Saul. Samuel forthwith challenged his disturber: "Why hast thou disquieted me, to, bring me up?" A dead man speaking! Certainly Samuel was not in the resurrection state (for that he must wait until the Lord's coming); he simply appeared in some form by divine permission. It has been asserted that the dead are in a condition of unconsciousness. Ecclesiastes 9:5 is quoted in proof — "the dead know not anything." But the writer of that book is concerned with things "under the sun"; and in the passage referred to he means that the dead are no longer able to follow the course of things down here. The story of the rich man and Lazarus (to which may be added such passages as Isaiah 14:9; Ezekiel 32:21) is

sufficient to show that both saved and lost are fully alive to the reality of their condition in the unseen world. Besides, the apostle says as to himself that to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord.

"To-morrow shalt thou be with me." Samuel did not mean by this that Saul would be found in the same place and circumstances as himself. Between saved and lost "there is a great gulf fixed," which is impassable from either side. Samuel simply meant that Saul would be in the death-state next day; that is to say, numbered amongst the dead like the departed prophet.

There is no trace of tenderness in Samuel's words. Time was when he had cried to Jehovah all night on behalf of Saul (1 Samuel 15:11). But Saul had sinned away his day of grace, and nothing remained but to pronounce sentence upon him. "Jehovah is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy." So said the prophet. "God is departed from me," wailed Saul, "and answereth me no more." Solemn position in which to be found! Saul had had many opportunities. His early reign was blessed with the light of God's presence, and with the counsel and support of the prophet. Yet his privileges were as nothing compared with those of men to-day who are permitted to hear the Gospel of Christ proclaimed in their ears. How awful should God say of anyone amongst us: "Let him alone" (Hosea 4:17).

Let us ask ourselves what our feelings would be if some such message as was delivered to Saul was delivered to us. What if from the realms of the dead we heard the words: "To-morrow shalt thou be with me?" The believer in Jesus would say with rapture: "To depart and to be with Christ is far better" (Php_1:23). But the football enthusiast and the lover of the theatre — what would they say? Dr. Johnson, of Uttoxeter fame, once remarked after visiting a place of amusement: "It went to my heart to consider that there was not one in all that brilliant circle that was not afraid to go home and think, but that the thoughts of each individual there would be distressing when alone."

When Saul heard of his impending death he "fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid." We are reminded of Jacob when he learned that he must now meet the one against whom he had sinned: "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed" (Genesis 32:7). Now mark the contrast to all this in Paul the apostle. His life was in jeopardy for the Gospel's sake. But was he dismayed? The very reverse. "We are confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body and present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). It is such an unusual thing to find men willing to be absent from the body (even the devil once said, "All that a man hath will he give for his life"), that we are constrained to inquire as to the ground of the apostle's confidence. His own words in Romans 5:8 tell us all we need know as to this: "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Here we have that which, when known and believed, banishes from the soul all dread of death. Christ has been into death for us, thus making complete atonement for all our sin and guilt, and breaking the power of the enemy once and for ever.

Chapter 8

"IS IT PEACE?"

"IS IT PEACE?"

"It came to pass, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, 'Is it peace, Jehu?' And he answered, 'What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel, and her witchcrafts, are so many?'" — 2 Kings 9:22.

There is anxiety, and even alarm, discernible in the inquiry of Joram, "Is it peace, Jehu?" The sequel proved that there was ample occasion for these sentiments. It was a time of upheaval in Israel. A revolution was in progress, which presently cost King Joram both his throne and his life.

The circumstances may be briefly stated. Israel and Syria were at war over Ramoth-Gilead. Joram, being wounded, had been obliged to return to Jezreel in order to consult his physicians, leaving his officers to prosecute the campaign. One day there arrived in the camp one of the sons of the prophets, who informed Jehu that it was Jehovah's will that he should be King over Israel. Nothing loth, Jehu sought the co-operation of his fellow captains, and forthwith set out for Jezreel to overturn the throne of his master. The watchman on the tower of the royal city reporting the rapid approach of a company, two horse-men were sent forth to inquire if all was well. The messengers not returning, the King set out himself to meet Jehu with the anxious question in our text. "Is it peace?" Note the reply. "What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel, and her witchcrafts, are so many?" The meaning is that no peace could be expected with so much unjudged sin in the land.

Joram, who thus rode out to his death, had been a very privileged person. Jehovah had taken great pains with him. See this King in 2 Kings 3:1-27, turning, with two other sovereigns, to the prophet in circumstances of dire distress. No water was available for their hosts. Their need was graciously met in the goodness of God. Then we have him in 2 Kings 5:1-27 made aware of Jehovah's wonderful healing power in the matter of Naaman's leprosy. In the following chapter we find God warning him on several occasions of designs against his life, and thus safeguarding him. 2 Kings 7:1-20 gives the story of the siege of Samaria, and the marvellous intervention of God on behalf of the famine-stricken people; and 2 Kings 8:1-29 shows us the King in conversation with Gehazi, and learning from him all the wonderful works of Elisha his master. In these various ways Jehovah spoke to this man's heart and conscience, if haply he would turn from his evil ways and live. But with all these divine privileges, Joram perished. How often has God spoken to us? Let us ask ourselves, how many privileges He has mercifully vouchsafed unto us?

There is a present-day application of our text. We are living in a time of universal disturbance. Revolutions in both East and West; wars and threats of wars in various directions. In the industrial sphere there is unrest everywhere. Thinking men are pretty much in the state of mind described by the Saviour in Luke 21:25-26 : "Upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity . . . men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." The anxious inquiry on every hand is: "Is it peace?" How relieved men are to learn that the atmosphere in the

direction of Germany is somewhat clearer than formerly! With what thankfulness do men hear of a strike averted here or settled there! How would all England feel if to-morrow's newspaper reported a settlement of the coal dispute? Yet everyone realises that these questions are not really being laid to rest, that the difficulties are only being bridged over, to surge up again at some future date. No one believes the root is being reached.

"Is it peace?" is the anxious question to-day, as in the time of Joram. The answer to men now must be upon the same lines as the answer to him so long ago. Peace is impossible with sin unjudged. There is a sin lying at the door of the world to-day compared with which even Jezebel's whoredoms and witchcrafts were the veriest trifles. What sin is that?

Go back with me in your thoughts 1,900 years in the world's history. In the village of Bethlehem a Babe was born of whom it was written centuries before: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace" (Isaiah 9:6). Outside in the fields the angelic host celebrated His birth thus: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" (Luke 2:14). He came from heaven to bring peace into a scene long distracted by sin. Judgement was not His mission. As Peter put it in Acts 10:36, God was "preaching peace by Jesus Christ." Aged Simeon, as he beheld the wondrous Babe, blessed God, saying: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." The sight of the Saviour dispelled from his mind all fear of death, and filled his soul with peace.

But men rejected the Prince of peace. "Depart from us was men's cry to God before the flood" (Job 22:17); the cry was the same when the Son came to earth. Since the Son was the revealer of the Father, the rejection of the Son involved the rejection of the Father also. "They have both seen and hated both Me and My Father" (John 15:24). This explains the Saviour's words in Matthew 10:34 : "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." His mission was peace, but men's refusal of Him has made peace impossible, and they have to suffer the sword instead. When the Lord Jesus thought of the consequences to men, He wept, saying: "if thou hadst known . . . the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes" (Luke 19:42). And so it has become true of men everywhere: "the way of peace have they not known" (Romans 3:17).

There are not wanting those who prophesy smooth things. In Jeremiah's day some said "Peace, Peace" while Jehovah's sword hung suspended over the land, and we have similar false prophets amongst us at the present time. If such may be believed, the upheavals that are going on in every sphere are the birth throes of a new and better day. Man is emerging from the chrysalis stage, and will presently be a more glorious being than ever before. All who speak thus are deceivers of men's souls. More to the point are Isaiah's words in Isaiah 57:20-21 : "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, said my God, to the wicked."

What is the Scripture outlook? Smash upon smash, catastrophe upon catastrophe until the whole of man's order of things has been ground to powder. Then God will bring upon the scene His Man, the world-rejected Jesus, and He will establish His throne upon the ruins of everything human.

Suffer me now to appeal to every individual heart! Why should not you be right with God? Then you need fear no ill, whatever may befall. Christ has "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:20). Here we have the settlement of the sin question, a matter of greater moment to you personally than any political or industrial question in the world. God's claims as to sin have been met by the atoning blood. Accordingly peace is preached "to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh" (Ephesians 2:17); that is to both Gentiles and Jews alike. The believer in Jesus is justified by faith, and has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). More than this, every believer is invited to bring his every request to God, with the sweet assurance that "the peace of God! which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Php_4:7). In 2 Thessalonians 3:16 at the close of an epistle which deals with the horrors of the last days, we find the comforting words: "The Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means." Amid the crash of empires and kingdoms, the overturning of every ancient institution, and the subversion of all law and order, the man who is right with God in virtue of the cross of Calvary can afford to be in perfect peace. It will suffice to close with the words in Job 22:21 : "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace, thereby good shall come unto thee."

Chapter 9

"ME" AND "MY SINS."

"ME" AND "MY SINS."

"As for me, Thou beholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before Thy face for ever." — Psalms 41:12.

"Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back." — Isaiah 38:17.

It is a wonderful thing that the Psalmist should say, evidently with pleasure, "Thou settest me before Thy face for ever." No man naturally wishes to be brought face to face with God. The whole history of the human race proves this conclusively. Adam and his wife, as soon as they were conscious of having sinned, "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden." Cain, after his fearful crime, "went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod." Jonah in his self-will fled to Tarshish "from the presence of the Lord." Scripture abounds with instances of men being brought into the divine presence, and being forthwith filled with the deepest distress. Isaiah's case (Isaiah 6:1-13) will suffice for an example.

This is a truly awful condition of things when we consider the end and object for which man was created. This is well expressed in the opening words of the Westminster Catechism. Question: "What is the chief end of man?" Answer: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever."

Men shrink from God's all-searching eye. As Hebrews 4:13 puts it: "There is no creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." There is much that we can hide from one another, and even from ourselves; there is nothing that we can hide from God.

Yet the Psalmist says with rapture: "Thou settest me before Thy face for ever." To understand this, we must go back somewhat in the book of Psalms. In the thirty-second the same writer says, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." The Holy Spirit's comment upon this passage is found in Romans 4:6 : "David describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works." This is the first step towards being happy and free in the presence of God. But upon what equitable basis is He able to impute righteousness to a man apart from works? Psalms 40:1-17 will answer. There we hear the Incarnate Son saying: "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire. Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." The atoning sacrifice of Calvary, which has superseded for ever all the offerings of the Levitical order, enables God to righteously pardon and justify every sinner who believes in Jesus. The Psalmist was evidently in the sweetness of justification when he penned our text. "Thou upholdest me in mine integrity." Imagine mortal man thus addressing his Maker! It is the Old Testament way of expressing the truth of Romans 8:33 : "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth?"

There is thus something to be got rid of ere any man can enjoy God and be at home in His blessed presence. That something is guilt. How beautifully our two Scriptures run together. "Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back." "As for me, Thou . . . settest me before Thy face for ever."

Psalms 41:1-13 has a first and primary reference to the Lord Jesus Himself. HE is before the face of God — justified, accepted, in eternal favour and love. Divine grace has associated me with Him, so that what God has made true of that blessed Man is true of me also. I am "in Him," accepted in His acceptance, blessed as He is blessed, and loved as He is loved. No wonder we read in Psalms 84:9 : "Look upon the face of Thine anointed," i.e., Thy Christ. According to the worthiness that God sees in Him, so is every believer favoured for evermore.

Let us take notice of the words "before Thy face." Not "before Thy throne." The "throne" is suggestive of distance, the "face" of knowledge and intimacy. Character is declared in the face. Through eternity God will be telling out His perfections to His redeemed, and we shall ever be learning what a God He is with whom we have to do. Psalms 21:6 says: "Thou hast made him exceeding glad with Thy countenance." Psalms 27:4 describes the heart's deep longing in this connection: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple."

"Thou settest me before Thy face for ever." The first man commenced with the knowledge of God, and before sin entered he enjoyed Him according to his measure and circumstances. All this he lost by his transgression. But grace sets the believer in Jesus upon a new footing altogether. Everything now depends upon the triumphant Second Man, and upon what He has accomplished. Thus everything is secured beyond the possibility of forfeiture or loss. "For ever" is my place and portion in the favour and love of God.

Chapter 10

GOOD NEWS FROM A FAR COUNTRY.

GOOD NEWS FROM A FAR COUNTRY.

"As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country." — Proverbs 25:25.

Water is a symbol of the Gospel. We find it so used in the last chapter of Scripture: "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

In the parable of the Pounds in Luke 19:1-48 the Lord likens heaven to "a far country." Why is this? In the opening chapters of Genesis heaven seems very near, and God a neighbour at hand. We read there of a garden planted by the hand of the Creator, containing everything that was pleasant to the sight and good for food. This was the home of the first man and his wife, and there the Lord God used to come, and hold sweet converse with them. But all this was quickly changed. There came the day when Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. Sin was the cause of this. It was said to Israel at a later date: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (Isaiah 59:2). Sin having thus entered, the divine pleasure in man ceased, and heaven from that moment has seemed "a far country." There is no moral affinity now between heaven and earth.

But there has been a visitor from the far country. John 1:14 tells us: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt amongst us . . . full of grace and truth. This is the glorious Person of whom we read higher up in the same chapter that He was in the beginning with God, and was God. Moreover, "all things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made." What a Visitor! In John 6:38 we hear Him saying: "I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." His unbelieving hearers stumbled at this, and said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it, then, that He saith, I came down from heaven?" In their blindness they saw in Him nothing more than a carpenter's son.

The people of Great Britain are accustomed to distinguished visitors. From time to time Emperors and Kings come to their shores. They are always well received, and they invariably return home well pleased. But how was the Son of God received when He came to earth? "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." Long before, Isaiah had written concerning Him: "He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

The Son of God was not only rejected when He came; He was murdered. In the parable of the Vineyard, He showed this vividly before the dreadful deed was committed. Having sent many servants to the husbandmen without avail, last of all the master of the vineyard sent his son, saying, "They will reverence my son." The master is God, the son is the Lord Jesus. But when the husbandmen saw the son they said: "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance" (Matthew 21:1-46). This is how men treated the Lord Jesus. Spite of His unique words and works, they hated and slew Him (John 15:22-24).

What next? The young Prince of Wales has recently been touring on the Continent. He has been treated with respect everywhere, but supposing he was murdered, and that by the sanction of the authorities, what would happen next? Surely the heavy hand of retribution would fall somewhere? When the statue of the Emperor Hadrian was destroyed in a riot at Antioch, the people trembled at the thought of the consequences. But what happened when Christ was slain? In Acts 1:1-26 we see Him ascending up where He was before, carrying the wounds which men had inflicted upon His sacred Person right up to the throne of God — sight of all sights for the angelic host! What response did God give to this? For ten days there was a lull. Then heaven opened once more, and the Holy Ghost came forth. What for? To destroy the guilty sons of men? No, but to preach the Gospel. Accordingly in Acts 2:1-47 we hear Peter charging home upon his hearers their dreadful sin in the murder of Christ, and concluding by offering them all forgiveness in His name. The Saviour, before He went on high, said that repentance and remission of sins were to be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). His very murderers were thus to have the first opportunity of blessing. Surely the message of forgiveness of sins for everybody is "good news; from a far country." We deserved wrath, and lo, we are offered pardon and peace!

Why are not men keen for such blessings? Our text tells us. They are not "thirsty." Cold waters are only acceptable to thirsty souls. Thirsty ones are most tenderly invited. Revelation 22:17 says: "Let him that is athirst come." In John 7:37 we hear the Saviour's call: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." But men are not thirsty. There is with them no sense of need, and so they are not interested. Yet when "good news" of another kind comes along men are interested enough. Suppose someone in our town fell heir to a fortune or a peerage, would it not quickly become the general topic of conversation? Or, to come closer home, suppose some man amongst us became notified of an inheritance left to himself, how keen he would be. Down would go his tools for ever, and he would start forth to take possession of his own. Yet when "good news from a far country" are addressed to men concerning the forgiveness of sins and eternal blessing they are not interested at all! They see nothing in it worthy of a thought!

One word more. The Visitor from the far country is coming again. The world has not seen the last of Him. The parable of the Pounds says so plainly. But how will He return? Not in lowly grace, upon a second mission of mercy, but in kingly power, to take vengeance upon all His foes. Hear the terrible words from His own blessed lips: "Those Mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before Me" (Luke 19:27). This is not mere parabolic language, but the setting forth of a dread reality. He who is at present proclaimed as Saviour to all is the divinely appointed Judge of quick and dead. The quick (i.e., the living) He will deal with at His appearing; the dead He will call before Him when time is ended.

Chapter 11

HUMAN INSENSIBILITY.

HUMAN INSENSIBILITY.

"The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider." — Isaiah 1:3.

"Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle-dove and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but My people know not the judgement of the Lord." - Jeremiah 8:7.

Of all the creatures with which we are acquainted, man is by far the most gifted and the most privileged. Moreover, he has been established by God lord and head over the whole system in which he moves. This being so, it is painful that a comparison should be divinely instituted between man and beasts and birds, with the result altogether unfavorable to man. In both Isaiah 1:1-31 and Jeremiah 8:1-22 we have throughout the language of complaint. The Creator complains of His creature man. Our texts expose his insensibility — insensibility to both grace and judgement.

Isaiah 1:3 was addressed to a people of pastoral habits. It was not yet the day of great manufacturing cities. Every man possessed oxen and asses. Accordingly Jehovah bids His people go to their own stockyards and learn a lesson there. "The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider." These are not the most intelligent of the domestic animals, but even so they offer a rebuke to man.

The ox knows to whom it belongs, "but Israel doth not know." Are men more intelligent to-day? Every man belongs to God, but are men alive to the fact? "In Him we live, and move, and have our being . . . we are His offspring" (Acts 17:28). Daniel denounced the wretched Belshazzar thus: "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified" (Daniel 5:23). Are men more mindful of their position in relation to God now?

The administration of the universe has been committed to a Man. "The head of every man is Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:3). The Father has given Him authority over all flesh (John 17:2). Sooner or later every created being will be constrained to acknowledge this. At the name of Jesus every knee must bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Php_2:10-11). Oh, the blindness that hinders men from perceiving to whom they belong until compelled to do so when time is no more, and salvation has become impossible!

The ass knows who feeds it, "but My people doth not consider." The beast knows from whose hand its bounties come, but not man! Yet, as Paul told the men of Lystra in Acts 14:17, God has never left Himself without witness, in that He has done men good, giving rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling men's hearts with food and gladness. But do men acknowledge His hand? It would be interesting to know in how many homes in this so-called Christian England men have given thanks at the meal table to-day. The old-fashioned "grace" is dying out, in keeping with the

growing infidelity of our time. If men fail to own God in His lesser gifts, what is their bearing towards the stupendous gift of His Son? Is Christ appreciated?

Thus in Isaiah 1:3 God complains of man's insensibility to grace; in Jeremiah 8:7 He complains of his insensibility to judgement. The stork, the swallow, etc., know their times, "but My people know not the judgement of the Lord." The birds named in this passage are all migratory. They take notice of the seasons. They perceive when the period of sunshine is over, and when the clouds and storms of winter are approaching, and they have the instinct to know when they should move off. But alas, for man! What was the character of the times in which Jeremiah prophesied? It was the last days of the Kingdom of Judah. The northern ten-tribe kingdom had already been overthrown, and "the destroyer of the nations" (Nebuchadnezzar) was now on his way to overthrow Judah also. Judgement was thus imminent, but the people understood it not. And so there was no repentance.

In our Lord's day men could discern the face of the sky, but were unable to discern the signs of the times (Matthew 16:3). They were too obtuse to see that it was their great day of opportunity. They had the long expected Messiah in their midst, and if they failed to recognize Him they must lose Him, and have the Roman scourge instead.

The men of Jeremiah's time and our Lord's day find their contrast in Noah. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Hebrews 11:7). Like the crane and the swallow, he saw the dark clouds approaching, and judged it wisdom to seek a place of safety. The men of Nineveh read us an even more striking lesson. The whole city was profoundly stirred at the preaching of Jonah, so that the King came down from his throne, and humbled himself before God in common with all his people. They recognized a warning from heaven in the denunciations of the strange man who walked through their streets. There has never been a more solemn moment in the history of the world than the present. The portents around us are of the gravest character. Everything is suggestive of coming disaster. A point is being reached in human affairs. Statesmen and leaders of every sort perceive this. But what is the point that is thus almost in sight? The end of man's day, and the ushering in of the day of the Lord. "Man's day" is that long period during which man has been allowed to have his own way without manifest intervention from heaven; the day of the Lord is the coming kingdom of the Lord Jesus, which will be introduced abruptly, and with desolating judgements. His appearing will dash to pieces the whole fabric of man's godless civilisation, and upon the ruins thereof He will establish an order of things that will perfectly suit the eye and the heart of God. The wise man says: "A prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself: but the simple pass on and are punished" (Proverbs 22:3). In view of the break-up that is coming, are you "prudent" or "simple"? Must the swallow and her fellows be your reprovers in the great day?

Chapter 12

PEACE: FALSE AND TRUE.

PEACE: FALSE AND TRUE.

"They have healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, Peace, Peace, when there is no peace." — Jeremiah 6:14.

"And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh." — Ephesians 2:17.

Two preachers of peace are seeking to gain the attention of the children of men. Both are in earnest? and in each case the preaching is intended to produce eternal results. These preachers are Satan and Christ. Neither is, of course, in person upon the earth speaking with audible voice. Both make their appeal to men by means of human instruments. There are thus two orders of preachers amongst us, both energised by supernatural power, and both preaching peace to men. Hell energises the one; heaven energises the other. The one order proclaims a false peace — a peace resting upon rotten foundations, and from which there must sooner or later come an awful awakening; the other proclaims a true peace — a peace founded upon the immutable basis of the Saviour's atoning blood.

Let me remind you of a remarkable parable which once came from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ. You will find it in Luke 11:21-22. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace; but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." The strong man here is Satan; the stronger than he is Christ Himself. The strong man's palace is this world; and his goods are the men and women who live therein. It is Satan's policy to keep these in peace, to lull them to sleep, so that serious thoughts may never disturb their minds. As 1 John 5:19 puts it: "The whole world lieth in the wicked one." He has his arguments for all classes and for all ages, and all designed to keep souls in a state of unconcern and death. Suppose a young person to become awakened to the great realities of God and eternity. Satan at once preaches peace by saying, "Time enough yet. Life is before you. Don't spoil your pleasures by serious thoughts." Suppose a middle-aged man to be aroused, again comes along the destroyer with the suggestion that now is the time to make money and the man who fills his head with solemn considerations will fall back in the commercial struggle. "Time enough yet" is once more the text. Or suppose a religious person to become exercised as to whether all is well for eternity, Satan at once protests that one so morally excellent, and so devoutly religious, can have nothing to fear, for all must be well. Yet the wise man has said: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). The man or woman who is trusting in religion or morality for salvation is building upon sand. Woe to them if they heed the lulling voice saying, "Peace, Peace," when indeed there is no peace.

Hezekiah says in Isaiah 38:17, "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness." It is a mercy from God when a false peace is smashed up. The "great bitterness" which results is not pleasant, but it is

nevertheless the way to God. See Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9:9 three whole days unable to eat and drink. When a man goes off his food thus his mind must surely be deeply agitated. The fact is, Saul had made the fearful discovery that with all his blamelessness of life and his religious zeal he was at heart an enemy of God and His Son. The best man of his time saw himself to be "the chief of sinners!" Oh, the bitterness of it? Have we been in the depths thus?

Our first text thus speaks of a false peace; our second tells us of a true peace, proclaimed by the Christ of God. "He came and preached peace," says the apostle, "to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh." He is manifestly speaking of Christ in resurrection. But what lies behind resurrection? Death. Christ has been down into death, and this on behalf of sinners. At Calvary the storm of divine judgement broke upon His holy head. All the waves and billows of God's wrath rolled over Him. But the storm has spent itself now; sunshine has come, and the Christ who died is alive again from amongst the dead, and glorified on high. The God of peace has brought back from the tomb the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant. He is now righteously able to preach peace to men everywhere. The peace He proclaims is not a mere soporific for the conscience, but the blessed knowledge that every question has been equitably settled by His atoning blood, and that, in consequence, every storm cloud has been dispelled for ever. "He is our peace," says the apostle. The very fact that He is now accepted in heaven is the public proof that the horizon Godward has been cleared once and for all for those who believe in His name

Hence the absurdity of bidding a man make his peace with God. The thing is impossible. No man can of himself get rid of a single sin. But in truth there is no peace to make. Christ has "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:20), and this He now proclaims to all in the Gospel by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 4:25; Romans 5:1).

Would you have peace with God? It is good to be at peace with our fellow-creatures to feel as we walk up and down the street that there is no enmity between ourselves and a single living soul; but it is better far to be at peace with our God. This happy position may be realized to-day by all who will humble themselves at the divine feet, and consent to be saved by grace alone.

Chapter 13

AN IMPERIAL CONVERT.

AN IMPERIAL CONVERT.

"Nebuchadnezzar the King unto all peoples, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth . . . I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me." — Daniel 4:1-2.

Nebuchadnezzar had recently been exalted to an imperial position by the hand of God. Kings and kingdoms had fallen before him, and he was now supreme amongst the nations. It was God's original purpose to govern and bless the nations of the earth by means of the people of Israel and the house of David; but Israel proving grossly unfaithful, and David's house becoming very evil, this purpose was put aside until the day of Christ, and power was meanwhile placed in Gentile hands. Accordingly Nebuchadnezzar was raised up, and to him was granted "the kingdom, power, and strength and glory."

Daniel 4:1-37 gives us the story of his conversion, as related by himself in a proclamation to all his subjects. What is conversion? A change of religious opinions? Nebuchadnezzer's views undoubtedly underwent a complete change. Bel and Nebo were to him gods no more. But conversion is more than this. A man might be severely orthodox in his opinions and yet perish for ever. Conversion is a mighty moral work in the soul whereby a man is turned right about face. One moment he has his back towards God and the next he finds himself face to face with Him, and he begins to regard sin and judgement as God regards them. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). Conversion is an absolute necessity for all who would have to do with God in peace and blessing. Have we all experienced it?

Nebuchadnezzar's conversion was as remarkable in its way as that of Saul of Tarsus. There are indeed some points in common in the two cases. Both were persecutors of God's saints; both were stopped abruptly by a voice from heaven; and both published the story of their conversion.

There were three great steps in the dealings of God with Nebuchadnezzar. We find the first in Daniel 2:1-49. The vision of the great image, when expounded by Daniel, after all the magicians had acknowledged their impotency, so impressed the King that he exclaimed, "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 couldst reveal this secret." He thus acknowledged Jehovah as superior to all other deities, but he was not yet prepared to transfer his allegiance to Him. He was Daniel's God — " your God"; but Nebuchadnezzar was not yet able to call Him "my God." The second step is in Daniel 3:1-30. After the marvellous rescue of the three Hebrews from the fiery furnace the King said: "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego . . . therefore I make a decree, that every people, nation and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort." There is progress here as compared with Daniel 2:1-49.

He has come to respect Jehovah, and will not allow anyone to speak amiss of Him, but still He does not know Him. He is "the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego," but not yet the God of Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 4:1-37 records the final step, and here we have a complete capitulation. Let me repeat that this chapter is an imperial proclamation. Such documents are not often read by the people at large, but here is a proclamation which must have excited the deepest interest amongst the many peoples who composed Nebuchadnezzar's empire. The King converted, and then telling the whole story in this public manner! Would that such proclamations were more frequently published. The King's story is very simple. In a dream he saw a mighty tree, with room in its vast branches for the fowls of heaven, and with shadows beneath for the beasts of the field. He also saw a watcher and an holy one come down from heaven directing the tree to be hewn down, with its stump alone remaining. The magicians being helpless as usual, Daniel was called in, who told the King that the tree represented himself, whose ways had been noted in heaven, and who was about to be visited by God in judgement unless he repented. Men forget that there is a Watcher who sees their every act and hears their every word. In Noah's day "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth," and in David's time He looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that did understand and seek God, but could find none that were not wholly unprofitable in His sight (Genesis 6:5; Psalms 14:2-3). How would any of us stand if the word went forth, "Hew down the tree?"

So solemn a dream should have brought Nebuchadnezzar to his knees, but it did not. Yet God, who is long-suffering to all, granted him twelve months respite before the stroke fell. At the end of that time the King, in all the pride of his heart, walked upon the roof of his palace, and as his magnificent capital with its mighty walls and brazen gates spread itself out before him, he exclaimed: "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdoms, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" While the words were yet in his mouth, a voice from heaven said, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; the kingdom is departed from thee." He was forthwith deprived of his reason; and imagining himself a beast, he was driven out into the fields, where for seven weary years he ate grass as oxen; and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until his hair grew like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. This visitation broke him down utterly, and when reason was graciously restored, he who once impiously said to Shadrach and his fellows, "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" now in his proclamation to all his subjects says, "I blessed the most High; and I praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever and ever."

Let us individually learn the lesson. Every man must sooner or later come down from his pedestal and prostrate himself at the divine feet. It is happy and wise to do so to-day, and then as lost sinners who have naught of our own to plead seek refuge in the Son of God, the only Saviour. His precious blood suffices to meet the need of the greatest transgressor.

Chapter 14

JOSHUA THE HIGH PRIEST.

JOSHUA THE HIGH PRIEST.

"Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" — Zechariah 3:2.

Zechariah 3:1-10 gives us the fourth of a series of eight visions which were granted to the prophet on a single night. He was thus shown the whole future history of his people. Israel is yet to be restored to Canaan, all their enemies are to be destroyed, and Jehovah will once more take up His abode in Zion. Our chapter deals with a very important question in connection with all this. Is Israel worthy of such blessing? And if not worthy (as indeed the people are not), on what ground will God grant them such inestimable good? This chapter cannot but be of the deepest interest to all who, in every age, realize that they merit nothing but judgement at the hands of a holy God.

The vision shows us a man in the divine presence. Surely a serious position for anyone. How would we feel to find ourselves there? Job was overwhelmed when he found himself, as it were, face to face with God. "I abhor myself," cried he, "and repent in dust and ashes." Isaiah, again, when granted a vision of God, exclaimed, "Woe is me! for I am undone." In what condition was Joshua found? As High Priest of Israel he was the representative of the people; accordingly his condition was the living picture of that of the people. The Scripture says, "Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments." In what better condition are men found today? Our very righteousnesses are as filthy rags; what then our unrighteousnesses? "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

Look again at our chapter. Not only was Joshua in the divine presence; Satan was there also, "standing at his right hand to resist him." It was the great adversary objecting to the exercise of divine mercy. Short shrift should we all receive if left to the commissions of Satan. With energy he denounces men before God emphasising their sin and guilt, and protesting against favour being shown to any. There is no more effective minister of righteousness than Satan when it pleases him to play that part.

Now mark the activity of divine grace. No word proceeded from the mouth of Joshua. What indeed could he say? The filth was there, in all its hideousness to the eyes of God. "Every mouth must be stopped," says Romans 3:19. Accordingly Joshua said nothing, and did nothing. God took up his cause, and rebuked the foe. "Is not this," said He, "a brand plucked out of the fire?" Like to be burned, but snatched from the burning. This is just the picture of all who believe in the name of Jesus. Next, the Lord commanded, "Take away the filthy garments from him." Then, "Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee." The garments of Joshua thus represented his iniquity with which the eye of God saw him to be covered from head to foot. Nothing gives our God greater delight than to justify the ungodly. When a sinner takes his true place before Him, confessedly guilty, and without one word to say in self-defence, with joy He says now as of old, "Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee." The cross of Calvary explains this marvel. The sacrifice of Christ is so divinely efficacious that, on the ground of it, God is righteously able to

clear from all charge of guilt, once and for ever, the soul that pleads it before Him.

In Joshua's case there was not only a stripping off; there was also a putting on. "So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments." Here let us notice an important distinction. In Zechariah 3:4 iniquities are called "filthy garments"; in Isaiah 61:10 righteousnesses are described as "filthy rags." Garments cover us; rags are things with which men seek to cover themselves, but in vain. Our iniquities cover us indeed; to change the figure, not a sound place can God find in our whole moral constitution, as Isaiah 1:6 shows. But when we foolishly seek to cover our nakedness by works of our own, it is but tatters we put on, which in reality cover us not at all. But God puts upon the returning prodigal "the best robe," and that is Christ. As He is, so are we in the divine sight henceforward and for ever.

Mark, God had a direct word for the sinner himself. "Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee." If God were to keep His purposes of grace locked up in His own great heart, how could any amongst us experience the comfort and blessedness of them? But He has not done this. On the contrary, He has told Himself fully out in the Gospel of His Son. By the testimony of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven we know that He who once suffered for our sins is now accepted on high, and that in consequence "there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). John's first epistle was written in order that Christians might have divine certainty as to all things. "That ye may KNOW," is John's characteristic word.

Chapter 15

A DIVINE COMPLAINT.

A DIVINE COMPLAINT.

"Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life. . . . There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust." — John 5:40; John 5:45.

We seem to detect something in the nature of a sob in the Saviour's complaint — "Ye will not come to Me." Nothing is more painful than to be made to feel that one is not wanted. Some of us have perhaps had such an experience. But none have known this bitterness like the Son of God. His life on earth was one perpetual snub. He was despised and rejected of men; and, in consequence, was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. When He considered what this must involve for those who thus coldly passed Him by His heart groaned within Him. In Luke 19:41 we have Him weeping over the blindness and obstinacy of men.

But who was this "Me" to whom men would not come? We learn something as to Him in the first chapter of this Gospel. He is the eternal Word, the Only-begotten of the Father, the One by whom all things were made. Our present chapter tells us more concerning His dignity and glory. He is the quickener of men's souls, the raiser of men's bodies, and the final Judge of all (John 5:25-29). When on earth He was well attested, and divinely recommended. The Baptist bore witness of Him, the Father's voice spoke publicly out of the heavens concerning Him, His own miracles testified to Him with no uncertain sound, and the Scriptures which the people read spoke of Him in their every part. All this He pointed out in the verses which precede our text. Yet with such an One men would have nothing to do. The awfulness of this becomes the more apparent if we think for one moment of all the honours which have been heaped of late upon King George in both East and West. Everyone has been keen to get near him, foreign squadrons acclaim him on his journey home — scarce a dog moves his tongue against him. Yet when the Sovereign of the universe visited our poor earth He was despised and rejected of men. "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:10-11).

What was the character of His mission that men shunned Him thus? Had He come here in majesty and wrath, men, conscious of their guilt, might well have sought cover from Him wherever they could find it. But "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). As our text says, He came that men "might have life." He was standing in the midst of a scene in which sin had long reigned unto death (Romans 5:21). In order that life might be available for men, He was prepared to give His flesh for the life of the world. So He says in John 6:51. And yet men did not want Him!

Who were the "ye" who so scornfully refused Him? Men who were the creatures of His hand, and who were moreover the objects of His special favour, for since the days of the Exodus no people had been so privileged as Israel. And what was their condition? They were "the slaves of sin," spite of their false boast that they had never been in bondage to any man (John 8:33-34). Their

peril was thus deadly, and their need great; yet they rejected the Son of God.

But there is another side to this matter. There was one in whom they did put their trust, as the Lord Jesus pointed out in John 6:45. Hear them saying in John 9:28 : "Thou art His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples." Moses then was their confidence and boast. Now Moses was a type of Christ in some respects. In his circumstances — as lifted out of the waters of death and set in association with the throne; and in his mission, as mediator between God and the people. But in other respects he was a contrast. After the dreadful sin of Israel in the matter of the Golden calf, we hear him saying "Now I will go up unto Jehovah; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin" (Exodus 32:30). No such language of uncertainty ever rested upon the Saviour's lips. He first made complete atonement for His people's guilt, and then went up on high in the power of it.

John 1:17 shows the contrast between the missions of these two: "The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The law, as 2 Corinthians 3:1-18 tells us, was a ministration of condemnation and of death because of the utter inability of sinful flesh to render its righteous requirements. Yet men love the Moses principle! It is as true as ever what Peter said in Acts 15:21 : "Moses hath in every city them that preach him." That is, there are those in every quarter who proclaim works as the ground of blessing before God. Men's confidence in Moses is really the expression of their confidence in themselves, for men cling to the notion that there is some good thing in flesh if only a fair chance be given to it.

The rejected Saviour was soon to leave His scornful hearers. Accordingly He warned them of the Antichrist. "I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (John 5:43). The Saviour's voice, now heard in the Gospel, will soon be silent. The next thing will be the last great deception, when men, who would not come to Him that they might have life, will hail with delight the Antichrist of the Devil, to their eternal ruin. Let us ask ourselves how far His bitter complaint applies in our own case.

Chapter 16

MAN'S MOUTH.

MAN'S MOUTH.

"Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." — Romans 3:14.

"Every mouth stopped." — Romans 3:19.

"With the mouth confession is made unto salvation." — Romans 10:10.

"With one mind and one mouth glorify God." - Romans 15:6.

The mouth both takes in and gives out. It is the avenue to the stomach and the outlet for the heart. The wise man has said: "All the labour of man is for his mouth" (Ecclesiastes 6:7). In this he spake truly. The Pharisees of our Lord's time were more fastidious concerning that which goes into the mouth than that which comes out of it. Hence their contention with the Lord in Matthew 15:1-39 because His disciples ate bread with unwashed hands. In His reply He said: "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." Then, after sternly denouncing the hypocrisy of these religious folk, He added an awful description of what the human heart contains. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries," etc.

It is not my intention on this occasion to run through all the Scripture passages which speak of the mouth. I propose to confine myself to the four passages in the epistle to the Romans in which it is mentioned. These all regard it from the moral side — as the outlet for the heart. In Romans 3:1-31 we have the divine indictment of man, presented in a string of quotations from the Prophets and the Psalms. Amongst them we find these terrible words from Psalms 10:1-18 : "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." If the heart did not contain these evils the mouth could never give them forth. Here then we have an insight into the human heart. Let it be noted also that this awful quotation occurs in the apostle's description of religious Jews, not in his account of heathen Gentiles. We are reminded of James' exposure of the inconsistency of the tongue: "Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God." It is possible therefore to sing the praises of God on Sunday and be guilty of cursing and bitterness towards men on Monday. Oh, the appalling corruption of the human heart! Well might the Saviour say: "How can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34). Yet it is one of the hardest of all lessons to learn that the heart of every man is incurably wicked.

But we pass on to Romans 3:19. Here the apostle concludes his detailed accusation of the whole human race, Gentiles and Jews alike. "That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." The meaning is that not one single word can be said in extenuation of man's universal condition of guilt and ruin. Not a single reason can be justly assigned why God should not pass sentence forthwith. How would a man feel in whose defence nothing can possibly be urged as he stands in the presence of His Majesty's judge? This is exactly man's position in relation to God. Convinced he may not be; convicted he is beyond all controversy. It is a happy

thing when a man acknowledges the truth as to himself, and feels constrained to say: —

"Nothing but mercy will do for me;

Nothing but mercy, full and free:

Of sinners chief, what but the blood

Could calm my soul before my God? "

In Romans 10:1-21 we have God's principle of salvation — faith in contrast with works. Two kinds of righteousness are presented to us: "the righteousness which is of the law" in verse 5, and "the righteousness which is of faith" in verse 6. The first is what men love most, because it gives a place to human effort; the second, however, is what God sets forth in the Gospel of Christ, and it calls for no human effort at all, but instead magnifies what God and Christ have done. Does any soul long to be saved, crying out with the Jailer of Philippi: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Here is God's answer to this tremendous question: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord (R.V.), and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." To confess Jesus as Lord is to renounce once for all our own self-will, the root of our every sin. It was a great moment in the history of the writer of the epistle to the Romans when he first lay broken and humbled at the feet of Jesus, and contritely called upon Him as Lord. God demands this from us all as the first step towards eternal blessing. Why does the apostle add, as a second condition, if thou "shalt believe in thine heart that God raised Him from the dead"? "Some perhaps would have preferred him to say, "If thou shalt believe that Jesus died." But the apostle does not so express himself. The reason is very simple. Resurrection pre-supposes death. The two great cardinal truths of the Gospel are given to us in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 thus: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures . . . and He was raised again the third day according to the Scriptures." Incidentally it is added, "And He was buried," as if to emphasise the reality of the Saviour's death.

Now see the magnificence of the statement in Romans 10:9. The Christ who died for the ungodly according to Romans 5:6, has been raised from the dead, and that by the very One to whose righteous throne His great sacrifice was presented as an atonement for our sin and guilt. This is the grand public proof that all the divine claims have been once and for ever satisfied. Thus "if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." The mouth gives expression to the peace and delight which now prevail in the heart when God becomes known as a Justifier and Saviour.

Our last text is really an exhortation to Christian unity. "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus; that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5-6). Such a passage serves to illustrate the marvellous fruits of God's salvation, when it is known and enjoyed in the soul. It brings together into one holy bond a great variety of persons who, apart from divine grace, would never have wished to know one another at all. Moreover, it enables them to sink their natural selfishness, and walk together in mutual consideration and love. Occupied not with themselves, nor with one another, they are free to glorify God with one mind and one mouth. Here we have a purifying of the mouth indeed. That which was full of cursing and bitterness in

Romans 3:1-31. is full of praise in Romans 15:1-33. Outward reformation could not effect so great a transformation. The mighty work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, whereby God and Christ become known and appreciated, can alone suffice for it.

Chapter 17

NO DIFFERENCE.

NO DIFFERENCE.

"There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." — Romans 3:22-23

"There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him." — Romans 10:12.

When reading the opening chapters of the epistle to the Romans one seems to be breathing the atmosphere of a court of law. All classes and conditions stand arraigned there. We hear the witnesses called, guilt proved, and then the verdict. In Romans 1:18-32 we have the condition of the Gentile world discussed; that is, the Gentile world as it appeared in the day of the apostle. Debasing idolatry and frightful moral corruption are the charges laid. The witnesses against these transgressors are the things which the Creator has made, whereby are declared His eternal power and Godhead. The sun and the moon in the heavens are a standing protest against idolatry by their perpetual witness to the reality of the supreme God. The Gentile world of the apostle's day finds its answer in the profligates of our own time — those who cast aside all divine restraint, and who not only themselves commit things worthy of death, but take delight in others who do the same.

In Romans 2:1-16 philosophers are addressed. These would denounce sin and propound good moral ideas, but their lives were no better than those of their fellows. Macaulay, in his essay on Bacon, remarks that "these teachers of virtue had all the vices of their neighbours, with the additional vice of hypocrisy." Wesley, in his "journal" comments upon Homer's words concerning the liar. "My soul abhors him as the gates of hell," that "he himself, on the slightest pretence, tells deliberately lies over and over." We have moralists in our own time also — men who speak well, but live ill. But God will not be put off with good words and fair speeches; He demands reality.

The last class charged in Romans 2:1-29 are the Jews. These were the professing people of God, into whose hands the Scriptures had come. They correspond to the multitudes who throng the "places of worship" of to-day. In his arraignment of the Jews the apostle does not cite creation as his witness, but produces passage after passage from their own Scriptures (Romans 3:10-19) . Those who are privileged to possess the Bible in any age must be judged thereby if they do not submit to its holy teaching.

The summing up follows — "every mouth stopped — all the world guilty before God." "There is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Let us not misunderstand the apostle here. He does not say all have sinned equally. Some have been so mercifully placed that all the innate devilry of their hearts has not been drawn forth, and this is cause for thankfulness. Our Lord in Luke 7:1-50 told of two debtors, one who owed five hundred pence and the other fifty. There was thus a difference in the amount due, but both were on the same level in this respect, that neither had anything wherewith to pay. I was once addressing a congregation of lepers in

Barbados, and amongst a number of deplorable cases I observed two smart young men wearing gold watches, and looking the picture of health. At the close of the service I inquired what these were doing in such company, and was told that the dread disease had but recently manifested itself in them. Whatever their general appearance, they were thus lepers like all the rest.

Why does the apostle say, "come short of the glory of God?" The reason is this. Man has lost the earth irretrievably; it is now for him a question of heaven or hell. But who is able to meet the requirements of God's glory, so as to be free and at home there? In Isaiah 6:1-13 we have a man terror-stricken because for one moment he found himself in the presence of the glory of God. There has been but one man in this world whom the glory could acknowledge as worthy of it. To Him there came a voice from the excellent glory: "this is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (2 Peter 1:17). In Him then we see what the glory of God requires in a man. Do we correspond to Him? Here alone is the true standard whereby we may measure ourselves aright. Suppose a young man sought entrance amongst his Majesty's guards, it would be vain for him to plead that he is the tallest person in the town if he falls below the fixed standard. In like manner it is useless to compare ourselves with other sinners. The Pharisee of Luke 18:1-43 committed this folly, and in consequence went home unblessed. Sin is a great leveller. God has said it, and from His sentence there is no appeal: "There is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." The religious man and the atheist; the High Conservative and the Socialist; the moral man and the adulterer stand upon one common platform of guilt before God.

Thus salvation must be altogether of grace; and if of grace, distinctions are impossible. Here our second text comes in most blessedly. The atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus has one value for all who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles. The "no difference" doctrine angered the Jewish people deeply. Paul, as its chief exponent, was fiercely persecuted by them on this account. Even Peter, when charged to preach to Cornelius and his company, was slow to admit that the grace of God was for all alike. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Remark in passing one of the many incidental proofs of the Deity of Christ. This verse is cited from Joel 2:32, where manifestly the reference is to Jehovah; in Romans 10:1-21 it is applied to the Lord Jesus. Then He is Jehovah! Were He not, He would not possess the competency to be the Saviour of men. He is moreover "Lord over all." Thus every one must bow to Him, either now or in the great hereafter.

What is required of men in order that they might be saved? Simply to "call" upon the name of the Lord This was all Israel could do in the midst of their misery in Egypt. To shake off Pharaoh was impossible; to get rid of the taskmasters was out of the question; but they could cry to God. In like manner to-day, he who calls upon the name of the Lord, acknowledging Him thus as his only hope, will be saved. To all such He is "rich." The blessings bound up in the salvation of God are neither few nor small; no creature tongue could declare them in their blessed fullness.

Now turn to a passage in Exodus 11:7, by way of contrast to this. "Against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel." If there is "no difference" amongst men in the matter of guilt, and "no difference" in the dispensing of God's saving grace, there is a difference, deep and eternal, between God's saved ones and all others. As light from darkness, day from night, and life from death, so may be distinguished those who are saved from all who are unsaved.

In Exodus 11:1-10 it was a question of the judgement of God. The destroyer was about to pass through the land. For the Egyptians there was to be divine judgement, but for Israel none. Christ is the line of demarcation to-day between those who are hastening to eternal doom, and those upon whom no judgement can ever fall. How do we all stand in relation to Him!?

Chapter 18

SO GREAT SALVATION.

SO GREAT SALVATION.

"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" — Hebrews 2:3.

In the course of his ministry the apostle had to do with all sorts and conditions of men. He was a chosen vessel unto Christ to bear His name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). His theme everywhere was the same — Christ as the one and only provision of God for the need of men. But his presentation of the theme necessarily varied according to the circumstances of those to whom he addressed himself from time to time. Thus at Lystra, amongst ignorant heathen, we find him speaking of the goodness of the living God in giving men fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:15-17). At Athens, amongst learned heathen, we hear him insisting upon the unity and supremacy of the Creator, and the origin and unity of the human family, and from these truths reasoning against the folly of idolatry (Acts 17:21-31). With the heathen he felt constrained to begin upon the very lowest rung of the ladder of truth.

Our text is from the epistle to the Hebrews. These were a people possessed of the Scriptures. For fifteen centuries the Hebrew nation had been in special relationship with God. Their minds were familiar with the many prophetic announcements of the coming Christ, and their eyes had witnessed the offering of multitudes of sacrifices which all pointed to His great atoning work. Moreover, the Saviour Himself had been in their midst. Neither in Rome, nor in Great Britain, was the Saviour born, but in the tiny land of the Hebrews. There He lived, suffered, and died, and from a hill in that most favoured of all lands He ascended into the Father's glory. It was thus to a people who were conversant with the mightiest of divine facts that the apostle put the solemn question: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? "

Let us dwell awhile upon this word "great." First, how great the need! The whole human race in revolt against its Creator! Jew and Gentile, high and low, rich and poor — all brought in guilty in the divine sight. No exceptions admitted anywhere; "there is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22-23). Moreover, no man naturally wishful for a different condition of things, for the carnal mind is enmity against God (Romans 8:7); and to complete the tale of ruin no man able either to help his brother or save himself. How great, then, the need that God should intervene in mercy with salvation for His rebellious creatures.

And how great the peril! Man being possessed of the divine inbreathing, he has eternity to face. When the grave is reached every man's condition and destiny becomes unalterable. Men are perishing; let us be quite clear as to this awful fact. Who can estimate what this means? How urgent, then, the need that God should provide a way of salvation for men since none could provide one for themselves.

How great the Saviour! Paul in his epistles to Timothy and Titus loves to speak of "God our Saviour." A salvation provided by One so exalted must needs be great and marvellous — worthy

of His name. David, in 2 Samuel 7:1-29 when meditating upon the divine disclosures concerning himself and his house felt that a "great" God must of necessity do great things for those to whom He manifests His grace. God, then, the One against whom we have sinned, is the One who has undertaken our cause.

How great the cost! Hear it described in the words of the Lord Jesus. "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Well might the poet sing: —

"Ours is a pardon bought with blood;

Amazing truth! the blood of One

Who, without usurpation, could

lay claim to heaven's eternal throne."

Nothing could expiate sin but the blood of Christ. Silver and gold are valueless here. Meritorious works and tears of repentance are alike unavailing. Not even the holy life of the Son of God could suffice to bridge the terrible gulf that sin has made between man and his Maker. "Apart from shedding of blood is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). How evil is Satan's slander that God is an austere person! Wonder of wonders! He who seemed to deny an apple to man unfallen has given His Son to man a sinner. Let men beware how they behave in the presence of God's "unspeakable gift." He who refuses the Son of God does so to his eternal loss.

How great the blessing! The salvation of God goes far beyond the mere forgiveness of sins, inestimable as this initial blessing is. The believer in Jesus is washed, sanctified, and justified; he is brought into the family of God and given a place amongst the many sons; he becomes an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ; he is blest with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ; and presently the whole blood-washed throng will be lifted right out of the present evil world and be set down in the Father's house on high, there to enjoy divine favour and blessing for evermore. Well does the apostle say — "so great salvation!" What creature tongue is able to declare what God saves His people from, and all that to which He brings them in Christ our Lord?

Let us now take account of the words which precede our text. "If the word spoken by (or through) angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord," etc. The apostle's first reference is to the law, which was given by angelic ministry at Mount Sinai. Judgement must needs fall upon those who set it at defiance. But if the transgression of the law brought men under judgement, how much more the refusal of grace? Such is the argument. Nothing could be more solemn. The God who would not have His law set at naught can never consent to have His Son treated with contempt.

What must men do in order to perish eternally? Go out and commit some fearful sin, such as would scandalise the town? There is no need to do anything of the kind. People have but to attend the preaching of the Gospel, and neglect to appropriate the Christ of God for themselves in faith, and their ruin is certain for evermore. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" To "reject" is not necessary; to "neglect" is sufficient.

Chapter 19

CREATOR: SAVIOUR: FATHER.

CREATOR: SAVIOUR: FATHER.

"A faithful Creator." — 1 Peter 4:19.

"God our Saviour." — 1 Timothy 1:1.

"God our Father." — 1 Timothy 1:2.

God is declared to us in three characters in the Holy Scriptures — as Creator, as Saviour, and as Father. In each of these characters we may know Him and confide in Him, if so our hearts desire.

In our time "Creator" has become a merely complimentary title upon men's lips. The theory of evolution represents the various forms of life as we know them to be just developments of lower forms, ever struggling upward in virtue of some power inherent in themselves. This view makes God at best a mere superintendent. That man is an independent creation, absolutely and essentially distinct from every other, is no longer believed by the many. But how does Scripture speak as to this? The sacred oracles most unquestionably represent God as the source and originator of everything — not only of everything that we see, but of "all things that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible" (Colossians 1:16). Six times in Genesis 1:1-31 the word "created" is used of His handiwork. "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Hebrews 11:3). Not "by geological research" (good and useful as this may be in its place), but "by faith" we understand. Matter is not eternal; it was created by the hand of God. But, what is of greater moment to us, man also was divinely created. Daniel used no figure of speech when he said to Belshazzar: "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." He was seeking to impress upon the guilty man the fact that he was a creature of God, with deep responsibilities to Him, which he had never acknowledged. This was the truth which Paul insisted upon with the learned men of Athens in Acts 17:1-34. He quoted with approval their own poet's words, "We are also His offspring," and himself added, "He giveth to all life and breath and all things." To these learned dreamers the apostle judged it necessary to teach that man came forth from the workshop of the Almighty. The process is described in Genesis 1:2. First we hear God saying, "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness," and then we have the different stages in the work. "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." The divine Potter first formed the body, and then into the inanimate frame He breathed His own breath. Man is thus a being totally distinct in nature and character from every other creature of God's hand.

"God our Saviour" is a wonderful title. It is found only in the epistles to Timothy and Titus. That He should Himself seek to save rebels against His own majesty is a marvel indeed. Though there is infinite variety in God's works, He has only been pleased to create two orders of moral beings — angels for the heavens and men for the earth. Both of these have revolted against Him. For angels He has provided no Saviour; for men He has. Who can explain so great a mystery? He was under

no obligation to save any of His rebellious creatures. He might have declared Himself "God our Judge" to men as to angels. But the Incarnate Son has told us: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16-17). And so "the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). "The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man has appeared," as we read in another place. "God our Saviour" is not so familiar a thought to some as "Jesus our Saviour." The popular conception is a severe God, and a gracious Jesus. Popery goes even further in its misrepresentation making even Jesus severe, and needing words from Mary to render Him favourable to sinners. "God our Saviour" means that the very One against whom we have transgressed has in His great love Himself provided all that His throne demanded. Who would distrust such a God?

Some were falsifying the Gospel in the apostle's day by preaching the law. Of these he says contemptuously: "Understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (1 Timothy 1:7). In the same way would he speak of the religious leaders of our own time who put men under law, and encourage them to go into the presence of God with vows upon their lips which none are able to perform. The Gospel reveals Him, not as an exactor but as a giver. It is a solemn thing to falsify His testimony.

Now if it be indeed true that "God is our Saviour," and that "the grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men hath appeared," the question arises, are we saved? Paul could say in 2 Timothy 1:9, "Who hath saved us," and in 1 Timothy 1:1-20 he blesses God for saving the chief of sinners. Can you thank God for the same inestimable blessing?

We read in our third text, "God our Father." Not the great universal Father, as some say, coupling with it the idea of the universal brotherhood of man. This is not God's truth, but one of Satan's most dangerous lies. He is the Father of all who believe in the Lord Jesus, but of no others. His name of Father was revealed by the Son. Israel knew Him as Jehovah, and the early patriarchs as the Almighty; we are privileged to know Him as Father. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (John 1:18). But the unfolding was gradual. During His earthly ministry He taught His disciples to say "Our Father, which art in heaven," and "heavenly Father," but these titles do not express the full grace of Christianity. Not until He was risen from the dead did He say "My brethren," and "My Father and your Father, and My God and your God" (John 20:17). Such words put all His own into His place and relationship with His Father and God. Godward we are "many sons;" Christward we are "many brethren," amongst whom He is Firstborn. Well might the apostle say: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God" (1 John 3:1). The Lord's own touching parable in Luke 15:1-32 shows how the Father delights to lavish His love upon those who come to Him in repentance. His love as "God our Saviour" is a love of compassion; His love as "God our Father" is a love of tenderest relationship.

Chapter 20

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables

Our Lord's

Miracles and Parables A Brief Exposition of

All the Miracles and Parables BY William Woldridge Fereday

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Chapter 21

Our Lord's Parables

Foreword The Saviour, in His ministry, spoke so frequently in an illustrative manner that it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a formal parable was intended, or whether He merely used parabolic language. The new wine and new garments, and the lighted candle, for example, while parabolic in character, have been left aside for the purposes of this book. But some may be surprised at the omission of the Rich Man and Lazarus, and the Sheep and the Goats (Luke 16:1-31; Matthew 25:1-46). The former I am not free to regard as a parable, while having no controversy with those who do so regard it. Not only is it not called a parable, but names are introduced, a thing without precedent in Our Lord's parables, so far as I remember. I prefer to look at the Rich Man and Lazarus as actual characters, whose history both in this world and beyond is solemnly traced by the Saviour for the moral profit of men everywhere.

Matthew 25:31-46 is commonly regarded as a parable, but, as I judge, mistakenly. The passage describes an important incident in the judgment of the quick at the Lord's appearing. The Gentiles will be challenged as to their treatment of those whom the King calls "My brethren," i.e., the latter-day remnant of Israel. I see nothing parabolic in the passage beyond the words, "he shall separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." With this explanation, I leave the matter to the judgment of my brethren. The Parables are treated in the order in which they are found in the Gospels.

W. W. F.

The Sower.

The Sower.

This, the first of our Lord's parables, was uttered under very painful circumstances. The Jewish leaders, after much previous evil behaviour, had just gone the length of attributing His power to Beelzebub. Further than this they could not well go in wickedness. Leaders and people were in such a condition of alienation from God that the blessings promised to Israel could not possibly be brought in at that time. From that point the Saviour commenced to use the enigmatical form of speech, which was intelligible enough to the pious minority, while utterly obscure to the profane mass. Like the cloud in Moses' day, which stood between Israel and the Egyptians, the parables were light to the one and darkness to the other. The Saviour likened Himself to a sower of seed (Matthew 13:3-8) This marks a new departure in the ways of God with man. During the earlier ages of the world's history God had been seeking fruit from man (from Israel especially), as He was well entitled to do. But He sought it vain, flesh being incorrigibly evil. Every succeeding dispensation only served to bring this out the more vividly. Man violated his conscience, set at nought the testimony of God's works, trampled under foot His law, and slew the prophets who remonstrated with him concerning his evil. It only remained to murder the Father's well-beloved Son in order to fill the cup of human iniquity to the full. God no longer looks for fruit from man; His present action is to sow the good seed of the Gospel, and so produce His own fruit. This work has been proceeding ever since the Son of God came to earth. But the human heart is not always responsive to the good seed of God's Word. The Lord shows in His parable that on this account the greater part of that which is sown becomes wasted. Men hear, but do not profit by what they hear. Four classes of hearers are indicated; the Saviour's own interpretation making the meaning clear beyond dispute. There are first the wayside hearers. Here we have the careless folk, who listen but heed not, their minds being too indifferent to permit of their becoming interested. As the birds catch up seed sown by the wayside, so Satan removes from these even the remembrance of the things which have been spoken. The preacher may be admired, but his message passes away. Then there are the rocky-ground hearers. They are perhaps the most disappointing of all. They respond immediately to the Word preached, and so cause much rejoicing to those who seek their good; but having no depth, as soon as difficulties arise, they throw their confession of Christ to the winds. These are the impressionable folk. They readily weep when the Saviour is presented to them; but it is mere sentiment, both conscience and heart being unaffected. The third class are the thorny-ground hearers. Good seed has no chance in a bed of thorns. These are the encumbered folk, and they include both rich and poor. The rich man is too full of his estates and horses and dogs to give deep attention to spiritual concerns, and the poor man is too burdened with the anxieties of life. In both cases, earthly affairs being put first, the soul is lost. The last class are the good-ground hearers. These, having experienced the action of God's harrow in their conscience, have learned their guilt and wretchedness, and have put their whole trust in the Saviour Who died for their sins and rose again. In these only is there permanence, though even amongst the true-hearted ones the fruit varies in measure some thirty, some sixty, and some a

hundredfold.

Chapter 23

The Wheat and the Tares.

The Wheat and the Tares.

Six of the seven parables found in Matthew 13:1-58 are divinely described as similitudes of the Kingdom of heaven. The parable of the Wheat and the Tares is the first of the six, and with it is given the Saviour's interpretation thereof to His disciples. The Kingdom of Heaven in its present form covers the whole profession of Christianity, whether true or false. In the coming age it will cover the whole earth, as predicted in Old Testament prophecies. Let us not confound the Kingdom of heaven with heaven itself. This is one of the blunders of Popery, and the blunder is most serious in its results, Many are to-day in the Kingdom of heaven who will have no place in heaven; their profession of allegiance to the absent Christ being merely formal and unreal. The Son of Man has sown good seed in His field. Christianity thus began with a number of persons who were true sons of the Kingdom. Satan soon set to work to corrupt the new testimony. He effected his purpose by introducing false brethren amongst the true. This happened "while men slept," i.e., when Christ's servants became so negligent of their Master's interests, and so dull in their spiritual perception, that they admitted to the outward communion of Christianity men whom they should never have countenanced-unregenerate persons, sons of the wicked one (Jude 1:4). These are called, not "tares," but "darnel-a worthless weed very like wheat in its early growth. When it became manifest that the crop was mixed and spoiled, the servants enquired of the householder if they should gather up the tares. He replied: "Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them." To gather out weeds is to kill them. In like manner the wheatfield of Christendom can only be weeded by putting to death every false professor of Christ's name. This is expressly forbidden, and for the grave reason that true wheat would be in danger of being mistakenly rooted up by erratic servants. Our Lord's prohibition has not been heeded in Christendom. Zealous ecclesiastics, Papist and Protestant, have from time to time sought to eradicate from the earth those whom they have judged as weeds, only to fall into the very blunder deprecated by the Saviour. Some of God's best wheat has been destroyed in the process; many of His truest saints have been burnt at the stake or otherwise martyred. Both wheat and tares are to grow together until the harvest. This means that they are to live side by side in the world (for "the field is the world"), neither molesting the other. To have fellowship together in the Church is quite another matter. So evil a blend was never contemplated in the parable.

Harvest-time is at the end of the age, at least a thousand years before the end of the world. The Saviour will gather every true believer into His barn at His coming again, and the angels will deal with the residue in unsparing judgement. Christ's heavenly glory, with all its blessedness, is the destiny of every blood-washed confessor; the lake of fire, with all its unutterable woe, is the eternal portion of every empty professor of His name. When the final separation has taken place, the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. From their exalted position of heavenly bliss the redeemed will dispense the blessing of God throughout the coming ages to the countless myriads who will be placed beneath their sway in the earth below. The final result will demonstrate that God's purposes of grace have not failed, whatever the seeming success of the

great adversary during the present time.

Chapter 24

The Mustard Tree.

The Mustard Tree. The Saviour next likened the Kingdom of heaven "to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" (Matthew 13:31-32). This is ominous, when we remember that the birds, according to the teaching of the parable of the Sower, represent the agents of the devil (Matthew 13:4, Matthew 13:19). The mustard tree is the profession of Christianity, which began in the humblest possible way, but which in time so completely changed its character as to become a great political force in the earth. Here, as elsewhere in Scripture, the tree is the symbol of worldly power (Ezekiel 17:3; Daniel 4:22).

Christianity is essentially a heavenly system. The Church of God belongs not to the present evil world, but to the scene of glory where Christ dwells. When Christians walked in separation from the course of things here, and with heart-devotedness to their Lord, their testimony was unequivocal, and such as God could bless to the salvation of souls. When the Christian community became influential in the earth, its spiritual usefulness declined, and it became a powerful engine in the hands of Satan. A great and imposing thing in the earth, with all the art's-music, architecture, etc.-pressed into its service, is the very opposite of all that Christ was. The sensuous worship of the cathedral and the abbey is as offensive to God as the simple worship of "the upper room" was His delight.

Let no reader misunderstand, It is not meant that the blessings of Christianity should have been confined within narrow limits. Far from it. The Gospel was intended to be spread abroad; for God loved the world, and Christ gave Himself a ransom for all. But Christian profession should have continued humble and unworldly, seeking nothing in the shape of power and honour where the Saviour only found a cross and a tomb. Instead of this, that which is called "the Church," whether viewed in its Roman, Anglican, or Nonconformist aspects, has been insatiable in its lust for worldly power. It has frequently been a terror to Governments, and it is at this hour a power in the earth which the civil authorities dare not ignore. This, instead of being matter for congratulation on the part of true Christians, is cause for deepest humiliation before God, that men bearing the Lord's name should have so blindly become the dupes of Satan in the falsifying of their own calling and testimony. In the branches of the mustard tree the birds found a congenial home. The Scriptures speak of Christendom in its last phase as "the habitation of demons, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird" (Revelation 18:2). This is true in a large measure at the present time. Had Christianity continued humble and unpretentious, its ministry would never have been sought as a "profession," and it certainly would never have filled its offices with sportsmen, drunkards, and the like. Alas, for the centuries of dishonour to the name of the Holy and the True which have been occasioned by the unclean birds who have found a lodging in the branches, even the topmost branches, of the great mustard tree!

Chapter 25

The Leaven.

The Leaven. Of all our Lord's parables probably none have been so seriously misunderstood as that of the leaven hidden in the meal (Matthew 13:33). It is affirmed most confidently by many that this parable shows the whole world converted by the blessed influences of Christianity. Unfortunately for this interpretation, every Scripture passage which deals with the close of the present era speaks not of conversion and blessing, but of apostasy and wickedness as its characteristic features.

Exodus 12:15 and Leviticus 2:11 will suffice to show how the Saviour's Jewish audience must have understood the simile of leaven. For fifteen centuries they had been under divine command to exclude leaven from their houses during their religious festivals, and they were forbidden to blend it with any of their offerings made by fire. It is thus the emblem of what is evil, and in this way it was frequently used by the Saviour in His teaching. The leaven of the Pharisees, the leaven of the Sadducees, and the leaven of Herod, representing respectively Ritualism, Rationalism, and Worldliness, all came from time to time under His lash.

How then should we read the parable? Something of a corrupt character is shown as subduing everything by which it is surrounded within a certain area. It is Christian doctrine in the vitiated form in which "the Church" has presented it to the world since apostolic energy ceased. Whole nations have become Christianised, hence the familiar word 'Christendom.' Not all the nations of the earth certainly, for Heathenism, Buddhism and Mohammedanism hold sway between them over the greater part of mankind. But what has the Christianising of nations effected? It would be folly to suppose that when historians tell us that such and such nations embraced Christianity long ago that necessarily all the persons composing those nations became savingly converted to God. Nothing of the kind is meant, but simply that, as a result of certain influences that were brought to bear upon them, they were induced to change their religion. But an unfaithful Church, in order to make Christianity palatable to the masses, compromised God's truth most pitifully. Thus, as the heathen had been accustomed for ages to hold carousals at certain seasons of the year in honour of their gods, they were suffered to continue them in the name of Christ. This is the unholy origin of Christmastide, Wakes, etc.

Christianity is essentially a spiritual and heavenly order of things. Therein is the heart of God revealed to men in pardoning grace, blotting out all the trespasses of all who unfeignedly believe in the Saviour's atoning blood. All these are accorded a new standing in Divine favour in the risen One who is now in the glory of God. They belong to heaven, not merely as a place of repose when this world can be held no longer, but as a scene where they should even now live by faith. All this, and much more that is of infinite importance and blessedness, has become utterly beclouded by the invention of a sacerdotal system, which substitutes the visible for the invisible, and the priest for Christ. This is the form, alas in which the world best knows Christianity. It is leaven, corrupt and corrupting until divine forbearance comes to an end, when it will be swept out of the way in unsparing judgment.

Chapter 26

The Hidden Treasure.

The Hidden Treasure.

Having spoken four parables in the hearing of the multitudes on the seashore the Saviour retired into the house with His disciples. He had other matters to communicate which only men born of the Spirit could be expected to understand. In His public utterances He had shown the Kingdom of heaven, i.e., Christian profession in its outward aspect-what any eye could see and any mind comprehend. He had graphically described the rise, development, and doom of Christianity, viewed as an external system. But if He had said no more, it might have been inferred that Satan was destined to be completely triumphant over all the work of God. For it is beyond controversy that the parables of the tares, mustard-tree, and leaven portend disaster, viewed from a spiritual standpoint. In the privacy of the house the Lord presented another aspect of things to His disciples, others besides the twelve being included in His audience (Mark 4:10). Three additional parables were given, the first of these being that of the hidden treasure. "The Kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found it he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth the field" (Matthew 13:44 The field is the world, according to the Lord's own interpretation; the treasure represents the saints who are in it. By the saints we mean all who truly believe in the Saviour's name, and who have been washed from their sins in His precious blood. He purchased the world for the sake of the hidden treasure, as a man to-day might purchase a quantity of old books for the sake of one volume on which his heart is set. The world is thus Christ's, not only by right of creation but also by right of purchase. Nothing can hinder it ultimately coming into His possession, with every person therein, however rebellious. The Father has given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him (John 17:2). When the age is completed, Christ will be seen surrounded by all His own (not one missing), even though the outer framework of Christendom be utterly wrecked. His enemies will then be constrained to bow to Him, in acknowledgement of His title and rights, and will for ever justify the righteous sentence which He will pass upon them for their contumacy and unbelief.

Every believing heart is overwhelmed with wonder and adoration at the thought of the purchase price. He "selleth all that He hath." Our blessing required the surrender of His heavenly glory, the degradation of the Bethlehem manger, and the shame of the cross of Calvary. Sin could only be atoned for by death and bloodshedding. But even from this the Saviour did not shrink, for the joy of being able to surround Himself eternally with happy myriads picked up by sovereign grace out of the ruin of everything below. If His own will experience joy in finding themselves in His heavenly presence, His heart will find deepest joy in having them there.

The Pearl

The Pearl

It is such a common notion that the pearl of great price is the Saviour Himself that it seems almost irreverent to challenge it. Yet the popular interpretation is open to serious objection for two reasons: (1) it would put this parable entirely out of harmony with the teaching of its context; (2) it represents the sinner as sacrificing something-all indeed-in order to acquire Christ. But Christ cannot be purchased. He is God's unspeakable gift to man, and all the blessings which are the fruit of His atonement, Eternal life, etc.-are gifts also. Peter severely denounced the man who thought the gift of God might be purchased with money. Moreover, the sinner is represented in Scripture as having "nothing to pay" (Luke 7:42). He who cannot meet his just obligations is surely in no position to buy costly pearls. And it should be remembered that it is the Saviour who seeks the sinner, rather than the sinner the Saviour. The parable runs thus:-"The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:45-46). As in the case of the hidden treasure. the purchaser is Christ. The pearl is the Church, which, in Scripture, is the aggregate of all believing persons from the descent of the Holy Ghost, until the coming of the Saviour into the air (Acts 2:1-47; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18). The hidden treasure may have consisted of hundreds of pieces of gold and silver, and thus suitably represents believers in all ages, who have been, and will yet be saved out of the wreck of Adam's world by the infinite grace of God. But the pearl represents the saved of the Christian period specifically. The Church holds a very special place in the ways of God. The divine purposes concerning it were retained as a secret in the divine bosom until Paul was raised up as a chosen vessel to communicate them to men (Ephesians 3:3-4). He was in a peculiar sense the minister of the Church; and from him we learn that the Church is Christ's body now, and will be His bride throughout eternity. In these special relationships the saved of the preceding and following ages have no part though the everlasting home of all God's saints is one-"the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12:22). The single pearl shows the unity and beauty of the Church as Christ sees and estimates it. The joyful Finder of the earlier parable is the toilsome Seeker in the parable before us. To have the pearl for His own He sacrificed His all. He left heaven's glory, and accepted in lieu thereof the lowly circumstances of earth. His earthly throne, as David's Son and Heir, He also surrendered, and accepted instead the cross and the tomb. All this was in order that He might possess Himself of the pearl upon which He had set His heart. As the Spirit elsewhere puts it: "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). Surely the affections of all the objects of His favour should be set upon such a Saviour for ever.

Chapter 28

The Drag-Net

The Drag-Net This is the last of the series of parables that were uttered by our Lord on the memorable day of Matthew 13:1-58 : "The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away" (Matthew 13:47-48). Here we have the final results of the operations of God, man, and Satan during the period called Christianity. As a net cast into the sea the Gospel has gone forth into all the world, with its touching appeal to men of every nation. It has achieved results which are manifest to the eyes of all. Both good and bad have been gathered in: the good fish representing those who, having humbly acknowledged their guilt and ruin, have been cleansed from their sins by the Saviour's precious blood; the bad being those (alas! how many) who "profess and call themselves Christians," with no love for the Saviour's person, and no living faith in the Gospel. It is vain to urge that we must not judge. How is it possible for the Christian to obey the injunction to love the brethren if he cannot distinguish between "the brethren" and all others? (1 John 3:14). How refuse fellowship to an unbeliever if it is impossible to define such (2 Corinthians 6:15). Or how avoid false teachers who bring in damnable heresies, if none can tell who are false and who are true (2 Peter 2:1). Although mistakes in discernment are only too possible, all those to whom Christ is something more than a mere name are solemnly responsible to distinguish, in godly fear, between those who are good and those who are bad, companying with the one, and eschewing the other. When the gospel net is full it will be drawn to shore. How soon this will take place is known to none but God, though everything around us is suggestive that the end of the age is drawing near. Then will ensue the great separation, which will sever the ungodly from even the outward communion of the godly for ever. According to the teaching of the parable, the fishermen's duty was to care for the good fish. This is the present responsibility of those who in this day profess to serve the absent Christ. The bad fish the fishermen merely cast out of the net, as not being those for whom they were in search. The judgement of God upon false professors will be meted out, not by human hands, but by angelic power. "So shall it be at the end of the age (not 'world'): the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:49-50). Such is the end of Christendom, as described by God Himself; not the whole world subdued to Christ by the operation of religious agencies, but eternal ruin for many who have passed current amongst their fellows as Christians indeed. The Saviour will undoubtedly have His own, though the final discrimination by His unerring hand will reveal an appalling amount of unreality and hypocrisy in the circle of those who, in one way or another, bear His holy name.

Chapter 29

The Two Servants

The Two Servants

One of the ugliest features of fallen human nature -insensibility to divine grace-is exposed in all its hideousness in the parable of the Two servants (Matthew 18:23-35). It happened on this wise. Peter had just enquired of the Lord if seven times would suffice for the forgiveness of an erring brother, and had received the startling reply, "Until seventy times seven." The parable before us was added immediately, and in it the exceeding grace of God and the incorrigible evil of man stand clearly revealed. The outline of the parable is as follows. A certain king, in taking account of his servants, found one who owed him ten thousand talents about three millions sterling in English money. The defaulter being penniless, the King ordered that he, and his wife, children and goods to be sold. In his distress the debtor fell at his master's feet, crying: "Lord, have patience with me and I will pay thee all." The King's heart being moved with compassion, the whole vast debt was immediately remitted. Presently the forgiven one met a fellow-servant who owed him a hundred pence-about three pounds in our currency; and instead of extending to him clemency after the pattern of that which had been so recently shown to himself, he seized him by the throat saying: "Pay me that thou owest." In his utter heartlessness, he gave no heed to the tears of his fellow, but cast him into prison until payment should be made. This parable may be read both dispensationally and morally. Dispensationally it presents to us the history of the people of Israel. Centuries of law breaking had made them serious defaulters before the Son of God came into the world, and to all this they added the enormous guilt of shedding His blood. In answer to His gracious prayer, "Father, forgive them," divine favour was shown to the nation after the Holy Ghost came down from heaven. To Israel first the Gospel of divine forgiveness was sent (Acts 3:26). This instead of melting their hearts, only served to bring out their utter moral insensibility to God's goodness. Scorning the Gospel for themselves, in their hatred to the Gentiles they put every obstacle in the way of its being preached to them (1 Thessalonians 2:16). This has filled their cup of iniquity to the brim. They are now suffering divine chastisement until their term is accomplished, and they have received of Jehovah's hand double for all their sins (Isaiah 40:2).

We must read this parable morally also. Viewed from this standpoint, it appeals loudly to us all. Every man is a defaulter in relation to God. Perfect obedience and love is His due from us, but who among us has ever rendered it. Yet the heart of God yearns over all His bankrupt debtors, and, on the basis of the atoning blood of Jesus, He proclaims full pardon to everyone. Myriads profess to have received His pardon. "I believe in the forgiveness of sins" is the language of multitudes in Christendom daily. But conduct alone proves whether or not the grace of God has really penetrated the soul. Where this is the case, the forgiven one gratefully walks in the spirit of grace towards all, meekly enduring wrong, and sincerely seeking every man's eternal good. Those who content themselves with saying "Lord, Lord," while not doing the things that He says, will find themselves ultimately in the place of the wicked servant of our parable, who was severely denounced by his lord for his hypocrisy and evil, and was forthwith delivered to the tormentors. "He shall have judgement without mercy that hath showed no mercy (James 2:13). Our God will be

satisfied with nothing less than reality in those who have to do with Him.

Chapter 30

The Labourers in the Vineyard.

The Labourers in the Vineyard.

There is absolutely nothing in this parable about the salvation of the soul. Salvation is altogether the fruit of sovereign grace, bestowed upon the unworthy on the basis of the blood of Jesus, the thought of wages or reward being utterly foreign to it. But every saved one is a servant, responsible in all things to his Lord. It is of this that our parable speaks.

Peter's remark in Matthew 19:27 called it forth. "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore." In reply he was told that faithful service will in no wise go unrewarded, and that as regards the apostles, special honour is reserved for them in the golden era when the Son of man will sit upon His throne. But perceiving in Peter's remark a tendency to exalt human doings and sacrifices unduly, the Lord added the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) The penny (or denarius) for which the householder agreed with his first batch of workers was the usual labourer's wage in that day. The agreement was thus equitable to all parties. At pay-time a difficulty arose concerning some whom the master found unemployed at the eleventh hour, and sent into the vineyard. In their case no wage was fixed; they were simply told, "Whatsoever is right ye shall receive." They trusted to the master's goodness-a safe principle where God is concerned. At pay-time these eleventh-hour labourers were recompensed first, and each received a penny. When those who were engaged in the morning came before the steward they supposed they would receive more, and they did not hesitate to complain to the master because no more than a penny was given to them. The master remonstrated with the ringleader thus: Friend, I do thee no wrong; didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take up that which is thine, and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do as I will with my own. Or is thine eye evil, because I am good? (R.V) The point is the absolute right of the Lord of all to do as He pleases in His own realm-a right which no reverent mind would contest for a moment. Human pettiness, even in true saints, is apt to appraise its own service and to magnify its own labours in the Lord's vineyard. But all such notions are rebuked by the recollection of what each soul owes to its Redeemer. At infinite cost, amidst circumstances of unparalleled grief and shame, He secured our salvation at the cross of Calvary. From the moment that this immense fact is apprehended, devoted service becomes the happy occupation of him who has received so inestimable a blessing. Love is the only true motive; every Scripture statement concerning ultimate reward being given as encouragement merely. When our noblest doings are compared with what Christ has done for us, we feel constrained to put our hand upon our mouth, and cast ourselves adoringly at His feet. He will delight to commend and reward even a cup of cold water given for His sake, but far be it from us to utter one word about the best we have done. It is grace alone which has put us into the path of Christ, the same grace sustains us therein, and grace will not fail to crown it munificently when the end is reached.

Chapter 31

The Two Sons.

The Two Sons. No preacher was ever less disposed for controversy than the Son of God, yet none were ever so incisive in their handling of contentious critics as He. And no wonder; being the Searcher of all hearts He knew perfectly the motives which actuated those who assailed Him; and being Himself the Truth He knew just what was required to meet every occasion.

During His last week in Jerusalem He was frequently assailed by the religious leaders of Israel. On one occasion, after He had exposed their spiritual incompetency for the sacred office, He gave utterance to the parable of the Two sons, wherein is set forth the hopeless case of men who say and do not. "A certain man had two sons, and he came to the first, and said, 'Son, go work to-day in my vineyard'. He answered and said, 'I will not': but afterwards he repented and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, Sir': and went not" (Matthew 21:28-30) The rebellious son, who at first refused to do his father's will, represents the publicans and the harlots. Immersed in iniquity, these hearkened to the stern denunciations of John the Baptist, and bowed their hearts in true contrition before God. When the Saviour's ministry of grace reached their ears they welcomed it, and thus became true heirs of the Kingdom. The son who promised obedience but did not render it represents the priests and Pharisees. These, steeped in religion, and profoundly contemptuous of "publicans and sinners," were in fact the veriest hypocrites. Nothing could be more cutting than the Saviour's words concerning them on another occasion: "All therefore whatsoever they bid you, observe and do; but do not ye after their works; for they say and do not" (Matthew 23:3). For such men, no sentence could be more righteous than this: "Verily, I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you. This parable should raise the most serious thoughts in men's minds to-day. All around us are those who "profess and call themselves Christians," with leaders and shepherds not a few. From all these God demands reality. Deeds, not words, are His holy requirement. A pious "Lord, Lord," can never deceive Him. True faith in the Saviour's name and in the blood He shed produces holiness, separation from the world, and devotedness to the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Where these things are not seen, profession is the merest sham, which may pass muster with men in the present world, but will be fully exposed in another scene. However startling it may appear, it is nevertheless true that maybe a religious person will be lost for ever. But it is equally true that multitudes of the earth's vilest will be found in the blessedness of the Father's house when the gathering moment comes. The very vileness of these latter disposes them to seek the Saviour's face, and to avail themselves of His great salvation. Like the crucified thief who said, "Lord, remember me," their cry of repentance has been heard, and divine forgiveness has been vouchsafed to them full and free. Salvation is altogether of grace, and it is the happy portion of every true believer, wherever found.

Chapter 32

The Wicked Husbandmen.

The Wicked Husbandmen. The Saviour was fully aware, during His last visit to Jerusalem, that conspiracy was abroad, and that the leaders of Israel were planning His death. In this striking parable, recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, He exposes their design fully. This so exasperated His enemies that they would have laid violent hands upon Him forthwith, but they feared the people (Matthew 21:46). The parable of the Husbandmen, though directed against the leaders, gives the whole history of Israel from the day that God began to bestow favours upon them. Their beautiful inheritance is likened to a vineyard, containing everything conducive to abundant fruit-bearing. In the East rent is paid, not in money altogether, but partly in kind. But God looked in vain for any return from Israel (Matthew 21:33-41). Eight centuries before Christ's coming He complained thus: "What could have been done more to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? (Isaiah 5:4). Nothing but the basest ingratitude and sin was ever rendered by Israel for all the favours wherewith God blessed them. Violence and murder were meted out to His messengers: they "beat one, and killed another, and stoned another." Stephen challenged them thus severely, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" (Acts 7:52). The climax of insult and iniquity was reached when the Son came, and they said among themselves: "This is the Heir; come, let us kill Him, and seize on His inheritance." Within a week these words received their painful fulfilment - the Son of God lay dead in the tomb. The history of Israel is the history of man everywhere. In their record we see our own hearts reflected. We shall miss all the moral value of the parable if we fail to perceive this. Fallen man is utterly unfruitful for God; and, what is worse, his heart is filled with antagonism to God and His Son. The apostle's words as to this in Romans 8:7-8 are very sweeping: "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Nothing avails but a new creation by means of the Spirit and the Word. In answer to the Lord's demand as to what should be done to the lawless husbandmen, His hearers pronounced their own sentence. "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." They wanted the inheritance for themselves, apart altogether from divine interference and claim; they should have destruction instead. The Stone which the builders rejected was about to become the head of the corner; and the day will arrive when the Stone will descend with crushing violence upon all transgressors, and grind them to powder (Matthew 21:42-44) Even the forbearance of God has its limits. The judgement of unfruitful Israel has already fallen; the judgement of unfaithful Christendom is rapidly approaching. From it there is no escape for any, but through faith in the Saviour's name, and in His precious atoning blood.

Chapter 33

The Marriage of the King's Son.

The Marriage of the King's Son. This parable, unlike that of the Husbandmen, is a similitude of the kingdom of heaven. The former parable gives the history of Israel under the law; the latter describes their conduct in the presence of divine grace. In the one, God is represented as presenting claims (as He was entitled to do); in the other, He invites to a feast. Taken together, the two parables show the utter failure of flesh in connection with both law and grace. Such is man that if God asks him for something he will not render it; and if God offers him something he will not accept it.

"A certain King made a marriage for his son" (Matthew 22:1-14). The King is God; the son is the Lord Jesus. Remarkably, the bride does not figure in the parable at all: everything is ordered for the pleasure of the son. This is the principle on which God is acting in His present dealings with men. In sending salvation to us, with all its inestimable blessings for eternity, His prime object is to give joy and honour to His beloved Son, in whom all the divine counsels are centred. But men have no regard for either God or His Son; hence our parable speaks of two invitations absolutely refused. There were two distinct missions to Israel; one before, and one after, the cross of Calvary. The second was rejected with violence to the messengers; they "entreated them spitefully and slew them." The children of those who killed the Old Testament prophets treated in like manner the New Testament apostles. Peter, John, and Paul experienced their cruelty, whilst Stephen and James were murdered by them. Our Lord gave a further warning as to all this in Matthew 23:34 : Judgement followed, as the parable foretold. The King's armies (in this case the Romans, under Titus) destroyed the murderers and burnt up their city. Compare Luke 21:20-24. But the King's goodness was not quenched by the ingratitude and evil of the first invited guests. Accordingly the servants were bidden to go into the highways and bring in all they could find, "both bad and good." Thus the grace of God, so scornfully rejected by Israel, has been extended to the Gentiles. "Whosoever" is now the grand Gospel cry. Divine love to the world is now proclaimed on the basis of the atoning blood of Jesus. But all is not right with these Gentile called ones. "When the King came in to see the guests he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment." A promiscuous gathering collected from the highways was not expected to possess raiment suitable for a royal banqueting house; wedding robes had therefore been provided. The individual upon whom the King's eye rested dared to affront the King by appearing in raiment of his own. He either thought too highly of his own apparel to put it aside, or too lightly of what befitted the presence of the King to suffer himself to don the wedding garment. This man is the representative of a class. In his presumptuous ignoring of the wedding garment he is the prototype of religious men destitute of Christ. All these boast of their own righteousness instead of submitting themselves to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3). Unless God in His infinite mercy opens their eyes to their true position, the outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth must be their portion for ever. The King's inspection of those who profess to have accepted His call may be nearer than any of us suppose.

Chapter 34

The Ten Virgins.

The Ten Virgins. This parable describes prophetically the conduct of professing Christians in relation to the hope of the Lord s coming. It is most certain that when the Son of God went up into the Father's house He left behind Him the promise to come again, and gather home to Himself all those for whom He died (John 14:3). For the fulfilment of this, all should have looked with fervent desire.

Then shall the Kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish" (Matthew 25:1-13). Christianity is a heavenly order of things. When it really engages a man's heart it sets him entirely outside of the present evil world, with his face towards the glory of God. The fact that his Saviour is no longer here has spoiled the world for the Christian. A stranger below, he waits for Christ's coming from above. It is Satan's unceasing aim to pervert the heavenly character of Christianity; hence the worldly employments with which religious leaders fill the minds of those who follow them-bazaars, concerts, and the like. The virgins are divinely divided into two companies-the wise and the foolish; the essential difference being that the one had oil in their vessels with their lamps, and the other had not. Oil is the emblem of the Holy Spirit, who is God's great gift to all who believe the Gospel (Ephesians 1:13). He who has not God's Spirit is no Christian, whatever his pretensions (Romans 8:9). "While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept. The hope of the Lord's coming for His people, which so fired the souls of believers in the apostle's day, became lost when the apostles were no more. Since that time men in Christendom have spoken only of the day of judgement at the end of all things. The Te Deum, with other ancient writings, acknowledges this solemn truth, but of the Saviour's descent into the air to call up His saints not a trace can be found in the literary remains of centuries. But the midnight cry has gone forth. The nineteenth century witnessed a revival of the hope. From one end of Christendom to the other the cry now resounds: "Behold the Bridegroom; go ye out to meet Him. Under the mighty impulse of the midnight cry multitudes of true believers-"wise virgins" have aroused themselves, and have shaken themselves free of worldly associations, religious or otherwise, and have resumed the original waiting attitude of the Church of God. The foolish virgins are also full of activity, though in a wrong direction. Realising that something is lacking, they are redoubling their religious zeal, in the hope of fitting themselves thereby for the Bridegroom's presence. Sacraments and formalities of every kind are their confidence and stay. Our parable shows that when the bridegroom came, "they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut." Readiness consists, not in attention to religious formalities, but in unfeigned faith in the Saviour's name, and in His atoning blood. Only those of whom this is true find themselves on the right side of the door, when the critical moment arrives. Those outside appeal in vain: "Lord, Lord, open to us." But one reply is possible: "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not. Both true and nominal Christians, like the wise and foolish virgins, are alike in their profession, but the return of the Lord from heaven will make clearly manifest how deep is the moral gulf which really separates the one class from the other.

Chapter 35

The Talents.

The Talents. This parable has a voice to all who hold the position of servants of Christ during His absence in heaven. He likens Himself to "a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered to them his goods." (Matthew 25:14-30). The only true motive for service to Christ is affection for His person. Salvation is by grace alone; it is the purchase of His blood, neither pious deeds nor service of any kind having aught to do with the matter. He who ventures to serve Christ in any capacity apart from appreciation of His blood, and love to His person, only undertakes that which will bring down judgement upon his head in the great day. The sovereignty of the Lord is seen in that to one was committed five talents, to another two, and to another one-"to each man according to his several ability. Thus Apollos was not so richly endowed as Paul, but both were equally responsible to do their best with what they had. This principle applies still. Let no true witness for Christ bemoan the smallness of his gifts, "for if there be first the willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" 2 Corinthians 8:12 Some of the servants of our parable, having received their talents, forthwith went and traded with them. What need for delay. In like manner, those who in our day have received qualifications from Christ are solemnly responsible to go forth and use them, asking permission from no man. The notion of official ordination has been the bane of Christian ministry for centuries. Romanists, Greeks, Anglicans, and Nonconformists agree in the fiction that ordination of some kind is necessary ere a man handle sacred things. The practical result of this is that many are installed as servants of Christ who have never known His salvation, and who are in consequence dead hindrances to the operation of the Spirit of God while others of a more spiritual type are discredited as unauthorised and piratical. Scripture nowhere asserts the need of official appointment for preaching the Word of God, still less for "the due administration of the sacraments." Elders and deacons were apostolically ordained, but these officers had nothing directly to do with public ministry. The work of the one was rule and visitation; and of the other, care for widows, etc. When John, in his second epistle, warned the elect lady against heretical teachers, he did not bid her examine their credentials, but to test their teaching. Paul gloried in the fact that he was an apostle, neither of men, nor by men (Galatians 1:1). No man had anything whatever to do with his call to service. When the lord returned, he called his servants together, and reckoned with them. In like manner will the Lord Jesus, at His coming again, investigate the doings of all who have professed to serve Him during His absence. The man who had received five talents was called first, as the one most responsible. He had gained five talents more, and was rewarded with his master's commendation. The man who had received the two had gained two more. His commendation was word for word the same as that of his more privileged brother. Each had done his best with his master's goods, and each was therefore invited to enter into the joy of his lord. Bliss with Christ is the happy end of all true labour for His name. The man with the single talent was cast into the outer darkness. He represents Christendom's unconverted preachers, whose hearts have never been warmed by the love of Christ, and who cannot therefore find delight in pleasing Him. Unworthy motives explain their public position, the duties of which they shirk as miserably as the man in our parable. Though such speak with the tongues of men and of angels, it is but as

sounding brass in the divine ears. Unless God mercifully lead them to repentance, Balaam's doom must be theirs for ever.

Chapter 36

The Sleeping Husbandman,

The Sleeping Husbandman,

"So is the Kingdom of God as if a man should cast seed on the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come" (Mark 4:26-29) This parable is peculiar to the Second Evangelist. Its point is the non-intervention of the Lord of the harvest with the outward course of Christianity. He Himself was the beginner of the present testimony to God's grace and goodness, in person, during His humiliation and by means of the Holy Spirit after He ascended on high. The Gospels tell us of His personal labours, Mark concluding with the statement that after His departure the disciples continued the testimony, "the Lord working with them."

He has thus "cast seed on the ground," the results being left to the responsibility of men. The reception which has been accorded to the Gospel seed is fully detailed in the parable of the Sower. The greater part of it has been rendered unproductive through the evil of the human heart. But the Lord does not interfere. He remains quiescent for the present in the glory of God. The apparent indifference of the Lord of the harvest has been a frequent cause of perplexity to the godly. They have witnessed the excellent of the earth cast to the lions by the heathen, and tortured in the Inquisition, and burned at the stake by the religious chiefs of Christendom, and their anguished hearts have marvelled at the silence of heaven. No angels have appeared for the deliverance of the oppressed, as in the case of imprisoned Peter; and no miracles have been wrought on their behalf as in the day when the three Hebrews were cast into the fiery furnace. "Oh Lord, how long?" has been the agonised cry of such as have marvelled at the triumph of evil, especially in the religious sphere. For the present, matters are suffered to take their own course. That no purpose of God is failing of its accomplishment is clear from our parable. Fruit is most certainly being produced for God in the world, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." Whatever the apparent trend of things, the Gospel is undoubtedly winning true hearts for the Saviour Who died and rose again. By and bye He will surround Himself in the Father's house with the full fruit of His great Calvary sacrifice. When harvest-time arrives, His attitude of non-intervention will be abandoned and He will exert Himself in power. Then "He putteth in the sickle." In that day He will discriminate, as He only can unfailingly, between those who really love His name and those who love Him not. For His own there is prepared a place in the glory above; for all others, whatever their religious profession or ecclesiastical status, there is reserved blackness of darkness for ever.

Chapter 37

The Two Builders.

The Two Builders.

Both Matthew and Luke give this heart-searching parable at the close of our Lord's sermon on the mount. Multitudes had listened to His teaching with wonder and admiration. His gracious words attracted them, and His authoritative tone (so unlike that of their scribes) commanded at least their respect. In their estimation "Never man spake like this Man." So far well, but the human heart is deplorably fickle and unreal. This leads men to hear, and even to approve what they hear, while rendering no obedience to the heavenly message. Hence the importance of the parable of the two builders. Whosoever cometh to Me and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: he is like a man who built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on the rock" (Luke 6:47-48). The man who hears manifestly stands in a position altogether different from that of him who hears not. The latter is utterly indifferent; the former gives more or less attention to the things which are eternal. But unless his sole foundation is the teaching of the Son of God, he has absolutely nothing that will avail him when the storm of divine judgement arises. "Back to Christ" is the cry today. Well, be it so; but what has Christ told us? In John 3:5 He insists upon every man's need of the new birth; in the same chapter (John 3:14) He declares the absolute necessity for His atoning sacrifice: and then proceeds to show (John 3:16) that the heart of God has provided what the throne of God demanded. "He so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son." His own lips have told us also that every man's eternal future depends upon his attitude towards Himself. "Back to Christ," if really meant, must lead men to bow at His feet in humble acknowledgement of His person and sacrifice. All who have taken this happy place have laid their foundation on the rock, and for them the impending judgement of God, however terrible, has no alarm.

"But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation, built an house upon the earth; against which the storm did beat violently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great" (Luke 6:49). Thus graphically does the Lord of all describe the collapse of all the hopes of such as have not built upon His words. Heaven is silent today: no fiery bolts proceed thence to drive the guilty into eternal woe: but a veritable hurricane of divine wrath will burst forth ere long, which will reveal indisputably where men really stand. Every unreal superstructure will then totter and fall. The fairest moral and religious exterior will not shield from judgement those who have not as lost sinners put their trust in the Saviour and in His precious blood. As the prophet declared ages ago: "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place" (Isaiah 28:17). Happy, eternally happy, is the man who has built on Christ, the Son of God. This foundation will stand, and this alone.

Chapter 38

The Two Debtors.

The Two Debtors. The Saviour was sitting at meat in the house of a Pharisee. His spirit was sorely grieved at the time. He had just had occasion to rebuke the men of His generation for their indifference to both John the Baptist and Himself. The stern asceticism of the forerunner so irritated them that they said he had a demon; and the geniality and graciousness of the Saviour so offended them that they called Him a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners (Luke 7:31-35).

Something to refresh His heart would have been deeply appreciated at that moment. But He was not to receive it at the hands of His host. He in his deplorable blindness was wholly unconscious of whom he had at his board that day. His God was there, but he knew it not. Yet he was a religious man-one of the ultra-religious indeed. His Guest, was, in his eyes, simply a travelling preacher, to whom it might be well to grant a meal. It had occurred to him that He might possibly be a prophet but this thought he dismissed as he noted His conduct in his house. So little did he esteem his Guest that he did not even offer Him the usual Eastern courtesies-water for His feet, etc. Truly there is nothing so blinding or benumbing as empty, formal religion.

Presently a woman of the city-a moral derelict from the streets-crept into the dining-hall, hearing that Jesus was there. Her soul was burdened. Sin lay heavily upon her. But she discerned in Jesus the Saviour of sinners. Whether He suited others or not mattered little to her; to one burdened with guilt like herself He was just the One she needed. None other in the universe could meet her case. She had heard of His grace to sinners, and her heart was attracted. No restraints or Pharisaical proprieties were suffered to stand in her way. She sought Him out, and claimed, not in words but in deeds, a personal interest in His saving grace. To the deep disgust of the host she rained tears upon the Saviour's feet, wiped them with the hair of her head, kissed them fervently, and anointed them with ointment. The Lord, aware of what was passing in the mind of the Pharisee, turned to him thus: "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed him five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?" (Luke 7:40-42). To such a parable but one answer was possible, and the application was evident. If each man's record of sin is not actually vile, there is no room for boasting, since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." It ill becomes one therefore to scorn another. Each would be well advised to seek pardoning grace for himself.

Turning to the woman, the Saviour said: "Thy sins are forgiven. He had come down from heaven for the salvation of such as she, and He was on His way to Calvary to expiate her guilt. Never again could she number herself amongst "miserable sinners"; ever after with gratitude her lips would say, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins, and in the life everlasting. Amen."

Chapter 39

The Good Samaritan.

The Good Samaritan. This touching parable was related by the Saviour as a rebuke to a caviller, who had challenged Him as to what he should do to inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25-37). To an honest enquirer, He would have replied that eternal life is the gift of God to those who believe on His Son; but to a caviller He could only speak of the law of Sinai. Unabashed and unconvicted (though a professional exponent of the divine law) His questioner then asked: "And who is my neighbour? This parable was then given, which not only furnished a complete answer to the question, but also shows in a vivid way man's utterly ruined condition as God sees it. No one who understands the parable of the Good Samaritan would ever seek to obtain eternal life by meritorious works of any kind. The man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and who experienced so disastrous a journey is a representative character; in him every man may see his own portrait, if he will. It is folly to speak of human progress; man's course has been retrograde ever since the catastrophe in Eden. He has fallen into the hands of the hosts of evil, who have stripped him of his once fair robe of innocence, injuring him mortally in so doing. His condition is hopeless so far as creature aid is concerned.

Two persons passed by as the stricken traveller lay weltering in his blood, the one a priest and the other a Levite; but neither proffered a helping hand. Yet the law taught that even the ass of an enemy was to be succoured if he was seen groaning under his burden (Exodus 23:5). But why did the Saviour select, out of the many classes and ranks of men, the priest and the Levite as those who did nothing for the dying one? Surely to teach us the utter inability of the system which these characters represented to meet the need of ruined man. The priest's business was with religious forms and ceremonies, and the Levite was responsible to instruct the people in the law of God: yet both of these are represented by a divine hand as doing nothing for a man in his hour of deadly peril. What a lesson is here! Yet so little heed has been paid to it that to this hour multitudes in their quest for salvation cast themselves, some upon priests, and some upon moralists, to meet their deep need. The blunder of it is painful to contemplate.

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him." Thus graphically the Saviour describes His own mission of grace. From heaven's glory He journeyed, going ever downward until Calvary was reached, where He bowed His head in death as an atonement for human guilt. Man being righteously under sentence of death, He must needs suffer and die in order to lift him out of his degradation and ruin. The Jews once called Him a Samaritan in contempt (John 8:48); in our parable He meekly accepts the title. Yet the scorn of man could not be suffered to dry up the springs of His grace, hence His loving provision of oil and wine, typifying the Spirit's application to the soul of the healing efficacy of His precious blood. In the picture before us we have the man, cured, carried, and cared for in every way. There is yet a higher aspect of saving grace the sinner brought into the Father's presence, to be for ever a sharer of divine joys. But this is shown to us in the later parable of the prodigal son.

Chapter 40

The Stronger than the Strong

The Stronger than the Strong

It was suggested by some that the power by which the Son of God wrought in this world was the power of Beelzebub. The suggestion was as absurd as it was blasphemous. But it furnished the Saviour with an opportunity of showing the relation of man to Satan as the fruit of the fall, and His own relation to the enemy as having come from heaven for man's deliverance and blessing. He put it thus: "When the strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when the stronger than he shall come upon him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils" (Luke 11:21-22). The strong one is Satan; the stronger than he is the Son of God. Satan's "palace" is the world as it is now; "his goods" are the men and women who dwell therein. The position is a terrible one; none the less so because the mass have no realization of it. Man's revolt from God has not yielded him the independence to which he aspired; it has reduced him to Satanic servitude instead. The Lord Himself on three occasions spoke of the enemy as "prince of this world." The blind eagerness with which men pursue their lusts and pleasures, some decent and some indecent, is sufficient proof of Satan's dominion over them. Even though no satisfaction is found for money or effort, and though the ultimate issue is manifestly ruinous, men rush heedlessly on. In fact, if they would extricate themselves from the toils of the destroyer, they have no power to do so. Satan has nothing to fear from the struggles of his captives, be they ever so frantic. His hold is firm; his dominion is ancient; and his resources are beyond anything known to the children of men. But Christ has come. From the Father's heart He came, as the living expression of His compassion for the wretched and lost. Hear Him proclaiming in the synagogue of Nazareth the character of His mission. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me; because He hath anointed Me to preach deliverance to the captives," etc. (Luke 4:18). Ere deliverance could be, He must meet the strong man and overcome him. In the wilderness He bound him; at the cross He bruised him. By submitting to death for a brief moment, He annulled Satan's Power. His resurrection is the glorious proof of His complete triumph over all the might of the enemy. Deliverance is, in consequence, available for all. None need remain a single hour under the dominion of the strong man. The cry of distress will assuredly be heard; pardon and eternal life will be freely bestowed upon all who believe on the Son. The soul is thus set free for ever. In the same discourse the Saviour gave utterance to the connected parable of the restless spirit (Luke 11:24-26). It is the case of one from whom the unclean spirit has gone out (not cast out), only to return later with seven-fold power. Dispensation- ally, this is the history of the nation of Israel, from which the demon of idolatry went out after the Babylonish captivity, with the certainty of returning in its most evil form in the day of the Anti-Christ (Matthew 12:45) The Christ of God having been disowned in Zion, "the abomination of desolation" is destined to stand in Israel's holy place (Matthew 24:15 Reformation is insufficient, whether for that nation or for individuals, in this or in any other day. It will not avail to put the soul beyond the reach of the enemy's power. living faith in the One Who died and rose again can alone effectually meet human need.

Chapter 41

The Rich Fool.

The Rich Fool.

Someone had just appealed to the Saviour concerning a property dispute. He declined to interfere, the matter being foreign to His mission at that time. He had come from heaven, not to adjust the world's wrongs, but to seek men's souls in love. The crooked will certainly be made straight by His hand, but in another era. For this He must return from His present place on high. But meanwhile, He Who never missed an opportunity of dealing with men's consciences concerning things unseen and eternal, used the occasion of the appeal to warn His hearers against absorption with this world's affairs. In order to present this the more forcibly He added the familiar parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21). The world has never been without such characters as the Saviour here describes. His omniscient eye had observed the like repeatedly. Men to whom the Creator has been specially kind, into whose lap He has poured blessings in abundance, and who have only used His favours to the utter exclusion of Himself from their thoughts. The rich man of our parable was hampered in regard to his produce. His farm had brought forth plentifully, and his barns were full to overflowing, so that greater storehouses must be erected. The possibility of any hitch arising in connection with his projects never occurred to his mind, so self-confident was he. Accordingly, he addressed himself thus: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." No thought of God, no thought of eternity, found room in his foolish mind. To him this world was everything, and he confidently expected to hold and enjoy it indefinitely.

He ought to have remembered that for man, unlike the beasts, there is a life beyond this world; and a God to meet, to whom all must render an account. The divine word to him, and to all of his kind, is, "Thou fool." This is God's epithet, not man's. Surely it is not too strong a term to apply to one who absolutely ignores his possession of a never-dying soul. He who thinks of nothing but his few years in this world, in utter forgetfulness of the ages upon ages which lie beyond, is a fool indeed. In Luke 16:1-31 the Saviour draws aside the veil, and shows us the torments of one to whom this world had been everything. He did it in mercy, as a warning to men in all succeeding ages. The question was recently asked concerning a deceased millionaire: "How much did he leave?" The solemn reply was given: "He left it all." So to the fool of our parable God said: "This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall these things be which thou hast provided?" "Whose," indeed! A matter of but small moment to the original possessor when the gates of death have closed upon him. To find then that a supreme blunder has been committed is almost too awful to contemplate. To get one's eyes opened to the reality of things when the border-line is passed can only lead to eternal despair; to face realities now will result in humble saving faith in God and His beloved Son. This is life indeed.

Chapter 42

The Returning Lord.

The Returning Lord. The Saviour frequently spoke to His disciples of His going away and coming again, and indicated to them two things that should characterise them during His absence-watching and working. The watching attitude is described in Luke 12:35-36 thus: "Let your loins he girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately." This attitude was early abandoned by the Church. When the Church became worldly, she lost touch of the truth of her Lord's return, and settled down to the enjoyment of ease and honour here. Having thus forgotten her heavenly calling, she fell into the blunder that her mission was to improve the world; and in the pursuit of this object she became too blind to perceive that her fancy was not being realised, and that instead the world was corrupting and ruining her. The Lord in His grace has revived the lost hope in these last days, with the happy result that many to- day are looking with fervour for His coming again. Watching is necessarily the fruit of affection, and this the absent Lord values more than the costliest sacrifices or the most toilsome labours. The highest possible character of reward is set before His watching ones: "He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them" (Luke 12:37). Every believing heart cherishes the prospect of serving Christ eternally with a perfection of service that is impossible at present; here we have quite another thought-more delightful far-that He will condescend to render service to us. It will be His joy for ever to minister to the happiness of those whom He has redeemed by His blood.

Working has its place no less than watching. Salvation is by grace alone, works having nothing whatever to do with it. Its basis is the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. But the realisation of this incites the soul to hearty labour for His name's sake. Concerning the diligent worker, the Lord has said: "He will make him ruler over all that He hath" (Luke 12:44). This honour is great-too great, indeed, for the most spiritual mind to grasp at present; but it is altogether a lower character of reward than that which is in store for watchers. To work for Christ is good; to watch for Christ is better. The Lord proceeded to speak of the evil servant who says in his heart, "My Lord delayeth His coming, and who. in consequence, beats his fellow servants and carouses with the drunken (Luke 12:45). It is the false religious professor who says "Lord, Lord," but has no mind to do what He says. Such the Lord will not only disown but destroy at His coming. In His work of judgement He will discriminate between those who knew His will, and those who knew it not. This is just the difference between the professing Christian and the heathen. Evil is evil, wherever it is found, and must needs be judged; but responsibility is measured according to what men know of God and His Word (Luke 12:47-48). Upon this equitable principle need we marvel if the heaviest strokes of the divine hand fall upon Great Britain when the hour comes for judgement to begin?

Chapter 43

The Fig Tree in the Vineyard,

The Fig Tree in the Vineyard, The history of Israel is the history of man. The special dealings of God with that nation have served to bring out the incorrigible evil of human nature. Tested in every way, endowed with every conceivable privilege, encompassed by divine care and attention, man is a hopeless failure. He yields no fruit for God. The parable of the fig-tree in the vineyard shows this with all plainness. The city of Jerusalem had just experienced a painful shock. The Roman governor, Pilate had butchered a number of Galileans, who had come thither to offer sacrifices. Some reported this to the Lord Jesus, desiring to hear His opinion upon the subject. In His usual way, He used the opportunity to deal a direct blow at the consciences of those who questioned Him. "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:1-3). Nothing is easier than to impute exceptional wickedness to those overtaken by calamity, in utter forgetfulness of the fact that man as man-man everywhere-is deserving only of the judgement of God. The Saviour accordingly added a parable, in which it is shown that the whole nation (not a few Galileans only) was altogether unprofitable to God, and, in consequence, going on to judgement. "A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard: and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he to the dresser of his vineyard, 'Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, 'Lord, let it alone 'this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and' if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down'" (Luke 13:6-8). Both the vineyard and the vine represent the nation of Israel (Isaiah 5:1-30; Psalms 80:1-19); the fig tree planted in the vineyard represents the remnant of Judah which returned from the Babylonian captivity. A bright testimony for God should have gone forth from a people so graciously blest; instead, such was their hypocrisy and evil, the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles through them (Romans 2:24). The "three years" suggest the various testings by means of the law, the prophets, and Christ (Acts 7:51-53). By none of these had the people's hearts been reached. God was still without any return from them. One more opportunity-only one-was to be granted in answer to the prayer of the dresser of the vineyard. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, who prayed: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The fresh opportunity was the testimony of the Holy Ghost after Christ's departure to heaven. This resulted in the murder of Stephen, and in the chasing out of Christ's other witnesses (1 Thessalonians 2:15). The fig tree has therefore been cut down: the guilty nation has been expelled from the land by the righteous judgement of God.

Christendom's turn is coming. Nineteen centuries of Gospel light have produced little else than worldliness, pride, and blasphemy-all perpetrated under cover of Christ's holy name. Divine forbearance, long exercised, will ere long come to an end. Then the stroke will fall, and Christendom will be the scene of the sorest judgements of God. Let each individual look to himself. What answer does my heart give to the costly sacrifice of Calvary, and the exceeding riches of divine grace proclaimed in virtue of it. Not until the heart appreciates Christ and His atoning blood

can fruit begin to be produced for God.

Chapter 44

The Great Supper.

The Great Supper. The Lord of all was dining with one of the rulers, who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees. Being the Sabbath day, He was watched critically by all who were present at the table. Observing a dropsical man before Him, He healed him, administering at the same time a stern rebuke to those who blamed Him for it in their hearts. He then addressed a remonstrance to His fellow guests for the self seeking which had led all of them to choose the best seats at the feast; and this He followed with a word to His host as to showing kindness to the poor and needy rather than to those who were certain to recompense him again. The pride and selfishness which His holy eye thus detected contrasted deplorably with His own profound humility and grace (Luke 14:1-35).

One of the guests interposing with the remark: 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God," the Saviour gave utterance to the parable of the Great Supper, wherein is shown that, however eager men may be for the best seats at feasts provided by their fellows, when God spreads a feast they want no place whatever, but pray to be excused. The Great Supper is an attractive presentation of the grace of God as revealed in the Gospel. The first invited guests were the religious mass in Israel. To them the Saviour first showed Himself with tenderest overtures of love. "And they all with one consent began to make excuse." The character of the excuses show that the blessings of God may be used to exclude God Himself from the affections. Such possessions as ground and oxen, and above all a wife, are good gifts from God to men. That these should turn the heart away from, rather than to, God, only proves how evil the human heart is. There is, moreover, glaring absurdity in the excuses given. Those who had bought property and oxen, having concluded their bargains, could well wait until the next day in order to see and prove what they had purchased. There was nothing in the circumstances to hinder their presence at the supper if their hearts really desired to be there. Being thus affronted by those he had invited, the master of the house sent his servant into the streets and lanes of the city, with orders to bring in the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind. These represent the moral outcasts of Israel-the publicans and the harlots, concerning whom the Saviour once said to His religious hearers, "they go into the Kingdom of God before you" (Matthew 21:31). But this was not sufficient; accordingly the servant was instructed to "go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." The servant referred to in this parable is the Holy Spirit of God, Who has graciously made it His business to reach men with the glad tidings of divine goodness and love. The highway and hedge folk are the Gentiles, to whom the Gospel of God is now being proclaimed, Israel having definitely refused it. As Peter put it to his Jewish audience on the day of How the Gentile world is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39)

How the Gentile world has treated God's invitation is painfully evident sacrifice of His Son for men's salvation should subdue every heart to which it is presented. His gracious offer of pardon and justification to all who believe in the Son should evoke the humble gratitude of every one who is privileged to hear of it. But the human heart is everywhere alike, whether in the Gentile or in the

Jew. It wants nothing to do with God and His Son. The flimsiest and most contemptible excuses are too readily found, to the present and eternal loss of all who are guilty of such egregious folly.

Chapter 45

The Lost Sheep.

The Lost Sheep. The cynical remarks of the religious classes in Israel rendered it necessary for the Saviour to justify His attitude towards the guilty and lost. The three parables of Luke 15:1-32 were accordingly given, in which is explained, in a manner calculated to move every true heart, the yearning of the divine Trinity over the erring, and the various parts played by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the blessing of such. In the parable of the lost sheep we have portrayed the work of the Son; in that of the lost piece of Silver we have the work of the Spirit; while in the parable of the prodigal son we have graphically described the warmth of affection with which the Father welcomes the wanderer home. The Lord spoke first of His own work for two reasons. First, because it was with Him men were finding fault at that moment, and second, because His self sacrifice on behalf of sinners necessarily precedes (and is, indeed, the basis) of the work of the Spirit and of the Father in men's souls. He put this question to His critics: "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" (Luke 15:4).If they would be so solicitous about a straying animal, why marvel that the Lord of all should yearn over lost men, made in the image and glory of God? To seek and to save such, He was even then upon that wonderful journey which began from the heights of heavenly bliss, and which would only end when the cross of Calvary had been endured. Such grace as this has no charm for religionists, their self complacency hiding from them their need of it. It may suit the profligate; but pride maintains that it does not suit them. In their own eyes they are the ninety and nine just persons, who have no need of repentance. So utterly alienated are they from divine interests and affections that they are unable to understand the joy of the Father and the Son when one sinner is brought home. The fact that the religious folk were ever the Saviour's bitterest enemies is sufficient to put this painful truth beyond controversy. But the Shepherd rejoices in the fruit of His sufferings and toil. He shoulders His sheep, and carries it home rejoicing: By His mighty power is every saved one kept until the end. No force, either human or infernal, can wrest even the feeblest of His lambs from His care (John 10:27-30). He brings them, not into the fold, but home to Himself. There is no fold in Christianity “One fold" is a sheer perversion in John 10:16; "one flock" is what the Saviour said. Wycliffe and Coverdale so rendered His words long before the Authorised Version was published it was departure from truth when "one fold" was adopted in preference. The "fold" savours of the bondage of the law, which men ignorant alas of the grace of God, have revived in Christianity; the "flock" suggests the liberty of divine love, which attracts, and binds, men to a personal Saviour. The Shepherd's joy is shared by His friends and neighbours, to whom He says: "Rejoice with Me; for I have found My sheep which was lost." Those who are accustomed to intimacy of communion with the Son of God know, to their blessing what this means. His interests are theirs; His achievements in the way of saving grace furnish them with material for holy triumph and delight. But in what relation did these religionists stand to Him, who, instead of rejoicing in His joy, could only coldly criticise the exercise of His goodness to the needy and lost?

Chapter 46

The Lost Silver.

The Lost Silver.

Since the first of the three parables (of Luke 15:1-32) indisputably refers to the Son, and the third to the Father, it is surely reasonable to look for the Holy Spirit in the parable that intervenes. And indeed it is blessedly true that each Person in the Godhead is equally interested in the blessing of men. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost work together in holy harmony in the gracious work of salvation. The Saviour asked: "What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one of them, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and search diligently till she find it?" (Luke 15:8). Here that which is lost is lifeless, in contrast with the first parable, which represents a living thing as going astray (the lost sheep). These are the two points of view from which the epistles to the Romans and Ephesians respectively regard the sinner. Activity in sin is the point in Romans; death spiritual death-is the point in Ephesians. The painstaking work of the Holy Spirit in seeking the lost is presented in a veiled form in our parable. It is a woman who acts. This suggests the Church of God, the individual members of which are the Spirit's instruments for reaching the souls of men. Many a dark heart needs the light of divine truth to be let into it, that its evil may be exposed, and its deep need of salvation be brought home. The woman's candle expresses this.

Unlike the sheep, which had strayed upon the mountains (Matthew 18:12), the piece of silver was lost in the house. The great professing mass called Christendom is likened in 2 Timothy 2:20 to a great house" containing a mixed medley of the precious and the vile. Thus it is not only that the profligate and the wicked are lost, but many religious persons also. Perishing souls may be found in both tavern and "place of worship." The lost sheep is the image of the one; the lost coin is the image of the other. The joy of the woman, when the missing piece was found, is declared by the Saviour Himself to resemble the joy that bursts forth amongst the angels of God when one sinner is brought to repentance. One soul is of sufficient value to engage the interest of all heaven. Who but God knows its worth? A single weeping reprobate furnishes more delight in heaven than a whole host of religious formalists, who wrap themselves around with the garments of their self-righteousness. It is marvellous, moreover, that the angelic host should unselfishly rejoice in the blessing of a being inferior in natural status to themselves, yet raised by sovereign grace to a more exalted position of blessing than the highest of the heavenly hierarchy have ever known or ever will know. Yet Peter says, concerning our blessings, "which things the angels desire to look into" (1 Peter 1:12). And Paul lets us know that through the Church is being made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10). They study His ways with us, and find profit and blessing thereby.

The Prodigal Son.

The Prodigal Son.

It is not now the grace that seeks the lost one, but the grace that receives the repentant one to home and blessing. This is the Father's part in the wonderful scheme of salvation. The basis of all blessing for men is the atoning blood. This, however, is not the point in the parables of Luke 15:1-32, but rather the principle upon which men are blest, which is sovereign grace. The Saviour now depicts two sons-one profligate, the other self-righteous (Luke 15:11-32). These represent the lawless and the religious classes respectively. The younger son, having obtained his portion from his father, forsook him, and wasted his substance in a distant land. In like manner do the mass of men live in utter disregard of Him whose offspring they are, and squander His rich endowments, health, means, and faculties, in the gratification of their carnal lusts. The first man aimed at independence of God, and the love of this has characterised all his progeny since. When the prodigal had "spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land." Thus all around him were destitute like himself, so that no man could relieve the pangs of his fellow. Graphic picture of the godless man's utter inability to assuage the grief and disappointment of his neighbour's heart. In truth they are all needy together, if they would but confess it.

Presently the wanderer descends to the swine-trough. Penniless and hungry, he is thankful to be permitted to tend swine, and even to share their food. "No man gave unto him." So says the Lord of all. Let infidelity inform us how many hospitals, orphanages, and other refuges of mercy would be dotted about on the face of the earth if Christianity had never shed its gracious influence into the hearts of men.

Feeding swine giving time for reflection, the prodigal's mind turned to the father's house, and its abundant provision. His heart became attracted thither, and he resolved to return and cast himself upon his father's mercy. This reminds us of Romans 2:4 "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." But the transgressor made one huge blunder. He purposed to say: "I am not worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." Conscience should have taught him that he had fallen too low for this; for surely the first requisite of a servant is a good character. Let us take the very humblest place before our God. Such is our state by nature that we are absolutely without fitness for any place whatever in the divine presence. But he who gives up all thought of merit, and casts himself unreservedly upon sovereign grace, pleading only the worthiness of Christ and the efficacy of His blood, will find himself forthwith brought into the relationship of son to the Father with rights and privileges such as even elect angels can never know. This the sinner of our parable proved. The great God is positively represented as running to meet him with kisses. Soon the best robe was upon him, with ring and shoes accompanying. The best robe is Christ, in whom the pardoned sinner stands complete, and with whose perfections he is henceforward covered in the eyes of God. "And they began to be merry." Not a hint as to its cessation. The Father's heart finds present and eternal joy in what His love has wrought for the objects of His favour; while these, and all who understand their case, feast and delight themselves in the divine presence for

evermore. Truly, it is good to know a Saviour God.

Chapter 48

The Elder Son.

The Elder Son. Our Lord's religious critics could not fail to recognise themselves in the elder son, whose attitude towards the repentant transgressor, and towards the father also, because of his goodness to him, He so strikingly portrayed (Luke 15:25-32).The elder son has a natural claim; and religionists in all ages have considered themselves in this position in relation to God-in a greater or less degree. But for this very reason they are rejected. "that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:29).It is surely not without intention that the elder son is invariably represented in Scripture as outside divine blessing. Cain, Ishmael, Esau, and Reuben are a few cases in point. It is the confessedly guilty sinner, who has nothing to plead but what he finds in God Himself, who gets the blessing. His elder son was in the field. "There was joy within, but he was without. "The field" is the place of labour. The sincere religionist is always a hard worker. He has a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Going about to establish his own righteousness, he does not submit himself to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:2-3). Like the elder son, he is "nigh" to the Father's house, but he never gets inside, and the warmth of the Father's heart he never experiences. Occupying himself with legal works and religious ordinances, his life is cold and cheerless; so that, like the elder son, who was puzzled by the sound of music and dancing, his heart is a stranger to the fullness of joy which is found alone in the divine presence (Psalms 16:11).

"He was angry, and would not go in: and his father came out, and entreated him.' He need not remain without; the door was not closed to him; he was as welcome as the prodigal to all the bliss of the father's house. But the whole difficulty lay there. In his self-parade-"Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment" he made it manifest that he looked for preferential treatment In his own eyes he was one of the ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance. In his anger he levels a positive complaint against his father: "thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." Here he tells out his own heart. His nearness to his father had been external only; his toil had proceeded from some other motive than love; his notion of real happiness was to be away from the father and in the company of his friends. Terrible exposure of the religious man's true state of heart in relation to God.

Hear the father tenderly pleading with the self-righteous one: "Son, thou are ever with me, and all that I have is thine. But it was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead. and is alive again; and was lost and is found." As far as this world is concerned, the man who has lived decently and religiously has a distinct advantage over the profligate. Health and fortune remain with him; hence the words, "all that I have is thine." But what is the value of this if pride and self righteousness are suffered to exclude the soul from the presence of God for ever. Our parable closes with the elder son still outside, angrily objecting to the grace which had been shown to his wayward brother. He is the parent of all those who in this day scorn the idea of being "converted" and "saved," and who will never consent to the wastrels of earth being labelled "the sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling" (1 Corinthians 1:2). The very thought of it touches them to the quick.

Chapter 49

The Unjust Steward.

The Unjust Steward. This parable, unlike those immediately preceding it, was addressed to disciples only (Luke 16:1-12) An important lesson is contained therein for those who follow the Lord Jesus Christ. An unfaithful steward is held up to our view-one who was convicted of wasting his master's goods. Receiving notice of discharge, his mind turned upon his future. "I cannot dig." said he: "to beg I am ashamed." He therefore resolved to ingratiate himself with his master's debtors during his brief remaining term of office, with a view to receiving benefits at their hands at a later date. He accordingly called them together and bade one who owed his master for a hundred measures of oil, sit down and write fifty; another who owed for a hundred measures of wheat was told to write eighty. The Saviour's comment upon this has frequently puzzled even devout readers of Scripture. The Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely; for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

Let us consider this carefully. First, the one who thus commends is not the Lord Jesus, but the imaginary lord of the parable. Secondly the steward was not commended for his honesty, but for his wisdom. A clever rogue necessarily elicits from his observers admiration of a kind. The point of the parable is that the man acted with his eye upon the future. He used his brief term of stewardship with a view to the years that lay beyond. In doing this he set an example even to true disciples. Hence the words that follow: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." To read these words of our Lord as if they had any reference to men seeking salvation would be disastrous. Salvation is by grace alone, and it is founded upon the Saviour's atoning blood. This cannot be too earnestly or too frequently insisted upon. But those who are saved have serious responsibilities concerning which they must each one give account at the judgement-seat of Christ. Hence each "disciple" should take a leaf out of the book of the unjust steward and use the brief period of life here with a view to blessing and reward in the life beyond. Perhaps there is nothing concerning which even true Christians fail more deeply than in the matter of money. Riches are called "the mammon of unrighteousness," because they are the fruit of sin. Such conditions as now prevail, one rich and another poor, could have no place in an unfallen world. A grave responsibility therefore rests upon the Christian as to how he disposes of that which he holds, be it little or much. He is indeed a steward; to Another he must render an account. He who spends all upon himself, reserving only his threepenny-piece for God, is living for the present only; he who uses his substance for God in the midst of a needy world is making friends by means of his possessions. There is no thought in Luke 16:9 of the objects of our benefactions welcoming us into the habitations above. Reference to the Greek shows that the Lord spoke in the third person-"that ye may be received." The one who welcomes the self-denying disciple to rest and reward is none other than the living God Himself, who is prepared to abundantly honour in another world those who have surrendered aught in this world for the sake of His name, and under the constraining influence of His mighty grace.

Chapter 50

The Unjust Judge.

The Unjust Judge. In a materialistic day such as the present, prayer is at a discount. Sense is more than faith, and the visible is greater than the invisible. But it nevertheless remains true that man is the most helpless creature conceivable apart from the God who made him; and he who ignores this is riding for a fall-rushing forward to destruction.

Even true-hearted souls are frequently tried by divine delay in answering prayer and are tempted to give up the praying attitude in consequence. To all such the parable of the Unjust Judge has an encouraging voice. It was also given to the disciples as a stimulus to pray always and not faint. The parable runs thus: "There was in a city a judge which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, "Avenge me of my adversary." And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' (Luke 18:2-5).

Dispensationally there is a reference here to "the days of the Son of man." In the previous chapter the Saviour had spoken of the last great crisis, and the painful circumstances in which the godly remnant of Israel will find themselves at that time. The parable of the Unjust Judge follows this immediately, and is connected with it. In the dark days of Anti-Christian apostasy, when Christendom and Judaism will join hands in the basest iniquity, those who cleave to God will have no resource but prayer. The book of Psalms gives us prophetically many of the agonising appeals that will then be wrung from their distressed hearts. God will certainly avenge their wrongs, and judge their oppressors in His own time; the question is, will His people wait for Him, and accept no deliverance but that which comes from His hand? This is the force of the Saviour's words, "When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). At all times, and under all circumstances, it is good to trust God. Ever since the fall, it has been the tendency of flesh to plan and provide for itself in utter independence of God. This is the root cause of the misery of which the earth is full. It is the beginning of good things when a man's pride and self-will become broken down, and he turns to God in humble penitence, pleading for salvation the Saviour's worthy name and His atoning blood. Such faith is blessed immediately, and for ever. But this step, supremely important though it be, is only an initial one. It is the introduction into a life of faith, every step of which should be marked by simple confidence in God. Let Him delay to answer prayer, if it so please Him, still faith perseveres, knowing assuredly that infinite power and love will never suffer a single trusting soul to be overwhelmed. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalms 30:5).

Chapter 51

The Pharisee and the Publican.

The Pharisee and the Publican. This was a shaft levelled at the self-righteousness, not only of our Lord's day, but of every other day also. Two men are represented as going up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican (Luke 18:9-14). If men are real anywhere, surely it is in the presence of God. It is reasonable to suppose that there, if anywhere, men will weigh their words, and speak as their hearts really feel. But what have we here? A man parading his merits in the Divine presence! "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." Not one word of thanksgiving or adoration for what God is in His gracious attitude towards men; every word was about himself and his own fancied perfections. What a spectacle is here! A man in the presence of the Giver of all good, yet no favour besought; in the presence of the Judge of quick and dead, and the Searcher of all hearts, yet no sin acknowledged. He asks nothing and confesses nothing.

Surely a terrible possibility is suggested to us in this parable. A man's religion may be his ruin. His very strictness of life may land him in perdition. Why? Because the religious man is apt to pride himself in his religiousness, and the moral man in his morality, and so become utterly blinded to the fact of his real sinnership before a holy God. Romans 9:30-33, Romans 10:1-4 may well be pondered in this connection. The apostle groaned over his religious fellow countrymen because they were seeking righteousness on the principle of works, whereas righteousness for man is only found through faith in Christ. Paul pursued the same false line himself until stopped in his career by the revelation of the glorified Christ (Php_3:4-9). The publican took wholly different ground before God. He belonged to that corrupt and hated class who collected the Roman taxes, thus helping forward the oppression of his suffering people. But he was now in the presence of God, and he felt deeply the sacredness of the place, and his own unfitness for it." The publican, standing afar off. would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, 'God be propitious to me the sinner.' "He might well smite upon his breast, for the heart is the spring of all evil. Man since the fall has been corrupt root and branch. The publican thought not of the Pharisee whether he was better or worse than himself; his own personal evil overwhelmed him as he sought to measure it in the light of God. "Be propitious to me" (for so the verse should read) was his penitent cry. The Lord of all declared: "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. "That is to say, the publican went home justified, and the Pharisee did not. This is the very opposite of all human thoughts. Weighed in human balances, the religious and benevolent Pharisee should have received the blessing, and the corrupt publican should have been driven away. But it is never so with God. This is a clear case of the kind described in Romans 4:5-6 of righteousness imputed apart from works. But on what equitable principle is God able to deal thus with the guilty? Let us note it carefully and reverently, it is the blood of Jesus (Romans 3:24-25; Romans 5:9)

The Pounds.

The Pounds. This parable, while similar in some respects to that of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), seems nevertheless to be a distinct utterance. The Lord was approaching Jerusalem for the last time, and the hopes of His disciples ran high. Their thought was that now would be established the glorious kingdom of which prophets and psalmists have spoken for ages. The moral necessity of the cross had not yet become clear to them. They did not yet understand that man's sin required the Saviour to accept the cross at His first coming, and to wait for the Kingdom until His second coming. So the parable of the Pounds was given, in which the Lord likens Himself to a nobleman going away to a far country to receive for Himself a Kingdom, and to return, entrusting His servants with responsibilities meanwhile (Luke 19:11-27) In the interpretation the servants are those who "profess and call themselves Christians"; the citizens, who sent the insulting message, "We will not have this man to reign over us," are the Jewish people. At the return of the Lord Jesus, two things will take place; the judgement of His adversaries, and the reward of His servants. In the parable of the talents, the trusts varied according to ability; in the Parable of the Pounds, each man received alike. Divine sovereignty is the point in the one; human responsibility in the other. The first man called was able to say, "Lord Thy pound hath gained ten pounds." Diligence had marked his conduct in relation to his Master's trust. Warmly did his Master commend him as a good servant saying, "Have thou authority over ten cities." What a Lord is ours! Such a recompense for fidelity in so small a matter. For diligence with this petty sum he was assigned rule over ten cities in the Millennial Kingdom. No Lord is so easily pleased as the Christ of God, and none rewards so amply, devoted service to His Name. The second man's account showed five pounds. To him was granted rule over five cities. He whom we serve notices both the quantity and the quality of what is done for Him (Luke 19:15; 1 Corinthians 3:13) Thus Romans 16:12 tells us of Tryphena and Tryphosa, who laboured in the Lord, and of the beloved Persis, who laboured "much" in the Lord. In like manner, Nehemiah 3:1-32 tells us of many who helped in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. but distinguishes some as working "earnestly. The "much" and the "earnestly" should be pondered by all who would be well-pleasing to the absent Christ.

There is, alas! a dark side to this parable. One man returned his pound to the Lord wrapped up in a napkin. In order to excuse his utter indifference to the claims of his absent Master, he slandered His character thus: "I feared Thee, because Thou art an austere man: Thou takest up that Thou layedst not down, and reapest that Thou didst not sow.” This wicked servant represents Christendom's merely nominal professors, who never dream of using their powers and possessions for Him whose name they bear. All such will find themselves utterly rejected in the great day; their judgement being richly deserved if only for their miserable perversion of the character of Him who is infinitely gracious and good. Has He not shed His blood for the Perishing thereby rendering salvation available for all, apart from works or price: and what does He ask from any but the simple fervent service that naturally flows from appreciation of His marvellous Love and grace?

Chapter 53

The Fig-Tree and all the Trees.

The Fig-Tree and all the Trees. The fig-tree is the well-known Scripture emblem representing the nation of Israel, "all the trees," in the parable now before us, represent accordingly the various nations which have to do with Israel (Luke 21:29-31). The Lord was giving utterance to His great Olivet prophecy. His sorrowful words about the temple being laid in ruins had drawn forth a series of questions from His surprised disciples. In His reply He spoke not only of the impending desolation by the Romans under Titus (which is the prominent feature in Luke's account), hut also of Israel's last bitter sorrow when the Antichrist is in power in Jerusalem. Concerning the latter, reference must be made to Matthew and Mark for full particulars. In all three Gospels it is made abundantly clear that deliverance will be brought in by the appearing of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven. Our parable runs thus: "Behold the fig-tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand. "We are thus entitled to expect signs of life to manifest themselves in Israel and in the nations with which she has special dealings before the Saviour's coming to earth to inaugurate the visible kingdom of God. This is suggestive that that great event is near, for it is indisputable that remarkable movements are proceeding amongst the people in question. The Zionist Congresses have revived the national spirit of Israel in a marvellous degree; the past few years have witnessed similar revivals of the national spirit in Greece, Italy, Egypt, and other powers, who have their respective parts to play in the stirring events that will wind up the present age. More extensive developments will yet be witnessed. Edom, Moab, Ammon, etc., long lost to view as nations, are destined to re-assert themselves and fall into position for the last great tragedy, if Scripture is to be credited. The Eastern Question, so often discussed, is in reality the Israel Question. Its centre is not Constantinople but Jerusalem. This political problem, so long the vexation of statesmen, will not be settled until the Son of man comes forth from heaven, and takes the affairs of earth in hand as the only rightful King of kings and Lord of lords. Then Israel's tribes will be re-established in the land of their fathers, and their foes and His will be put down for ever. The world's summer-time is indeed at hand, but desolating judgement storms must needs spend their force ere it can be brought in.

Meanwhile, believers in the Lord Jesus have an even more glorious expectation. For them the Saviour has promised to descend into the air with a shout, calling them home. In that moment of moments every sleeping believer will be raised from the tomb, and every living believer will be changed, and so be caught up to be for ever with the Lord. The precious atoning blood entitles them to this, who otherwise had no hope and no claim, and no due but eternal woe. The removal of the whole Christian host will doubtless come as a tremendous shock to the world; but this must be ere the world's last fearful tragedy begins.

Chapter 54

Our Lord's Miracles

Foreword

We are living in a sceptical age. Men say they no longet believe in miracles. Not in heathendom is this said, but in Christendom, where the light of the Gospel shines. There is but one more step to take, in this unbelief — the repudiation of God Himself. This step will be taken shortly. MAN will deify himself in the son of perdition — the Antichrist of Scripture (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). When this happens, no more place will be found for God and His Son. Remarkably, when this state of things comes about, men will believe in miracles once more. "Signs and lying wonders" will appear, and be credited. Hell produces its marvels as well as heaven. This was witnessed in Moses' day, and it will be witnessed again in the day of Antichrist.

Infidelity, religious and otherwise, may carp at the records of our Lord's miracles, but the miracles were wrought, nevertheless. The fact that at least three of the Gospels were published ithin a few years of our Lord's ascension, when falsehoods could easily have been disproved, is sufficient to establish their credibility, even on the most human principles. But when we take into account the august fact (which every reverent soul believes) that the Spirit of God is the Author of the Gospels every query is hushed to rest. But why were the miracles wrought? The Saviour Himself tells us — "the works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me" (John 5:36; John 10:25). They were thus graciously granted as aids to faith in His person and mission. Hence the rebuke to Philip, "Believe Me for the very works' sake." Hence, too, the Saviour's lament in John 15:24 : "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father." Because the miracles were aids to faith they were all, with one exception, acts of mercy — acts which should have appealed to the sensibilities of all concerned as showing out the divine heart towards man.

It would be as foolish to over-state the value of miracles as it is to affect contempt for them. Aids to faith must not be confounded with the ground of faith. Faith founded on miracles is of so little worth that the Saviour, when surrounded by believers of this sort, refused to commit Himself unto them (John 2:23-25). True faith is founded on the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Simon Magus was attracted by miracles, and proved a fraud; Sergius Paulus desired to hear the Word of God, and so became a true disciple (Acts 8:13; Acts 13:7; Acts 13:12).

W. W. F.

Chapter 55

The Leper Cleansed.

The Leper Cleansed.

He who believes in a God Almighty and Supreme can have no difficulty in crediting miracles, especially when they are vouched for in God-breathed Scriptures. The objection that miracles are inconsistent with natural laws is beside the mark, seeing that they have nothing to do with natural laws, being instead sovereign interpositions of God altogether apart from, and above, them. No greater miracles can be conceived than the momentous facts on which Christianity rests — the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He who bows in faith to these will necessarily regard all other marvels as small in comparison. He who turns away from the facts of Christ's miraculous incarnation, etc., has no claim whatever to be recognised as a Christian. Our Lord's miracles were not mere works of power; nor were they simply expressions of love and sympathy toward those who benefited by them: they were truly. all this; but they were also intended to teach spiritual truths. The cleansing of the leper is recorded by all the evangelists excepting John. Matthew gives it in the opening verses of his eighth chapter. Guided by the Spirit of God, Matthew disregards historical sequence in his presentation of it, placing the miracle after the Sermon in the Mount, although it took place some time earlier. His object apparently was to put in strong contrast the low faith of the Jewish sufferer with the high faith of the Gentile centurion described in the verses immediately following.

Leprosy is a type of sin. Those under its terrible power were as unfit for God's 'earthly dwelling-place as unpurged sinners are for His heavenly abode. The only physician for leprosy was God Himself; the same gracious One can alone meet the need of those polluted by sin. In answer to the leper's appeal our Lord "put forth His hand and touched him." Contact with the diseased one conveyed no defilement to Him, but it conveyed healing to the sufferer. Beauteous picture of the grace which brought Him from above into man's circumstances; touching sin, so to speak, at every point, yet personally unstained from first to last. The leper's faltering "If Thou wilt, Thou canst" was at once answered by the Saviour's hearty "I will; be thou clean." To His ability and willingness to heal and to bless there is no limit; whatever limitations there be are in the trembling faith of the human heart. The healed one was then bidden "show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them." A striking testimony indeed, seeing that this was the first Israelitish leper cleansed (so far as Scripture speaks) since the instructions of Leviticus 13:1-59 & Leviticus 14:1-57 Were given nearly l,500 years before. The presence of a cleansed leper at the altar with his two birds in his hands testified that God had come into the land, and was meeting men's need apart altogether from priestly ministrations and religious ordinances. A principle this of the greatest possible moment for our souls today. Cleansing for the soul is found, not in human doing of any kind, but in the fountain of the Saviour's blood. This, when divinely applied, makes the vilest sinner whiter than snow, a greater moral miracle than the physical wonder wrought upon the Jewish leper.

Chapter 56

The Centurion's Servant.

The Centurion's Servant.

During our Lord's ministry in Israel only two persons were specially commended by Him for their faith, and they were both Gentiles — the Syro-phoenician woman, and the Roman centurion of Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10. Religious formalism had so checked the development of faith amongst the chosen people that it was scarcely to be found within their circle.

It was but a slave concerning whom the centurion appealed to the Saviour, but he was, for some reason, precious in his sight. In contrast with many in Israel, the Roman discerned God in the person of the lowly Carpenter Who was traversing the province. He at once made his supplication to Him, and was answered, "I will come and heal him." He instantly begged the Lord to take no such trouble, arguing that it was not even necessary. "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. It was this that excited our Lord's commendation — his confidence in the efficacy of His word when personally absent. We have here a principle that is vital to us at the present hour. Christ is not here, having gone up to the Father's throne. But His Word is with us in the Scriptures we may at all times hear His living voice. His word declares the efficacy of His one sacrifice (Hebrews 10:12); it proclaims the pardon and justification of all who believe in His name (Acts 13:38-39); and it gives to all such the sweet assurance that eternal life is already theirs, and that into judgement they can never come (John 5:24). On His Word we rest; it is our all, seeing that Himself is no longer with us. If His Word could be wrested from our hands, our darkness would be impenetrable.

There are striking differences between the two accounts of this miracle, as given to us by Matthew and Luke. They are due, not to any blundering on the part of the writers, but to the special guidance of the Holy Spirit, Who indicated to each what features should be introduced, and what should be omitted. Thus Matthew, on the one hand, who wrote with Israel specially in view, appends our Lord's solemn warning to that nation that many should come from afar, and be blessed with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, while the sons of the kingdom should be cast out. Such a word was most necessary for a people who were building their hopes on religious associations and privileges, to the neglect of personal faith. Luke, on the other hand, who was himself a Gentile, and wrote for Gentiles, omits the warning to Israel, and introduces instead, what is so instructive to Gentiles, the fact that the centurion in the first instance got the Jewish elders to plead for him with the Saviour. If the warning noted by Matthew was intended to humble Jewish pride, this feature added by Luke should suffice to depress Gentile conceit. Are we not apt to forget that, as a matter of fact, we owe everything to the Jew? The Scriptures, the Saviour the first preachers of Christianity, all came to us from the bosom of Israel. Had this been remembered, Abraham's children would not have to complain of centuries of oppression from "Christian" hands. The slave was healed. Such faith as his master evinced could not be denied. Nor will faith in the Word of the absent Saviour ever fail to receive fullest acknowledgment from God.

Chapter 57

Peter's Wife's Mother.

Peter's Wife's Mother.

Those who reverence the Scriptures and believe in their divine inspiration will have no hesitation in believing that a spiritual reason accounts for Matthew's displacement of this incident in his Gospel narrative. For he records it after the cases of the leper and the centurion's servant, while comparison with Mark and Luke makes it certain that it occurred some time anterior to them both. The dispensational character of Matthew's Gospel is the true explanation of this seeming disorder. The first seventeen verses of his eighth chapter furnish us with a group of incidents that are most Interesting when viewed in the light of the dispensational ways of God. Thus the healing of the leper by the touch of Jesus is a picture characteristic of the time of our Lord's personal presence on earth. He was in closest contact with Israel from day to day, prepared to bestow every blessing upon the nation, yet meeting with but feeble response in the way of faith. The healing of the centurion's servant by His word spoken at a distance shows what is happening at the present time. He is no longer personally amongst us, but His Word is with us, and multitudes of Gentiles are finding blessing through faith in its wonderful message. The restoration of Peter's wife's mother is a picture beforehand of what He will do when His present gracious work amongst the nations is concluded. He will turn once more in His goodness to Israel, of which people Peter's mother-in-law was a representative. She lay sick of a great fever when the Lord found her, but one touch of His hand sufficed for her complete recovery. In like manner He will find her nation on the verge of utter ruin in the day when His feet shall stand once more on the Mount of Olives, but His personal presence will be as efficacious for Israel's full deliverance as for the raising up of Peter's wife's mother so long ago. Neither Zionist Congresses nor the favour of European powers will succeed in terminating Israel's centuries of sorrow; that blessed consummation is absolutely certain, if Scripture is to be believed, is dependent upon the appearing of the Son of Man. When the Redeemer comes to Zion He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob, and all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26). The apostle's mother-in-law being treated, the day closed with large blessing. Crowds of sufferers of every kind assembled round her door, and found healing and sympathy from the gracious One. Even so will it be at the close of the present age. When the twelve tribes of Israel are restored to their inheritance, and once more enjoy divine favour, universal peace and blessing will prevail. The world groans increasingly under its intolerable burdens, and schemes not a few are ventilated from time to time for the mitigation of them, but all efforts in this direction will be futile until earth's rightful King re- turns. His order in that day will be as follows: first, Israel blessed; then, all nations by their means. Meanwhile, pardon and salvation are available for individuals, however numerous, who will put their trust in the Saviour's precious blood.

Chapter 58

The Storm on the Lake.

The Storm on the Lake.

If men failed to recognise their Creator when He condescended to tabernacle here in flesh creation acknowledged His presence and power. The storm described in Matthew 8:23-27 took place at the close of the day on which the seven parables of Matthew 13:1-58 were delivered. Tired with His day's labour, the Saviour slept, a touching proof of the reality of the humanity which He had assumed. Presently one of Gennesaret's sudden storms burst upon the little boat, to the dismay of the disciples, who. though believers. but feebly realised who it was that was voyaging with them. Had they considered that He was the Creator of the universe, would they have experienced a moment's alarm. Was it not He Who, ages before, shut up the sea with doors, and made clouds the garments thereof, and Who said, "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed"? (Job 38:8-11). Would, or could, the sea engulf its own Lord and God?

Alas for the poor human heart! Mark, with his customary observance of details, tells us the disciples roughly awoke their Lord, crying, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish. It is painful to transcribe the words; how cruelly they must have wounded the tender susceptibilities of the Saviour! "Carest Thou not." Had He not cared for the children of men, He would have remained in His own glory; the Bethlehem manger, the Galilean boat, and the cross of Calvary would never have been His lot. Yet, so gracious is He, no word of censure escaped His lips for the heartlessness of their speech; He merely said, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Well has it been said, "Never man spake like this Man. " But how painful to Him to find such feebleness of faith amongst the special objects of His favour after His experience of the splendid faith of the Gentile centurion! His voice sufficed for the stilling of the elements. "Peace, be still." Long before this incarnation the Psalmist wrote of Him, "Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, Thou stillest them" (Psalms 89:9). Not a single attribute of Deity did He lay aside on becoming man. Omnipotence and Omniscience shone forth in Him whenever occasion called for their display. Demons, disease, death, winds and waves all fled before His word. The human mind, however richly taught of God, can unravel the mystery of the union of the divine and the human natures in His Person. Reason has insoluble difficulties here; faith finds instead material for adoration and praise. The miracle brought the disciples to His feet In wonder, not unmixed with dread. What manner of Man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him? The answer is simple and plain. He was God manifested in flesh, on His way to death for the eternal blessing of all who believe. But in His humiliation, as now in His glory, He had power to dispel every danger that could befall His people. Storms of various kinds may burst upon us during our passage through this world, but none can destroy us while Jesus lives. Our part is just to confide in Him.

Chapter 59

The Two Demoniacs.

The Two Demoniacs.

Man's subjection to the power of Satan is the fruit of the fall, and is a terrible reality not to be underrated. On various occasions the Saviour, when here, was confronted by persons possessed with demons. This, while a special affliction in individual cases, is a picture of every unregenerate man's spiritual condition. The prince of the power of the air regulates the present course of things here, working in all the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2). Yielding themselves to his authority, men become his slaves (Romans 6:16). One of the most blatant. proofs of this awful condition of things is modern Spiritualism.

Matthew tells us of two demoniacs who met our Lord on the eastern side of the Lake of Galilee, as He stepped ashore from His stormy passage (Matthew 8:28-34). Remarkably, both Mark and Luke speak of one only. This probably is because one case was more desperate than the other, and the second and third evangelists were led to concentrate their attention upon him; while Matthew who always wrote with Jewish readers before his mind, and who knew the weight two witnesses would have with such (Deuteronomy 17:6; Deuteronomy 19:15), was careful to record the fact that two men were blessed, even though he omits a crowd of other details.

However blind men might be, to the personal glory of Jesus, demons always recognised Him as their Lord, and trembled and cringed before Him. Knowing Him to be the dread Judge Who will, at the opening of His reign, consign them and their leader to the abyss (Revelation 20:1), they implored Him not to dismiss them to that awful region before the time. In answer to their prayer? they were suffered to enter into a herd of swine, with the result that the whole two thousand rushed violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished. The whole countryside turned out at the tidings of what had occurred. They found the once-possessed men sitting peacefully at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in their right mind. All their devilish ferocity, which had made them the terror of the district, was gone for ever. Yet not gratitude but aversion seized the minds of the people, and they forthwith besought the Saviour to depart out of their coasts. Two men had been delivered from the hold of Satan, but at the cost of two thousand swine. Were two souls worth two thousand swine? In their deplorable blindness, they judged not. If such was to be the result of the presence of the Son of God, they would prefer Satan for their neighbour. Such conduct would be incredible, did we not see men at the present hour sacrificing their own souls for trifles lighter than air. What matters it that the Saviour, by the shedding of His precious blood, has acquired the right to emancipate from Satan's power every soul that longs for deliverance? In the judgement of many, business, wealth, pleasure, are all to be preferred to any blessing He can bestow.

Chapter 60

The Palsied Man

The Palsied Man This miracle of healing was wrought at Capernaum, the city adopted by the Saviour as His home after He gave up Nazareth. It did not take place after His return from Gadara; this incident, though reserved for the opening verses of Matthew 9:1-38, occurred immediately after the cleansing of the leper recorded in Matthew 8:2-5.

Every physical disease healed by the Saviour typifies In one way or another the moral disease of sin. Thus leprosy pictures the sinner in his uncleanness; fever shows him in his restlessness; while palsy is the expressive type of utter helplessness. Romans 5:6 comes to mind here-"when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Most merciful provision for a palsied race!

Four friends brought the sufferer to Jesus. In their earnestness they refused to be thwarted by the crowds that barred the door, so they let down the couch, through the roof, at His feet. His first words to the palsied man were not words of healing but of pardon. "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." Unquestionably the soul is of greater importance than the body. The forgiveness of sins is a mightier boon than the most perfect physical health. Our Lord's words provoked some unuttered criticisms on the part of some of His audience. "This man blasphemeth." Omniscience in Him read their thoughts, and He rebuked them forthwith. Who can forgive sins but God only?" The query was reasonable. What mortal man has ever had such authority granted to him by God? But He Whom the scribes misjudged soon gave ample proof that He was God indeed by bidding the man take up his bed, and go to his house. "That ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins." Every Jewish student of Daniel 7:1-28 would know that the Son of man is identical with the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9, Daniel 7:13, Daniel 7:22). If He be really the Son of man of prophecy, then is He most truly divine. His less critical observers went home saying, 'We have seen strange things today." Had their spiritual vision been undimmed they would have recognised that Psalms 103:3 “Who forgiveth all thy iniquities, Who healeth all thy diseases" had been fulfilled before their eyes, and each tongue would have exclaimed, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." It was men's unbelief in these wonders so often repeated in favoured Capernaum, which constrained Him to say at a later date, "Thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgement than for thee" (Matthew 11:23-24). Privileges unvalued entail severest judgement from God. How far does this principle apply to our favoured land?

Chapter 61

Jairus' Daughter.

Jairus' Daughter.

During the world's preparatory ages, i.e. the ages that preceded Christ's coming, the divine dealings were especially with the people of Israel. The result of all God's dealings with that nation was to make manifest the true condition of our race. The human heart having been proved to be incorrigibly evil in the most favoured of the families of the earth, it goes without saying that it is irretrievably evil everywhere. The case of Jairus' daughter Matthew 9:18-26) illustrates these principles. Mark and Luke tell us that she was dying when her father first petitioned the Saviour on her behalf, and that he heard of her death from a messenger who was sent after him; Matthew shortens his report of the occurrence by commencing with her death. Her case was thus hopeless as far as man was concerned, even though her parent, as a ruler of the synagogue, was an authorised exponent of the law of Jehovah. The dead maid furnishes us with a picture of Israel dead — spiritually dead — in spite of ages of possession of God's law. It had not imparted life to Israel; it was impossible, therefore, that it could impart righteousness. If it could not supply man's first need, it certainly could not supply his second need. "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law" (Galatians 3:21). Yet in utter blindness as to their true condition, Israel has unceasingly sought righteousness by means of works of law. Gentiles have no more learned the lesson of human ruin than the chosen people; hence the painful fact that in this Gospel day the majority of persons in Christendom are striving after blessing on the principle of works In one form or another.

Jairus felt deeply the powerlessness of all ecclesiastical and legal machinery In the presence of death, and he therefore made his application to the Son of God. With His usual tenderness, the Saviour said to the distressed parent, "Be not afraid; only believe." Taking with Him Peter, James and John only, He entered into the death-chamber and forthwith overcame death by His quickening word. It sufficed for Him to say 'Damsel, arise," and immediately her spirit returned from the unseen world, and became reunited with the body. Blessed earnest of what the same gracious One will accomplish in a spiritual way for her entire nation when He comes again!

Meanwhile, the principle is stamped indelibly on the page of Scripture that man is dead In the eyes of God. It is vain to preach good works and religious ordinances to the dead. Why should we Gentiles foolishly essay to reach blessing by means that have signally failed in the case of Israel. Not law works but Christ can alone meet man's deep need. Hence His own gracious declaration: "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Chapter 62

The Issue of Blood.

The Issue of Blood. The woman who touched the Saviour's garment has always been an object of peculiar interest to devout readers of Scripture. Her painful case, and the simplicity of her faith, never fail to arouse our spiritual sympathies. Her case was an interruption of our Lord's mission to raise Jairus' daughter. She is thus a type of those who are today seeking and receiving blessing while our Lord's relations with Israel are suspended. The fact that the woman's case is interwoven with that of Jairus' daughter serves to bring out clearly the parts that both God and man play in the blessing of the soul. The girl, like every unregenerate sinner, was dead; Who Can quicken the dead but God? The woman exercised her faith; this God looks for in all who would receive His favours. God's part is to quicken: man's part is to believe. A vast multitude thronged the streets of the little port of Capernaum. They were following Jesus to the ruler's house. He who judged by appearances would have concluded that the whole country was in love with the Son of God. But as it was in Capernaum, so it is now in Christendom — many follow from mere curiosity, many go because others go; but only individuals here and there, like the woman of our story, seek Him because their hearts yearn for that which He alone can supply. The woman was now penniless. During twelve years she had been vainly seeking health at the hands of Jewish physicians. Why did she not earlier make her application to the great Healer of all? She reflects, only too sadly, those In our day who, in their quest for salvation try everything and everyone rather than the Son of God. Sacraments, teetotalism, benevolence, and a crowd of other remedies, are trusted in by various souls for that which He alone can give. When the woman came to the conclusion that her only hope lay in the Lord Jesus, she formed her resolution accordingly "If I can touch but His clothes, I shall be whole" (Mark 5:28). Marvellous faith! She had acquired such confidence in Him that she believed one touch of His fringe with its blue ribbon attached (Numbers 15:37-41) would suffice for her complete healing. The Saviour was aware of what was passing, and to the astonishment of Peter and the others He turned and inquired, 'Who touched Me?' As then so now, He carefully distinguishes between the thoughtless crowd of religious adherents and the earnest individual seeker after blessing. Calling the woman before Him, and eliciting her frank confession of what had taken place, He dismissed her home with the comforting assurance, "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace" (Luke 8:48)- It is good to have to do with One so gracious as He. The humble seeker after spiritual healing has but to claim an interest in His precious blood, and pardon, salvation, and peace become the heart's portion for ever. We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved" Acts 15:11).

Chapter 63

The Blind and the Dumb.

The Blind and the Dumb. The cases of the two blind men and the dumb demoniac recorded in Matthew 9:27-34 are found only in the first Gospel. They apparently followed immediately upon the raising of Jairus' daughter. Taken together, these fresh incidents furnish us with a sadly complete picture of man in his natural condition. Toward God man is stone-blind. His eyes are open widely enough to the concerns of this life, its business, pleasures, etc., but to everything spiritual he is one who sees not. What though the goodness of God, the perfections of Christ, the cleansing efficacy of His blood, and the glories of heaven are portrayed before him, he sees nothing in them to attract his blinded eyes. They are the most uninteresting of all the matters that come before him. The natural man is also as dumb as he is blind. The tongue that is so ready of speech when temporal things are being discussed, collapses into utter silence when God and Christ are introduced. Concerning the highest and best of all topics he has absolutely nothing to say. His tongue is tied.

There is but One who can open blind eyes and set at liberty tongues that are dumb. The Gospel is sent to men "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 26:18). When the blind men were brought into the house of our Lord, He asked them, "Believe ye that I am able to do this" They replied, "Yea, Lord." Instantly the healing touch was given, and the inestimable boon of sight was granted to them. Men spiritually blind and dumb are equally welcome to the Saviour. One touch Of His gracious hand, sought in faith, and everything becomes viewed in a new light, and the delivered soul feels as one introduced into a new world. Henceforward he cries with the ecstatic apostle, "We see Jesus" (Hebrews 2:9). His eyes are enraptured with the glories of his Saviour and Lord; for the excellency of the knowledge of Him he counts everything else but loss. His tongue makes its boast in the Lord; it is continually filled with His praise. He testifies of Him burningly to all. This is surely a spiritual miracle.

We are commenting upon true cases of physical healing. In dealing with them our Lord was fulfilling what was long before predicted of Him in Isaiah 35:5-6. The kind of miracle has ceased for the present, to reappear when the Millennial kingdom is established. But meanwhile the spiritual wonder is being enacted before our eyes every day.. The grace of God is revolutionising men's lives continually; the dead are quickened, the blind are made to see, and the dumb are made both to speak and sing. Who but our God, and what but the Gospel, could accomplish such marvels as these.

Chapter 64

The Withered Hand.

The Withered Hand.

It was the Sabbath day; and, as His custom was, our Lord repaired to the synagogue. Synagogues were not places of worship (there was but one such place in Israel-God's temple in Jerusalem): they were merely buildings in which copies of the Scriptures were kept under the charge of an official, whose duty it was to allow the people to read them, and to expound them to one another. The Saviour descried a man in the synagogue with a withered hand. His whole heart of compassion went forth at once toward him. He had but recently been criticised by the Pharisees for permitting His disciples to relieve their hunger in the cornfield on the Sabbath day; this afflicted man became a fresh ground of objection with them. According to Mark and Luke He put this question to them: "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day, or to do evil." Matthew adds the query: "What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold of it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep?" (Matthew 12:9-14). The natural heart loves formality. Religious ordinances appeal powerfully to it. For the due observance of them according to their own thoughts, religionists have ever been ready to contend fiercely, even at the risk of Hindering 'God's work of grace. What cared the Pharisees of our Lord's day that the land was full of misery if only Sabbath forms were carried out punctiliously. Man in this day, inheriting their spirit, would rather souls go unshepherded and perish than that established customs should be touched. Nothing so deceives the heart as religion without heart-conversion to God; nothing so betrays men into the most egregious inconsistency. The men who quibbled about our Lord healing on the Sabbath day saw no wrong in plotting on that day to murder Him. At a later date, the priests abstained from crossing Pilate's threshold, lest such close contact with a Gentile should defile them and unfit them to eat the Passover; yet. it never occurred to their seared consciences that It. was infinitely more defiling to shed an innocent man's blood! Oh, religion without God, how dark has been thy record of inconsistency and sin! The Saviour suffered nothing to hinder the out- flow of His goodness. Forms could not bind Him. Accordingly, the afflicted one was bidden to stretch forth his hand, and it was made whole as the other. Many of us suffer from withered hands at this hour. Sin has so paralysed us that we can do nothing for God. No good works can we accomplish, however deeply we may feel the necessity of them. But there is salvation in what Christ has done. His precious atoning sacrifice suffices for all our need. The man who confides in Him is blessed apart altogether from meritorious works of every kind. One result of His blessing is that the hand, once withered, becomes empowered to do somewhat for Him in the midst of a burdened and suffering creation.

Chapter 65

The Five Thousand

The Five Thousand A bloody deed had just been committed in the land. John the Baptist, the honoured forerunner of the Messiah, had been beheaded. Our Lord, feeling the pressure of the circumstances (for it was the shadow beforehand of His own death in the following year), retired into a desert place privately with the twelve. But He was not suffered to be quiet. Eager multitudes found Him out even in the wilderness. He did not resent it. Though men showed but little consideration to Him, in His perfect: grace He was prepared to show the fullest consideration to them. Though Israel had acquiesced in the murder of His herald, He loved Israel still. His disciples would have dismissed the people, but He refused to send the hungry away. As a test of faith, He questioned Philip as to where bread was to be found wherewith to feed so many; He replied that two hundred denarii a labourers earnings for about eight months-would only suffice to give each a little. Andrew thereupon remarked that a lad was present with five barley loaves and two small fishes, "but what are they among so many" (John 6:5-9). Neither of them realised that they were addressing the Creator of the universe, "Who calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Romans 4:17). In their heartlessness they would have driven the needy away; and in their unbelief they would have starved them if they must needs remain. Such is the human heart, even in Christ's true servants! The Lord Jesus soon showed to all that He was the God who gave the manna (Exodus 16:1-36), and also the Jehovah of Psalms 132:15, Who said: "I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread." Accordingly He bade the multitudes sit down upon the grass in hundreds and in fifties (Mark 6:40). Order is stamped upon all His ways, whether in creation or in grace. "God is not the author of confusion." But: before He performed what was really a stupendous miracle, He gave public thanks for the food He was about to administer (Matthew 14:19). Wonderful combination of human dependence and divine omnipotence in One person! In His hands the five loaves sufficed for five thousand men besides women and children, with twelve baskets full of fragments remaining. Little wonder that in an outburst of enthusiasm the people at once desired to make Him king John 6:15). A ruler who is a giver would be indeed a boon to long-taxed men. The Lord refused the kingdom. It will yet be His, but He will accept it at God's hand, not at the hand of man. When the due time arrives, He will establish a visible government in Jerusalem, and will inaugurate an order of things that will fill the earth with peace and blessing. As in the day of the five thousand, so in the Millennial age, He will associate His own with Himself in the administration of the blessing. Never more will men complain of tyranny and wrong; never again will they know want. The social problems which baffle the keenest intellects at the present hour will find their perfect solution then, but not before. The cross of Calvary is the basis of future kingdom-glory and blessing, as well as the sure foundation of present pardon and peace for individuals who believe. If the world did but know it, the Redeemer-King is its only hope. The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded by all four evangelists.

Chapter 66

Walking on the Sea.

Walking on the Sea.

"How can these things be?" is a very natural question when the human mind contemplates the works and ways of God. lt. is, however, the query of unbelief, not of faith. Whether it be the collapse of Jericho's walls, Jonah's three days' abode In the fish's belly, our Lord's walking on the sea, or any other wonder nothing staggers the heart that has learned to trust God and believe His word. When the Saviour refused to be made king after the feeding of the five thousand. He went up into a mountain to pray, bidding His disciples cross to the other side of the Sea of Gennesaret. It is a picture of what was soon to take place-His going up to God to enter upon His present ministry of intercession, leaving His disciples to face the billows of this stormy world during His absence. The twelve found their passage rough and trying, as followers of a rejected and crucified Lord have ever found life and testimony here. Many a storm has Satan raised in the hope of destroying all witness to the Name he hates. In the fourth watch of the night the Lord went to the disciples, walking on the water. Thinking it was an apparition, they cried out in fear, but were soon calmed by His cheery call: "It is I; (or "I am,") be not afraid." He has never failed to draw near to His own in their hours of distress and need. He is the "I am" of Exodus 3:14. The possibilities involved in such a name forbid the smallest questioning of unbelief. "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (Psalms 46:2). The boat is the emblem of the old system of things in which our Lord left His disciples at His glorification. The Book of Acts shows how tenaciously they clung to the old order, with its earthly sanctuary, its successional priesthood, etc., and how very slow they were in learning that Christianity is essentially a heavenly and spiritual system: instead of being a graft upon Judaism, Christianity is its total opposite in character and spirit. Judaism, with its gorgeous ritual, appealed to the senses; he who understood Christianity better than many says, "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Satan's aim has always been to corrupt the work of God; hence when the old boat of Judaism was destroyed by Titus he set to work to prepare another boat under Christ's name. Earthly sanctuaries, priests claiming successional rights, etc., soon appeared, to the complete falsification of the testimony of God.

Matthew, Mark and John all tell us of our Lord's walk on the water; Matthew adds another feature (Matthew 14:24-33). Peter, when he learned that lt. was the Lord Who was approaching, begged for permission to go to Him. This being granted, he leaped into the sea, and went to Jesus. For a moment he faltered as he saw the wind and waves, but a cry from his lips and a touch from the Master's hand made his feet secure. In like manner the individual believer of today who turns his back on Christendom's religious boats, in obedience to the call in Hebrews 13:13, must look to the Lord alone for sustainment in his walk of faith. But the first act of faith, without which nothing else is possible, is the soul's humble obedience to Him for pardon and salvation. The storm ceased when the Lord and Peter stepped aboard the boat. Similarly the world's raging will be hushed when Christ and His saints show themselves once more in the midst of Israel.

Chapter 67

The Syrophoenician Woman.

The Syrophoenician Woman. In Matthew 15:1-39 : we have two hearts revealed to us — the heart of man and the heart of God. In reply to the Pharisees' criticism of His disciples for eating with unwashed hands, our Lord laid down that a man is not defiled by that which goes into his mouth, but by that which comes out, the words being the expression of what is in the heart. He proceeded to draw an appalling picture of the human heart. According to His judgement, which cannot err, it is a pestilent sink of iniquity.

Turning away from His hypocritical opponents, the Saviour went into the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon. He had but a short time before, held up these places as specially hardened (Matthew 11:21); what could He hope to find there to refresh His distressed spirit. He was soon appealed to by a Canaanitish woman to cast a demon out of her daughter: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon." How terribly she erred! As one of a cursed race, of which remnants existed in the land merely because of the dilatoriness of God's people in Joshua's day, what could she claim from David's Son but judgement? At first the Saviour gave her no answer, but being urged by His disciples to dismiss her He said: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of Israel." This was indeed His mission at that time. He "was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Romans 15:8). In this character Gentiles could have no claim upon Him whatever. The earnestness of the woman, however, was such that she would take no denial. Accordingly she pressed her suit further, saying: "Lord, help me." She dropped the Jewish title of "Son of David," and craved mercy simply. But she had not gone low enough, so our Lord replied: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." This, was indeed a testing word. Yet she did not fire at it, and turn away, like Naaman, in a rage. She meekly retorted "Yea, Lord, for even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table." (See Revised Version.) Her argument was perfect, and it prevailed. Though she was truly but a Gentile, outside the elect family of Israel, she had confidence that such was the goodness of the divine heart that there was blessing In it for even the meanest of His creatures. Certainly He whose eternal home is the Father's bosom would not contradict her in this. His strange bearing was intended to elicit this fine expression of faith from her. The Saviour's stern demeanour covered a heart of tenderness that yearned to bless her the moment she took true ground before Him. He appears to have visited the locality for her sake; for, having healed her daughter with His word, He forthwith returned to the place from whence He came. His eye had discerned the woman's sorrow from afar though she knew it not. The secret of blessing is to take a low place at the divine feet. As born of a ruined stock, and individually guilty of sin, we have no claim on God save for judgement. But he who will humbly acknowledge himself ungodly and undone, will speedily learn that such is the heart of God towards him that He sacrificed His Only-Begotten Son for his blessing, and that in virtue of His atoning death, sins and iniquities are remembered no more.

Chapter 68

The Four Thousand.

The Four Thousand. The bold faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman was truly refreshing to the spirit of the, Saviour, so often distressed by the unbelief of long-favoured Israel. In like manner he finds pleasure today in the faith of Gentile believers while Israel continues estranged and scattered. Yet nothing will ever be allowed to alienate Him from the seed of Abraham; He loves them with an everlasting love, and the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. He speedily returned, therefore, from the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon, and busied Himself once more in the midst of Israel.

Needy multitudes gathered around Him (Matthew 15:29-39). His touch sufficed for the healing of every kind of disease, and delivered ones were constrained to glorify the God of Israel. These things took place on a mountainside in Galilee. After three days of such occupation the Saviour became concerned for the feeding of the people, far removed as they were from the ordinary sources of supply. He put no testing questions to His disciples, as when the five thousand were before Him; but simply declared His compassion for the people's need, and His intention Or supplying it. So forgetful is the human heart in everything where God is concerned, that the disciples, overlooking the previous miracle, expressed their doubt as to finding sufficient bread in the wilderness to feed so great a multitude. This elicited the fact that seven loaves and a few little fishes were available. This handful became mighty in the hand that once destroyed the empire of Pharaoh by means - of a humble shepherd's rod. In simple-hearted dependence upon God (for the Son had become truly human), He offered public thanks for the temporal mercies that soon supplied the need of the vast throng before Him. Four thousand men were fed on this occasion. besides women and children. At the conclusion of the meal the fragments were gathered up, for with the absolutely perfect One waste could not accompany wealth and benevolence. Seven large baskets full remained, as compared with twelve hand-baskets full after the earlier feast. Scripture numerals are significative of spiritual truths. Seven (twice repeated in this narrative) is the number of perfection: four is the world-number. We thus learn symbolically that when He opens His hand to remedy the woes of men there will be perfection of blessing: and this, not merely for Israel's tribes. but for the whole world. This happy condition of things, however, cannot be until His return from heaven. His appearing in majesty will be the bright opening of a day fraught with peace and blessing such as the world has never yet known.

Meanwhile, from a heart fully charged with grace and goodness, divine mercy flows freely to individuals everywhere who feel their need of these things. Though the groan of the world, as such, cannot he hushed while the Saviour remains seated at the right hand of God, no individual need go unblessed for a single hour. On the perfectly righteous basis of His death and resurrection, every yearning soul may have spiritual healing and pardon, and may find in the exalted Saviour Himself full satisfaction of that heart-hunger which the things of this world can never allay.

Chapter 69

The Demoniac Boy.

The Demoniac Boy. lt. is a terrible fact that this world is under the power of Satan as its prince. The Saviour was reminded of it in a peculiarly painful manner as He descended from the holy mount after His transfiguration. He found a crowd assembled, with scribes among them, and a poor demon-possessed lad wallowing and foaming in their midst. His disciples were there; but, through lack of faith, they were impotent in the presence of the enemy's power. Divinely commissioned and endowed though they were (Matthew 10:1), they were unable to meet the emergency. The Lord learned upon inquiry that the lad had suffered thus from his childhood. A picture, only too correct, of our race, which fell into the hands of Satan in its very infancy, i.e., in the days. of the garden of Eden. The poor child was both dumb and deaf (Mark 9:25), reflecting thus the spiritual condition of every representative of fallen Adam. The unregenerate man has nothing to say for God, and he has no ear for the commandments of God. God is to him as though He were not. The afflicted child was in constant peril of his life. His father said of the unclean spirit within him: "Oft-times it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters to destroy him." In like manner every undelivered sinner is in jeopardy, not of temporal disaster merely, but of eternal destruction. Man's chosen leader is truly a cruel deceiver; would that all eyes were open to the fact!

Disappointed in the disciples, who should have been able to make potent use of the Saviour's name, the despairing father turned to the Lord Himself. With no great amount of faith, however. "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us" (Mark 9:22). What words to address to the Lord of all! He Who created the universe, and all that is therein, could surely overthrow the power of Satan, a mere creature of His hand, albeit the most mighty Demons always recognised Who and what He was; men, alas, but rarely.

It is the privilege of Christ's heralds now to pro- claim not what He is able to do merely, but what He has done. Having bowed His head in death as an atonement for sin, He is righteously able "to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bound" Luke 4:18). None need remain under the galling yoke of Satan for a single hour; one simple appeal to the victorious Lord in heaven's glory sets the soul at large for ever. "If Thou canst" said the Saviour to the parent; “all things are possible to him that believeth” (R.V.). Here we have the secret of blessing and deliverance at all times. It is not human effort, whether resolutions, prayers, or religiousness, but simple faith in the Son of God. The Gospel was intended to open men's eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance amongst all who are sanctified by faith in Christ (Acts 26:18). With tears the father exclaimed: "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." At once the blessing came, and the child was set free for ever. Each of the Synoptists records this touching incident Mark, as usual, with greatest fullness of detail.

Chapter 70

The Tribute Money.

The Tribute Money.

It was quite natural that the Capernaum collector should challenge Peter in regard to his Master's payment of the half shekel-a tax levied upon all males in Israel for the upkeep of the temple (Matthew 17:24-27). In His eyes He was only an itinerant preacher, perhaps a prophet, and therefore liable for the impost as all others. But Peter erred egregiously In answering the inquiry in the affirmative. Only a little while before he had confessed Him as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," and had received the Saviour's benediction for it (Matthew 16:16-17); now he acknowledges His liability for a petty tax as though He were a mere son of Jacob. When he entered the house, the Lord anticipated what he had to say, showing thus His perfect omniscience. "What thinkest thou, Simon, Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own sons or of strangers?" To this the blundering apostle returned the only answer that was possible — "of strangers." Jesus saith unto him: "then are the sons free." A simple statement, yet how full! Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of Him Who dwelt in the temple. From Him the great Sovereign of the universe never could or would demand anything. But observe the Plural — "sons." He put Peter alongside of Him- self as sharing His position and relationship. "The grace of this is astounding. Yet Scripture is mast explicit in its address to every Christian: "Thou art no longer a servant, but a son...Ye are all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26; Galatians 4:7). We owe this to the Saviour's atoning blood, which has put away all our sins, and furnished God with a righteous ground for the display of all His love and grace. The blood of Christ entitles every believer to share His relationship of Son to the Father, and to be with Him in His heavenly glory for ever. But these wonders are not yet acknowledged by the world. Neither Christ nor Christians are yet recognised in their true position of exaltation as sons to the Father. Consequently the tax must be paid without demur. Neither clamour, nor resistance- passive or otherwise could proceed from the meek and lowly One. Had the half shekel been required at census time as atonement-money (Exodus 30:11-16) the case would have presented grave difficulties; but the collection was of a different nature, a mere change for the maintenance of the temple (2 Chronicles 24:6). Mark the tender consideration of our Lord; Notwithstanding, lest we should stumble them' He would rather pay any figure, however unjust or objectionable, than endanger the testimony of God by provoking invidious comments from the unregenerate. How little has His example been heeded by Christians when smarting under a sense of wrong!

Small though the amount was — a coin — the Saviour did not possess it. Creation must therefore supply it at His command. "Go thou to the sea, cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for Me and thee." Everything and everyone — wind, waves, fishes, demons, etc. discerned Who He was but poor benighted man. Painful thought! The most favoured of all God's creatures, the blindest of all through sin! Yet His infinite grace picks up multitudes of the wretched sons of men, and puts them in the company of His own beloved Son, so that He can link them with Himself and say, "Me and thee."

Chapter 71

Blind Bartimaeus.

Blind Bartimaeus. The Saviour was journeying to Jerusalem for the last time. In less than a week all the sorrow of earth were over for Him. Death, with its agony and shame, was behind Him, and His body lay In the tomb. But though His sensitive spirit felt the weight of all that was impending, nothing was permitted to stay His beneficent hand. Human misery and need aroused all the tenderness of His heart.

He was just passing out of Jericho, after being a guest at the house of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-48). The fact that this city had lain under a special curse for ages was no barrier with Him; divine grace in Him rose supreme over everything. Had it not been so, He would never have visited our earth, so long under God's displeasure because of sin. A blind beggar, hearing the tramp of a crowd, and inquiring what it meant, learned that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. Mark tells us his name was Bartimaeus; Matthew lets us know that he had a companion, this being the third instance in which the first Gospel notes two sufferers where the other Gospels speak only of one.

Bartimaeus cried out lustily: 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.' He received no rebuff from the Saviour for addressing Him by this title. In using it he was as right as the Syro-Phoenician woman was wrong. As born of the stock of Israel, he was entitled to look for a king of David's line who should open the eyes of the blind, unstop the ears of the deaf, make the lame leap as a hart, and teach the tongue of the dumb to sing (Isaiah 35:5-6). Bystanders sought to silence him, but to no purpose. "He cried out the more a great deal, Thou Son Of David, have mercy on me" Mark 10:48). Had he missed this opportunity, he would never have had another, for the Lord never visited Jericho again. His cry reached the Saviour's ears. Learning that he might approach, the blind man "cast away his garment, sprang up, and came to Jesus" (R.V.). This poor man reads us many lessons. There is a garment of self-righteousness which multitudes are hugging today to their soul's harm. Oh, that they would cast it from them, and as sinners seek the Saviour's feet! (Romans 10:3). Many among us would also do well to imitate Bartimaeus' earnestness in appealing for the blessing, and the alacrity with which he hastened to receive it. One word from Jesus sufficed for his healing: "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. "Not only he, but a]so those who beheld the miracle, burst forth in praise to God (Luke 18:43) The Lord did not bid him be silent about his healing as when He healed two blind men some time before (Matthew 9:30). He was about to present Himself publicly In Jerusalem as Israel's long expected King, and it was well that a testimony should be rendered at this juncture to His person and His power. But the clearest testimony avails nothing for men willingly blinded by Satan; hence no crown awaited Him In Jerusalem but a crown of thorns; no throne of glory was in preparation for Him, but instead a cross of shame. But this, in the wonderful ways of God, has secured our salvation from eternal woe.

Chapter 72

The Accursed Fig Tree.

The Accursed Fig Tree.

Every miracle performed by the Son of God on an earth was an act of goodness and mercy, with the single exception of the cursing of the fig-tree. This occurred during His last week of sorrow. His ministry during that week was exercised in Jerusalem, but each evening He went out of the city to lodge in Bethany, preferring the simple reality of Lazarus and his sisters, to the dead religious formalism of which Jerusalem was full.

One morning, as He traversed the road between Bethany and the metropolis, feeling hungry, He paused at a wayside fig-tree intending to pluck some fruit. He found Leaves in abundance, but of figs there was no sign. The gathering time not having come, the branches should have been laden (Mark 11:12-13). He forthwith pronounced His anathema upon it: "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever." The tree presently withered up from the roots (Matthew 21:19). The whole proceeding was so unique, and its severity so unusual for One so full of grace as the Lord Jesus, that we are arrested by it, and constrained to enquire into its significance. Some time before He had likened the Jewish people to a figtree planted in a vineyard (Luke 13:6). This furnishes us with the key to this remarkable incident. He was Himself Jehovah who had shown favour and care to Israel for ages, and Who was entitled therefore to look for some return. Alas! Israel's history had been one of sin and rebellion from the beginning. Under every divine test they had produced nothing but thorns and briars. Now He had come from heaven in person to put them to the supreme test of His own presence. This was soon to end in blood. The air was full of conspiracy against Him; and in a few days, as He perfectly well knew, He would be lying dead in the tomb. His cursing of the fig-tree was therefore a symbolic action; for the tree represented Israel under the old covenant, soon to be utterly rejected as hopelessly unfruitful for God. When God does gather fruit from that people, it will be from a new generation under the new covenant of grace in the Millennial kingdom. The cursing of the fig-tree has a voice for men in Christendom as well as for men in Israel. Israel's history, rightly viewed, is a mirror in which men everywhere may see their own reflection. The Christendom of today is as unreal and as unfruitful for God as the Israel of the past. Every thoughtful observer will admit that we are face to face with a profitless mass of hollow religious profession. In no sphere is there so much sham as in the religious sphere. Men commemorate with feasting the birth of the Saviour while spurning His salvation; they build costly temples in His name while refusing Him one inch of space in their hearts; they celebrate with pompous ritual His atoning death while despising it for their souls' need. The Judge of guilty Israel will not for ever spare far guiltier Christendom. In Romans 11:16-22 will be found its righteous doom.

Let us away with all unreality and sham. He who has given His whole heart to us is surely worthy of all that our poor hearts can render in return.

Chapter 73

The Demon in the synagogue.

The Demon in the synagogue. When our Lord first left Nazareth to live at Capernaum He was met with an extraordinary experience in that little port. According to His custom, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day His disciples attending Him. His exposition of the Scriptures was interrupted by a demon-possessed man crying out: "What have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art Thou come to destroy us I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God' (Mark 1:24). To be confronted in such a place with the power of Satan was surely very. remarkable. The Saviour frequently met demoniacs in the outside world, thus being painfully reminded that the world is under Satan as its prince; but that a demon should intrude, as it were, into the very presence of God was extraordinary. The demon knew Him, and did not hesitate to confess Him as the Holy One, a title long before assigned to Him in Psalms 89:19. But the Lord could no more receive testimony from such a source than Paul later, when publicly witnessed to by a Pythoness in the streets of Philippi (Acts 16:16-18). Between Christ and Satan there can be no affinity, but rather the deepest moral antagonism. Accordingly, in the presence of the congregation, the Lord overthrew the power of the enemy, and set his victim free. The people went home marvelling both at the teaching they had heard and the power they had witnessed. Is there anything today answering to the demon in the synagogue? Most assuredly, for history is; repeating itself continually. The parable of the mustard-seed comes to mind in this connection. The Lord likened the profession of Christianity to the least of all seeds which developed to such proportions that it provided a lodging-place for the birds of the air. Now seeing that in the course of the same exposition He used the birds as symbols of the emissaries of Satan (Matthew 13:4; Matthew 13:19; Matthew 13:31-32), what have we here but a forecast of Christian profession losing its original humble character, and becoming a great and showy 'system, with room beneath its shelter for the very, enemies of Christ and the Gospel. How sadly this has been verified must be patent to every thoughtful observer. How comes it that in buildings erected for the preaching of the Word of God men are heard discrediting the Inspiration of the Scriptures, repudiating the possibility of miracles, doubting the virgin birth of Christ, speaking disrespectfully of His atoning blood, and spiritualising away the momentous fact of His resurrection. Comes this kind of thing from the Spirit of Truth, or from some other spirit? Let us not deceive ourselves. There is a working of Satan in Christendom today as real and as malignant as in Israel of old. The manner of its manifestation has changed, but that is all. In a polished age men are apt to use mild terms for grave offences, and thus obscure their real nature and character. It is infinitely wiser and safer to set things in their true light, however hideous they may appear.

None can put down the power of Satan but Him Who cast out the demon in the synagogue of Capernaum. This He will accomplish effectually when He comes out of heaven in power and majesty. Meanwhile, those who fear God are enjoined to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather to expose them (Ephesians 5:11).

Chapter 74

Ephphatha.

Ephphatha.

Mark tells us that after His special journey into the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon for the healing of the Syro-Phcenician, the Saviour made a circuit of the Decapolis district. This consisted of ten cities which had been granted special privileges by the Roman conquerors about a century earlier. There, as everywhere else, He found abundant need for the exercise of His divine power and mercy. A man was brought to Him who was deaf and had an impediment m his speech (Mark 7:31-37); a humiliating picture of every man's moral and spiritual condition as the fruit of the fall. God lost man's ear in the garden; ever since that fatal day the disposition of the whole human family has been to listen to anyone rather than to God. Hence the exhortation to the chosen people: "Hear, O Israel" (Deuteronomy 6:4), and the divine lamentation: "Oh, that My people had hearkened unto Me" (Psalms 81:13). hence, too, the appeal to us all: "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7). The tongue of the unregenerate man is as estranged from God as the ear; for none can deny that the most eloquent conversationalist betrays an impediment in his speech as soon as the things of God and Christ are introduced. The Saviour took the sufferer aside from the crowd. It is good to be alone in the divine presence. The busy hum of the world is not conducive to spiritual reflection. The great destroyer of souls would rather keep men in a continuous whirl of business and pleasure than see them sitting down quietly in meditation before God. But it is in the hush of the divine presence that we learn our sin and guilt, and our deep need of sovereign grace. There, apart from the thoughtless, clamorous crowd, we see things In their true light, and our souls find eternal blessing. The Saviour touched first the ears of the afflicted one. and then his tongue. This order is significant In the spiritual realm the ear must be opened to receive divine Instruction ere the tongue is able to speak forth God's praise. "We believe, and there fore speak" (2 Corinthians 4:13). "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). He who has received by way of the ear the Gospel of Christ into His heart will delight to speak of the marvels of God's grace to all around. As He touched the man the Lord looked up to heaven, and sighed, saying "Ephphatha," that is "Be opened." The burden of the world's sin, and the many miseries attendant Upon it, oppressed His gracious spirit. He recalled the day when, ages before, He pronounced His whole creative work "very good' (Genesis 1:31), and He groaned as He considered all the havoc that Satan and man had caused through sin. It was this that brought Him from above. But He had come, not to heal physical diseases only, But to make atonement for sin by His blood, in order that all who believe might be delivered once and for ever from the guilt and thraldom of sin, and be reconciled to God in peace and blessing. The astonished multitudes who beheld the present miracle exclaimed, "He hath done all things well." With what fullness of meaning may this be said when the new heavens and the new earth appear, peopled by countless myriads of the blest, saved from sin, suffering, and death as the fruit of His priceless. sacrifice.

Chapter 75

Men as Trees Walking

Men as Trees Walking Our Lord on one occasion performed a miracle in two parts. The scene was Bethsaida: its record is found in Mark 8:22-26) the other Evangelists being silent as to it. A blind man being brought to Him, the Saviour led him out of the town, and spat upon his eyes; then, putting His hands upon him, He enquired if he saw anything. The man replied: "I see men as trees, walking." The great Healer touched him a second time, after which he looked up, and saw all things clearly. He was then dismissed to his home. The line pursued by our Lord in this instance was very singular, and its lessons are of an unusual kind. The partial sight of this man represented the spiritual condition of the disciples while the Saviour was with them. They but dimly perceived the true character of His gracious mission. They sincerely believed that He was the long-expected Messiah, Who should sit upon David's throne; but that He must needs suffer, and be made an offering for sin had no place whatever in their thoughts. They clearly understood that such a chapter as Psalms 72:1-20, with its kingdom-glories, had reference to Him, but it never dawned upon them that Isaiah 53:1-12, with its predictions of suffering and shame, must also find its fulfilment in Him. His post-resurrection conversation on the way to Emmaus cleared away many difficulties for those to whom it was addressed: "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory" (Luke 24:26). His visit to Jerusalem later in the same day dissipated the perplexities of others. "He opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them: 'Thus it is written, and thus it behoved the Christ to suffer; and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations' (Luke 24:45-47). Hence forward these men were mighty witnesses to a crucified Saviour, while looking and waiting for His return from heaven as a glorious King.

Many true-hearted believers today are as imperfect in their spiritual vision as the disciples of long ago. So to speak, they "see men as trees walking." Very few things are clear to them. For example, many fear that though they are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus they may ultimately find themselves rejected. failing to understand that there is no condemnation for those whom divine grace has identified with Christ. They are apprehensive that the gift of the Holy Spirit may be withdrawn from them, not perceiving that this priceless bestowal is due to the Saviour's blood, which makes it secure for ever. They imagine that every time the Christian fails he needs a fresh cleansing in the atoning blood. their faith not having grasped that the Christian is judicially clean for ever, needing nothing for daily failures but the water of the Word of God. They are fearful concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus lest they should then be left behind, not having learned that our translation to glory is the fruit of sovereign grace alone, which can never fail. Oh, that all these would go aside once more with the Saviour and get another touch from His blessed hand, as the poor man of Bethsaida. They would then read spiritual things in God's own light, and their joy would be full for ever.

Chapter 76

The Draught of Fishes.

The Draught of Fishes.

It was a notable day in the history of Simon Peter when the Saviour requested the loan of his boat on the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1-11). It was not his first acquaintance with Him. Some time before he had been introduced to the Lord by his brother Andrew, and it had resulted in a heart-attachment to Him which was abiding and eternal (John 1:40-42) But, like many another truly converted soul. Simon had much to learn concerning the evil of his own heart and the remarkable incident upon the lake was an immense blessing to him in this direction.

It happened on this wise. The Saviour was being hard pressed by multitudes eager to hear the Word of God. Being by the lake shore, and observing two boats near by, He asked for the use of one that He might teach the people therefrom. Simon, who was washing his nets with his partners, responded with alacrity, and the preaching was continued under these exceptional conditions. When the speaking was finished, the Lord bade Simon launch out into the deep, and let down his net for a draught. Though he had toiled all night in vain, he obeyed the injunction, with the result that so great a multitude of fishes was hauled up that the net brake. The second boat was requisitioned, and both were so heavily freighted that they began to sink.

Never had Simon and his companions known such an experience. In Simon's own case, it yielded deep spiritual blessing. It so brought home to him the reality of having to do with God that all the evil of his heart became naked and bare before him, and he fell at Jesus' knees, saying: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Such was his soul distress that he was completely oblivious to the dangerous condition of the sinking boat. This was not his conversion. He had been converted at his first meeting with the Saviour; this was simply a deepening of the work of God in his soul. Job had such an experience (Job 42:6); Isaiah also (Isaiah 6:5); and Paul. The latter was reduced to confess: "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18). "No confidence in the flesh" was henceforth one of the mottoes of his life (Php_3:3). When a man reaches this point he learns that nothing counts with God but Christ, and his whole confidence becomes centred in Him Who died and rose again. Happy position in which to stand; involving, as it does, complete deliverance from one's old self with all its pretensions and claims. The poor conscience-stricken fisherman was soon graciously encouraged by the Lord. "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Accordingly Simon and his partners abandoned their boats and nets for ever, and followed the Saviour in His mission of love to the souls of men. Singularly, Luke omits all mention of Andrew in his narrative, while he alone tells us of the special work in the conscience of his brother. Catching men by means of the Gospel became the happy occupation of Simon and Andrew, James and John from that moment. An instance of fishing with the net is given in Acts 2:1-47, when three thousand converts were safely landed; and an instance of fishing with the hook is recorded in Acts 8:1-40, when an individual soul was savingly blessed by a desert road.

Chapter 77

The Widow's Son at Nain.

The Widow's Son at Nain.

It was surely not unreasonable when Paul demanded of King Agrippa: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead (Acts 26:8). Let it once be admitted that there is a God Who is supreme in the universe. and it is easy to believe in resurrection, however stupendous the miracle may be. He who created man from dust is surely able to call him forth again from the domain of death, if it please Him so to do. But God alone can perform such a marvel. When at different times Elijah, Peter and Paul raised persons from the dead, they were manifestly wielding power not their own, and the miracles were granted In response to their prayer of faith. But He who was greater than they could arrest a funeral procession with His majestic "I say unto thee, Arise," and death immediately yielded up its prey. Well might the people say that He spake as one having authority, and that never man spake as He.

We have before our minds just now His action at the gate of Nain (Luke 7:11-17). As He approached the place, accompanied by His disciples, and followed by the usual multitude, a dead man was being carried out to burial. He was the only son of a widowed mother. So sorrowful a spectacle could not fail to appeal to the tender heart of the Saviour. All His sympathy went out forthwith to the desolate mourner. But in Him sympathy was ever combined with power. Hence He not only said to the mother, "Weep not”; He also said to her son, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." "And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother."

We recall His claims as recorded in John 5:21-29. He affirmed that as the Father raises up the dead and quickens them, even so the Son quickens whom He will. He further asserted that the Father has committed all judgement unto Him, that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. Quickener of the dead, and Judge. Tremendous claims assuredly, with which none dare trifle. If Jesus of Nazareth be not all this, let us never more breathe His name. He who claims such prerogatives falsely, must be branded as the worst and most dangerous of men. But if He is indeed both Quickener and Judge, let us hasten to His feet, and acknowledge His title with reverence and godly fear. He quickens the spiritually dead in this Gospel day by means of the written Word (John 5:24-25). and all who are thus quickened become possessors of eternal life; when the Gospel day is over He will quicken men's bodies also, calling forth those who have done good unto the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil unto the resurrection of judgement (John 5:28-29). Yet this does not imply that all will be raised simultaneously; Revelation 20:5-6 makes it perfectly clear that a thousand years will elapse between the resurrection of the blessed and the resurrection of the lost. The greatest marvel of all is that One possessed of such prerogatives should have stooped to death Himself for the blessing and salvation of men ruined and undone. It becomes us to bow our heads adoringly in the presence of His own declaration: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:14-15.

Chapter 78

God or Beelzebub.

God or Beelzebub.

"He was casting out a demon, and it was dumb" (Luke 11:14). "Blind and dumb," adds Matthew 12:22). A most merciful deliverance assuredly, for which every observer should have been profoundly thankful to God. The common people were not altogether unappreciative, for they said: "Is not this the Son of David?" It has frequently happened that the simple ones of the earth have been very true in their perception of the hand of God. But with the religious leaders it was otherwise. They said: "He casteth out demons by Beelzebub the prince of demons" (Luke 11:15, R.V.). Matthew says this came from the Pharisees; Mark adds that the scribes were involved in it also (Mark 3:22). It is a question whether we should condemn the most their spiritual incompetency or their desperate wickedness. If they were really quite unable to distinguish between the hand of God and the hand of Satan they were utterly unfit to be instructors of God's people; If instead they saw God's power and deliberately imputed it to be the operation of hell, because it did not happen to work through official channels, the wickedness of it is almost too awful to contemplate. No evil is worse than religious evil; how much there has been of it let the annals of ecclesiasticism declare.

There have ever been certain recognised channels through which, in men's judgement, divine power and blessing ought to flow. But it is most certain that the blessing of God has reached multitudes of souls apart from official channels altogether. Like Gideon's fleece, ecclesiasticism has been dry while the refreshing dew of God's Spirit has been experienced all around (Judges 6:40) This, instead of producing heart-searching In those thus divinely passed by, has only too often evoked rancour and blasphemy. It is a settled principle with ecclesiasticism that everything outside of itself is unauthorised and abominable. The compassionate Saviour stooped to reason with His evil critics. He asked them how Satan could possibly cast out. Satan, and pointed out that a kingdom divided against itself must needs come to desolation, and that a house divided against itself cannot stand. The true position was this — Satan as the strong one had long kept his captives in peace; now a Stronger had come, with power to overcome him, and divide the spoils. For this let us praise our God. The Stronger than Satan is manifestly the victorious Son of God. He has met the enemy in his last stronghold — death, and has vanquished him, putting away sin the while; there is not a single child of Adam but may be set free from the thraldom of Satan forthwith by appealing to the Saviour's grace. Sin-distressed souls need not concern themselves with the ways and criticism of contentious religionists; the Saviour is their true resource; let them cast themselves on Him. To His stern rebuke our Lord added these words: "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad" (Luke 11:23). He was undoubtedly wielding the power of God in grace and blessing to needy men; those who opposed Him were not gatherers but rather scatterers, of God's "beautiful flock" (Jeremiah 13:20): Let us tremble lest religious prejudice land us in this terrible position today. Where the hand of God is clearly seen, where the Spirit of grace is really blessing and comforting souls, let us frankly acknowledge it, and without a reserve in our hearts let us praise and magnify our God.

Chapter 79

The Bent Woman.

The Bent Woman. This was a Sabbath-day incident, and is recorded by Luke only (Luke 13:10-17). Probably on no day in the week was our Lord so closely watched by His adversaries as on the Sabbath, in the hope that they might convict Him of some breach of the law concerning it. How little did they realise, in their unbelief and perverseness, that they were criticising the very One who gave the law from the fiery mount! The sadness of it is heightened by the fact that these were not the ignorant of the land, but the religious leaders of God's chosen people. The present miracle was performed in a synagogue, most likely in Jerusalem. A woman was there who "was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself." Expressive picture of every man's spiritual condition through sin, unable to look up into the face of his God, and without strength to remedy his evil plight (Psalms 40:12; Romans 5:6). The woman had suffered in her deformity eighteen years. If Scripture numbers are significant, as we believe, eighteen, being the treble of six, is suggestive of the full manifestation of evil. Compare Revelation 13:18. She thus becomes the type of the worst of sinners. Her condition appealed at once to the sensitive spirit of the Saviour. He called her to Him, and said: "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. Had there been a spark of spiritual discernment in the ruler of the synagogue, he would have at once called for Psalms 103:1-22. From every tongue present there might well have sounded forth the refrain: Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases" Alas for the ruler! No such sentiments occurred to his spiritually darkened mind. Instead, he blazed forth with indignation, saying to the people: "There are six days in which men aught to work; in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath-day. "This outburst suggests a serious question. When God prescribed the Sabbath for man, forbidding him to work therein, did He thereby intend to bind His own hands, and make it improper for Himself to work on that day, even to perform a deed of mercy? The very suggestion is profanity itself. So good is He, so compassionate in His love, nothing can stay Him in His ministry of Grace to poor ruined man. The woman just healed was "a daughter of Abraham," i.e. she was possessed of Abraham's faith. Must faith wait for blessing because it is the Sabbath-day. Impossible, seeing that faith, not works or ceremonial observances is the standing principle of blessing with God. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness...Therefore it is of faith, that it might be of grace" (Romans 4:5; Romans 4:16). Grace gives the blessing, and faith receives it. All the work necessary for man's eternal good was wrought by the Son of God, when He died upon the cross of Calvary. The Saviour did not hesitate to expose the hypocrisy of His heartless critic. He would loose his ox or his ass and lead it to the water on the Sabbath day, yet would deny God the right to relieve a suffering woman. Truly our God has no more malignant or unreasonable antagonists than those who oppose Him in the name of religion.

Chapter 80

The Dropsical Man.

The Dropsical Man.

Yet another Sabbath-day incident. The place, not a synagogue, but the dinner-table of one of Israel's chief Ecclesiastics, and he a Pharisee. Luke 14:1 (who alone reports the case) says 'they watched Him". Nothing more need be stated concerning the attitude of the host and his friends towards their Guest. They were sitting at table with God manifested in flesh, yet so blind were they that they knew it not.

It was an instructive occasion for those who had ears to hear. The lips of Eternal Truth were freely opened. Things were said that day which should have sent every guest to his closet in humiliation be- fore God. The Saviour spoke of the boundless grace of God, and He spoke also of the hopeless evil of the human heart. The presence of a sufferer — a man afflicted with dropsy — furnished Him with His text. He raised the question of the Sabbath Himself this time. He demanded of the lawyers and Pharisees about Him: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day, or not." Obtaining no response, He healed the poor fellow, and let him go: knowing that they were bitterly censuring Him In their hearts for His deed of mercy, He proceeded thus: "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath-day!" The challenge was unanswerable. Where their own interests were concerned they would not scruple to act promptly, let the day be ever so sacred.

Man-even religious man-thus stands convicted of being utterly out of harmony with God. His boasted fidelity to religious forms is not the fruit of love to God, but simply gratification of his spiritual pride. What can be conceived more offensive than this. If open transgressors produce "wicked works" (Colossians 1:21). religionists produce "dead works" (Hebrews 9:14). and both are equally hateful to Him with whom we have to do. So morally alienated is man from God, that it has to be said to all alike: "Ye must be born anew" John 3:7). The Saviour's exposure of the human heart at the Pharisee's dinner-table is painful to read. First. He rebuked the pride of His fellow-guests, as shown in their eager scramble for the chief seats; then He censured the selfishness of the host in that he had invited only those to his table who would be certain to recompense him again (Luke 14:7-14). .Pride and selfishness in the presence of the self-sacrificing One who had left heaven's glory for Calvary's cross in His love to perishing sinners! A person venturing the remark, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God," He added the parable of the great supper, the sad moral of which, as regards man, is that though God provide something ever so costly and rare, man has no heart for it. The scramblers for the best seats in the Pharisee's house wanted no seat at all where God and His grace were found. "I pray thee have me excused" was their uniform reply to His loving invitation. If God would have guests at His feast, such is the animosity of the human heart towards Him, even amongst the religious, that He must needs "compel them to come in." Truly, if man's heart be only evil, the heart of God is only good, and that eternally.

Chapter 81

The Ten Lepers.

The Ten Lepers. This striking incident happened during our Lord's last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. The record of it is preserved in the third Gospel only (Luke 17:11-19). Ten lepers met the Saviour at His entrance into a village, and with one accord cried to Him for mercy. The fame of His deeds of power had spread from Dan to Beersheba; hence the readiness with which these victims of disease appealed to Him. Remarkably, one of them was a Samaritan, the rest being Jews. Under ordinary circumstances the nine would have spurned the company of the tenth ("for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans"); but the stress of a common disease had put them all on one level, and they apparently felt it. The greatest leveller of all is sin, of which leprosy is in Scripture the expressive type.. High and low, rich and poor, religious and irreligious, are all In the same position before God in this respect; "there is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). What matters it that some owe 50 pence and some 500 if all alike have nothing wherewith to pay (Luke 7:41-42). In answer to the cry of the lepers the Saviour said: "Go, show yourselves unto the priests." Why did He act thus? Why did He not put out His hand, and touch them, and so give them instantaneous healing, as with the leper of Luke 5:13? The reason appears to be that He would test them as to their confidence in His word. Their response was perfect. With no change whatever in their condition they turned their steps in the direction of the temple to offer their two birds (Leviticus 14:1-4), being confident that healing would be experienced on the road, as really happened. "As they went they were cleansed." Let these poor fellows read us a lesson today. Confidence in the divine word (for us the Scriptures) is the deepest need of our time. Higher Criticism, and the "opposition of science falsely so-called" are destroying faith in the Word of God. Multitudes are weltering in unbelief, to their deadly peril. Yet blessing for us, as for the ten lepers, is only found in the way of faith; and "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). A remarkable thing happened. As soon as the little band became conscious that they were healed. The Samaritan broke away from his companions (who continued their journey towards the temple), and re- turned to Jesus, falling at His feet, and glorifying God with a loud voice. In his eyes sanctuaries, ceremonies, and priests, were the veriest trivialities compared with the Son of God. The nine might occupy themselves with the religious formalities of Jerusalem, but he could only be happy at the Saviour's feet. The Lord commended him for it in the words: "Were there not ten cleansed; but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." If the Lord could so speak in a land where the religious ceremonies of the people were of divine institution, what would He say today when the ceremonies in which men pride themselves are derived partly from Judaism and partly from Paganism, all of them in defiance of the teaching of the New Testament epistles? There is nothing so spiritually barren as ceremonial religion; there is nothing that so satisfies and delights the heart as having contact with the person of the Son of God. To Him, not to religious centres, our allegiance is due; for has He not purged our sins by His blood, and does He not live now on our behalf in the glory above. Let others impoverish themselves with mere religion if they will, but let us find our all in Christ Himself.

Chapter 82

Malchus Ear.

Malchus Ear.

"The beloved physician" tells us of a very touching scene in the garden of Gethsemane. It happened on the eve of the Saviour's last woe. The cross was looming before Him with all its anguish and shame. He had just risen from His distressful prayer when a band of armed men approached to apprehend Him. The kiss of the traitor indicated to them the One of Whom they were in search. Yet for such an One there was no peril, save as He chose to yield Himself to the malice of His foes. At the sound of His voice His assailants fell to the ground (John 18:1-8); and nothing would have been easier for Him than to walk away, had it pleased Him so to do. But having come from above to offer Himself as an atoning sacrifice He meekly submitted Himself to their will. But those around Him were not of the same spirit. Peter, with his accustomed fire, drew a sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus the servant of the high priest. How unlike the Lard are even the noblest of His followers! In Peter, at that moment, we see fleshly activity when his Master was submissive, and an hour or two later when Jesus was confessing before Pontius Pilate the good confession, Peter was denying Him in the presence of the servants with oaths and curses (1 Timothy 6:13; Luke 22:54-62).

Now mark the Saviour's grace. He rebuked His disciple for his unholy zeal, and forthwith touched the ear of the servant and healed him. It is Luke who tells us of this extraordinary display of healing grace, and it is John who records the names of the parties concerned (Luke 22:51; John 18:10). Truly, there is no limit to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not only during the days of His ministry, but when the clouds were darkening around Him, He was the willing servant of human misery and need, This is most beautifully shown in His kindness to the dying thief, and in His healing of Malchus' ear. An open antagonist healed and blessed! Can the annals of human nature show anything like it? Yet it is the very essence of the Gospel that the Saviour should act thus. Hence the words in Colossians 1:21 : You who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death. He who penned these words had personally experienced the truth of them. Malchus was barely so pronounced an antagonist of the Son of God as Saul of Tarsus, "who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." It is no marvel that one who had been so divinely favoured - delighted henceforward to proclaim: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:12-15). No one in the universe is so able to melt hard hearts as the Lord Jesus, and to transform the most violent adversaries into humble and devoted disciples. All His ways are ways of matchless grace.

Chapter 83

Water made Wine

Water made Wine

It will be noticed that John in his history of the Saviour pursues a line altogether different from the other evangelists. The reason of this is that while Matthew, Mark, and Luke present the Lord to us in various human characters-as Messiah, Servant, and Son of Man, John sets forth His essential Deity. In the course of his exposition of this marvellous theme. he gives us a set of seven miracles. rightly called in the Revised Version "Signs." Four of them were performed in Galilee and three in Judea. The first of these signs was wrought in Cana. soon after the Saviour emerged from the retirement of Nazareth, and before His first visit to Jerusalem as a Prophet. He had been invited with His disciples to a wedding feast, His mother being there also (John 2:1-11). Unlike His herald. John the Baptist. our Lord was no ascetic (Luke 7:33-34). He was the most accessible and gracious of men. Marriage is a divine institution; He would signify His respect for it by His presence at its celebration when called. In a world of evil, marriage is an immense moral safeguard for men, and is "honourable in all" (Hebrews 13:4). "Forbidding to marry". is one of the predicted marks of the apastasy (1 Timothy 4:3). Amongst the notable first preachers of Christianity Paul seems to have been the only unmarried man. Peter and the other apostles took their wives with them on their missionary journeys (1 Corinthians 9:5). The wine ran out at Cana. Mary drew the Lord's attention to the fact, evidently prompting Him to perform a miracle. It is noteworthy that He immediately rebuked her. Only on two occasions do we find Mary intruding herself into the Lord's matters of service, and on each occasion He set her aside. (Compare Matthew 12:46-50; John 2:3-4). Intensely devoted to her though He was as son to mother, He would not suffer a merely natural relationship to influence the course of sacred things. All who reverence the Scriptures will see in these records a warning given beforehand against the superstitious blunder, now widely prevalent, of attributing intercessory and mediatorial powers to Mary. The feast-chamber at Cana was furnished with waterpots, but even they were empty, sadly suggestive of the emptiness of all earthly joy and delight. At the Saviour s word the pots were filled with water, which became instantly transformed into wine of such excellent quality as to draw forth high praise from the master of the feast. "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now." What Christ gives is necessarily superior to anything this world can afford. We are hereby reminded in a typical way of the pure joy with which even earth will be filled in the day of Christ's Kingdom. When He who now sits upon the Father's throne is established upon His own throne in Zion, all earth's woes will be brought to an end. He will fill the whole scene with peace and blessing.

Meanwhile the wine is suggestive of the profound truth that all blessing for men, whether now or in "the world to come" is founded upon redeeming blood. For the Saviour ere He went on high appointed a cup of wine as the abiding memorial of His own most precious blood (Matthew 26:27).

Chapter 84

The Courtiers Son.

The Courtiers Son. The Lord was again in Galilee, having returned from Jerusalem through Samaria. During His stay in the metropolis He had expounded the way of life to Nicodemus, and on His journey homeward He had ministered eternal satisfaction and joy to the woman by the well of Sychar. The latter incident was followed by two days of happy. labour amongst Samaritans deeply eager to hear His word.

He was once more in Cana. A nobleman, resident in Capernaum, appealed to Him to visit that port and heal his son, who was now at the point of death (John 4:46-54). The story is interesting in all its parts, for the present and future history of Israel may be read therein. The man was a courtier, or 'King's officer" (R.V. margin); i.e. he was though a Jew. attached to the court of Herod, the alien ruler of the northern districts of Israel. Expressive picture of the false position in which the elect nation has long stood. Having proved false to its unique calling in separation from all other peoples, God has abandoned the nation to the fruit of its ways, with the result that Israel has been for ages subservient to Gentile masters. Like the courtier's son, Israel has fallen under the power of death, so that nationally the people are likened in Ezekiel 37:1-28, to a valley full of dry bones, no more to live until the day of the Saviour's presence here in power. In answer to His suppliant, the Lord replied: "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe." In Israel generally this was only too true (1 Corinthians 1:22), while with Samaritans and Gentiles His word sufficed. With fervour the father besought Him: 'Sir, come down, ere my child die." His faith was far below that of the Roman centurion under similar circumstances. He urged the Saviour not to come, but to speak the healing word where He was. being persuaded that nothing more was required (Matthew 8:8). The Jewish courtier must be taught his lesson; accordingly he was dismissed with the words: "Go thy way, thy son liveth." He believed the Saviour; for his faith, though feeble, was real. He therefore turned his steps homeward, soon meeting servants who had been sent out from Capernaum with the happy intelligence that his son was well. Upon enquiry he learned that the fever left him at the very hour of the Saviour's utterance in Cana. From that moment his whole household became believers in the Messianic title of Jesus of Nazareth.

Faith in the word of the absent Christ is the great need of the present time. No longer is His voice heard speaking on earth, but He speaks from heaven in the sacred Scriptures. Therein He tells us of the infinite love of God, of the costly sacrifice of Calvary, and of pardon, justification and eternal life, the blessed portion of all who trust in Him. If the divine voice is not to be heard in the Scriptures then is heaven absolutely silent, and we are left to blindly grope our way down towards destruction. He who imagines that the Creator has thus abandoned His creatures, plagues his own heart with unreasonable thoughts concerning Him Who is both infinitely wise and infinitely good.

Chapter 85

The Pool of Bethesda.

The Pool of Bethesda.

"What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son". No one need misunderstand these words of the apostle, transcribed from Romans 8:3. They declare unequivocally the powerlessness of the law to help ruined man, and the supreme necessity for the mission of the Son of God. These principles are strikingly exemplified in the case of the infirm man who was healed by the Saviour at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-47). The porches of the pool were invariably crowded with sick folk, for it appears that from time to time an angel troubled its waters.. which then gave healing to the first person that stepped in. This, while a merciful interposition on the part of God, and beneficial to those possessed of some strength, was manifestly of no avail whatever for persons absolutely helpless. The pool is thus remarkably typical of the law, which promises life and righteousness to those who keep it in all its parts, but which has nothing but condemnation and death for those who fail to keep it (Galatians 3:10-12). Now, seeing that man is utterly evil In root and branch, and so "without strength," it is manifest that the law can never yield him blessing. Scripture says truly "the law is the strength of sin" and "the law worketh wrath" 1 Corinthians 15:56; Romans 4:15). The Saviour observed a man at Bethesda who had been afflicted thirty-eight years! just the period of Israel's unnecessary wandering In the wilderness as the fruit of putting themselves under law (Deuteronomy 2:14). Hoping against hope, the poor fellow had long watched the pool having no thought in his mind that healing could ever come to him by any other means. Sadly like the multitude in Christendom today. whose only thought concerning salvation is. that lt. must be obtained by human effort, if it is to be obtained at all. And this after the full revelation of God's grace in Christ! To the Saviour's enquiry, "Wilt thou be made whole" the impotent man replied: "Sir, I have no man. when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but, while I am coming, another steppeth down before me." A truly extraordinary reply, seeing that the pool was not mentioned in the question. He must now learn that what the pool could never accomplish for such as he, the Son of God could accomplish instantly by His word. At the command of Omnipotence, "Rise, take up thy bed and walk," he arose, took up his bed, and departed to his house. In like manner all the need of the soul is now met by the Saviour's word, apart from works of any kind whatsoever. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). His atoning death and triumphant resurrection explain how He is able to offer such simple terms to the ruined children of men. Had heart and conscience been lively in Israel, there would have been national humiliation before God concerning Bethesda's suffering throng. Such was the special character of Israel's calling that suffering and disease would have been unknown amongst them had they continued faithful to Jehovah (Deuteronomy 28:1-68). But to everything divine the people, and especially their religious leaders, were utterly insensible. Instead of appreciating the Saviour's goodness they persecuted Him for healing on the Sabbath day. Such is religion without God.

Chapter 86

Blind from Birth.

Blind from Birth. The Saviour had just delivered Himself from the malice of His enemies. who took up stones to cast at Him because He declared Himself the "I am." As He passed by, He noticed a man who had been blind from birth (John 9:1-41). The disciples enquired whose sin was responsible for this affliction — the man's, or his parents'? They were as narrow- minded as Job's three friends. who regarded suffering as a special mark of divine displeasure. having no other thought as to it. The Saviour pointed out a higher purpose. — “that the works of God should be manifest in him." The man's misery furnished occasion for the display of divine power and goodness.

He forthwith proceeded to heal him, adopting on this occasion methods altogether unique. He spat on the ground, made clay of the spittle, put it as ointment upon his eyes, and then bade him wash in the pool of Siloam, "which is by interpretation, 'Sent.'" Healing resulted immediately. But what is there for us in this extraordinary record. The clay symbolises our Lord's lowly humanity; the water is an emblem of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). Thus when a man apprehends by the Spirit's and the momentous fact that the mighty God became human for his salvation, and that He who walked here abased was indeed the 'Sent' One of the Father, his spiritual blindness is dispelled for ever. He forthwith begins to see, and everything becomes viewed in its true light. The Gospel is designed to open men's eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God (Acts 26:18). The Gospel is not a mere system of doctrines, nor is it simply a moral code; it is God's testimony to men concerning His beloved Son-God and man in one person, once the suffering Surety, but now glorified in the highest heaven. The healed man was soon challenged by his neighbours as to his recovered sight. He could only reply that "a man called Jesus" had thus blessed him. The religious leaders then took up the matter. and soon manifested their bitter animus against the gracious Healer. Proofs of His power were not wanting, but they were in no humour to acknowledge His divine mission, let the proofs be ever so many. The parents parried their enquiries, dreading excommunication, the usual resort of prejudiced ecclesiastics when Scripture and reason alike fail them. In their examination of the man himself. the Pharisees affected to honour Moses, and even God also. but both at the expense of the Lord Jesus, Whose dishonour was their undeviating aim. The man's simplicity irritated them. His expression of surprise that so great a wonder should be wrought in the land, and the professed exponents of God's truth unable to decide from whence the power came; and his guileless reasoning that his Healer must at least be a worshipper of God and a doer of His will galled them beyond endurance. Accordingly they cast him out, saying in their offended pride: "Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?"

They could not have conferred upon the poor fellow a greater boon, little as they intended it. The cast-out sheep was soon found by the Good Shepherd, despised and rejected as himself. When his Deliverer revealed Himself to him as the Son of God he fell at His feet adoringly saving, "Lord, I believe. " Religion is as hostile to the Son of God now as in the days of His humiliation; but why need we concern ourselves with its moral and spiritual blindness when there is sufficiency in the

Saviour outside of it all to satisfy the need of every longing soul?

Chapter 87

The Raising of Lazarus.

The Raising of Lazarus.

Bethany was ever a sweet spot to the self-emptied Son of God. It was one of the few places on earth where He was loved. and where His wounded spirit found rest. Lazarus and his sisters constituted a delightful home circle. They loved each other, and they were one in their faith in the despised and rejected Messiah. Sickness invaded their home. for the wisdom of divine love does not always shield its objects from this visitation. Lazarus was laid low, to the deep distress of his devoted sisters (John 11:1-57). The Lord was at that moment in retreat beyond Jordan. There the appeal reached Him: "Lord, behold he whom Thou lovest is sick.' The sisters did not definitely ask Him to come to their aid. assuming apparently that the news would bring Him without delay. He could have healed the sick man from a distance by His word (as in the case of the centurion's servant), but He did not do so. Nor did He hasten to Bethany, but remained yet two days where He was. Were we not persuaded that such an One as He could never err, His conduct in this instance would amaze us. He was walking in the light, and saw perfectly the course He should pursue to the glory of God. Presently He announced to His disciples that Lazarus was dead, and that He was glad for their sakes He was not there, adding. "Nevertheless, let us go to him." Their warning that perhaps martyrdom awaited Him in Judea the Lord passed by without concern. A stupendous miracle was to be performed. He had already restored two dead persons to life Jairus' daughter, and the son of the widow of Nain. The one was just dead, and the other was on the way to burial. But Lazarus had been buried four days when the Saviour reached Bethany, and his body was already advanced in corruption. Martha met Him with the remark that if He had been on the spot her brother had not died. When He spoke of resurrection she replied: "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." She did not realise that she was addressing the Resurrection and the Life, Who has power to raise His own sleeping ones when He pleases, and to stay the march of death upon His living ones so that they will never die at all. With all the light given in the New Testament epistles since Martha's day few in Christendom are at this hour beyond her poor notion of a general resurrection at the last day.

Mary followed her sister to the feet of Jesus. Touched by the scene of grief the Saviour groaned and wept — precious proofs of the reality of His holy humanity. Coming to the tomb, the stone was removed at His word spite of Martha's remonstrance. A few words of prayer to the Father were followed by the loud summons: "Lazarus, come forth," and soul and body were united once more. Liberty followed: "Loose him, and let him go." Wonderful outshining of the glory of God in Him whom men were about to crucify! Should not this marvel have convinced His adversaries of the futility of their designs against Him?

He is the Quickener of the dead. At the appointed hour He will raise His own for glory with Himself in the Father's house, and at the epoch of the dissolution of all things He will call forth His foes for the resurrection of Judgement. Meanwhile He quickens men's souls. Those who heed His voice in the Gospel message pass even now from death unto life, and have the blissful assurance that into

judgement they will never come (John 5:24-29). Life and liberty are the present blissful portion of all who believe in the name of the Only-Begotten Son of God.

Chapter 88

The Post-Resurrection Haul.

The Post-Resurrection Haul. This was the last miracle wrought by the Saviour before going on high. The cross and the grave were now behind Him. He had been delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification; nothing remained for Him now but to ascend up where He was before. Remarkably, John, the only one of the four evangelists who uses the word "ascend" in connection with our Lord, gives us no account of the ascension itself (John 3:13; John 6:62; John 20:17). Instead, he furnishes us with a series of three incidents which seem expressly designed to show the varied results of the Saviour's atoning work as regards this world. We have first, in the Lord's manifestation of Himself to His disciples on the evening of the resurrection, a picture of the Church of God, now being gathered by the Holy Spirit to Christ as its Centre; then we have, in His showing of Himself to doubting Thomas, an earnest of His future revelation of Himself to long-unbelieving Israel; and, fin- ally, in the remarkable draught of fishes, we may see a picture of the great ingathering from all nations in the Millennial age. God's order for blessing is thus, first, the Church; then Israel; then the world as such. (Let the reader carefully peruse John 20:19-31, John 21:1-14). The fishing incident happened on this wise. The Lord had appointed His disciples (the men who were soon to evangelise the world) to meet Him in Galilee. On arrival there, instead of waiting for Him, they went fishing at the suggestion of Peter. This was disobedience. Their course is a vivid representation of the present condition of their nation; God's chosen instruments for the world's blessing, yet in obstinate disobedience to the divine will (Romans 10:21). A whole night of toil yielded no result to the disciples. Even so will Israel one day confess "We have not wrought any deliverance in the earth" (Isaiah 26:18). Now it has to be said to them: "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you. as it is written" (Romans 2:24). The Saviour came upon the scene as morning dawned. His presence changed everything for the discouraged fishermen. In reply to His enquiry they dismally acknowledged that they had nothing to eat (picture of the present barrenness of disobedient Israel); then at His command they lowered the net on the right side of the boat, and forthwith enclosed 153 great fishes. "And for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken." If the sea, which is here described by its Gentile name (Tiberias, after Tiberius Casar) represents the nations, as we believe, then we have in this haul a striking picture of the great universal ingathering when Israel is once more In relationship with God (Psalms 67:1-7). This will not be until the Saviour's feet again stand upon the Mount of Olives.

Every devout soul longs to see the world delivered and blessed. It has been the holy aspiration of the pious in all ages to see the earth filled with the knowledge of God. This yearning has its source in God Himself, and He will not disappoint it. Nevertheless, Christianity is not destined to bring about its happy realisation. The world's blessing hinges upon Israel's blessing. When Israel turns to the Lord and resumes her high place as leader and teacher of the nations, universal good will follow speedily. Meanwhile, salvation is available for all — Jews and Gentiles alike — who put their trust in the Saviour Who died for their sins and rose again.

Chapter 89

Papers on Prophecy

Papers on Prophecy

By W.W. Fereday

These are five papers on Prophecy by W.W. Fereday (Brethren). These are really small books in themselves, so these studies are very developed.

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The Lord Will Come

The Lord will come. - Papers on Prophecy

By W W Fereday.

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The Restoration of Israel.

Preface.

The volume now placed before the reader includes Nos. 1 to 6 of the "Papers on Prophecy" which have been appearing monthly. It was suggested that they should be published in this collected form, as being more convenient for readers in general. Nos. 7 to 12 will be published at intervals, if the Lord will, and afterwards be issued as a second volume.

May the Spirit of Truth abundantly bless these simple papers to all who read them. May they be used of Him to stir up affection for our absent Lord, and to deepen in many hearts an earnest desire for His coming again. Our object in writing them will then have been attained. W. W. F. May, 1898.

The Church's Heavenly Hope.

Every Christian looks to spend a glad eternity in heaven with the Lord Jesus. It is unquestionable that it is His desire and intention to have us there. In His wonderful prayer to the Father just before He suffered He thus expressed Himself, "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world," (John 17:24). Having said this, He went into death for us. The dread consequences of our sins fell on Him. He took up the cup of Divine wrath on our behalf that our souls might be delivered. All the work being done, every question having been settled, the Father raised Him up from among the dead, and glorified Him at His own right hand in heaven. He has gone up as Man into the glory; and thus, having previously accomplished redemption, has made out a title for all who believe in His Name to be there also. Glorious thought! All who trust in Him are "to live together with Him" in the Father's house for ever (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10).

As to all this no believer has any real doubt. But it is undeniable that serious uncertainty prevails in many minds as to how we shall be introduced into all this glory. Not a few think by death, fully expecting that all will close their earthly pilgrimage in this way, and thus pass one by one into the enjoyment of our everlasting portion. But however ancient the idea, it is a profound mistake. Scripture states most emphatically "we shall not all sleep" (1 Corinthians 15:51). Indeed, nowhere in the New Testament is the believer told to look for death as the due end of his pathway here. If the cases of Peter and Paul be adduced as seeming to teach the contrary, the answer is that they were exceptional, and had Divine revelations that their labours would close by a violent death for Christ's sake (2 Peter 1:14; 2 Timothy 4:6-8). They do not touch the general principle.

For what, then, should the Christian prepare himself? For the return of the Son of God from Heaven. No unbiased reader can read through the Acts and the Epistles and deny that all the early converts to Christianity looked for the coming of the Lord Jesus. It animated their hearts, separated them from the world, enabled them to patiently suffer, and quickened them to marvellous zeal in the Lord's service. The Thessalonians are happy instances of this (1 Thessalonians 1:1-10).

But let it be distinctly understood what we mean by the coming of the Lord. Scripture speaks of two events, quite distinct in time and character, which it is of the utmost importance never to mix together. It is a wise word that the Apostle wrote to Timothy, "Rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). While this is always necessary, in no department of Scripture study is the neglect of it more serious than in the matter now before us. The Word of God speaks of two quite distinct things: (1) The return of the Lord Jesus for His heavenly saints; and (2) His appearing in public glory for the deliverance of His earthly people, and to reign in righteousness, subjugating all foes. If these are confounded very little headway will be made in the study of the prophetic word. The one is a descent into the air only for the removal of His own; the other is a descent to the earth, as we read, "His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east" (Zechariah 14:4). The one is characterised by deepest affection for the objects of His Divine favour; the other by terrible desolating judgments, upon His enemies (Revelation 1:7).

Perhaps the reader will compare the last chapter of the New Testament with the last chapter of the Old. In Revelation 22:16 we read, "I am the root and the offspring of David, and the Bright and Morning Star." But in Malachi 4:2 we have, "Unto you that fear My Name shall the Son of righteousness arise with healing in His wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith Jehovah of Hosts." Such are the different characters of hope set before the heavenly and the earthly people respectively. Who can fail to see that these Scriptures speak of two entirely different events? The morning star is visible (to those who watch) before the sun, as every one knows.

The public appearing of the Lord to judge and to reign has been the subject of prophecy almost since the world began. It has been used by the Holy Spirit for the comfort of the godly, and for the warning of the ungodly. Enoch, the seventh from Adam, told of it, as Jude shows: "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all," etc. (Jude 1:14). But the heavenly hope of the Church of God, the coming of the Lord Jesus into the air to receive His own, was not revealed, as many other truths, till New Testament times.

The reason is not far to seek. The Old Testament is occupied with God's government of the earth, with Israel as His centre. Consequently the earthly aspect of the matter alone is brought out. But we find something very different when we come to the New Testament. There we see Israel tested, not by the Law, but by the presentation of the Messiah, and rejecting Him with scorn and hatred. He Whom they have abhorred and refused the heavens have received. They are now fugitives and vagabonds in the earth on account of their sins (though yet to be restored); and God is giving effect to another purpose — a purpose of a heavenly character. Souls are now being called out of the world by grace, both Jews and Gentiles, to be the heavenly joint heirs of Jesus. Such have no portion in the earth, but are united to the risen Head by the Holy Ghost (1 Corinthians 12:13). Our calling and portion being above, the heavenly hope of which we speak is set before us by the Holy Spirit. He has come out from the glory into which Christ has entered, and one of His gracious offices is to show us "things to come." (John 16:13).

The Lord Jesus, before His departure from this scene, spoke of the hope to His beloved disciples. (Read John 14:1-4.) Their hearts were filled with sorrow at the thought of His leaving them. He was everything to their hearts. They had left their nets at His call, they had followed Him in His patient service throughout the land; and now to be told that He was going away! But how did He comfort them? He promised to return and fetch them to be for ever with Himself in the Father's house. If they seemed to be losing the glory of the Messianic kingdom by His going away they should have a better portion, yea, a heavenly one. Henceforth they must believe in Him as unseen. This was hard for a Jew, with the Old Testament prophecies of a glorious kingdom before him. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me." Those who believe while He is hidden have the better portion (John 20:29; 1 Peter 1:8). But He went on to add, "In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." He had not made them His companions on earth to cast them aside now that He was returning to the Father. This were unlike Jesus. They should be His companions for ever; therefore He assures them that there was not only a place on high for Himself, the First Begotten, but for His beloved ones also, in the riches of His grace.

But how were they to enter that glory?" And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). The Lord added no more as to His coming; it was not a fitting moment; their hearts were surcharged with sorrow. For all details they must wait until the coming of the Comforter, Who would instruct their souls as they were able to bear it.

Strange that any should think that the Lord meant their death when He spoke thus! Yet it has been the general thought of the pious for centuries, If John 21:22, 28 be pondered it will be seen that, however the disciples blundered in some things, they never imagined death and the coming of the Lord equivalent terms. If death (or sleep, as the Holy Spirit prefers to call it) meets the Christian he departs to be with Christ. This is quite a different thing from Christ coming for him. The saints who have gone to the Lord are in a disembodied state (though consciously enjoying His blessed presence), and are waiting as truly as we are, though in a different waiting-room, as it were, for the moment of the Lord's coming. They will be glorified at the same instant as those who are alive and remain. It is a hymn, not Scripture, that speaks of "glorified spirits in heaven."

Now for the details of this blessed event. They are furnished in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18. The Thessalonians were but young believers — a few months old in the faith at most — when the epistles of Paul were addressed to them. A grave rebuke surely for those who say that such matters as the Lord's coming should not be brought before young or simple souls. In many respects the youthful Thessalonians set us all an example. They were characterised from the first by considerable fervour towards the Lord, by earnest service for Him, and above all by ardent expectation of His return. They are described thus: "Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, Whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). The Lord prizes more than everything this affectionate waiting for Himself. It is very precious in His sight, however lightly esteemed among men.

But the Thessalonians soon fell into a difficulty. They were but partially instructed souls, the faithful Apostles having been hunted out of their town by the malicious Jews (Acts 17:1-10). Presently some of their number fell asleep. This was a great surprise and Satan's opportunity. The adversary is always ready to disturb the peace and joy of the saints of God. What had become of the sleepers? Would they not lose considerably by not being here to welcome the Lord? Such were the questions which agitated their minds.

The Spirit of God soon made all plain by means of the Apostle. "I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." Do not misunderstand these words. Saints are not forbidden to sorrow. By no means. God would not have His children stoical. He would have us feel the circumstances of the way, but would not have us swallowed up by them, as others. "The Hope" comes into the Christian's sorrow. It sweetens the most bitter cup and brightens the darkest hour. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep through Jesus will God bring with Him." This is wonderful! The sleeping saint, instead of being a loser, is only the more like his Lord. And what God did for Christ He will do for all who are His. He raised Him out of the cold tomb and placed Him in glory; He will do the very same at the appointed hour for all His beloved sleeping ones. "Through Jesus" is more correct in 1 Thessalonians 4:14. "In Jesus" has no real meaning, not being a Scriptural phrase at all. "In Christ" expresses our standing before God in Him risen, as Romans 8:1-39. shows; "in Jesus" is nowhere found that I am aware of. "Through Jesus" is very sweet here, and stills every rising murmur. When a loved one is called hence it is no mere accident or circumstance; it is the act of Jesus. "He doeth all things well."

The Apostle says, "them which sleep through Jesus will God bring with Him." This must be carefully noted. The Thessalonians had only heard in a general way of the Lord's coming. They knew He was coming back to reign, and they were assured of being associated with Him in His glory; but they knew not yet the distinction between His coming for and with His saints. Their perplexity gave the Spirit of God an opportunity of bringing this forward clearly. Obviously, if the saints are to come with Christ when He comes to set up His kingdom they must have been previously caught up to Him where He is. This is fully explained in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, which verses are better read as a parenthesis.

The Apostle's statement has the authority of Divine revelation. Let our souls ever have the fullest confidence that all that is contained in the Scriptures has come to us from God." For this we say

unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (go before) them which are asleep." This was the word that was so sorely needed. They feared the sleepers would be inferior in some way or another. Notice the order. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." What can be simpler or more blessed! "The Lord Himself shall descend." It is the Heavenly Bridegroom coming for His blood purchased Bride. He will not send mere messengers, however glorious, but will come Himself."

He comes — for, oh! His yearning heart

No more can bear delay —

To scenes of full unmingled joy

To call His bride away."

It is the moment when the Divine Eliezer delivers up the true Rebekah to be the everlasting and beloved companion of the Son (Genesis 24:1-67). It has often been remarked that the word rendered "shout" in this place implies a call, not of a promiscuous character, but to persons in relationship. His shout concerns not the world — at any rate, not just then; it is for His own. "The sheep hear His voice." "They know His voice" (John 10:3-4).

The sleeping saints will hear His call and come forth in incorruption and glory. All other dead persons will be left in their graves, as will be shown, if God permit, on another occasion. The living, wherever found, whether in England or China, Greenland or Cape Horn, will respond also, and will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and go up to meet the Lord. Mighty display of Divine power! It is the fruit of Divine love, the crown of His grace, the necessary result of Divine righteousness. Supreme moment! How one's heart longs for it as the words flow from the pen!

It will be observed that the Spirit of God speaks of two classes of saints — two only. "The dead in Christ" — "we which are alive and remain." All who come under these heads will be removed to glory. It is of moment to notice this, because of the notion, now painfully prevalent, that many of the Lord's own will be left behind at the rapture to pass through the great tribulation because of their faulty walk. Scripture lends no countenance to such an idea. Hebrews 9:27-28 is generally pressed into service for this, but if the verses be read with care it will be seen that the contrast is not between watchful and unwatchful believers, but between believers and the ungodly world. The prospect before the latter is death and judgment; before the former the coming of Christ apart from sin unto salvation. The idea springs from the principle of legalism, so deeply rooted in most minds, that our blessings depend upon our walk and behaviour. This is undoubtedly true as to rewards, but our removal to glory is not reward but the consummation of God's grace. Our title to share in it is not a becoming walk, but the precious blood of Christ. I have known some of the most devoted of God's saints completely under a cloud, and filled with uncertainty, through having imbibed such teaching.

Here another question may arise in some minds. "Scripture," it is said, "seems to speak of many things to be accomplished before the coming of the Lord." True, but not before His removal of His

heavenly saints. Instead of a multitude of prophecies having to be fulfilled before the Church of God goes, no prophecy can be fulfilled until it has gone. Prophecy is connected with the earth and the people of Israel; our heavenly hope does not come into the scheme of prophecy at all. The whole Church period is a kind of parenthesis in the ways of God. While He is gathering out the heavenly people, Israel is scattered, and prophecy stands still; when His present purpose is completed, and the Church is all gathered home, Israel will again come into view, and prophecy will flow on from the point where it was broken off by the rejection of Christ. Many things must be accomplished ere Christ will be revealed from heaven to take to Himself His great power and reign; but the Spirit of God has placed nothing between us and His descent into the air to call us up.

Oh that all the Lord's own were looking for Him in simplicity of faith, yearning to see His face, and to be with Him in the Father's house! When in the early days of the Church of God the hope was held fast there was thorough separation from the world, and real devotedness to Christ. The well known parable of the ten virgins shows the original position as regards the coming of Christ. (See Matthew 25:1-46) "The kingdom of heaven" during this period, while the King is rejected, is the sphere of Christian profession. The Lord likens it to "ten virgins which took their lamps and went forth to meet the Bridegroom." They were "virgins." Such was the ground taken, and such was the character to be maintained. They took their place outside the world — they "went forth" Christianity does not leave a soul in the world, but detaches it, and sets it with its back upon the world and the face towards the glory. This was unquestionably the universal attitude of believers in the early days of the faith. None looked for death, as many now; all looked to see the Lord, and to be caught up to Him according to His promise. The Romans waited patiently for the glory, groaning meanwhile with the suffering creation (Romans 8:17-25); the Corinthians came behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:7); to the Galatians the Apostle could say, "we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (Galatians 5:5); the Philippians looked for the Saviour to come from the heavens to change the body of humiliation and fashion it like unto His own body of glory (Php_3:20-21); the Colossians expected to be displayed in glory with Christ at His manifestation (Colossians 3:4); and the Thessalonians, as we have already seen, were waiting with singular affection and earnestness for the Son of God from heaven.

In every way, at every turn, the Spirit of God brings forward the coming of the Lord in one or other of its aspects. It is the constant theme of the New Testament Scriptures, whatever some may say to the contrary. The hope sustained the early Christians in sorrow (1 Thessalonians 4:13); it enabled them to be patient under oppression (James 5:7-8); it encouraged them to suffer loss and reproach for Christ (Hebrews 10:36-38), and led to thorough purification of the life and walk (1 John 3:3); it cheered the Apostle in the course of his service for Christ, and enabled him to go patiently onward through evil report and good report (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; 2 Corinthians 4:14).

Need we wonder at all the evil that came in when the hope faded from men's minds? Alas! it happened as the Lord warned — "while the Lord tarried they all slumbered and slept." Not only the foolish, but the wise virgins also. All were together in this sad departure from the Lord. It is a well-known fact that scarcely a trace of the heavenly hope of the Church of God can be found in writings for hundreds of years after the first century. It had leaked away. Not that the Lord's coming

was never referred to in any way. It has always been held that He will come some day to deal with the world in judgment. But the proper hope of the Christian, the portion which His grace has set before us, of removal to heaven to be with Him before the judgments fall, was completely lost.

The result for the mass of Christian profession was worldliness. The word of the Lord to the Church has long been, "I know... where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is" (Revelation 2:13). Satan's throne is in the world. He is its prince and god. Sad that the Church should ever have got into such a place. Her true path is that of a heavenly stranger passing through this scene, as Rebekah through the desert with Eliezer to meet her Lord at the appointed moment. It is her holy and solemn responsibility to bear testimony on the way, but not to settle here, nor to mingle in the affairs of this alien scene. Nothing can deliver the saints of God from the position of compromise in which so many are found but the laying hold in simple faith, in the power of the Holy Ghost, of the mighty yet simple truth that the Lord is at hand.

If the loss of the hope has been so serious for the general company of the saints, what shall we say of those who have assumed to be their leaders? Let Scripture speak: "If that evil servant shall say in his heart, my lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to eat and drink with the drunken: the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 24:48-51). Sadly faithful picture of priestly domination and tyranny. But what is the root of it all? The saying in the heart, "My lord delayeth his coming." The surrender of the hope led on — by gradual stages, of course — to all the evils and enormities of which the pages of ecclesiastical historians are so full.

But a change has come. The Lord is waking up His own to their long-lost blessings. The Holy Spirit is actively at work in every direction in the hearts of believers. It has happened as the Lord said: "At midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom... go ye out to meet him" (Matthew 25:6). The Lord would recall His own to their true attitude before the consummation. His word to each individual saint is, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from among the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (or "shine upon thee") (Ephesians 5:14). The Christian is not dead (blessed be God!) being in possession of eternal life in His Son; but it is very possible to be found sleeping among the dead. Of what use is the believer in such a case? Where is his testimony? "Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand" (Romans 13:11-12). Do you know the time, beloved reader? Are you saying within yourself, "Time enough yet; my Lord delayeth His coming;" or does your heart leap within you at the prospect of soon seeing His face? We read of some of old that they had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do (1 Chronicles 12:33). Would that this were true of all Christians in this day!

Do not allow the truth of the Lord's return to become a mere doctrine for the head, Let it be a vital reality in the heart. If really looking for Him, purge yourself from all your idols. Expel everything from you that is an offence to His Spirit. Cast off every bit of Egypt, which is even a greater reproach for the Christian than for Israel of old (Joshua 5:9). Get on your watch-tower and cry from the depths of your soul, "Come, Lord Jesus!" He values this more than anything else. Service for Christ is good, and cannot be too abundant, and the Lord values it; but He prizes yet more watching for His return. We get the two things in Luke 12:1-59. In Luke 12:43-44 we read,

"Blessed is that servant whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you that he will make him ruler over all that he hath." Not a cup of cold water will be forgotten in the coming day; all is written in heaven. But He puts watching before service. See Luke 12:35-38. The true attitude is first described. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh they may open unto him immediately." Observe the striking illustration the Lord uses. It is that of a man-servant in expectation of his master's return from a wedding feast. In order not to keep him waiting he is standing in the entrance hall, with his hand upon the handle of the door, that when he hears the well-known knock he may open unto him without a moment's delay. Are we thus waiting for Christ? Now, observe what the Lord goes on to say. See how deeply He values simple-hearted watching for Himself. "Blessed are those servants whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants." Heavenly honours await those who long for the Lord's return.

Well, the wondrous moment is near! Soon will the whole Church of God hear the trumpet call and quit this vale of tears for ever. Of Enoch it is written, "He was not found, because God had translated him" (Hebrews 11:15). The same will presently be true of all the millions who compose the Church of God. What an awful moment for the world! Those whom it has ever despised and persecuted for Christ's sake caught away from its midst never more to return! Never again will men be faithfully warned by them of coming danger, nor be lovingly appealed to believe in the Saviour — in the day of His long-suffering grace. An awful blank will be made! The salt removed, the light transferred to shine in other and more congenial spheres!

That moment will be peculiarly solemn for those who have professed the Lord's Name. "The Lord knoweth them that are His; "and He will make no mistakes (2 Timothy 2:19). He will take to Himself His own, rejecting all others, however loud their claim. To many He has to say, "I know thy works, that thou hast a Name that thou livest, and art dead" (Revelation 3:1). Better far never to have heard His Name than to go on with an empty profession of it. He will not remove souls to glory because they have maintained a profession of religion. By no means. But all who in simple faith have learned and owned their sinful state, and been washed from their sins by His blood, and sealed by His Spirit, however poor and feeble, will be claimed as His, and caught up into His heavenly presence.

Inexpressibly solemn to hear Him say, as He will to many, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not." The great separation is coming. The wise virgins will go in with Him to the marriage; all others will be left outside, to their eternal ruin. In which company will the reader be found?

"The night is far spent and the day is at hand

No sign to be looked for; the star's in the sky.

Rejoice, then, ye saints, 'tis your Lord's own command

Rejoice, for the coming of Jesus draws nigh."

The Resurrection of Life and the Resurrection of Judgment.

We have seen what the Lord has set before believers as the goal of their hopes — His own personal coming to receive them to Himself. It is now proposed to deal with the momentous connected theme of Resurrection. It is believed on all hands, save by men very far advanced in infidelity, that "There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:15). But all are by no means clear as to the matter. It has long been thought that all, both saved and unsaved, will rise together in a general resurrection at the last day. This idea, however ancient, is a serious mistake. Scripture lends it no countenance whatever, but speaks in unmistakable terms of two resurrections, separated from each other by at least a thousand years.

Let us turn to Revelation 20:1-15. There we have the preparations for the millennial kingdom. The previous chapter gives the public appearing of the Lord Jesus, accompanied by His heavenly saints, and the overthrow and destruction of those who oppose His progress. Then we get Satan bound and consigned to the bottomless pit for a thousand years. What remains? Simply to point out those who are to share with Christ in the glory of that wonderful period. Hence we have "the first resurrection." The various classes of the heavenly saints are shown in their risen condition; and we read, "They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4-6). Nothing can be plainer than this to a simple mind. It is not a resurrection of good principles, as some have strangely said, but of persons; and that prior to the millennium, and long before the last great judgment. There is no meaning in the term "the first resurrection" if there be but one; and what can be made of the words "the rest of the dead?"

When the Lord Jesus comes for His own every sleeping believer will be raised up in glory. We read, "Christ the firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ's at His coming" (1 Corinthians 15:23). At the same moment that the living are changed the sleepers will be raised. They will hear the shout of their Lord and the trumpet call, and will come forth to be re-united with all their brethren in His presence. The bodies of the saints sown in corruption will be raised in incorruption; sown in dishonour, will be raised in glory; sown in weakness, will be raised in power; sown as natural bodies, will be raised as spiritual bodies, conformed to Christ Himself (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). No others will be raised at that time. "The Lord knoweth them that are His." All who have despised Him, what ever their morality and religiousness in life, will be left in their graves for the judgment at the great day.

This mighty act will include all those who have died in faith from the earliest ages. The Old Testament believers, though forming no part of the Church, and therefore not coming into the heavenly Bride, will unquestionably be raised at the same moment as the Church of God. The expressions, "They that are Christ's," in 1 Corinthians 15:1-58, and "The dead in Christ," in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18, take them in beyond just controversy. Abel was the first believer to die; all from his day up to the moment of the rapture will be raised simultaneously to go with Christ into the Father's house.

The sleeping saints are as truly waiting for the coming of Christ as we who are alive and remain. They have not yet received all that they have looked for. They are at rest in heaven with Christ, which is far better than toiling and suffering here. They are enjoying His love in a fuller measure

than we do, who have so much to hinder us. But they are in a disembodied state; their precious dust is still in the hand of the grave. This cannot satisfy either them or the Lord. The redemption price includes the body as well as the soul, and the Lord will raise up the bodies of all His own at the fitting time. The whole of 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 should be carefully pondered as to this. The subject there is the resurrection of the body, which some at Corinth were disposed to deny. The apostle commences from the resurrection of Christ; and goes on, as regards the saints, until we bear the image of the heavenly at the coming of the Lord from heaven. The resurrection of the lost is not mentioned in the chapter at all; it was quite a different subject to the mind of the apostle, never to be confounded with it.

Ours will be a resurrection from among "the dead." This expression, so frequently used in the New Testament, escapes the notice of Bible readers too often. Look at Mark 9:9-10. As the Lord and His disciples came down from the Mount of Transfiguration "He charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen till the Son of Man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean." Wherein do you suppose lay their difficulty? Not in the general fact of the resurrection, for they were orthodox Jews, not Sadducees, and believed thoroughly in it. But the Lord spoke of a resurrection, "from," or, more properly, "from among, the dead;" and of this they had never heard before. The Old Testament says nothing of a special resurrection for saints, not coming at all within its scope; and the disciples, at the moment, had no clearer light than it afforded. Christ's resurrection was "from among the dead." God came in on the third day and raised Him up. "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades: neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption" (Psalms 16:10). It was not a general resurrection. The great mass of graves were left untouched. True, some saints arose, as an earnest of what is to come (Matthew 27:52-53).

Christ's resurrection was an act of Divine favour and love. He had glorified God; God could do no less than glorify Him at His own right hand in heaven. This gives us a title. He rose as the "firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:20). What God did for Him He will presently do for those that are His. He will make a marked distinction between such and the ungodly, not merging all in one, as so many suppose vaguely.

Some passages in Luke's Gospel may be profitably looked at in this connection. In Luke 14:14 we read, "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." What does this mean if all rise together? Is it not something special, something blessed, that the Lord holds out in this place? Look also at Luke 20:35-36. In the course of His reply to the cavil of the Sadducees the Lord said, "They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world (age), and the resurrection from (from among) the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." Clearly this is not the mere general fact of resurrection. That cannot be a matter of attainment, for no one can shirk it. The most ungodly man must rise again and stand before the throne. Obviously the verse treats of the special portion of the saved when the Lord claims His own. Such will then be raised from among the great mass of the dead and made equal in condition unto the angels. Our calling is superior, for we are children and sons, while angels are but servants; our condition until the Lord's coming is inferior, but this He will change then by His mighty power.

This is what Paul longed for so ardently in Php_3:11. The Revised Version of the passage is to be preferred to the Authorised, which is quite a mistake: "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from among the dead." This does not imply doubt in any way. What he means is that the prospect to be attained at that blessed moment was so wonderful, so overwhelming, that he cared not how trying the path might be that lay between. The thought of the end sustained him on the road. It lifted him above all his sufferings, and energised him for service and conflict. Does it act thus with us?

Some of our readers may say at this point, "These passages seem to indicate very plainly that believers will have a special resurrection of their own at the Lord's return; but there are other passages that seem to teach with equal plainness a general resurrection;" and John 5:28-20, Daniel 12:2, and John 6:39-40, are the Scriptures usually brought forward as objections.

Let every Christian reader be assured that there are not, nor can be, contradictions in the inspired word of God. It is of the highest importance, in this day of renegade thoughts and principles, to be very firm and decided as to this. If we meet with portions of Scripture at any time that seem to be contradictory the defect is with us, not with the Holy Spirit of God. Never let us surrender what is sure for that which may be doubtful. Rather let us hold fast what we have learnt from God, and wait patiently on Him for clearer light as to the difficulties, even if we have to wait for years.

Let us examine briefly John 5:28-29. The principal difficulty lies in the expression "the hour." "The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation (judgment)." Some think this shows all to take place simultaneously. Not so. The expression "the hour" is often used in Scripture in an extended way. Of course the context must always decide when we are to take it so. Here nothing can be more plain or simple. In this very context it is used in this way. In John 5:25 the Lord says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." These are unquestionably the spiritually dead — those who are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). Such heard the voice of the life-giving Son of God when He was present on earth and passed from death unto life; but is this work all over? Blessed be God, no! Sinners are still hearing His voice; "the hour" runs on still. This removes the difficulty with regard to John 5:29. If "the hour" of John 5:25 spreads itself over nearly two thousand years it is not hard to believe that the same expression may cover one thousand years. Moreover, the Lord speaks plainly of "the resurrection of life" and "the resurrection of judgment.'? He distinguishes them expressly. Surely He would not have spoken thus if all rise together. Consequently the passage, over which so many stumbled instead of being an insuperable difficulty, is really one of the simplest proofs of a special portion for those who have eternal life in the Son of God.

We will now turn to Daniel 12:2. "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." This, I am fully convinced, has no reference to the resurrection of the body at all. The words "them that sleep in the dust of the earth" are not usual as applied to the dead. The whole context must be carefully looked into to get the mind of God in this place. Daniel 11:36-45 speaks of the Antichrist and his doings in the glorious land. Daniel 12:1 shows it to be the epoch of Israel's terrible tribulation followed by their final deliverance. Then we have the words I have quoted. I believe them to refer to the ten tribes of

Israel. The two tribes only will suffer in the land in the latter-day crisis, and are alluded to in the first verse. There will then be a movement among the ten tribes — a rising up from their long national humiliation — with a view to taking possession once more of the land of their fathers. But only some will enter into blessing. The rebels among them will be purged out, utterly rejected by God. This is what is before us in Daniel 12:2. This national waking up is spoken of as a resurrection in several other places in Scripture. The following passages among others may be consulted: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Isaiah 26:19; Romans 11:15.

If the passage teaches a general resurrection at the end really, how can the words "many of them" be explained? Will not all rise again? Moreover, the epoch is a serious obstacle. It is the Lord's coming to put down the man of sin and deliver Israel in order to the setting up of the millennial kingdom. Consequently, if the resurrection of the dead, saved and lost, is shown here, then all will rise before the millennium — at least a thousand years — before the Great White Throne. This conclusion will not suit any school of interpretation so far as I know. If the verse be read as setting forth, in a figurative way, the national reviving of the tribes of Israel, all is simple and clear.

Now a word or two as to John 6:39-40, "And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." This is often triumphantly urged as disproving any special portion for the saints of God. Let us look at it carefully. The Jews had in their minds two "ages," or dispensations — (1) that of the Law; (2) that of the Messiah's kingdom. They believed one would give place to the other in due time. This was what was in the Lord's mind in Matthew 12:32 when in speaking of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, He said, "It shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in that to come." That is to say, neither in the age of the Law nor in that of the Messiah. This helps considerably to an understanding of John 6:1-71. The term "the last day" means not the last day in an absolute sense, when time will give place to eternity, but "the last day" of the period preceding the kingdom of the Messiah. Christianity is a kind of parenthesis in the age of the Law.

Now we must consider other matters. It is plain that at the Lord's descent into the air all sleeping believers will be raised in glory, and all living saints will be changed by His power. This is the first resurrection, but not the whole of it. The first resurrection is in three parts — (1) the resurrection of Christ; (2) of all sleeping saints at His coming; and (3) of those who will lose their lives during the great tribulation. Such are included in the first resurrection, and will be raised in time to share the blessings of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. We get these classes carefully distinguished in Revelation 20:4, already referred to. "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them." Daniel saw the thrones, but no occupants (Daniel 7:9). Who are meant by "they"? Those who are manifested with the Lord Jesus at His appearing. Such come forth as His armies, following Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean (Revelation 19:14). These are the heavenly saints who are caught up, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18. God brings them now with Christ, that the world may know that the Father sent the Son, and that He loves us as He loves Him (1 Thessalonians 4:14; John 17:23). Christ will in that day be glorified in His saints and wondered at in all that have believed (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

All these will reign with Him, and will have judgment given unto them. Their places in the kingdom will be ordered according to their faithfulness on earth. Solemn consideration for all our hearts! Let us ponder it well, and look carefully to our walk and ways.

Then we have the two classes of saints who will be added to them. "I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and those [This word has unfortunately been omitted in our Authorised Version. See Revised Version. It is necessary to make the two classes clear.] which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4). These are evidently raised just at the commencement of the millennial kingdom, for John describes them as "souls," and adds "they lived." They are added to those already raised, and thus complete the first resurrection.

A few words as to these saints may be helpful. They are not, as some have taught, unwatchful Christians who are left behind at the Lord's coming, and who have to suffer in consequence, and wait a while for their heavenly portion. The Word of God knows of no such thing. Our places in the kingdom depend, as I have said, on our walk and service now; but not our translation to heaven to be for ever with the Lord. That is the fruit of Divine grace alone. Who, then, are these two classes of saints? You will find the one in Revelation 6:1-17, the other in Revelation 15:1-8. In Revelation 6:9 John saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God and for their testimony. This corresponds exactly with the first class of Revelation 20:4. He heard them cry with a loud voice, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" These are evidently not Christians. Christians, as Stephen in Acts 7:1-60, the rather pray for their murderers and bless their persecutors; at least, we are taught to do so by our Lord Jesus. But the souls in Revelation 6:1-17. call for vengeance. Are they wrong in uttering such a cry? Impossible, especially when we consider that the seer saw them in a disembodied state in heaven! There, surely, all improper feelings have no place. These are Jewish sufferers, the early witnesses of the gospel of the kingdom after the removal of the Church of God to heaven. Their testimony has not been received, for they are seen as slain. They take their stand on the ground of earthly judicial righteousness — quite right for a Jew, but quite wrong for a Christian, who is always expected to manifest the spirit of grace. Their cry reminds us of the Psalms. They live in a different dispensation to Christianity. In answer to their cry "white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled," or completed (Revelation 6:11). Here we have a reference to a further class of martyrs. Later in the same book we find them (see Revelation 15:2-4). "I saw, as it were, a sea of glass, mingled with fire; and them that had gotten the victory over the beast and over his image, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sang the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb," &c. Here are the fellow servants of the martyrs of Revelation 6:1-17, the second class of raised saints, as in Revelation 20:4. These are not necessarily preachers of the gospel of the kingdom. They are perhaps more passive. They lose their lives because they decline to receive the mark of the beast or to worship his image. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego of old, they stand true in an evil day, confiding in the living God. At all cost to themselves they refuse to take part in so great wickedness and sin against God. There will be no middle ground in the day of Antichrist. All must declare plainly whom they serve. If

the true God, then all the power of hell will be let loose upon them. Such will find comfort in the Lord's words, "Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Matthew 5:12). If they lose the earthly kingdom, through faithfulness, just when it is about to be set up, the Lord will give them a better portion in the heavens, though they are too late to form part of the Church. None are really the losers who suffer for His sake. His heart will take a great delight in dealing out to all such a full reward.

The raising up of these bands of latter-day martyrs completes the first resurrection — the resurrection of life. They will all reign with Christ. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath, no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6). Happy souls! Wondrous the grace that will introduce us into such a place!

But what of the rest of the dead — the ungodly? Their tombs will be left untouched until the judgment of the Great White Throne. During the blessed period of Christ's beneficent reign over the earth they will remain in their graves, to be judged at the end. '"The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." How awful to be found among them!

When the term of universal peace and blessing has run its course, we read, "I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from Whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works" (Revelation 20:11-12). This is the final resurrection — the resurrection of judgment. There is no trace of saved persons in this throng. They are the lost, called up by the quickening voice of the Son of God to hear their righteous doom. They are "clothed," i.e., they resume their bodies, to be found, alas! "naked" before Him (2 Corinthians 5:3).

Man has a hereafter, either of bliss or woe. He does not and cannot perish like the beasts, though he may degrade himself morally to become like the beasts that perish (Psalms 49:12, Psalms 49:20). Man has a life that is endless. He derived it by the direct inbreathing of God. The beasts have not this. They lived when made, but of the man two things are recorded. First, "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7). This refers to the body, which became mortal through the entrance of sin. Mortality is never spoken of in Scripture in connection with the soul.

"Dust thou art, to dust returnest

Was not spoken of the soul."

Secondly, we read — "and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Such is the simple yet majestic language of Scripture. Having received such a life, man lives on, either in happiness or in woe. Many confound this with eternal life, which is very unintelligent. The latter is God's gift in Christ to believers only. It is life in association with the Son of God in His own sphere of blessedness above. Immortality is by no means synonymous with eternal life. The former, man had from the very beginning, before the fall; the latter is the gift of God, through grace. It cannot be earned by works of law or by fleshly effort of any kind; it is alone to be had through faith in the Son (I John 5:11-12).

Has my reader received the gift of eternal life? If so, very soon God will apply the power of it to your poor body, and "mortality shall be swallowed up of life" (2 Corinthians 5:4). Let the words of the Lord Jesus remain in the heart, "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). Thus He sets forth the power that resides in Himself. He will presently put it forth on behalf of all His own.

In view of our blessed portion and prospect, may all our steps be quickened; in view of the awful future awaiting the ungodly, may our zeal be deepened to win souls for Christ while we may.

The Coming Judgments.

It is a wonderful thing to be able to contemplate the judgments of God, and be altogether free from alarm; But such is the happy portion of the believer in Jesus. The accomplished work of Christ has turned judgment aside for all who believe- it will not, and cannot fall upon any of them. We have the sure word of the Lord Jesus for this — "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Here faith rests, and takes up the triumphant challenge, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?" (Romans 8:33, Romans 8:31) Blessed certainty! Precious God-given assurance!

It is quite possible that some of our readers have been taught differently as to this. The confused idea has long prevailed in Christendom, that there is to be a great general judgment at the end of time, into which all, whether saved or lost, must come; and that there can be no real certainty as to one's eternal future until that day. This is a profound mistake, grievous in its results, and in plain defiance of the Lord's precious word in John 5:24. If the believer walks thus uncertainly, what real affection can there be towards God? And how can there be the heavenly tone in the daily walk that God looks for in His own?

The truth is, that every believer is placed by God beyond judgment. We are no longer "in Adam" exposed to death and judgment, but "in Christ" where there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1). Not only so, but we are "clean every whit," "holy and without blame before Him in love," loved by the father with the same love wherewith He loves His Son (John 13:10; Ephesians 1:4; John 17:23, John 17:26). As Christ is, so are we in this world. God can no more bring the believer into judgment for his sins, than Christ Himself. Perfect love casts out all fear (1 John 4:17-19).

It is of the first importance that the Scriptures should be rightly divided as to this solemn theme. For clearness' sake, we will consider the matter in the following order:

1. The Judgment Seat of Christ for Believers.

2. The Judgment of the Quick.

3. The Judgment of the Dead.

1. The Judgment Seat of Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 5:10 we read, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Here the Apostle's language is very general. "We" includes every soul that has ever lived in this world. Believers are not to be exempt; all must be manifested before Christ. Not necessarily on the same day, as some affirm, nor with the same issues. Indeed there are two classes plainly shown in the Scripture: those who have done good, and those who have done evil. Our bad was dealt with at the cross of Christ, when the blessed One bowed His holy head beneath the righteous judgment of God, and nothing remains to be dealt with but the good which we have wrought by the power of the Holy Ghost. The ungodly, on the contrary, when they stand before Christ at a later day, will have no good to show ("there is none that doeth good, no, not one"), and will be dealt with in righteousness for all their bad. The thought of this filled the heart of the Apostle with holy concern. The terrors of the coming day for those who know not God and have not believed the Gospel, were before him, and made him earnestly labour that souls might be delivered from the wrath to come. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 5:11).

It is a solemn, yet blessed, thought for the believer that everything is to come out before Christ. We need have no fear or alarm. We shall then be in a glorified state, as the earlier verses of 2 Corinthians 5:1-21 show. We shall stand at the judgment seat in bodies fashioned like unto the glorious body of the Lord Jesus; for, prior to this manifestation, He will come for us and gather us out of this scene, and place us in the Father's house. When I read there the whole story of my life, I shall see fully the wonders of His Divine grace. We shall then know the full truth about ourselves, and shall adore and magnify the precious grace that has made us what we are.

But how anxious this should make every saint to walk and serve day by day so as to please the Lord! Our service will all come out there. "After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them" (Matthew 25:19). Those who have built on the foundation gold, silver, and precious stones will receive a reward. "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (1 Corinthians 3:8). Every little bit of faithful and true service for Christ will be fully recognised then. A cup of cold water will not lose its reward. All is written in heaven by the loving, yet holy hand of Him who notes every bit of good in His own, while not ignoring their evil.

How gracious of Him to reward any! Whatever fruit we have borne, whatever good we have done, has been really the action of His own indwelling Spirit. It is, as Augustine has said, "God crowns not our merits, but His own gifts. Because He makes them ours, He rewards them, just as if they were our own virtues." He will take real pleasure in saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant,... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21-23).

But what if the Christian's service is bad? Thank God, it will not endanger his salvation, which depends not on service, but on the accomplished work of Christ But he will be a loser, as we read, "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire" (1 Corinthians 3:15). Solemn thought! The Lord may have to disown the toil of a lifetime because it has not been according to His revealed mind and will. It is not quantity the Lord looks at, but quality. That which flows from real love to His holy person, He values highly, as we may judge from His gracious words to her who lavished on Him her ointment of spikenard (Matthew 26:6-13).

How true it is that "the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Man would be disposed to bestow the greatest reward where the greatest display has been, and the largest results (outwardly) have been obtained; but it may be found in the coming day that the best prizes will be carried off by those who have made but little stir in Christendom, and whose names have been but little known, but who have nevertheless served Christ loyally and faithfully according to their measure and opportunities. Not that it must be inferred from these remarks that only service for Christ will be reviewed at the judgment seat. The whole life will come out either for praise or blame. The Apostle brings this forward when exhorting slaves, in Colossians 3:24-25. He comforts them by saying, "Of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for we serve the Lord Christ." They might have unreasonable and unjust masters, but the Lord took notice of all, and will reward duly by-and-by. Then the Apostle throws out the word of warning, "But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no respect of persons."

Let every Christian therefore look well to his ways. In the light of all this, how are we living? How are we serving? Soon we shall stand before Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Soon will His holy eye look over all our record, and His holy lips will pronounce His mind as to it. Will our lives in the home, in business, and everywhere else bear His close inspection? Will our service bear the all-searching test of His holy Word? Is it pursued because we love Him and owe all to Him, or is it carried forward for mere self-exaltation and for the strengthening of party? Let us be real. Better far to have the examination now, while there is time to correct, than to let all go on to the judgment seat, where we may find ourselves eternal losers.

Such is the judgment seat of Christ for those who believe in His Name. It is no question of visiting sins upon them, but of manifestation. Rewards will be dealt out, and places in the millennial kingdom allotted, according to faithful service here below. Not that reward is the motive for service or godliness. That would be legalism. Love to Christ is the spring, the rewards come in as encouragements for our souls by the way.

2. The Judgment of the Quick or Living.

Christ is ordained of God to be the Judge not only of the dead, but of the quick, as Peter declared to Cornelius and his company (Acts 10:42). This is a large theme, and can only be dealt with briefly here. It is but little understood, though confessed as doctrine in all the Creeds of Christendom. It is quite the fashion to merge all into the judgment of the dead. The judgment of the living really covers a wide area. It commences with the judgments that will be poured out from heaven after the heavenly saints are removed, and which will go on until the public appearing of the Lord Jesus to put down all His foes. It will be continued more or less throughout the millennial reign, ending with the overthrow of the gathered hosts at the close (Revelation 20:8-9). Then will come "the time of the dead, that they should be judged" (Revelation 11:18).

But we have space for a little detail. The Book of Revelation furnishes us with an outline. In Revelation 2:1-29 & Revelation 3:1-22, in the epistles to the seven Churches, we have a sketch of the history of the professing Church from beginning to end. It is Church history, viewed from the Divine standpoint. In Revelation 4:1-11 & Revelation 5:1-14, we see heaven preparing itself for judgment — God on His throne and the Lamb receiving the seven-sealed book. Grouped around the throne are the four-and-twenty crowned and enthroned elders representing symbolically the

heavenly saints in their kingly and priestly character. These are all seen at home with the Lord before the judgments fall. Instead of being terrified by the judgments proceeding from the throne, they worship and adore. They know God, and they have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. In Revelation 6:1-17 the judgments begin to be poured out. All this is future. It is freely admitted that there may have been some sort of analogy in events that have already taken place; but strictly speaking, all this is to come. These are judgments on the living, not the dead. First we have the seven seals broken one by one by the Lamb, and judgments falling — mostly of a providential character. Then the trumpets are blown, and further strokes descend. The vials follow, and in them is filled up (or completed) the wrath of God. The manifestation of Christ and the heavenly armies takes place next, and the assembled hosts of His enemies are overthrown, the leaders — the beast and the false prophet — being consigned forthwith to the lake of fire (Revelation 19:1-21). All this is the judgment of the quick; it is Divine dealing with living men on the earth preparatory to Christ taking His throne in Zion.

There is one important incident in the judgment of the quick which must be looked at a little more fully, because it is so generally misunderstood and misapplied. I refer to the separation of the sheep from the goats, in Matthew 25:31-46. This is often regarded as setting forth the final judgment of the dead. The page in the Bible now open before me is headed "Description of the last Judgment." This is a mistake, and by no means a small one. Look carefully at the whole prophecy of which these few verses form part. The Lord was with His disciples on the Mount of Olives, and in answer to their questions, opens out to them the things concerning His coming to establish His kingdom at the end of the age. The first few verses (Matthew 24:1-14) are general, and describe the general circumstances of His servants until the end. In Matthew 24:15 He speaks of the idol (abomination) to be set up in the holy place by the Man of Sin, of the great tribulation to follow, and then of the sufferings of the elect in Judea in that day. This part is closed up (Matthew 24:29-31) with His own appearing in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. This is His manifestation to Israel, and subsequent to His removal of the heavenly saints. Then follows a long parenthesis in the prophecy, in which we observe six parables. Three are for the Jewish people, the fig tree (Matthew 24:32-35), the days of Noah (Matthew 24:36-41), and the thief in the night (Matthew 24:42-44); the remaining three concern the professing Church, the faithful and evil servants (Matthew 24:45-51), the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), and the talents (Matthew 24:14-30). The thread of the prophecy is then resumed. "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory; and before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 24:31-32). The time and circumstances of this session are thus easily determined. It is immediately after the public appearing of the Lord Jesus and before the establishment of the kingdom. But is it the judgment of the dead, as so commonly supposed? By no means. It is at least a thousand years too early. The dead, i.e., the ungodly, will remain in their graves until the reign of Christ is over, and will then be called forth to stand before Him. How then can there be a general judgment before the millennium? But there is a more serious difficulty still in the passage — there is no mention of any dead at all. Nor is there one word about resurrection of either good or bad. Further, three classes are found — the sheep, the goats, and the brethren (the first two being dealt with according to their treatment of the third), which quite unfits the passage for the purpose for which so many seem to desire it.

It is the judgment of the quick. The throne is not "the Great White Throne," but "the throne of His glory." The Son of Man sits there in His character of King, and calls all the Gentiles before Him, and enters into, not the question of their sins in general, as later at the Great White Throne, but their treatment of those whom He graciously styles "My brethren." These are Jews, preachers of the gospel of the kingdom during the brief interval between the removal of the Church to glory and the revelation of Christ to judge and to reign. Some will treat them badly, thus showing out their deep hatred to God and His Christ. Those who lose their lives at that time are found under the altar, in Revelation 6:9-11, crying for vengeance on their foes. Others will treat them kindly, bowing to their testimony, and receiving it as the Word of God, in blessed proof that the Spirit of God has been working in their hearts.

All this the King inquires into. The sheep He pronounces blessed of His Father, and invites them to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. They shall enjoy all the blessings of His millennial reign. They are not a heavenly company, but an earthly; and their portion is not said to have been ordered before the foundation of the world, as ours (Ephesians 1:4), but from its foundation. This distinction is of great importance.

The sheep seem astonished when the Lord commends them for having fed, clothed, and entertained Himself. They inquire, "Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee?" (Matthew 25:37-39.) They had shown such kindness to poor Jewish preachers of the gospel of the kingdom, but had not thought of their deeds at all as done to the Lord Himself. "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

It is most evident that we are not on Christian ground here. Christians are members of the body of Christ, constituted such by the baptism of the Holy Ghost; consequently, all that is done to them, whether it be kindness or otherwise, is accepted by the Lord as done to Himself (Acts 9:4-5; 1 Corinthians 8:12; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). This may not be quite understood now by all who believe, for many have no due understanding of their proper relationship to Christ, but all such ignorance will be dissipated in the glory. Christians will not then be surprised to hear the Lord speak of gracious acts done to His saints as done to Himself. But the sheep are surprised! They know nothing of such a principle. They form no part of the Church of God, where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but are saved as Gentiles by Jewish preaching at the end (Colossians 3:11). Then the King will reckon with those on His left hand. To them He will say, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in; naked, and ye clothed Me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited Me not. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee? Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me" (Matthew 25:41-45). Thus will He deal with those who have failed to show kindness to His poor Jewish brethren of the last days. It is a solemn thing to lift the hand against the Jew. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper" (Isaiah 54:17).

But this does not complete the judgment of the quick. Many details are to be found in the Prophets, far too numerous to be reproduced here. Suffice it to say that when Israel reappears as a nation, her ancient enemies will reappear also, with hearts as bitter against them as ever in the past. The careful reader has only to examine the "burdens" of Isaiah and the other prophets to be convinced that none of them have been exhausted by the indications of long ago. Assyria will come up again, and be dealt with (Isaiah 10:12); the Philistines (Isaiah 14:29-32), Moab (Isa. 15:16), Damascus (Isaiah 17:1-2), and many others. Israel will be specially used for the punishment of Edom, Moab, and Ammon (Daniel 11:41). These are all temporal judgments, for their implacable enmity to the chosen seed, and are all included in the judgment of the quick.

It may be urged against this, that most of the peoples named no longer exist. This presents no difficulty to faith. God has spoken in His word, and there faith rests. However apparently impossible to us, every sentence will be made good. Besides, who are we to say that Edom, Moab, etc., no longer exist? We no longer know these people by their old titles, but they are probably near our doors under other names. The same difficulty may be pressed with regard to the ten tribes of Israel. No one knows certainly where they are, nor by what name they are at present called (though many guesses have been made, especially of late years), but God has His eye upon them, and will bring them forward when the suited moment arrives. At the same epoch, their adversaries will show themselves, with the same sentiments as of old, to receive from Jehovah's righteous hand condign punishment for their hostility to the people of His choice. The judgment of the quick will go on more or less, throughout the millennial kingdom. "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment (Isaiah 32:1). Long-suffering will not then be exercised with regard to sin, as now; every offence apparently being summarily dealt with (Isaiah 45:20). We are apt to overlook this aspect of the Lord's glorious reign. We speak much of the blessedness of it, and of the peace and glory that will prevail, but are apt to forget the strict righteousness that will form the foundation of His rule. The true Melchizedec is first King of Righteousness, then King of Peace (Hebrews 7:1).

Another point to be remembered in considering the judgments of God soon to be poured out upon the world is that the heavenly saints are to be associated with the Lord Jesus in this solemn work. Daniel says, "Judgment was given to the saints of the Most High," or high places (Daniel 7:22). This the Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians of. They were so far forgetting their high calling and destiny as to carry their disputes into the courts of the world, before the unjust. Paul indignantly exclaims, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?" (1 Corinthians 6:2-3).

This has been greatly overlooked in Christendom. Far from expecting to be the world's judges — yea, the judges of angels, too — not a few of those who really love the Lord Jesus quite expect to be brought into judgment themselves! This is serious — injurious to both peace and affection. As already shown, every believer is placed beyond judgment in the risen Christ, a standing in Divine righteousness being already his through His accomplished work. Nothing remains but eternal participation with Christ. Consequently in all He does we shall have a part; hence our future position as associated with Him in the judgment of the world and of the angels.

The final act in the judgment of the quick is the overthrow of the vast hosts which will be gathered together by Satan after his release from the bottomless pit. It seems inconceivable that after such a season of blessedness, man will be found ready to revolt against the Lord; but so it will be. The heart of man is so incurably bad that neither grace nor glory displayed before it, touch or alter it in the slightest degree. Nothing avails but a new creation, and this is the work of the Spirit of God.

Hence, when Satan goes out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, he succeeds in gathering them together to battle, in number as the sand of the sea. "And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city; and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them" (Revelation 20:7-9). Jerusalem is the object of their attack, for there the saints (i.e., the earthly saints) are congregated. Swift judgment falls upon them from heaven. Their deceiver and betrayer is then consigned to the lake of fire, his eternal place of suffering abode.

3: The Judgment of the Dead.

In pursuing our subject, we have now reached the end of time. Christ is the Judge of the dead, even as of the living. "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son; that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father" (John 5:22-23). How solemn that men should have to stand before Him! The One who died for sinners, and rose again: the One who has waited throughout this period of Divine long-suffering and grace, able and willing to save all who believe, however lost or vile! Then for men to have to stand before Him at the end! What shame and confusion of face! What speechlessness! Will men in Christendom be able to say that they never heard His Name, nor the sound of saving grace? Will they be able to plead that the Word of God, containing the record of His grace and truth, was never placed within their reach? Neither will nor can be urged in extenuation of their position. The sentence of God will be justified by each and all.

"And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from Whose face the earth and the heavens fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God [or 'the throne'], and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hell [Hades] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell [Hades] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:11-15). It is a "great" throne, for the most momentous of all questions is to be settled there; "white" because of the holiness and righteousness of all that is there enacted. All who are not raised in the first resurrection must then rise, the mighty voice of the Son of God calling them from their tombs. The sea comes forward with its contingent, as Hades delivers up the spirits to be reunited with the bodies. The books tell their tale, all is faithfully recorded by! a holy God. The Word of God will be there, even as the Lord Jesus said, "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge you in the last day" (John 12:48). Every word heard, every chapter read, only increases responsibility, if not received by faith in the heart. How does the reader stand in view of all this? Has the reader been cleansed from his sins by the blood of Jesus? Is forgiveness yours, and justification and acceptance in the risen Christ?

If not, lose no time, we entreat you. The present period of grace and mercy is fast hastening to its close, and soon the Master of the house will rise up and shut to the door. Then all hope must flee, mercy will be no more. What a contrast! Eternal glory in the Father's house for all who believe in the Son; a long eternity of woe in the lake of fire for all who avail not themselves of His wondrous grace.

"Jesus, the Lord our righteousness!

Our beauty Thou, our glorious dress!

'Midst flaming worlds, in this arrayed,

With joy shall we lift up the head.

"Bold shall we stand in that great day,

For who aught to our charge shall lay,

While by Thy blood absolved we are

From Sin's tremendous curse and fear?"

The Apostasy of Christendom and the Antichrist.

We will now consider the march of events in Christendom after the removal of the saints to glory. The coming of the Lord will by no means, alas! clear the field of Christian profession. To many thousands, it is feared, He will have to say, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (Matthew 25:12). True, they carry the lamps of profession, but they are oil-less; they fear His name, but they have never come into living contact with Him; they Sing His praises with their lips, but have never known His love and grace in their hearts. All such will be left behind at the rapture, however loud their plea. What will be their future? This we now propose to consider.

Many have thought the era of the Gospel to be the final one, and that the millennium will be an outcome of it, brought about by diffusion of truth, and the spiritual subjugation of the whole world to Christ. But Scripture speaks very differently. The millennium will be brought in by desolating judgments, not by Gospel labour; and as for the present period of favour and privilege, instead of ending in universal glory, it will terminate in darkness and apostasy.

There is a sad consistency in all the history of man. Every dispensation has ended in gloom. Man has failed in whatever circumstances God has placed him. The period of innocence ended in the fall and the expulsion from the garden; the age of conscience resulted in the flood; the dispensation of the law terminated in the rejection and murder of the Messiah; and more might be added. The Church period will have no different ending, all New Testament Scripture being witness. We will quote a few proofs. In 2 Timothy 3:1-17 we read, "This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come." Then follows a dark description, reminding us of heathen depravity as told out in Romans 1:1-32. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." This is very solemn. Clearly there was no thought in the Apostle's mind of the professing Church and the world becoming better and more suitable for Christ. Look also at Romans 1:13. "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." Consider, too, the short Epistle of Jude. There the course of evil in the professing

Church is traced from its first introduction by the enemy by means of certain men who crept in unawares, until the Lord's appearing in judgment. The evil is not eradicated, but goes on intensifying until the Lord Himself arises to deal with it. Recall also the Lord's parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:24-30. The enemy sowed the tares soon after the wheat was sown, and they grow on together until the harvest, when the great and final separation comes.

With all this may be connected the warning in Romans 11:1-36. There the Apostle shows that Christendom has taken the place of Israel in the earth as regards the outward privileges and responsibility. The Jewish branches of the olive tree were cut off because of unfaithfulness, as every one knows. But what of the Gentiles, who have succeeded them as wild branches grafted in? "Be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off (Romans 11:20-22). This does not touch the question of individual salvation, which is eternally secured in Christ; it is dispensational responsibility. Who will pretend that Christendom has continued in the goodness of God? Judgment, therefore, must fall, though not until the cup of iniquity is filled up by the apostasy of the last days.

To this we will now turn. Observe the way in which the solemn subject is introduced in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17. The Thessalonians at the time of the writing of the Epistle were in deep distress. They were passing through sore tribulation. Paul alludes to "all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure" (2 Thessalonians 1:4). The enemy had let loose his rage upon them, because of their faith in the Lord Jesus. He had wrought in another way also, which was much more serious. He had succeeded in instilling into their minds the idea that the day of the Lord had set in, and that the great tribulation connected with that solemn epoch was upon them. A letter even had been sent to them, pretending to be from the Apostle Paul, confirming them in the notion. All this wrought very sadly among them. The brightness of their hope, which the Spirit commends so warmly in the First Epistle, became clouded, and deep gloom settled down upon them.

Yet one simple consideration would have materially helped them. The Old Testament Scriptures, in speaking of the day of the Lord, speaks of it as judgment on the ungodly. In that day the tables will be turned. The Lord's friends will then be at rest in His blessed presence, while His foes will be in adversity. This thought would have assured the Thessalonians; but unfortunately our hearts are such, that often in a time of difficulty we forget what would prove real help and comfort to our souls.

Observe carefully the Apostle's words: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Lord is present." This is unquestionably the correct reading of this important verse. The Authorised Version is manifestly wrong here. How could the inspired Apostle write beseeching them not to believe that the day is at hand, when elsewhere he says, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand"! (Romans 13:12.) It would be flat contradiction, which can never be in the Scriptures, where all is of God.

On the contrary, he begs them not to be persuaded that the day of the Lord had come. But on what does he ground his exhortation? On the coming of the Lord Jesus to gather together His own. In no way could he have presented the distinctness of the two events more clearly. The coming of the Lord for His own is one thing; His day (introduced by His appearing in glory) quite another. The saints are to be removed to heaven before the last great crisis; but inasmuch as the whole Church of God was still on earth, how could the Thessalonians suppose that it had arrived? Such is the reasoning of the Apostle, at once simple and reassuring.

Another consideration is then presented. Before the day of the Lord sets in the apostasy must take place, and the man of sin run his course. "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away" (more properly "the apostasy") "first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" (2 Thessalonians 2:3). This must not be confounded with other predictions. It is important to rightly divide the word of truth. In 1 Timothy 4:1 the same Apostle writes, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly that in latter times some shall depart from the faith." If the verses which follow be examined carefully, it will be seen that Popery is in view, with its Satanic hypocrisy and restrictions. The expression "latter times" therefore simply means times subsequent to the writing of the Epistle. 2 Timothy 3:1 presents a further stage in the development of evil: "in the last days perilous times shall come." We do not here read of some departing from the faith; the evil is much more general. Who can read the Holy Spirit's language in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, and fail to see that it is our own day that is so vividly described? "The last days" are running their course now.

But 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 speaks of a later and more solemn period still. Grave as are the features of the "latter times" and the "last days," the Apostasy is immeasurably more serious. It means nothing less than a universal renunciation of all profession of Christianity. The Lord's true ones — the salt — having been removed, and the Holy Spirit having left the scene, what is to preserve the mass from headlong ruin? Not that the nominal profession of Christianity will necessarily be abandoned immediately the saints are taken away. It will doubtless be maintained for a time. Many a religious building will be opened as usual, many a Christless sermon will be delivered then, as, alas! too often at the present time. But it will not continue very long. Liberal-mindedness (so-called) will prevail. It will no longer be deemed necessary to contend for this truth or that; the union of Christendom (of which one hears so much even now) will then be more than possible, only to be followed, under Satanic leadership, by the throwing up of the very name and form of Christianity.

Many really sincere souls find this hard to believe. They have so long cherished the thought that the Gospel is destined to convert the whole world to God, that it seems inconceivable that Christendom itself will become more corrupt and evil than even the heathen world beyond. But the testimony of Scripture must be honestly faced. Nothing is to be gained, but the contrary, by buoying ourselves up with false hopes and expectations. We really thus give the enemy an advantage, because a measure of blindness must inevitably result as to our present pathway in the midst of growing darkness and evil.

It cannot be denied that things are rapidly moving onward to the apostasy. God forbid that one should present a gloomier picture than is just, but the facts are patent to all. On every hand the inspiration of the Scriptures is called in question or denied; many indulge in the loosest and

gravest speculations concerning the person of Christ; the fundamental doctrine of the atonement is set aside by multitudes; the eternal punishment of the ungodly is widely repudiated; and many more sorrowful details might be added. This is a day of compromise and surrender. Truths that our fathers suffered for gladly are lightly yielded now, as if they were the merest trifles; and those who suffered for them in the past are regarded by not a few with a kind of compassion, as over scrupulous and narrow, which a little nineteenth century enlightenment would have helped!

If such is the condition of things while the saints of God are here, what will it be when we are all gone? Scripture answers, Apostasy. Arising out of this is the revelation of the Antichrist, the man of sin. Man is a religious being naturally, and must have an object of worship. If God is thrown off, a Satanic substitute is accepted. This we have long seen in heathendom; presently it will be witnessed in Christendom. Satan will bring forward his man when the suited moment arrives, and present him to his dupes. Let it be distinctly understood that the Antichrist is a person. Some have thought the Apostle's remarks in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 to refer to the Papacy, but this is a great mistake. It is not a system, nor a succession of men, but an individual. The Popes, however arrogant and evil, have never gone to the lengths described here. The man of sin sets himself up above all that is called God or that is worshipped. He sets aside all objects of worship, true and false, and claims sole Divine honour. His seat will be in Jerusalem. "He sitteth in the temple of God showing himself that he is God." Only on Mount Moriah has God ever owned a temple of a material character. During the Church period the temple of God is a spiritual thing. The saints themselves form His temple and the Spirit of God inhabits it (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 1 Peter 2:5). But when the saints are removed to heaven, this is necessarily at an end. Then the material temple will come into view again. It will happen thus. A goodly number of the Jews will be found in their own land at the end of the age (indeed, many are returning at the present time). They will set about to re-establish their old system of worship, with its sanctuary, priesthood, and sacrifices. At the appointed moment the man of sin will introduce himself to them, claiming to be the long-expected Messiah. It will happen then as the Lord foretold, "I am come in My Father's Name, and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (John 5:43). His pretensions will be admitted by the blinded mass, the godly remnant, on the contrary, saying within themselves, "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords" (Psalms 55:21). The elect are not deceived; a stranger will they not follow, for they know not his voice.

Antichrist will soon display himself in his true colours. At the first, he will form a covenant as the leader of the Jews, with the great power of the West for protection (Daniel 9:27). The godless mass will glory in this, saying, "We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through" (referring to their powerful Northern foe), "it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves" (Isaiah 28:15). But this will not hold good long. In the midst of the week, i.e., the seven years of the covenant, the Antichrist, backed up by the Beast (the Roman head), will turn upon them, suppressing their worship, and will seek to force idolatry upon them. If it be asked, "How can this affect all Christendom?" the answer is, that Christendom's political chief and the evil one in Jerusalem are in league, consequently where the one has influence, the other has also. Christendom and the Jews will be together in apostasy, in the last days, strange as it may sound in some ears now. Has the reader ever weighed up 1 John 2:22? "Who is the liar but he that denieth

that Jesus is the Christ? He is Antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son." Here we get the two forms of evil distinctly connected; the first part of the verse being Jewish unbelief, the second part Christian, or, more properly, Antichristian apostasy. Solemn thought! Where the light has shone the brightest the darkness will be the most dense very shortly.

There is restraint at the present time, as the Apostle shows: "And now ye know what withholdeth, that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only He Who now letteth will let, until He be taken out of the way" (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7). Evil intruded itself into the sphere of Christian profession very early, but though it is steadily but surely working, there is restraint, that it come not yet to a head. The "what" in 2 Thessalonians 2:6, unnamed by the Apostle, is probably government. It is still true that "the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1); and while this is so there is at least a measure of check on human will. But presently Romans 13:1 will cease to be true, for the supreme power in Christendom will receive his throne and authority direct from the Dragon (Revelation 13:1-4); then the way will be open for evil to show itself in its most extreme form.

"He" in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 is the Holy Spirit. He dwells in the Church of God and in the individual Christian, and is here to guard the interests of Christ. He will not suffer the fearful impiety of which we are speaking to take place while He is present. But when the Church is removed He will quit the scene, and man will be left to the evil of his own heart, and to the devil.

Those will be days of fearful delusion. To help it on miracles will be performed, and these in great variety. Miracles are not necessarily proofs of Divine authority, whatever Papists may say; the devil can perform them, when God thinks proper to allow it. The coming of the man of sin is "according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Perhaps the most serious is the appearance of fire called down from heaven. This we find in Revelation 13:13. This was Elijah's great sign that Jehovah was the true God, which caused the people to fall on their faces and own "Jehovah, He is the God; Jehovah, He is the God" (1 Kings 18:38-39).

The judicial hand of God will be put forth in that day, as well as the power of Satan. It is righteous retribution from Himself. Men in Christendom have had the truth, but have not loved it; instead of believing it they have had pleasure in unrighteousness. God will remember all this in the day to come. His hand will be upon them. He will send them a strong delusion, that they shall believe the lie of the enemy. The truth not having been received (though known), the lie shall be to their eternal ruin. Some find it hard to believe that the (so-called) enlightened men of this day will soon bow at the feet of the man of sin; but it is solemnly true. Men who affect to despise their ignorant ancestors for bowing down to stocks and stones will presently be found doing what is immeasurably worse. Probably the strictly religious Jews of the Lord's day did not care to be told that the unclean spirit of idolatry will return into their midst with sevenfold virulence (Matthew 12:43-45). The last state of Judaism will be worse than the first, and Christendom will be in the same condition. The two systems, so opposed in principle, will be together in evil in the dark day that is at hand.

We will now turn from 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 to some other portions of Scripture. Refer to Daniel 11:36-45. A person is here very abruptly introduced as "the king." Who is he? If the whole chapter be examined carefully it will be found to be occupied with the contentions of the kings of the North

and South (Syria and Egypt) about the glorious land. Down to Daniel 11:35 the chapter has been fulfilled. The exploits of the Maccabean times are spoken of, also the intervention of the Romans, under the title of the ships of Chittim, before the first coming into the world of our Lord Jesus. Then we observe a great chasm in the prophecy, so common in the prophetic word. This whole period is passed over in silence, and we are carried forward to the last days. "The king" of verse 36 is clearly a person reigning in the land, and quite distinct from the kings of the North and South, who both make war upon him (see Daniel 11:40). It is Antichrist, but viewed, not as the leader of Christendom's apostasy, as in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17, but as the profane leader of the Jewish people. The language is too similar to that of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 to be misunderstood. "And the king shall do according to his will, and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished; for that that is determined shall be done. Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall magnify himself above all" (Daniel 11:36-37). Here we have the sadly familiar features, pride, willfulness, blasphemy, and usurpation of God's place and title. Daniel 11:37 is plain that he will be a Jew. No Gentile could hope to be received by the Jewish people as Messiah, heir to the throne of David. It is strange that all interpreters of prophecy do not see this really simple point.

The man of sin is introduced as "the king" with equal abruptness in Isaiah's prophecy. "For Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king also it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it" (Isaiah 30:33). See also Isaiah 57:9; Thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase thyself even unto hell." Both passages refer to the same solemn person, the one setting forth his doom, the other the extreme wickedness of the people of Israel in having to do with him.

Now a word or two as to Revelation 13:1-18. In the first half of the chapter we have the Satanic revival of the Roman empire, with the blasphemy of its head and his persecution of the saints of God. In Revelation 13:11 we read, "And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon." This is very plain. The language of this and the following verses clearly identify him with the evil agent we have been considering. He is called here a beast because of his connection with the political power. The first arises "out of the sea," i.e., out of the anarchy of the nations; the second comes up "out of the earth," the condition of things being more settled at the moment of his appearance. The second beast is the deceiver and miracle worker rather than the first. The one is characterised by great political power, the other by Satanic seduction.

How awful the end of both! They have lifted up their hands against the living God, and against His Christ, and they will feel the weight of Divine wrath in a peculiarly awful manner at the Lord's appearing. 2 Thessalonians 2:8 speaks very solemnly of the Antichrist, "Whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming." How full of meaning is his title, "Son of Perdition," as we read these words! "The breath of his mouth" is His word (see Isaiah 11:4; Isaiah 30:33). One word from the Lord, and the career of these messengers of Satan is over for ever. Their power is paralysed by His appearing in glory, however great their stoutness of heart in His absence. Revelation 19:20 completes the solemn account: "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with

which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These were both cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone." Pre-eminent in wickedness, they shall be pre-eminent in punishment. All other transgressors will pass through death, and be raised to stand before the Great White Throne, thence to be consigned to the lake of fire; these men are solemn exceptions. Without passing through death at all, they are cast in at least a thousand years before the mass of the ungodly.

In conclusion, a few words to the conscience of the reader. We have been considering an inexpressibly solemn theme. We have seen what will be the end of merely nominal profession of Christianity — apostasy, and the worship of the man of sin. How is it with the reader? Is Christianity with you a real thing, or a name only? If the latter, be warned in time! Do not rest satisfied with an oil-less lamp, which will avail you nothing in the great day, but acquaint yourself with the Christ of God while you may. The greatest sinner He will not refuse, nor the greatest professor, if the true state is owned before Him. "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12).

"See the Saviour, long expected,

Now in solemn pomp appear!

And His saints, by man rejected,

All His heavenly glory share:

Hallelujah!

See the Son of God appear!

The Coming Great Tribulation.

It is commonly understood by those who bear the Name of the Lord Jesus that the Scriptures speak of a period of unparalleled trial for the saints of God before the termination of the present age. Many are not a little exercised as to the matter, not being at all clear in their minds as to who the persons are who will suffer at that time. Some assert that the Church of God will be in the scene of conflict then, and that therefore the heavenly saints will be the sufferers during that terrible period; others affirm that the Church of God will be removed to glory ere that day begins, and that its trials will fall upon a different order of witnesses altogether. The question is manifestly far too grave and fraught with results much too serious, to be allowed to remain a mere matter of speculation or opinion. It cannot be treated as a point of indifference. Time hastens, and the darkness deepens around us; every thoughtful Christian believes that we are drawing near to the fulfilment of all that the prophets have spoken. Hence the importance of knowing certainly the mind of the Lord. If the Church of God is indeed to pass through the terrible ordeal, it is of moment to know it, that we may prepare ourselves for it and not be taken unawares; while, on the other hand, if the Scriptures which speak of the great tribulation really contemplate an entirely different company of saints, it is well to be assured of it, that our hearts may be at rest about the matter.

All this we now propose to inquire into. The only standard of authority is the Word of God. What a mighty contrast there is between the ever-varying opinions of men and the inspired Word of our God! On the one hand there is no certainty, but frequently distress and doubt; on the other hand,

there is solid ground for the feet to stand upon, and faith finds perfect rest. All doubts are there removed, all mists are dispelled; divine certainty is known and enjoyed in the soul.

We will first examine Matthew 24:1-51. This is admitted to be the most important passage dealing with the coming great tribulation. To have right thoughts as to this chapter is to get real help as to many other portions of Scripture. The general character of the Gospel of Matthew must be borne in mind. It is not in vain that the Spirit of God has given us four different accounts of the Lord Jesus in His walk and ways below. Each evangelist presents the Lord in a different aspect, as must be evident to every reader. In what character does Matthew present Him to our hearts? Unquestionably as the Messiah of Israel. Matthew 1:1-25 shows Him to be Abraham's true Seed, and David's Heir. The Gospel as a whole is the trial of the question whether or not Israel was prepared to receive Him. The result of the test we know. He was despised and rejected by men, and abhorred of His own nation. Consequently, in Matthew 16:18, the Lord speaks of the Church — "Upon this rock I will build My Church" — a new work of grace to be performed consequent upon the final rejection of Himself by Israel. Warnings abound in Matthew's Gospel. Israel was not left in ignorance as to what would happen if the Messiah was not received. One of the Lord's most solemn statements concerning them is to be found in Matthew 23:37-39, which immediately precedes the chapter now under consideration. Mark the sorrow of His blessed heart expressing itself: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord." All this the disciples heard and pondered. Their minds were filled with the promised kingdom; they firmly believed that their Master was the long expected Deliverer, and they looked that He would soon set up the kingdom in power and glory. The following, among other passages, show what was in their thoughts: Matthew 20:20-23; Luke 19:11; Luke 24:21; Acts 1:6.

They did not as yet understand the cross, though the Lord frequently spoke to them of it. Deliverance from the Romans and all other oppressors, followed by glory in the land, was alone before their minds. But they might have gathered at least two things from the Lord's lamentation over Jerusalem: first, that there must be a period of desolation for Israel and the temple, because of their unbelief; and secondly, that there will be a future coming of the Blessed One, when He will be gladly welcomed by the very nation that once disowned and rejected Him.

However, in passing hence, they drew the Lord's attention to the beautiful buildings of the temple, and got in reply: "See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2). This was too plain to be misinterpreted. Accordingly they asked the Lord the three questions found in Matthew 24:3. "Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the age? "Just a few words on the expression "Thy coming." Let it be distinctly understood that they in no way referred to the heavenly hope of the Church of God, the coming of the Lord Jesus into the air to gather together His own. Of this they had absolutely no knowledge whatever. It was not yet revealed; indeed, they knew nothing at all about the Church itself beyond the brief word already referred to in Matthew 16:1-28. Could we have spoken to them on that day of accomplished redemption, and a rent veil, of Sonship to the Father, of the Holy Ghost's indwelling, of union with a glorified Man in heaven, or of translation to heaven to spend eternity with the First-begotten in

the Father's house, they would not have understood a word. All these are privileges now known and enjoyed, being the inalienable portion of all who in this period believe in the Lord Jesus. But these things were not known by the disciples when with the Lord on the Mount of Olives. It will greatly help to the elucidation of Matthew 24:1-51 if all thoughts of the Church of God are promptly dismissed from the mind.

The questions raised by the disciples were not asked from the standpoint of the Church at all. They were merely Jewish believers who believed in Jesus as the Messiah, and who were desirous of information concerning His earthly kingdom.* They are thus representatives of a similar company of saints who will be found in the land at a later day.

{*I am anxious that the above remarks should not be misunderstood. Though the eleven formed no part of the Church of God at the time of which we speak, they most assuredly did afterwards; indeed, they were its first members. But this was not true until the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost descended from heaven to form the body.}

At this juncture it may be well to compare Luke's account of the Lord's remarkable prophecy. He was led of the Spirit of God to dwell on the first of the three questions, with the Lord's answer. Hence we get there full information concerning the overthrow of Jerusalem by the Romans, with but few remarks concerning the crisis at the end of the age. Matthew, on the other hand, while naming all the questions, was guided to dwell on the answers to the second and third only. Through not noticing this, many interpreters have imagined that Matthew 24:1-51 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, because the parallel passage in Luke does! But this is a great mistake, and due to want of attention to the Spirit's use of the two writers. We may here observe the importance of inspiration. Merely human arrangements cannot account for such differences; but when we bear in mind that the Holy Ghost had different objects before His mind in taking up his chosen vessels, all is simple and plain.

Now let us glance down the Lord's words in Matthew 24:1-51. In Matthew 24:4-14 the general position during the Lord's absence is briefly described. His servants must expect to meet trial and suffering in their service, but must persevere to the end. These exhortations are of value to those who serve the Lord Jesus now; but will have their full application in the circumstances of the Jewish witnesses at the time of the end.

Then we get something more definite. "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whoso readeth let him understand): then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains" (Matthew 24:15-16). Here we have a very important sign. What is meant by "the abomination of desolation"? "Abomination" is the Scripture title for an idol. Thus we read of "Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites," and "Chemosh the abomination of Moab" (1 Kings 11:5-7). It is, therefore, an idol set up in the holy place at Jerusalem. This has never happened in the past. True, the temple was defiled by Antiochus Epiphanes (Daniel 11:31), but this was long before the Lord's prophecy. The only event of note in connection with the temple since the Lord Jesus spoke was its destruction by the Roman armies under Titus in A.D. 70; consequently the Lord's prediction has yet to be fulfilled.

The explanation is as follows. In the closing crisis the Jews will receive the false Christ, as has been shown in a preceding paper. He will keep his word with them for a time, and will appear to be

their guardian and friend. But he will change his tactics after a while, and in league with the power of the West will seek to force idolatry upon them. Not only will he himself sit in the temple of God, claiming to be divine, but he will place there the image of the Roman beast. This I believe to be the "abomination of desolation" to which our Lord Jesus here refers. There will be really three false objects of worship in that day — the dragon, the image of the beast, and the Antichrist (Revelation 12:4-15; 2 Thessalonians 2:4). The mass of the Jewish people will blindly accept all this. The Lord warned that wicked generation that the unclean spirit would return with sevenfold malignity at the end (Matthew 12:43-45). The devil-possessed herd of swine furnish us with a solemn picture of them, rushing headlong to destruction (Matthew 8:28-34).

They have kindled their own fire in accepting the false Messiah, and shall lie down in sorrow; this they shall have at Jehovah's righteous hand, as the prophet declares (Isaiah 1:11).

Those will be terrible times for such as fear God; fearful persecutions will break out more severe in character than anything yet known. The Lord bids them note the signs and take warning. When they behold this daring iniquity in the sanctuary in Jerusalem they are to flee. So urgent is the matter that "Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes" (Matthew 24:17-18). They are to make for the mountains with all possible haste. All this instruction is plainly for persons living in Judea. Readers of Scripture who persist in seeing the Church of God in this chapter must find themselves beset with difficulties in every detail of the prophecy. Is the Church of God confined to one land that such signs should be of service? Is not the Church rather to be found in every quarter of the earth? When once it is perceived that the godly in Judea are in view, all is simple and clear.

The Lord bids them pray that they may not have to flee in the winter, or on the Sabbath day. How exceedingly gracious! He is ever-mindful of the circumstances of His beloved saints, however apparently trivial or small. He thought of the suffering involved in a winter flight without time to go into the house for an overcoat! And what a dilemma they would find themselves in if the image happened to be set up on the Sabbath day! Therefore He bids them cry to God that it may not so occur. In such a case they would not know what to do. If a journey of any length were undertaken on the Sabbath day (Acts 1:12) it would involve a breach of the law; yet, if they stayed awhile, for conscience sake, they might lose their lives.

The introduction of the Sabbath day is an additional proof that we are on Jewish, rather than Church, ground in this chapter. Nowhere in the epistles of the New Testament is the Sabbath spoken of in connection with the Church of God save in Colossians 2:16-17, where the apostle contends for liberty as to it. The Christian's day is not the seventh day, but the first of the week; which speaks to us of redemption accomplished, of victory won, and of a new creation where all things are of God. It is serious to confound the two days, though commonly done. The principles connected with them are entirely different, and even opposite. The Sabbath day is in abeyance during the present period of grace, but will come into view again then God resumes relations with the people of Israel.

To return. The tribulation will be an unparalleled one. Satan will just then have been cast out of heaven (never more to return), and will be full of fury, knowing that he has but a short time (Revelation 12:7-13). All opposition to his schemes he will endeavour to stamp out by means of his

principal tools, the Roman Beast and the man of sin. Still, God holds the reins. The enemy cannot exceed His limits. He has fixed the moment when the sorrow shall cease, and all the rage of Satan cannot prolong it one hour. What comfort this is for the saints of God! "Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:22). For three years and a half the tribulation will rage. The period is variously described in Scripture, leaving no real doubt in the mind. In Revelation 11:3, Revelation 12:6, we read of "one thousand, two hundred and threescore days;" in Revelation 11:2, of "forty-two months;" and in Daniel 7:25, of "a time, and times and the dividing of time." Daniel 9:27 also confirms this.

Before speaking of the deliverance, the Lord gives another warning of a highly important character. "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo! here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore, if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not" (Matthew 24:23-26). This word of counsel will doubtless prove to be of great value at that time. The fugitives might easily be duped. When fleeing for their lives, crying out of their agonised hearts, "Oh Lord, how long;" "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down" (Psalms 79:5; Isaiah 64:1) , how easily might they be deceived by false reports. Suppose someone told them that Christ had come, and had arrived at Bethlehem or elsewhere, it might be believed. There is a vast difference in the hope of the Christian and the hope of the Jew in this respect. Our hope is not the coming of the Lord Jesus to the earth, but into the air. We shall meet Him there, and go with Him into the Father's house. This is our proper expectation; but it will be otherwise with the waiting Jews. He will come to them where they are, His feet first touching the Mount of Olives, the spot from which He went up (Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:9-12). But the point of the Lord's warning is that they will not need to be informed when He appears, for His manifestation will be a public display of glory, comparable to the lightning coming out of the east, and shining unto the west: "Every eye shall see Him" (Revelation 1:7).

His advent will bring the Great Tribulation to a close. The righteous Lord will deal with His adversaries, especially the Beast, and the Man of Sin (as we have already shown), and deliver and comfort His oppressed and suffering saints. Such is the testimony of Matthew 24:1-51.

We will now consider the testimony of the Old Testament prophets. Read Jeremiah 30:4-9. The Prophet evidently speaks of the same time as the Lord Jesus in the chapter we have been examining. "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it." This is plainly the well-known time of unparalleled trouble. But who are the sufferers contemplated? Not the Church, of which Jeremiah knew even less than the disciples who sat with the Lord on the Mount of Olives. "It is even the time of 'Jacob's trouble.'" "These are the words which Jehovah spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah." All this is very simple and intelligible, save to those who are addicted to the habit of "spiritualizing" the prophecies of the Old Testament. Such a mode of interpretation is a grievous mistake, highly injurious in many cases to the soul, which finds itself appropriating as its own merely earthly blessings, when God would have the heart in the enjoyment of the heavenly portion, which He has made ours in the risen Christ. When God says "Israel" and "Judah," we may be assured that He means what He says. Hence, Jeremiah's prediction speaks of trouble for the earthly people, no others being before his mind. But deliverance shall follow, as Matthew 24:1-51

has shown us. Jacob shall be saved out of his tribulation, the yoke of the oppressors shall be broken for ever, and Israel shall serve Jehovah their God and the true David their king.

Turn now to Daniel 12:1: "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time; and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." This exactly corresponds with what has already passed before us. It is the same epoch, for if the preceding verses be examined (Daniel 11:36-45) it will be seen that the Angel is speaking to the Prophet of the day of Antichrist's supremacy in the glorious land (Israel). With this is connected "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time." This is the familiar period of unparalleled tribulation. But who are the sufferers? "Thy people." Daniel's people are the Jews, as I need not stay to prove. Deliverance follows the trouble, at least for the elect — those written in God's book.

How harmonious is Scripture in all its parts! Though Jeremiah, Daniel, and the Lord Jesus wrote and spoke at different times, and under widely different circumstances, they exactly correspond in every little detail. The reverent mind cannot fail to see in this the guiding hand of the One Spirit. He it was Who inspired all the writers in the book of God, giving unity and harmony to the whole. May our confidence in the Spirit of God be deepened in this evil day, when so much unbelief and doubt is around us on every hand.

The next passage for consideration may present greater difficulties to some readers of Holy Scripture; I refer to Revelation 7:9-17. There we read unquestionably of Gentiles, which has led many to suppose that the Church of God is intended. But attention to the place accorded to Revelation 7:1-17. in the Book of Revelation will greatly help to solve the difficulty. Look back at the preceding chapters. In Revelation 1:1-20 we see the seven candlesticks, and the Son of Man walking in their midst; this is introductory. In Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22, in the epistles to the seven Churches in Asia, we have a sketch of the outward history of the Church on earth from the days of the Apostles until the end. After this we hear nothing, more of Churches except in the postscript (Revelation 22:16). Revelation 4:1-11; Revelation 5:1-14, show heaven preparing itself for the work of judgment, and the heavenly saints, under the figure of twenty-four crowned and enthroned elders, are seen at home with the Lord before the judgments commence. This is followed by the breaking of the seals (Revelation 6:1-17) and the outpouring of divine wrath. Then Revelation 7:1-17 comes in. It is a parenthesis really, coming between the sixth and seventh seals. It speaks of mercy in the midst of judgment. The heart of God loves mercy. Judgment is His strange work. He must execute it, in consistency with the holiness of His nature, and in order to maintain the majesty of His throne, but He does not delight in judgment. It gives Him real delight to bless and save men, as Luke 15:1-32 shows; He never takes delight in judging them.

Revelation 7:1-17, then, is a parenthesis of mercy. The judgments are restrained, while God draws aside the veil, as it were, to mark of His own. First we get 144,000 sealed Israelites. A defined number of all the tribes of Israel are sealed in order to be preserved during the terrors of the times. But is this all? No; there are saved Gentiles also. "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried

with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9-14).

Some will say, "Surely these are the Church of God!" All such will do well to examine the verses very closely. Observe, this white-robed palm bearing throng are quite distinct from the elders, who, we have already remarked, represent the Church, though not the Church only. One of the elders raised the question with the Apostle as to this countless throng, and then explained that they had come out of the great tribulation. The definite article should be inserted in Revelation 7:14. It helps to a better understanding of the elder's words. They are evidently persons who have heard the gospel of the kingdom from Jewish messengers and believed it. Suffering follows for them, though not necessarily loss of life. It must be remembered that the seductions and troubles of the last days will be very widespread. Though most severe in Judea, as is just, they will extend thence more or less over the whole civilised earth. The Man of Sin in the land, being in league with the Chief of the revived Roman Empire, will spread his poison, with its consequent suffering and sorrow, on every hand.

But these white-robed ones have by grace stood firm. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego of old, they have refused to join in the universal idolatry. "They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They are now seen victorious, about to enter into blessing. The terms of their blessing speak of earth, rather than heaven, the figures being borrowed principally from Isaiah 49:1-26. "Before the throne" is probably a moral, rather than local, expression, as in Revelation 14:3 (compare also Revelation 12:1). Their place and portion, I have no doubt, will be in the millennial earth under the peaceful reign of the Lord Jesus.

A few words as to Revelation 12:1-17 may be helpful to some of our readers. The great tribulation is not there referred to by name, but the allusion throughout is evidently to that period. The sun-clothed woman is seen persecuted by the Dragon, but preserved by God, and nourished in the wilderness during twelve hundred and sixty days (Revelation 12:6-14). Who is this woman? Revelation 12:5 is sufficient to answer the question. The man child is Christ beyond all just controversy, and Christ came of Israel, as the Apostle reminds us in Romans 9:5. Revelation 12:1-5 shows us Israel as viewed from God's standpoint, invested with all the symbols of authority over the earth. In the closing days, she is the object of Satan's enmity. He will stir up the powers against her, and do all that is in his power to destroy her. But he will not succeed. Israel is intended by God to have the supreme place in the earth; a remnant will therefore be preserved in mercy through all the horrors of the last scenes for this end. His word to His tried ones will be, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee, hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast" (Isaiah 26:20). He will provide for them a Zoar, even as for Lot in a former day (Genesis 19:1-38).

One more Scripture remains to be noticed — Revelation 3:10 : "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

This word is undoubtedly for the Church of God. It is part of the Lord's address to the Church in Philadelphia. But how different the language of this passage to those we have been considering! We do not find here counsel as to what to do in the time of trial, nor any promise of preserving grace, but simply, "I will keep thee from the hour." There is surely a vast difference between being preserved through the trouble, and being kept from it altogether. Enoch and Noah naturally come to mind here. The one told of judgment to come, but was translated to heaven before it fell; the other likewise warned of coming wrath, but, instead of being removed from the scene of judgment, was preserved through it in a shelter provided for him and his house by God. Enoch is a type of the Church of God, Noah is rather a figure of the godly remnant of Israel.

"The hour of temptation" is a wider term than the "great tribulation." The latter, as we have seen, is of but three and a half years' duration, beginning only in the midst of Daniel's seventieth week, when the false Christ changes his front and demands worship; the "hour of temptation" commences when he first appears, and covers, therefore, the whole of the last prophetic week, and possibly more besides. From it all the Church of God is to be preserved. We look for the Bright and Morning Star. Ere the judgments of God descend, we shall be taken out of this evil scene, and safely housed with Christ Himself in the Father's house on high.

Meanwhile His word is to us the word of His patience. He waits at the Father's right hand above, and we wait in the place of conflict below, for the same wondrous event, for the same blessed moment of joy. May it be increasingly a reality with every one of us, for His Name's sake!

Lamb of God! Thou soon in glory

Wilt to this sad earth return;

All Thy foes shall quake before Thee,

All that now despise Thee mourn.

All Thy saints shall then be with Thee,

With Thee in Thy kingdom reign;

Thine the praise, and Thine the glory,

Lamb of God, for sinners slain!

The Restoration of Israel.

The ultimate future of Israel is very different from that of Christendom. The latter will plunge into the darkest kind of apostasy, as has been already shown, with no restoration after wards; whereas Israel, after the severe purging of the latter-day crisis, will be brought into blessing and earthly glory. Scripture is blessedly full and plain as to this. Any who have difficulties as to the Jewish question will do well to ponder prayerfully, in the first instance, Romans 9:1-33; Romans 10:1-21; Romans 11:1-36. After having unfolded in the previous chapters the indiscriminate grace of God

proclaimed in the Gospel, the Apostle takes up the special promises made by God to Israel, and explains His dealings with regard to them. First, he shows that God is sovereign, and acts as He pleases. This really explains Israel's history in the past. God chose Isaac not Ishmael, though both were the sons of Abraham. Later He chose Jacob in preference to Esau. In this case both were children of one mother (which Isaac and Ishmael were not), and born at the same time. Again, He spared Israel in His sovereignty when they had forfeited everything by their worship of the golden calf, saying, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Romans 9:15). Thus Israel's place in the past was due to the sovereignty of God. There was no question of special merit or desert: He willed it, and that is all. On the same principle He has set them aside during the present period because of their sins and rejection of Messiah, and is dealing in sovereign grace with the Gentiles.

But has He done with the seed of Abraham for ever? By no means. The Apostle raises the question, "I say then, Hath God cast away His people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew" (Romans 11:1-2). He then proceeds to show that God has a remnant during the present time, while the spirit of slumber is upon the mass of the nation. These of course are incorporated in the Church of God, the body of Christ. But this is not all. God has not forgotten them as a people, and intends to reinstate them in His divine favour, with the full pardon of all their sins. They have been cut out of the olive tree because of their defection, but they shall be brought in once again. In Romans 11:23 we are shown that this is possible, "God is able to graft them in again;" in Romans 11:24 that it is probable, "How much more shall these... be grafted into their own olive tree?" Then the Apostle rises higher still in his reasoning and shows it to be certain, "Blindness in part is happened unto Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." And so all Israel shall be sated: as it is written, "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Romans 11:25-26).

There are three reasons why God must restore the people of Israel:

(1) His Word; (2) His Name; and (3) the death of Christ.

(1) HIS WORD. The promises of God to Abraham, confirmed later to Isaac, were unconditional. In sovereign grace He appeared to Abraham and said, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed... all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever... unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 12:3; Genesis 13:15; Genesis 15:18). These promises have never been really fulfilled. Israel has never inhabited the whole extent of the land, as here described. True, it was all under tribute in the days of Solomon, but that was not a sufficient answer to the promise of God. His intention was that they should inherit the land themselves and enjoy it apart from the presence of the stranger. Further, it is patent to all that they have not yet had any of it for an everlasting possession; for what they did take possession of they lost after a while by reason of sin, and were dispersed among the Gentiles. Let none suppose that because this was the case, there is no future glory for them. Though they have been unfaithful to God, He will not be unfaithful to them, but will make good all His word. This is strikingly reasoned out by the Holy Spirit in Galatians 3:15-18. There we read, "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; though it be a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his

seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many: but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise." This is very simple. Their law-breaking has not cancelled God's word. His promises were unconditional and before the law. They remain therefore to be made good at the end; for it is impossible for God to lie.

(2) HIS NAME. When at the first He called Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt, God said, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is My Name for ever, and this is My memorial unto all generations" (Exodus 3:15). More than this, He distinctly connected them with Himself under His Name Jehovah: "I am Jehovah, and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by My Name Jehovah was I not known to them" (Exodus 6:2-3). This Name expresses His unchangeableness, as Malachi 3:6 shows; in it, therefore, is bound up the restoration of the people, however guilty and undeserving. They have changed towards God, but blessed be His Name, He has never changed towards them, though obliged because of their sins and unbelief to hide His face from them, as it were, for a season. Let the following splendid declaration be pondered by all who think that God has done with Israel: "Thus saith Jehovah, if heaven above can be measured and the foundation of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all they have done, saith Jehovah" (Jeremiah 31:37). This is magnificent surely, and worthy of the God who uttered it.

(3) THE DEATH OF CHRIST. This is an additional reason, and a grandly fundamental one, why God will yet show mercy to guilty Israel. Does the reader remember the prophecy of Caiaphas in John 11:49-51? It was that Jesus should die for the nation. No doubt his thoughts about the matter and the thoughts of the Holy Spirit were very different, but his words contain the truth nevertheless. Believers should see more in the cross of Christ than the mere putting away of our sins. Thank God! He has borne our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24); but there is a part in that cross for Israel also. They will be brought to know this by-and-by. During Israel's long dark night of unbelief the memorial ox that precious sacrifice is before God (Leviticus 6:9). When the Lord Jesus is manifested in glory, they will mourn for Him, as Zechariah speaks. They will learn in that day that He whom their fathers pierced was wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their iniquities (Zechariah 12:9-14; Isaiah 53:5). What a discovery for Israel! what a lesson to learn after ages of unbelief! Thus will God place them — and that everlastingly — under the shelter of the precious, once-accomplished work of Christ.

Having considered these reasons for their restoration, let us examine some of the statements of Scripture as to it. Turn to Ezekiel 37:1-28. Here we have the Prophet in the midst of a valley of dry bones. He was told that these bones represented the whole house of Israel. "Behold, they say, our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts" (verse 11). Death is here used to describe their national condition. Death is variously used in the Word of God: (1) It describes the spiritual condition of the unconverted (Ephesians 2:1); (2) The separation of soul and body; (3) The final doom of the ungodly (Revelation 20:14); and (4) national dissolution, as here. The following passages may also be consulted: Isaiah 26:13, Isaiah 14:19; Daniel 12:2.

Ezekiel's vision in no way speaks of the resurrection of dead men, as such, nor of the conversion of sinners, though the chapter has at times been used for both these purposes. It is the national awakening of the people of Israel to the possession and enjoyment of their long-lost glory. With this corresponds the words of the Apostle in Romans 11:15 : "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? "This is the work of God alone; the time the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not till then will God look upon them with favour, nor put out His hand to restore them.

Any attempt to re-establish them in their land and national position prior to that day, however well-intentioned, will only end in disaster. Let this be well pondered. While on the other hand it is a serious thing to ill-treat or oppress the Jew; on the other hand it is solemn to interfere with the governmental dealings of God by attempting to reinstate them in their possession. They are scattered and broken under the hand of God. He it was Who expelled them for most serious reasons. Who will essay to reverse His sentence? It is no mere accident that has befallen them, but the righteous judgment of God. Ere they can have true restoration Israel must receive at the hands of Jehovah double for their sins (Jeremiah 16:18; Isaiah 40:2). He, and He alone, is entitled to fix the time when their warfare shall be accomplished and the indignation shall cease (Daniel 11:36).

Isaiah 18:1-7 is a highly interesting chapter in connection with Israel. It seems to predict an effort by some maritime power to gather them just before the time of the intervention of Jehovah. The chapter is not a burden, but a call. "Woe to the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia: that sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters, saying, Go, ye swift messengers) to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled!" (Isaiah 18:1-2). The land is not named, but three marks are given: (1) it is a distant land; (2) it is a maritime power; and (3) friendly to the Jews. There is no need to speculate as to its name; events will show in due course.

But Jehovah is not in the movement, His time not having arrived. However, He draws attention to it: "All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, see ye, when he lifteth up an ensign on the mountain, and when he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye. For so the Lord said unto me, I will take My rest, and I will consider in My dwelling place like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest" (Isaiah 18:3-4). The language may be obscure to some of our readers, but it clearly shows that while men are mistakenly active, God is not moving, but from His heavenly dwelling place He notes what they are doing. He considers their action; but He takes His rest, the due moment not having arrived for deliverance.

Will the enterprise succeed? Will the divine sentence of exile and chastisement thus be reversed for Israel? No. "For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches. They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth, and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them" (Isaiah 18:5-6). Man's scheme will thus be blasted. When all seems fair, and success seems certain, disaster will come. The people thus restored will but fall a prey to the powers around. With this Scripture before us we need not be surprised at any attempt to reinstate

scattered Israel in the land of their fathers. The closing verse of the chapter shows that when Jehovah intervenes on behalf of His people the results will be glorious and full. The once scattered and peeled people will be presented to Himself to be settled in peace for ever around His long-loved centre, the Mount Zion.

We will now consider the details of this. When they were expelled from the good land long ago it was in two parts. The ten tribes were carried away by the kings of Assyria; the two tribes, forming the kingdom of Judah, by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Scripture is silent as to the home-going of the two tribes. It simply regards them as in the land during the events of the last days. They will return in unbelief, and will acknowledge and suffer under the false Christ. They will either rebuild the temple, or adapt to their use some other existing building. Anyhow, we read of "the temple of God" and "the holy place" (2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 11:1-2; Matthew 24:15).

The mass of them will be very pleased with their leader, though the godly will have their misgivings from the first. He will come to them in his own name, and will be received, as the Lord Jesus warned (John 5:43). As their head he will form a seven years covenant with the Roman beast for protection, &-c. This Jehovah describes as a covenant with death and an agreement with hell (Isaiah 28:14-22), denouncing the pride and impiety which leads up to it. The reason of this covenant is apparently their dread of the Northern foe, called "the overflowing scourge." But their agreement will prove worthless, for their dreadful foe will chastise them nevertheless; and what is worse, their chosen leader will himself prove a worse enemy within — a veritable wolf in the fold. Alas, for guilty Judah! When the (Christ of God came they knew Him not. They discerned not the things which belonged unto their peace, nor the time of their visitation. Therefore the sorrow and scourging, the darkness and delusion.

The appearing of the Lord Jesus will deliver the godly remnant of Judah from this terrible enemy and persecutor. Matthew 24:29-31 makes this perfectly plain. He will answer their agonised cry for help and deliverance by His appearing in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. He will appear to their joy, and those who hate them shall be ashamed (Isaiah 64:5).

The re-gathering of the ten tribes will follow. The great trumpet shall be blown, and those who are ready to perish shall be brought together to worship Jehovah in the holy mount at Jerusalem (Isaiah 27:1, Isaiah 27:3). The trumpet of Matthew 24:31 refers to the same event, I have no doubt. Then will the feast of trumpets be fulfilled (Leviticus 23:23-26). When the silver trumpets were first instituted in connection with the tabernacle, they were for the calling together of the people (Numbers 10:1-3).

What a home-coming it will be after long centuries of wandering and desolation! What joy to God, and what blessing for the people of His choice! And, also, what a meeting of the tribes after dreary ages of separation and estrangement! Isaiah 49:18-23 graphically describes their meeting. To those already in the land — the two tribes — the Lord says: "Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together and come to thee." They shall clothe themselves with them as a garment, and the land will be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants. It is all most touchingly described by the Spirit. "Then shalt thou say in thine heart, who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?" Well may they ask. For centuries Zion has been bereaved of her children. Long has the land kept her Sabbaths.

But when Jehovah's time comes, how marvellous and glorious the change!

He will see to it that His own are brought home in a manner befitting the people of the Lord. The Gentiles shall bring Zion's sons in their arms, and her daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. Kings shall be their nursing fathers, and their queens their nursing mothers; and they, the ransomed of the Lord, shall return with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away (Isaiah 49:22-23; Isaiah 35:10).

Many wonder where these tribes are at the present time, and much time and labour have been spent in the endeavour to settle the question. But why should Christians exercise themselves as to such a matter? Where Scripture is silent, we do not well to be curious. Faith is assured that God knows their whereabouts, and that He will make it manifest in His own time and way. The table of shewbread in the sanctuary of old with its twelve loaves was ever before the Lord, and during the darkness the light of the golden candlestick shed its rays upon them (Leviticus 24:1-9). This is night for Israel beyond all question; but the eye of God is upon them, not one of the tribes is forgotten before Him. He knows where to lay hands upon them when He requires them for restoration and blessing.

It must not be supposed, however, that they are all Israel who are of Israel (Romans 9:6). The two tribes, as we have seen, will be severely sifted in the land under Antichrist, and but a third part will be brought through the fire for blessing (Zechariah 13:8-9). The mass will follow the Deceiver to their everlasting ruin and sorrow. The ten tribes will also be sifted, though not quite in the same way. They were not guilty of the grave sin of the rejection of the Messiah, as their brethren were. Judah will be the greater sufferer, being responsible before God for that fearful crime. Still, the other tribes will be put through the sieve, as Ezekiel 20:34-38 shows. Jehovah will bring them into the wilderness before restoring them to Canaan, and will there plead with them face to face. They must pass under His rod, that the rebels and the transgressors may be purged out. The remnant will then be brought in, to be uprooted no more for ever; for Jehovah will plant them in their own land, with His whole heart, and with His whole soul, as the Prophet assures us.

Then the nation will be one once more. They have been a divided people since the days of Rehoboam. Solomon's serious defection from the Lord caused the rending of the nation after his death. Jeroboam was divinely permitted to lead ten tribes away from their allegiance to the house of David (1 Kings 11:12). They have never been united since that day. They were often in open conflict with each other, the larger company being invariably in league with the kings of Syria. Then came the yet greater separation, when the ten tribes were deported by the kings of Assyria. These have never since been restored to their own possession.

The prophet Ezekiel was instructed as to their future unification in a very simple way. He was bidden to take two sticks, and to write on the one, "For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions;" and on the other, "For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions ;" and was then to join them to each other, making them one stick in his hand (Ezekiel 37:15-17). Thus will Jehovah do for Israel by-and-by. Their divisions will be healed, these always being the fruit of sin and failure, whether in Israel, the world, or the Church of God.

In the coming day of glory, Israel will have one King and one centre. Christ will be their head, the true David, the man after God's own heart (Ezekiel 37:24-25; Zechariah 14:9, Zechariah 14:16-17;

Hosea 1:11; Hosea 3:5). Then they will sing in reality, "Hosanna to the King of Israel that cometh in the Name of Jehovah." In the past it was but the excitement of nature, the cry changing in less than a week to "Away with Him. Crucify Him. We have no king but Caesar." In the future it will be a real work of the Spirit of God, producing sentiments in their hearts of a divine and abiding character. What a King Christ will be to them! David and Solomon both typified Him, but in what a faint degree! David sinned, and brought the pestilence among the poor sheep in consequence; Solomon dazzled them with glory and splendour, but the yoke was heavy and the oppression severe; and the bright season of glory ended in gloom and disaster. But the true David will bring peace and blessing to His people; the true Solomon will display before them a brighter glory, but His rule will be in righteousness and equity, with no defection on His part at the end. God has only One whom He can entrust with universal rule — His beloved Son, the Son of Man.

Not only will Israel then have but one King; they will have but one centre also. The ancient rivalry between Jerusalem and Samaria will be heard no more; Zion will be exalted to its rightful place as the chosen resting place of the Lord, the city of the great King. It will be an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations (Psalms 132:13-14; Psalms 47:2; Isaiah 60:15). "Jehovah loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God" (Psalms 137:2-3). From thence will the whole earth be administered, and from it will go forth the law and the word of the Lord. Jerusalem has long been trodden under foot by the Gentiles for the sins of her children, but God will yet favour her dust and take pleasure in her palaces. When the arrogant Gentile has been humbled to the dust, Jehovah's long-loved Zion will be restored to its divinely-appointed place in the earth.

When Zion is restored Israel will possess the sanctuary of God once more. This was a distinguishing mark of old, and it shall be so again, in the day to come. "I will place them, and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore... and the nations shall know that I Jehovah do sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore" (Ezekiel 37:26, Ezekiel 37:28). The plan of the new temple may be seen in Ezekiel 40:1-49, &c. The Shekinah cloud which left so reluctantly in the day of Israel's transgression will return again to their joy. The priesthood will be restored, and the sacrifices, and some of the feasts. The sacrifices of the future will, of course, be commemorative in their character, looking back to the one great sacrifice which is the foundation of all blessing, whether for heaven or earth. Of the feasts, all will be restored but the feast of Pentecost and the Day of Atonement. The first is now having its accomplishment in the call of the Church of God; the second will be completed in its last part when the great High Priest comes out of the heavenly sanctuary, and shows Himself to His own.

Though Israel will thus have the sanctuary of God once more, they will be, as it were, but its guardians. God intends the Gentiles to have a part in the blessings and privileges of it. "Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar: for Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (Isaiah 54:7). Year by year the spared ones of the nations will go up to Jerusalem to keep the feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16). This will not arouse Jewish enmity or jealousy then. They will no longer be the coldly conservative people that they have been. In the early days of Christianity it drew out all their rage that the Gentiles should even hear the Gospel, though they had no regard for it themselves. What changes grace works! In the Day of their blessing, they will gladly share with others the favours so richly bestowed upon them, and will thus

fulfil their high and holy mission in the earth.

The whole nation will be converted. When they are brought under the power of the New Covenant, God will put His laws in their hearts and write them in their minds. They will not need to appeal to each other's consciences as to sin, nor to exhort each other as to the Lord, for all will know Him from the least to the greatest (Jeremiah 31:31-34). A mighty change, surely, when we consider their present alienated state!

A fresh outpouring of the Spirit will also be experienced at that time. The early rain fell on the Day of Pentecost, and marvellous have been the results. The latter rain will fall on Israel in the day of their millennial glory. God will put His Spirit within them, pouring Him out from on high (Ezekiel 37:14; Isaiah 32:15). Joel's prophecy, quoted by Peter in Acts 2:1-47, will then be completely accomplished. No fresh outpouring must be looked for until then. During this period of grace the Holy Spirit is here as the birthright portion of every individual Christian and of the Church of God. It is ours to walk in the Spirit and to be filled with Him. Many are vague as to this. They observe that the spiritual condition of the Church at large is low, and deplore it, but think that the only corrective is another outpouring or baptism of the Spirit. This is not the case, however well-intentioned the souls may be who think so. The real need is more simple faith in the mighty fact that the Holy Spirit is present on earth. Let us use the power we have, and God will honour the effort.

When Israel is thus converted and blessed with the Spirit the link of relationship between them and Jehovah will be fully restored. Israel has been an unfaithful wife to Jehovah, playing with many lovers, so that He has had to divorce her and put her away. But the time of her widowhood is drawing to a close, the Lo Ammi sentence will soon be reversed, and God will once more have pleasure in His people. In the past she did not know, in her blindness, who it was that really loved her, and gave her corn, and wine and oil, and decked her with jewels; but when grace operates in her heart, she will turn to Him in contrition and repentance, that she may be received to His heart once more. "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her (or, speak to her heart).... And it shall be at that day, saith Jehovah, that thou shalt call Me Ishi (my husband); and shalt call Me no more Baali (my lord). I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name" (Hosea 2:14-17). The Book of Psalms and the Song of Solomon open up to us the dealings of God with Israel in that day; the one showing His work in their consciences and the other His work in their hearts. Israel shall be His in reality in that day of glory.

Those will be days of universal blessing. Not by our means will God fill the earth with His glory, but by means of restored and converted Israel. The following is their language rather than the language of the Church of God: —

"God be merciful unto us and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us, that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise Thee, O God, let all the people praise Thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for Thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise Thee, O God, let all the people praise Thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us: and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him" (Psalms 67:1-7).

Well might the Psalmist say, as he thought of the coming glory: "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be His glorious Name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen and Amen" (Psalms 72:18-19).

Thy sympathies and hopes are ours;

Dear Lord! we wait to see

Creation, all — below, above,

Redeemed and blest by Thee

The Lord Will Reign

The Lord Will Reign - A Series of Papers on Prophecy

By W W Fereday.

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Preface.

This volume completes the series of "Papers on Prophecy," which have been published at intervals during the past twelve months. The nearness of the return of the Lord makes even the smallest contribution to the already extensive literature upon prophetic subjects, of some value to souls. It is our earnest desire that many who already love our Lord Jesus may be helped and blessed as they read these papers; and if they fall into the hands of any who are still unprepared to meet the Bridegroom, may the gracious Spirit of God lead them to a saving knowledge of Christ. This is our desire and prayer.

W. W. F. September, 1898.

The Olivet Prophecy.

Matthew 24:1-51 & Matthew 25:1-46.

Probably no student of the prophetic word will deny the great importance of the prophecy that we are now to consider. On all hands this is regarded as one of the most comprehensive utterances found in the Scriptures; which, if rightly apprehended, will materially help to the elucidation of many other parts of the Inspired Word. It must be evident to all that this prophecy covers a wide area, giving us a very large view of the ways of God with the earth and His own people in it.

This prophecy, spoken by the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Olives, cannot be rightly understood, unless the object of the Spirit of God in the Gospel of Matthew is clearly seen. Matthew differs from all the other evangelists in the style and arrangement of his Gospel. The evident aim of the Holy Spirit by his means is to present the Lord Jesus to us as the Messiah of Israel. The incidents recorded, the manner of their introduction into the narrative, the parables related, and the Old Testament Scriptures quoted, all combine to make this perfectly plain to such as examine the

Divine Word with care. He is brought upon the scene as the Son of David and the Son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1-25), unlike what is found in the Gospel of Luke, where His genealogy is traced back to Adam and to God (Luke 3:1-38).

Matthew's Gospel is really the record of the trial of the great question whether Israel would receive their Messiah or not. Alas! the story is well known to us all. "He came unto His own (things) and His own (people) received Him not" (John 1:11) He found no welcome in Israel, though He came among them with hands full of blessing. He was despised, rejected, and abhorred, as the Prophet foretold. Therefore He spoke constantly of changes to be brought in. In the seven parables of Matthew 13:1-58: He unfolded "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven," showing the form the kingdom was about to take through the sin of the chosen people. In Matthew 16:1-28, after the remarkable confession of Simon Peter, He went further, and spoke of the Church — "Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell (Hades) shall not prevail against it." Israel's setting aside was at hand, and God was about to give effect to other purposes and plans.

Matthew 23:1-39 is exceedingly solemn. First, the Lord denounced the leaders and teachers of the people, exposing their hypocrisy and iniquity; and then poured out His sorrow and lamentation over blinded Israel heedlessly rushing onward to ruin, forsaking their own mercies. He loved His people — they were the chosen seed of Abraham, the friend of God; He. felt the position keenly. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:37-39).

The force of these words must be seen in order to have a true understanding of the prophecy which follows. Three things are shown, or at least implied, in them: (1) His going away because of Israel's condition; (2) The resulting desolation of the people and sanctuary; and (3) His future appearing when Israel will welcome Him with joy. On this the Olivet Prophecy is based.

Having poured out His lamentation, the Lord departed from the temple. The disciples drew His attention to its costly buildings, and got in reply, "See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." This drew out the three questions found in Matthew 23:3 : "Tell us when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world (age)?"

It is of moment to grasp what was in the minds of the disciples when they put these questions to the Lord. Many readers of Scripture persist in regarding them as representatives of the Church of God in this matter, accepting all the resulting counsel as for our own path. But it is plain that the Twelve had not the Church in mind at all just then. It is freely admitted that they became subsequently part of that wonderful unity, but they stood in no such position and relationship when with the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Olives. They were Jews, with minds full of earthly hopes and prospects, founded upon the prophecies of the Old Testament. They firmly believed Jesus to be Israel's Messiah, and they counted on Him to remove all difficulties out of the way and set up His throne in Zion. This was more or less in their minds all through their companionship with Him, even beyond death into resurrection (Matthew 20:21; Luke 24:21; Acts 1:6). Hence their inquiries. If Jerusalem and the temple were to be overthrown, where would be the promised kingdom? And if

the Lord was really going away before the setting in of the kingdom glory, when would He return?

These beyond all just controversy were their difficulties. The prophecy on Mount Olivet was intended by the Lord to meet them. Thus Israel is in view throughout, as we shall see even more plainly as we proceed with our examination of it.

At this point the reader should remark the difference between Matthew 24:1-51 and the parallel chapter in the Gospel by Luke (Luke 21:1-38). It is one of the most striking proofs of the Spirit's inspiration of the Word of God. Both evangelists record the Lord's prophecy, but Matthew was led to dwell on the Lord's replies to the second and third questions, relating to the time of the end, whilst Luke gives prominence to the first question with its answer.

It is important to observe this carefully. Man would not have ordered matters thus. But God, not man, is the real Author of the Scriptures, and had different designs in using the various vessels, whether understood by them or not. Thus Luke dwells on the overthrow of Jerusalem and the temple, saying very little indeed about the trials and sorrows at the end of the age. It should be remarked that the Christian period comes in between Luke 21:24-25 as a timeless gap.

Now let us briefly survey Matthew 24:1-51 and Matthew 25:1-46. The prophecy naturally divides itself thus —

Part 1 — Matthew 24:4-14.

Part 2 — Matthew 24:15-31.

Part 3 — Matthew 24:32-51, Matthew 25:1-30.

Part 4 — Matthew 25:31-46.

Part 1. is general. The Lord describes the general circumstances of His servants until the end of the age. That which follows is, in a certain sense, the expansion of these verses. The same principle may be observed in Revelation 11:15-18. There we have Christ's appearing with all its results, reaching through the kingdom on to the time of the judgement of the dead. All the rest of the Book of Revelation is really summed up in those few words. It is so in Matthew 24:4-14. The servants of Christ must be prepared for deceivers, for tumults in the world, and for persecution for His Name's sake. All this is more dwelt upon in Mark's account of the prophecy. His special theme is Christ as the Servant of God; consequently anything bearing on service has a large place in his Gospel.

These counsels are unquestionably of value to those who serve the Lord Jesus during the present time, but in their strict application, they are for the witnesses in the latter-day crisis. "The gospel of the kingdom" will be their grand theme. It will bring them suffering and rejection assuredly, but those who endure to the end, until the Son of Man appears, shall be delivered and rewarded by Him.

Part 2. enters more into details. In Matthew 24:15 we read, "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation." This is a very plain mark, leaving no doubt as to the scene of the sorrows described. This will be set up in "the holy place." Where in all the earth does God own such a place, save in Jerusalem? When in the past was an idol (abomination) set up there?

Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed a few years after the Lord's words were spoken, and the temple has never been restored since. But plainly it will be set up again, and the Lord's words mean nothing less than a serious attempt to introduce idolatry into it.

"How will this be?" some may say. The Word of God answers the question clearly. A false Christ in the last days will be welcomed by the Jewish people, as the Lord solemnly warned them in John 5:43: He will apparently find a number of them in their land, with their temple and ritual restored (Revelation 11:1-2). He will present himself to them, and will be received. All will go on well for a time, but in due course, he will manifest his true character and designs. Backed up by the new power of the West, he will stop the daily sacrifice, and set up an idol in the sanctuary, and even sit there himself as God (Daniel 12:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:4). Then will begin a reign of terror for the godly. At that juncture Satan will be expelled from the heavens, and will come to earth filled with great wrath, knowing that he has but a short time (Revelation 12:7-12).

The Lord's counsels now before us refer to this solemn period. The godly are to flee, not staying even to get their clothes. The mountains of Judea are to be their hiding-place, their Zoar. So compassionate is the Lord for them in their trial, that He bids them pray that this may not happen in the winter, or on the Sabbath day. Either would be serious. A winter flight, without time to fetch an overcoat, would be attended with much suffering on the one hand; and on the other a conscientious Jew would be in a serious dilemma if the signal were given on the Sabbath day. But these are Jewish marks, beyond doubt. What has the Church of God to do with the mountains of Judea, or the Sabbath day? All this is followed by the great tribulation, already considered in these papers. So violent and severe will be the onslaught of the enemy, that but for divine intervention, no flesh would be saved. How comforting it is for suffering saints to know that God holds the reins!

The fugitives must be on their guard against deceptions in their hour of distress. If thwarted in his designs by their flight, Satan will devise another course, and seek to persuade them that their longed for Deliverer has arrived at some point. This the saints must watch against. Their agonised hearts will be yearning for Christ to appear in accordance with the testimony of the prophets. The character of their hope, in contrast with that of Christians, will expose them to the snare. Whilst Christians look for Christ to descend into the air only, the Jew looks for the Lord to come to the earth. How easily therefore might these bewildered and perplexed ones be deceived! They are not to heed such reports. Such are of the Serpent. When the Lord Jesus really comes, they will not need to be informed of the fact, for as a lightning flash He will manifest Himself to Israel, and every eye shall see Him. "The carcass" helps further to fix the scene of these sorrows (Matthew 24:28). It is Israel (Isaiah 24:19; Ezekiel 37:11); the vultures being her many enemies.

The Lord's appearing will be attended by solemn signs, in the heavens and on the earth. Sun, moon, and stars will be affected. "Then shall all the tribes of the earth (or land) mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30). This is not His coming as Bridegroom for the Church, but His public manifestation with His saints, as Colossians 3:4 speaks. All who have been previously caught up will come with Him in the solemn day of which we are speaking. This will be the Father's proof to the world, that He loves us as He loves His Son (John 17:23).

The great trumpet is then blown, and the angels are employed for the gathering together of God's elect. Who are these? The ten tribes of Israel, I believe. The two tribes are the only sufferers in the

land at the end; the ten tribes will be brought home at the Lord's appearing. Isaiah 27:1-2, Isaiah 27:13, speaks of their gathering together. The following Scriptures speak of them as God's elect, and as His saints, Isaiah 65:9-22; Psalms 1:5. At this point in the prophecy, the Lord leaves the main subject, and turns aside into a lengthy parenthesis, resuming the thread at Matthew 25:31.

Part 3. is, as remarked, a parenthesis, extending from Matthew 24:32-51, Matthew 25:1-30. It consists of six parables, containing moral instruction and warning. But they are evidently divided into two sets of three each. First we get three parables bearing strikingly on the circumstances of the godly remnant of the Jews: (1) the fig tree; (2) the days of Noah; and (3) the thief in the night. The fig tree (Matthew 24:32-35) is the well-known symbol of the Jewish nation (Matthew 21:18-20). When the events described in this chapter are seen, the godly are to understand that the Messiah is near at hand. Some find difficulty in the words, "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled" (Matthew 24:34), supposing the Lord to mean that all must be accomplished within the life-time of those who then heard Him. This has led some to interpret this chapter as referring to the overthrow of Jerusalem, which has had the effect of throwing them entirely off the track. "Generation" is used here in a moral sense, as in Psalms 12:6-7, and simply means that the unbelieving, Jewish people shall not cease to exist as such until all these words be fulfilled in them. Compare also Matthew 12:43-45. Hence their existence amongst us to this hour, in spite of all their vicissitudes and sufferings.

The days of Noah (Matthew 24:36-42) are eminently parabolic in connection with the Jews. This patriarch was not translated to heaven before the judgement fell (as Enoch), but was left to pass through it, though preserved by God. Thus it will be with the Jewish remnant. They will be here, as the chosen of God, in the midst of a corrupt and apostate world. When the Lord Jesus appears, there will be a discriminating judgement in Israel; some will be cut off in anger, others will be left for kingdom-blessing.

The thief in the night (Matthew 24:43-44) follows, showing the need of vigilance. This is the manner of the Lord's coming in connection with the ungodly, not His descent for the Church (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10). These parables close with, "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh."

The parables that follow present an entirely different line of instruction. The faithful and evil servants (Matthew 24:45-51) furnish rather a picture of Christendom than of anything in Judaism. From this point until we reach Matthew 25:31, all reference to "the Son of Man" is dropped, the insertion of the words in Matthew 25:13 being an error, as probably most Bible readers are aware. The parable of the servants speaks of service amongst the household of God. The talents show a wider character of service, but the Lord Jesus commences with this. Does it not show that He greatly values care bestowed on His own during His absence? Many in this day speak and act as if the Gospel were everything. This is to miss the mind of God seriously. The Gospel is highly important, no doubt, and has a very large place in the divine heart; but God will have His own cared for and fed, nevertheless. This is what we get in the first of the second series of these parenthetic parables. Such as have served well in His house will be rewarded for it at His return; but evil servants who have served ill will be solemnly judged. What a correct portraiture of what has happened in Christendom! When the hope leaked away, and men began to say, "My Lord delayeth His coming," all sorts of evil entered, to the Lord's dishonour. Both leaders and led

dropped into the world, and a long dark reign of priestly domination and tyranny followed, in sad accordance with the words of the Lord in this place.

The parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) follows very aptly. If the parable of the servants shows how the leaders have acted during the Lord's absence in heaven, this reveals how the whole mass of professors have declined from the Lord. The number is expressive, "ten" speaking to us of human responsibility. Man, as a responsible creature, always fails, whether in Israel, the Church, or elsewhere. Such is the humbling story, wherever we turn in the Word of God.

The picture here is very striking, yet simple. "The kingdom of heaven" during the present time is the sphere of Christian profession. Later, the kingdom will take a different form, and be the scene of the display of Christ's earthly glory. Christian professors, then, are likened to virgins, who went forth, lamp in hand, to meet the bridegroom. Such was the ground taken at the first. Those who bore the Lord's name stood apart from the world as belonging to Christ, and looked for His return from heaven. How much sorrow and shame would have been spared had this position and character been maintained throughout! "But while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept" (verse 5). Not only the foolish — the merely nominal professors — but the wise also, possessed of the oil of the Holy Spirit though they were. It is sadly true. For many dreary centuries the hope was lost completely. Let the works of post-apostolic writers be examined, and it will be found that all lost the distinctiveness of the Christian hope, merging it in the coming of the Lord to judge the world at the end.

Dr. Burton in his "Lectures on Ecclesiastical History" speaks of one Papias (A.D. 163) as holding some peculiar opinions." He believed that, previous to the final judgement, there would be a resurrection of the just, who would reign with Christ upon earth for a thousand years. Eusebius, who acquaints us with this fact, is probably right when he says that Papias misinterpreted the apostolic declarations, and misunderstood their figurative expressions." This is sufficient to show how the mass had declined. In Papias' ideas, we discern the remains of the truth concerning the Lord's coming, which to those of his time were but peculiar opinions, and this less than a hundred years after the departure of Paul!

But the Lord would not suffer His own to remain in this condition until His coming; so we read of the midnight cry, "Behold the bridegroom: go ye out to meet Him." This undoubtedly took place at the commencement of the present century, when the Spirit of God drew the attention of many to some of the truths of Scripture long overlooked, and among them the true hope of the Church of God. What a shaking it caused! What a putting aside of things unbecoming to Christ! What devotedness of heart to His precious person and work! Would that we could see the same freshness and fervour now! Let us examine our hearts, beloved. The Lord looks for affectionate desire after Himself — ardent longing for His coming again. He prizes this more than anything we can render to Him.

The great separation is coming. The foolish, with their oil-less lamps, will soon find themselves outside for ever. The Lord knoweth them that are His. How is it with the reader? Your profession of His name may be ever so loud, and your religious reputation among men ever so high, but if there be not living faith in the Son of God, He will disown you in the coming day. All who have been cleansed from their sins by His precious blood, and sealed with the Holy Ghost, He will take in with Him to the marriage, and the door will be shut.

The talents (Matthew 25:14-30) speak to us again of service during the Lord's absence, but of a more varied character than the parable of the faithful and evil servants. Here He entrusts His goods to His stewards, to each according to his ability. The principle is similar to that in Ephesians 4:1-32. There we have the gifts of the risen Head for the edification and blessing of His members below. Gift and ability are distinct. A man may have natural ability as a speaker; we can readily understand the Lord entrusting him with the gift of an evangelist, provided, of course, that the other necessary qualities are there also.

The Lord's servants should keep before them their Lord's return, when all that they have wrought will be inquired into. "After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them" (verse 19). This corresponds with 1 Corinthians 3:1-23: There we have some commended and rewarded, and others who have missed the reward; and a third class of servants, who, because evil, are destroyed. Service does not affect the salvation of our souls, that being founded on the accomplished work of Christ; but it will materially affect our reward at the Lord's return, and our place in His millennial kingdom.

The Lord graciously notes all the good of His saints. Every little act of loving service is faithfully recorded by Him. It is sweet to observe that He said the same words to the one who had traded well with the two talents, as to him who did well with the five. The measure and capacity were different, but each was faithful with what he had, which is all that the Lord looks for in any of us. But are we thus doing our best for Him?

The evil servant is cast out into outer darkness. His hypocritical excuse betrays plainly that he never knew his Lord at all. Would any who have ever tasted His love and grace call Him "a hard man"? Certainly not. The doom of the false servant is certain. With all his privileges and religious status, he is not the Lord's, and is thus rejected solemnly. What a warning for all who venture to serve Him and to preach His word, never having really known Him!

This brings us to the close of the parenthesis in the Lord's prophecy. We will now only consider

Part 4. On this part, extending from Matthew 25:31-46, we can afford to be brief, having gone into it at some length in a previous paper. The thread of the prophecy is resumed from Matthew 24:31, where it was dropped in order to bring in the parables. There we have the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; here we have what will follow that solemn event. "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory; and before Him shall be gathered all nations (or the Gentiles): and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left" (Matthew 25:31-33) . This session is not the final judgement of the dead, but the King's inquiry into a particular matter. How have the Gentiles treated those whom He graciously styles "My brethren"? These are the Jewish preachers of the Gospel of the Kingdom during the sorrows of the last days. Some will treat them well, receiving their message, and will be spared to enjoy the blessings of Christ's millennial reign; others will treat them scornfully and with cruelty, to their own solemn judgement. Their punishment is everlasting, their conduct having plainly manifested the enmity of their hearts to God and Christ; the righteous will pass into life eternal, though in an earthly condition.

This brings us to the door of the Lord's glorious kingdom, when the age of the law gives place to the age of Messiah; and here this remarkable prophecy ends. The Lord grant understanding of it to every reader, for His Name's sake.

Hallelujah! for the Lord

God omnipotent shall reign:

Hallelujah! let the word

Echo round the earth and main.

See Jehovah's banner furled,

Sheathed His sword: He speaks, 'tis done;

And the kingdoms of this world

Are the kingdoms of His Son.

He shall reign from pole to pole

With illimitable sway;

He shall reign, when like a scroll

Yonder heavens have passed away.

The Times of the Gentiles

This is a term used by the Lord Jesus to denote the period of Gentile supremacy in the earth (Luke 21:24). It covers the whole period from the overthrow of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar until the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus for the deliverance of the people of Israel and for the establishment of His own millennial kingdom.

It fell to Daniel's lot to give us the particulars. His book has a unique place in the inspired volume, and is, in consequence, of a very important character. It traverses ground not pursued by any other prophet. The prophets in general pass over in silence the time of Gentile dominion. They dealt with the consciences of the people in Israel and Judah, as to their moral state at the time of their testimony, and then pass on to the coming of Christ, when all God's purposes concerning the earth, delayed by the failure of the chosen seed, will be fully and gloriously accomplished.

But Daniel's line is quite different. He had no direct word for the people as to their state and prospects, but was entrusted with revelations as to the intervening period between their setting aside and their final restoration in grace. His book is in two parts. Daniel 1:1-21; Daniel 2:1-49; Daniel 3:1-30; Daniel 4:1-37; Daniel 5:1-31; Daniel 6:1-28 record visions granted to the heathen monarch, Nebuchadnezzar, with Daniel's interpretations of them, some connected historical events being also added. Daniel 7:1-28; Daniel 8:1-27; Daniel 9:1-27; Daniel 10:1-21; Daniel 11:1-45; Daniel 12:1-13: give us the visions vouchsafed to the prophet himself, wherein the same ground is gone over as with Nebuchadnezzar, But in a much fuller way, and with special reference to the people of God, i.e., the nation of Israel.

Daniel 1:1-21 opens with the solemn statement that the king of Babylon besieged and took Jerusalem, taking king and people captive, and removing the vessels of the House of God to Babylon. This is very important to observe, as it gives us the ground on which the prophecies of Daniel proceed. The throne of David was the throne of Jehovah (1 Chronicles 29:23), and Jerusalem was the city of God, the city of the Great King (Psalms 48:2, Psalms 48:8). God's intention from the first has been to administer the earth by means of the people of Israel. They are the centre of His ways as regards the earth. "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deuteronomy 32:8). Here we learn that the division of the earth among the descendants of Noah, recorded in Genesis 10:1-32; Genesis 11:1-32, was no mere matter of chance, but regulated by the Most High in view of His future purpose. Israel, as we have said, is His centre. Jerusalem is His divinely chosen seat of government, and the house of David its earthly administrators.

All this failed of old, as, alas! everything does that is entrusted to the responsibility of man. Israel forsook Jehovah their God, and proved an unfaithful witness to the surrounding nations. The house of David turned away from Him — its choicest representative, Solomon, leading the way in evil. God cannot be a party to His own dishonour. Israel having sunk to the level of those around, if not in some respects even lower, it was impossible for God to maintain them in the high position in which He had set them, more especially as every faithful testimony by means of the many prophets raised up was of no avail. The result of all was that Jehovah overthrew the throne which He had established, banishing the house of David and the guilty nation from the good land, and granted supreme power to the Gentiles for a season. This power has been abused by its Gentile holders, even as by Israel of old, but it will remain with them till the coming of the Son of Man, whose right is the dominion and glory.

Daniel 2:1-49 gives us the vision vouchsafed to Nebuchadnezzar. It was at once a prophetic unfolding of the future and a testimony to him personally. He was now supreme in the earth. Every foe had been put down, and he had reached the summit of earthly glory and majesty. How would he use his power and position? The dream was sent that he might learn that his position had not been reached by mere skill or might, but that the hand of Jehovah was in it. Hence he was responsible to act as His steward on the throne of the earth.

It is not necessary to dwell on the king's agitation of mind after seeing the vision, nor on his unreasonable demand on the Chaldeans, &c., whereby the impotence of merely human wisdom was made manifest. Nor need we dwell on his tyrannical decree, or Daniel's exercise of heart before God about the affair; but will proceed directly to the vision and its interpretation. The prophet said, "Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:31-35). "This is the dream." In this vast image composed of four metals, Gentile

monarchy is viewed as a whole, with its various deteriorations. We will dwell more fully on the different powers presently; it will suffice now to name them — Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. They are all brought to an end by the crushing violence of the stone cut out without hands, which then becomes a great mountain, filling the whole earth.

Some have thought this stone to be the Gospel, but a moment's reflection will convince any thoughtful reader that this is a mistake. The Gospel of God's grace is not designed to overthrow and scatter the kingdoms of the earth, but to save individual souls in order to have part with the Son of God in heaven. The Gospel leaves earthly power where it finds it, calling those who believe out of the world to be pilgrims and strangers in it until the Lord comes. The stone is Christ, coming in kingdom, power, and glory, to put down all rule authority, and power. God intends to place all things under His feet, and to give Him a kingdom which shall rule over all (Hebrews 2:6-8; Psalms 8:1-9)This will be brought in by judgement. His path to the throne will be resisted when He appears, to the discomfiture and ruin of His foes, and to the destruction of their kingdoms for ever (Psalms 45:3-5; Daniel 2:44; Revelation 19:11-21). The whole scene will then be placed under the hand of One whom God can trust, unlike Nebuchadnezzar, or even Solomon with all his wisdom and glory.

Turn now to Daniel 7:1-28, where the unfolding of these matters is fuller, and with special reference to the people of God. This vision was granted to the prophet "in the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon." It is well to note this. Men do not like the thought that God knows the end from the beginning, and is able to speak of those who are not, as though they were. The Babylonish power was not yet broken, yet God made known to His servant its successor in the dominion, pursuing the theme right on to the coming of the Son of Man.

"Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another" (Daniel 7:2-3). Here the different Gentile empires are viewed, not as a whole, as in Daniel 2:1-49, but separately. The sea is an emblem of the nations, the winds being disturbing elements in general. Thus each of these empires arose out of the upheaval of the nations. Some may ask, "Why are they shown as wild beasts?" We learn in this figure their moral character in the eyes of God. Beasts live for the gratification of their lusts, without any sense of responsibility towards God. The figure is a true one. Neither Babylon, nor Persia, etc., ruled for God; love of power and greed of conquest marked each and all of them in a greater or less degree.

The first beast is easily recognised. It was "like a lion, having eagle's wings." This is the power of Babylon. Jeremiah 4:7 alludes to it under the figure of a lion, and Ezekiel 17:3 as an eagle. Jeremiah 49:19-22 unites the two figures. In Nebuchadnezzar's vision it was shown as the head of gold. This was the power to which God committed dominion after the setting aside of Israel and the house of David. It is a remarkable fact that while Israel was still owned by God, no power was permitted to attain supremacy in the earth. Both Egypt and Assyria aspired to it and contended for it, but neither obtained the coveted position. But when the due time came for the overthrow of the throne of David, the rising power of Babylon was permitted to subdue both the ancient empires named, and so became supreme among the nations. The continuance of this depended on faithfulness to the trust committed by Him who rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will. Babylon proved unfaithful, and consequently was set aside. In Daniel 7:4 we

have its humiliation shown in a very striking way. The prophet beheld the lion's wings plucked: "and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it." Another prophet had some time previously given the limits of its dominion. Jehovah said through Jeremiah, "And now have I given all these lands into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him. And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come," etc. (Jeremiah 27:6-7) How comprehensive is the word of God!

Babylon's destroyer and successor was shown to Daniel as a bear raising up itself on one side, having three ribs in its mouth between its teeth (Daniel 7:5). This is the Medo-Persian power, the well-known captor of mighty Babylon. The figure used aptly sets forth its ferocity and greed of conquest. In its one-sidedness we may observe the accuracy of the Spirit of God in the details of Scripture. In the next chapter, where the same empire is expressed by a ram with two horns, we learn that one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last (Daniel 8:3). This is a reference to the fact that this was a two-branched power, and that the leading branch — the Persian — was the younger. Thus does the Spirit of God take notice of a simple and well-known historical fact.

The Medo-Persian power was shown to Nebuchadnezzar as a breast and arms of silver, and pronounced "inferior" to his own (Daniel 2:39). This inferiority was not in extent of dominion, but in character of rule. Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute monarch — "whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up, and whom he would he put down" (Daniel 5:19). The succeeding power was more limited as to this, the princes, etc., playing an important part in the government. Thus Darius found himself unable to save an innocent man from the den of lions, though he greatly wished to do so. The empire that followed — the Grecian — was more military in its character, its ruler being, to a large degree, under the influence of his generals; while the Roman empire, shown as iron in the Babylonish king's dream, was a strange blending of the imperial and the democratic.

The third monarchy appeared before Daniel as a leopard having four wings on its back, and four heads (Daniel 7:6). This, as already observed, is the Grecian. Here it is important to make a few remarks as to the interpretation of these figures. It has been asserted that, in order to understand the visions of Daniel aright, the student must be well acquainted with the facts of ancient history. It has even been said that these throw light on the Word of God! Let the reader beware of admitting such an idea into the mind. The Word of God needs no human compositions to throw light on it — it is light itself, shining brightly for the blessing of our souls in the midst of darkness. It is admitted, of course, that historical facts confirm the Word of God when its prophecies have been fulfilled, but God has given His word that His saints may know His mind before the things come to pass, and are patent to everybody. If the student will but compare Scripture in prayerful dependence on the Holy Ghost, he will be able to grasp its import, even though he may be very deficient in his mind, as to many of the great historical events of the past.

To proceed with our chapter. The first of the Gentile powers was still running its course, yet the Spirit of God goes on to speak of the third and even the fourth. Who could declare such things but God Himself, who knows the end from the beginning, and to whom time is nothing, everything being to His mind one eternal now? Thus in Daniel 8:21, the Grecian power is expressly named as

the conqueror of the Medo-Persian. Its rapidity of conquest is set forth by the figure of a leopard (one of the swiftest of beasts after its prey), with the addition of four wings of a fowl to accelerate its movements. So rapid was its progress, that when shown as a goat in Daniel 8:5, it is said it "touched not the ground." In such a way the Spirit of God takes notice of the campaigns and victories of Alexander the Great. After his death, his kingdom was divided between his four great commanders, as we read "it had four heads." The great horn of the rough he-goat being broken, in place of it came up four notable ones (Daniel 8:8, Daniel 8:22).

The fourth wild beast particularly attracted the notice of Daniel the prophet. "After this, I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly, and it had great iron teeth, it devoured and brake in pieces and stamped the residue with the feet of it, and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns" (Daniel 7:7). This cruel nondescript is the power of Rome. We need not go outside the covers of Scripture to interpret it. In the opening of the New Testament we find, not Babylon, Persia, or Greece, supreme in the earth, but Rome, and under its government (Christ was born into the world (Luke 2:1; Luke 3:1).

"It had ten horns," these being ten kings (Daniel 7:24). Never was this true in the past. The Roman empire was under one government. True, in the latter days of its supremacy many of the emperors associated others with themselves in the administration of their vast dominions, but never was there anything of the kind described in Daniel's vision. Here we have ten horns — ten kings, and one arising among them becoming their leader and head. What does this prove? Most assuredly that this vast power, so long scattered and broken, has a history yet before it, for Scripture cannot be broken, its every word must be fulfilled.

Now this is exactly what is revealed in the Book of Revelation 13:1, John saw a strange beast arise out of the sea (the tumult of the nations), combining in itself most, if not all, of the features of the various Gentile monarchies spoken of by Daniel. We learn more still in Revelation 17:8. "The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition, and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not and yet is" (or "shall be present "). This fully explains the matter. "The beast was" — i.e., it existed in the past, "and is not." There is no such power now, but it will be revived by the power of Satan in the last days for the accomplishment of his evil designs against Christ and His saints. He will succeed in bringing together once more the atoms of that mighty power that has been in a state of dissolution since the days of Honorius.

The little horn is its last head. Three of the first horns were plucked up by him before the eyes of the prophet. This probably means that the beginning of his great power will be the subjugation of three kingdoms, which leads to seven others uniting together under his presidency. This may be judged advisable when the time comes because of the serious growth of democratic principles, making it well-nigh impossible for rulers to hold their people in check. But however it may be brought about, the general fact is plain that the Roman empire of the future will be a confederacy of ten kingdoms, each ruled over by its own sovereign, but all submitting to the general leadership of the little horn.

This personage must not be confounded either with the Antichrist, on the one hand, or with the little horn of Daniel 8:9, on the other. Antichrist is a religious rather than a political leader, his

kingdom-power apparently being confined to the land of Israel, where he will be accepted as the promised Messiah (Daniel 11:36). He will be in league with the Western Chief, undoubtedly, but must not be confounded with him. Revelation 13:1-18 : shows both the distinction and the connection. The little horn of Daniel 8:1-27 is expressly stated to arise out of one of the four divisions of Alexander's empire, and is identical, I have no doubt, with the king of the North in Daniel 11:1-45.

The Roman head is solemnly described in our chapter by the Holy Spirit. "He shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High (or high places), and think to change times laws, and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time" (Daniel 7:25). Here we have three things stated of him. (1) He is a boastful blasphemer. Compare Revelation 13:1-6. Having received his throne and authority from the dragon, he defies and blasphemes the God of heaven. (2) He is a persecutor. He and his coadjutor, the Man of Sin, will seek to stamp out all confession of God and His truth, and thus will come about the unparalleled great tribulation, of which we have already spoken in these papers. (3) He will seek to overthrow the Jewish order and institutions, which are what is meant by "times and laws." This he will be permitted to do for the space of three years and a half, to the sore affliction and sorrow of the godly in Israel.

In this connection the remarkable prophecy of the "seventy weeks" should be carefully examined by the prophetic student (Daniel 9:1-27). We have only space for a few words here. It is the term of Israel's and Jerusalem's servitude and desolation, commencing with the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem (see Nehemiah 2:1-20), terminating with the final blessing and reconciliation of the people. It is divided into three parts — seven, sixty-two, and one. The seven weeks were occupied with the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the added sixty-two making 483 years in all, bringing the Prophecy down to the manifestation of Messiah the Prince. How literally as to time this was fulfilled probably every Bible reader is aware.

But Messiah was not received, consequently we read, "And after the threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, and shall have nothing" (for so Daniel 9:26 should read). He was entitled to a throne, but the unbelief of His people did not suffer Him to have it. In wondrous grace He accepted the cross instead, where faith sees, not only human unbelief and sin, but the accomplishment of redemption. His soul was made an offering for sin, and on this foundation all who believe are forgiven and justified. The cutting off of Messiah is followed in the prophecy by the overthrow of the city and sanctuary, with war and desolation until the end.

The language of the verse is very precise, and should be carefully noted. "The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and sanctuary." Every one knows that the people in question were the Romans; they under Titus captured and destroyed guilty Jerusalem. "The people" have come and done their part; "the prince that shall come," arising from their midst, has not yet appeared.

Then we observe a chasm in the prophecy, which is not an unusual thing in the prophetic Scriptures. "And he shall confirm a covenant with the many for one week" (Daniel 9:27) . Who is meant? Clearly, "the prince that shall come"; and he is a Roman head, this very passage being witness. The whole period from the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 until the time of the end is ignored in this place. The sixty-nine weeks expired when Christ was present in Israel; there

remains but the seventieth, i.e., seven years, to be accomplished. Its events are here briefly set before the prophet. "And he shall confirm a covenant with the many for one week; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and because of the overspreading of abominations there shall be a desolator, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate." This passage is admittedly a difficult one, and translations vary, but I have given that which furnishes us with the sense most simply. We have no space here to discuss the verse, on which very much might be written; briefly the following is its meaning. The future Roman head (the little horn of Daniel 7:8) will form a treaty with the mass of the returned; Jews, confirming them in their possessions and worship. In the midst of the term (seven years) he will break his word, and in league with the false Christ in the land, will suppress their worship. The mass will accept his substitution of the worship of "the abomination of desolation," and because of this, God will permit the desolator - the king of the North — to chastise them, the Jewish people continuing thus to suffer, in the government of God, until they have received the measure of punishment divinely meted out to them. Jerusalem is here called "the desolate." Compare Isaiah 62:4.

Now let us carry back to Daniel 7:1-28 the light thus furnished in Daniel 9:1-27. We have seen the blasphemy and cruelty of the last Gentile head; next we see his overthrow and judgement. Daniel beheld a session in Daniel 9:9-12; the thrones set up and the Ancient of Days sitting in judgement. The result is, that dominion is taken out of Gentile hands and given over to the Son of Man. "I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 9:13-14).

How refreshing after all that has passed before us! God has One in store whom He can entrust with universal dominion, and who will rule and act for His glory. The house of David has failed, the Gentiles have failed; but this blessed One can never fail. He sits now at God's right hand, and faith beholds Him there crowned with glory and honour; soon He will have all things placed beneath His feet (Hebrews 2:6-9). When He comes forth in power and glory, the last head of the Gentiles will be consigned to the lake of fire, in company with the man of sin (Daniel 7:11; Revelation 19:20). Well may the Apostle say, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"! (Hebrews 10:31.)

Christ's kingdom will fill the whole earth. Nebuchadnezzar saw it under the figure of a stone cut out without hands becoming a great mountain, and filling the whole earth, after crushing all adverse powers (Daniel 2:35). In this rule the saints are associated, and in His judgement also. "Judgement was given to the saints of the Most High (or high places), and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom" (Daniel 7:22). What a privilege and dignity for us who believe in His name! Yet how ready we are to forget it, and to sink to a merely human level! The Corinthians are painful proofs of this. In forgetfulness of the mighty fact that the saints are to reign with Christ by-and-by, they accepted ease and honour in the present world; and overlooking that the saints are to be the world's judges in the coming day, they were taking their complaints against one another into the world's courts to be tried by the unjust! (1 Corinthians 4:8; 1 Corinthians 6:1-3.) It is a solemn warning for our souls, we may be assured.

In view of the approaching kingdom, and our place in it in association with the Lord Jesus, our God would have us follow humbly in the footsteps of His beloved Son, accepting the cross, and letting the world go by for His sake. Christ's pathway to the throne was the cross; God has set no other way before His saints.

Hasten, Lord, the glorious time,

When, beneath Messiah's sway,

Every nation, every clime,

Shall the Gospel's call obey.

Then shall wars and tumults cease,

Then be banished grief and pain;

Righteousness, and joy, and peace,

Undisturbed shall ever reign.

The Future of Russia.

In our paper on "The Times of the Gentiles," we considered the history and future doings of the powers represented in the great image of Daniel 2:1-49 : We will now inquire into the actings of a vast power of which the prophet Daniel says nothing, but which is destined to play a very important part in the latter-day crisis. We refer, of course, to Russia. There was no "Russian empire" in the days of the Old Testament prophets, yet its doings are minutely described by the Holy Spirit in the Word of God.

It is worthy of remark that God only takes notice in His Word of the powers of the world in so far as they are connected (either for good or ill) with His own people. Dominions and movements that men count great are suffered to pass entirely unnoticed in the inspired Word, if they do not happen to fall within the line of God's dealings with His own beloved people, the seed of Abraham, His friend. Israel is His earthly centre; everything therefore that affects them is of the deepest interest to the Spirit of God.

Russia's future bold and profane doings are unfolded in Ezekiel 38:1-23 & Ezekiel 39:1-29. The prophet was told by God to set his face against "Gog, the land of Magog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him." We cannot state fully here the reasons for accepting "Rosh" as a proper name, our space not permitting. It must suffice to say that the translators of the Septuagint so rendered it many years before Christ; and the English revisers of 1881 have adopted it in their work. "Meshech" and "Tubal" represent the Moschi and Tibareni, two ancient tribes long ago incorporated with the empire of Russia." They were in fact three great tribes, by the ancients called Scythians, the first of them apparently deriving its name from their proximity in those days to the river Rha, or Volga (though some think the Araxes), and supplying that of the modern Russ, as the others are reproduced in Moscow or Muscovy and in Tobolsk. There is, of course, no difficulty in supposing migrations northward from the original seats, supposing that they may have been the races in the north of Asia Minor during the days of Ezekiel, and familiar to us as the Moschi, Tibareni, and perhaps other tribes named in later authors of

Greece."

{(W. Kelly, "Notes on Ezekiel.") Any reader who is desirous of fuller information as to these tribes may refer to Smith's "Bible Dictionary" and Rawlinson's "Herodotus."}

How wonderful in its comprehensiveness is Scripture! Who could have imagined in Ezekiel's early day that in the north parts would exist a mighty empire full of schemes of self-aggrandisement, and full of enmity to God's land and God's people? Yet such a power has for some time been before us, with just the aims and purposes foretold in the Word of God.

The time referred to in the prophecy is clearly given — "in the latter years"; "in that day when My people Israel dwelleth safely" (Ezekiel 38:8). This is very plainly the time when God sets His hand the second time to recover the remnant of His people. Israel has never dwelt safely in their own land since Ezekiel uttered his prophecy; indeed, Israel as such has not been in the land at all. Those who returned to Palestine under Zerubbabel and Ezra were but a feeble remnant, and mainly of the two tribes Judah and Benjamin. Ezekiel's prediction therefore looks onward to their future ingathering. Thus no sooner are they restored to the land of their fathers, the power of the Western and Eastern enemies being completely broken, than their Northern foe, who has been watching their re-establishment and blessing with envious eyes, swoops down upon them with his vast hordes. The hatred of Russia to the Jewish people is well known, and has been painfully proved before our eyes in recent years. This will manifest itself even more malignantly by-and-by, as we shall see. But when the God of Israel makes inquisition for blood, it will all come up in remembrance before Him.

The Gog and Magog of Ezekiel must not be confounded with those of Revelation 20:8. The latter Scripture refers to a gathering together of enemies from all quarters at the close of the thousand years' reign; the other speaks of an invasion from the North at the commencement of that period.

Nor must the Gog of Ezekiel be confounded with "the king of the north" of Daniel 11:40. This is a very common mistake with even careful students of prophecy. The king of the North (identical, I have no doubt, with "the king" of Dan. 8:33 and "the little horn" of Daniel 8:9) will invade the land when the man of sin is in power there, and will be suffered (at least at first) to carry all before him. He will pass through "the glorious land" as an overflowing scourge.

Gog's invasion is a little later, when Israel is dwelling safely, and just beginning to enjoy the many blessings brought in for them by the appearing of Christ and His heavenly saints. These two enemies come from the same direction — "the north" — and their policy is the same; still they are distinct powers. "The king of the north" will probably be urged on, and even helped, it may be, by Russia; as we read, "his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power" (Daniel 8:23). Russia will probably instigate the lesser antagonist to move before she judges the right time has come to move herself. "The king of the north" of old ruled over Syria; we may therefore reasonably expect to see ere long a new state formed of some of the Asiatic provinces of the Sultan, and placed under the protection of Russia. This power will prove, as Russia, a determined opponent of Israel's blessing at the end of the age.

But who can really hinder when God rises up, and works on behalf of His people?

"When He makes bare His arm,

Who shall His work withstand?

When He His people's cause defends,

Who then shall stay His hand? "

Puny man may set all his forces in array, and even defy the Almighty to His face, as Pharaoh of old, but it is only to be overthrown and broken himself. God intends Israel to lead the nations of the earth, and to enjoy His own presence and blessing; the mightiest powers of the world are utterly unable to prevent it. If man had faith, he would not attempt an enterprise so hazardous, but would bow to God's purposes; but, alas! man has not faith, and so rushes blindly on to his own destruction.

This is what Jehovah says about the movement of this great enemy: "Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal; and I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords, Persia, Ethiopia, Libya, with them, all of them with shield and helmet, Gomer and all his bands, the house of Togarmah, of the north quarters, and all his bands, and many people with thee. Be thou prepared, and prepare for thyself, thou and all thy company that are assembled unto thee, and be thou a guard unto them" (Ezekiel 38:3-7). Here we have the vast array. Gog is leading on his hosts, with those of his many allies and vassals, against the people of the Lord. If it were simply a question between Israel and the enemy, the seed of Jacob would now be finally wiped out. They can surely then say, with the Psalmist, that were it not that Jehovah is on their side, with such a rising against them, they would be swallowed up quick (Psalms 124:1-8). But Jehovah will not give His chosen a prey to their teeth, but will turn upon their enemies in righteous fury and indignation. We observe a little Divine sarcasm in the words, "Be thou a guard unto them." The hosts of Gog will find their leader unable to protect himself when Jehovah rises up to defend His people's cause.

Israel's unwalled villages and want of practice in the art of war will attract the envious eye of their unscrupulous foe. Their great wealth will appear to be within easy reach of his rapacious hand. But he forgets that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro in the earth. His eye is upon Gog; He notes the thoughts that arise in the heart, and the plans that result.

He turns to the enemy thus: "After many days thou shalt be visited" (or "mustered"): "in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste; but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely, all of them. Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm; thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou and all thy bands, and many people with thee. Thus saith the Lord God: It shall also come to pass that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought; and thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages: I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, to take a spoil and to take a prey, to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land" (Ezekiel 38:8-12).

Russia has always been desirous of possessing the land of Palestine, but has never been able to accomplish the design; and if so eager now, while the land is largely a waste, how much more eager and desirous when the desolate places are inhabited once more, and that by a people with vast possessions, and apparently without protection! Ah! God is not in all his thoughts. His love to Israel for the fathers' sakes is neither known nor believed, hence the disastrous enterprise, undertaken so confidently.

Poor Israel! What distress this terrible invasion will plunge them into! After all their vicissitudes and their dreary centuries of banishment and suffering, is everything to be snatched from their grasp just when all looks so bright and fair? The Western hosts have not been able to stand, but have been Divinely judged and overthrown; the king of the North and his array have met with a judgement equally solemn; and is the Northern enemy to be allowed to spoil all for them?

Isaiah 33:1-24 seems to speak of the same time and circumstances. It follows the chapter that deals with the establishment of Christ's reign of righteousness and peace (Isaiah 32:1-20). It pronounces woe on an enemy who comes up treacherously to spoil Israel, yet never having been so treated by them. We believe this refers to Gog, of whom Sennacherib was an early type. Israel's distress is vividly described in Isaiah 33:7-9 : "Behold, their valiant ones shall cry without; the ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly. The highways lie waste: the wayfaring man ceaseth; he hath broken the covenant; he hath despised the cities; he regardeth no man. The earth mourneth and languisheth; Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down; Sharon is like a wilderness, and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits."

But, as often remarked, man's extremity is God's opportunity. This has been blessedly proved on many occasions by the people of God. Israel will prove it gloriously when Gog's alien hosts swarm into their land. They have no might wherewith to beat down the foe; but God is near at hand and will intervene on their behalf. "Now will I rise, saith the Lord; now will I be exalted; now will I lift up Myself." Woe to the oppressors of the people of God when this is so! Here is His word to the boastful invader: "Ye shall conceive chaff; ye shall bring forth stubble: your breath as fire shall devour you. And the people shall be as the burnings of lime; as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire" (Isaiah 33:10-12).

Jehovah will make of Gog and his multitudes a permanent warning to the nations of the earth not to meddle with His chosen. No people have ever prospered that have ill-treated Israel, in strict accordance with the word: "No weapon formed against thee shall prosper" (Isaiah 54:17). Jehovah will sanctify Himself before the eyes of the Gentile world at large by His terrible dealings with Gog and his army. His fury will come up in His face, and there will be a great shaking throughout the land of Israel, resulting in a frightful destruction of the enemies of His people. Israel will not need to fight: Jehovah will fight for them, and, as on the shores of the Red Sea, they have but to stand still and see His salvation. He will dispose of their enemies in the coming day with the same ease as He disposed of Pharaoh's legions in the distant past. He will first create confusion in their ranks and turn their swords against each other (Ezekiel 38:21). This is no new method of warfare with God. He used the same means in Gideons day. (Judges 7:22)

This will be followed by more direct Divine visitation: "I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood, and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain and great hailstones, fire and brimstone" (Ezekiel 38:22). Such, proud

Russia, will be the end of thy mighty hosts in the day when thy hand is lifted up against the people of the Lord! As in the days of Joshua Jehovah cast down great stones from heaven upon the enemy, and as in Deborah's time the very stars in their courses fought against Sisera, so will it be in the day to come. His thunderbolts will work fearful havoc amongst the enemies of His people (Joshua 10:11; Judges 5:20). The very windows of heaven will be opened, as it were, to pour down destruction upon them.

Who can stand when God rises up? Frail, yet daring, man may assemble all his might, and kings and rulers may take counsel together, but the blast of the Almighty's nostrils is sufficient to scatter them all. Yet the lesson is never really learned, so evil and deceitful is the heart of man. In the Russian hordes, Jehovah will magnify and sanctify Himself, and all the nations shall know that He is Jehovah.

Immediately following this tremendous overthrow will go forth a summons to the fowls and beasts to feast upon the slain: "And, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord God: Speak unto every feathered fowl and to every beast of the field, Assemble yourselves and come; gather yourselves on every side to My sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you, even a great sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel, that ye may eat flesh and drink blood. Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bullocks, all of them fatlings of Bashan; and ye shall eat fat till ye be full, and drink blood till ye be drunken, of My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. Thus ye shall be filled at My table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, saith the Lord God" (Ezekiel 39:17-20).

What fearful scenes of judgement and desolation this poor earth is to witness before everything settles down into the holy calm and rest of Messiah's reign! Only a little while before this ghastly summons a similar call will be made to the fowls of the heavens to feast upon the carcases of the Western armies, under the leadership of the beast and the false prophet (Revelation 19:17-21); now they are invited to gorge themselves with the Russian hosts. Is this what Russia is training her vast armies for at the present time? Terrible thought! fearful contemplation!

So numerous will be the weapons left upon the field, that the children of Israel will not need to cut firewood for seven years afterwards. A solemn lesson of righteous retribution, surely, before all eyes during the opening years of the millennium! "And they that dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the handstaves and the spears, and they shall burn them with fire seven years, so that they shall take no wood out of the field, neither cut down any out of the forests, for they shall burn the weapons with fire, and they shall spoil those that spoiled them and rob those that robbed them, saith the Lord God" (Ezekiel 39:9-10). Little do the superintendents of the Muscovite arsenals know the ultimate future of the vast stores under their hands.

After the birds and the beasts have performed their ghastly work, there will be nothing but bones to bury, but this will be a gigantic task. The whole house of Israel will be engaged some seven months in this dismal service. Gog will come up thinking to possess lands and much spoil, but will only find a grave: "And it shall come to pass in that day that I will give unto Gog a place there of graves in Israel, the valley of the passengers on the east of the sea, and it shall stop the passengers, and there shall they bury Gog and all his multitude, and they shall call it the valley of Hamon-gog. And seven months shall the house of Israel be burying of them, that they may

cleanse the land, yea, all the people of the land shall bury them, and it shall be to them a renown the day that I shall be glorified, saith the Lord God" (Ezekiel 39:11-13).

There was no need to insert the word "noses" in Ezekiel 39:11 in the Authorised Version. The Revised Version omits the word. The addition of it obscures the sense. It is not so much that there will be an offensive smell as that this vast burying operation will cause all who pass by to stop and consider. Thus will God read a solemn lesson to many. His own people, as they pause and behold, may well say: "So let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might" (Judges 5:31).

The seven months not being sufficient to purge the land entirely, at the expiration of that time a staff of men will be told off to complete the work. The land is to be Jehovah's land, and glory is to dwell there; therefore nothing inconsistent with His holy presence, however apparently trivial, must be allowed to remain. "And they shall sever out men of continual employment, passing through the land to bury with the passengers those that remain upon the face of the earth, to cleanse it; after the end of seven months shall they search. And the passengers that pass through the land, when any seeth a man's bone, then shall he set up a sign by it, till the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamongog. And also the name of the city shall be Hamonah. Thus shall they cleanse the land" (Ezekiel 39:14-16). Thus all who move about in the land will be expected to co-operate in the work of cleansing by setting a mark against stray bones that meet their eyes, that everything offensive may be completely removed. A bone is quite sufficient to defile the land in the eyes of Jehovah, as Numbers 19:16-18 shows.

Jehovah will then carry the war into the invader's own land: "And I will send a fire on Magog, and among them that dwell carelessly in the isles, and they shall know that I am Jehovah" (Ezekiel 39:6). We cannot tell precisely what form this will take; it is sufficient to know that God will not only overthrow Gog's hosts, but devastate his land in retributive judgement. Such is the future of Russia according to the word of the Lord by Ezekiel.

Micah 5:1-15 apparently refers to the Russian invasion also. "The Assyrian" finds his antitype partly in the king of the North, and partly in the Gog of Ezekiel. Micah 5:1-15, in our judgement, refers to Gog. Christ, the true Judge of Israel, is then in the land; He who once was born in Bethlehem Ephratah, and whose goings forth have been from everlasting, is then in the midst of His people, to feed, bless, and protect them. This makes the expedition of Gog and his hosts the more grave. "And this Man shall be the peace when the Assyrian shall come into our land; and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds and eight principal men. And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof; thus shall He deliver us from the Assyrian when he cometh into our land, and when he treadeth within our borders" (Micah 5:5-6).

This is the final settlement of the Eastern question. This great question, which has perplexed all the leading men of Europe so long, Christ Himself will then set at rest for ever. None shall possess Zion and the glorious land but His elect; all other aspirants shall be disappointed, and all objectors and opponents shall be destroyed. Jerusalem, instead of being a burdensome stone to the nations, will be the centre of the earth, all dominion and glory flowing from thence.

Both Israel and the nations will learn a solemn lesson from all these appalling events. As regards Israel, we read, "So the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day and forward" (Ezekiel 39:22). Their hearts, now so cold and obdurate, will ere that day be turned to the Lord; they will then be teachable scholars in the school of Jehovah. The nations, too, will then learn their lesson, that Jehovah will not suffer Israel to be tampered with by others, but will deal with them Himself in His righteousness, that their evil may be purged away in order to receive His lasting blessing: "The heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against Me, therefore hid I My face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies; so fell they all by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions have I done unto them, and hid My face from them."

After these words, Jehovah proceeds to speak of their blessings, closing with the gracious assurance, "Neither will I hide My face any more from them; for I have poured out My Spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord God" (Ezekiel 39:23-29).

How privileged is the Christian to be in possession of all this knowledge beforehand! Nothing is withheld from the heavenly joint-heirs of the risen Christ. Though our own proper portion is unquestionably in the Father's house on high, and not on the earth, we are permitted to know all that will transpire in this scene both prior and subsequent to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. May this lead us, not into a spirit of merely idle curiosity, than which nothing is more serious and dangerous in the things of God, but into earnest separation from the world, while faithfully bearing testimony to it. May our hearts ever be set on Christ in heaven, that when we hear His gracious voice saying, "Surely I come quickly," we may be able joyfully to respond, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

There shall come a night of such wild affright

As none beside shall know,

When the heavens shall shake, and the wide earth quake

In its last and deepest woe.

What horrors shall roll o'er the godless soul,

Waked from its deathlike sleep,

Of all hope bereft, and to judgement left,

For ever to wail and weep! "

Babylon and the Beast.

Revelation 17:1-18, Revelation 18:1-24.

We picture before us in these chapters is a peculiarly solemn one to the Christian. It is not now the judgement of the ungodly world for its many sins and rejection of the Son of God, but of her who has for ages pretended to be the true spouse of Christ in the earth. It is His utter and final rejection of the vilest system that has ever darkened the earth — a system which, in spite of its manifold corruptions and evils, has all along claimed to be the true Church of God, outside of which there is

no salvation.

The judgement of Babylon evidently occurs under the sixth vial, and is spoken of in that connection (Revelation 16:19); but the brief notice there given of it was not sufficient for the Spirit of God. The subject being one of unusual gravity and importance, He pauses, ere proceeding with the prophecy, to devote two whole chapters to the details of it.

We will first examine Revelation 17:1-18. It consists of two parts. Revelation 17:1-6 furnish us with the vision; Revelation 17:7-18 give us the angel's interpretation of it. The vision is opened in a very remarkable manner: "And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgement of the great whore that sitteth on many waters" (Revelation 17:1). No careful reader can fail to be struck with the similarity of the language here to that in Revelation 21:9. In the latter place the true bride, the Lamb's wife, is shown in all the beauty and glory with which she is to be Divinely arrayed; in the chapter before us we have the devil's evil and offensive counterfeit. We believe the Spirit of God purposely used almost identical language in introducing both, that the contrast might be fully before our minds. Assuredly our souls may gather profit and instruction from the consideration of both pictures, though so widely different in character.

The widespread influence of the harlot is declared in the fact that she "sitteth upon many waters." These are expressly explained to us in Revelation 17:15 : "The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." Local influence has never satisfied the false Church; she has always claimed to be "Catholic." Her evil arms have been extended north, south, east, and west, to the demoralisation and injury of all who have sunk beneath her sway, and, above all, to the dishonour of Christ, whose name she has professedly owned. Her ceaseless activity by means of her many agents and societies is well known to us all. Would God we were as earnest in spreading the precious truth of Christ!

Next, her evil character is declared as the holy eye of God sees it: "with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication" (Revelation 17:2). "Fornication" is frequently used in a symbolical way in Scripture. The following are a few instances among many:2 Chronicles 21:11; Isaiah 23:17; Ezekiel 16:29. It means evil intercourse with the world. Alas that this should have been true of any bearing the name of Christ! The Church is the deeply loved spouse of the absent Christ, and belongs to heaven, not to this dark and corrupt scene at all. Her path should ever have been that of a stranger, simply passing through on her way to meet the Bridegroom in glory. But so early as Paul's day the world crept in amongst the saints. He watched with deep concern the working of this at Corinth and elsewhere. To the Corinthians he wrote: "Already ye are full, already ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us, and I would to God ye did reign that we also might reign with you" (1 Corinthians 4:8). There was a disposition to accept ease and honour here rather than to cheerfully bear the cross of Christ.

Observe the yearning of his faithful heart in 2 Corinthians 11:2, 1 Corinthians 11:8 : "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ; but I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." Babylon knows nothing of such sentiments as these, but has trafficked with the great ones of the earth for her own

evil ends, and has simply stupefied with her corruptions the mass of those beneath her baleful influence. To fall into her snare is to lose all spiritual sensibility, and even conscience itself.

"So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness; and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns" (Revelation 17:3). This point of view is very striking. When the angel showed John the bride of the Lamb, he carried him away "to a great and high mountain" (Revelation 21:10). To get into God's thoughts about the true Church, we must be lifted above the mists and clouds of this world into the clear atmosphere of His own blessed presence. But the seer was carried "into the wilderness" to see the great whore! Thus would the Spirit of God remind us that all her surroundings are barren, even though her wealth and splendour abound. Do not genuine souls prove this? The impressive and gorgeous ceremonies of her ritual may captivate and overawe the senses, but they leave the soul unsatisfied and unfed. Ritual is not Christ, and He alone can satisfy the hunger and thirst of the soul.

In connection with both visions, John tells us he was carried away "in the Spirit." It is important to note this. On the one hand, heavenly things can only be truly learned when we are under the influence of the Holy Spirit; on the other, we only really discern the evil character of such a system as Babylon as He instructs us. With such deceitful hearts as ours, it would be hardly safe to gaze upon the glory and splendour of the harlot under any other guardianship. We might be attracted and ensnared.

Observe the woman's seat. She rides a scarlet coloured beast, with seven heads and ten horns. We will say more about this when we come to the angel's interpretation of the vision; we merely say now that it is the revived Roman empire. The harlot has always loved and striven after earthly supremacy; here she has it fully.

The Spirit of God next dwells on her gaudy attire: "And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colours, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand, full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication" (Revelation 17:4). Here we have every mark of earthly glory and even royalty. How utterly opposite to all that God has declared as His mind and will for His Church! Her heart is plainly in the world, not heaven; present and seen things are everything to her, not the unseen and eternal.

Now examine the contents of her golden cup: "full of abominations." The Spirit means by this idolatry (compare 1 Kings 11:5, 1 Kings 11:7). How awful that such an evil should ever have crept into the profession of Christianity! Such is the poor human heart that it yearns for an object that may be seen. This is fully shown in heathendom. In Christendom such things came in first as aids to worship and as memorials of the departed; they soon became full objects of adoration to superstitious minds. Babylon has helped this enormously by means of her priesthood and hierarchy. This is in plain defiance of the Law (Exodus 20:3-5); how much more is it opposed to the spirit of Christianity!

Alas, idolatry will assume an even graver form still in the days to come! When the true saints of God quit this scene for the Father's house, and the presence of the Holy Spirit is withdrawn, the full height of human evil will be reached. We refer, of course, to the days of antichrist. Then it will not be a mere image or crucifix; but man, energised by Satan, will assume God's place and title, to his utter and fearful ruin.

The harlot's cup contained also "the filthiness of her fornications" (Revelation 17:4), speaking to us of the awful moral corruptions which have resulted from her guilty intercourse with the world. The two ingredients of her cup appear in their early form in the epistles to Pergamos and Thyatira. In addressing Pergamos, the Lord rebukes her for dwelling where Satan's throne is — i.e., in the world - and then proceeds to speak of "the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication" (Revelation 2:12-14). In Thyatira we note a further advance in departure and evil, for Jezebel is brought before us, which calleth herself a prophetess and teacher, and seduces Christ's servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols (Revelation 2:18-22). The whole epistle to Thyatira should be carefully pondered in connection with our subject, and it will be seen that Babylon the Great is really Thyatira fully developed.

Now let us look into the name and character of the great whore. It is on her forehead; there is no effort at concealment. Names in Scripture are declarative of character. Accordingly in this instance we have corruption unblushingly displayed. Evil as her history has been in the past, there are darker developments at hand. Her full character has not yet been told; but the day of her complete manifestation is near upon us. "And upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth" (Revelation 17:5).

Satan always imitates the work of God. God has spoken of a "mystery " — Christ and the Church (Ephesians 3:1-21); Satan must needs have a mystery also. So at about the same epoch, when God is about to bring in His King of kings and Lord of lords, Satan brings forward his king of kings in the person of the Beast.

It may be asked, "Why is the false Church named Babylon?" It is an interesting but solemn study to gather together from the Old Testament Scriptures the various features that concentrated themselves in the city of this name of old. In Genesis 11:1-9, we have its foundation as the expression of man's pride and independence of God; in Genesis 10:8-12, in connection with Nimrod it becomes the seat of oppression and violence; later it becomes known for its splendour, even Israel being ensnared (Joshua 7:21); and, finally, it was the very centre of idolatry, into which the people of God were carried captive because of their sins and unfaithfulness to God (Isaiah 44:1-28, etc.). These are some of the leading characteristics of Babylon in the Word of God. It is exceedingly solemn therefore that when the Spirit of God would select a name whereby to describe the professing Church in its last stage on earth He judged no name so suitable as Babylon. The sober and reflecting reader has but to consider and look around, and he will see all these features before his eyes under the holy name of Christ.

There can be no real doubt that Rome is here before the mind of the Spirit of God. Two marks are given — one geographical, the other political — which the reader should observe. The woman is said to sit on seven mountains (Revelation 17:9), and stated also to be "that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth" (Revelation 17:18). Rome, as a seven hilled city, is well known; her political ascendancy was no less apparent when the vision was vouchsafed to the Apostle in the isle of Patmos.

Papal advocates have frequently endeavoured to turn away the keen edge of this Scripture by applying it to Pagan Rome, but all to no purpose. It is but to do violence to the Word of God. Better far own the truth of it, and separate from the evil before the judgement falls (Revelation 18:4).

Such is the Divine path for all who really desire to do the will of God.

On the other hand, Babylon must not be confined to the papal system. We are firmly convinced that it includes a great deal more. We have heard and read much of late years about "the reunion of Christendom," which appears to be the cherished ideal of a very large number of professing Christian people. We believe this will come about yet, but it will be reunion in darkest evil. No doubt, while the true saints of God remain in the world, such a calamity will be averted. Not a few find considerable difficulty in surrendering or sinking all that they believe they have learned from God, and thus a great barrier is raised by conscientious souls against the accomplishment of such a project. But when all the saints are removed to the Father's house, those who remain in the various ecclesiastical systems will doubtless sink their doctrinal and other differences, and unite together for the common weal, as they fondly suppose. In this way will ambitious Rome preside over the religious destinies of Europe once more, with the results that this chapter declares. No thoughtful observer can fail to see that this is the direction in which everything is now tending. The religious bodies are not to-day where they once were. Things have greatly changed during the last half-century. Doctrines that were regarded as vital realities then are viewed as mere matters of opinion now, to be held or surrendered at pleasure; principles for which earnest men contended and suffered in the past are waived and very lightly regarded to-day. The various systems are gravitating towards each other in a way that cannot be overlooked or denied. The Established Church is not now divided from Rome by such an impassable gulf as formerly; and the Dissenting bodies have followed in her wake to an alarming degree. We are not now speaking of the increased fraternizing of Christian men apart from denominational differences, but the gravitation of the various systems towards each other. This, we believe, will culminate in Babylon the Great, fully developed. At least, let the Christian reader pause and consider.

One more mark remains to be noticed before we turn from the vision to the angel's explanation of it: "And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, and when I saw her I wondered with great admiration" (Revelation 17:6). The seer wondered, and well he might! He knew Jerusalem to be thirsty for the blood of the saints (Matthew 23:34-37), and at the time of the vision he was suffering under the persecuting hand of pagan Rome, but he was here shown a symbol of the professing Church, and she drunken with the blood of the saints! It has been painfully verified. Pagan Rome slew its thousands, but Christian Rome (so-called) has slain its tens of thousands. What a day of reckoning is at hand! The sighs and tears of the helpless and the suffering have gone up to God. In His book all is faithfully recorded, and the tears are in His bottle. Righteous retribution will yet fall. Babylon will be overthrown and judged, to recover herself no more for ever.

In the interpretation of the vision some important particulars are added (quite a usual thing in Scripture), but the interpretation is chiefly occupied with the Beast. On this we shall be brief, as we remarked on this when dealing with "the times of the Gentiles." Three things are stated as to the Beast: "The beast that thou sawest was, and is not, and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit and go into perdition" (Revelation 17:8). That is, it has had a past history, it is at present non-existent, but will yet be revived by Satanic power and energy. Of no power but Rome could this be written. Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece have each had their day and have fallen, never to rise to an imperial place in the earth again. But Rome will rise once more. The mighty power of the West will be brought together again by Satan just about the time when God will bring his First-begotten into

the world.

The Beast's seven heads and ten horns are carefully explained by the angel. The heads have a twofold signification. First, they represent the seven mountains on which the woman sitteth, wherein we recognise the well-known fact that Rome is a seven-hilled city; secondly, "they are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come, and when he cometh he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition" (Revelation 17:10-11). "Seven kings," or forms of government. Five had passed away before John's day: kings, consuls, decemvirs, military tribunes, and dictators; the sixth, the imperial, was then in power. The seventh is thought by many to have been the empire of Napoleon 1. Satan's aim by his instrumentality was evidently to revive the old empire of Rome, but God's time had not come, so he continued but a short space. The eighth, which is of the seven, we believe, will be the imperial revived. In Revelation 13:3, where the same power is before us, the wounded head of the Beast was healed, by which we understand the revival of the imperial authority.

The horns are kings, as the angel tells us: "And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet, but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast" (Revelation 17:12-13). It is very clear that this is still future. Never in the past did the Roman empire consist of ten kingdoms welded together, as this prophecy plainly describes. In ancient times Rome's vast dominions were under one government, and since the early part of the fifth century it has been in a state of dissolution, and many smaller kingdoms have arisen on its ruins. But in the future ten distinct kingdoms will be cemented together, each retaining its own sovereign, yet all under the general leadership of one head.

The harlot, then, will ride the beast. This is not true at the present moment, but Babylon will attain to this once more. The pontiffs chafe now because of their limited political power as compared with the past ages, and are always intriguing in order to possess more. Their dreams and desires will be abundantly realized at the time of the end, though but for a short space.

The harlot meets her judgment from those whom she has ruled. Weary of her charms, themselves being saturated with infidelity (rapidly working today), they turn upon her and destroy and despoil her: "And the ten horns which thou sawest and the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and shall burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled" (Revelation 17:16-17). We quote here from the Revised Version. "And the beast" is correct, not "upon." The Beast, the imperial chief, and his satellite kings will be of one mind in their outburst of indignation and rage against the harlot. Superstition will fall before infidelity, never to have a resurrection. This will be disestablishment with a vengeance. All profession of the name of Christ will be abandoned, and the great wealth of Babylon seized and appropriated by the rulers of Christendom.

But though her fall will be brought about instrumentally by means of the powers of the world, the hand of God is in the matter. He has a long score to settle with the great corruptress and bloodthirsty persecutress of His saints. God's side of the affair is shown in Revelation 18:1-24, and this explains Revelation 17:17, which tells us that "God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will." In

Revelation 18:1-2, we read, "After these things, I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power, and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird," etc.

Jerusalem of old met her doom at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, but God was in it, and so here. God will permit the lawless hands of men to despoil and crush the whore, but it is His hand nevertheless. There is a solemn sequel to this overthrow. Flushed with their achievement, the Beast and his confederates will turn upon the Lamb at His appearing, to their own ruin, it need hardly be said (Revelation 17:14).

The summons to "come out of her" has puzzled many readers of these chapters. We believe the Spirit of God intended the call to have influence with the people of God at all times, and not merely at the time when all is in process of fulfilment. Thus, wherever the anointed eye of the saint discerns any of the features of Babylon, it is incumbent on him to depart out, that he may have no fellowship with her iniquities, and so be clear of her plagues. "Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity" (2 Timothy 2:19).

The downfall of Babylon fills the kings of the earth — i.e., those outside the Roman empire — with sorrow and dismay. Their bitter lamentation is vividly described by the Spirit of God in Revelation 18:9-14. The merchants and the shipmen take up the wail also: "And they cast dust on their heads and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate." Well may they weep and lament. The grievous departure from the simplicity of the apostolic upper room has caused the false Church to be the best customer the traders of the world have ever had. But this, when once overthrown, will never be restored; her ruin is final and irrevocable.

A mighty angel significantly took up a great millstone in the presence of the seer and cast it into the sea saying, "Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all." Israel, on the contrary, after her long career of evil, will be restored by God to His favour in sovereign grace and mercy.

Heaven and earth are at utter variance as to all this, as, alas! about many other things besides. While earth is bemoaning the ruin of the splendid harlot all heaven is filled with rejoicing. "Alleluia" resounds through the courts of heaven that so foul a blot has been at last removed from before God, that so great and long-standing a dishonour to His truth has been brought to an end. The marriage of the Lamb follows, to the joy of God and His saints.

"Crown the mighty Conqueror, crown Him,

Who His people's foes o'ercame;

In the highest heaven enthrone Him,

Men and angels sound His fame!

Great His glory!

Jesus bears a matchless name,"

"BREAK FORTH, O EARTH, IN PRAISES."

The Church.

Break forth, O earth, in praises

Dwell on His wondrous story;

The Saviour's name and love proclaim —

The King who reigns in glory —

See on the throne beside Him

O'er all her foes victorious,

His royal bride, for whom He died,

Like him for ever glorious.

Israel.

Ye of the seed of Jacob!

Behold the Royal Lion

Of Judah's line, in glory shine,

And fill His throne in Zion.

Blest with Messiah's favour

A ransom'd holy nation,

Your offerings bring

to Christ your King,

The God of your salvation. The Gentiles.

Come, O ye kings! ye nations!

With songs of gladness hail Him,

Ye Gentiles all, before Him fall,

The Royal Priest in Salem.

O'er hell and death triumphant

Your conquering Lord hath risen;

His praises sound, whose power hath bound

Your ruthless foe in prison.

Hail to the King of Glory

Head of the new creation —

Thy ways of grace we love to trace

And praise Thy great salvation.

Thy heart was pressed with sorrow

The bonds of death to sever,

To make us free, that we might be

Thy crown of joy for ever.

- Sir E. Denny.

The Bride, the Lamb's Wife.

How refreshing it is to turn away from the dark sin of man and contemplate the magnificent grace of God! We have seen the awful evil of the false Church and the divine judgement upon her; it is now our pleasure to consider the glorious future that is in store for the true Bride of the Lamb.

God has His own wondrous purposes of grace, formed in His own great heart before time began. These He will assuredly accomplish for His own glory, spite of all human failure and the hostility of Satan. But He allows man first to show what he is. Thus the past six thousand years have revealed a long story of human sin and shame, whether in the world, in Israel, or in the Church of God. When man's sad story is fully told, God will come in, setting all aside and accomplishing His own eternal counsels in rest and glory. This is due to Christ, who suffered all in this scene that God might be glorified.

In pursuing our present theme we will first ask the reader's attention to Ephesians 5:25-32 : There we have the affection of Christ declared for the Church. The Apostle in this place is really giving practical exhortations to the saints as to their conduct in the different relationships of life. But he was so full of the great theme that he had been commissioned to everywhere unfold that even when exhorting thus he could not refrain from bringing in Christ and the Church.

The Christian wife is bidden to consider the Church's position in relation to Christ and to render due obedience to her husband. The Christian husband, on the other hand, is directed to keep before him Christ's affection for the Church as his pattern of behaviour to his wife. The Spirit of God would lead us into God's thoughts and show us heavenly patterns, that they may have their due effect in our daily walk on earth. May the spirit of heaven enter into our various earthly relationships more and more!

Let the reader weigh well before the Lord the precious statement in Ephesians 5:25 : "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it." This is fuller and deeper than the statement in Matthew 13:46 : "Went and sold all that He had and bought it." It was one thing to surrender all His earthly rights as Son of David and Son of man, but quite another to lay down His own life. "Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed unto him but a few days for the love he had to her" (Genesis 29:20). But Christ did more than serve. He suffered and bled that the Church might be His own possession for ever. Was ever love like this? But it could not be otherwise. Sin stood in the way.

Divine grace must have a righteous foundation, so He accepted the cross with all its unutterable agony and shame, that every righteous claim of the Throne of God might be met. For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross and despised the shame (Hebrews 12:2). Now all barriers are removed, and His grace and love flow out richly and blessedly to all who believe in His name.

Let it be distinctly understood what Scripture means by "the Church" which Christ so loved. Many are vague as to this, having a general idea that the term includes all the saved from the beginning to the end of time. We sometimes meet with the phrase, "The Church in Jewish times," &c. But we are firmly persuaded that this is a great mistake. We find no mention of the Church in the Old Testament at all. There we find God dealing with an elect nation, blessing them after an earthly manner in the Land of Canaan. The godly in the midst of that nation and elsewhere appear as so many units looking up to God in their own individual faith, but a scheme for forming them into a corporate body nowhere appears. When but Lord Jesus was here in flesh He spoke of the Church as a future thing to be built upon Himself, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:18). Clearly He did not regard it as then existing in any shape whatever. The birthday of the Church of God was the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended from heaven according to the promise of the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:1-47).

Even then the full character of the new company was not revealed. It is questionable whether any of the first Christians knew at the beginning into what a wonderful sphere of heavenly blessing they had been introduced. The unfolding of this was reserved for Paul — one born out of due time. To him, by special revelation, was made known God's eternal counsel concerning Christ and the Church. Hitherto it had been an unrevealed secret — "hid in God" (Ephesians 3:1-21). Then it came out that God was forming believing Jews and Gentiles into "one new man" — to be the body of Christ the Head, and, as we shall see shortly, to be His Bride in the day of glory.

Into this those who lived and died prior to the Pentecostal outpouring do not come. Those who follow us in testimony on the earth are again a distinct company of saints, with a portion peculiar to themselves. It is no question of merit or superior godliness, but of God's own sovereign intentions. If He has chosen to keep the best wine until now, none do well to complain; and if He has seen fit to provide some better thing for us than for other companies of saints, who dare find fault? If the Church's portion, like Benjamin's mess, is really five times as much as that of others, let us see to it that we enjoy it, and not endeavour to explain it away (Genesis 43:34). The Old Testament worthies will certainly find their place in heaven for ever (Hebrews 11:16), but will not stand in the same relation to Christ as the believers of the present dispensation, though their blessings, of course, as ours, is founded on His blood. Through His grace, all who are saved now are called into a special place of honour — a peculiar character of blessedness.

Christ displayed His love in the past, then, by giving Himself up for the Church. His affection is proved in the present by His constant and unwearying care. We read "that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word" (Ephesians 5:26). He applies His own gracious Word to her who is to be His companion in bliss for ever, that her thoughts and desires may be formed suitably to Himself, and that she may be weaned from every attraction that Satan and the world present. He brings Himself and His glory constantly before her heart, and thus she is not only cheered and helped in the desert path, but she is able to put from her everything inconsistent

with the One to whom she is going. This is the aim and object of all His present care and attention. He would have His beloved Church heavenly practically while waiting to see His face.

Such is His love and grace; but what shall we say as to the response of our hearts to it? "So much to be loved, and so little to love." We have not been all we should have been for Christ. The Church has not kept herself as a chaste virgin for Christ, but has trifled with many lovers, to her hurt and loss. Nothing is so painful as unrequited love. How Solemn to read "I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love" (Revelation 2:4). Let us confess our failure. Let us frankly own that we have not appreciated and responded to the heart of Christ as we should. In the days that yet remain, ere all is closed in glory, let us cultivate earnest affection for Him. This can only be as we keep near to Him and learn the deep secrets of His wondrous love to us.

The next step is the presentation to Himself, and for this we wait: "That He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing: but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27). This takes place when He descends into the air to receive His blood-bought Bride to Himself. The last Adam is to have a partner in His dominion, even as the first. She shall sit with Him on His throne, even as He now sits with the Father on His throne.

Thou too shalt reign —

He will not wear His crown of joy alone;

And earth His royal bride shall see

Beside Him on the throne.

What a transformation His grace will effect in that day! The Church will then be glorious; each member of it bearing His own heavenly image. No spot or wrinkle will be seen. Every bit of worldliness is a stain on the garment of the Bride. Wrinkles are signs of decay. Alas! there were many to be seen before the great Apostle of the Church went to his rest. He saw love declining, zeal waning, and the world creeping in on every hand. But the holy, yet loving, hand of the Lord Jesus will remove all in that day. Every thing that would remind of wilderness, failure, shall be obliterated. The Church will then be holy, not only in nature, but in ways. She will be without blemish also. In the midst of much that grieves and disheartens now, how joyful and elevating is the contemplation of it! After showing that in doing all this Christ loves the Church even as Himself, well does the Apostle close by saying: "This mystery is great: but I speak; in regard of Christ and the Church" (Ephesians 5:32).

Turn now to Revelation 19:1-10. There we have the marriage supper of the Lamb. It must be carefully observed that this is a heavenly scene preparatory to the appearing of Christ with all His saints. This scene is therefore entirely distinct from that which is described in Psalms 45:1-17. There we have the Messiah present on earth with His sword girded upon His thigh for the subjugation of all His foes, and for the establishment of His glorious kingdom. At His right hand stands the Queen in gold of Ophir, but we must not understand her to be the Church of God. It is Israel, the earthly associate of the Messiah, as the Church is the heavenly Bride of the Lamb. To Israel it will then be said, "Thou shalt no more be termed forsaken, neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a man marrieth a virgin, so shalt thy sons

marry thee, and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" (Isaiah 62:4-5). The mutual affection of Messiah and Israel will be found fully expressed in the Song of Solomon.

But the Church's association with the Lamb is heavenly in its character; the nuptials are brought before us in Revelation 19:1-21. We do not regard this as the presenting to Himself spoken of in Ephesians 5:27. That is the first thing after the meeting in the air, and is entirely between the Bridegroom and the Bride. The marriage supper is the public event when all the friends of the Bridegroom are called together to share in the general joy.

This apparently immediately follows the judgement of Babylon the Great. When the false woman is thus dealt with, all heaven is filled with triumph and praise. While earth is mourning over her overthrow, the courts of heaven are resounding with Alleluias. Then the true Bride is seen: "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of many thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice and give honour to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready" (Revelation 19:6-7). From this point we hear no more of the four-and twenty elders. We believe them to represent the whole company of the heavenly saints, i.e., the believers of Old Testament times and the Church of God. Now that the Bride is brought forward as such, the symbol of the elders is dropped. The different classes of saints fall into their respective places, and are henceforward shown in their own particular relation to Christ.

What a moment of joy that will be for Christ and for us! He will see then of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. He will see, at least in measure, that He has not laboured in vain nor spent His strength for nought. His blessed heart longs for the time when He will surround Himself with all those for whom He died. He will not rest until He has finished the thing and has us all at home in the Father's house in glory. In contemplating future glories, we are apt to think principally of the bliss that will then be ours. But let us think of Christ's part in the matter. It is the day of the gladness of His heart. His was the sorrow and woe; His shall be the blessedness and joy. He is worthy of it all.

The marriage supper is not described in detail. It would not accord with the general character of the Book of Revelation. A few sentences are written, but that is all. We read "His wife hath made herself ready." This does not imply any sort of human fitness, which could have no place in heaven, but simply (so we judge) that she has put on the garments which divine grace has provided. According to His riches in glory all is given, that the heavenly Bride may be found a suitable companion for the Lamb.

But though there is no such thing as human fitness, the excellent deeds of the saints, wrought on earth through the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, are had in remembrance at the wedding feast. "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness (lit. "righteousnesses") of the saints" (Revelation 19:8). Never will Christ forget the good works of His own. His eye notes and His hand records every little reproduction of Himself, whether in general walk or in active service. Even a cup of cold water given for His sake will be remembered above, no small encouragement, surely, for all who really seek the honour of His Name. In this sense, we are weaving our garments now. Solemn, yet blessed, thought for us all!

There are guests at the supper. "And he saith unto me, write, Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). Who are these? Not angels, for they are never said to be "called." The term is only used of objects of redeeming grace, i.e., of men. Are not these the friends of the Bridegroom, as John the Baptist said in his day? (John 3:29.) Hebrews 12:22-24 comes to mind also. There we have the different companies in "the heavenly Jerusalem," and among them "the spirits of just men made perfect" as distinct from "the Church of the first-born ones." These are plainly the saints of the Old Testament dispensation. They will share in the common joy of the marriage-day, though not included amongst the myriads who form the Bride.

Need we wonder that the angel thought it necessary to add, "These are the true sayings of God"? The glory of the scene is so wonderful, the relationship so intimate, the blessedness so vast, that the heart needs, as it were, to be assured that it is really God's intention to make it all ours. Oh, that the thought of the future acted more powerfully upon our lives in the present! Seeing that we look for such things, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!

We will now pass to Revelation 21:1-27. There we have the Bride shown under the symbol of a city — the holy Jerusalem. Many figures are borrowed from the Prophet's description of the earthly city, and are here given a heavenly turn by the Spirit of God. Every reader should carefully observe that this chapter does not describe the Bride's home, but herself. This is necessary to remark, as many have read these glowing utterances as referring to heaven. Some may wonder why such a symbol should be used of the Bride of the Lamb. We must remember that she is to be associated with Him in all His future government. When He administers the government of the earth, His Bride will share in His honours. Viewed as in connection with the earth, she is set before us as a city, radiant in glory, and illumined by the divine presence.

How full of meaning are the words "the Lamb's wife." The title "the Lamb" reminds us of the sufferings and death of the Blessed One. The Church is called to have fellowship with His sufferings during the present time; and, in consequence, shall participate in His glory. The suffering comes before the glory. Let us remember this. It may help us in some of the circumstances through which we may have to pass for His Name's sake.

It should be carefully observed in Revelation 21:1-27, that Revelation 21:1-8 speak of eternity, and that Revelation 21:9 carries us back to the millennial condition of things. Revelation 21:1-8 follow the description of the great White Throne, which will be set up at the very end of time, when the heavens and the earth are no more. The language of the verses clearly refers to a condition settled for all eternity, whether for the blessed or for the lost. But the succeeding verses carry us back to the time-state. Does not the mention of the vials and the plagues prove this? And if confirmation be needed, we would refer the reader to the mention of "nations," "kings," and "healing" (Revelation 21:24-26; Revelation 22:2). Such expressions would not be used if the eternal condition were being described. Revelation 21:9-27, Revelation 22:1-5, we have no doubt, shows the Lamb's wife in her millennial attire.

To behold this glorious vision, John was carried away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain. It is good to get far above all the mists and swamps of this poor world, and to enter into God's thoughts. The Spirit of God delights to show what the Church is to be in the future, that it may have power over our souls during the present. It was a fairer sight that was shown to John than Moses

beheld when with God on the heights of Pisgah. The one was earthly, the other heavenly; the one was soon marred by the sins of God's people, the other will retain its God-given perfection for ever.

In describing the Holy Jerusalem the Spirit uses a great many charming figures, all very full of meaning. Our space will not permit of a detailed examination of them all; we must content ourselves with a few brief remarks. But we earnestly commend the study of this chapter to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ. It will amply repay care and patience. The Spirit of God is here showing the glories with which divine grace will invest the Church in the coming day. What more pleasing or elevating study for our hearts? What more sanctifying in its effects'?

First, she is said to have "the glory of God." Hope has given place to realization, expectation to possession. For this the Lord Jesus prayed to the Father, and for it we rejoice in hope. Then the Church will be a perfect light-giver. "Her shining was like a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal." Her shining has been sadly marred here. She has suffered the world and other things to come between her and her Lord. It is only as He shines on His own that they are able to reflect His glory before the eyes of others.

Next we read of "a wall great and high." This suggests the twofold idea of separation and security. Alas! the Church has not been careful to exclude all evil during her sojourn on earth; but in the glorified state "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth." Separation from evil will then be perfectly carried out. Also, what security is there! No more thieves and robbers occurrent, and the roaring lion no longer going about seeking whom he may devour. And, what is even more blessed, no more evil hearts of unbelief to lead us astray!

There are gates, implying intercourse with the outside world. The heavenly redeemed will not keep to themselves the blessings of God, but will gladly dispense them to all around. Angels are at the gates. Their place is not to rule, but to serve. They are content to be the heavenly porters of the city. No jealousy is in their hearts. They know their place, and fill it for God; and they admire the grace which has called redeemed men to an incomparably higher place and relationship. God is glorified in it all, and that is sufficient for them.

The gates bear "the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel." This fact has been viewed by some as showing that the earthly Bride is contemplated in these chapters. But there is no need thus to understand the statement. The names are on "the gates" which, as we have said, speak of intercourse with the outside world. Now it is plain that God will administer the earthly part of the inheritance by means of Israel. We regard this connection with the heavenly Bride to be as follows: The latter will be the inner circle of government and in closest association with the King; Israel will be the outer circle of government, and will be in direct contact with the people of the earth. Even in present day administrations these differences may be seen; the Cabinet being the inner circle in connection with the Sovereign, lesser officers forming the outer circle who come into more direct contact with the people.

The wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are inscribed "the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb." This reminds us of Ephesians 2:20. The Church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets. They were the vessels inspired by God to bring out the truths, far in advance of Old Testament revelation, that are needed for the present dispensation.

When the city was measured with the golden reed its length, breadth, and height were found to be equal. Tested by divine righteousness no inequality or unevenness is detected. How different now! We often see much unevenness, if not positive crookedness, and it causes our hearts pain. But how complete the change in the day of glory! Christ's own perfection will be everywhere seen, to the delight and admiration of all. "And the building of the wall of it was of jasper," speaking of divine, though not Godhead, glory (Revelation 4:3); "And the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass" - divine righteousness everywhere seen. The precious stones follow, into the details of which we cannot now enter. They show that every kind of beauty will be displayed in the glorified. God's own character will be seen in all; all His excellencies will be manifested as never on earth.

Each gate was of one pearl. This reminds us of the well-known parable in Matthew 13:45-46. From whatever point the holy city is viewed, there is the memorial of the deep love of Christ — that love which led Him into unutterable depths that we might be His for ever. "The street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass." "The street" is emblematic of intercourse. How sweet and perfect will this be with each other in the glory! Our intercourse is frequently marred here, through the unwatchfulness of our hearts. In glory it will be according to divine righteousness, agreeable to God, and a delight to us.

No temple was seen in the Holy City, in contrast with the earthly. Israel's metropolis will possess the Temple of God once more (Ezekiel 40:1-49. &c.); at once a privilege and joy. But this cannot be for the heavenly saints, who are to enjoy a nearness to God peculiarly their own, through Christ's redemption. No part of the heavenly city is more holy than another; the presence of God and the Lamb fill it throughout.

Nor is there any need of created light, for the glory of God is there, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof. The homage of the kings of the earth will gladly be paid to the Lamb's wife, and the nations shall walk in its reflected light. Not only so, but from the Throne of God and of the Lamb, through the city, a river of blessing will flow, for the benefit of all. Eternally fruitful the glorified will be, and, during the millennial age, will minister to the nations for their healing. Creation's scars shall all be removed.

These are some of the glories that await us. Every sentence in Revelation 21:1-27; Revelation 22:1-21, is divinely full, and, blessed be God, divinely true. His own matchless grace will make it all good in all His own, for Christ's glory. These are glories and joys that will never fade. It is refreshing to contemplate the Bride in her eternal condition, after considering her millennial relationship and connections. When all things are made new, the Holy City, New Jerusalem, will come down from God, out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:2). Still a Bride. The freshness not departed, the first glow of love not vanished. The Bridegroom's love perfect for her, and hers perfect for Him, and that for ever and ever.

He is coming, coming for us;

Soon we'll see His light afar,

On the dark horizon rising,

As the Bright and Morning Star,

Cheering many a waking watcher,

As the star whose kindly ray

Heralds the approaching morning

Just before the break of day.

Oh! what joy, as night hangs round us,

Tis to think of morning's ray;

Sweet to know He's coming for us,

Just before the break of day.

He is coming, coming for us;

Soon we'll hear His voice on high;

Dead and living, rising, changing,

In the twinkling of an eye

Shall be caught up all together,

For the meeting in the air;

With a shout the Lord, descending,

Shall Himself await us there.

Oh! what joy that great foregathering,

Trysted meeting in the air;

Sweet to know He's coming for us,

Calling us to join Him there.

He is coming as the Bridegroom

Coming to unfold at last

The great secret of His purpose,

Mystery of ages past,

And the Bride, to her is granted

In His beauty now to shine,

As in rapture she exclaimeth —

"I am His, and He is mine."

Oh! what joy that marriage union

Mystery of love divine;

Sweet to sing in all its fullness —

"I am His, and He is mine."

Christ Millennial Reign.

In our consideration of future judgements and all glories, we have now arrived at that happy and glorious period which has been the theme of the Holy Spirit almost since the world began — the millennial reign of the Second Man, our Lord Jesus Christ. At various times, and in many ways, has the Spirit of God spoken of that epoch in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Sometimes He presents us with a striking picture which, by the light of later revelations, the instructed mind cannot fail to understand; as for example, the appearing of Melchizedek, King of Righteousness, and King of Peace in Genesis 14:1-24. On other occasions, we find Psalmists breaking forth into rapturous song, and depicting in glowing strains the glorious time that is coming for this poor sin-stricken earth; and later, especially in the days of Israel's declension and ruin, we find the Prophets borne along by the Spirit of God, and sublimely describing the glories and blessedness of the same wondrous period. Not that all who thus spoke fully understood their own utterances. They were frequently carried far beyond what their own minds could enter into. As we read in 1 Peter 1:11, "Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit Of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow." But whether Moses, Psalmists or Prophets wrote, it was one Spirit speaking through all, for the rest and joy of faith, and for the warning of the ungodly.

Our present subject is immense, and, if fully considered, would require a considerable volume to itself. As this cannot well be, and as it is important to be concise, we propose to deal with the coming millennium in the following order. We will endeavour to show what that glorious time means: —

1. For Christ.

2. For the Heavenly Saints.

3. For Israel.

4. For the Nations of the Earth.

5. For the Creation in General.

6. For Satan.

1. It will be the hour of CHRIST'S supremacy as Man, not only over the heavenly part of the inheritance of God, but over the earthly also. This consideration should make it clear to every mind that there can be no millennial blessing until Christ comes. It used to be vaguely thought by many that the millennium will run its course prior to His appearing; His coming for judgement being placed by such expositors at the close of that period. But a Christless millennium is, to say the least, a very unsatisfactory idea, not at all sustained by the Word of God. If any of our readers have any doubt as to this important point, we earnestly beg them to consider carefully Acts 3:19-21. We quote from the Revised Version: "Repent ye therefore, and turn again that your sins may be blotted out (it is Peter's appeal to Israel), that so there may come seasons of refreshing

from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus: whom the heavens must receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of His holy Prophets which have been since the world began." This shows that Christ will remain in the heavens until the hour of Israel's repentance, and then will appear for universal blessings. His coming is therefore clearly pre-millennial.

The foregoing passage refers, of course, to the earth only. To understand the full glory of that day, Ephesians 1:9-10, should be consulted. "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, for the administration of the fullness of times; to head up all things in the Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth." (J. N. Darby's Translation.) Here we learn that God intends to make Christ the Head and Centre of a united system of heavenly and earthly glory. Everything is to be His. God has made known to us beforehand what His will and pleasure is, because of our connection, through grace, with Him who is to inherit it all.

Psalms 8:1-9 will then receive its full accomplishment. The Son of man there spoken of is not Adam, but Christ. The divine purpose is there declared to set Him over all the works of God's hand. The first man had this grant of power from God (Genesis 1:26-28), but failed to act for His glory. He sold himself into the hand of the enemy, and became his tool and slave. When the Second Man takes up the reins of universal government in God's due time, He will glorify God perfectly, and bring in full blessing for all beneath His sway.

Perhaps the earthly glory that is in store for Christ is not sufficiently thought of by the saints at large. It is, of course, thoroughly believed and understood that He has present glory in heaven, and every redeemed soul owns gladly that He is worthy of it; but His future glory in the earth has not the place it should have in the minds of many. Yet it is due to Him as an answer to His humiliation below. It is not sufficient that He is glorified in heaven. He never was dishonoured there. But it is a perfect delight to those who love His name that He is to be glorified and adored in the very scene of His rejection and shame. God will see to this. Here where: His royal claims were scorned, every knee shall bow to Him; here where He was reviled and insulted, every tongue shall own that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. His Name shall be excellent in all the earth.

After all man's failure and sin, it is a relief to the heart to know that God has a Man in store to whom He can entrust universal dominion, and who will use it for His glory. The house of David, for whom God intended supremacy in the earth, miserably failed in the person of its choicest representative; the first great Gentile head (Nebuchadnezzar) to whom power was divinely entrusted after the failure of David's house, misused his might and authority; but God has One in reserve Who will succeed gloriously where they and all others have painfully failed.

The kingdom of Christ will be brought in by power and judgement. It is vain to cling to the notion of a peaceful subjugation of the whole world by means of the Gospel. Scripture nowhere countenances the idea, though, blessed be God, it everywhere proposes blessing for all, if they believe the Gospel. Psalms 45:1-17 vividly describes the coming of Christ to reign: "Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O most mighty, with Thy glory and Thy majesty. And in Thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness: and Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the kings enemies; whereby the people fall under Thee" (Psalms 45:3-5) . This is not Gospel progress, but unsparing judgement of

enemies. David and Solomon together typify Christ in His reign. The first was a man of war. He was ever shedding the blood of his enemies, with the result that his son succeeded to a peaceful throne, and was enabled to reign in rest and glory. Thus will it be in the day to come. "By fire and by His sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many" (Isaiah 66:16). Then peace will follow on a righteous ground.

Righteousness and peace, therefore, will be the two great characteristics of the reign of Christ. Melchizedek shows this typically. His personal name means king of righteousness, and the name of his city means peace (Hebrews 7:2). "Behold a King shall reign in righteousness . . . and the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever" (Isaiah 32:1-17). Evil will be promptly put down, instead of being borne with in long-suffering as now (Isaiah 65:20), and peace will flow universally. Righteousness will then be exalted, and iniquity will hide its head.

2. THE HEAVENLY SAINTS are to have part with Christ in this dominion. By "the heavenly saints" we mean not merely the Church of this dispensation, but all whose portion is above.* We observe at least four classes of these in Scripture: (1) The Old Testament believers; (2) the Church of God; (8) the latter-day witnesses who lose their lives for the testimony of Jesus and for the Word of God; and (4) those who refuse to worship the beast and his image. The first two of these classes will be removed to heaven at the Lord's descent into the air, in order to their coming with Him at His public appearing (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:23, 1 Corinthians 15:51-55; Colossians 3:4). The third and fourth classes will apparently be raised at His appearing, in time to have part in His administration of the kingdom (Revelation 6:9-11; Revelation 15:2-4; Revelation 20:4). All these are to share the reign of Christ. "The Saints of the Most High (or, high places) shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever" (Daniel 7:18).

{*The saints of the present period will, of course, have a closer and more intimate association with Christ than others. When He fills all in all, the Church, His body, has a special place (Ephesians 1:22-23).}

Here a difficulty may present itself to the minds of some of our readers. It has been asked: "Are the heavenly saints to be actually on the earth during the kingdom?" By no means; our home is above. Even Christ Himself will not be personally present on earth throughout that period, else where the need for a "prince" to represent Him in Jerusalem? (Ezekiel 44:1-3; Ezekiel 45:7-25, etc.). Matthew 13:41-43, may help us here. First we read of "The kingdom of the Son, out of which all evil will be purged. This is the earthly part evidently. Then we read of the kingdom of the Father, and it is in that we are to have our place; "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Our position in relation to the earth is thus compared to that of the sun. We shall be the world's light-givers, and dispensers of divine blessing. We shall visit the earth with Christ at His appearing, and probably afterwards; but our own proper habitation is the Father's house above.

The thought of such dignity should influence our walk in the world now. This is what the Apostle brought before the Corinthians, when, in utter forgetfulness of what they had been called to, they carried their grievances against each other before the world. "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?" (1 Corinthians 6:1-3). Our association with Christ in the coming kingdom is thus referred to as a

truth well-known in that day. How grievous the fall when Christians not only lost sight of their own future place as the world's rulers and judges, but even admitted the idea of standing before the Great White Throne to be judged themselves! The notion of a general judgement, to which we refer, is a serious dishonour to the accomplished work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ere we leave this point, another important consideration must be briefly noticed. Our respective places in the coming kingdom will be allotted according to our walk and service in the present age. To the faithful servant the Lord will say, "I will make thee ruler over many things" (Matthew 25:21-23). This is frequently brought forward in the epistles as an incentive to godliness of walk and diligence in service (2 Timothy 4:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Peter 1:11). Let every Christian reader lay this seriously to heart. Suppose any to deliberately choose a path of ease and honour in this world, as the carnal Corinthians of old, will they — can they stand well in the approaching kingdom? (1 Corinthians 4:8-14). Impossible. But if, on the other hand, any are willing to let the world go by for Christ's sake, content to bear the cross day by day, will He fail to reward them suitably in the day of His glory? In this way David acted towards the companions of his distress when he reached the throne. The Greater than David will be equally mindful of every bit of faithfulness to His Word and Name.

3: ISRAEL'S PART in the millennial kingdom will, of course, be in the earth, according to the terms of Jehovah's promise to their fathers. The Land of Canaan is to be theirs for an everlasting possession, and Jehovah will plant them in it with His whole heart and with His whole soul (Jeremiah 32:41). All their backsliding shall be forgotten and their sins forgiven, the law of God being henceforward divinely written in their hearts and minds. Ere these blessed results can be attained, Israel (the whole twelve tribes) will have to pass through terrible discipline in righteousness, Judah in the land and the ten tribes outside of it. But the remnant that shall be left after the sifting will be converted to God. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the watercourses. One shall say, I am Jehovah's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto Jehovah and surname himself by the name of Israel" (Isaiah 44:3-5).

When the nation is thus right with God He will be able to use them as His instruments in dealing with others, and this in a twofold way. First, He will by their means put down enemies — Edom. Moab, and Ammon in particular escaping the devastating hand of the King of the North for this purpose (Daniel 11:41; Isaiah 11:14). Then He will make them channels of blessing to all that are left of the nations. Micah 5:7-9 is very interesting in this connection: "And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a dew from Jehovah, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man nor waiteth for the sons of men. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. Thine hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off." Here we have Israel's twofold mission; as a lion among the beasts they put down foes, and as a dew from Jehovah they dispense blessing all around.

Jerusalem in that day will be the metropolis of the earth. It is Jehovah's chosen dwelling place, the spot that His heart desires as His settled abode and rest (Psalms 132:13-14). He has spoken

glorious things of it, and intends to make it an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations (Psalms 87:3; Isaiah 60:15). His presence will cause it to be called "Jehovah Shammah" ("Jehovah is there"). To that centre the representatives of the nations will annually go up to pay their court to the great King and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (Ezekiel 48:35; Zechariah 14:16).

The sanctuary of Jehovah will be restored to Israel in the millennial day. Many particulars as to this and the redistribution of the land among the tribes will be found in Ezekiel 48:1-35. Well may all who behold Israel's blessing then say, "Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee" (Isaiah 12:6).

The prosperity of Solomon's day, when all Israel sat peacefully every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, eating and drinking and making merry, was as nothing compared with what God will vouchsafe to His people in the reign of David's greater Son (1 Kings 4:20-25). David was led of the Spirit to describe the blessedness of that time in Psalms 72:1-20., and was carried far beyond himself into rapturous worship and praise. Faith, as it contemplates the future, breaks out into: "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel"; while the enemy from without can only say with sadness, "Alas! who shall live when God doeth this?" (Psalms 72:18; Numbers 24:23).

4. THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH will then receive their full portion of blessing in connection with the people of Israel. God's mercy to His chosen will be abundantly spread abroad. His way will be known upon earth and His salvation among all nations. The name of Jehovah will be excellent in all the earth, and all nations will call Him blessed.

Israel will not then be the coldly conservative people that they have been in the past, but will gladly share with others the rich blessings vouchsafed to them by God. But universal blessing cannot be until the millennial day. In vain do Christians speak of the whole world being converted by means of the Gospel as at present preached. The thought is well-intentioned, we are sure, but it is nevertheless a great mistake. Ethiopia will doubtless soon stretch out her hands unto God, but not as the result of Christian labour. It will be brought about by Jewish instrumentality, when Christ is here reigning on His throne in Zion. The divine intention by means of the Gospel of the grace of God is to "take out" from among the nations a people for His Name. The body of Christ is still in course of formation, and is being composed of believers from among both Jews and Gentiles.

In the Church, the distinctions of Jew and Gentile have no place (Colossians 3:11). In the millennium they will reappear, though in blessing. The Jew will have the chief place in the earth; the Gentile will be blessed subordinately. "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; it shall come to past, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before Jehovah, and to seek Jehovah of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek Jehovah of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before Jehovah. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you" (Zechariah 8:20-23). Their kings will be their leaders in this. The nations will have their respective kings in that day, but they will all recognise the supremacy of the Lord Jesus, as King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 21:24-26; Psalms 72:10-11).

Conversion, if not absolutely universal then, will be very nearly so. "All Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:26), and apparently the great majority of the surviving Gentiles also. The words of Zechariah quoted above, point to this, and we are told elsewhere that "the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together"; also that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea"; and that the Spirit of God shall be poured out upon all flesh (Isaiah 40:5; Isaiah 11:9; Joel 2:28). Yet we read in Psalms 18:44-45, "As soon as they hear of Me, they shall obey Me; the strangers shall submit themselves (marg. 'yield feigned obedience') unto Me. The strangers shall fade away, and be afraid out of their close places." Compare with this Psalms 66:3; Psalms 81:15. From these, and other passages, it would appear that some will bow falsely, and merely because they are in the presence of a power that it is impossible to withstand. It was so with some in the early days of Solomon's kingdom (1 Kings 1:1-53). Such, with others, perhaps born during the Lord's reign, will be only too ready to listen to the suggestions of Satan when he is released for a little season at the close (Revelation 20:7-9). What is man! Grace does not attract him; and even glory will not permanently convince him!

5. We will now consider briefly what God will do in that day for the CREATION IN GENERAL. Man, by his sin, has not only brought ruin on himself, but has marred his home, and dragged down all the creatures dependent upon him. Thorns and thistles are marks of man's sin, much more the groans of the brute creation (Genesis 3:18). Man, unlike angels, was constituted by God the centre of a system of things. The whole of this lower creation either suffers or rejoices with its head. This is its time of suffering. "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Romans 8:22). We who believe groan also in sympathy, our mortal bodies forming a link with the old creation. But we alone are in God's secret, as to where deliverance will come from, and when. Though it understands it not, "the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestations of the sons of God." When Christ comes upon the scene, bringing with him the whole glorified family of God, then the creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

What a change will then pass over this poor earth! Think of the wolf casting aside his savage instincts and dwelling peaceably with the lamb; the leopard lying down with the kid; the calf and the young lion feeding together; and a little child leading them all! (Isaiah 11:6-7; Isaiah 65:25.) Think also of the sucking child playing on the hole of the asp, and of the weaned child putting his hand on the cockatrice's den, and getting no harm! What days of peace and quietness for man and beast! There will be one solemn exception to this general deliverance — the serpent. "Dust shall be the serpent's meat" (Isaiah 65:25). The reason is not far to seek. Under this form the tempter seduced our first parents? and thus brought in all the misery; this God will never overlook or forget. The curse pronounced in Eden will not be revoked in this case (Genesis 3:14). There will be physical changes also, at least in the land of Israel. Thus we read of a river flowing from under the threshold of the house of God, parting into two heads, going east and west, and fertilising wherever it goes (Ezekiel 47:1-23.). We read also that "the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose," and that "instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree" (Isaiah 35:1; Isaiah 55:13). Barrenness will be practically unknown in the day of Christ's supremacy in the earth. Wonderful jubilee for this long-enslaved scene! Well may believers say "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

6. SATAN will then be placed under restraint. For a thousand years men will be spared temptation from without. If sin appears (an exceptional thing, it would seem, Isaiah 65:20), men will not be able to blame any but their own evil hearts. During the whole period of the reign of Christ, the great adversary will be confined to the bottomless pit (or the abyss, Revelation 20:1-3). This should not be confounded with Gehenna — the lake of fire. The one is a place of temporary confinement, the other is his eternal portion, in common with ungodly men. Satan and his agents well know what is in store for them. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, demons recognised Him as their tormentor, and on one occasion besought Him not to consign them just then to the abyss (Matthew 8:29; Luke 8:31). The time for this is Christ's appearing, and it is in order that the whole earth may know peace and rest under His holy and beneficent sway.

Thus will the tide of blessing roll on. Earth's deep scars will be divinely effaced, and human sorrows and afflictions will cease. Though the population will enormously increase, there will be plenty for all, for the earth will be prolific as never before. There will be no want for His subjects; every need will be abundantly supplied. Surely such a term of blessedness and peace will convince men that the service of Christ is better than that of Satan! Alas, no! No sooner will Satan be released from his prison than he will succeed in stirring up rebellion. A vast hosts will be got together to make war on the camp of the (earthly) saints and the beloved city (Jerusalem). Divine retribution will fall at once, without warning or mercy (Revelation 20:7-10). Nothing remains to be done but the judgement of the dead at the Great White Throne, which will follow in solemn sequence. On this we need not now dwell, having already considered it in an earlier paper. The reign of Christ as man being over, and all foes having been subjugated, Christ will deliver up the kingdom to Him who is God and Father. "When all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). Here we pause. Time is no longer; eternity is come.

Christ is coming! let creation

From her groans and travail cease

Let the glorious proclamation

Hope restore, and faith increase:

Christ is coming!

Come, Thou blessed Prince of Peace!

Earth can now but tell the story

Of Thy bitter cross and pain;

She shall yet behold Thy glory

When Thou comest back to reign

Christ is coming!

Let each heart repeat the strain.

Long Thine exiles have been pining,

Far from rest, and home, and Thee

Soon in heavenly glory shining

Their Restorer shall they see:

Christ is coming!

Haste the joyous Jubilee! With that blessed hope before us,

Let no harp remain unstrung:

Let the mighty advent chorus

Onward roll in every tongue:

Christ is Coming!

Come, Lord Jesus, quickly come!

Chapter 92

Coming Events on Earth and in Heaven

Coming Events on Earth and in Heaven.

By W W Fereday.

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The Blessed Hope

The outlook for the world is of the gravest possible character. Its advanced civilisation, of which has been so complacent, has utterly failed to preserve from the most colossal and the most barbarous conflict of the ages. The world's vaunted civilisation has, indeed completely broken down, and its priests and prophets can only bewail its ruin. From the present mighty upheaval a new order of things must needs emerge. A reconstruction practically every department of human affairs will take place. But what the result of it all will be — how it will operate — no one can say. There is ample room for anxiety on the part of rulers and statesmen everywhere.

It is no part of the duty of the Christian to occupy himself with the immediate future. The Spirit of God would concentrate our attention upon a certain fixed point in the purposes of God, when everything will reach its climax. We refer to the great Day of the Lord, which will be ushered in by the public manifestation of the Lord Jesus from Heaven. Of that Day prophets and psalmists have spoken and sung in ages past. That Day will bring about a total reversal of the order of things which it will fill here. It will bring to an abrupt termination "Man's Day" — this period of human pride and self-will — in order that the will of God may prevail. When "the world kingdom of our Lord and

His Christ" (Revelation 11:15) established, righteousness, peace, and blessing will fill the earth. Until then the anguish must needs deepen day by day.

The Day of the Lord, however near it may be, will not open just yet. Many prophetic events (which will doubtless be crowded into a very short space of time) must be accomplished before its inauguration. But there is a preliminary event (inseparably connected with the "Day") which may take place at any hour — the Lord's descent into the air to call up to Himself His Heavenly elect. It is the divine intention to bring forth "the saints of the Heavenly places" in the same glory with Christ when He appears. He will come "to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that have believed, in that Day" (2 Thessalonians 1:10). In order that this may be, He will first gather up His own and fit them for the great display.

This is what the Apostle in Titus 2:13 calls "the Blessed Hope." The Church is to see the Lord as "the Bright Morning Star" before Israel and the world behold Him "as the Sun of righteousness" (Revelation 22:16; Malachi 4:2). This will be the fulfilment of the Saviour's promise to His disciples on the eve of His departure: "I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there ye may be also" (John 14:3). That there is no thought of death in this familiar passage is sufficiently proved by John 21:22-23.

Our feeble minds can scarcely comprehend what is told us concerning our Lord's return. He will descend, His mighty voice will be heard, sleeping saints will be raised, and living ones "changed in a moment" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52). In the morning occupied with our usual toil; in the afternoon at home in the Father's house for ever. What an expectation!

The question may arise with some: "Will every saint be taken?" Unquestionably. It is "the Hope of righteousness" (Galatians 5:5). God has connected the Hope with the righteousness with which He has invested us in the risen Christ. He whom God has "justified" must needs be also "glorified" (Romans 8:30). It would be a dishonour to the work of the Lord Jesus if one of His saints were omitted in the Day for which we wait. Even to the ill-behaved Corinthians the Apostle wrote: "We shall all be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51).

The expectation of Christ should mightily influence us during "the little while." The Spirit brings it before us in Scripture in connection with all the circumstances of daily life. It is an incentive to holiness. "Every man that hath this Hope on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). It is impossible to cherish the though that we shall be conformed to His image presently without longing to be more like Him morally now. The Apostle in his prayer for the Thessalonians, in 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13, looked forward to the Lord's Coming as the consummation of a blameless and holy walk in them. It is

2. Comfort in Sorrow. Thus to the perplexed and the, bereaved, the Spirit, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, present the hope for their comfort and encouragement. The Old Testament believer looked for reunion with departed one in the realms of the dead (2 Samuel 12:23); the New Testament saint looks to meet in the air, in resurrection life, and glory, all those to whom he has said farewell in the faith of Christ.

3. Cheer in Persecution. The Hebrew believers had suffered much, both in property and person, for the Name of the Lord Jesus. The Apostle earnestly desired that their faith should not droop by reason of their afflictions Accordingly he says: "Yet a little while, and He that shall come, will come,

and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10:37) The loss would soon be over, and then the everlasting gain

4. Support under Oppression. To those who were enduring tyranny, whose good service was neither appreciated nor rewarded by those who held them in bondage, James wrote: "Be patient therefore, brethren unto the Coming of the Lord . . the Coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (James 5:7-8). His eye sees all that comes upon His own during their pathway through the world, and He will adjust their every wrong at His return He is a righteous Lord.

5. Encouragement in Service. Thus we read is 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 : "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence o our Lord Jesus Christ at His Coming? For ye are our glory and joy." Does the tried heart of the worker sometimes feel overcharged by the unbelief and waywardness of those amongst whom he labours? Let him encourage his heart with the happy thought that the full fruit of all true service for Christ will be seen without fail when He returns.

Above all things, the Spirit of God would produce in our hearts longing to see the Saviour's face. To work for Him is good, and will receive its reward; to wait for Him is better, and the reward is correspondingly more wonderful, as Luke 12:35-38, Luke 12:42-44 testifies. May our hearts be so completely detached from everything here that in response to His "Yea, I Come Quickly," we may be able joyfully to respond, "AMEN, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

The Elders In Heaven.

The history of the professing Church having been unfolded before him in the epistles to the seven assemblies the Apocalyptic seer next heard the call, "Come up hither," and immediately he found himself in spirit before the throne of God. John is here the representative of us all. The same Voice that saluted his ears in Patmos will presently be heard by the whole household of faith, and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we shall find ourselves, not in spirit merely, but in person, in the midst of Heaven's glories, in the presence of God and the Lamb.

Grouped around the throne of the Eternal, John saw four and twenty thrones (not "seats" as in the A.V. of Revelation 4:4), with four and twenty elders sitting upon them, clothed in white raiment, with crowns of gold upon their heads. From the first mention of them in Revelation 4:4 until the last in Revelation 19:4, the book of Revelation represents these elders as characterised by spiritual intelligence. They understand the divine purpose in connection with creation (Revelation 4:11), they give interpretations to the Apostle in Revelation 5:5; Revelation 7:13-14, they sing with appreciation of the Blood of the Lamb in Revelation 5:9-10; they celebrate the divine assumption of the Kingdom in Revelation 11:16; and they acquiesce in God's judgement of the great whore in Revelation 19:4. Who are these favoured ones?

Let it be distinctly understood that Revelation 4:1-11 and Revelation 5:1-14 do not give us a picture of what is, but of what will be. Heaven, at present, wears; no such aspect as that which is portrayed in these chapters. Not until the present enterprise of God's Spirit is completed will Heaven thus prepare itself for the work of judgement. It is important to keep this fact in mind if we would understand what beings are shown to us in the enthroned and worshipping elders.

Note, first of all, that they are a representative company. The elders, both in the Old and New Testaments, stand (or act) for the whole company of God's people (Exodus 4:29; Deuteronomy

31:28, Acts 11:30). The number corresponds with the divisions of Israel's priesthood in 1 Chronicles 24:1-31 and 1 Chronicles 25:1-31. The twenty-four chief priests were representative of the whole priestly family. The elders of the Revelation are manifestly priests; their robes (Revelation 4:4) and censers (Revelation 5:8) indicating this. They have also a royal character, for they are both crowned and enthroned. They are not angels, for the angelic host is everywhere shown as a company apart (e.g., Revelation 5:11); and, moreover, angels are not called to occupy thrones, rule being no part of their office (Hebrews 2:5). Nor are the elders the spirits of departed saints awaiting the resurrection, for their number remains the same throughout — there is no increase. Who then can the elders be but the whole Heavenly priesthood, viewed under this representative symbol? By the Heavenly priesthood we mean all those who are glorified at the moment of our Lord's descent into the air - the saints of the Old Testament dispensations, and the Church "which is His Body" (Hebrews 11:40). All these, whatever differences there may be in their position and relationships in other respects, can unitedly and joyfully sing: "Unto Him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. AMEN" (Revelation 1:5-6). I find myself amongst that holy throng !

These kingly priests are all seen enthroned in peace and rest in the presence of God and the Lamb, before God "arises to shake terribly the earth" (Isaiah 2:21). And "not the earth only, but also Heaven" (Hebrews 12:26). Not until Revelation 6:1-17 does the Lamb commence to break the seals of the fateful book. But the judgement is manifestly preparing, for "out of the throne proceeded lightnings, and thunderings, and voices" (Revelation 4:5) The elders are seen in holy calm: Not even the thrice "Holy" of the living creatures dismays them, as a similar cry distressed Isaiah so long ago (Isaiah 6:5). They are in the presence of God on the ground of redeeming Blood, and they know it. Judgement there must needs be, for the long-suffering of God is now ended, but judgement means nothing for those whose hope and confidence is the Blood of the Lamb.

What a scene is described to us when the Lamb takes the Book out of the right hand of Him that sitteth upon the throne! John was weeping sorely because no one in Heaven or earth was found competent to open (or even to look upon) the book, in answer to the angel's challenge. Told of a Lion — the Lion of the tribe of Judah — he looked, and behold a Lamb, and He bearing the marks of having been slain. It is the same glorious Person as the Son of Man of Daniel 7:13-14, who is there seen approaching the throne of the Ancient of Days in order to receive the investiture of the Kingdom; in Revelation 6:6-7, He takes into His hands the book of the divine counsels as the only One in Heaven or earth capable of carrying them into effect. The book is completely filled — "written within and on the backside"; no purpose of God will ever require revision or addition. All that is required is One to put everything into execution.

The Lion speaks of irresistible power; the Lamb of redeeming grace. God's ultimate object is blessing. Accordingly, when judgement has done its work, redemption will be known in earth below even as in Heaven above. We get the celebration of this in Daniel 7:13-14. When Judah's Lion rises up "Man's Day" will be brought to a close, and the Day of the Lord will set in.

The sight of the once-slain Lamb in the midst of the throne moves all Heaven profoundly. The elders rise from their thrones, and with the living creatures they fall low at His feet and chant His

praise. The songs of earth wax old; Heaven's "New song" never. God will never weary of listening to His redeemed proclaiming the worthiness of the Lamb; both to Him and to them that song will have eternal freshness. The language of the new song is not correctly given in our Authorised Version It should run thus: "Thou art worthy to take the book and to open its seals, because Thou hast been slain, and hast redeemed to God by Thy blood out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and made them to our God kings and priests; and they shall reign over the earth" (Darby's Translation). The language is not personal, but general. They speak not so much of those who derive benefit from the Redeemer's work, as of the work itself. Its wondrous value is their theme. It goes without saying that they are themselves blessed in virtue of it, and so, likewise, are the saints who are suffering at that time upon the earth; but, we repeat, it is the work, rather than the beneficiaries thereof, which they proclaim before the throne of God.

The angels then express themselves. The elders sing to the Lamb; the angels speak of the Lamb. With a loud voice they say: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." All Heaven is thus in sympathy with the heart of God; every tongue proclaims the worthiness of the One who died. At last a Person has been found to whom power and riches can be safely entrusted, and who will use them for God and His glory.

But the circle of praise expands yet further, until Heaven, earth, and sea, in glad unison, say: "Blessing and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." It is a prophetic anticipation of the complete deliverance of the whole creation (so long groaning in bondage) as the fruit of the Redeemer's work. The four living creatures respond with their deep "Amen," And the four and twenty elders fall down and worship.

Wonderful thought ! we may find ourselves in the midst of all these glories ere another day dawns.

The New Empire and Its Head.

As a result of the world's conflicts and disorders, a new federal Empire will arise in Europe. Its extraordinary characteristics will excite universal wonder and admiration. In men's eyes it will be incomparable, and its might irresistible. More than human wisdom will be required to bring it to perfection; but when it is established, it will represent the climax of all that men have been striving after from the beginning.

The idea of such an Empire is running strongly in men's minds to-day. The British Premier (Mr. H. H. Asquith), speaking in Dublin early in October, 1914, described his own aspirations thus: "A real European partnership, based on the recognition of equal rights, and established and enforced by a common will."

About the same time the following remarks appeared in The Glasgow Herald: "What a consciousness of strength it would give us, and what a splendid watchword for the struggle, if we could say, with our Allies, that we are fighting for a federated Europe, better still, if we could say we were fighting for a federated world!"

The Daily Mail of 21st December, 1914, hailed the agreement of the three Scandinavian monarchs, as possibly heralding "the beginning of the realization of the old idea of the formation of a nucleus United States of Europe." A prominent writer on military matters, referring to the fear of

some that Russia may become the terror of Europe if the German power is broken, has suggested that the surest way of counteracting that danger, should it arise, would be the federation of the Western powers, even naming ten which, in his opinion, might advantageously draw together. All these statements, a few out of many that might be quoted, are interesting as showing the drift of things in our time. [Written in 1915. The idea of "a League of Nations" has made great advances since then.]

The new Empire, when it appears, will be, after all, an old one revived. Destined to be destroyed by the Son of Man at His second coming to earth, it is the same power that used violence to Him at His first coming. It is the Roman power, but in a form different in many respects from anything known in the past. Thus the Beast, which John saw rising up out of the sea in Revelation 13:1, was in appearance like a leopard, its feet were as those of a bear, and its mouth as that of a lion. These creatures represent the world-empires which preceded Rome — Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece (Daniel 7:4-6). The Empire of the future will thus combine Alexander's rapidity of action with the Persian greed of conquest, and Babylon's tyrannical despotism.

Moreover, the Beast has ten horns. These, we are told both in Daniel 7:24 and Revelation 17:12, are ten kings, who will federate for mutual advantage under one powerful head. Nothing of the kind was seen in the Empire which the Goths destroyed! while powers of both past and future are divinely characterised as wild beasts. That is, they have neither conscience nor heart. Their dominion is founded on rapacity and brute force. Remarkably, the states of this intermediate period, while the Roman Empire is in abeyance, have voluntarily accepted this character — all of them having adopted either a wild beast or bird of prey for their national symbol. Hence the British lion, the German eagle, etc.

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THE FOUR PHASES OF THE EMPIRE are indicated in Revelation 17:8, it was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition." During some twelve centuries it "was." Under this power, John himself was suffering. In A.D 476 its last remnant was extinguished. Accordingly, at the present time it "is not." Presently, it will "ascend out of the bottomless pit," which means that it will be revived by the energy of Satan. Finally, it "will go into perdition," being consigned to eternal doom by the Lord Jesus Christ at His appearing.

All the power of the resuscitated Empire will be centred in its distinguished chief. Thus, doings which are attributed to the Beast itself in Revelation 13:5-7, are attributed to the horn upon the Beast in Daniel 7:8, Daniel 7:11, Daniel 7:25. His confederate kings will "have one mind, and will give their power and strength unto the Beast" (Revelation 17:13). For all practical purposes the Emperor is "the Empire." He wields its mighty power autocratically. The beginning of his prosperity

will be the subjugation of three European Kingdoms (Daniel 7:24). Then (the need of a strong hand being generally recognized) seven others will combine with them under his headship for mutual advantage. The archer upon the white horse who goes forth under the first seal is, in all probability, this victorious leader in the first stages of his career (Revelation 6:2). He is "the prince that shall come" of Daniel 9:26.

1. Religiously, the Empire will be infidel. Though it will be for a time in closest association with, and even dominated by, that which calls itself "the Church" (Revelation 17:1-8), this will be a political arrangement only, involving no respect whatever even for Babylon's caricature of Christianity. [Religion tends more and more to become a mere matter of political convenience. Even Great Britain is not ashamed to pass as the patron of Mohammedanism when the political situation renders it advantageous to do so.] God will no longer be acknowledged even in the formal language of State documents. He will be openly blasphemed (Revelation 13:6). The principle of Romans 13:1-14, will no longer have any application: the civil power will be in avowed apostasy. An image of the Beast will be set up, which the mass will readily worship, and also the Dragon, as the source of the Beast's power and authority. All who refuse to bow will be persecuted. These are not the saints of the Church period, who at that epoch will all be in the Father's house, but the fruits of the latter-day preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom. The blood of these faithful ones, Jews and Gentiles alike, will be shed like water. The cries of the agonised sufferers of the Jewish race may be heard in the prophetic language of many of the Psalms (e.g., Psalms 9:1-20, Psalms 10:1-18, Psalms 44:1-26, etc.). Some of the brightest testimonies that have ever been rendered to God in this evil world will be rendered during the dark hours that will precede the Millennial dawn.

2. Economically the Empire will be the most burdensome despotism the world has ever known. Everything will be centralised. The Government will gather up all the cords into its own hands. Since the Government of that day will be an autocracy, it follows that one tyrannical hand will control the whole vast machinery of human affairs. This is the point to which the present craze for association, co-operation and nationalisation will ultimately land men. Every person will be required to carry a mark — either the name of the Beast or the number of his name. He may wear it in hand or forehead, as he may choose; but carry the mark he must, or be crushed out of existence, since none will be permitted to trade without it. Class distinction will exempt none from this iron rule; "small and great, rich and poor, free and bond" must alike submit (Revelation 13:16). Wielded by his malignant lieutenant, the false prophet (the Antichrist of 1 John 2:18-22), the power of the Beast will penetrate into every quarter. In their mad rage against all ancient authorities, men will produce a perfect welter by their revolutionary violence (Romans 6:12-17; Luke 21:25, Luke 21:28). This will create the need for a strong hand to intervene, and the opportunity for the Emperor of the future will thus arise. Men will be thankful for him until they prove by bitter experience that they have committed themselves to a more galling tyranny than they have ever known before. They will be "scorched" by their own boasted luminary (Revelation 16:8).

This reign of terror will be ended by the abrupt appearing of the Lord from Heaven. The Beast and the false prophet, at the head of their hosts, with all the satellite kings in attendance, will make war against the Lamb; and theme two leaders will be seized, and consigned forthwith to the Lake of Fire (Revelation 19:19-1, Revelation 20:1-15). Without experiencing death and resurrection, these — earth's greatest transgressors — will be summarily judged at least a thousand years before the Great White Throne is set up

The earth's only hope is Christ. Oh, that men perceived this! Every scheme devised by men for the rectification of their wrongs, every device to place human affairs upon a sound and satisfactory basis, is doomed to disappointment. Christ is the Man of God's purpose. He, and He only, is able to make the rough places plain, and the crooked things straight. All this He will accomplish in His Day.

The Casting Down of Satan.

The greatest rebel in the universe, the prime instigator of all evil both above and below, is Satan. During many ages his insolent opposition to all God's will has been tolerated in divine forbearance, but the moment has been already fixed when His forbearance will end. Then the exalted transgressor will meet his doom.

Popular theology seems vague as to the present whereabouts of Satan. Some persons speak of him as if he were already in Hell; others appear to limit the sphere of his operations to the earth. That he has not yet been cast into Hell is sufficiently proved by his own words in Job 1:7. Appearing before Jehovah amongst the sons of God on a certain occasion, the Creator inquired of him: "Whence comest thou?" To which he replied: "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." It is most certain that when Satan or any other transgressors are once cast into Hell there will be no coming forth again to walk to and fro in the earth. Hell's woeful prisoners will not be permitted to roam about at will.

The truth is that Satan and his hosts have not yet been expelled from the heavenly places. Hence they are called in Ephesians 6:12 (margin), "wicked spirits in Heavenly places," and in Isaiah 24:21, "the host of the high ones that are on high." Satan himself is described in Ephesians 2:2 as "the prince of the power of the air." Daniel 10:11-12 shows that evil spirits are even able (when permitted by God) to impede the journey of an angel, sent from above with an answer to prayer. Some have thought that the presence of rebels in the heavens accounts for the omission of the words "it was good," in connection with the work of the second day in Genesis 1:6-8. The omission is certainly remarkable.

Romans 16:20 assures us "the God of Peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Let us repeat to ourselves the word shortly." The career of the great disturber is nearing its end. Christ will soon "undo the works of the devil," according to the divine purpose (1 John 3:8). The first of all prophecies — the word spoken in Eden — will then be completely fulfilled: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head" (Genesis 3:15). The saints are to be associated with Him in His mighty victory, hence the Apostle says "your feet" in Romans 16:20.

Scripture indicates three steps in the overthrow of Satan. The first is found in Revelation 12:7-12; the second in Revelation 19:1-3; and the third in Revelation 20:10. Created originally "full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty," set upon the holy mountain of God as the anointed covering cherub (thus Prime Minister of the Universe, guardian of the rights of the divine throne), Satan will finish in the Lake of Fire (Ezekiel 28:12-17). Not as king will he be sent thither, but as the principal offender and greatest sufferer. It is a hymn, not Scripture, which has addressed him as "Satan, thou king in Hell." The fall of Satan, from heights to us inconceivable, to depths unimaginable, is appalling to contemplate.

In Revelation 12:1-17 the veil is drawn aside that we may behold wonders in Heaven. First we are shown the divine purpose concerning Israel (the sun-clothed woman), with Satan's opposition thereto; then we are permitted to witness a mighty struggle wages in Heaven between Michael and the Dragon, each the leader of angelic hosts. The result of the war is that Satan and his armies are cast out into the earth, never again to have a footing on high. This issue the Saviour saw in prophetic vision when the seventy returned to Him in Luke 10:17-18. The triumph over demons through His Name was to Him the earnest of the final victory.

The duration of the Dragon's sojourn upon earth is definitely stated — 1260 days. From this we learn that the expulsion from Heaven takes place in the middle of the last of Daniel's seventy weeks (Daniel 9:27). As Isaiah 24:21 shows, it is at the epoch of God's judgement of "the kings of the earth upon the earth." This passage indicates the order of these solemn happenings; first, the Heavenly foes overthrown, then the earthly.

The Church must needs be removed from the earth ere Satan and his followers are cast out of Heaven. Our conflict is characteristically with principalities and powers, with the universal lords of this darkness, "with wicked spirits in Heavenly places" (see J. N. Darby's translation of Ephesians 6:12). These now use their subtle influence to prevent our practical realization of our Heavenly portion in the exalted Christ. They will continue in their present position until at last our fighting days are done.

Heaven is filled with rejoicing at their expulsion. It is an important step towards the establishment of the Kingdom of God, and the authority of His Christ. "Now is come the salvation, and strength, and the Kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the Blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives even unto death" (Revelation 12:10-11). Three companies of saints may be discerned in these verses: the raptured ones of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (it is they who speak); the martyred witnesses of Revelation 6:9-11, who loved not their lives even unto death; and the suffering saints of Revelation 12:7; Revelation 13:2, against whom the adversary's accusations have been directed. Never again will he be permitted thus to oppose the priestly service of (:Christ in Heaven, but for a brief season he will be suffered to oppose Him as Prophet and King by means of his two chief instruments as in Revelation 13:1-18.

Satan being cast into the earth, pandemonium will ensue. "Woe to the earth and to the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath because he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (Revelation 12:12) Horrors which are at present beyond the power of human minds to comprehend will fill the scene for an appointed period. Then the divine hand will come down upon Satan once more. Revelation 19:11-21 presents to us in vivid prophecy the coming forth of earth's rightful King. The Beast and the false prophet are consigned to the Lake of Fire, and their hosts are destroyed. Then comes the turn of the malignant instigator of all the evil. John sees an angel coming down from Heaven with the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. In Revelation 9:1 the key is used to open the abyss for the release of hellish evils to operate against men; in Revelation 20:1 the key is used to close it upon the great deceiver. Identified by all his titles — "the Dragon, the Old Serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan" — he is cast into the abyss, which is forthwith closed and sealed. This is the doom which the demons of our Lord's time, notably the

legion of Luke 8:31, so greatly dreaded. He who once caused a seal to be placed upon the tomb of the Son of God (Matthew 27:66), has now a seal placed upon his own prison. At the utmost possible distance from God, he experiences restraint during the thousand years of our Lord's glorious reign. Whatever outbreaks of evil there may be during that period cannot be attributed to Satan, for his deceptions are for the time being at an end. What a reversal of present conditions: the saints sit upon thrones, and their adversary goes into the awful abyss !

But the Millennial Kingdom being a dispensation (the last of them all), it is needful that men should be tested once more ere time gives place to eternity. Accordingly Satan is released for a little season. Unrepentant and unbroken, he makes one last great effort to regain his lost world-empire. Men in remote regions giving heed to his overtures, a vast revolt takes place. But it is earth's last convulsion. As Satan's host seeks to compass about the camp of the saints, and the beloved city (Jerusalem), fire falls from Heaven and devours them.

One last stroke then descends. "The devil which deceived them was cast into the Lake of Fire and brimstone, where the Beast and false prophet are, and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20:10). This is that of which our Lord spake in Matthew 25:41, "everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels." There will be a restricted area ("a lake") somewhere in the universe of God where evil will be confined and punished eternally. No activity in sin can be permitted, even though heart hatred to God and His Son must needs abide, for neither new-birth nor repentance are possible in Gehenna. Absolute subjection will be divinely enforced (Php_2:10-11). Satan and all his dupes, whether angelic or human, will be found together when the final judgement of God is executed.

The Apostasy of Christendom.

The dream of universal conversion to God as the fruit of Christian testimony, however long and widely cherished, is not destined to be realized. Attractive though the thought may be, it has no warrant whatever in Holy Scripture. Every passage which speaks of the close of the present era predicts complete disaster. Darkness, not light- judgement, not conversion, is the appointed end.

The question is sometimes asked: "Is Christianity a failure?" If by this is meant, have any divine purposes failed? the answer is emphatically, "No." No purpose of divine grace can ever fail. All that the Father has given to the Son will undoubtedly come to Him. Christ will at the last surround Himself with all His own. But if the inquiry means, has Christianity, as a system, failed to assimilate everything to itself, the answer must be, Yes. But then God's Word never gave any one the slightest reason to expect that it would. Such a thought should never have been entertained by God's people.

Let us consider a few passages relative to the close of the present era.

1. First, one from the Old Testament. Isaiah 60:2 describing the condition of the human family when Christ shines forth, says: "Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people." This language is plain enough, and reminds us of our Lord's words in Luke 18:8: "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" Had we no other Scripture statement before us, Isaiah 60:2 is sufficient to prove that Christianity is not destined to illuminate the whole earth

2. Take, next, our Lord's teaching in Matthew 13:1-58. In a series of parables He declares the course of things in the Kingdom of Heaven during His absence. Matthew 13:24-30 show that God's wheatfield would be utterly marred by Satanic activity, rendered possible by the carelessness of the labourers responsible; Matthew 13:31-32 indicate that the Kingdom would develop so abnormally that it would afford shelter to the very servants of the devil, Matthew 13:33 speaks of the utter corruption brought about by evil doctrine, while in His last words uttered that day He likened the Kingdom to a net, which gathered much fish only fit to be cast away as worthless. A solemn end to the present period is clearly set forth in our Lord's instruction.

3. We turn now to the teaching of the Apostles. Jude's epistle is occupied with the matter before us. In the course of his few words this writer traces the introduction and development of evil in the professing Church right on to the Lord's judgement of it at His appearing. Jude's language is stern and scathing concerning those who were diligently corrupting the most wonderful testimony ever committed by God to men. No one can read Jude's epistle without perceiving that the position was hopeless from the beginning, and that every succeeding hour has only brought matters nearer to divine judgement.

Paul has much to say concerning the close of this age

Note his parable of the olive tree in Romans 11:16-24

The Jewish people — the natural branches — having been cut off because there was no moral correspondence between them and the root (Abraham), Gentiles, "cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature," have been grafted into their place, and are now the responsible people of God in the earth. But all such stand by faith, or not at all. He who spared not the natural branches cannot be expected to spare the grafts if they appreciate not His goodness. Hence the threat in Romans 11:22, "thou also shalt be cut off." There is no question here of individual salvation, which cannot be affected by dispensational failure; the point is that Gentile profession, looked at as a whole, will be divinely rejected as Israel in an earlier age, if not faithful. But has Gentile profession been faithful? What need for "reformation" or "revival" if all is well? How would it be possible for Protestant to reproach Papist, or vice versa, if "Christendom" had continued in the goodness of God? The breakdown is undeniable; nothing remains, therefore, but the divine cutting off.

Let us now compare three Pauline Scriptures, and note the stages of development indicated in them. In 1 Timothy 4:1, "the Spirit speaketh expressly that in latter times some shall depart from the faith." The verses which follow show plainly that Popery is specially intended, with its outward protestations of sanctity, and its inward moral corruption. "Latter times" simply means times subsequent to the writing of the epistle. The evils described would influence "some"; the departure would not be universal.

In 2 Timothy 3:1-5 he goes further, saying, "This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come." Then follows a picture of wickedness strikingly similar to that of the heathen in Romans 1:28-32 : Christian profession in its last phase is thus destined to be just heathenism with a religious gloss. This is exactly what we see around us today. No hope of improvement can be entertained, for what days can follow "the last"? Moreover, the Apostle says distinctly, "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13).

The last stage of development is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17, and there we learn that ere the Day of the Lord sets in there will come the apostasy, and the revelation of the Man of Sin. "A falling away" (2 Thessalonians 2:3), is far too vague a rendering; "the apostasy" is what the Apostle wrote. The language is terribly precise, and its significance is solemn beyond expression. It means nothing less than the total abandonment of the very name of Christianity Individual apostates there have ever been; we have yet to behold the absolute blotting out of all profession of the Christian faith.

Obviously this cannot be while true Christians remain upon the earth. The presence of the "salt" must needs preserve the mass from utter corruption. Hence the Apostle does not say the apostasy must take place before the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him. He will first come into the air, and remove His own; then, before "the Day" shines forth, the religious mass left behind will throw off even the Name of the Lord that bought them.

It may sound strange to some that such a condition of things could ever be. That Christian lands could again become pagan seems well-nigh inconceivable. Yet the observant eye can scarcely fail to see that everything is working rapidly in that direction even while true believers are present. In recent years the leaders of religious thought have deposed the Bible from its ancient place as the Book of God to the level of a mere religious work liable to criticism as any other; Christ has been degraded from His Godhead glory to the status of a preacher (and sadly lacking even as that); His miraculous birth and resurrection have been voted myths; and His precious Blood has but the value of that of a martyr. "A modified Christ!" they say, is what the times require.

"Liberal mindedness" is the cry heard all around us By this is meant easy toleration of every form of religious error, with a frown and a word of contempt for all who hold fast the truth. "Liberal mindedness" has no kindly expressions for the truth, nor for those who still love it. The Ritualist would speak more generously of Romanists and Greeks, with all their blasphemous superstitions, than of the Evangelicals of his own communion. The New Theologian would say better things even of the Spiritualist than of those in his own denomination who preach such a gospel as the late Mr. Spurgeon preached.

The results of this attitude towards the truth are now everywhere apparent. The fear of God has well nigh disappeared. Accordingly, the Lord's Day is flagrantly desecrated in every quarter and by all classes; heathen religions are applauded; pagan practices are being reintroduced; morals become more lax year by year, and the people are increasingly difficult to govern. Floods of lawlessness bid fair to sweep everything to ruin. The prospects for the end of the age are thus grave indeed, yet not more so than the Word of God foretold from the beginning.

The Anti-Christ.

The expectation of the Antichrist is, and ever has been, universal throughout Christendom, spite of much confusion of thought as to the quarter from whence he springs, and the true character of his unholy mission.

"The Antichrist" is a title only found in John's first epistle (1 John 2:18-22). Other titles belonging to the same transgressor may be found scattered over the Book of God. Almost from the beginning of Christianity there have been antichrists, but this does not touch the fact of a personal Antichrist yet to come, with whom no others can be confounded. Thus John writes: "Little children, it is the

last time (or hour); and as ye have heard that the Antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time" (1 John 2:18). "Antichrist" means one who sets himself in opposition to Christ, and this manifestly where Christ should be exalted. This is sufficient to let us know where to look for antichrists in our own day — not in the atheistical lecture hall, but in the Christian university and pulpit.

In like manner, when the last great deceiver is manifested his connection will not be so much with paganism, as with Judaism, and apostate Christianity.

The old Protestant idea (held tenaciously still by many) was that the Bishop of Rome is the Antichrist. This will not bear the test of Scripture; for two reasons: (1) the Antichrist is an individual, not a succession of men, nor a religious system; (2) the Romish Harlot is rather the woman of sin than "the man of sin" (compare 2 Thessalonians 2:3; Revelation 17:1-6).

We will endeavour to classify some of the Scripture passages which deal with this subject, beginning with

1. The Antichrist's relation to Israel (or more properly, Judah). Where the Christ is looked for, there the Antichrist may be expected to present himself, and certainly unbelieving Israel is still looking for the promised Christ; not yet accepting the Lord Jesus as such. Daniel 11:1-45 is an important passage in this connection. It is part of a communication beginning in Daniel 10:1-21, given for the instruction of the prophet concerning the future of his nation. Daniel 11:1-2 speak of the closing days of Persian supremacy; Daniel 11:3-4 show the Grecian conquests under Alexander, with the break up of his empire after his death; Daniel 11:5-35 describe the contentions of the kings of the North and South (Syria and Egypt) two of the principal divisions of Alexander's empire, Palestine being their usual battle-ground; then, at Daniel 11:36, a new party is abruptly introduced — a King in the land — with whom both the kings of the North and South make war. The description of this Jewish King is so absolutely identical with that of the Man of Sin in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, that it is clear both passages speak of the same person. "The King shall do according to his will, and he shall magnify himself above every god," etc. Here we have the man so opposite in every way to the lowly One who delighted to do the Father's will, of whom our Lord warned His hearers in John 5:43: "I am come in My Father's Name, and ye receive Me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive."

The formation of a Jewish state (a likely event at an early date) will create the need for a ruler. This will be Satan's opportunity to introduce the Antichrist. He will be fair spoken at the beginning; his words will be smoother than butter and softer than oil, but war is in his heart (Psalms 55:21). From the first, the godly in Judea will recognize the Dragon's voice (Revelation 13:11). When he judges his position secure, he will suppress the Jewish religious ordinances (by that time restored, with the temple as their centre), and persecute to the death all who venture to acknowledge God. This "man of the earth" will murder the innocent, saying in his heart: "God hath forgotten; He hideth his face; He will never see it" (Psalms 10:1-18). This "worthless shepherd will eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their hoofs in pieces." See the Revised Version of Zechariah 11:10-17. Yet the ungodly Jewish mass will be highly pleased with their new leader at first. In Isaiah 57:9 Jehovah says: "Thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase thyself even unto Hell." The king here is the Antichrist.

His power will be twofold; kingly authority and spiritual authority will be wielded by him. Hence he has "two horns" (Revelation 13:11). Commencing as a "beast" (a political force), he will end as a "false prophet" (a religious deceiver). Compare Revelation 13:11; Revelation 19:20. Like the Popes of the Middle Ages, he will be at once a temporal sovereign with limited power, and a religious leader with practically unlimited power. His religious influence will extend far beyond the limits of his own immediate dominion. His association with the Roman power accounts for this.

2. We will now consider the Antichrist's relation to Christendom. This is shown in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 from this epistle we learn the future of those "who obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," people who have had the truth in their midst, but who believed it not. These will be swept along by the current of antichristian apostasy. Great miracles will be wrought in aid of the great deception. There is a pointed contrast between Acts 2:22 and 2 Thessalonians 2:9; the first passage having reference to our Lord's works, and the other to the operations of the Man of Sin. Amongst other marvels, he will be permitted to use the very miracle that Elijah employed on Mount Carmel to call Israel back to Jehovah. Compare Revelation 13:13 with 1 Kings 18:24. His doings are called "powers" for they are manifestly superhuman; "signs" for they have meaning and teaching; and "wonders" for they are calculated to attract attention and admiration. Strange that an evil age which is characterised by unbelief in miracles (even the miracles of our Lord being discredited) should close with a general and enthusiastic belief in them!

It is not a long-continued evil, such as Popery, that is indicated in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17, but the climax of insult and wickedness, with which God deals very promptly. It is, indeed, the final conflict between God and Satan before the latter is banished to the abyss. "The mystery of lawlessness" was working even in the days of the apostles, but there was then and there is still, a restraining power hindering its full development until God's time comes to allow it. The restraining power is not mentioned, but it is obviously the presence of the Spirit of God in the Church. When the testimony of the Church is ended, the hindrances will disappear, and evil will rush madly to its predicted end.

3. The Antichrist's relation to the Beast the Roman power — is dealt with in the Book of the Revelation. He is the associate and lieutenant of Europe's last mighty potentate, and will share his special punishment (Revelation 19:20). "He exerciseth all the authority of the first Beast in his presence" (Revelation 13:12). Like Nebuchadnezzar, the last head of Gentile power will perceive the importance of unity in matters of religion (Daniel 3:1-30). A form of religion will be devised that will suit all, Jews and professing Christians alike. The desirability of a religion so comprehensive is frequently spoken of in our time. Satan will see to it that such a religion shall be provided. The worship of man will therefore be decreed. In this connection some have experienced difficulty in the understanding of Scripture teaching. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 it is the Man of Sin who exalts himself and demands worship, and in Revelation 13:1-18 he causes men to worship the Beast, or his image. To some this seems contradictory. Yet there is no more contradiction here than in the fact that our blessed Lord, when on earth, accepted worship for Himself while earnestly testifying that He sought the glory of Another. There will be a trinity of evil in the last days. The Beast, the false prophet, and the Dragon will array themselves against Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hence John saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouths of the Dragon, Beast, and false prophet (Revelation 16:13-14).

The king of Daniel 11:36 is most certainly the Antichrist, for he rules in Israel's land. Comparison with Revelation 13:1-18 makes it impossible to identify him with the Beast out of the sea (Revelation 13:1), but rather with the Beast out of the earth (Revelation 13:11). The former is the Roman power; the latter is the Antichrist.

We venture no speculation as to the mystic number 666. It is a sign divinely given for the guidance of understanding ones when the crisis arrives, and for them its meaning will be plain. The understanding or wise ones are elsewhere referred to in Daniel 11:33; Daniel 12:3-10; Matthew 13:23; Matthew 24:15. They are a class by themselves — God-fearing souls, who, like the sons of Issachar in David's time, have "understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chronicles 12:32). While the demon-possessed mass, as foreshadowed by the swine in Luke 8:33, plunge wildly into the vortex of evil, they, with minds enlightened by the Spirit of God, are enabled to form a sober judgement concerning all that is transpiring around them, and in result hold themselves entirely aloof from Satan's devices. The excitement and enthusiasm with which the new order of things will be welcomed by men generally (Revelation 13:3-4) will not appeal to them; they will have misgivings from the beginning. Witness-bearing and suffering will be their duty and portion until deliverance reaches them by the appearing of the Son of Man from Heaven.

The Great Tribulation.

Ever since sin entered, this world has been a difficult scene for men of faith. More or less of contumely and suffering have fallen to the lot of such in all dispensations. Hebrews 11:1-40 shows this clearly. The difficulties have been rendered more severe by the rejection of Christ. Those who cleave to Him in the face of the world's hatred and scorn must expect to be reproached, and to have their name east out as evil for His sake (Luke 6:22). The Christian period is thus peculiarly characterised by tribulation and loss. Whereas the Israelite of old was entitled to expect earthly prosperity in proportion to his fidelity, the godly now are expressly told in Scripture to expect persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). The Lord Jesus warned His disciples on the eve of His departure, "in the world ye shall have tribulation," adding, happily, for their encouragement, "but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The Apostle also wrote to those newly converted from heathenism: "Verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation"; and in the preceding verse, "yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto" (1 Thessalonians 3:3-4) Everywhere he and his fellow-labourers exhorted the disciples to continue in the faith, giving them to under stand "that through much tribulation we must enter into the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

But as distinct from anything yet experienced, the Word of God speaks of a time of unparalleled tribulation at the end of the present age, immediately preceding the appearing of the Son of Man in power and glory. Man) passages speak more or less directly of that period (Psalms 9:1-20; Psalms 10:1-18 being examples), but there are FIVE PASSAGES IN PARTICULAR which are so specific in their reference to it that it will be well to confine ourselves to them just now Amongst these five, Revelation 7:9 is the most precise in its terms, the literal rendering of the words employed being "the tribulation, the great one," as if God would allow of no misapprehension in our minds concerning the period referred to.

1. But if Revelation 7:1-17 is the most precise, Matthew 24:1-51 is the most luminous of the passages which directly deal with the subject of the great tribulation. In answer to three questions

addressed to our Lord by His Jewish disciples, troubled by His warnings of His own departure, and the approaching destruction of the Temple, He described to them the circumstances in which the godly in Judea will find themselves at the end, [The differences between Matthew 24:1-51 and Luke 21:1-38 are exceedingly interesting Luke was guided by the Spirit to give more particularly our Lord's reply to the question (the first of the three) relating to the overthrow of the temple; Matthew gives His reply to the questions relating to the end of the age. "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies," is the key to Luke 21:1-38 : "when ye shall see the abomination of desolation . . stand in the holy place," is the key to Matthew 24:1-51. The one is past, the other is yet to come.] adding some instructions of the highest importance for those who will be called to pass through the last dread agony there. The setting up in the Temple of the abomination of desolation, as spoken of by Daniel the prophet, is to be the signal for instant flight for all who heed the words of the Lord. No thought of clothes or any other possessions is to detain them; they must speed to the mountains. That their experiences be not unnecessarily painful, He bids them pray that their flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day. The Saviour's account of that time is exceedingly grave: "then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:21-22). In their agitation, the refugees must be on their guard against deceivers, for some will announce His Coming to this point or that. To all such voices they must pay no heed. When He really appears they will no more need to be told of the fact than when the lightning lights up the heavens. "Every eye shall see Him." His appearing will bring His suffering ones deliverance from all their foes.

But who are the sufferers referred to in Matthew 24:1-51? Jewish saints, clearly. The Church, with its Heavenly calling and expectations, was not before the minds of the disciples when they questioned the Lord as in Matthew 24:3. They were inquiring from their then standpoint as Jewish saints who truly believed that Jesus was the predicted Messiah. Moreover, Jewish marks are indelibly stamped upon this part of the prophecy — "the holy Place," "Judea," "the Sabbath Day," etc. Let this important fact be noted. For the Christian, suffering is a privilege (Php_1:29; Php_3:10). And we are nowhere told to avoid it. The great tribulation, on the contrary, is a penal infliction upon the Jewish people for their apostasy, and the godly are expressly instructed to flee from its terrors.

2. Our next passage is Jeremiah 30:4-9, and here comment is almost needless. The same period of suffering as in Matthew 24:1-51 is manifestly referred to, for the prophet exclaims: "Alas, for that day is great, so that none is like it." It is the time of unparalleled tribulation. But for whom? Let the passage itself reply: "These are the words that Jehovah spake concerning Israel, and concerning Judah." "It is even the time of Jacob's trouble." As in Matthew 24:1-51, so in Jeremiah 30:1-24 final deliverance follows. Jehovah will break the yoke of the stranger from off Israel's neck, and the people shall serve Jehovah their God, and David their king.

3. We turn now to Daniel 12:1, where again we read of unparalleled trouble, "such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time," followed (as in other passages) by the deliverance of God's people. But who are the people that are contemplated? "Thy people," says the angel, by which the prophet would understand his own loved nation. The contest of this passage should be carefully noted. In Daniel 11:36-45 we have described the doings of the last

Jewish Sovereign (the Antichrist), and his implacable antagonists, the kings of the North and of the South. Daniel 12:1-13 opens with the words: "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people." The archangel's interest in the chosen nation will become active at that crisis. "And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time; and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." It is thus but a remnant that will be saved, but it is their final deliverance from all oppressors. We understand Daniel 12:1 to refer to the two tribes then returned to their land, and under the sway of the lawless king, and the following verse to refer to the ten tribes who will at that epoch be brought out of their hiding places for divine sifting in view of Millennial blessing. With Daniel 12:1 might be linked Revelation 12:43, or Revelation 12:13-17, and Isaiah 26:20-21, as describing God's watchful care over His tried faithful ones in Judea during the last sore trial.

Jeremiah, Daniel, and our Lord thus correspond exactly in their statements — a time of tribulation such as men have never before experienced must fall upon Israel ere the long predicted triumph and blessing.

4. Revelation 7:9-17 speaks of sufferers out of "all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues." Let the reader observe the place given to this vision in the Apocalyptic prophecy. As already shown, the saints of the Old Testament dispensations, and of the Church period are seen enthroned in Heaven under the symbol of four and twenty elders in Revelation 4:1-11. Then the Lamb takes the Book, and, as seal after seal is broken, various judgements fall upon the earth. But before the last seal is opened, there is found a parenthesis of mercy. In Revelation 7:1-17 God lets us see what He is doing in the way of grace while His judgements are abroad. Israelites to the number of 144,000 are sealed, and an innumerable multitude of Gentiles are shown, clothed in white robes, and with palms in their hands. These are not partakers of the present Heavenly calling for the following reasons.

1. They are a company apart from believing Israelites, a fact quite out of harmony with Ephesians 2:14-17; Ephesians 3:6.

2. They are distinct from the enthroned elders; and

3. They are temple-worshippers, whereas the Heavenly Jerusalem possesses no temple (Revelation 21:22).

4. "Before the throne" may be regarded as a moral, rather than a local, position. They would seem to represent the large result of the latter-day preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom by Jewish witnesses (Matthew 24:14). This company may well be compared with the "sheep" of Matthew 25:31-46. In neither passage is there a suggestion that any have died, though their sufferings may have been intense. It is certain from Revelation 7:1-17 that while the great tribulation will be at its fiercest in Judea, it will be felt in a greater or less degree to the ends of the earth.

5. One passage remains to be noticed — Revelation 3:10. Here the Church is in view, beyond all just controversy. To the assembly in Philadelphia the Lord says: "Because thou hast kept the Word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Here we meet with a new expression — "the hour of temptation" (or trial). This includes "the great tribulation," but goes beyond it. It covers the whole

period of Antichristian activity at the end. During the first part of his career, the deceiver will speak with words smoother than butter, being a persecutor for 1260 days only. But from the entire period the Church is to be kept; so runs the Word of the Lord. Not preserved through the trouble, like the pious remnant of Judah, but kept absolutely from it. Enoch's portion is as suggestive of that of the Church, as Noah's is of that of Israel.

Babylon and The Beast.

There seems an intentional contrast between Babylon the Great in Revelation 17:1 and the Bride, the Lamb's wife, in Revelation 21:9. The language introductory to the two descriptions is practically identical. In each case one of the seven angels which had the seven vials came and talked with John, saying: "Come hither, I will show thee," etc. From this we infer that the Spirit of God would have us keep the Bride in mind while thinking of the Harlot, the one being the antithesis of the other.

Though Babylon's fall is announced in Revelation 14:8, her judgement actually takes place under the seventh vial, and is indicated in its prophetic order in Revelation 16:19; but such is the gravity of the matter, that, before proceeding further with the prophecy, the Spirit describes at considerable length her wickedness, her latter-day triumphs, and her doom.

The angel carried John in spirit into a wilderness to see Babylon, the great Whore; to a great and high mountain to see the Bride. This is significant. The Whore finds her home in the world, and the world is as barren and unsatisfying as a desert, let men labour to improve it as they may; the Bride, on the contrary, belongs to another sphere altogether, and John must be lifted out of this scene in order to get a glimpse of her.

What John saw in the wilderness was a gaudily-dressed, richly-jewelled woman, riding upon a scarlet-coloured Beast, having seven heads and ten horns. This Beast has already come before us as the revived Fourth Empire. The woman's name is emblazoned upon her forehead: "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth." Sitting upon the Beast declares plainly that she rules the Empire; the State is under her guidance. She is also said to "sit upon many waters." This shows that her influence is very far reaching, for the waters are "multitudes and nations, and tongues" (Revelation 17:15).

If the Bride of Revelation 21:1-27 is the church (as we do not doubt), it follows that the Harlot is that which has assumed her place and standing in the earth. The mystery of Babylon and the Beast is thus Satan's caricature of the mastery of Christ and the Church. The one is called "great," the other "holy." Men admire greatness; God values holiness.

[The word "great" should be eliminated from Revelation 21:10. The best MSS. Omit it.]

The Beast is the revived political system of Rome; the woman is Rome's religious system, with whatever else she may have gathered into herself ere the Apocalyptic vision becomes a reality. She has daughters — other professedly Christian bodies, scarcely less evil than their mother; and these would seem (in some cases at least) to continue distinct until the end. The harlot is Jezebel (Revelation 2:20) in her full and final development, after every opportunity for repentance has passed away. She is "Babylon" at the finish, characterised by pride, independence of God Worldliness, idolatry, and bloodthirstiness. Well might John marvel that anything that had ever

possessed even a vestige of Christianity should be so characterised. Yet this is what both God and man will behold just before the last dread stroke falls.

Rome, ever lustful of power and influence, and at all times fertile in schemes for the attainment of these objects is clearly destined to have one brief period of universal supremacy, and to dazzle men's eyes with her meretricious Splendour before her lurid glare is extinguished for ever. Just when she has arrived at the pinnacle of glory, and the goal of her hopes, she is overthrown utterly. The head of the Empire and his subordinate kings will tolerate her pretensions for a time, finding her useful for their own purposes. But she who has ruthlessly trampled upon men in the past — kings and people alike — must yet be trampled down herself. Retributive judgement, on the lines of the great governmental principle of Galatians 6:7, is clearly predicted for the harlot in Revelation 18:6; Revelation 19:2.

Events are moving rapidly towards the fulfilment of this prophecy. The great war has made it manifest that Rome has a very real hold upon the minds of men, even in quarters where it might least be expected. Not only Great Britain, but Protestant Holland also, have sent embassies to the Vatican, in defiance of the customs of several centuries; and now it has been decided that Rome is to have a part in the League of Nations. Even those who have no real love for her are being made to feel that she is a factor in human affairs which cannot be ignored. Step by step she will get into the saddle once more, and control the destinies of Europe.

Her overthrow is thus described. "The ten horns which thou sawest, and the Beast (not "upon the Beast"), these shall hate the Whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire."

She will thus be stripped of all her wealth and glory, and reduced to utter ruin. The terrible happenings in France at the epoch of the great Revolution are solemnly suggestive of how this may be brought about.

But while the woman is identified with the city in Revelation 17:18, it is not the city itself that is destroyed, for the Beast would scarcely destroy the ancient capital of his own dominion. That which is overthrown is the corrupt religious system which has for so long had its seat in the seven-hilled city on the banks of the Tiber. This the rulers of the restored Empire despoil and destroy.

Human hatred after all only brings about the fulfilment of the divine will, even though God has no place whatever in the thoughts of Babylon's tormentors, who are all utterly infidel. "God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will, and to agree and give their kingdom unto the Beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled."

In the course of a fresh vision in Revelation 18:1-24 ("after these things"), the divine side of the great catastrophe is emphasised. The Beast and his confederate kings are not mentioned. "The kings of the earth" who bewail her ruin (Revelation 18:9) must be carefully distinguished from the ten sovereigns who accomplish her overthrow. They are the more distant rulers of the earth "who have committed fornication, and lived deliciously with her." Her glitter has attracted and ensnared them, but their geographical situations have preserved them from feeling the weight of her oppressive hand in the same degree as those nearer to the seat of her power.

The merchants of the earth weep and mourn over Babylon's fall. Her merchandise is catalogued in detail in Revelation 18:12-13. It begins with "gold" and ends with "bodies and souls of men."

The long-suffering of God and His silence in the presence of iniquity have frequently been a cause of perplexity to God's harassed people. But the divine judgements, however delayed, are sure. No form of evil will escape His hand, least of all that which cloaks itself with the Name of His beloved Son.

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

The Bride of the Lamb is now brought into view, that the Marriage Supper may be celebrated (Revelation 19:1-21). Both the judgement of the Whore, and the marriage supper take place before the public manifestation of the Lord Jesus the one on earth and the other in Heaven. The Whore is overthrown instrumentally by the Beast and his confederate kings; the Beast himself is dealt with directly by Christ at His appearing.

While many on earth Lament the overthrow of Babylon, all Heaven rejoices. The foulest blot that ever disgrace the earth is removed in her judgement, and the whole of Heavens occupants justify the divine sentence. "True and righteous are His judgements.... And again they said Alleluia." Moreover, the elders and the living creatures in the presence of these judgements, fall down and worship God who sits upon the throne.

Next, there comes a call from out of the throne to "Praise our God," and with voice as of a great multitude and as the rushing of many waters, and as of mighty thunderings, there bursts forth the response: "Alleluia for the Lord God omnipotent (or, the Lord our God, the Almighty) reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come and His wife hath made herself ready" (Revelation 19:5-7) The removal of the false system, Babylon, is a great step towards the establishment of the Kingdom; but since the King is destined to have a bride (antitype of Eve) associated with Him in His glories, the marriage must take place ere the Kingdom really appears.

But who is the Bride? What company of believing people is represented by so happy a symbol? Here we must carefully distinguish between dispensations, if we would indeed understand. In Psalms 45:1-17 we see the king in His might, with the Queen standing by His side in gold of Ophir. To confound this with the picture in Revelation 19:1-21 is to confound earthly things with Heavenly. The viewpoint in the Psalms is necessarily the earth, and there Israel has the chief place in the ways of God; but Revelation 19:1-21 describes a scene in Heaven, and what place has Israel there? It would be incongruous to think of Israel as Bride in the Book of Revelation, seeing that in Revelation 12:1-17 Israel is shown rather as the mother of our Lord. Moreover, the Bride of Revelation is the Lamb's wife. This title is suggestive of suffering. Not Israel, but the Church, has been His associate in rejection and suffering, and this during the entire period of her pathway. At the very close of Scripture we have the Spirit and the Bride crying with one voice, "Come." Who is this that is thus possessed of the Spirit before the Lord's return? Assuredly not Israel, but the Church.

It is interesting to note that we have four women shown to us in the Apocalypse; each representative of a corporate body, or system. First, we have Jezebel in Revelation 2:20. This is Popery. Second, we have the sun-clothed woman of Revelation 12:1. This is Israel. Third, we have

Babylon the Great in Revelation 17:1-18. This is Popery at the end, with whatever else she may have incorporated with herself. Finally, we have "the Bride, the Lamb's wife," in Revelation 19:7; Revelation 21:9. This is the Church.

The twenty-four elders, who fill so interesting a part in the Apocalyptic visions, are mentioned for the last time in Revelation 19:4. The reason, we believe, is this. The saints of both Old and New Testament dispensations down to the time of the Lord's Coming for His own are included in that symbol, and until the Marriage Supper takes place all these act together as sharers of a common priesthood; but when the moment comes for the marriage, these divide into two distinct companies, for the Bride is the Church, and the Church began, not in Eden, but in Jerusalem in the day of Acts 2:1-47. As the Revised Version of Ephesians 3:15 correctly teaches, there are various families in Heaven and on earth. There are blessings that are common to the people of God in all ages, and there are also blessings peculiar to this most favoured era. Election, faith, redemption, saintship, and heirship we share with all the objects of God's grace in every dispensation, but other blessings, as the relationships of body and bride to Christ are ours alone. Thus we must distinguish between saint of Old and New Testament dispensations as we contemplate the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. All are there but some as Bride, and some as guests.

Remark, it is the Marriage of the Lamb, not of the Bride whosoever she may be. God's object is Christ. It is "the day of His espousals, . . . the day of the gladness of His heart" (Son_3:11). On the same principle, the, grace of God to man is charmingly presented to us in Matthew 22:2, as a marriage made by a king for his son. A wedding feast described without even a mention of the wife; is there anything like it elsewhere in literature? In this way God would show us that in providing good things for man, He is seeking, first of all, the joy and glory of His beloved Son.

But what have we in such a statement as this: "His wife hath made herself ready"? Is not all our meetness His alone? In one sense, yes. The best robe of divine righteousness is upon every saint. But there is another garment that will be conspicuous at the Marriage Supper it is called "the righteousnesses of the saints." This will be granted in divine government as the result of the manifestation at the Judgement Seat of Christ (Revelation is characterised, as a book, by divine government)

The Judgment Seat must be set up before the supper is spread. There every believer will read his life anew in the light of God. The deeds done in the body (2 Corinthians 5:10) will be appraised at their true worth by One with whom no mistake is possible. While bad and good will alike pass before Him, it will be His joy to commend and reward the good. Every deed wrought in the power of the Spirit, fruit of the life of God within, will be held in eternal remembrance. Every such deed is a stitch, as it were, in the garment of saintly righteousness which the Bride will wear on the marriage day, and which the Bridegroom will survey with the utmost delight, as the evidence of love manifested to His Name here below. The Kingdom is a reign of righteousness, and we take our place therein according to righteousness. All this is settled at the Judgement Seat. Following the Judgement Seat is the Marriage Supper, and then the public appearing of the King.

The Bride is arrayed in "fine linen, clean and bright." Her evil rival loves purple and scarlet (Revelation 17:4). This world's glories appeal to the latter; righteousness and purity are the delight of the former. There are four figures of righteousness employed in the Scriptures: (1) Gold,

expressive of intrinsic divine righteousness; (2) Brass, the judgement of righteousness as applied to man; (3) Fine Linen, the righteousness of saints; (4) Filthy Rags, all human efforts apart from grace.

The marriage scene having been described, John was commanded: "Write, blessed are they which are called unto the Marriage Supper of the Lamb." Who are the called ones? Scarcely the saints who compose the Bride, and certainly not those of anti-Christian times, for they are not raised until the supper is past (Revelation 20:4). We conclude, therefore, that the called ones are the saints of Old Testament days, all of whom will share the bliss of the coming Day in their own divinely appointed positions and relationships.

Overwhelmed by the glories thus presented to his gaze, John fell at the angel's feet to worship him, and was promptly rebuked for his fault. Even an apostle was liable to err. Flesh cannot be trusted even in the presence of glories. How merciful the provision of the thorn after Paul had been caught up to the third Heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1-21).

Another supper is described in the same chapter in Revelation. In Revelation 19:17 we see an angel standing in the sun, and crying with a loud voice to all the fowls of Heaven to gather themselves together unto the great supper of God. The details, as given by the Seer, are terrible. The birds gorge themselves with the flesh of kings, captains, horses, and men of every degree. It is Armageddon, not the Armageddon of the newspapers, but the Armageddon of Holy Scripture. It is the most awful incident in the judgement of the quick, when earth's true Sovereign appears. Finding Himself opposed by the armed hosts of earth, He will destroy them by the word of His mouth.

Whatever men's dreams, war will not end until He end it summarily once for all (Psalms 46:8-9).

What bliss to have part in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, but what horror to be involved in the great supper of God !

The Re-Gathering of Israel.

Nearly nineteen centuries have passed since the Apostle asked the question, "Hath God cast away His people? meaning the twelve tribes of Israel (Romans 11:1). Christendom's answer to this question has been practically "Yes," for Christendom has long treated Israel with disdain and cruelty, as though they were a people (like Amalek of old for whom divine forgiveness could never be. But Christendom has blundered in this, as in many another matter of grave importance.

In answer to his inquiry, the Apostle directs attention to his own case. "I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." If God could find mercy in His heart for such a one as Paul, it may be regarded as the earnest of mercy for his guilty nation, for Paul was a specimen case, both in sin and in grace (1 Timothy 1:12-16). Moreover, he adds in Romans 11:2 : "God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew." Mark the word "foreknew," for it covers everything. It explains all God's dealings with Israel from first to last Seeing that He "foreknew" His people, He was fully aware, when He pledged Himself to Abraham, how ungrateful and evil his seed would be, yet He gave the father of the faithful both His word and His oath (Hebrews 6:13; Galatians 3:15-18). His purposes therefore stand postponed undoubtedly, but not abandoned. Israel must yet possess every inch of the territory promised to Abraham and must yet enjoy every predicted

blessing in the land and that for evermore. The divine character makes this absolutely sure.

When God in His Word speaks of judgement upon Israel He invariably limits it with an "until." Thus in Romans 11:25 we are told that "blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." In Luke 21:24 we read: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." "The fullness of the Gentiles" means the present Christian company; "the times of the Gentiles" means the period of Gentile supremacy, which commenced with Nebuchadnezzar some six centuries before Christ. When the Christian company is completed, and removed to Heavenly glory, and when the appointed period of Gentile supremacy is ended, God will turn His attention once more to the whole house of Israel.

We repeat, "the whole house of Israel," for so runs the Word of Jehovah. See Ezekiel 39:25, as one of many passages that could be quoted in this connection. Ten of Israel's tribes are lost to us (the assertions of certain cranks notwithstanding); we are familiar with representatives of two tribes only. "The Jews," we call them. But all Israel's tribes are known to God, and "He that scattered Israel will gather him" (Jeremiah 31:10). "Though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee" (Jeremiah 30:11).

The world's blessing awaits Israel's restoration to God and to Canaan. Not to the Church, but to Abraham, Jehovah said: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). Peter told the people in Acts 3:1-26 that Jesus would remain in the Heavens until their repentance and conversion. When Israel turns to God, times of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord, and the restitution of all things will take place. In Psalms 67:1-2 Israel in faith prays: "God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us (Selah); that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy salvation among all nations." Israel and Jerusalem form the pivot upon which everything turns for the nations and for creation. Neither London, Berlin, nor Rome is, nor ever can be, God's centre of administration and blessing. How little do the proud ones of earth understand this! Truly God's thoughts are not men's thoughts, neither are His ways men's ways (Isaiah 56:8).

The resuscitation of Israel as a nation, when it comes about, will be one of the most remarkable events in the history of our planet. It will be a divine work. Only God can make the dry bones live (Ezekiel 37:1-28). Man will try his hand at it before God's time is fully come. Isaiah 18:1-7 suggests an effort on the part of a maritime power to re-establish the people so long "scattered and peeled." Such a movement is being discussed at the present hour. The Turkish Empire having been overthrown, the future status of Palestine has become practical politics. Such is the fascination which that land has for the "Christian" powers, and such is its geographical situation, that it would be well-nigh impossible to allot it to any existing State without serious trouble ensuing. Accordingly, the suggestion has already been made to give it back to the Jews. This is a very likely thing to happen, but such an event will be no fulfilment of the Scriptures we have been considering. It is a partial restoration only, and a restoration for trouble.

The re-establishment of a Jewish State will furnish the Antichrist with his opportunity, with all the horrors that that means for the unhappy people. God's time will come when the Son of Man appears in glory. Then the great trumpet will be blown, and all Israel will be gathered, never again to fall a prey to their neighbours (Isaiah 27:13). Jerusalem will become the metropolis of the earth; the throne of Jehovah will once more be set up there; the Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh;

and righteousness and peace will be established.

Israel's enemies will be numerous at the time of the end, for Satan ever delights to stir up hostility against those who are loved of God. The enemy in the land (the crafty Antichrist) will be set upon by both the kings of the North and South, the Jewish people suffering terribly in the fray, as though ground between the upper and nether millstones. The king of the North is the latter-day representative of the potentates who once ruled from the Aegean to the Indus (Daniel 11:1-45); the king of the South is the ruler of Egypt. The king of the North, in whom will be fulfilled the many unaccomplished prophecies concerning "the Assyrian," will be no mean foe. His prowess is described in Daniel 11:40-45; and the experiences of the Jewish people under his iron heel are given in Psalms 79:1-13); Zechariah 14:1-2. His allies are named in Psalms 83:1-18 and Daniel 8:24 shows that he will be backed by a power mightier still than his own.

That power is Russia — Israel's last and most deadly enemy. Two whole chapters in Ezekiel (Ezekiel 38:1-23, Ezekiel 39:1-29) are devoted to the last disastrous enterprise of the Czar of that day. It is remarkable that so detailed a description should have been given by the Spirit of God more than twenty-five centuries in advance. There was no Russian Empire when Ezekiel penned those chapters. China, India, and Egypt were already hoary. The very foundations of the Russian Empire were not laid until about fifteen hundred years after Ezekiel's day. The alliances with which we were familiar during the Great War have already been annulled as far as Russia is concerned. France and England will at the end form part of the revived Roman Power, the policy of which will be utterly at variance with that of Russia. The cupidity of the Northern Empire will be aroused by the wealth of restored Israel, and the absence of fortifications in their land will suggest an easy victory (Ezekiel 38:10-12). But Jehovah will speak in His jealousy, and in the fire of His wrath; He will put hooks into the jaws of Gog, turning him back with utter destruction. The burying of the bones will occupy the house of Israel seven months, and the munitions of war left upon that frightful battlefield will supply Israel with firewood for seven years (Ezekiel 39:8-16).

The closing words of Moses' wilderness song (Deuteronomy 32:43) describe the situation at the end when the judgements of God have done their work. "Rejoice, O ye nations, with His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to His adversaries, and will make expiation for His land and for His people" (R.V.). Israel's wrongs avenged, the people and their land reconciled to God in virtue of Christ's atonement and all the nations of the earth sharers of Israel's joy — such are the gracious purposes of God when fighting days are done.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

The goal of Christian desire, according to 1 Corinthians 1:7 and 1 Peter 1:7, is "the revelation of Jesus Christ. In the one passage the Authorised Version reads "coming and in the other "appearing"; in both, "revelation" the proper term. The reference is to the great and notable day when God will bring again His First-Begotten into the world, not in lowly grace, as long ago, but in majesty and glory. That day will be momentous in its issues. No day (that of the Cross alone excepted) could be more far-reaching in its results. It will be 1. The solemn winding up of Man's Day, and the ushering in of the Day of the Lord. "Man's Day" (1 Corinthians 4:3, margin) is that long period of human pride and self will which commenced with the intrusion of sin into the world, and which will be ended by divine judgement at the revelation of Jesus Christ. During Man's Day God is naught, and man is all. The Day of the Lord will reverse the conditions. Isaiah 2:10-22 is the

first passage of Scripture that specifically mentions that Day; and graphically describes the complete overthrow of all that of which man has boasted himself, that Jehovah alone may be exalted. Terror will fill men's minds when this takes place. Twice it is stated that Jehovah will arise to "shake terribly the earth." All human schemes and accomplishments will tumble to pieces, to be patched up no more The cataclysm of 1914-1918, appalling though it was, is, nothing compared with the utter collapse of everything of man's at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Happy are they who have received a Kingdom which cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28).

2. God's public vindication of the Man Christ Jesus Let Satan and men attempt what they may, the once crucified One must reign, and every created being must render homage to His Name and title. Long ago, by the pen of Isaiah, Jehovah drew attention to Him as His Servant whom He upholds, and His elect in whom His soul delights, and concerning Him He has declared:" He shall not fail, nor be discouraged till He have set judgement in the earth, and the isles shall wait for His law" (Isaiah 42:1-4). This passage is quoted in Matthew 12:17-21 in proof of God's pleasure in Him when Man on earth, the Day will come when He will fulfil every sentence of it, and the despised One will reign.

It is becoming in the Christian to "love His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8), and that not because of the relief and reward it will bring to us (and it will bring us both "rest" — 2 Thessalonians 1:7 — and "the crown of righteousness"), but because of what that Day will mean for Christ. We love that Day in advance; we delight to think of the vindication and glory it will yield to the Lord Jesus.

3. The first step towards the final overthrow of Satan. The great adversary will lose for ever his footing in the Heavens as the result of the war with Michael and his angels (Revelation 12:7-8), but he will still have liberty to pursue his evil designs, although his activity will be limited to the earth. But the revelation of Jesus Christ will put an end even to this. The angel of Revelation 20:1, with key and chain in hand, will apprehend him and cast him into the abyss, sealing up that place of horror for a thousand years.

During the lengthy period of the Kingdom of the Son of Man, men will not be exposed to the craft of the deceiver. But the abyss is not his place of final punishment. The Kingdom being a dispensation — a term of responsibility for man — Satan is released for a little season at its close. A revolt ensues in the outlying parts of the Saviour's dominion after which the adversary is apprehended a second time and forthwith consigned to the Lake of Fire, where he, with the Beast and the false prophet, will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Even infernal beings must confess Jesus as Lord (Php_2:10-11). He is their Judge as well as the Judge of men, as the demons acknowledged with such manifest terror in the days of His flesh (Matthew 8:29). It is His business to put out of the way all - men and spirits alike — who dare to challenge the supremacy of God.

4. The revelation of Jesus Christ will be the solution of every problem, and the settlement of every question.

Problems and difficulties of every kind, social and political, are increasing rapidly as the age grows old. The world's leaders are sorely perplexed. Already we see something of the condition of mind described by the Lord Jesus in Luke 21:25-26, though the fulfilment of the passage is not yet. It looks forward to an even graver crisis than the present. "Upon the earth, distress of nations, with

perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." Man's sin and folly have created the confusion, but man is not capable of dissipating it. No difficulty is ever really settled. Politicians and others succeed from time to time in putting a patch on here and a patch on there. A reasonable appearance is thus put upon things for the time being, only to be followed by outbreaks more serious and widespread. There is only One man in the universe really competent to straighten out human affairs. In symbolic vision He is shown to us in Revelation 5:6 as a Lamb "having seven horns and seven eyes." This means perfection of power and wisdom. It sometimes happens now that a man has power without wisdom, and sometimes wisdom without power. The first is disastrous to the people, and the second is useless to meet the need. Solomon, with his phenomenal wisdom was just the shadow beforehand of the Lord Jesus. When He arises in His might, and shows himself in His glory, He will take earth's sceptre into His own capable hands, "and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain" (Isaiah 40:4). God will "lay help upon One that is mighty" (Psalms 89:19). His hand will be upon the Man of His right hand, upon the Son of Man whom He has made strong for Himself (Psalms 80:15). "With righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth" (Isaiah 11:4).

Knowing where men's true hope lies it is impossible for the spiritually instructed believer to give the smallest countenance to creature schemes and aspirations. Instead, he waits in patience for God to bring out the Man of His purpose. The Christian waits for "the revelation of Jesus Christ," suffering meanwhile with all others.

The Restitution of All Things.

This is that Golden Era of which prophets have written glowingly, and psalmists have sung rapturously from the beginning of their testimony. It is that wonderful time when divine rights will everywhere be respected here below; when the long-rejected Jesus will be enthroned in His appointed Kingdom; and when man's evil career will receive an abrupt check. Then Satan's power will be set aside; his wretched work will be in large measure undone and creation's wounds will be healed. "The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;" "instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree;" "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together;" yea, "all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Isaiah 35:1; Isaiah 55:13; Isaiah 40:5; Isaiah 52:10). Blessed era! How remote if we were to judge by appearances, but how near when we hold the prophetic lamp aloft in faith!

Let us read together Acts 3:19-21 (in a corrected translation): "Repent therefore and be converted, for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and He may send Jesus Christ, who was fore-ordained for you, whom Heaven indeed must receive till the times of the restoring of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began" (J.N.D.). Peter was the speaker. He was addressing the Jewish people on the occasion of the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. He made a definite proposal to his audience — by divine authority, of course. If they would repent of their many sins, and especially of their murderous rejection of Jesus, times of refreshing should come to them from the presence of Jehovah. He would even send back the very One whom they had driven away, and the times of the restitution of all things should set in. Bible readers in Israel had long looked for such a consummation. In Matthew 17:11, the Lord confirmed the disciples in

their expectation that Elijah "shall first come and restore all things." In keeping with this hope, they asked Him after His resurrection: "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Now Peter, with light from Heaven in his own soul such as even he never possessed before, lays before the people the conditions upon which the longed-for restoration could take place. Their thoughts might be limited to Israel; God's thoughts take in the whole creation.

The restoration of all things is contingent upon two other events: the repentance of Israel, and the return of Jesus. He will not return until Israel is prepared to welcome Him; and until His return no universal restoration is possible. A Millennium without the Lord Jesus, whatever the aims and desires of men, can never be.

The restoration of all things has limitations. Peter's words show this: "of which God has spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began." Some have pressed the Apostle's words to make them include even the unpardoned dead. The restoration does not go beyond what "God has spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets," and certainly no prophet bids us look for the restoration to divine favour of men who have died in their sins. The prophets' standpoint was the earth, and in heart-stirring language they describe the removal by divine power of all the scars that sin has caused in order that God may once more have pleasure in the works of His hands, and that men may enjoy His mercy. The healing of the lame man was an example, strikingly illustrating Isaiah 35:5-6.

In that era Israel will be restored. All the twelve tribes will enjoy the blessing of God throughout the whole extent of the magnificent possession promised to the fathers. (In the past they have occupied only a small part of their destined inheritance.) The temple will be restored to them, with Jehovah's presence filling it continually (Psalms 68:29; Ezekiel 43:4-5). None of them will need to exhort his neighbour to "know the Lord," for all will know Him from the least to the greatest of them (Jeremiah 31:34).

The Nations will also be blessed (Psalms 22:27-28; Psalms 72:17). No longer characterised by pride and independence of God, no longer filled with envy and hatred towards each other, they will dwell peacefully under the sway of the King of kings and Lord of lords. In accordance with the divine purpose, they will acknowledge the special place of favour and supremacy given to Israel, and will render respectful homage. They will seek Jacob's face, as Psalms 24:6 tells us, because God is in Jacob's land. From year to year the ambassadors of all nations will attend at Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16).

Creation at large will be restored. No longer will the strong prey upon the weak. Even the wolf will dwell with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the lion will eat straw like the ox (Isaiah 11:6-7). The Son of Man's beneficent rule will extend to "the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas" (Psalms 8:7-8). The manifestation of the sons of God will be the signal for the complete deliverance of all from the bondage of corruption (Romans 8:19-21).

But whatever the blessedness of that era, absolute perfection will not then be realized, and thus finality will not be reached. The Millennial Age (the last of the dispensations of God) is the vestibule to the everlasting Kingdom, the eternal state, the new Heavens and the new earth. Therein perfection will indeed be found. The Son of Man having subdued every antagonist, and

silenced every rebellious tongue, God will be "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Chapter 93

The Last Great Crisis

The Last Great Crisis.

By W. W. Fereday.

(Extracted from Truth for the Last Days, Vol. 2, 1901, page 125.)

It is not an unusual thing to find students of prophecy confounding together the different actors in the great crisis of the last days. The reason is not far to seek. Some of those characters act in unison to such a degree, and pursue to so large an extent the same policy, that it is easy to account for the confusion that exists in the minds of some as to them. Considerable discrimination is needed in the examination of this subject.

The Antichrist naturally comes to mind first. This title occurs in 1 John 2:22, where he is spoken of as the leader both of Jewish unbelief and of Christian apostasy. He not only denies that Jesus is the Christ (the long known form of Jewish unbelief), but he denies also the Father and the Son. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, he comes before us as the man of sin, the son of perdition. In this passage we learn that he will sit in the temple of God (in Jerusalem, surely), and proclaim himself the supreme object of divine worship. To this lie, God will give up the great mass of the Jewish people who will have returned to their own land in unbelief, and also the vast body of lifeless professors of Christianity who have never received the truth in the love of it. This passage reminds us of Daniel 11:36, where the same great leader in wickedness is spoken of as "the king." Here we find him in a strictly Jewish connection. He is the accepted political head of the returned Jews, and an object of jealousy and hatred to the kings of the North and of the South, who both make war upon him. No one, we judge, can read Daniel 11:36-39 carefully, and question that the Antichrist is a Jew. Under the same title of "king" he appears also in Isaiah 30:33; Isaiah 57:9. In the first of these passages his doom is described; in the second, Israel is reproached by Jehovah for having any dealings with him. Turning again to the New Testament, he comes before us in Revelation 13:11 as a wild beast coming up out of the earth, having two horns like a lamb, but speaking as a dragon. Here is shown his connection with the Imperial power, of which we will speak presently. It is plainly the same wonder-working person as in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17. A later passage in Revelation (Revelation 19:20) speaks of him as "the false prophet," which carries our minds back to Deuteronomy 18:15, of which Scripture he pretends to be the fulfilment. Another plain allusion to the Antichrist may be found in Zechariah 11:1-17 As the foolish shepherd, he devours the flock that the true Shepherd loved so well, and would fain have blessed. Having refused Him who came in His Father's name, Israel will receive him who comes in his own name to their hurt and ruin. There are many minor allusions to the same person in different parts of Scripture (e.g., Psalms 10:18 — "the man of the earth"), but those referred to above are the most important ones, and will suffice for our present purpose.

We will consider next the last great Imperial Head of the West.

In Daniel 7:8 a little horn, bold and blasphemous in his actings, arises out of the ten-horned fourth beast. We need not stay to prove that the fourth beast represents the Roman Empire; most of our readers are agreed as to it. Its ten horns are the ten kings who rule it at the end under the presidency of the little horn. As the Prince of the Romans, who long ago destroyed Jerusalem and the sanctuary, he will form a covenant with the mass of the returned Jewish people for one week — seven years (Daniel 9:26-27). This covenant or treaty will doubtless be negotiated by the Antichrist acting on behalf of the Jews as their king. It is divinely described in Isaiah 28:14-20 as a covenant with death and an agreement with hell, and appears to be entered into on the part of the Jews as a defence against their dreaded Northern enemy. The book of the Revelation furnishes us with some valuable information as to the re-appearance of this great power, which, as all are aware, has no existence at all at present In Revelation 13:1, it arises as a wild beast out of the sea. This shows us the circumstances which lead to its uprising. The sea represents the nations in a state of upheaval. Such a condition of things can easily evolve a great empire, the empire of the first Napoleon being a proof of it. But such passages as Revelation 11:7; Revelation 17:8 imply that another power will be at work. "The beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit": ominous words! Satan's hand is there, in order to deprive God's King, if possible, of His rightful inheritance in the earth. He nominates the beast for universal sovereignty in a moment when God's time has almost come to give the kingdoms of the world to His beloved Son. We are disposed to regard Isaiah 14:1-32 also as referring to the last great Gentile head under the titles of, "Lucifer, son of the morning"; we leave it as a suggestion with our readers.

The third actor is the little horn of Daniel 8:9. Care is needed here, for many fail to distinguish between the horns of Daniel 7:1-28, Daniel 8:1-27. The horn of Daniel 7:1-28, as we have seen, arises out of and dominates the fourth beast, which is almost universally believed to be the Roman Empire. The horn of Daniel 8:1-27 arises out of one of the four principal divisions of the Grecian Empire, the third beast of the preceding chapter. The horns are thus totally distinct. Antiochus Epiphanes was the forerunner or type of the Eastern horn, who will be a great thorn in the sides of the returned Jews. As the King of the North in Daniel 11:40, he makes war upon them, and comes to his end in their land. In him will probably be fulfilled the many unfinished prophecies concerning the Assyrian, notably Micah 5:5-6. This power has no existence at present, but will doubtless be brought upon the scene in due time.

The fourth prominent figure in the latter day crisis is Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal (Ezekiel 38:1-23; Ezekiel 39:1-29). Here we have the vast dominion of Russia, a power ever bitterly hostile to the Jews. This enemy appears to come up against the land after the appearing of the Lord; his overthrow and the complete annihilation of his hosts is graphically portrayed by the prophet. This is not the same enemy as the king of the North, though many students of the prophetic word appear to think so. Their policy is the same, and they both come against Jerusalem and the glorious land from the North; but they are distinct powers nevertheless. The king of the north is the less formidable antagonist of the two, and is backed up by another, in all probability by Russia itself (Daniel 8:24); Gog comes up with far greater hosts after his tool (as we cannot help regarding the king of the North) has met his doom. Another Scripture which we believe refers to Gog is Isaiah 33:1. After the opening of the kingdom of Christ in Isaiah 32:1-20, a new enemy comes up treacherously to spoil His people, and is consumed as the burnings of lime and as thorns in the fire. Who is this but the great Northern adversary? There are thus tour principal

movers in the stirring events of the last days, and if we would understand prophecy aright we must not confound them. The first two act together in their wickedness; the second two act in concert likewise. The first pair are characterised by hostility to God's Christ; the second by animosity to His earthly people. But God will triumph over all in His time, and will yet give the kingdoms of this world to His beloved Son, who alone is worthy.

Chapter 94

The Approaching Judgment of Christendom

The Approaching Judgment of Christendom.

By W. W. Fereday.

(Extracted from Truth for the Last Days, Vol. 2, 1901, page 321.)

It is a deeply solemn thing to realise that one belongs to a system which stands responsible before God for ages of failure and unfaithfulness, and upon which, in consequence, the judgment of God will soon descend. Yet how feebly is this soul-subduing thought entered into by the children of God in general! Many are so occupied with their own immediate surroundings, that the fact of their belonging to the Church of God — a corporation nearly nineteen centuries old as a witness for God — has little, if any, place in their minds. Others, alas! though truly born of God, have become so infected with the spirit of the times that positive expressions of Laodicean complacency are frequently to be found upon their lips.

Now God would have His own spiritually intelligent as to the true position of affairs at the present moment. We are not living in the first days of the Church of God, but the last; a fact which should, of itself, suggest the most serious considerations to the mind. What is the character of this Church of God, whose earthly history is drawing to its close? And what was its testimony and responsibility as set up by God at the beginning? It has often been pointed out that the Church has been introduced parenthetically into the ways of God. Israel's deep failure as God's responsible witness in the midst of idolatry, and, above all, their rejection of Messiah, has necessitated the complete setting aside of that nation for the present. Not until Christ appears in glory will Israel again truly have God's testimony committed to them. During the interval, while Christ sits at the right hand of the Majesty on High, the Holy Spirit is present on earth engaged in the formation of the Church of God. The very day of His descent from heaven (Acts 2:1-47) witnessed the inauguration of the new system — a spiritual one in contrast with Israel's national one. The saints on earth (at first merely a remnant from among the Jews) became at once the body of Christ and the house of God, though the doctrine of these was not unfolded until some years later. What freshness and power characterised the new testimony! What Divine love amongst the saints, what renunciation of the world, what zeal in the propagation of the truth, even in the face of fierce persecution!

The Church was responsible to maintain its testimony unimpaired until the end. In manifested unity and love, in separation from the world, and in bold confession of all the truth committed, should the Church have continued. Faith should have carried her triumphantly through all the vicissitudes of wilderness life, and over all the obstacles raised up by the enemy. It is vain to remark that everything that God has ever entrusted to man has failed in his hands, and that every dispensation has ended in Divine judgment. This, while true, in no way mitigates the failure of the Church, who, with more light from God, and greater privileges than were ever before possessed, has her own distinct place of responsibility, and must be held accountable accordingly. Her public position as "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15), necessarily involves judgment from God if the

testimony is not faithfully maintained.

The failure Soon came. He who loved the Church with a peculiar affection, at an early date had to blame the Corinthians for being full, and reigning before the time (1 Corinthians 4:8); he had to deplore the defection, through lukewarmness and love of carnal ease, of all the assemblies in Asia (2 Timothy 1:15); and he also found it necessary to instruct his beloved child in the faith as to the path of individual faithfulness when evil should become rampant (2 Timothy 2:1-26) Jude speaks of ungodly men having crept in unawares, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 1:4); Peter warns of false teachers bringing in damnable heresies (2 Peter 2:1-2); and John of Antichrists, who had once companied with the Apostles themselves, but who had gone out, manifesting their true character (1 John 2:18-19). A little later, we find the Lord Himself complaining, in His messages to the churches, of the forsaking of first love (Revelation 2:4), of the harbouring of men holding the doctrines of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes (Revelation 2:14-15), and other and even graver evils.

In view of all this (and how much more might be added!) how solemn is the Spirit's word in Romans 11:22, "Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God, on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." In this chapter the professing church is looked at as having taken Israel's place on earth as the possessor of privileges from God. If faithful, the result should be blessing; if unfaithful, the same cutting off that Israel has experienced should follow. Who will pretend that Christendom has continued in God's goodness? The Protestant points disapprovingly at the glaring errors and gross corruptions of Rome; and the Romanist, with good cause, directs his scorn at the divisions of Protestantism, and its relinquishment of what it once professed, the faith of the Bible. What room is there for boasting on the part of any?

What then is coming? Just what the Spirit says in Romans 11:1-36 : "Thou also shalt be cut off." Or, as the Lord Himself expressed it in Revelation 3:16 : "I am about to spue thee out of my mouth." Only ignorance would plead the Lord's promise in Matthew 16:18: "The gates of hades shall not prevail against it" — as militating against this, the Lord there simply guarantees the durability of His own handiwork. His judgment of human responsibility is another matter altogether, and is plainly dealt with in other Scriptures. The professing church has failed as deeply as Israel, and shall be judged as truly. There is, however, this difference between Israel's rejection and the rejection of Christendom; that, whereas for the one there is to be a restoration in grace at the end, for the other the judgment is final and irrevocable. Solemn thought!

Does this in any way endanger individual salvation? By no means. The passage already quoted from Matthew 16:1-28 is sufficiently explicit as to this. God's judicial dealings with Israel did not touch the salvation of true children of faith; nor will the approaching judgment of Christendom affect in any way the eternal security of all who are "in Christ." Nothing can annul, or even weaken, the infinite grace of God in this respect. What comfort for the man of God while painfully exercised as to the evils around him!

What should be the practical outcome of what we have been considering? First, God would have His true hearted ones feel and confess the sins of the Church as their own. Daniel furnishes us with a fine example of this spirit. Though, personally, a holy man, he poured out his heart to God in touching confession concerning the sins of his people, justifying God in all His governmental

dealings with them. He made no attempt to individualise ana1hema himself, but kept before his soul that he belonged to God's people, and was, therefore, a part of that body which had so grievously failed. In like manner, let us remember that we belong to the Church of God, the most privileged witness that God has yet set up, and withal the most guilty. Such a thought keeps the soul humble and unpretentious.

Secondly, God would have each exercised soul walk wholly apart, in individual faithfulness, from the public evils that will presently bring down His righteous judgment. Let us beware of all the streams that will shortly pour their waters into the foul pool of the apostasy. While cultivating fellowship with all who conscientiously seek the glory of Christ, and while seeking the deliverance of all others as far as possible, may we be kept free from moral, doctrinal, and ecclesiastical corruption, that we may walk in holiness before God with robes unspotted.

Scripture Character Studies

Scripture Character Studies

by Fereday, W.W.

This is a 12 chapter work on the following characters: Abimelech, Balaam: His Words and Ways, Elijah the Tishbite, Elisha, the Prophet, Jonah, Jonathan and His Times, "Bring me a minstrel.", Josiah and Revival, Samuel — God's Emergency Man, Solomon and His Temple, Simon Peter — Apostle and Living Stone.

Scripture Character Studies

Abimelech.

Balaam: His Words and Ways

Elijah the Tishbite.

Elisha, the Prophet.

Jonah

Jonathan and His Times

"Bring me a minstrel."

Josiah and Revival

Samuel — God's Emergency Man.

Solomon and His Temple.

Simon Peter — Apostle and Living Stone.

Abimelech.

Abimelech.

Judges 9:1-57

W W Fereday

From the Bible treasury, Vol. 20 page 178.

The Spirit of God has drawn our attention in the O.T. Scriptures to several men who are undoubted foreshadows of the coming man of sin; among these Abimelech the son of Gideon occupies a solemn place. He was of a stamp very different from his father, for Gideon was a man of faith and holds an honourable place in God's list as given in Hebrews 11:1-40. He had God's glory before him as his object; and loved the people of Jehovah, and groaned over their low estate. He was, therefore, a fitting instrument for God to use, and He used him mightily to the utter discomfiture of Midian, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon (Judges 8:28).

The son, alas! was moved by a different motive. No sooner was the judge, his father, dead, than he gathered together the family of his mother, and urged them to use their influence with the Shechemites on his behalf. The glory of Jehovah and the blessing of his people were not before him; he desired to exalt himself — he would be king. How painfully he reminds one of the personage in Daniel 11:36! The Spirit of God there, after speaking to Daniel of various leagues and conflicts between the kings of Syria and Egypt (which part of the prophecy has received fulfilment), abruptly introduces the awful king of the latter days. He passes over entirely the present period of time which is never the subject of O.T. prophecy, and fixes attention upon the time of the end.

"The king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished." This is the Antichrist of 1 John 2:1-29, 1 John 4:1-21, the man of sin, the son of perdition, of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17; but in Daniel 11:1-45 we get him in his local and political character, the wilful and self-exalting king in the glorious land. Now the Lord has declared that 'he that humbleth himself shall be exalted and he that exalteth himself shall be abased' the truth of which Abimelech proved, as also will the impious antitype of the future. It was by fair speeches that the son of Gideon won his way, and so with the man of Daniel 11:1-45 "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords" (Psalms 55:21). There will be a lamb-like air about him; but in the ears of the elect — who know not the voice of strangers — his voice is that of the dragon (Revelation 13:1-18). Antiochus who is another type of him, worked his way similarly. "And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall be corrupt by flatteries" (Daniel 11:32). By all this the mass are deceived and led away, as the Shechemites. were; the remnant, "the people that do know their God" are preserved.

Abimelech was an apostate from the worship of Jehovah, which his father had restored, and evidently followed Baalberich (compare Judges 11:4, 46). Here the type fails in completeness, for the coming one will do graver still. Not content with disregarding the God of his fathers, and speaking marvellous things against the God of Gods, "he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Here we have human iniquity reaching an awful height, not yet reached by any. It is the full development of the first departure: 'Ye shall be as God' said the tempter. It is man's privilege and glory to be dependent (have we learned this?); the man of sin rejects absolutely such a place and claims God's name and worship — only to be hurled from his usurped throne into eternal ruin.

Abimelech soon developed a thirst for blood, — sadly typical of the dark day at hand. "He went to his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons, upon one stone." How quickly did Israel forget what they owed to Gideon! An apostate power is invariably a persecutor of God's saints. When the abomination of desolation is set up in the holy place, all must bow or die. Who are the souls under the altar in Revelation 6:9-11? Undoubtedly those who will suffer under antichrist for the word of God and for their testimony. From oppressed hearts will the cry go up, "O Lord, how long"? and the cry is heard. "When He maketh inquisition for blood, He remembereth them; He forgetteth not the cry of the humble" (Psalms 9:12). But all will not lose their lives in the coming day, any more than in the day of Abimelech. We read, "Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself." He was enabled to bear testimony: "he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim" (the mount of blessing; Deuteronomy 27:1-26) and solemnly set before Israel their position with regard to the usurper. In his speech he brings forward successively the three trees which are constantly used in Scripture as emblems of the Jewish nation the olive, the fig-tree, and the vine, all of which refused the proffered dominion, finally accepted by the bramble in the person of Abimelech. Having delivered his message, eminently prophetic, the witness "fled and went to Beer, and dwelt there for fear of Abimelech his brother." He is thus a type of that part of the Jewish remnant who will be persecuted for their testimony, but who will be preserved by a faithful God through all until the end. Such are counselled by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24:1-51.

Righteous retribution follows in due course "for it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you," and "he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword " (2 Thessalonians 1:6; Revelation 13:10). Fire came out from the men of Shechem as Jotham prophesied to devour Abimelech; Gaal the son of Ebed gained the confidence of the treacherous Shechemites and caused them to curse Abimelech, and to rebel against him. Accordingly fire comes out from the false king to devour them and the house of Millo, and he appeared at first to carry all before him. But God had decreed his destruction, and when fighting against the tower of Thebez, with the final victory all but sure, "a certain woman cast a piece of millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to break his skull." God is not restricted to means; He Who sold Sisera into the hands of a woman could use similar instrumentality here, when all else had proved unavailing. "Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren: and all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads; and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal" (Judges 9:56-57).

Even so shall it be with the wilful king of the future, the impious and blasphemous persecutor of God's saints; the Lord Jesus "shall consume him with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy him

with the brightness of His coming" (2 Thessalonians 2:8). The down-trodden remnant of God's people shall be delivered at the appearing of Jesus, Israel's true Messiah, the King after God's own heart.

W.W.F.

Chapter 97

Balaam: His Words and Ways

Balaam: His Words and Ways

W W Fereday.

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Thou Hast Seen It.

Balaam and his evil doings are brought before us in eight books of Holy Scripture — five in the Old Testament and three in the New. This fact is sufficient to prove the seriousness of his activities. The last mention of Balaam (and Balak) is in the epistle to the Assembly in Pergamos (Revelation 2:14).We learn from this that the wickedness of Balaam and Balak has been reproduced in the Christian circle. It is important therefore that every believer in the Lord Jesus should seek to understand what is involved therein.

Balaam appeared upon the scene in the closing days of Israel's forty years journeyings in the wilderness. Aaron died at the age of 123 on the first day of the fifth month in the fortieth year. The People had reached their eighth encampment after Aaron's death when Balak and Balaam conspired against them (Numbers 33:38-48). The question therefore arises, how did Moses get to know all that he has recorded in Numbers 22:24? It is the story of things which took place behind the scenes as far as the people of God were concerned. No one in the camp could know of the

negotiations between Moab and Amalek concerning an alliance against them; nor could anyone know what was said and done in Balaam's house in distant Mesopotamia, and of the strange journey when even the ass rebuked its master for his folly. Also, seeing that Balaam's parables were all uttered from heights looking down upon the camp of Israel, none in the camp could be aware that anything was transpiring at all. Alas, the people were too much occupied with their murmurings to think of anything else! How then did the inspired historian get the story of Balaam's doings and sayings which he has recorded with so much detail? Moses most have got it all very quickly, for these things occurred during the last few weeks of his life. The answer to the question is simple; Moses received the whole story by direct revelation from God. He knew, if His people did not, all that wicked men, urged on by Satan, were scheming against the people of His choice, and in His changeless love to them, notwithstanding their unfaithfulness from the beginning, He intervened and frustrated all the designs of the enemy. He even constrained the mercenary soothsayer to say the very opposite of all that he wished to say! — What a God is ours!

How little did the malicious conspirators think that God was taking note of everything, and that the story of their doings would be recorded by divine authority to be read by men in all succeeding ages! As little did the Roman officer Claudius Lysias imagine that his lying letter to the governor Felix concerning Paul was noted and preserved by God for insertion in His sacred Word! (Acts 23:25-30). Let us never forget that all that we say and do concerning persons we dislike, and of which we hope they will never hear, are all observed and recorded by the all-seeing God. Every malicious word and deed will have to be accounted for "in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ" (Romans 2:16). Listen to the words of Him who will sit upon the judgment seat: "I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36).

Direct divine revelation is the only explanation of other chapters than Numbers 22:24. Take, for example, the first two chapters of the book of Genesis. There we are told of what God said and did day after day during His great work of preparing the earth for the habitation of man, and when the moment came for the man to be created God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion, etc." There was most certainly no scribe standing by to record all that the Creator did and said during those wonderful days; and we must have remained in eternal ignorance of it all had not God been pleased to make the whole matter a subject of divine revelation to the historian. Thus we learn to trace everything to its true source — God. He who questions either the possibility or the reality of divine revelation has no claim whatever to be regarded as a Christian.

When Jehovah told Moses of the diabolical conspiracy against Israel he might well have said in the language of the Psalmist: "Thou hast seen it; for Thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with Thy hand. Break Thou the arm of the wicked; and as for the evil man, seek out his wickedness till Thou find none" (Psalms 10:14-15). When he told the people of the danger which had threatened them, Moses said. "They hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee. Nevertheless Jehovah thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but Jehovah thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because Jehovah thy God loved thee" (Deuteronomy 23:4-5). Precious words, "because Jehovah thy God loved thee!" But how poor the response from faithless human hearts!

Balak's Fears.

When Moses and the children of Israel sang their song of triumph on the shores of the Red Sea, they said; "the peoples shall hear and be afraid... the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them... fear and dread shall fall upon them" (Exodus 15:14-16). This was fulfilled to the letter when the King of Moab and his people beheld Jehovah's pilgrim host encamped upon their frontiers forty years later. There were in the camp of Israel 601,730 men able to carry arms; with women and children there were probably at least three million souls, admittedly a vast company. Balak was alarmed; the more so because Israel had recently destroyed three military Powers which had ventured to oppose their march. The King of Arad had gone down; likewise Sihon, King of Heshbon, and Og, King of Bashan (Numbers 21:1-35). Sihon had some time previously waged a successful war with Moab, and had annexed some of her territory; how then could Balak hope to stand up against a nation which had destroyed his powerful neighbour? When men are in trouble, the proper thing is to turn to God in prayer. He is as truly interested in the affairs of nations as in the difficulties and sorrows of individual men and women; but Balak knew nothing of God. If the rulers of our own time would humbly spread out their troubles before God, much grief and destruction would be spared. Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah are two fine examples of kings turning humbly to God in moments of national peril (2 Chronicles 2:1-37; 2 Kings 19:1-37).

In reality Balak had nothing to fear. Jehovah had already said to Moses: "Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle; for I will not give thee of their land in possession" (Deuteronomy 2:9). Jehovah had in view a better portion for Israel than the land of Moab. Moab typifies the comfortable, self-satisfied man of the world — "at ease from his youth, settled on his lees" (Jeremiah 48:11). proud and arrogant in consequence (Isaiah 16:6). God's saints today need not envy such, for they have a better and more enduring portion. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). Asaph, when he got out of communion with God, did envy the prosperity of the wicked; when he went into the sanctuary, and contemplated things there with God, he recovered his spiritual equilibrium (Psalms 73:1-28).

Knowing nothing of God, Balaam hastened to form alliance with Midian and Ammon (Numbers 22:4; Deuteronomy 23:3-4). Not being satisfied that military power would suffice to withstand the conquerors of Sihon and Og. he sent messengers to a noted soothsayer Balaam the son of Beor, living in Mesopotamia. Israel's victories were already being attributed by outsiders to divine power. Thus Rahab said to the spies; "We have heard how Jehovah dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt, and what ye did to the two Kings of the Amorites that were on the other side of Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things our hearts did melt" (Joshua 2:10-11). In sending for Balaam, Balak sought to oppose the supernatural by the supernatural. The Mesopotamian prophet was reputed to have influence with the invisible world. "I know that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed... Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people" (Numbers 22:6).

This complex character had some knowledge of God — alas, no heart knowledge! He brought the name of the one true God into his nefarious practises in order to give them an air of respectability. Also, many persons would be more easily duped by his use of the name of God. Balaam was what is now called a "Spiritualist." A very misleading name really; "Spiritist" or "Demonist" would be

more correct. Modern Spiritualists seem to be divided into two classes; there are those who leave God quite out of their pretensions (which is at least honest); and there are also those who call themselves "Christian Spiritualists." The latter class are particularly dangerous; for these are not Bible-reading days, and many souls are easily led astray by the use of the word "Christian." In quite a number of cases the clergy tamper with this great evil and even recommend it as a useful adjunct to "preaching." The truth is, there is no possible connection between Christianity and Spiritualism. God in His word notably in Deuteronomy 18:9-14 unsparingly condemns this iniquity in all its forms. It is apostasy a turning away from God and His revealed truth. It is intercourse with demons, ruinous to all who practise it. The land of Canaan was full of this when the hosts of Israel marched in, and they were divinely charged to utterly exterminate it. Indeed, the prevalence of this particular evil was one of the principal reasons why the holy and righteous God could tolerate the seven Canaanitish nations no longer.

The Invisible Powers of Evil

There is no doubt whatever that we are surrounded by a vast world of spirits, some good, and some evil. The good are those who continue in their proper allegiance to the Creator; the evil are those who are in revolt against Him, following the leadership of Satan. But both good and evil are deeply interested in the affairs of men; the one delighting in their blessing, and the other seeking to compass their ruin.

There are three notices of the spirit world in the epistle to the Ephesians which must detain us for a moment. In Ephesians 1:20-21 we have Christ's position in relation thereto. He is seated at God's "right hand in the heavenly places. far above all principality and power, and might and dominion." However mighty the spirit forces in the universe may be, Christ is superior to them all, and all must yet acknowledge His Lordship. In Ephesians 3:10 we are told "that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies is made known through the Church the manifold wisdom of God." These are holy spirits, who observe with unselfish interest what God is doing for His redeemed, and they admire the wisdom of His ways therein. Peter says they desire to "look into" these things (1 Peter 1:12). Then in Ephesians 6:12 we learn that the Christian's present conflict is "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in heavenly places" (see margin).

These spirit-forces are highly organised (we read of "chief princes" amongst them Daniel 10:13): and their power is enormous. They act upon individuals to their ruin and they influence also the course of public affairs; they are largely responsible for the disasters which come upon men from time to time. Kings and statesmen, however talented and well intentioned they may be, are helpless pawns in the hands of diabolical spirits, if they have not learned the need of absolute dependence upon God.

Let no-one misunderstand the foregoing. We are not referring to the spirits of departed men and women. These are quite unable to influence earthly affairs, even if they know anything at all about them, which is very doubtful. Our reference is to angelic beings, some good, and some evil, as before stated. Men have always had a desire to pierce the veil which separates the visible from the invisible. Such inquisitiveness is dangerous in the extreme, and those who indulge in it expose themselves to the tyranny of beings greatly their superiors in power and subtlety, who delight to allure souls down to eternal ruin.

It has pleased God, in His gracious instruction of His own saints to give us glimpses of what is going on in the invisible world. He wishes His own, who are set in testimony for Him here, to have some understanding of the terrible influences which are persistently working for the destruction of the human race. We are thus ourselves preserved from Satanic deception, and are able to warn others also. Daniel 10:1; Daniel 12:4; 1 Kings 22:14-23; and Revelation 16:12-16 are scriptures which every Christian should carefully examine in this connection. In Daniel 10:1-21 we find the prophet in prayer for three weeks concerning the future of the people of Israel. At the end of that period an angel came to him saying that he was sent off at once with the answer, "but," said he, "the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days" (Daniel 10:13). Of whom is the angel speaking? Not of a man, certainly; for how could the Persian Sovereign hinder an angel coming from heaven with an answer to the prophet's prayer? And would he be likely to know that the prophet had prayed at all? It is a mighty spirit of whom the angel speaks, a spirit that interested itself for good or for evil in the politics of the Persian State. Then in Daniel 10:20, we read: "now will I return to fight the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come. "It is impossible to introduce men into such a passage. The angel is speaking of movements and counter movements in the spirit world, resulting in conflicts here upon earth. If the angel's message be read through to the end (Daniel 12:4), we shall learn of many mischievous doings on the part of Kings and others, energised by Satan; we shall also learn that Israel forms the centre of God's earthly ways, and that the archangel Michael has special charge of Israel's interests and that in due time he will act in power on their behalf. (Daniel 12:1) In connection with this interesting angelic communication to Daniel, Zechariah 1:7-11; Zechariah 3:1-5, and Zechariah 6:1-8 may well be carefully considered.

Turning now to 1 Kings 22:14-23. Ahab, Israel's wicked and wilful king was disposed to go to war with Syria for the recovery of Ramoth-Gilead. His misguided ally, Jehoshaphat King of Judah (pious, but weak) wished to know what Jehovah might have to say about the undertaking. In due course faithful Micaiah was brought out of prison, and in few words he described a scene in the heavenlies. Jehovah was seated on His throne surrounded by the host of heaven. His patience with Ahab being now exhausted, He called for a volunteer who would dispose the doomed man to go to war to his undoing. After much discussion, a spirit proposed to go down and put a lie in the mouths of all the King's prophets. "Go forth, and do so," said the great God. No words can adequately set forth the solemnity of this. Israel's war with Syria was thus arranged in the spirit world, as many a war since. Blinded by Satan, Ahab paid no heed to what he heard. God's faithful witness was sent back to prison, and the king rode forth to his death.

Revelation 16:12-16 deals briefly with the last gathering of the nations for battle. The dread word "Armageddon "is found here. Spirit forces are responsible for the world's final conflict. It will suffice to quote the passage "I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are the spirits of demons, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the whole earth. to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty. "The language is doubtless symbolic, but its meaning is too plain to be misunderstood. As the scriptures become more and more neglected and discredited (largely as the fruit of the so called "Higher Criticism") men will listen with increasing willingness to "seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy "(1 Timothy 4:1-2). Terrible result of the poison of unbelief injected by the serpent into the minds of Eve and

Adam at the beginning! (Genesis 3:1).

One of the oldest of the Books of the Bible enlightens us as to Satan's malicious activity against individuals.

When various disasters came upon Job, he had no idea that he had been the subject of conversation in the heavens. Jehovah had observed his ways with much pleasure; Satan also had observed him, but with malignant eyes. When Jehovah raised the question of Job with Satan, he was answered with the insinuation that Job only served Him for his own advantage. God therefore allowed the enemy to strip him bare of all that He had given him; yet Job did not renounce his God. At a second conversation in the heavens, Satan urged that the trouble had not gone far enough, and if God would touch the patriarch's person He would see what manner of man he really was. We will not pursue the familiar subject further; but when Job's friends, having heard of his troubles, came to visit him, and found him covered with boils, sitting in anguish upon an ash-heap, their words and also Job's show that none of them really understood the matter. But Job clave to his God, spite of His strange dealings with him, and in the end he was more richly blessed than ever.

The Scriptures that we have examined tell us a little of the hostility of Satan and his hosts to God and to men individually and collectively. A great day is coming, and it may be very near, when a mighty clash of spirit-forces will take place on high, resulting in the expulsion of Satan and his angels from the heavens, never to have a footing in those regions again. Then will be heard the shout of triumph from the glorified saints: "Now is come the salvation, and the strength. and the Kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night "(Revelation 12:7-12).

Having some knowledge of these terrible forces of evil, Balaam was willing to be their tool for the destruction of God's people Israel, but Jehovah, who loved the people, frustrated him at every point, and from his lips there flowed not curses but blessings!

To and From Mesopotamia

"Many shall run to and fro" (Daniel 12:4). Even since the expulsion from Eden man has been a restless being. He is never more restless than when he is in trouble, or when he thinks he sees trouble approaching. North, South, East, and West are searched for help, or for a way of escape. Thus, when Balak became alarmed by reason of the proximity of the people of Israel to his borders, he sent messengers to neighbouring kingdoms seeking alliances, and he also sent messengers to Mesopotamia to bring along the renowned soothsayer Balaam. He would have done better to get down before God, who never turns aside the supplications of those who feel their need of Him. In our own day we have seen statesmen flying thousands of miles at the risk of their lives to consult with flesh and blood concerning their anxieties. A day of fasting and prayer an the part of these statesmen would produce better results, Oh, the blindness which prefers flesh, with its notorious fickleness, to God with His well-known faithfulness to all who put their trust in Him! (Isaiah 2:22).

Balak's messengers went to Mesopotamia "with the rewards of divination in their hands" (Numbers 22:7). Knowing that the false prophet "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Peter 2:15). Balak sought to make sure of him by sending "cash in advance!" But the treacherous deceiver introduced Jehovah's name into the matter, and lodged the messengers for the night under the

pretence of seeking the mind of God. The business in hand was of immense importance, for he was required to effect the ruin of a whole nation; did he therefore spend the night in prayer to God? Nothing was further from Balaam's thoughts. He simply went to bed; and God, who was watching all these movements with the deepest interest, came to him with the challenge, "What men are these with thee?"

Let us note the whole position carefully. The people of Jehovah, who had been ungrateful and disobedient throughout their wilderness journey, were now in grave peril. They were not aware of it and therefore did not make supplication to God. But Jehovah Himself took the matter up, and there we are reminded of His changeless favour. He loved the people, spite of all that they were, and He would not allow the enemy to harm them. Oh, the comfort of this thought for ourselves!

Was Balaam aware who it was that spoke to him that night? This is not certain when we remember that he was a man accustomed to hearing voices from the invisible world. But whether or not he understood at first that it was Israel's God who was dealing with him, he replied quite frankly that Balak requested him to curse a people who had come out of Egypt, of whom he was afraid. The answer of God was in three short sentences. (1) "Thou shalt not go with them." This should have sufficed to close the matter absolutely. A man who really knew God would never raise the question again. (2) "Thou shalt not curse the people." Therefore however much his covetous heart might desire Balak's silver and gold, he must not attempt to do what Balak desired. (3) "They are blessed." A man who knew God would be assured that God would never go back upon this. Here is the whole divine communication: "Thou shalt not go with them: thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed!" "And I cannot reverse it," said Balaam later!

His words to his visitors next morning have a tinge of disappointment in them: "Jehovah refuseth to give me leave to go with you." His heart was not in communion with God about His people. Gladly would he have overwhelmed them in ruin for the sake of reward; but he was conscious of divine restraint.

When Balak's messengers returned to Moab, the King was not disposed to let the matter rest. Accordingly he sent another embassy, composed of persons greater in dignity than those he sent at first, and offered to increase the reward if only Balaam would come. Balaam said that if Balak would give him his house full of silver and gold he could not go beyond the word of Jehovah. This sounds well; but he added "tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what Jehovah will say unto me more" (Numbers 22:18-19). Such an attitude was sheer wickedness. Jehovah had already clearly stated His mind; thus there was nothing about which to consult Him further. But Balaam was bent upon going, and he knew enough of God not to desire open conflict with Him (Like Gamaliel in Acts 5:39); he would bend Jehovah to his self-will if possible! Appalling thought! Colossal ignorance of our God!

God spoke again to Balaam in the night, saying, "If the men have come to call thee, rise up and go with them; but the word that I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do." God would now deal with the fool according to his folly. He should go as he wished; but God was determined to cover him with confusion, and bring great blessing for His own people out of these Satanic manoeuvres. The man's wicked attitude towards God concerning this matter calls to mind the behaviour of the Jewish captains in the days of Jeremiah when they were afraid of the Chaldeans. They requested the prophet to pray for them that they might have divine guidance concerning their path, when they

had already made up their minds to go with their whole company to Egypt (Jeremiah 42:1-22). Let us beware of going before God at any time with our minds already made up. It is a serious affront to the Divine Majesty!

Balaam, having obtained permission from Jehovah, arose eagerly in the morning, saddled his ass, and set forth with Balak's messengers. He was not walking in the light, as the Lord Jesus in John 2:9 when starting on a journey. Balaam walked in darkness, hoping that he was to have his own way, and reap a rich reward for his villainy. His heart was not filled with divine affections, and longing to be used of God for the blessing of men. He had no message; what he would be constrained to say when his eyes beheld the tribes of Israel he knew not. What a journey, a journey that will preach its lessons, and that will not be forgotten while the earth abides! Never was Satan more determined to curse; never was God more determined to bless! Never had Satan a more willing servant; never was a man more impotent than Balaam when the Almighty took him in hand! How good to the soul to meditate in the ways of our God!

The Madness of the Prophet

Our really excellent Authorised Version is faulty in its rendering of 1 Timothy 6:10. The apostle did not say, "the love of money is the root of all evil," for it is indisputable that many evils are sometimes found in persons who are not plagued with the love of money at all. The Revised Version gives the meaning more correctly "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." From that pernicious root envy, lying, and murder (not to mention other sins) can easily spring. But the same hateful things can also come from other roots. Love of money was the ruin of Balaam, as of Judas Iscariot and many others. The Holy Spirit when commenting on Balaam's doings fifteen centuries later said, "he loved the wages of unrighteousness! (2 Peter 2:15).

So we picture the prophet setting out from Mesopotamia for Moab with Balak's silver and gold filling his soul's vision, utterly heartless as to the devastation and sorrow — that he was to endeavour to bring upon an unoffending people in order to obtain his reward. The people of Israel had done him no wrong, and he had no direct quarrel with them; yet he was willing to blast a whole nation — men, women, and children. Nothing more horrible could well be imagined. No wonder we read that "God's anger was kindled because he went " (Numbers 22:22).

A heavenly being stood in the way with a drawn sword in his hand. He is called "the angel of Jehovah." This was no mere servant. It is the same messenger who appeared to the wife of Manoah in Judges 13:1-25 and who said his name was "Wonderful." Both to her and to Balaam he spoke with divine authority. To Balaam He said: "I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before Me . . . Go with the men; but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak." The speaker was none other than He whom we know as the Lord Jesus Christ.

The ass saw the Angel, and turned aside from the threatening sword. Alas, that the beast should have more perception than a man made in the image of God! "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, My people do not consider" (Isaiah 1:3). Such was Jehovah's complaint of the moral insensibility of the people to whom He had been more kind than to any other. The very cattle could put them to shame!

Balaam smote his ass three times. The Angel rebuked him for it, for every act of cruelty to animals is divinely noted.

When the sons of God are manifested in glory with the Firstborn, the groaning creation will be finally delivered (Romans 8:19-22). Meantime, "Jehovah opened the mouth of the ass" Let no-one doubt it. The Holy Spirit, who is the real Author of every book of Scripture, says so, not only in the book of Numbers, but in the much later second epistle of Peter. This answers every question to those who have learned to believe God. Why should not the ass speak? He who gave speech to man can surely give speech to a beast at any moment if circumstances require it. "The iron did swim" (1 Kings 6:6). "The sun stood still" (Joshua 10:13). And, pray, why not? "Is anything too hard for Jehovah?" (Genesis 18:14). Bring Him into these matters, and all difficulties vanish. "None can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" (Daniel 4:35).

"The dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbade the madness of the prophet." Madness indeed, to imagine that he could annul or change the declared purpose of Jehovah concerning His people! Madness to suppose that a beneficent Creator would allow million of souls to be destroyed in order that a spiritualistic practitioner might earn a fee! But what madness are men not capable of who are ignorant of God? Is the devastation of the earth in our own time evidence of wisdom or madness? Had Balaam any heart-knowledge of God he would have refused to go a step further after his experience with the Angel. True, the Angel said. "Go with the men; but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak." But he also said. "Behold. I went out to withstand thee, because the way thou walkest in is for ruin before me" (Numbers 22:32, Darby). After hearing all this, Balaam was clearly proceeding to his doom. His words "I have sinned" no more came from a divinely convicted conscience than the same words from the lips of self-willed Saul in 1 Samuel 15:24.

In due course Balaam met Balak. and was rebuked by him for not coming when first invited. But it must have been with a more than doubtful mind that Balaam entered upon the sorry business for which he had been summoned from Mesopotamia. In some respects these two servants of the Devil foreshadowed the beast and the false prophet of the last days, who will with diabolical energy move earth and hell against the Israel of God for their destruction, but who will have no more success than the Balak and Balaam of long ago. Indeed they will be "cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Revelation 19:20). Who is able to withstand God?

The Great Question.

God has a twofold controversy with Moab concerning the people of Israel: first, "because they met you not with bread and water in the way when ye came forth out of Egypt," and, second, "because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia to curse thee"(Deuteronomy 23:4). We learn, from this that sin can be negative as well as positive. He who neglects to do the will of God is as real a sinner as he who openly defies it. In Matthew 25:1-46 the foolish virgins were shut out from the marriage feast because they neglected to obtain oil for their lamps; the servant with the one talent was cast into outer darkness because he neglected to use his talent for the Lord, and the "goats" were sent away into eternal punishment because they neglected to show kindness to the King's messengers. Such neglect as is exposed in Matthew 25:1-46 suggests contempt for the will of God — a very serious matter indeed. Samuel said to the people of Israel: "God forbid that I should sin against Jehovah in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23). It was evil therefore in the sight of God that Moab (and Ammon) did not meet His pilgrim people with bread and water when they were marching from Egypt to Canaan."

But these enemies went further. There was not mere neglect but also open hostility. Many centuries after Moses' day Jehovah said, "O My people, remember now what Balak King of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal, that ye may know the righteousness of Jehovah" (Micah 6:5). A great question was thus raised by Balak and Balaam under the instigation of Satan against the people of Israel, a question which it is important we should understand, for it affects us intimately. Satan is as full of malignity against God's heavenly saints as against his earthly people. Israel was delivered from Egypt by the power of God, with promises of blessing in a divinely chosen land ringing in their ears; their path, year by year, was marked by divine love and care; the people were now on the threshold of the promised land: and the moment had almost come for them to cross the Jordan and take possession. Satan, who had wrought havoc amongst them persistently during the wilderness years, now roused himself for a supreme effort against them, Balak and Balaam being his chosen instruments. He sought to deprive them of the promised blessings; indeed, he desired their utter extermination. Had the great question been raised at the beginning of the forty years everyone would have expected Jehovah to refuse the suggestion to destroy the people. Why deliver them from the taskmasters of Egypt, and why preserve them from the perils of the Red Sea if He was willing to destroy them? But the question was not raised at the beginning of the forty years, but at the end. And what was the history of those years? On Jehovah's part, goodness, faithfulness and patience; but on the people's part unbelief, ingratitude and persistent disobedience! Moses truly loved the people and sacrificed all his worldly prospects in order to serve them, but they broke his heart, and on one occasion they so provoked his spirit that he uttered words which deprived him of the land of his soul's deep desire (Isa. 56:32-33; Numbers 20:12; Deuteronomy 4:21-22). With such a record, could the people be cursed? Could Jehovah be induced to cast Israel aside? This was the question that was raised and answered in the plains of Moab.

We study this grave chapter in Israel's history with deep interest because it concerns us vitally. What have we been towards our God during the days of our pilgrimage? We must all bow our heads with sadness and shame as we put this question to our hearts. But can our shortcomings affect God's counsels of grace concerning us? Will He cease to love us, erase our names from the book of life, and fling us back to where He found us? Blessed be His holy name, NO! He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love; He has taken us into favour in the Beloved; He has washed, sanctified, and justified us; and has sealed and anointed us with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:3-6; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22). All this must stand for ever, for God is faithful, whatever His people may be. In His righteous government He may chasten us even as He chastened Israel of old, but He will never abandon His counsels of grace. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Romans 11:29). Listen to Moses in Deuteronomy 23:5: "Jehovah thy God would not hearken unto Balaam, but Jehovah thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because Jehovah thy God loved thee" similarly, all our blessings are secured in the risen Christ, and the Father loves us as He loves Him.

It suits the arch-hypocrite of the universe, Satan, sometimes to make a stand for righteousness. Can it be consistent with the divine character that an unfaithful people should still be loved and blessed? In Zechariah 3:1-10 the prophet was shown in a vision Satan resisting Joshua as representative of the nation of Israel. He would fain have the man in filthy garments flung into the

fire as wholly unsuitable for the presence of God. But he was divinely rebuked! Satan before he fell held high office in the creation of God. There is a veiled allusion to him in Ezekiel 28:11-17. We quote Ezekiel 28:14 : "thou art the anointed cherub that covereth, and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire." These words make it apparent that Satan's office was to guard the interests of the throne of God. In his hypocrisy even now he "transforms himself into an angel of light" and his servants into "ministers of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). Evil spirits are not always unclean. (Mark 5:2); they can be sanctimonious and Pharisaical when it suits them (1 Timothy 4:1-3). They could even by the lips of men charge the Lord Jesus with Sabbath-breaking, blasphemy, and sedition! They could affect to be shocked at the ways and words of God's Holy One!

As we read the book of Numbers it is delightful to discover that the efforts of wicked men and of Satan caused God to give forth, by the unwilling lips of Balaam, some of the most marvellous outpourings of grace and blessing concerning His people that we find anywhere in Scripture. In explanation of this we should glance back at Numbers 21:8-9. The uplifted serpent was a type of the uplifted Son of Man as we learn from His own blessed lips in John 3:14. This suggests God's utter rejection of flesh as hopelessly evil in His sight. Nothing that proceeds from the first man can be acceptable to Him. The sinner needs not only forgiveness for the sins which he has committed; he needs also a new and divine life. This is what Nicodemus was told at the midnight talk in Jerusalem. A truly humiliating lesson for us all to learn! The root is bad as well as the fruit; the life as well as its evil manifestations. Life for man is only found in Him who upon Calvary's tree bore the judgment of God against all that we were and against all that we have done. He lives now in resurrection power, and every believer is entitled to say "the life that I now live in the flesh (i.e. in the body) I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me"(Galatians 2:20).

In the uplifted serpent Jehovah (typically) put out of sight all the inbred evil of the people of His choice: how then could He cancel all His purposes of grace, and cast them away from His presence? The devices of the enemy turned to his own confusion, and furnished the God of all grace with an opportunity to set forth more clearly and fully than ever the great thoughts of His heart.

Let us read again Micah 6:5. "O My people, remember now what Balak King of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of Jehovah." This is a truly remarkable passage when we consider the places which are named therein. "Shittim" was on the wilderness side of the Jordan, but "Gilgal" was inside the promised land. Thus Jehovah's answer to the enemy was in deeds as well as in words. His words were uttered in Shittim (and very full and wonderful they were); His deeds were witnessed in Gilgal, where the people of Israel, after their miraculous crossing of the Jordan, pitched their camp, and from which they went forth conquering and to conquer. Most blessedly therefore did Jehovah display His righteousness in the fulfilment of His gracious word to His people. But how quickly they forgot His works, and ceased to sound forth His praise!

God's Sanctified People.

Balak met Balaam at the frontier of his kingdom. Neither king nor prophet were in good humour. Balak was affronted because Balaam had not readily responded to his requirements; and Balaam

had the feeling that he was under restraint, am what matters would not develop as Balak and himself desired. Balak first took his visitor to Kirjath Huzoth, and there he offered oxen and sheep in the presence of Balaam and of the princes who had fetched him from Mesopotamia. We may perhaps regard this as a kind of official welcome. To whom Balak offered his sacrifices we are not told; certainly the one true God had no place in his esteem. (Numbers 22:36-41).

On the following day the real business commenced. "Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost part of the people." This is the first mention of Baal in the Word of God. It was the chief male deity of the Phoenicians and the Canaanites, Ashtoreth being the chief female deity. (Sorrowful words to write!) This form of idolatry obtained a footing in Israel in the days of the judges , it was cast out in the time of Samuel (1 Samuel 7:3-6); it became firmly established in the kingdom of the ten tribes in the reign of Ahab; and Jezebel's daughter Athaliah introduced it into the Kingdom of Judah. This great evil was one of the causes of the expulsion of the whole twelve tribes from the land of promise.

Balak's object in conducting Balaam to the high places of Baal was that probably such a stronghold of his false worship would be favourable to the business in hand. Surely at such a spot Baal would help him! But he reckoned without God, and in a short time he was compelled to listen to the Gospel of God from the Devil's own platform! What discomfiture! Balaam took up the matter and asked Balak to build seven altars, and prepare for him seven oxen and seven rams. This wicked man probably had some knowledge of the sacrificial system which Jehovah had instituted in Israel. He knew that burnt offerings were acceptable to Him; but did he really imagine that the presentation of sacrifices from such a man as himself would be so agreeable to Jehovah that after all He would allow him to have his own way, and curse the people? His blindness and ignorance in offering burnt offerings at such a moment was remarkable. But whatever the oxen and rams on the altars meant to Balaam they suggested Christ to God; and when Christ is before Him in the perfection of His great sacrificial work, what can He do but bless His people? Balaam understood nothing of this. He was as blind as the wicked men who put the blessed Son of God upon the cross of Calvary. There was an aspect to that cross of which they knew nothing. Little did they imagine that God would bring vast blessing out of their appalling deed!

As the smoke of the sacrifices ascended, "Balaam said unto Balak, Stand by the burnt offering and I will go; peradventure Jehovah will come to meet me: and whatsoever He sheweth me I will tell thee"(Numbers 23:3). Such a speech was an exposure of the man. Why the word "peradventure"? Did God ever refuse to meet any soul that sincerely sought Him? Why this language of uncertainty? It was pious cant. When he turned aside to "a bare height" Balaam had no wish whatever to meet Jehovah. His one desire was that Jehovah would let him alone, that he might do what Balak wished, and so earn his reward. Numbers 24:1 tells us definitely that he went "to seek for enchantments," which means that he sought to get through to the demons with whom he was accustomed to have dealings. But "God met Balaam" to his dismay, we doubt not! He told God of his altars and sacrifices (had not God eyes to see for Himself?); and Jehovah "put a word" in his mouth, and bade him return to Balak and speak it.

A distinguished assemblage awaited Balaam. The King stood by the altars, surrounded by all the princes of his realm. Surely there was never a more momentous occasion in the history of Moab! Balak had taken much trouble, and gone to considerable expense to get Balaam's assistance.

Evidently he had a great opinion of Balaam's influence with the powers of the invisible world. Why did he not call the nation together in its supposed time of peril to pray to Baal for help? Why not convene such a gathering as that on Mount Carmel in Elijah's day. when the prophets of Baal cried for many hours. "O Baal. hear us?"(1 Kings 18:1-46). Balak judged that the Mesopotamian soothsayer was the most likely person in the world to help him. When Balaam returned from the "bare height" where God intervened and spoke to him, Balak and his princes were full of expectation. What would he say? Would he pour forth such maledictions as would blast the power of the people they dreaded, so that the armies of Moab and her allies might easily destroy them? Balaam had used the name of Jehovah quite freely in their hearing, and he had told them that he could only say what He gave him to say; but all such language was mere jargon to the pagan Moabites. Surely Jehovah could be bought, as all other deities, and was not Balak prepared to pay a high price in order to attain his ends?

"Balaam took up his parable, and said, Balak, the King of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the East saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, denounce Israel." Here is a clear statement of what was required. How little did these wicked men realize that they were really calling down a curse upon themselves! For Jehovah said to Abram when He first called him; "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee" (Genesis 12:3). Let all the nations of the earth beware how they seek the hurt of the seed of Abraham, however faulty they may be.

Having stated clearly what was expected, Balaam was constrained to say, "How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I denounce whom Jehovah hath not denounced?" (J. N. Darby prefers the word "denounce" to "defy"). This should have sufficed to break up the meeting. No success was possible and the sequel proved that the more the enemies of God's people sought to draw forth a curse against them, the more richly and fully the blessing flowed.

Balaam gave utterance to four parables. Taken together. they give the whole story of God's grace to His people. His wonderful ways, traced from His sovereign choice of them until their ultimate triumph under Christ in the Millennial Kingdom. Each parable has its own theme. In the first is set forth the special and exclusive position in which God had placed His people. "From the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, it is a people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Numbers 23:9). When God distributed to the nations their inheritance at the time of the Babel scattering Israel was uppermost in His mind (Deuteronomy 32:7). Israel was to be the centre of His earthly dealings, and the people were meant to be a witness and blessing to all the nations, while divinely separated from them. "Ye shall be holy unto Me: for I Jehovah am holy, and have severed you from the peoples to be Mine" (Leviticus 20:26. J.N.D.). Faith in Solomon responded to this in his prayer at the dedication of the Temple. "They are Thy people, and Thine inheritance, which Thou broughtest forth out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron . . . Thou didst separate them from among the peoples of the earth, to be Thine inheritance as Thou spakest by the hand of Moses Thy servant when Thou broughtest our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God"(1 Kings 8:51-53). But the people did not value their distinctive place of separation to God, Solomon himself becoming one of the worst transgressors in this respect.

Balaam was speaking "from the top of the rocks," and thus described the people as God in His grace regarded them; had he walked through the camp and been permitted to record all that he saw and heard there, he would have told a different story, for the ways of the chosen people were

scarcely better than those of the heathen Moabites. Israel's distinctive place in the earth has been forfeited by sin; but it will yet be restored in grace when Christ appears.

Meantime, the Holy Spirit is upon earth forming the Church, the body of the exalted Christ. God is "visiting the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name"(Acts 15:14). The Church belongs to heaven all its blessings are there; and it was meant to walk in absolute separation from the world in testimony to Christ. Christians are called "the sanctified" in Hebrews 2:11; and the Lord Jesus said of them in John 17:1-26 : "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:15-16). But the Church has been no more faithful in its distinctive place of blessing than Israel in the past. It has been said, and we quote the words with shame: "I looked for the Church and I found it in the world; I looked for the world, and I found it in the Church."

God wants a separated people. Only through such can He be glorified; only through the instrumentality of such can He carry out His purposes of love.

Paul told the Galatians that "our Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil world according to the will of our God and Father" (Galatians 1:4). He told the Hebrews, "Jesus, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate." He followed this with the earnest appeal: "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach"(Hebrews 13:12-13). Shall we not, as individual believers, seek to walk apart from everything that is unsuitable to God and to Christ? Shall we not seek to be sanctified "wholly," that our "whole spirit and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"? (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

The people in their tents knew nothing of what was being said about them in the heights. If God's thoughts of grace had really penetrated their hearts, how different their history would have been!

Balaam concluded his first parable almost enthusiastically (alas, his heart was not in the words that he was constrained to utter!): "Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel! "Our God is both great and generous largeness characterises all His ways of grace. In speaking of the great supper in Luke 14:23 He said "that My house may be filled." Whether it be earthly or heavenly blessing that is in view, God always contemplates a countless host (Genesis 22:17; Revelation 7:9; Revelation 19:6).

"Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his: "The life of the righteous had no attraction for him ("he loved the wages of unrighteousness"); and had it been in his power he would have consigned millions to perdition; His end is noted by the Holy Spirit. When the five kings of the Midianites were slain in battle, Balaam perished with them (Numbers 31:8). He was a long way from home at that tragic moment; but death found him amongst the inveterate enemies of the people of God, and still seeking Israel's hurt.

How great the contrast between Balaam, and godly old Simeon in Jerusalem, who, as he held the Babe Jesus in his arms, blessed God, and said: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation!" (Luke 2:27-30). We shall meet Simeon again, for he appreciated Christ; but we shall not find Balaam in his company.

God's Justified People

Balak was astounded and indignant at what Balaam said concerning Israel. "What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and behold, thou has blessed them altogether" (Numbers 23:11). Balaam could only reply that he was in the hands of Jehovah. Do we marvel that Balak did not immediately expel the prophet from his borders? Alas flesh is always foolish and obstinate where God is concerned (Romans 1:22; Ephesians 4:18). The King suggested that they should go to another place, and try again. How terribly Satan deceives man made in the image of God whose hearts are not truly subject to Him!

Balak now took Balaam "into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah," and there seven fresh altars were built. and a bullock and a ram was offered on each one. What low and contemptible thoughts both King and prophet had of their Creator, to imagine that such devices and changes of position could revolutionise His mind concerning His people! The King of Syria and his advisers were just as stupid when they were at war with Israel in the days of Ahab. They suggested that Jehovah was God of the hills, but not of the valleys; consequently if the Syrians fought on the lower ground, victory would be theirs: (1 Kings 20:1-43).

The words "the Lord" should not have been inserted in the Authorised Version of Numbers 23:15. Balaam said to Balak, "stand here by thy burnt offering while I meet yonder." He did not go to meet Jehovah; he did not wish Him to cross his path again. In Numbers 24:1 it is expressly said that he went to seek for enchantments"; but Jehovah, in His love to His people (although unworthy) would not allow this. Accordingly He intervened a second time, and met Balaam. He put a fresh word in his mouth, and said. "Go again unto Balak and speak thus" — It is immense comfort to our souls to note these divine activities. The God with whom we have to do delights to "stand between us and the foe."

Balak's question when Balaam returned to him was remarkable: "What hath Jehovah spoken?" From what we know of him he was not willing to submit to whatever it might please Jehovah to say. His hope was that His second message would be more favourable to Moab than the first. What a delightful contrast to this way the attitude of Cornelius and his friends when Peter went to them in Caesarea by their invitation! "Thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." (Acts 10:33) Such an attitude of soul brings blessing. The whole company listened with avidity to Peter's testimony to the Lord Jesus, and in less than an hour (probably) every person present received the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Ezekiel's day some in Israel said to one another: "Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from Jehovah." They went to Ezekiel and listened to him: they were favoured to hear divine truth! but they were nothing the better for it. Jehovah said to His servant: "Lo, thou art unto them a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument, for they hear thy words but they do them not"(Ezekiel 33:30-32). A condition distressing in its heartlessness! May God preserve us from it!

Faith delights to hear what God has to say, and is sure that His word is true. Thus David, when sitting before Jehovah in communion, said: "For Thy word's sake, and according to Thine own heart, hast Thou done all these great thing; to make Thy servant know them" (2 Samuel 7:1-29, 2 Samuel 8:1-18, 2 Samuel 9:1-13, 2 Samuel 10:1-19, 2 Samuel 11:1-27, 2 Samuel 12:1-31, 2 Samuel 13:1-39, 2 Samuel 14:1-33, 2 Samuel 15:1-37, 2 Samuel 16:1-23, 2 Samuel 17:1-29, 2

Samuel 18:1-33, 2 Samuel 19:1-43, 2 Samuel 20:1-26, 2 Samuel 21:1-22). And when in old age David had to mourn over the unfaithfulness of his own house, he was enabled to say: "Yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation and all my desire? although He make it not to grow" (2 Samuel 23:5). This means that God's revealed counsels were sure whatever His apparent delay in the development of them. All that David looked for awaits the coming in power of the Lord Jesus.

Dear Christian reader, whoever you be in a world of change and upheaval the only sure thing is the word of God. Read it; meditate upon it; believe it in its every part. Men are promising one another all sorts of things as we write, and many bewildered souls hope that common sense will yet bring order out of chaos. Nothing but heartache lies ahead for those who thus cherish "confidence in flesh." But the counsels of God are sure; they have Christ for their centre and they will be brought to fruition in God's appointed time.

To return to Balaam. The opening words of his second discourse are exceedingly precious: "Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent, hath He not said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" (Numbers 23:18-19). The wicked speaker is here condemning himself; although probably his seared conscience did not realize it. If God indeed never goes back on His word, why did he consult Him a second time before leaving Mesopotamia? It is terribly possible to read, and even to utter words of which we know neither the meaning nor the power; are we alive to this danger for ourselves? Are our souls grounded in the great truth of God's unchangeableness? Psalms 119:1-176 contains 176 verses; and throughout this long psalm the writer is expressing his confidence in God's word; and is telling us how sweet it was to his taste, and how much more precious than gold and silver (Balaam would not have agreed with the Psalmist in the last item!)

Balaam's words in Numbers 23:19 may well be read again and again. True, the words came from the lips of a bad man, but their source nevertheless was the Spirit of God. There is another Scripture that we must put alongside Numbers 23:19. In 1 Samuel 15:29 when Saul was being rebuked for his disobedience to the command of Jehovah, and was told that the kingdom would now be rent from him, the prophet added: "the Strength of Israel will not repent, for He is not a man that He should repent." From this solemn passage we learn that God is as faithful and sure in His judgments as in His grace. Solemn consideration for all who are disposed to quibble at His severity (Romans 11:22).

Balaam continued: "Behold, I have received commandment to bless; and He hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it." Here we have an advance on what he said in his first utterance. "God hath not cursed"; now he passes from the negative to the positive. "He hath blessed"; but his added words were venomous, "and I cannot reverse it." Gladly would he have done so for reward. But how delightful to our souls to hear the enemy of God's people making public confession that he is powerless to reverse God's grace towards His chosen. "Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take!"

We come now to the central theme of Jehovah's second message: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob; neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel." Yet the whole story of the wilderness journey is full of Israel's "iniquity and perverseness." Moses, who loved the people, was obliged to say, "you have been rebellious against Jehovah from the day that I knew you" (Deuteronomy 9:24).

Several of the later prophets traced the perpetual evil of the nation from Egypt to the Captivity. (Read Isaiah 1:1-31; Jeremiah 32:1-44; Ezekiel 20:1-49). Yet Balaam was instructed to say such wonderful words concerning them from the top of Pisgah! It is noticeable also that he used the natural name Jacob "Supplanter" as well as the name of grace Israel ("prince with God"). God's grace in justifying the ungodly is thus set forth. The full exposition of this wonderful work of God is found in the Epistle to the Romans.

On what principle of righteousness could Jehovah constrain the enemy to say He had not seen iniquity in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel? Consider the following precious facts: — (1) On the awful night in Egypt, when God was judging wickedness in the Egyptians He sheltered the Israelites, who were as evil as their oppressors, under the blood of the lamb. Beautiful picture of how God has sheltered us from a more terrible judgment by the blood of Christ. (2) Not long before Balaam came upon the scene, when Jehovah chastised His people for murmuring, He provided for dying sinners the brazen serpent, blessedly typical of the uplifted Son of man by whose death we live, all that we were by nature being judged in His great sacrifice. (3) Moreover, in the midst of Israel's camp stood the tabernacle, with its blood stained Mercy seat. All these things — the lamb, the serpent, and the Mercy seat — spoke to God of Christ and His perfect work. With Christ before Him, now risen from amongst the dead, and exalted at His own right hand, God is able, consistently with His righteousness, to bless His people, and that abundantly. "He hath made Him sin for us, who knew not sin; that we might become God's righteousness in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21. J.N.D.).

But is this the whole truth? Have the faults of God's justified ones no seriousness in His sight? Will He pass them over lightly, while condemning others severely? He deals with His own on an exactly opposite principle to this. Sins against grace are more heinous than sins committed in ignorance of grace, and are dealt with by God accordingly. Hence the words in Amos 3:7 : "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities?" This is God's government of those in near relationship to Himself. Psalms 90:1-17. the first of the fourth (or "Numbers") book, was written by Moses. He had observed Israel's evil ways in the wilderness, and also Jehovah's governmental chastening of the people, and he says: "Thou hast set our sins before Thee; our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance" (Ps. 11:8). Is this a contradiction of Numbers 23:19? By no means. The enemy was constrained to proclaim the grace of God which, resting upon righteous foundations, never varies; Moses gave expression to the government of God. These two truths must be held together in the soul, in order that a proper balance may be maintained. We hope to return to this important matter ere these studies conclude.

Balaam gave utterance to another precious truth concerning the people of God. Not only does He justify them in His grace, but He delights to dwell amongst them. "Jehovah his God is with him." The cloud upon the Tabernacle was proof of this. We have something better than Israel ever imagined. The Holy Spirit is with us. In 1 Corinthians 6:20 we are taught that He dwells in the body of every individual believer, and in 1 Corinthians 3:16 that the saints collectively constitute His temple. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?" This is the great forgotten truth of the dispensation — one of its greatest marvels, one of its richest blessings, yet practically forgotten! What power was seen in the Pentecostal Church! What power would yet be experienced if God's saints could be aroused to the immense fact that His Spirit

abides with us still! In 1 Corinthians 14:22-25 the case is supposed of a stranger coming into the Assembly of God, and becoming, so impressed with the power operating there that the secrets of his heart are laid bare, and falling upon his face he worships God. and reports that God is in His people of a truth!

"The shout of a King is among them," added Balaam. This is anticipative. God already dwelt amongst them in the Tabernacle, but the King is even yet future. Not David is meant, still less Saul, but Christ. He is the King of Jehovah's choice (1 Samuel 2:10). He will yet reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously." (Isaiah 24:23).

"God brought them out of Egypt; He hath as it were the strength of an unicorn (or, buffalo)."How disgraceful therefore their unbelief when they spoke of their enemies as giants, and of themselves as mere grasshoppers in their sight! "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we." Had they measured the Canaanites by the God who brought them out of Egypt they would have spoken differently, but God was not in their thoughts (Numbers 13:30-33). Caleb and Joshua had no dread of the foe, and both lived to enjoy the blessing of Jehovah in the promised land. Whenever we speak of lack of power, it is to our shame. The Holy Spirit being always with us there is never any lack of power; but too often there is lack of faith to use the power.

Having said all these wonderful things about the people of God — a people divinely blessed and justified, a people concerning whom God's word is unchanging, a people amongst whom God dwelt in fulness of power — Balaam had to publicly acknowledge that the hellish influences which he had sought to invoke against them were impotent. "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there divination against Israel; according to this time it shall be said of Jacob, and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" (Numbers 23:23) The people of God will be at last triumphant over every foe, and an abiding monument of divine grace. " Behold the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain." Micah 5:89 uses similar language concerning Israel's triumph in the day of Messiah's power. "The remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many peoples as a lion amongst the beasts of the forest, as a young lion amongst the flocks of sheep. Who, if he go through, both treadeth down, and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. Thine hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off:"

Our ultimate triumph is stated in Romans 16:20 : "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." When the last Adam puts down the persistent disturber of the peace the Church will be in manifest association with Him.

Of Jacob and of Israel it will yet be said, "What hath God wrought!" and concerning the Church it is written, "in the ages to come He will show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" Ephesians 2:7.

The Beauty and Order of God's People.

Were it not that we have learned somewhat of the wilfulness of the flesh we should be amazed that Balak and Balaam should make yet another attempt to bring disaster upon Israel. Balak was very angry at what he had been obliged to listen to: but, although he said to Balaam. "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all," he added almost immediately. "Come, I pray thee. I will

bring thee to another place, peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence." This was obviously sheer wickedness. Jehovah had already thwarted his plans twice, yet he was determined to make another effort, Balaam not objecting. Surely the adversaries of God's people were never more persistent in their hatred than at the time we are considering!

The new point of view was "the top of Peor, that looks towards Jeshimon" (meaning, "the waste"). Balaam was this time constrained to give a truly delightful description of the people as God saw them; but the people were not yet in Canaan in restful possession of every promised blessing, they were still in the desert wastes. When we examine the New Testament epistles we find wonderful descriptions of God's saints, not only as they will be in heavenly glory eternally, but as they are today while in this evil world! God sees His saints as "in Christ," and faith says exultingly, "as He is, so we are in this world" (1 John 4:17).

Balaam was now fully convinced that it was useless to turn aside any more to seek enchantments. He had proved by experience that the power of Hell is of no avail against the power of God, and that nothing could alienate His heart from the people of His choice. This should have produced in him a broken and contrite spirit, but, alas, it produced no such effect! The tragedy (for himself, not for Israel) accordingly proceeded to its terrible end.

In Numbers 24:2 we read "the Spirit of God came upon him." This may startle some, who may not have learned the distinction of being born of the Spirit, and subsequently and for ever indwelt by the Spirit, and the Spirit of God coming upon an individual. Since Christ accomplished His great sacrificial work, and ascended up on high, the Holy Spirit is God's Gift of love to all believers without distinction. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers no more have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them than the humblest child of God. But, as distinct from this, we sometimes read in the Old Testament records of the Spirit of God coming upon men for some special service. This is the sovereign act of God, irrespective of conversion. Thus the Spirit of Jehovah came upon Othniel (Judges 3:10), and upon Azariah the prophet in the days of Asa (2 Chronicles 15:1). These were true saints, but we also read that the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and even upon the King himself (1 Samuel 19:20-24). None of these were saints, for murder was in their hearts at the time. In 2 Chronicles 35:21 we find God admonishing the pious (but misguided) King Josiah by the instrumentality of the pagan King of Egypt.

In Numbers 24:1-25 therefore we have the Spirit of God coming upon a particularly malicious servant of Satan, taking him completely under His control, and compelling him to describe in glowing terms the beauty of the people of God as God in His grace beheld it! Wonderful manifestation of divine superiority over all the power of the enemy when we consider that the speaker longed to say the opposite of all that he did say! With how much more force the words reach our hearts as coming from the lips of such a man as Balaam then if they had flowed from the lips of Moses who loved the people, and who sought their good in every way!

Balaam opened his third parable in peculiarly solemn terms. He describes his own position in relation to God and to the wonderful things he was given to utter. "Balaam the son of Beor saith, and the man of opened eye saith, he saith, who heareth the words of God, who knoweth the knowledge of the Most High, who seeth the vision of the Almighty. who falleth down, and who hath his eye open." (Darby's translation). The man was thus conscious that with eyes divinely opened he was beholding things in which his heart had no interest. While describing the blessedness and

the ultimate triumph of the people that he hated, he knew himself to be a fallen man. Not "fallen into a trance," as the Authorised Version says, but definitely fallen. This privileged but wilful man has gone down to eternal ruin.

We must pause here, and put a question to our own hearts. Is it not possible for us to "see" in an intellectual way, and even to speak of the precious things of God, without our own hearts being moved by them? As we read God's Word, and get to understand its teaching, let us exercise our hearts and consciences that the truth may get a firm hold of us, and mould and influence our lives. "The eyes of your heart being enlightened," is the true rendering Ephesians 1:18. Children of God though we are, let us not neglect the warning of Balaam's unholy handling of the precious things of God.

"Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in tents according to their tribes" (Numbers 24:2), and he said, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel" (Numbers 24:5). If the whole of his third parable be read carefully it will be seen that Balaam begins with the coverings of the people before he speaks of the people themselves. We do not get the pronoun "he" and "his until we reach Numbers 24:7. These details should be noted. In Exodus 26:1-37 in the instructions concerning the Tabernacle and its fittings the various coverings are described as the tabernacle (Exodus 26:6); the tent (Exodus 26:12): and the coverings (Exodus 26:14). Exodus 26:1-6 speak of the fine twined linen curtains with blue, purple and scarlet wrought in them. as the tabernacle; in Exodus 26:7-13 we have the eleven curtains of goat's hair, and they are called the tent — the "ohel" over the "mishcah": and Exodus 26:14 speaks of the coverings over all, ram's skins dyed red, and badger's skins. All these things spoke to God of Christ, whose personal perfections cover His people, and secure every blessing for them. How suggestive therefore all Balaam's words: "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!" Alas, that the unhappy man was incapable of appreciating the sweetness of what he uttered!

Balaam's third parable is very full. He is describing the beauty order and blessedness of the people from Jehovah's point of view

Here is a sketch of it: —

What unity! "The tribes" — Numbers 24:2.

What order! "Abiding . . according to their tribes" — Numbers 24:2.

What beauty! "Valleys": "Gardens" — Numbers 24:4.

What fragrance! "Aloes" — Numbers 24:6.

What dignity! "Cedars" — Numbers 24:6.

What sufficiency! "Beside the waters " — Numbers 24:6.

What overflowing! "Water out of buckets" — Numbers 24:7.

What power! "Unicorn" — Numbers 24:8; "Lion" — Numbers 24:9.

What Unity! The twelve tribes were still one whole. The breach which took place after the death of Solomon has not been healed to this day. The tribes will be re-gathered by the sound of the

trumpet at the appearing of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 24:31; Isaiah 21:13) It will then be said, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalms 133:1). The unity of God's saints in this period is more intimate than that of Israel's tribes. The Spirit of God came from heaven at Pentecost to form it. There is now on earth a wonderful spiritual organism called the body of Christ. All the members are in living union with the glorified Head in heaven, and all are in union with one another. If the truth of this were realized in faith, every true Christian would abandon the ecclesiastical organisations of Christendom, and would never acknowledge any divisive working of any kind again.

What Order! Balaam saw Israel abiding in tents "according to their tribes." Our God is a God of order. When the five thousand were fed they were not allowed to drop down upon the grass as they pleased: the Lord Jesus said "make them sit down by fifties in a company" (Luke 9:14). Israel's camp in the wilderness was planned by Jehovah Himself. The tribes were arranged around the Tabernacle in four groups of three each, under their respective standards (Numbers 2:1-34.). Even so in the body of Christ every member has been divinely placed and furnished from the infinite resources of the Head in heaven with all that is needful for the blessing and development of the whole, "God hath set the members everyone of them in the body as it hath pleased him" (1 Corinthians 12:18). "The whole body is fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part making increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love"(Ephesians 4:16). How sorrowful to compare God's gracious order with the human machinery which has impoverished the Church for so long!

What Beauty! "As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side!" Lovely imagery! What more beautiful than a valley; what more attractive than a garden? The one is suggestive of loveliness, which God always delights to see in His people; and the other of culture. In Son_4:12, the Bridegroom says, "A garden enclosed is my sister spouse, a spring shut up. a fountain sealed: thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits": the bride in response says, "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits" he accepts the loving call, "I am come into my garden, my sister-spouse!" Israel was God's cultivated garden in the old dispensation; the Church is His cultivated garden now. Hence the words of the apostle in 1 Corinthians 3:9, "Ye are God's husbandry." Individual saints are His plants, tenderly cared for in infinite wisdom and love. Of mere religionists the Lord Jesus once said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up." (Matthew 15:13).

Another image of beauty as far as Israel is concerned is found in Ezekiel 16:1-63. Jehovah is there remonstrating with the people for their ingratitude. He likens Israel to an outcast babe which he adopted and nourished with gracious care. "Thy renown went forth amongst the nations for thy beauty, for it was perfect through My comeliness which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord Jehovah"(Ezekiel 16:14). Moses in Psalms 90:1-17, says, "Let the beauty of Jehovah our God be upon us." "Thy beautiful flock," said Jehovah reproachfully in Jeremiah 13:20 to the rulers who neglected His people.

We who in this age believe in Jesus stand before God in all the perfection and acceptability of the Risen One. In Colossians 3:12 the apostle uses of Christians the same terms as are used elsewhere of Christ, "The elect of God, holy, and beloved." Compare Isaiah 42:1, "Behold My servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth." In Acts 2:27 : "Thou wilt not suffer

Thine holy One to see corruption." In Matthew 3:17 : "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Seeing that God in His grace speaks of us as He speaks of His own Son let us "walk as He walked" (1 John 2:6.). Those who are beautiful before God should also be beautiful before men. Our practical state should correspond to our standing.

What Fragrance! "As the trees of lign aloes which Jehovah hath planted." Aloes were used for the purposes of fumigation and incense, the wood having a sweet smell. In Psalms 45:1-17, which describes the great King coming forth in His majesty, we read, "All thy garments smell of myrrh and aloes, and cassia." When Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took down the body of our blessed Lord from the cross they wound it in linen cloths. with a hundred pounds weight of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39-40). Someone has said that the aloe tree is "an image of all that is lovely, fragrant, flourishing, and incorruptible." Wonderful that Jehovah should select this particular tree as setting forth the fragrance of His people in His sight! On the same principle He bade Moses put pure frankincense upon the twelve loaves which stood continually upon the table of shewbread in the sanctuary (Leviticus 24:7). The frankincense upon the meal offering typified the fragrance of Christ to God (Leviticus 2:2); the frankincense upon the twelve loaves teaches us that God's people, viewed as "in Christ," are fragrant as He. This thought should have a profound effect upon our lives. In measure as we are occupied with God and with Christ our lives will be fragrant to those who have to do with us. They will be conscious as they behold our words and ways that we are accustomed to intimacy with God. The very face of Moses when he came down from Mount Sinai revealed the fact that he had been occupied with God (Exodus 34:29).

What Dignity! "As cedar trees beside the waters." In the description of the bridegroom (Christ) in Son_5:15 we read, "His countenance (or, bearing) is as Lebanon, excellent as the Cedars." In Balaam's third parable the same image of stateliness and dignity is applied to Israel. There has never been on earth so dignified a nation. They stood in special relationship to God, separated from all others; they possessed His word; and they were constituted the pivot of His ways in government and blessing (Psalms 147:19-20). Alas, the people's hearts have never yet entered into the reality of it!

In this era, while Israel is estranged from God, Christians are God's cedars. Every believer in Jesus is a very dignified person indeed in the divine estimation! He is a child, son, and heir of God. He stands in nearer relation to God than the most exalted of angelic beings, for he is a member of the royal family of the universe. He will be displayed in majesty with the First-born Son when He comes forth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to reign. The world will be amazed at the magnificent display of glory on that day. All this is true of every Christian without distinction; but the world has no understanding of these marvels. "The world knoweth us not because it knew Him not"(1 John 3:1). The sense of God's wonderful grace gives moral dignity in our bearing towards men. Carnal pride and pretension is hateful to God, but the moral dignity which results from appreciation of His grace is acceptable in His sight.

What Sufficiency! "Planted . . . beside the waters." God plants judiciously; man, not always. God knows that His plants need nourishment, and He places them where they can get it, and moreover provides them with means whereby they can absorb it. There is a suggestion of trees in Colossians 2:7 : "Rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught." The rooting is the act of God, and once for all He roots His saints in Christ. Then, like trees, we are

built up and established as we draw to ourselves the nourishment divinely provided. This is our responsibility, and it is continuous. There is no lack on God's part. "The river of God is full of water," and it greatly enriches all who draw from it (Psalms 65:10). In Christ dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and we are complete (filled full) in Him (Colossians 2:9-10). One great object for which the epistle to the Colossians was written was to stress the truth that the Christian need not, and should not, go outside of Christ for anything. There was some danger in this respect in Colosse. Other things were being presented to them to be added to their Christianity. "Christ is all," says the apostle in Colossians 3:11.

The people of Israel, although planted beside the waters, that is to say, they were in direct relationship with Jehovah, were frequently turning aside from Him, to their own hurt, as well as to His dishonour. But there is a day coming when the people will turn back to the One they have so grievously neglected. They will see God in Christ, and then it will be said: "Jehovah shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought; and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not" (Isaiah 58:11). In Jeremiah 31:12 it is added: "They shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow, together to the goodness of Jehovah, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock, and of the herd; and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all." Let us avoid Israel's failure, and "hold fast the Head, from whom all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (Colossians 2:19).

What Overflowing! Those who are drawing from the infinite resources of God have something to impart to others. They take in more than they can well contain, hence Balaam's words (although the poor man did not know what he was saying),"he shall pour water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters." If Balak had understood what he was now hearing he would have had no dread of Israel. The people were intended to be a blessing to all the nations; they were to spread abroad the knowledge of the one true God, and to share with others His wonderful grace. Israel has never yet risen to this. How cruelly the Jewish people persecuted Paul because he carried the Gospel to the Gentiles! "Away with such a fellow from the earth; it is not fit that he should live" (Acts 22:22). In the Kingdom-age their whole attitude will be changed. The beautiful Psalms 67:1-7 expresses the joy of the people as they share their blessings with the nations around them. Micah 5:7 says "the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples as a dew from Jehovah, as the showers upon the grass. that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men."

While Israel is dry and barren, unblessed by God, and a curse to the world rather than a blessing (Jeremiah 26:6), believers in Jesus have a fountain of water within themselves springing up into eternal life (John 4:14) and from them rivers of living water are flowing forth (John 7:38). This is the power of the Holy Spirit making the things of Christ very real to the Christian, and enabling him to communicate them to others out of the fulness of his heart. The word "buckets" suggests energy in drawing. Where are we as to this? Are we filling our buckets with the good things of God, and pouring them forth to those around us? Also, are we making such advance in the spiritual life that we need larger buckets than once we did? Are we drawing up larger supplies than ever, and pouring them forth abundantly? "Young men" and "fathers" should be able to handle larger buckets than "babes" (1 John 2:12-27). "His seed shall be in many waters" expresses the universality of service and testimony for God. "The waters . . . are peoples, and multitudes, and

nations, and tongues" (Revelation 17:15).

What Power! The victorious power of the people of God, when Christ takes His place at their head, is the theme of Balaam's final parable; but he concluded his third utterance with some reference to it: The King and His Kingdom rise up before the prophet's vision. "His King shall be higher than Agag, and His Kingdom shall be exalted." The King here is Christ, higher than earth's highest. Balaam vividly describes the power of God as it acts for, and in His chosen people. "God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn (or buffalo); he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows" (Numbers 24:8). For the second time reference is made to the great deliverance from Egypt. The God who broke the power of the enemy at that time will break the power of even mightier foes in the coming day (Micah 5:8).

In Numbers 24:9 Balaam was constrained to re-affirm two ancient prophecies concerning Israel. Jacob said of Judah in Genesis 49:9 : "Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up; he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion, who shall rouse him up?" Balaam said: "He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion; who shall stir him Jehovah said to Abram in Genesis 12:7 "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." Balaam said: "Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee." Thus did the God of Israel confirm His word by the lips of an implacable foe!

If God's earthly people were unconquerable, and superior to all the malice of the enemy, this is yet more blessedly true of God's heavenly saints. We are even now established before Him in Christ the victorious One, and the Holy Spirit dwells within us both individually and collectively. Thus the blessing is full and secure, and the power abundant, may our faith rise up to it all!

The Restraining Hand.

That Balak should have waited to hear anything more from the lips of Balaam is perhaps surprising, but the hand of God was in it for reasons of His own. Balak was greatly disappointed with the first and second parables; but after he heard the third, wherein the people he hated described as not only sanctified and justified, but also positively lovely in the eyes of Jehovah, he was furious. "Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together; and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies; and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times" (Numbers 24:10). He now wished to get rid of his visitor. He might indeed have slain him in his fury, but a different end was divinely designed for Balaam; and, moreover, the full message of God had not yet been delivered. Balak bade him flee to his own country, adding, "I thought to promote thee to great honour; but, lo, Jehovah hath kept thee back from honour." To all this Balaam's poor covetous heart would regretfully say "Amen." We recall his words to the messengers who waited upon him in Mesopotamia, "Get you into your own land. for Jehovah refuseth to give me leave to go with you" (Numbers 22:13). Thus, if Balak was disappointed with the result of this extraordinary business, Balaam also was disappointed quite as keenly. But the King having fetched up the soothsayer was not allowed to dismiss him at his will. He had already heard much that was distasteful to him, but he must hear yet more. His own Kingdom of Moab had not been mentioned thus far; its turn was now coming.

The King, as we would judge. might easily have walked away after giving Balaam his word of dismissal, but Jehovah held him to the spot. There is no other explanation of his remaining there another minute. Also, how else can we explain his silence when Balaam spoke definitely of disaster to his own nation? The enemy of the people of God had raised a very serious question concerning them, and Jehovah would render his answer in full, and Balak must be made to hear it.

The four parables taken together give the whole story of Jehovah's grace to Israel from the deliverance from Egyptian bondage right onward to Millennial glory and supremacy. It is delightful to our souls to trace it, for Israel's God is also our God; and He who was so faithful to them in spite of all their disobedience, may be trusted to be faithful to us also. His ways with Israel are leading up to the land of promise for an everlasting possession with Christ as King in their midst; His ways with us are leading up to the Father's house on high.

Balaam reminded Balak that he told him at the beginning that if he would give him his house full of silver and gold he could only say what Jehovah gave him to speak; and he added, "Now, behold, I go unto my people; come, I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days." Balak had no wish to hear more, and Balaam had no wish to say more; but the power of Hell having been invoked against His chosen people Jehovah had taken the matter up (unasked), and He would see it through to the finish. Moreover, it must finish in His time, and in His way. Restrained by the power of God, Balak was compelled to listen to a remarkable prediction of earth's final military catastrophe. "The latter days" now come before us.

The Latter Days.

CHRIST IN POWER: HIS PEOPLE EXALTED.

Balaam's voice has long since died away. There is an interval of thirty-five centuries between his days and ours, yet in his final utterance in Moab he spoke of things which are still to come. Who knows the future but God! With us there is a yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow, but with God the most distant future is as vivid and well known as the present. He is the great I am (Exodus 3:14), "who calleth the things which be not as though they were" (Romans 4:17). In His controversy with Israel concerning the idols of which they were so foolishly enamoured, Jehovah in Isa. 42:48 challenges the deities of the heathen to declare "things to come." Thus they would prove themselves to be gods indeed. "I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsels shall stand; and I will do all My pleasure" (Isaiah 46:9-10).

The politicians of earth grope in the dark. They can only see things as they are at the moment; their ultimate issues are hidden from them. But children of God who will take the trouble to study the Scriptures, know whither things are tending, and what will be the outcome of them. The greater part of the Bible is occupied with the great crisis which is now approaching, when God will bring forth into manifestation the Man of His choice, and put all things under His sway. Men who know not God, and to whom the Bible is a sealed book, have no resource in their anxieties but alliances and treaties. God's saints, instructed by the Holy Spirit, have no confidence in these devices, and they wait for Christ. This in the proper moral effect of the reverent study of prophecy. "Horns" and "beasts" may be very interesting, and may furnish much material for discussion; the aim of the Spirit of God in disclosing to us the future is to separate us from man's hopelessly evil order of

things, and fix our minds upon Christ.

Balaam opened his last parable by recounting his own privileges — more fully than before. It is painful to read his words, and to realize that one so divinely favoured has perished eternally. "Balaam the son of Beor saith, and the man of opened eyes saith; he saith who heareth the words of God, who knoweth the knowledge of the Almighty, who falleth down, and hath his eyes open" (Numbers 24:15-16. Darby's Translation. Revised version similar). Some may be disposed to say, "Surely such a man was born of the Spirit, although perverse in his ways, as we ourselves are all too frequently!" But the New Testament shows us persons may be partakers of even greater privileges than Balaam, and yet fall into such a condition that it is impossible to renew them to repentance. Hebrews 6:4-5 speaks of such persons:-

1. Enlightened.

2. "Have tasted of the heavenly Gift."

3. "Made partakers of the Holy Spirit."

4. "Have tasted the good word of God."

5. "And the powers of the world to come."

All these things can be known apart from divine life. and faith in Christ. If the clause "partakers of the Holy Spirit" presents a particular difficulty to some, the reference is to the great truth that the Assembly is the Holy Spirit's dwelling-place (1 Corinthians 3:16). All who take part in such a company, whether real or unreal, are in the presence of that divine Person.

Let none of us be contented with mere externals however good they may be. The essential thing is heart-faith in the Son of God. Ever so little true faith in Him is worth infinitely more than stores of Bible knowledge and Assembly privileges. Balaam's case was the more serious because of the light which shone across his path, but which never penetrated his soul.

It is not unusual for prophets when describing the future to speak in the present tense, as if the great things were even then passing before them. Thus David in Psalms 45:1-17 speaks of the great King as if He were even at that moment riding in majesty, and in Isaiah 53:1-12 the prophet speaks of the suffering, Messiah as if He were then on earth, and experiencing ill at the hands of men. So Balaam in his fourth parable. "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not nigh"(R.V.). In prophetic vision he saw Christ; but the Lord Jesus could not say of him what He said to the Jews concerning Abraham: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56). It gave Balaam no joy to see Christ, and to be constrained to describe the great day when He will exalt the people Balak hated, and destroy all their enemies, Moab included. Indeed he said, "Alas, who shall live when God doeth this?" (Numbers 24:23). This sounds like a wail of disappointment and despair.

Let us look again at Balaam's words: "I see Him, but not now, I behold Him, but not nigh." He thus beheld in vision a glorious Person to whom he could never come near. Distance must be his portion for ever, solemn thought! Nearness to Christ is a very precious privilege. When He comes forth to reign, "at His right hand will stand the Queen in gold of Ophir." (Psalms 44:9). This is Israel — "a people near unto Him" (Psalms 148:14) "It shall be at that day, saith Jehovah, that thou shalt

call Me Ishi (my husband), and shalt call Me no more Baali (my master)" (Hosea 2:16).

The Church will be in a place of greater nearness still. She will be eternally the body and bride of Christ, and the sharer of His heavenly glory, which is immeasurably more wonderful than anything Israel will experience in the land of promise.

In speaking of the coming Christ, Balaam said, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall arise out of Israel." Here we have the two aspects of His coming. The star is for watchers, and the Church has been called to know Him during "the long dark night." while Israel persists in obdurate unbelief. In Revelation 22:16 Jesus says: "I am the Root and Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star," and to the overcomer in Thyatira He not only promises authority over the nations, but adds, "I will give him the Morning Star" (Revelation 2:28). Peter distinguishes between the prophetic word, and the Morning Star thus: "We have the prophetic word made surer (by what Peter and his companions saw on the holy mount), to which ye do well taking heed (as to a lamp shining in an obscure place) until the day dawn, and the Morning Star arise in your hearts" 2 Peter 1:19). The Church will see the coming One at the dawning of the day before the sun shines forth in glorious majesty (Malachi 4:2). We should ever be on the alert for this; in spirit like the wise men of Matthew 2:2 who said, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him." While others slept, these watchers were scanning the heavens for some sign of the approach of the promised One. God graciously responded to their faith, and gave them a star to guide them on their way. Let us not forget the words of the Apostle in 1 Thessalonians 5:5-6. "Ye are all the sons of light, and the sons of the day; we are not of the night nor of darkness. Let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch, and be sober." We are living far down the dispensation. Man's day, so full of pitiful blunders and desperate sorrows, is drawing to a close. "Knowing the time. that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." (Romans 13:11-12).

Here we must note the various divine titles that were put into the mouth of Balaam. In his first and second parables he spoke of God ("El") and Jehovah. God ("El") is suggestive of creative power and Jehovah of covenant relationship.

In his third parable Balaam introduced the name Almighty ("Shaddai"); and in his final parable speaks of the Most High ("Elyon") and the Almighty. The title "Most High" is used frequently in Scripture in connection with the Millennial Kingdom. It teaches us that God is greater than all the petty dignities of earth. He will put them all down in His day. and will dispose of the world as it pleases Him. Who has a greater right to distribute its territories and fix the boundaries of the nations than He who created all things? But how feebly is this understood by earth's statesmen!

Melchizedek, who was a remarkable type of Christ the coming King, spoke of God as "the most High God, Possessor of heaven and earth" (Genesis 14:18-19). In Deuteronomy 32:1-52, where Moses is telling the people of Israel how God distributed territories at the time of the Babel scattering, he also used the title "Most High." In Psalms 83:17-18 where Asaph the prophet describes the destruction of Israel's enemies at the end, he says, "Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame and perish: that men may know that Thou, whose name is Jehovah, art the Most High over all the earth." These thoughts are important, and should

be carefully weighed. The earth is full of confusion and sorrow because men in their pride and self-will are bent upon dividing the earth according to their own devices, and to gratify their own ambition. In the intervals of strife, when plenipotentiaries come together to discuss terms of peace, God is not uppermost in their thoughts, still less the Man who is the divinely appointed Heir of all things. New arrangements are made, with possibly some compromises here and there; but fresh disasters come along all too soon, for the rights of God are not recognised. The nations will yet have to learn that God is the Most High, with absolute right to dispose of everything according to His will; and as the Almighty He is well able to carry out His will, and crush all opposition.

Balaam was led to describe the conquests of God's King when He appears, and he mentioned Moab first. "He shall smite the corners of Moab." In Daniel 11:41 where the depredations of the latter day King of the North are foretold (not to be confounded with Gog — Ezekiel 38:1-23), we read, "he shall enter into the glorious land, and many countries shall be overthrown: but these shall escape out of his hand, Edom, and Moab, and the chief of the children of Ammon." Why are these ancient enemies of Israel specially named as to escape the heavy hand of the terrible invader? Because Jehovah had already decreed their destruction by the hands of His own people. Isaiah wrote more than a century before Daniel's day: "they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab. and the children of Ammon shall obey them" (Isaiah 11:14). Thus Balak was given to understand that it is not Israel that is doomed to destruction, but his own envious and guilty Moab. But not Moab and her confederates only. He "shall destroy all the children of Sheth (or tumult)." With these words we may connect Psalms 68:30 "scatter Thou the people that delight in war." The God of peace will not for ever tolerate the doings of "the sons of tumult." Devastated lands, ruined cities, blasted homes, and broken hearts present a sorry spectacle to Him. Self seeking leaders who are responsible for these conditions, who seek their own aggrandisement at painful cost to others, are utterly abhorrent to the God of peace. When the seventh trumpet is sounded (Revelation 11:15-18) a great shout of triumph will be heard in heaven because the world-kingdom of our Lord and His Christ has at last come. Amongst the many results of the coming of the King it is written: "Thou shalt destroy them that destroy the earth." But ruthless disturbers of the peace will not disappear until that day. One troubler may be cast down, but another will arise, (if not in his place geographically) elsewhere. This has been the world's sad experience ever since the days of Nimrod and Chedorlaomer, the first recorded tyrants.

Israel (i.e. the spared remnant) is destined to play an important part in the subjugation of the enemies of God and His people. Balaam said: "Edom shall be a possession, and Seir also shall be a possession, and Israel shall do valiantly." (Numbers 23:18). The destruction of the Western hosts as described in Revelation 19:19-21, and the overthrow of the hordes of Russia and her Allies as in Ezekiel 39:1-29 will be quite apart from human instrumentality; but against other foes it is the divine intention to make use of delivered Israel. This is made perfectly clear in Zechariah 9:13; Zechariah 12:6, and other Scriptures, including Isaiah 11:14 already quoted. The long down-trodden sons of Jacob will then become as a lion amongst the nations treading down, and tearing in pieces, with none to deliver (Micah 5:8) "out of Jacob shall come He that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city." Led on by Christ, who will then indeed be "a man of war" (Exodus 15:3: Psalms 45:3-5) Israel's armies will be irresistible. When this work of judgment is completed, Israel will be able to say: "So let all Thine enemies perish. O Jehovah, but let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might" (Judges 5:31).

Balaam's words in Numbers 24:19 would seem to be final. What could be added to the statement that "out of Jacob shall come He that shall have dominion." and destroy even the remnants of His peoples' enemies? But the Spirit of God had still more to say in three short appendices. When Balaam looked on Amalek, "he took up his parable and said. Amalek was the first of the nations, but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever." Ancient prestige, however wonderful it may be in the eyes of men, will count for nothing when God arises in His might.

Next, Balaam "looked on the Kenites, and took up his parable, and said, Strong is thy dwelling place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock. Nevertheless the Kenite shall be wasted, until Asshur shall carry thee away captive" (Numbers 24:21-22). Great fortifications, strong natural frontiers, and every possible accumulation of military force will be worthless when the day of the Lord opens, for He is wiser and stronger than men. Everything will collapse before Him.

Such triumphs for God and His people found no response in the heart of poor Balaam. Thus he opened his third appendix with the moan, "Alas, who shall live when God doeth this! "He rightly felt that His intervention will sweep the earth clear of all that which fills men with pride and vain glory. Then in few words he spoke of "Armageddon," where the last terrible clash of the nations is destined to take place. (Revelation 16:13-16). That will indeed be the "war to end war!" "Ships shall come from the land of Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish for ever." "Chittim," strictly speaking, means the island of Cyprus, now in possession of Great Britain; but in Scripture it is used as a general term for the West (Jeremiah 2:10), viewed from the Holy land as God's centre. In Daniel 11:30 Chittim indisputably means the Roman Empire. Asshur stands for the cruel Assyrian of Isaiah and Micah, the King of the North of Daniel 11:40. He is at first victorious in the world's last crisis. "Many countries shall be overthrown" by him (Daniel 11:41), Jehovah using him as one of His "carpenters" (Zechariah 1:20-21). But both the Assyrian and the Roman are divinely appointed to destruction. The "he" of Numbers 24:24 is the last head of the Roman Empire (Comp: Daniel 7:8), the core of which will be the nations of Western Europe — Britain, France, Italy, Spain, etc. In this blasphemous tyrant, with his confederate, the false prophet of Revelation 19:20 (the Antichrist) all evil will reach its consummation, and both will be despatched from the battlefield to the lake of fire. In the light of the terrible doings of recent years (1939-1945) the thought is deeply solemn that earth's most terrible monsters will not arise out of Germany, but from amongst the Allied Powers (Russia not included here) who have toiled and suffered to put Germany down! How different would the whole history of earth have been had rulers and people moved and acted in humble dependence upon God!

The Doctrine of Balaam.

In three New Testament epistles Balaam is brought before us as a warning. Peter speaks of "the way of Balaam" (2 Peter 2:15). He is writing severely of false teachers their evil doctrines, and their pernicious ways. The Apostle, with eyes anointed by the Holy Spirit, could see men of the Balaam type rising up amongst Christians after his departure. The whole chapter (2 Peter 2:1-22) should be carefully studied. That holy men such as the Apostles should have such "successors" is an appalling thought! Bad teaching can only produce bad living. "The way of Balaam" was the way of self-will. There was a certain course that he desired to pursue, which would yield him substantial gain if he were successful; but his soul knew nothing of humble subjection to the will of God. Let us beware! Above all things we must be careful concerning the doctrines that we hold and teach; but

the truth of God must be allowed to humble us, and subdue every atom of self-will. Even a dumb ass rebuked the madness of Balaam. God forbid that we should lay ourselves open to such rebukes!

The Apostle Jude in his short epistle: pronounces a threefold "woe" on the misleaders of the people. "Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Korah" (Jude 1:11). Note the progression in these statements "gone"; "ran greedily after"; and "perished." The outstanding evils of Christendom are before us in this solemn passage. "The way of Cain" was (typically) the rejection of Christ and His death as the only ground of approach to God. Multitudes of persons in the religious world of our own time are following his ruinous example. "The error of Balaam" was the corruption of ministry for the sake of personal gain. Balaam has had no lack of successors throughout the centuries. Hirelings in abundance have asserted themselves, caring nothing for the glory of God, nor for the blessing of men. Their own advantage has been uppermost in their thoughts. "The gainsaying of Korah" is placed out of its historical order by the Apostle Jude, for he preceded Balaam in the history of Israel (Numbers 16:1-50). But Korah's great sin is mentioned last in the passage before us because of its exceeding seriousness. Men who at the best are only ministers of God challenge the rights of Christ by pretensions to priesthood. The Lord Himself is thus affronted, and the foolish souls who submit to Korahites are kept in spiritual blindness and ignorance, and are cheated of the grace of God to their present and eternal damage. The people, alas love to have it so. Gorgeously appareled officials, professedly doing everything for them, appeal to their superstitious folly. The more the study of the Word of God is neglected, the more readily men and women fall into priestly snares.

Many have noted points of similarity between 2 Peter 2:1-22 and the epistle of Jude, and some have suggested that one writer copied from the other. This is not correct. Each writer had his own line given to him by the Spirit of God, as everywhere else in Scripture. Peter deals particularly with the wickedness of religious leaders (abundantly proved in the pages of "Church" History); Jude has in mind their apostasy.

The doctrine of Balaam is mentioned by the Lord Himself in His address to the Assembly in Pergamos in Revelation 2:14. Let us note these distinctions :-

"The way of Balaam" in 2 Peter 2:15.

"The error of Balaam" in Jude 1:11.

"The doctrine of Balaam" in Revelation 2:14.

Pergamos was one of the seven Assemblies in Asia that were selected and addressed by the Lord Jesus in the second and third chapters of the Apocalypse. There were doubtless Assemblies in the cities named at the time the messages were given by the Lord, and each Assembly needed just the message that was sent; but these chapters are part of a prophetic book, and they come therefore within the scope of our Lord's words in Revelation 1:3 : "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22 are as truly prophetic in character as the nineteen chapters which follow. The omniscient eye of the Lord discerned the path that the Church would tread from the days of the Apostles down to His coming. He beheld sunshine and shadow,

faithfulness and treachery, and He laid it all out for the guidance of those who have ears to hear, and who desire to do His will.

Thus He "who has the sharp sword with two edges" said to Pergamos, "I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication" (Revelation 2:14). A fresh phase of the diabolical conspiracy of Balaam and Balak against Israel is here exposed. These men had zealously striven to array the forces of earth and Hell against the people of God, and their efforts had been turned to confusion by Israel's faithful Jehovah. The episode concludes in Numbers 24:25 thus: "Balaam rose up and went and returned to his own place; and Balak also went his way." But before the soothsayer left his disappointed patron, he apparently made a vile suggestion to him. If Jehovah could not be turned away from His people, perhaps the people could be turned away from Jehovah! Balaam knew enough of God to be sure that if the people of Israel could be tempted into sin Jehovah's hand would come down upon them in judgment. Thus we read in Numbers 25:1-2 : "Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods; and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods." Balak was recommended by Balaam to bring out the women and girls of Moab, and thus cast a snare before the all too frail people of Jehovah! Moses became aware of this later, for he referred to it when reproving the people for sparing all the women after a campaign against Midian. "Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against Jehovah in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of Jehovah" (Numbers 31:15-16). The record in Numbers 25:1-9 is painfully solemn; a great lesson is here which we must not miss. As surely as Balaam sought. to mingle the people of God with the ungodly in a by-gone age, the teachers of the doctrine of Balaam have laboured to mingle Church and world together in our own era and they have been sadly successful. History is continually repeating itself. Satan first endeavours to destroy, then, finding this impossible he seeks to corrupt, for a pure testimony for God in the earth is abhorrent to him.

In the Apocalyptic Assemblies Pergamos follows Smyrna. In Smyrna we have persecution. In the prophetic view, this refers to the second and third centuries of the earthly history of the Church when the Imperial authorities, urged on by Satan, sought to blot out the name of Christ. A change came when the Emperor Constantine made a profession of Christianity in the early years of the fourth century, and then decided to make the proscribed faith the religion of the State. We must think sympathetically of the saints of that period who, with their forefathers for at least two hundred years, had suffered cruelly for the name of Christ. What relief it must have been to them when the ruling power ceased to be hostile, and professed to be friendly! It was no longer discreditable and dangerous to be a Christian; instead, it became positively respectable, and the Bishops and clergy were welcomed at the Imperial Court. But the guile of Satan was in all this, little as the mass perceived it. There was doubtless a spiritual minority who realized the serious tendencies of the changed conditions, and who humbly sought grace from above to be true to their Lord. But the masses were blinded.

The Church was alas no longer to be distinct from the world. It was to be its agent and ally; indeed one theologian defined the Church as "the nation in its religious aspect!" No wonder the Lord said to the Assembly in Pergamos: "I know where thou dwellest, where Satan's throne is" (Revelation

2:13). Satan's throne is in the world of which he has been the acknowledged prince since the true Prince was cast out (John 16:11). To be in the world is one thing; to dwell in it. i.e. to settle down and be at home in it, is quite another. We are reminded of the stinging words of James 4:4 : "Adulteresses! Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

Let us remind ourselves that we belong to a heavenly order of things. The Church is an exotic in this evil world. On the evening before His death the Lord Jesus said to the Father in the hearing of His disciples: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14-16).

To the disciples themselves He said: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19). In all His teaching the Lord sought to prepare them, not for the world's friendship and patronage, but for its hostility. One great object that He had in mind in giving Himself up to death was that He might have a people altogether for Himself; not bye and bye when earth of necessity has slipped away from us, but here and now. At great cost He purchased the treasure and the pearl; both are now His, and His exclusively. (Matthew 13:44-46).

What could be plainer than the words of the Apostle in Galatians 1:3? "The Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from the present evil world, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." In conformity with this, he states his own position definitely in Galatians 6:14 : "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." To the Hebrew Christians he wrote that Jesus in order "that He might sanctify the people with His own blood suffered without the gate." (Hebrews 13:12). He went "outside" in His exceeding grace and He wants His people "outside" with Him, confessing in all their words and ways that "here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come."

The question may arise in some minds: "What does Scripture mean by the world? Does it refer to the frivolities of the flesh, and to those lusts and abominations which many decent people would abhor?" The scripture term means much more than this. It includes the whole order of things which Cain and his family established in independence of God as described in Genesis 4:1-26. That order has developed and expanded, with ramifications religious, social, political, commercial, scientific, and otherwise. "The world" may have different forms of manifestation in various lands. but in principle it is the same throughout, men determined to live and act in independence of God. The whole order of things here below which men love and pursue to their eternal ruin, is drastically described by the Holy Spirit in His warning to saints in 1 John 2:15-17 : "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." Such language leaves no loophole whatever. Evasion is impossible. The world in all its manifestations is offensive to the Father, and it will come under severe divine judgment ere long.

If the question be asked: "Has not the incoming of Christianity modified conditions amongst men? May we not now speak of a Christian world?" The opposite is the truth. The incoming of Christianity has made the whole position more serious than before. Men are not only as determined as ever to order their affairs without reference to God, but they have added to their sin and folly the rejection of His beloved Son sent in grace. The shadow of the cross is over all men's undertakings, and that terrible crime must yet be avenged. In Galatians 1:4 the writer speaks of this era as "the present evil age" (not "world") ; and in 2 Corinthians 4:4 he speaks of Satan as "the god of this age" (not "world") who blinds men's eyes to prevent the Gospel of the glory of Christ shining into them. Satan was never spoken of in this way until he succeeded in banding together men of all classes to cast out of the world God manifested in flesh (Acts 4:27). Having accomplished this. he has stepped into the place of the rejected One and is the world's god. Those who profess allegiance to the Lord Jesus, and who confess that they owe everything to His precious blood, should stand sternly apart from the world and its ways, and testify to its evil (John 7:7). What have the world's political parties, military enterprises, co-operative societies, unions, and combines to do with those who even now are in union with the glorified Christ in heaven as His body, who will shortly be presented to Him as His bride, and who are destined to reign with Him over all things above and below? "The doctrine of Balaam" would drag us down from our high places, and make us grovel in the dust with those whose interests are exclusively in things below. Definite separation becomes us, and the Lord's promise to those who overcome "the doctrine of Balaam" is singularly sweet and comprehensive. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Mark how individual is this appeal!) To him that overcometh will I give of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. (Revelation 2:17).

The manna — God's gift to Israel in the wilderness, typifies Christ in His humiliation. An omer was to be placed in a golden pot and laid up before Jehovah in the sanctuary (Exodus 16:33) This suggests that only God knows the whole truth concerning the Man Christ Jesus. A little has been told to us in the four Gospels but John, when laying down his pen said that if all the things that Jesus did and said were written the world could not contain the books. (John 21:25). The promise to the overcomer in Pergamos! means that He who was perfect in His separation to God will have much to tell us about His wonderful pathway when He gets us home. With what delight shall we listen to His voice !

The white stone, with its new name, private and personal to him who receives it, is the expression of the Lord's approval. Ample recompense for every one who has sought to follow His steps in separation to God, and in obedience to His will!

The epistles to the Apocalyptic Assemblies reveal to us how very early destructive doctrines became established amongst the people of God. "The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes"; "the doctrine of Balaam"; and the vile teaching of the prophetess Jezebel! Of both moral wickedness and doctrinal evil it is written, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Corinthians 5:6 , Galatians 5:9). Unwatchfulness leaves the door open for these things (Jude 1:4.). May God in His infinite mercy preserve both writer and reader in moral and doctrinal purity while we wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus.

The Government of God.

An "ecclesiastic" once said to an ardent evangelist "Say what you like, your doctrine of free grace tends to careless living." Such words should not be lightly brushed aside. Is there any truth in them? Are all those who boast of their eternal security conspicuous for holy living? Or is it not true that in some cases persons speak with the utmost confidence concerning their salvation while their ways merit stern reprobation? But is the remedy for laxity a general return to legality, with its banks of cloudy doubts and fears?

It is important that truth should be well balanced in our minds. One-sided teaching cannot be expected to yield good results. There are two lines of truth which should be held with equal firmness amongst us — the grace of God, and the government of God. These two lines of truth are found in both Old and New Testaments, in connection with God's earthly people, and also in connection with His heavenly saints. The grace of God towards Israel shines out brightly in all Balaam's parables, and especially in the words, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel" (Numbers 23:21). Nothing could be allowed to affect this. Jehovah's marvellous grace to Israel was founded upon the blood of the Paschal lamb, and also upon the blood of atonement which was always present on the Mercy-seat. All this spoke to God of Christ. But how great the contrast between Numbers 23:2 : and Numbers 25:4 : "Jehovah said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before Jehovah against the sun that the fierce; anger of Jehovah may be turned away from Israel! In this terrible passage we have not the grace of God, but the government of God — always righteous, always holy. The people were behaving very wickedly. Israel, which was to stand above and not be reckoned among the nations, had abandoned their position of separation to God, and had quite forgotten their special relationship to Him. They had come down to the level of the heathen Moabites. They were committing fornication with the women of Moab and Midian, and were worshipping their gods. True, they were not behaving worse than the people around them and their doings were not scandalous in the eyes of Balak and his princes; but God's people must "not walk as other Gentiles walk" (Ephesians 4:17). This is true in all dispensations. Israel being in direct and special relationship with Jehovah, came under His heavy hand in discipline. We hear Him saying at a much later date in the history of the nation: "Hear this word that Jehovah hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I punish you for all our iniquities" (Amos 3:1-2).

Nothing could be more equitable than this principle. God could not appear to excuse the shortcomings of the people of His favour. Men of the world frequently do this, but God's ways are always righteous. If He were to exercise leniency towards His own people, how could He judge the world? And we must never forget that the principalities and powers in the heavenlies are observing with deepest interest His ways with the children of men. (Ephesians 3:10; 1 Peter 1:12).

The vile doings which are recorded in Numbers 25:1-18 constituted a particularly dark chapter in Israel's wilderness history, and they brought down a particularly severe chastisement. In later Scriptures Baal-Peor is referred to in terms of the utmost gravity. (See Joshua 22:17; Psalms 106:29; Hosea 9:10; 1 Corinthians 10:8). Altogether twenty-four thousand Israelites perished there under the hand of God.

The divine principle enunciated in Amos 3:1-2 is the explanation of Israel's fearful sufferings during many centuries sufferings unparalleled in the history of the nations. The end is not yet; the worst is yet to come.

But when Israel emerges humbled and broken from the final tribulation, the people will acknowledge the righteousness of Jehovah's governmental dealings; no more will they make their boast in the law; they will appreciate His grace, fully expressed in the long rejected Christ. Thus they will become fitted to take their true place at the head of the nations, leading them in paths of righteousness and peace.

Israel's transgressions at Baal-Peor, and the judgment of God which came upon the people in consequence. are specifically mentioned in 1 Corinthians 10:1-33 as a warning to all who call upon the name of the Lord in this day. The words of the Apostle are deeply solemn as to this. "All these things happened unto them for examples (or types); and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." The spiritual value of the histories of the Old Testament is thus emphasized; and it is repeated in Romans 15:4.

The same two lines of truth — the grace of God, and the government of God — which we have found in the book of Numbers are found also in the first Epistle to the Corinthians. The condition of the Assembly in Corinth was deplorable when Paul wrote his letter. Almost every form of evil was active there: party strife (1 Corinthians 1:1-31.); gross immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1-13.); litigation in the world's courts (1 Corinthians 6:1-20.); eating and drinking in the temples of idols (1 Corinthians 10:1-33.); gluttony at the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:1-34.); disorder in speaking (1 Corinthians 14:1-40.); and dangerous doctrines concerning the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-58). To all this must be added most improper feelings towards the devoted man who had led them to Christ. Yet with all these terrible evils present to his mind, the Apostle addressed them as "the Church of God which is in Corinth, them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling" (1 Corinthians 1:2). Here we have the grace of God strongly expressed. In 1 Corinthians 3:9 the Apostle adds: "Ye are God's husbandry (cultivated plot); ye are God's building" (His temple). These wonderful figures described the Corinthian brethren collectively. God had made them all this in His grace. The writer would not lessen the sense of it in their souls. What God had made true of them in virtue of Christ and His work formed the basis of his subsequent rebukes and appeals.

In 1 Corinthians 6:1-20 the grace of God to the Corinthians individually is strikingly set forth. We must remember that the majority of the saints in the Assembly in Corinth were formerly heathen; Jews were not numerous amongst them. The Greeks of that day were undoubtedly polished and educated. Their works of art are the admiration of men still. But along with all this there was the deepest moral degradation, fruit of the idolatry which had covered the earth for ages. Paul was divinely encouraged to persevere in his work in Corinth, spite of opposition. The Lord said to him, "I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:10). Out of the terrible filth at Corinth he picked up pearls which will be the delight of his Lord for ever. But meantime things were not going well there. Paul had not felt led to build himself a house in Corinth, and settle down amongst the believers. He formed them into an Assembly, instructed them as to their new privileges and duties, and left them to their own responsibility, assured that the Holy Spirit would take care of them, if they would look

to Him in faith. This they failed to do; hence the sorrow with which the Apostle addressed his first letter to them. Nevertheless, spite of their failure, he set forth the grace of God very strongly. In 1 Corinthians 6:11, after mentioning some of the most abominable evils into which the Corinthian people in general had sunk, he said: "And such were some of you but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Had the Corinthians been in the enjoyment of all this, they might well have burst forth into praise in some such words as these (happily familiar to many who will read these pages):-

O God of matchless grace,

We sing unto Thy name!

We stand accepted in the place

That none but Christ could claim.

Our willing hearts have heard Thy voice,

And in Thy mercy we rejoice.

Tis meet that Thy delight

Should centre in Thy Son!

That Thou should'st place us in Thy sight

In Him, Thy Holy One!

Thy perfect love has cast out fear,

Thy favour shines upon us here!

(Hannah K. Burlingham)

A further precious setting forth of grace is found in 1 Corinthians 6:19 "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price." The words "Know ye not?" repeated six times in this chapter, were intended as reminders of the great things the Corinthians had been taught, but which they were letting slip. Terrible danger for us also!

As surely as Jehovah in His holiness resented the transgressions of the people of Israel in Balaam's day — "a people near unto Him" (Psalms 148:14), so did the Holy God resent the transgressions of the Corinthian saints, a people nearer still to Him, and more richly blessed than Israel ever imagined — chastisement followed in both cases.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that the saints will judge the world, and even angels, in the coming day (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). With such a destiny before us, dare we in our ways come down to the world's level? In warning the Colossians against fleshly corruption, the Apostle said, "for which things sake the wrath of God cometh on the sons of disobedience, in which ye also walked once when ye lived in them" (Colossians 3:7). He wrote similarly to the Ephesians (Ephesians 5:6). The wrath of God will not come down upon God's saints, however faulty they may be (the blood of Christ secures us from that); but the judgment of God in the form of chastening is certain if we do

not judge ourselves. Some in the Corinthian Assembly were proving the truth of it. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Corinthians 11:30). Their conduct was not necessarily worse than that of others around them. In that licentious seaport multitudes were doubtless guilty of all the evils which are condemned in Paul's Epistle, yet perhaps the hand of God did not come down upon them in the marked way that is described in the verse just quoted. The sins of the ungodly are all noted in God's books, and will be dealt with at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:12). God's redeemed will not be there, having been glorified long before; our judgment is here and now, "that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Corinthians 11:32).

The government of God is one of the principal themes in the writings of Peter. In his first epistle the children of God are in view, and in his second epistle the world is before him. In exhorting the children of God to be holy, the Apostle says, "If ye call Him Father who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17). Fathers, young men, and babes; preachers and teachers and their hearers, all alike live under the eye of the Father, who takes account of all our ways. A careful walk becomes us. The whole "time of our sojourning here" has its dangers; and the Father's holy hand corrects us as we need it. In 1 Peter 4:17 he says: "The time is come that judgment must begin at the House of God ("whose house are we" Hebrews 3:6); and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" In Ezekiel's day, when Jehovah could no longer forbear, and felt constrained to smite, He said: "Begin at My sanctuary" (Ezekiel 9:6). When Nadab and Abihu were destroyed for offering strange fire before Jehovah, Moses said unto Aaron, "This is that Jehovah spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified" (Leviticus 10:3). It is true in every dispensation that "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him" (Psalms 89:7). The Corinthian brethren forgot this: hence the calamities which overtook them in the holy government of God. If we become indifferent to His honour, He will take up matters with us, and thus vindicate His great name.

Peter raises a serious question in this connection: "What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely (i.e. with difficulty) be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:17-18). The question is answered in the writer's second epistle. "The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word (the word of God) are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men . . . The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:7-10) Thus no evil will be indefinitely spared. Whatever the long-suffering of God, judgment is certain upon sinners and saint alike. For the one it is irretrievable ruin, for the other it is present chastening in order that we may become partakers of the holiness of the One Who uses the rod (Hebrews 12:10). The path of the believer through an evil world, with a principle of evil within himself ever ready to respond to the evil around, is not easy. Yea, it is difficult, and indeed impossible apart from sustaining grace (Matthew 19:26). But the humble confiding soul need not fear. Greater is the power (of the Holy Spirit) within him than all the power that can be arrayed against him (1 John 4:4). Glory is as certain for the believer in Jesus as eternal judgment is sure for all who "obey not the gospel of God."

What important principles of truth are laid open to us in the ancient history of Balaam the son of Beor!

(1) The sovereign grace of God, which neither the malice of the enemy nor the unfaithfulness of God's people can ever affect! This, as regards Israel, was proclaimed by hostile lips, on enemy ground, and in the hearing of the would-be destroyer!

(2) The righteous judgment of God against those whom He brings near to Himself.

(3) The inveterate (but futile) hatred of the powers of darkness against the objects of God's favour.

(4) The watchful interest of God in His own, even when astray from the path of holiness. Unasked, He places Himself between them, and all who would do them harm. "Blessed be God our God."

Chapter 98

Elijah the Tishbite.

Elijah the Tishbite.

W W Fereday.

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Elijah the Prophet.

Nearly three thousand years have passed away since witnessed for God upon earth, but he is by no means a forgotten character. The ear that is divinely alert still hears, as it were, his firm step and stinging words. His stern denunciations of evil caused all classes to tremble before him. In his burning zeal for God; in his righteous! indignation against the apostasy of his nation; the prophet was equally bold towards kings, priests, prophets, and people. John the Baptist resembled Elijah in this. The Lord God of Israel, against whom the chosen people were so grievously unfaithful, was a living reality to him. The knowledge of God, and the consciousness of His presence before whom I stand" made him bold beyond all others in his day. Meditation upon such a character is a holy stimulus for those who would witness for God and His truth in any age. Never were uncompromising men of the Elijah stamp more needed than in this easy-going complacent Twentieth Century. "Man's day" (1 Corinthians 4:3) is rapidly drawing to a close The judgement of God is fast approaching both for Christendom and the non-professing world. The diabolical character of present-day developments needs to be fearlessly and faithfully exposed.

In some respects Elijah was unique amongst the Old Testament prophets. He was the first to raise a dead person, he passed out of the world without tasting death; he left an immediate successor behind him in Elisha; and he had a moral successor in John the Baptist (Luke 1:17; Matthew 17:12: Moreover, Elijah was sent back to earth with Moses to do honour to the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, and his work is even yet unfinished. His voice will be heard, again in the land of Israel (Malachi 4:5).

Do we all understand the meaning of the word "prophet" The prophets of God did not necessarily predict future events: some did so, notably Isaiah, whose Spirit given predictions are exceptionally rich and full; but many others such as Elijah dealt exclusively with existing conditions amongst the people. It is a simple rule in Bible study to examine the Holy Spirit's first mention of any matter for we thereby learn its general significance throughout the Book of God. Someone has said: "God graciously hangs up the key just inside the door." We first meet with the word prophet in Genesis 20:7. It is applied to Abraham! In the teaching of the New Testament two ante-diluvian witnesses Abel and Enoch are called prophets (Luke 11:50-51; Jude 1:14). but it is nevertheless true that the first man specifically called a prophet in the Old Testament is Abraham.

Let us seek to understand the Holy Spirit's use of the term. Apart from divine guidance, Abraham went down to sojourn in the Philistine city of Gerar. To avert possible danger to himself he said of Sarah, "she is my sister." Abimelech the King attracted by her, took her into his house; but God intervened, saying in a dream, "Restore the man his wife: for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live." Remarkable certainly, for the whole story suggests that at that time there was more pious fear of God in the mind of Abimelech the Philistine than in Abraham the Hebrew — "the friend of God." Yet Abraham was a prophet, and possessed intercessory influence such as Abimelech had not! Incidentally we may learn from this that even when our spiritual condition is low, our privileges as saints, priests etc. are not withdrawn from us, although for the time being we are not in enjoyment of them, and are unable to exercise them for the blessing of others.

Abraham neither spoke nor wrote predictive matter, so far as Scripture speaks; although when in normal condition his spiritual vision enabled him to look far ahead, and see with joy the day of Christ (John 8:56). A prophet was simply a man who had the mind of God, and was able to utter it.

Thus in Psalms 105:15 other patriarchs are called prophets as well as Abraham. They were men in touch with God and could give forth His mind as no others could in their day.

The words of the woman of Samaria in John 4:19 will help us here. She said to the mysterious stranger who was conversing with her, “Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet." Yet He had not spoken to her either of future glories or of coming judgements, but His unexpected words concerning her five husbands, and the man with whom she was then living, made her feel that He was speaking to her directly from God. Indeed, He was God manifested in flesh, although she had no sense of this mighty fact at that moment.

There were prophets also in the New Testament (Ephesians 2:20: Ephesians 4:11). There was no resemblance between their ministry and that of such men as Isaiah and Jeremiah. It was not the future that occupied them; it was theirs to give forth the mind of God concerning the new wonderful work in Christianity, the Scriptures being not then complete. We even read in Acts 21:8 of four women, daughters of Philip the evangelist "who did prophesy." But their service would be rendered in private (1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

Of Elijah's antecedents nothing is told us. Concerning his parentage, his age, and his upbringing nothing is stated, unless his name, which means "Whose God is Jehovah," is meant to indicate a pious father who named his son in faith. God is silent also concerning other prophets. Of Haggai and Malachi for example, we know nothing beyond their bare names. But what matters! The object of the Spirit of God is not to occupy us with men, but with the messages they carried, and which will continue to have spiritual value until the world's end. Let us remember this when we have to listen to men speaking in the name of the Lord in the assembly or elsewhere. We may conceivably get something very definite from God, even though but "five words" (1 Corinthians 14:19), from a speaker quite unknown to us, and whose attainments may not favourably impress us. Look not at the messenger but at the message. Quench not the Spirit. despise not prophesyings; but prove all things, hold fast that which is good." (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21).

Israel's Evil History

Elijah's abrupt appearance in public, with his terrible announcement to king and people, calls for some explanation Walking boldly into the king's court, he said, "As Jehovah the God of Israel, liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. (1 Kings 17:1). What a message from the God who at another time said, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt" (Hosea 11:1). What was the meaning of the fearful chastisement, probably without precedent in the world's history, which was thus announced by Elijah? Ahab was apparently stunned by the boldness of the messenger, and the terribleness of the message, for he attempted nothing against Elijah at that moment. Yet Ahab had no scruples about shedding innocent blood! In order to understand the situation, it is necessary to consider how Israel stood in relation to God.

No nation has ever held, or ever will hold, a position in the earth at all comparable to that of Israel. That nation forms the very centre of God's ways both in government and in blessing. The kings and statesmen of earth do not understand this; hence the futility of all their treaties, with bitter disappointment to millions. Israel ignored: Christ ignored; God ignored! What stability can there be even in the most carefully worked-out plans for the peaceful settlement of the nations?

The divinely appointed place of Israel is described thus: "Jehovah shall make thee the head, and not the tail, and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath, if thou hearken unto the commandments of Jehovah thy God" (Deuteronomy 28:13). When the descendants of Noah, with their diverse languages, scattered abroad, and seized upon lands here and there as it pleased them, the invisible hand of God guided them to where He would require them when Israel came upon the scene. No one understood this divine working at the time. God may have spoken of it to Abraham and to others; hence the words of Moses when he placed the international position before Israel's tribes shortly before they entered the land of Canaan: "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will show thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee. When the most High divided (or, assigned) to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deuteronomy 32:7-8). Men may at any time lay violent hands upon territories that they desire, but only by divine permission can they obtain them. The all wise Creator sees some way in which the wrath of man will serve His purpose. There is thus an over-ruling hand which controls the movements of nations, little as men perceive it. This was true in the earliest days, and it is true still.

When the first nations settled down in their lands, they threw off the knowledge of God which they had inherited from Noah and his sons, and they plunged into idolatry. Romans 1:18 says, "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge." Their conceptions of deity, under the deceptive influence of Satan, sank lower and lower. First, "they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man"; soon, they set up beasts, then birds, and even creeping things. The worship of the serpent became popular. It was not naked savages who thus plunged deeper and deeper into the abyss of folly; for the ancient kingdoms of Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt (amongst others) possessed much learning. It is impossible for men to rise morally above the level of the gods they worship accordingly beast-worshippers soon became beastly themselves in practise. Romans 1:18-32 should be carefully pondered for it is God's sad description of the depths of vice and folly to which men descended when they turned their backs upon Him. Let moderns beware in their increasing godlessness.

The country whose divinely-given title is "the land of Israel," and which God says is "the glory of all lands": (Ezekiel 20:6), was occupied by seven other nations when the people of Israel arrived upon its frontiers. The gross corruptions with which those Rations filled that land were amply sufficient to deprive them of any decent title to further possession. In Abraham's day the cup of their iniquity was not. full (Genesis 15:16); but it was overflowing when Israel's hosts came upon them as God's executioners. To anyone who doubts the righteousness of dispossessing those nations to make room for Jehovah's chosen people, it is sufficient to quote Leviticus 18:25 : "the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out its inhabitants. “

The land was promised unconditionally by Jehovah to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and in the Kingdom-age the seed will possess it from the Nile to the Euphrates. But in Joshua's day they entered Canaan under the Sinai covenant on the ground of responsibility. The law's conditional "ifs" became their ruin. When Moses the Mediator finished his course, he left no successor, properly speaking. The High priest was established as the link between Jehovah and the people, and the civil leader was placed under his guidance. "He shall stand before Eleazer the priest, who

shall ask counsel for him after the judgement of Urim before Jehovah: at His word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him" (Numbers 27:18-23). When the priesthood became morally corrupt (1 Samuel 2:29-30), God spoke of a king. Leaving aside the disastrous episode of Saul, the people's choice, David was God's appointed king, and the priesthood fell into a secondary position. The kingdom reached the height of its power and splendour under David and Solomon. These kings were both typical of Christ, the only true hope of Israel and the nations. David typified Him as the man of war, victorious over all His people's foes; and Solomon typified Him as the man of peace. Glory and prosperity unexampled filled the land during Solomon's reign; but, alas! that most gifted monarch became leader of the people in serious departure from God. To gratify his many foreign wives he filled the land with strange gods (1 Kings 11:1-43).

When "the God of glory" called Abraham, and revealed to him His thoughts (Acts 7:2) His purpose was to recover and bless all the nations by the instrumentality of his seed (Genesis 12:2-3; Genesis 22:18). When Abraham was thus called the whole earth was sunk in the darkness and impurity of idolatry; indeed, Abraham's own family "served other gods" (Joshua 24:2 It was sovereign grace therefore on God's part thus to bless Abraham, and then make him a blessing to others. The kingdom of Israel was established as God's witness in the earth; the people should have faithfully held aloft the lamp of divine truth for the enlightenment of all. When they descended to the level of the nations around them, their testimony was gone, and the blessing of the nations became impossible. It awaits the day of Christ. When He appears in kingdom majesty, all that has failed in the hands of Adam, Noah, David, Solomon, and others, He will take up and fulfil gloriously.

The disruption of Israel followed Solomon's death, and the breach has not been healed unto this day. Ten tribes followed the lead of Jeroboam the son of Nebat; the remaining two continued with the house of David. Jehovah' promised Jeroboam "a sure house" if he would walk in His ways, for Jeroboam understood that God was disciplining the unfaithful royal house through him; nevertheless, Jeroboam having no faith in God and His word, and fearing for the security of his throne if the people continued to go up to Jerusalem to worship, installed golden calves in Bethel and Dan, and presumably built sanctuaries for them (1 Kings 11:37-38: 1 Kings 12:26-30; Amos 7:13). He ordained priest from amongst all classes (ignoring the special privilege of the Levites); and he instituted feasts of his own devising in defiance of Jehovah's law as laid down in Leviticus 23:1-44. Thus the people were wholly diverted from God's centre, and from His order connected therewith. All this was more than unfaithfulness; it was open apostasy. Happily, considerable numbers abhorred these evils, for the Word of God had some authority over their hearts; they turned their backs Upon Jeroboam's evil inventions, in some cases surrendering their homes and lands, and they went south where there was still a measure of respect for Jehovah's Word, and where at any rate they could worship in the house that was called by His name. That this large movement was a true spiritual work is clear from the following passage: "out of all the tribes o Israel such as set their hearts to seek Jehovah the God of Israel came to Jerusalem to sacrifice unto Jehovah the God of their fathers. “ The influence of these pious immigrants was so good that for three years the two tribes" walked in the way of David and Solomon" (2 Chronicles 11:13-17). The deplorable break-up of the nation; the report of the wickedness of Jeroboam and his followers; and the coming amongst them of a crowd of pious souls (leaving their all behind them), apparently

woke up Rehoboam and his two loyal tribes to the seriousness of the devilries which had been-developing in the land for some years, and for a time (alas, only for a time) things went well.

The movement of these Northerners who desired to continue faithful to Jehovah when the mass became apostate has a message for us today. Israel's history has been "written for our admonition" (1 Corinthians 10:11). We who stand in Israel's place in testimony for God in the earth should profit by the Holy Spirit's records. How do matters stand with us at this time? We open our Bibles at the early chapter of the Book of Acts, and we read with delight how Christianity began. What love! 'What devotedness! What close attachment to the teaching of the Apostles, who were God's mouthpieces for the new regime!

The merest glance at the intervening centuries tells us that the spiritual decline has been terrific. Unity has been thrown to the winds. Rival "churches. “ National and otherwise. have arisen; positive idolatry is practised throughout the greater part of Christendom; and even those communities which profess to abhor Greek and Roman superstitions are themselves honeycombed with deadly heresies. The call to separation rings out clearly in the Word of God. notably in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; and 2 Timothy 1:1-26. Do we heed it! But separation, to be acceptable to God, must be thorough and complete. It must enter into all the circumstances of our lives. The great call to religious separation in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 is followed with an earnest appeal to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). This is very far reaching. It is possible to turn resolutely from fellowship with the world in religious matters, and to speak very strongly against conformity thereto. and yet walk unconcernedly with the world in other respects, so deceitful is flesh, even in God's saints! For example, is it consistent to condemn fellowship with unscriptural religious systems, and yet voluntarily seek fellowship in a Co-operative Society? Again, how can we justly blame the Roman "priest" for burning incense before God (he may possibly do it with a good conscience quite ignorantly), if we ourselves burn tobacco before God and before men? Many speak severely (and not too severely) of a "Sunday religion"; let us beware of a mere "Sunday separation!" Our baptism teaches death to sin and the world (Romans 6:1-23); are we prepared for this?

The Israelites who separated themselves from the wickedness of Jeroboam and his followers, and removed into the Kingdom; of Judah desired to cleave to Jehovah's ways as written in His Word. The innovations of unsanctified men were abominable in their eyes. Let us imitate their excellent example.

The Rival Captains

It seems difficult to realize that little more than half a century had passed since the death of Solomon when Elijah came across the Jordan from the wilds of Gilead with his terrible announcement of the coming drought! In order to understand the gravity of that moment, we must keep before us the evil doings of the ten tribes after they broke away from the house of David, and also forsook Jehovah for the gods of the heathen. God bore with much patience the doings of those years, but the time had now come for drastic punishment. Jehovah in His righteous government was constrained to assert Himself, and in order to bring home to the people the folly of idolatry, and the gravity of disobedience to His Word.

After the disruption, the Northern Kingdom continued about 260 years. Then the Kings of Assyria destroyed it, and deported the people. Nineteen kings in all reigned over the ten tribes; alas, there was not a single good king amongst them, although some were admittedly more desperate in their wickedness than others. As we examine their history, we find frequently the dismal refrain: "he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin." (1 Kings 26:26 etc.) The Southern: Kingdom outlived the Northern by 130. years. The King of Babylon was the instrument used by God for its extinction The people were carried away into captivity. "and the land enjoyed her Sabbaths, for as long as she lay desolate, she kept Sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years" (2 Chronicles 36:1-23 Nineteen kings and one queen ruled over the two tribes several of them as wicked as any who polluted the Northern Kingdom, while other kings, such as Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah, were really excellent men. The "salt" of these pious leaders preserved the decaying kingdom from ruin for many years. Alas, for the day when Jehovah could no longer permit any of Israel's tribes to continue in the land. His righteousness demanded that He should expel them all.

Jeroboam, in spite of his wickedness, was allowed by Jehovah to reign twenty-two years. Jehovah had used him: for the chastisement of the guilty house of David; but his own evil course, in spite of his knowledge of Solomon's sins, and also of God's encouragement of Himself to do well. made it impossible for him to establish a new dynasty. The “sure house" mentioned in 1 Kings 11:38 could not be; for Jeroboam had led the people far away from their God.

Who can God entrust with power but Christ? He who was faithful and obedient in the days. of His humiliation will be equally faithful and obedient in the golden Kingdom- age when God will place all things beneath His feet (Hebrews 2:8). At the end, "He will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father: when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. When all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that did put all things under Him, that God may be all in all " (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). The Perfect Administrator, seeking the glory of God, and the blessing of all His creatures!

God might use Jeroboam to chastise Solomon and his house; He might use the Kings of Assyria to chastise Jeroboam's subjects; and He might use Nebuchadnezzar to chastise Judah and its kings: but all these in their turn God has been obliged to judge, for these rods of His anger (Isaiah 10:5) were no more faithful to God than those against whom He employed them.

Jeroboam's son Nadab reigned two years only. (1 Kings 15:5). He was then murdered by one of his captains — Baasha while they were at war with the Philistines, and were besieging Gibbethon. Baasha occupied his bloodstained throne twenty-four years, and he became Jehovah's instrument for the extermination of Jeroboam's vile family. Baasha's son Elah succeeded his father, but was murdered two years later by an officer named Zimri. This man hoped to establish himself in Tirzah the capital of the ten-tribe kingdom. But another captain — Omri — aspired to the throne, and within a week he captured Tirzah, Zimri perishing in the flames of the royal palace, which he himself set ablaze when he perceived that his cause was hopeless. But even this did not settle the country. Yet another aspirant to the throne appeared Tibni the son of Ginath. "Then were the people of Israel (i.e. the ten tribes) divided into two parts: half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king; and half followed Omri. But the people that followed Omri prevailed against the people that followed Tibni the son of Ginath: so Tibni died, and Omri reigned." (1 Kings

15:21-22) Deplorable record! We are speaking, not of pagan nations, but of God's chosen people, for whom He had done great things from Egypt onward, and to whom He had made known His holy will. They were still dear to his heart — "beloved for the fathers' sake" (Romans 11:28). At a much later date, Jehovah, when pronouncing judgement upon His people spoke of Israel as "the dearly beloved of My soul" (Jeremiah 12:7). Israel possessed the Scriptures; no other nation was so privileged. Yet what a story of lawlessness and transgression is written in the Books of the Kings! Ambitious captains plunderers and murderers, contending for supremacy in God's inheritance, with no thought of glorifying Him, nor of doing good to His poor people. Jehovah might well have challenged those ruthless leaders as in Jeremiah 13:20 : Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock!" Yet not a trace of exercise of conscience is discernible in the land concerning this condition of things; none crying out in the anguish of faith: " How long, O Jehovah. ... Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins for Thy name's sake " (Psalms 79:5-9). A downward course is always slippery. Let us all beware of the smallest beginning of departure from the revealed will of God. "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe, and I will have respect unto Thy commandments continually" (Psalms 119:117).

Omri and Ahab

Omri did not secure the throne of Israel without a long struggle. Comparison of 1 Kings 16:15 and 1 Kings 16:23 of 1 Kings 16 suggests that the civil war raged four years. Seeing that half the nation preferred Tibni to Omri this is not surprising; but the condition of the country while these unprincipled men were contending must have been pitiful. Only a few years before, probably within the memory of living persons, the twelve tribes of Israel were a united people. They stood high amongst the nations by the goodness of God. and the sovereign was receiving the homage of all the kings round about. The country was wealthy and peaceful. Gold was so plentiful that silver was thought nothing of in the days of Solomon (2 Chronicles 9:20). Now they were divided into two mutually antagonistic nations, and two ruthless military leaders were contending for the mastery in the Northern State. Also vast amounts of Solomon's accumulated treasure had been seized and carried away from Jerusalem into Egypt "How are the mighty fallen!" (2 Samuel 1:27). Truly the consequences of turning away from God and His Word are disastrous! Let us take heed!

Omri was apparently an able man, as the world speaks for he brought order out of chaos, and after twelve years reign he left the throne of the ten tribes unchallenged to his son. He seems to have overhauled the laws of the nation In Micah 6:16, long after Omri's death, Jehovah complained that "the statutes of Omri" were preferred to His holy ordinances. “The statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitant thereof a hissing: therefore ye shall bear the reproach of My people. “ It is no uncommon thing for the professing people of God to prefer human rules and regulations to the plain teaching of His blessed Word. The Lord Jesus told the religious leaders of His own time: "Full well ye reject the commandment of God that ye may keep your own tradition... making the word of God of none effect through your tradition which ye have delivered" (Mark 7:9-13). Since the Lord spake thus, the Scriptures have been completed; the whole revelation of God is in our hands; yet the great majority of souls in Christendom are far more subject to ecclesiastical regulations and human dictation than to the wholesome Word of God!

In the middle of his reign Omri decided to transfer his capital from Tirzah to a preferable site which had attracted his attention. Being a man of military genius, he desired for his seat of government a place of greater strategic value than Tirzah had proved to be when Zimri endeavoured to hold it. It could not sustain even a week's siege! (1 Kings 16:18). "So he bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria" (1 Kings 16:24). Such a memorial of his reign would suit the vanity of Omri, besides making for greater security in time of war. Although firm rule, and a new up-to-date Metropolis may be considered desirable thing in men's eyes, it is the moral and spiritual condition that counts with God; and Omri became a more wicked ruler than even his bad predecessors. “Omri wrought evil in the eyes of Jehovah, and did worse than all that were before him." He continued the worship of Jeroboam's golden calves. and added fresh devilries of his own devising. When he died, he was buried in the new city which he had created on the hill of Shemer. But "there shall be a resurrection of the dead. both of the just and unjust"(Acts 24:15).

"Ahab his son reigned in his stead — Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years." The new king exceeded his father and all others in transgression against Jehovah. “Ahab did more to provoke Jehovah the God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him"(1 Kings 16:28-33). Things were thus ripening fast for the heavy stroke which fell upon the nation with such devastating effects by the instrumentality of Elijah.

One of the daring evils of Ahab's reign was the rebuilding of Jericho by Hiel the Bethelite. Indeed, anything was possible in those dark days. Flesh had utterly broken loose, and all divine restraint was cast aside. “In his days, Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in Segub his youngest son, according to the word of Jehovah which He spake by Joshua the son of Nun" (1 Kings 16:34) At the time of the conquest of Canaan by the people of Israel, Jericho was the first city to oppose their progress. It typifies the world as that which would hinder the Christian enjoying his present heavenly portion in Christ Jesus. Jericho 's walls fell flat by direct divine action, and the wicked city was given to the flames. Joshua pronounced the curse of God upon anyone who should venture to rebuild it, and Joshua charged them with an oath at that time (R.V.) saying "Cursed be the man before Jehovah, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son he shall set up the gates of it" (Joshua 6:26). Five hundred years elapsed between Joshua and Ahab; but, during all that time, when the people of Israel frequently turned aside into paths of disobedience, no-one was bold enough to brave the divine imprecation. Its terms were serious; the daring builder, whoever he might be, would pay the penalty of his impiety in the death of his firstborn son at the beginning of his undertaking, and in the death of his youngest at its completion. In Ahab's day Hiel the Bethelite was sufficiently infidel to dare the Almighty in this matter; but it happened to him "according to the word of Jehovah which He spake by Joshua the son of Nun. “Abiram his firstborn died when he laid the foundation, and Segub his youngest died when he set up Jericho's gates. Truly, God is not mocked!" (Galatians 6:7).

A form of evil suggested in Hiel's open defiance of God which has become painfully common in our day. The judgements of God are openly challenged; from many modern pulpits eternal punishment is never mentioned; and multitudes say impudently that they do not believe in Hell. We cannot but recall Satan's first move against our race. Adam and his wife were placed by the generous Creator in a garden of abundance and delight, with one single prohibition. There was a

tree in the midst of the garden of which they must not eat, or the judgement of death would ensue (Genesis 2:17) The serpent approached Eve, as we all know. challenging God's word as to this, saying definitely. “Ye shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4); but the Word of God stood nevertheless, and so it must ever be. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Hiel the Bethelite, and his wife with him (if she were living), surely felt the bitterness of beholding both the eldest and youngest of their sons laid low in death. Why not abandon the mad enterprise when Abiram died. Alas, for the stubbornness of flesh! Satan was ready enough with some natural explanation of the young man's death, and so the building operations continued to the predicted tragedy. Let all the cavillers in Christendom beware! whatever Satan and his agents may say, there is a "Hell of fire that never shall be quenched, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44, Mark 9:48).

The Holy Spirit notes that Hiel was a Bethelite. His hometown had many sacred memories which should have influenced the man's soul. Near by, Abram pitched his tent and reared his altar when he first entered the land (Genesis 12:8). There he enjoyed manifestations of Jehovah, and listened to His gracious promises of blessings for days yet to come. It was at Bethel that God spoke to Jacob in a dream, and opened out to him the future in a very full way, assuring him of His continued interest in him, even though at that moment his ways were displeasing in His sight. Jacob felt that the spot was the very house of God, although no visible temple stood there. (Genesis 28:11-22). Some years later, when Jacob was suffering at the hands of Laban, he received this precious word in a dream, “I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar"(Genesis 31:13). This was a sweet reminder that amidst all his troubles and vicissitudes he had to do with a faithful God. Still later; after years of wandering, "God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there, and make there an altar unto God, that appeared onto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother"(Genesis 35:1). This call exercised Jacob deeply. He became aware of many things in himself and family that did not suit the presence of a holy God. He charged his household to put away all the strange gods that were among them, and to purify themselves, and change their garments. To Jacob's soul, now divinely stirred, it was impossible to take strange gods and other evil things to a spot that was to him the very house of God. The assembly is the house of God today; our exercises should be deep and thorough when we gather together to have to do with God.

When Jacob arrived in Bethel, “he built there an altar, and called the place El-Bethel: because there God appeared unto him when he fled from the face of his brother." Note again how Jacob connected the presence of God with the place. In calling it "El-Bethel," which means "the God of the house of God," he took much higher ground than when he built an altar near Shechem, and called it "El-eloheh Israel," i.e. “God the God of Israel" (Genesis 33:20).Self was the centre of his thoughts when he said the latter, the expression of his trust that God would look after him; but at Bethel he rose to the thought of having to do with God in His own house, and thus everything connected with himself must be in suitability to the holy One who dwelt there.

Hiel might well have learned great lessons from these memories; but his mind was too utterly alienated from God to learn anything. Bethel in his time horrible to say-was one of the chief seats of idolatry. There stood Jeroboam's golden calf, glaring proof that the early sin of Exodus 32:1-35

had never been truly judged. Let us not miss the lesson of these Old Testament records. “They were written aforetime for our learning" (Romans 15:4). From whence comes the repudiation of God's judgements in our day! From those circles which claim to know God, and where the term "house of God" is freely used; in other words it is not so much the non-professing world which speaks against the judgements of God, as the leaders and teachers of those "who profess and call themselves Christians." The results of this widespread denial of the judgements of God are disastrous; morality everywhere declines, and deceived souls glide carelessly down to eternal ruin.

Jezebel

Jezebel! One of the most sinister figures in the Word of God! This wicked woman not only wrought incalculable mischief amongst God's chosen earthly people in the days of Elijah's testimony; her name is used by the Holy Spirit in Revelation 2:20 as the symbol of a frightful system of evil which has intruded itself into a more sacred. circle than Israel ever was. One of Ahab's many sins was his marriage with idolatrous Jezebel. "It came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him" (1 Kings 16:31). The Israelites were expressly forbidden to inter-marry with the corrupt nations of Canaan "thy daughter shalt thou not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. “The inevitable consequences of disobedience in this respect were divinely stated: . "they will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of Jehovah be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly" (Deuteronomy 7:3-4). Here there is no suggestion that a God-fearing husband or wife might win for the truth an ungodly partner; the very opposite result in sure. The influence of a woman over a man is considerable; it is of the greatest importance therefore that every one who knows God should be divinely mated. Many a man besides Ahab has been ruined by a marriage contract entered into in defiance of the Word of God. A great contrast to Jezebel is found in Abigail. Well might David, after she had restrained him from violence, say, “Blessed be Jehovah the God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me, and blessed be thy advice" (1 Samuel 25:32). Happy is the man who in any age and in any land, meets an Abigail!

Ahab was a weak character; Jezebel was strong and energetic. A most unfortunate combination! 1 Kings 21:27 suggests that his whole course might have been different had his wife been an Abigail instead of Jezebel. When Elijah pronounced the divine sentence upon him after the murder of Naboth, we read that "he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly. “This was excellent; and Jehovah so far relented towards him that the judgement was at least deferred. No mans weakness of character excuses his wickedness; still, God in His pitifulness, does take account of the influences which surround us all. "There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of Jehovah, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up" (1 Kings 21:25). But he should never have married the woman .

Idolatry was no new evil amongst God's favoured but faithless people Israel. Their whole course in this respect is traced with much detail in Ezekiel 20:1-49. In Egypt, before the deliverance, they worshipped the gods around them (Ezekiel 20:8); they worshipped idols in the wilderness, although perhaps covertly (Ezekiel 20:13), and they worshipped idols in the land (Ezekiel 20:28). The worship of Baal in particular is noted in Judges 2:11-13; Gideon was instructed by God. to throw down the altar of Baal which his father had erected, and also to cut down the Asherah which

stood by it (Judges 6:25): just before Jephthah was raised up for the people's- deliverance, they confessed that they had forsaken God, and served Baalim (Judges 10:10).

The "Groves" so frequently referred to in the history of Ahab and Elijah were really statues of Ashtoreth. Baal seems to have represented the sun, and Ashtoreth the moon. In the divine indictment of the Northern Kingdom, when the people were carried captive into Assyria, we read: "they left all the commandments of Jehovah their God, and made them molten images, two calves, and made an Asherah, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal" 2 Kings 17:16 Note how "all the host of heaven" is here linked with Baal. In Jeremiah 7:18 Ashtoreth is called "the queen of heaven." From Job 31:26-27 we gather that homage to the Sun and moon was the earliest form of idolatry.

There was a moment in Samuel's day when this evil was apparently sincerely judged. The prophet urged the people to put away the strange gods from amongst them, and prepare their hearts to serve Jehovah only. "Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and. Ashtoreth, and served Jehovah only" (1 Samuel 7:3-4). This was good, for Jehovah is a jealous God, and will not share our hearts with any other (Exodus 20:5; Hosea 10:2). Hence our Lord's rebuke to the tempter in the wilderness, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve"(Matthew 4:10). Jezebel's coming into Israel put the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth upon a firm footing. It became the religion of the State with priests and prophets in abundance who ate at the royal table (1 Kings 17:19). With all this wickedness before us this gross defiance of all the commandments of God, we can understand somewhat the fiery indignation of Elijah's soul and the sternness with which be testified against it. Do we feel strongly concerning the widespread disobedience to God and His Word in our own time? Does it turn us to prayer Does it lead us into complete separation to God, and do we seek courage to protest against it all by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us?

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It is important that we should transfer our thoughts for a while from the first book of Kings to the Apocalypse. The re-appearance of Jezebel's name in the closing book of the Bible suggests that the gross evils which confronted Elijah long ago confront us also. although in a somewhat different form. Truly, there is nothing new under the sun, and history constantly repeats itself!

The epistles to the seven assemblies in Asia are familiar to all Bible readers. There were doubtless assemblies in the places named, and in each case the message sent was what was needed at that time. Jezebel's name figures in the epistle to Thyatira. The Lord said, "Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel . . . . and she teaches"(R.V.). There is a two fold rebuke in these words. which the Authorised Version obscures. First, there was toleration of a wicked person, in defiance of 1 Corinthians 5:13; and second, — the person — a woman was allowed to teach, contrary to the prohibitions of 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12. What a condition of things in the very first century of our era! What early departure from the revealed will of God! The Thyatiran woman called herself a prophetess; i.e., she claimed to teach by divine authority but her teaching was vile, and intended to lead souls astray We need not suppose that her name was really Jezebel; the name is used symbolically. On the same principle Jerusalem is called in Revelation 11:8 "spiritually Sodom and Egypt. “This means that that which should he the holy city of God will be in the world's final crisis just Sodom and Egypt repeated The Jezebel of Thyatira, whatever her real

name, is just the reproduction of the vile Sidonian princess with whom Elijah had to do.

Thyatira is only mentioned twice in the Scriptures, and is each case a woman's name is connected with the city. But how great the contrast between pious Lydia, Who esteemed it an honour to lodge four preachers of the Gospel (Acts 16:15) and Jezebel who sought to deceive Christ's servants who would listen to her, and who would fain have destroyed those who refused to listen.

Although the epistles were addressed to assemblies then existing, the fact that they have been accorded a place in a prophetic book suggests that the scope of their teaching goes beyond what was merely local. The number seven in itself significant. From amongst many assemblies in Proconsular Asia these were divinely selected because their varied conditions furnished a prophetic sketch. In Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22 we have an outline of the extended history of the professing Church from the days of John down to the end. in Ephesus things were orderly, false pretenders (male or female) had no footing there; but love had grown cold. In Smyrna we have persecution; and in Pergamos we find the Church making her home where Satan's throne is; i.e. in the world; Thyatira follows with Jezebel. It does not call for much knowledge of Ecclesiastical history to see in these circumstances a picture of what has actually taken place in the Christian circle. First, love grew cold; then God allowed the times of persecution in order to revive the affections of His saints; then when persecution ceased early in the fourth century, and the Government began to patronise the Church. worldliness became characteristic; and out of that condition Popery developed, of which the woman Jezebel is the apt symbol.

Here is the Lord's description of the "Christian" Jezebel. She calleth herself a prophetess, and she teaches and seduces My servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not"(Revelation 2:20-21). in the religious system which Jezebel represents it is affirmed that "the, Church" teaches, and that everyone should obey their voice under pain of eternal judgement. The very principle is false. The Church is never represented in the Scriptures as a teacher at all, but as taught-by the gifts given by the Head for that purpose (Ephesians 4:11). Seven times in Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22 we read, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches;" therefore, instead of hearkening to the Church, he that would be true to the Lord must hearken to the voice of the Spirit speaking to the Church, frequently in terms of censure. The divine voice is heard in the Scriptures, which "are profitable for doctrine, for reproof for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Fornication, as mentioned in the Apocalypse, means worldliness, illicit intercourse with that from which all who fear God and reverence His Word should keep absolutely separate. Rome has always sought the favour of the world's rulers for her own ends; and the rulers have too often paid court to the harlot for some supposed advantage to themselves The going to and from the Vatican on the part of professed "Protestant " leaders in recent years has been very noticeable and nothing but mischief can come out of it. The nations and their rulers in their present grave difficulties need GOD. Trafficking with Jezebel is more likely to deepen than to assuage His displeasure with them all.

Rome's idolatry is notorious. Her images, pictures, shrines and relics are abundant. The Lord in His mercy has given her ample opportunity to repent of her manifold and long continued

transgressions; but she repents not. Terrible, judgements are determined upon the harlot, and upon all her admirers.

From Revelation 2:1-29 we must pass briefly to Revelation 17:1-18, where we see, Babylon the Great, mother of the harlots and the abominations of the earth "riding upon a scarlet coloured beast. The "mystery" woman is the final development of Jezebel after all true saints have been removed to the father's house On high. The fact that the woman is shown riding upon the beast suggests that the religious power will acquire considerable influence over the governments at the time of the end. But the harlot 's supremacy will be short-lived. The infuriated kings will, when the moment is ripe for it, turn upon her, "make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. “It is the will of God, little as the kings mean it so (Revelation 17:16-17). This is the end of that which calls itself "the Roman Catholic Church, “ largely augmented in its last stage by much that is at this moment distinct from it. Ahab's Jezebel had a gruesome end (2 Kings 9:33-37) That which has reproduced her amazing enormities, and practised them in the name of "Him that is Holy, Him that is true"(Revelation 3:7) will have a fearful end also. Meantime God would have all who love His truth stand in stern separation from everything that is even remotely suggestive of Jezebel and Babylon (Revelation 18:4).

Elijah's Prayer

The presence of a prophet in Israel pre-supposes a condition of failure. Had God's order operated as it should, there would have been no need for special divine intervention. When kingship was established in the person of David (after the complete break-down of the priesthood) Jehovah intended that the king should henceforth be the link between Himself and the people. The king should be His mouthpiece to them. Kingship soon failed spiritually even the richly gifted Solomon led the way in idolatry; but God, who is never without resource, raised up prophets from time to time, who delivered His messages to the people independently of the king, from whose oppressive hand God's faithful witnesses frequently suffered. What the conditions were in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during several reigns, we have seen; there was indisputably urgent need for a stern witness, and Elijah was the man chosen by God for this service.

The sovereignty of God in His choice of instruments for His work is noticeable throughout the Scriptures. Take the scriptures themselves: the first writer had the status of an Egyptian prince, “and was mighty in his words and his deeds"(Acts 7:22): the last writer was a Galilean fisherman and between these two we find kings, priests, prophets, a military commander. a Prime minister, a herdman, a tax-gatherer, and a doctor (besides others). We have seen that there was urgent need for a testimony to Israel in Ahab's day yet God did not send an Aaronite priest from Jerusalem, nor a man otherwise notable; His sovereign choice was a simple countryman without any official or social standing, and apparently without literary accomplishments. In the same sovereign way of acting, when God desired to send a peculiarly solemn testimony to Israel in the early days of our era, He did not use an apostle, but took Stephen from his humble service amongst the widows for His purpose (Acts 6:1-15).

Why did God employ Elijah? His flaming zeal for the glory of God, and his simple-hearted faith in His Word and in His power is the answer. It is interesting to observe that there are two Elijah's noted in the Scriptures. and the contrast between them will help us at this point. The other Elijah is found in Ezra 10:21 He was one of many priests of Aaron's favoured line who sinned against God

after His merciful restoration of a Jewish remnant from the captivity in Babylon. In flagrant defiance of the Word of God this man had taken a strange wife. Where was zeal for God's glory in such a one? 'What sense had he of the blessedness of special relationship to Jehovah! Also, what neglect, or rejection, of the lessons which he should have learned from the disasters which had fallen upon the nation because of their unfaithfulness to God! Thus the instructed priest of Ezra 10:21 stands out as a model of disobedience to the known will of God. The very mention of him (although we would not ignore his repentance) makes us realize the more the loyalty and zeal of the humble Tishbite.

It was a great moment when Elijah walked into the king's presence with his brief, but grave message: "As Jehovah the God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word" (1 Kings 17:1). What the Lord Jesus said of John the Baptist would have suited Elijah also: "What went ye out to see? A man clothed in delicate raiment! behold, they that wear delicate raiment are in King's houses" (Matthew 11:8). Elijah is described in 2 Kings 1:8 as a man in "a hairy garment, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. “ John the Baptist dressed similarly (Matthew 3:1-17). In such attire Elijah confronted Ahab and his court. What lay behind this amazing courage! For this we must enquire of the apostle James who wrote about our prophet nearly a thousand years after his day (James 5:17). Elijah was pre-eminently a man of prayer. Being thus accustomed to have dealings with the Sovereign of the universe at His lofty throne he did not dread Israel's petty sovereign sitting upon his throne, whatever might be the strength of the armed guard around him! Elijah's God was a living God: and he lived, served, and testified in the consciousness of His presence.

If any would enquire why Elijah's prayer is not mentioned in the book of Kings, the answer is that the Scriptures are a great whole, and it does not always please God to tell us all that could be told about any matter in a single book. Every detail has been placed in its own suited setting by the all wise Spirit of God. Thus, in Numbers 13:1-33. we have Jehovah commanding Moses to send twelve men to spy out the land of Canaan; but in Deuteronomy 1:1-46 we learn that the people in their unbelief demanded this. Both statements are true. Reading both we have God's side and man's side of the matter. In Deuteronomy 1:1-46 we have the record of the people's unfaithfulness. and in Numbers 13:1-33 we are reminded of God's ceaseless interest in them spite of their unbelief. Another example will be found in the life of the apostle Paul. The brethren in Antioch, after there had been much disputation with teachers who desired to put Gentile Christians under law, requested Paul and Barnabas, with some of their own number, to go up to Jerusalem about the question; but in Galatians 2:1-2 Paul says, “'I went up by revelation. “There were thus two sides to the matter the brethren's request, and the Lord's direction.

In 1 Kings 17:1-24 we have Elijah's public action, which probably startled all who heard it; and in James 5:1-20 we have his private dealings with God before he came forth into public. The connection in James's epistle concerns us intimately; we are all exhorted to pray for one another, and the Apostle adds, "the ardent and energetic prayer of the righteous man has great efficacy"(Darby's Translation). Let no-one miss the seriousness of this. Every Christian has access to the throne of grace: but the man who would pray for others must be himself a righteous man; he must look well to his own conduct, and examine carefully his own ways, ere he ventures into the Sanctuary. Even then prayer must not be a mere utterance of words, the whole spirit of the man must be "ardent and energetic." Here we have the secret of successful prayer.

Many years ago. a newly-converted Methodist was taken to the prayer-meetings of some special friends of mine. After he had listened to tree wordy prayers which told God many things that He knew already and which asked for nothing in particular, the young man arose, and cried out, "0 God, teach these good men how to pray! "The elder brethren were annoyed at the intrusion; but my sympathies are with the young man!

Prayer, to be of any avail, must come from prepared hearts, and be definite and pointed. “Elias was a man of like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit" (James 5:17-18)

We must think of Elijah exercised before God in the solitudes of Gilead about the appalling condition of His people. The prophet's words to Ahab, however unexpected and startling, were no mere spasmodic outburst. He had doubtless spent much time before God about the nation and its ways. He loved the people; he longed to see them right with God; but the grossest evils had become so deeply entrenched, that he felt something drastic was required in order to bring the people to their senses. So he turned to prayer. Acceptable prayer must be based upon the Word of God. and the prophet doubtless remembered Deuteronomy 11:16-17 : "Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods and worship them; and Jehovah's wrath be kindled against you, and He shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and ye perish quickly from off the good land which Jehovah giveth you. “With such words before him, the distressed prophet cried out of the depth of his heart, “O God, stop the rain! "Being fully assured that he had the mind of God about the matter he went into the presence of Ahab, and said, "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." God responded to His servant's faith, "and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months."

When the disciples asked the Lord Jesus why they were unable to cast out a demon (although they had been sent forth with divine authority so to do- Luke 9:1), He replied, "Because of your unbelief. . . . this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:19-21).

Elijah was a man of deep spiritual feeling; in communion with God he felt the evil of the circumstances around him. Are we like Elijah in this respect! The reader would be wise to lay down this book, and read Daniel's ninth chapter throughout. That holy man of God "with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes, “prayed, and confessed the sins of his people and their rulers from the very beginning of their national history, and he appealed humbly to God for His mercy. Ezra and Nehemiah prayed on similar lines, each in the ninth chapter of his book. If these Old Testament saints could look back over 600 years of their people's history, and confess their sins as their own, what have we to say concerning 1900 years of disobedience and unfaithfulness in the Church of God? Have we no responsibility concerning what lies behind us! Or are we so enslaved by denominational interests, and by the interests of "local assemblies, “ that larger thoughts are quite foreign to our minds!

If we would be useful to God in these last days, we must train our souls to look at things from God's point of view. The deep spiritual feelings of men of old are a rebuke to us. for these are days of shallowness and superficiality. Daniel, when told of judgements yet to come (Daniel 7:1-28) says "my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me"; when further

solemn things were made known to him, in his eighth chapter, he says, "I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days"; and in Daniel 10:1-21, When in prayer to God about His unhappy people, he mourned three full weeks, he ate no pleasant bread, neither flesh nor wine entered his mouth, neither did he anoint himself. Such deep spiritual exercise is well-pleasing to God; but are we up to it! In the light of what the Spirit has written concerning Elijah, Moses, Samuel, Daniel, Paul, Epaphras, and others, we may well ask ourselves. Have we yet learned how to pray!

The Great Drought

It delights God as Creator and Governor of the universe, to lavish His bounties upon men, spite of their unworthiness and ingratitude. "Jehovah is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works"(Psalms 145:9). The Lord Jesus, when bidding His disciples to love their enemies, said, “that ye may be the sons of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust"(Matthew 5:45). When the foolish pagans of Lystra desired to offer sacrifices to Barnabas and Paul as gods come down to earth in the likeness of men. these faithful men ran in amongst them, and bore testimony to the one true God. Of Him they said, "He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave you rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). The regularity of the seasons, as they come and go, are the abiding evidences of God's gracious interest in His creatures. Faith, perceiving this, cries out: "O Jehovah. how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches" (Psalms 105:24). What then does it mean When He forbids showers to fall, or the sun to shine!

It was doubtless with a heavy heart that Elijah turned away from the King's palace after the delivery of his heavy message, and went into retirement. He certainly did not desire the ruin of the nation. Had there been prompt repentance, so that the threatened stroke might be averted, his heart would have danced for joy. In this he was unlike Jonah, to whom the repentance of a threatened people was a real annoyance! (Jonah 4:1). It touched his dignity that he should have uttered a sentence which a merciful God did not execute!

What a God is ours! Oh, the grace that He has revealed to us in the Gospel of His Son! The heart of God is filled with joy, and all heaven shares His joy. when even an individual sinner humbles Himself in true repentance before Him. Surely we have all tasted the grace that pardons, cleanses, and reconciles all in virtue of the precious blood of Christ!

Before the children of Israel moved away from Mount Sinai Jehovah had a plain talk with them about their future. Leviticus 26:1-46 : should be read. "If ye walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments, and do them; then I will give you rain in due season. and the land shall yield her increase. and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely (Leviticus 26:3-5). This would be prosperity indeed! "But if ye will not hearken unto Me, and will not do all these commandments; and if ye shall despise My statutes....I will do this unto you....I will break the pride of your power: and I will make your heaven as iron and your earth as brass: and your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits"(Leviticus 26:14, Leviticus 26:16, Leviticus 26:19-20) Nearly forty years later. Jehovah addressed the new generation in similar terms but even more solemnly, and at greater length Read Deuteronomy 28:1-68. Every blessing

should be theirs in the land to which they were going, and they would be the envy of the surrounding nations, if they would hearken diligently unto the voice of Jehovah their God, to observe and to do all His commandments (Deuteronomy 10:1). "But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of Jehovah thy God to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes, then heaven that is over thy head shall be brass. and the earth that is under thee shall be iron" (Deuteronomy 28:15-24). No word could be plainer. With these words ringing in their ears as it were, Israel's tribes entered the good land. It is a blessed thing to be in relationship with God, but it is also very solemn. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2) The nearer to God the more severe the discipline. In Elijah's day Jehovah still recognised the people as His own although they (the ten tribes) no longer recognised Him as their God Hence the judgement of the great drought, while other nations as idolatrous and vile as Israel, were not smitten thus. So now "the time is come that judgement must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17). Those who profess to own the lordship, of Christ are therefore amenable to special divine discipline. There were doubtless many liars in Jerusalem in the days of Ananias and Sapphira, but none were specially singled out for the judgement of God, but these who knew His will (Acts 5:1-42). Many ill-behaved Corinthians were made sick, and some even died, while there were almost certainly persons in the same city (as men would judge) guilty of more and graver transgressions, yet they were suffered to live! Solemn thoughts these for us all! But the Apostle adds: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Corinthians 11:30-32). The world's judgement is sure; every sin will be remembered even the secrets of men's hearts will be laid bare; but from all that the grace of God has exempted those who believe. Our judgement under His governing hand, is here and now. (Cp. 1 Peter 1:17).

When Solomon led Israel in prayer at the dedication of the temple he thought of every kind of trouble which might come upon the people in the future, including the stoppage of the rain. "When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess Thy name, and turn from their sin because Thou afflictest them: then hear Thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of Thy servants and of Thy people Israel, when Thou teachest them the good way in which they should walk, and give rain upon Thy land. which Thou hast given to Thy people for an inheritance" (1 Kings 8:35-36). Mark the words, "if they pray towards this place. “ Israel did nothing of the kind in Elijah's day. Their hearts were stubborn; there was no sense of guilt; and they were in no mood for humiliations before God. As for His loved centre, they had definitely turned their backs upon it. Bethel and Dan with their golden calves, were more to the taste of Ahab's followers than Zion where Jehovah dwelt in the midst of His people. with the atoning blood ever upon the mercy seat under His holy eye.

What a contrast between the happy condition of the people in the early days of Solomon's reign and in the reign of Ahab and Jezebel! In Solomon's day "Judah and Israel were many, as the sand is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry" (1 Kings 4:20). In Ahab's day, a consuming drought for three years and six months! Who can imagine the conditions of the country, and the privations of the people. It gives God no pleasure to smite the children of men, whoever they may be, nor does it please Him to blight the landscape. The Son of God, when upon earth, said, "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Luke 12:27). In His gracious

condescension, He could take notice of one of the humblest of flowers, and draw attention to its simple beauty, which, being divine handiwork, was more lovely in His sight than the man made robes of Israel's wealthiest king. As we write, vast areas in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere are in an appalling condition of devastation as the result of men's sin and folly. If men in their hardness of heart do not feel the grievousness of all this. God does.

Blessed be His name, He will change everything: at the appointed hour. The public manifestation of Christ, accompanied by the "many sons, “ will introduce earth's jubilee (Romans 8:19). Then "the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing....in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert" (Isaiah 35:1-2, Isaiah 35:6). "There shall be abundance of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon; and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth"(Psalms 122:1-6).

Lord, Lord, Thy fair creation groans;

The earth, the air, the sea,

In unison with all our hearts,

And calls aloud for Thee.

(Sir Edward Denny).

Until He comes and men with one accord, humbly acknowledge Him all schemes of reconstruction are in vain. The diligent builders of to day will be the mad destroyers of to-morrow! There is a driving force behind men of which they are but little conscious. They speak and write of the futility of war yet spend time, energy, and wealth in preparation for and in the prosecution of it! Surely Satan, the malign and astute deceiver and destroyer, laughs at his dupes! Yet the multitudes prefer him to the Christ of God! When our blessed Lord was here, and cast a legion of demons out of a desperate man who was the terror of the district, "the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought Him to depart from them" (Luke 8:37). Apparently not a single voice was raised in gratitude to Him for the immense benefit He had conferred Upon the neighbourhood, and none desired Him to remain! This is still the attitude of benighted man: no God, no Christ! Thus slaughter and devastation continue, becoming ever more serious.

Not many years after the apostate ten tribes had been carried away into captivity (for they learned no permanent lesson from the heavy divine visitations of Elijah's day) the Southern Kingdom also was smitten with the dearth. How long it continued, we know not. But "Judah mourneth, and the gates thereof languish; they are black unto the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up. Their nobles have sent their servants to the waters: they came to the pits, and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty"(Jeremiah 14:1-22). The prophet goes on to describe the sufferings of both man and beast. The solemn feature of this infliction is that Jeremiah was forbidden to pray for the people. "Thus saith Jehovah unto this people. they have loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore Jehovah doth not accept them; He will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins. then said Jehovah unto me, "Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry. “ Jeremiah pleaded on their behalf that their prophets had. misled them; but Judah had been as willing to listen to false prophets as their

Northern brethren in the days of Ahab. "Then said Jehovah unto me, though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind could not be towards this people, cast them out of My sight. and let them go forth"(Jeremiah 15:1). Accordingly, all the tribes have been expelled from the good land which Jehovah in grace promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give them. It is a serious thing to turn away from the voice of God, and to refuse to learn the lessons of His chastening hand. Is the time near when it will be too late to pray for unfaithful Britain when not even the intercessions of a Moses or a Samuel will avail to avert ruin?

By the Brook Cherith

The wise man tells us "there is a time to keep silence. and a time to speak" (Ecclesiastes 3:7). Elijah had delivered his message in Ahab's court, and in due course be would speak for God to the nation and its idolatrous priests; in the meantime there was nothing to be said, the time of silence had come. The prophet's experience during his period of inactivity is as instructive to us as all his movements in public service; and we doubt not that Elijah reaped as much blessing in retirement by the brook Cherith as Moses did when he led Jethro's flock to the backside of the desert of Sinai (Exodus 3:1). Moses had been too hasty in his desire to deliver God's people Israel (Exodus 2:11-14). Doubtless during his forty years of quiet shepherd-service he learned the great lesson of dependence upon the wisdom and power of God. Forty years in God's school taught him that God has no use for fleshy energy in the carrying out of His purposes of love. Elijah had not been hasty; but, like Moses, his life was in peril. Both men must be divinely preserved for important services yet to be rendered.

Saul of Tarsus spent a season in Arabia soon after his conversion. When he learned the mighty truth that the despised Jesus is the Son of God, he preached Him in this character in the synagogues of Damascus (Acts 9:20). But he soon went away for a term of quietness in Arabia (Galatians 1:17). The wisdom of this is clear. The Lord's commission to him was very comprehensive in character; his teaching was to reach all classes, from the highest to the lowest; and his path would lie through much suffering (Acts 26:16-18; Acts 9:16). What a revolution was being wrought in his life! The bitter antagonist of Jesus was to be His foremost witness to men! A term of quietness, in which he could revolve these things in his mind in the presence of God, was most desirable. Saul was soon in danger, as Moses and Elijah before him, for the world will not tolerate a faithful witness for God.

The word of Jehovah came to Elijah saying, “Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan" (1 Kings 17:2-3). We first meet with the formula "the word of Jehovah" in Genesis 15:1-21, and there it occurs twice. Abram was being addressed. But whenever God is pleased to speak, He expects to be obeyed.

In every age, the Word of the Lord should alone direct the life of the believer. When Jesus was in the wilderness, and hungry after forty days abstinence from food, He absolutely refused the tempter's suggestion that He should turn stones into bread. There would be nothing morally wrong in doing so, and He unquestionably had the power to satisfy His need in that way; but there was something far more important to Him than "the bread that perisheth. “ It was the Word of God, and He had no direction from Him to do what the tempter suggested. The first man might set aside the Word of God in order to do his own will; the second Man would perpetrate no such folly. “He answered and said, it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that

proceedeth out of the mouth of God"(Matthew 4:4). Here is our perfect example. He lived daily according to this simple principle without wavering. When He came into the world. He said. "I delight to do Thy will; O My God, yea, Thy law is within My heart"(Psalms 40:8). As He moved up and down amongst earth's self-willed millions, He told them, “I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me"(John 6:38). When the cross lay just before Him, we hear Him saying in the darkness of Gethsemane, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless. not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). For this perfect obedience the Father loved Him (John 10:17).

The secret of a peaceful life is not submission to, but delight in the will of God. It should be to us "the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25). In response to the mercies of God, we should present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God. All thought of conformity to this world should be abandoned. We should seek to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, that we may prove by experience "the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2). If the Word of the Lord really controls us in our private lives, in our business transactions, and in our assembly associations, we shall "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being faithful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10). Self-will, and neglect of the Word of God, is responsible for many of our sorrows and mistakes in the various spheres in which we move.

Elijah's obedience to the word of the Lord comes before us in the sacred history, and we feel rebuked as we ponder it but, wonderful and devoted servant of Jehovah though he was, he broke down utterly when Jezebel's murderous threat reached him, and without any word from Jehovah, he ran for his life (1 Kings 19:1-21). How much better to have spread out the trouble before God in faith as Hezekiah spread out Rab-shakeh's blasphemous and angry words at a later date (Isaiah 37:1-38)

At the risk of being thought tedious, it seems desirable to say a little more about the will of God, and its bearing upon our lives. Same Christians who appear to be honest and sincere, nevertheless ask in bewildered tones how the will of God may be known, for they find it so difficult to ascertain it. None of us need expect God to speak to us in the same way as He spoke to Elijah. Such words as, “Hide thyself by the brook Cherith”; “Get thee to Zarephath"; and “show thyself unto Ahab” could not possibly be misunderstood God speaks to us now in the written Word. We are privileged to hold in our hands the complete revelation of God; moreover we have dwelling within us the Holy Spirit, who delights to guide willing minds into all truth. So full and complete are the Scriptures that there is something there to suit every circumstance in which any saint may be found at any time. But we must be at home in the book of God, or obviously we shall be at a serious disadvantage in the hour of need. The blessed Lord Jesus, when tempted by the Devil, know exactly where to put His finger upon the three passages in the book of Deuteronomy that suited His purpose. But in seeking guidance from God through the Scriptures we need not look for such injunctions as “Thou shalt not go to London on Monday." or “Thou shalt not smoke," or “Thou shalt not join a Co-operative Society." God does not deal with us as though we were infants but rather as intelligent persons, standing before Him in the dignity of sonship, and endued with the Holy Spirit. In many matters there are indeed plain commandments, and the Lord Jesus says, “He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me" (John 14:21); but much more frequently we learn the mind of God from the great principles of truth which we have

pondered, and stored up in our affections. Every department of Scripture truth — typical, historical, prophetical — contains important principles which are of immense value to the soul that desires to be altogether for God's pleasure in an evil world. Hence our Lord's words in John 14:23. “If a man love Me, he will keep My word". This goes far beyond keeping His commandments. A simple illustration may help here: — a child who truly loves his parents, and delights in their company, will know instinctively what will please them without being told in specific terms. In like manner, if we are walking humbly with God, with flesh judged, and with one simple desire, to know His will and to do it, the whole path will be clear. When our Lord declared His intention of going into Judea when Lazarus died, the disciples expressed their surprise, because they knew that there was conspiracy there against Him; but He replied, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him" (John 11:9-10). Having but one desire before Him — to do the Father's will, he did nothing for two days after He heard of the sickness of His friend; but having learned the Father's will, He went forward unhesitatingly. Practically, He was walking in broad day-light, and thus every step was clear. So will it be with us if we "walk as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

When we seek guidance from God about any matter, and He delays to give it, let us remain where we are and do nothing, as the Lord Jesus did in John 11:6. The opposite of this is seen in the Jewish captains who asked Jeremiah to seek guidance for them from Jehovah when they had already made up their minds to go down into Egypt. This story of flagrant hypocrisy is written in Jeremiah 42:1-22, and should be read carefully by everyone.

Elijah's experience should be a real help to true hearts. He went to Cherith by the word of the Lord, and there he remained until he received further instructions. The water of the brook became less and less as the days passed and the drought continued; but he waited. in faith, assured that the One who sent him there had not forgotten him. In due time a fresh word came, and he moved away to Zarephath. Elijah's God is our God; but with this difference-we know Him as Elijah could not know Him; to us He is Father, blessedly revealed as such in the Son of His love. Let us trust Him fully.

We must linger a little longer by the brook Cherith, and examine yet further Jehovah's dealings with His servant. Note the words, “I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. “This sufficed for every need. Whatever the conditions around, the unprecedented barrenness, Elijah would not starve, for no word of God can ever fall to the ground. The alarm of the disciples when upon the stormy lake was groundless, for the Lord had said, “Let us pass over unto the other side" (Mark 4:35). There could be no doubt about the issue of the voyage with such a One on board; He had spoken, therefore “the other side” was sure.

The path of obedience is the path of sufficiency. The disciples were without food in John 21:5 because they were acting in self-will. Instead of waiting patiently in Galilee until the Lord came to them as He had appointed (Matthew 26:32), Peter said, “I go a-fishing," and his companions responded, “We also go with thee." A whole night of toil yielded nothing but disappointment. Jehovah's word to Elijah concerning Cherith was, "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." He was not left to choose his own hiding place. Jehovah chose for him. and there his need was met. If we are sure we are where the Lord wants us, we need have no fear.

It is interesting to observe in the Bible history how obedient the humblest creatures can be to God in contrast with rebellious man. — the milch kine who went straight to Beth-shemesh with the ark of God, although their calves were at home, is an example of this. The pagan Philistines were impressed with it, and they acknowledged the hand of the God of Israel (1 Samuel 6:1-21). Another example is seen in the untrained colt who willingly bore the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem amidst tumultuous crowds (Luke 19:35). The ravens were carnivorous birds, yet they carried bread and flesh to Elijah daily. In Luke 12:24, the Lord Jesus expressly mentioned these unclean creatures as objects of divine care.

How blessed it is to have to do with One who is “Lord of heaven and earth" (Matthew 11:25), and who thus has all things at His command! The food reached Elijah regularly; the same God who provided manna every day for Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 16:1-36) sent the ravens to Elijah with "bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening, and he drank of the brook. “Our God loves regularity. Unpunctuality and disorderly ways do not please Him. the, the Lord fed five thousand men besides women and children, He commanded them to sit down "in ranks by hundreds and by fifties." (Mark 6:40). If any reader is disposed to be unpunctual and slovenly, these facts should be remembered.

We have to think of Elijah as being lonely for perhaps several months. Those were not days of pocket Bibles, nor of magazines, nor of expository works; and we have no reason to believe that the prophet saw a human face all the time he sojourned at Cherith, but he had GOD! Should we be satisfied to have no one to speak to but God? What days and weeks of quiet reflection! What opportunities for prayer, for himself, and for his disobedient and suffering nation! How absolutely were all the discordant sounds of earth excluded!

The times become increasingly restless, and the children of God are more or less affected by the influences around them. Newspaper reading, and "listening in" are the settled habits of many, to their spiritual hurt. One shudders to hear a large Conference gathering sing with fervour —

"Oh the pure delight of a single hour

Which before Thy throne I spend,

When I kneel in prayer, and with Thee, my God,

I commune as friend with friend!"

The question naturally arises. How many of these people have ever spent a single hour at the throne of grace? Yet their words imply that it is their custom so to do! Do they all devote even a few minutes daily to Scripture reading and prayer in the home? Brethren, let us watch against every form of unreality. It is possible to utter grievous falsehoods in the presence of God by means of a Hymn book!

David wrote in Psalms 4:8 : "1 will both lay me down in peace, and sleep, for Thou, Jehovah, although in solitude (R.V. margin) makest me dwell in safety." Elijah at Cherith could have said the same; no wild beast or other enemy could harm the lonely man who was there by the word of the Lord, and abiding under His watchful eye.

The Widow of Zarephath.

This Zidonian Woman is one of the outstanding characters in Bible history. Nearly a thousand years after her day, the Lord Jesus made public reference to her, without, however, revealing her name. But her name is as well known in heaven as that of the woman who put her two mites into Jehovah's treasury (Luke 21:2). In the coming day of recompense these widows will receive warm divine "commendation. “The widow of Zarephath will have a prophet's reward for her care of Elijah when his life was in danger (Matthew 10:41). All such deeds are carefully recorded by our appreciative God. Lovers of hospitality are very agreeable to Him; and when the Son of Man sits Upon the throne of His glory, as in Matthew 25:31-46 He will praise to the uttermost those who have been kind to His needy messengers. What joy it will give to those hospitable folk to hear His voice, and what honour to be commended before the hosts of angels who will surround the throne of the King of Kings on that great day! Earth has witnessed many wonderful sights, but has seen nothing yet to be compared with the majesty described by our Lord Himself in Matthew 25:1-46.

It is not given to angels to lodge the servants of their Lord, although they may, and do, care for them in other ways. If we cannot now prepare a meal for the Lord Himself as Martha did, we can perhaps prepare one for some hungry man Who seeks to serve Him in the Gospel of His grace. Such messengers are described in 2 Corinthians 8:23, as "the glory of Christ." "We therefore ought to receive such," writes the Apostle John to his friend Gaius, "that we may be fellow helpers to the truth" (3 John 1:8). Dear Christian retailer, open your doors wide to those who go forth in the Lord's name, and be assured that He regards loving attentions to them as done to Himself. Do not compel the preacher to say on his return home, "They received me as an angel of God. It never occurred to them that I needed food!"

To return to our Lord's public reference to the widow of Zarephath. When He stood up in the synagogue in Nazareth, and read Isaiah 61:1-2, telling the people that this Scripture was being fulfilled amongst them by His presence, they presently said contemptuously, "Is not this Joseph's son!" The Lord warned them that such unbelief would drive the blessing of God elsewhere, and He forthwith reminded them of two notable instances when the blessing of God reached Gentiles to the passing by of the seed of Abraham. Naaman the Syrian was cleansed from his leprosy at a time when there were many lepers in Israel who had not the faith to seek healing from God. Also — and the Lord was very full about this case — "I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow" (Luke 4:25-26). The Lord's way of stating the case suggests that it was a great honour that was put upon the Gentile widow; and the sequel proved that she received rich blessing from the God of Israel in one of the darkest periods of Israel's history. This being true, Elijah has been justly called "the first apostle to the Gentiles." But our Lord's mention of the widow and of Naaman in the synagogue of Nazareth only aroused the anger of the people, and they forthwith sought to kill Him. The very suggestion that God would take any notice of Gentiles (unless to destroy them) was anathema to them. Even the prophet Jonah to some extent felt similarly.

Jehovah's instructions to Elijah at this juncture demand careful attention: they were most extraordinary, and Elijah was probably surprised when he received this fresh communication from God. He had waited patiently at Cherith until the brook dried up, confident that Jehovah would remember his need in good time. Here is the fresh word of the Lord to him: "Arise and get thee to

Zarephath which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there; behold, I have commanded a widow woman to sustain thee" (1 Kings 17:9). Our God is not always pleased to explain Himself, but He expects His saints to trust Him. Philip was called away from a great work in Samaria to go down to a desert place (Acts 7:26, As an obedient servant "he arose and went. “It is not that our God resents a humble inquiry from a perplexed messenger. Ananias of Damascus was startled to be told to call upon a man called Saul of Tarsus, and he said: “Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to Thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy name" (Acts 9:13-14). This was no spirit of rebellion in Ananias; he was just surprised and perplexed, and quite frankly said so to his Lord, who answered him very graciously. What a Lord is ours! What a contrast to the petty tyrants of earth!

Elijah, when he received his instructions from Jehovah, "arose, and went to Zarephath. “ He asked no questions, and made no difficulties: but surely thoughts arose in his mind! Jehovah expressly said that Zarephath "belonged to Zidon. “ He was thus sending His servant outside Israel's land for bread! When Abram went down into Egypt in a time of famine, he did wrong, and nothing but trouble came out of it (Genesis 12:10). When Elimelech and Naomi, with their family, went into Moab in another time of famine, they also did wrong. and they all suffered deeply for it (Rth_1:1-5). On the other hand, when the Shunammite woman with whom Elisha had to do, went with her household into the land of the Philistines when bread was lacking in Israel, she did right, for she had a "thus saith the Lord" for the step that she took (2 Kings 8:1-2).

In Elijah's case, Jehovah was not merely sending him out of Israel's land, He was sending him into the kingdom of Jezebel's father. Israel's calamities throughout Ahab's reign proceeded principally from Zidon. This is the more remarkable when we go back somewhat in Scripture. Zidon — "called great Zidon" — was a part of the promise to Abraham, and at the time of Joshua's conquest, was actually allotted to Asher, but Asher never had sufficient faith and energy to extirpate the evils which had their seat there, and take possession of the city. Judges 1:1-36 is a miserable chapter of slothfulness and indifference; and Asher is specially mentioned in Judges 1:31-32 as having failed to drive the Amorites out of Zidon, and various other cities. (Read also Joshua 11:8 and Joshua 19:28). Let us not miss the lesson of Asher's failure. If we do not in faith get the mastery over evils within ourselves, they will acquire terrible influence over us as the years pass.

Moreover, Jehovah said to Elijah, “I have commanded a widow woman to sustain thee." We are accustomed to think of widows as needy persons who should be compassionately cared for by others. Yet Elijah was deliberately told by his God to place himself under a widow's care! The prophet's national instincts would be against going into a Gentile area; his religious instincts would lead him to abhor a hot bed of Baal-worship; and his manly instincts would cause him to shrink from being a burden upon a widow! But all who desire to serve the Lord acceptably in any age must of all things learn to be obedient. His servants must go where He sends; do what He bids; and deliver the messages that He gives them. Paul wrought in the spirit of this; and at a time when the dealings of God with him in service were somewhat strange, he said; "Thanks be unto God, who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place (2 Corinthians 2:14). He felt that he was just a captive in the Lord's hands, being led hither and thither as seemed good in His sight; but the chains were chains of love, and all the leadings were in perfect wisdom. So long as he was unto God a sweet savour of Christ, it mattered nothing to him what form the service might take, nor where that service might be rendered. Troas,

Corinth — all were alike to him if it was the will of God. But oh, the grace that can transform a ravening wolf into "a sweet savour of Christ!"

"To God be the glory;

Great things He hath done!"

The Meal and The Oil

Wherever the brook Cherith may have been (and the locality has not been satisfactorily identified), Elijah must have traversed many miles of country roads before he reached Zarephath. He would thus see for himself some of the havoc wrought by the drought. He could not have said with the Psalmist: "the pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing" (Psalms 65:13). Instead, he would see barren fields, leafless trees. and dry water-courses. The prophet might have said with Joel: "how do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture: yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate" (Ch. 1:18). As one who loved the people, Elijah could do no other than lament to see such conditions in the land of Jehovah's choice, of which He said a little before the conquest: "it is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: a land which Jehovah thy God careth for: the eyes of Jehovah thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year" (Deuteronomy 11:11-12). But sin always yields bitter consequences. Let us beware lest we fall in some way under the disciplinary hand of God.

As Elijah drew near to Zarephath he would naturally wonder with whom he was to lodge. He had been given no address, and there were probably many widows in the place! How should he find the right one. Presently, he saw a woman gathering sticks. Did he speak to God in silent prayer as Nehemiah did? (Nehemiah 2:4). This is a holy habit that we should all cultivate at every stage of our wilderness journey. (A beautiful example of pious exercise will be found in Genesis 24:42-48). Did Jehovah indicate His will to Elijah as He did to Samuel in the house of Jesse! Samuel was sent there to anoint a king over Israel. All Jesse's five sons passed. before him, but the prophet had to say, "Jehovah hath not chosen these"; then, when the unthought-of David was fetched in from the fields, Jehovah said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he" (1 Samuel 16:1-12).

When Elijah found himself face to face with the widow of whom Jehovah had told him, he asked her for a drink of water, much in the same way as the Lord Jesus asked a drink from the woman of Samaria. As the widow turned to fetch it, he said, "Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand." This request brought out the woman's destitute condition. She said, "As Jehovah thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse; and, behold, I am gathering two sticks that I may go in and dress it for me and my son that we may eat it, and die" (1 Kings 17:12). Truly, a pitiful story! It will be observed that she brought in the name of Jehovah. This is wonderful! While the foolish people of Israel were turning their backs upon the one true God, preferring the false gods of the Zidonians. we have a woman who, in spite of the unholy influences around her, believed that Israel's Jehovah was the true God. In this she reminds us of Rahab (Joshua 2:9-11). It is important to remind ourselves that, although God has never at any time entered into covenant-relationship with any nation but Israel, He has always had true saints (individuals) elsewhere. Peter was constrained to acknowledge this as he entered into the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:34-35). But the widow's faith at the time of Elijah's arrival was very

low. She did not say "my God," as Paul in Php_4:19. Her heart was indeed towards Jehovah (no other god had any place with her); but possibly she felt that He had quite forgotten her! Her language was that of despair; she was about to make her last cake; then she and her son would lie down and die!

When God's governmental hand lies upon any nation, His own saints have to share, at least in measure, the circumstances of the ungodly, whose evil has brought down the stroke; but God's saints may always have the sweet assurance that He cares for them, that His eye is upon every one, and He will not suffer any of His children to be tried beyond what they are able (1 Corinthians 10:13). Thus, while others perhaps writhe and even curse under the hand of God, His own exercised children learn valuable lessons, and get much blessing out of adversity.

How true is the saying, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity!" Great blessings were now to be enjoyed in the widow's home. She will remember throughout Eternity Jehovah's dealings with her, and the story of those dealings has been a stimulus to the faith of God's saints for well-nigh three thousand years.

Elijah said to her: "Fear not (oh, how blessed are God's Fear-nots!): go and do as thou hast said; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son." If the prophet had said no more than this, his words would have sounded heartless and selfish. With only enough meal left to make one cake, he asked her to make him one first! The word "first" should, of course, be noted. Elijah stood before the woman as the representative of the Great God, and his request really meant that she was to put God first, even at this grave crisis in her life. The Lord Jesus taught this in Matthew 6:33; and when a man once asked Him to let him "first" go and bury his father, He rebuked such an attitude towards His call (Luke 9:59). God must stand first with every one of us, and where He has His rightful place in the affections and lives of His saints, blessing is sure.

Now let us examine what Elijah's apparently strange request was founded upon. He gave the poor widow a direct and definite message from God. "Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, the meal in the barrel shall not waste, neither shall the oil in the cruse fail, until the day that Jehovah sendeth rain upon the earth" (1 Kings 17:14). He who pledged Jehovah for judgement with Ahab, now pledged Him for blessing with the widow. Her flagging faith promptly responded, "and she went and did according to the saying of Elijah"; i.e. she made first a cake for him: and then found to her delight that there was sufficient meal in the barrel to make another cake for herself and for her son. She found God true to His word, and for a whole year the household of three was thus divinely fed. We need not suppose that either the barrel or the cruse ever filled up. She would probably be always working on the bottom; but day after day there was sufficiency for them all.

On the principle of Hebrews 13:5-6 we are entitled to build our own expectations upon the word of Jehovah to the widow of Zarephath. In Hebrews 13:5. the writer quotes words addressed to Joshua (Joshua 1:5). "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"; hands them on, as it were to us; and then encourages the Christian to boldly say, 'the Lord is my helper. and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." He who was faithful to Joshua, the military commander with great responsibilities resting upon him. and who was faithful to the widow and her child, can be trusted to be faithful to us also.

One verse from God sufficed at Zarephath. Without hesitation the hungry woman acted upon it. She proved God's word true; and it is always true. We must pause here and take account of ourselves. We have, what the widow had not. the whole Word of God. It is said that in the English Bible there are 31,173 verses. What spiritual wealth! There are messages from God for our souls in every direction; but have we appropriated them. Are we feeding upon faithfulness. (Psalms 37:3 R.V.). Saints of earlier ages really put us to shame. They had so few words from God; but how much they were to them! The whole of Psalms 119:1-176 might well be pondered in proof of this. The widow of Zarephath gave her all on the strength of one verse from God; Abram in Genesis 15:5 built all his hopes on five words from God — "so shall thy seed be"; Matthew surrendered all on the authority of two words "Follow Me" — from the lips of the Lord Jesus; and Peter risked his life at the sound of one word — "Come" — from the same blessed lips. (Matthew 9:9; Matthew 14:29). Peter jumped out of the boat and walked upon the sea, feeling that he would be as safe there as on the fish quay in Capernaum; and he would never have even begun to sink had he not turned his eyes away from the Lord. and looked at the wind and the waves.

How painfully we limit our God! It is true that He is able to do "exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think"; but let no reader of these pages follow the bad example of careless persons who intrude a "can" into the middle of Ephesians 3:20. We can ask larger things than we do ask. and we could think higher thoughts than we do think. if only our faith were more simple and active. But while all this is true, we must be careful to take note of dispensational distinctions in our handling of the Word of God. As a Heavenly people. we must not apply to ourselves words than can only properly apply to an earthly people. For example in Psalms 37:11 we read: "the meek shall inherit the earth." This is blessing true for a faithful Israelite, but no follower of Christ in His rejection need expect to become a great landowner if he cultivates meekness. for it simply won't happen!

We may picture to ourselves a happy contented household in Zarephath. The meal and the oil failed not, and the woman and her son had the benefit of Elijah's profitable conversations and of his prayers. There was no home on earth more divinely favoured at that time. The food is suggestive of that which nourishes the souls of the saints today; the meal speaks of Christ, and the oil of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's ministry of Christ through the written word keeps God's saints well nourished and happy in the midst of a discontented and unhappy world.

Dear Christian readers. do not neglect your food, your spiritual food. Let your very countenances show, as in the case of Daniel and his three friends, that the will of God is good and that its results are satisfying. Let it be clear and unmistakable that those who walk with God have an infinitely better portion than those who love the present world.

Until the Day.

The household in Zarephath was sustained by the temporal mercies of God, which never failed; but also their hearts were sustained by the hope which He set before them. Let us look again at the message of Jehovah to the widow: "Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, the meal in the barrel shall not waste, neither shall the oil in the cruse fail, until the day that Jehovah sendeth rain upon the earth" (1 Kings 17:14). Mark the words, "until the day" — words from the very, heart of a faithful God, who would give deliverance and blessing in His season. The fields were not always to be scorched, nor the trees fruitless, nor the streams dry. It was Jehovah's gracious intention to reverse these disastrous conditions, and grant once more a happy blend of sunshine and showers

which would make "the field joyful and all that is therein" (Psalms 104:12). However unbelieving might be the multitudes around them, the little group in the cottage would cherish the words of God, and wait in faith for Him to act in goodness by His almighty power.

What a picture we have here of our own position today as believers in the Lord Jesus! The world is in a sorry plight: vast regions have been blighted by the ravages of war; and famine and pestilence deepen the misery. The conditions are beyond the wisdom and power of man to correct; and yet there is HOPE. In God's word — in both Old and New Testaments — we meet frequently with the words "the day." The context in almost every case will show that this gave confidence and strength to men of faith, both in Israel and in the Church. What is meant by "the day?" It refers to a point of time to which God has been looking forward through the ages when He will publicly intervene in the affairs of earth, and clear away everything that is offensive in His sight. and which has brought suffering to both man and beast.

We who believe in the Lord Jesus in this dispensation belong to the heavens-there our portion lies, and we look to see the Saviour as the Bright Morning Star before He shines forth in majesty as the Sun of Righteousness. Everyone will see the Sun (every eye shall see Him"); but only His waiting saints will see the Morning Star. We belong in spirit to the day now "we are all sons of the light, and sons of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness "(1 Thessalonians 5:5).

All that we see and hear around us which is so displeasing to God is also displeasing to us, for we have been born anew, and also have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. We feel that we are living and moving in an uncongenial atmosphere: but our hearts nevertheless go out towards men in all their sorrows. and we are glad to be assured by the Holy Spirit that "the creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty and glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:21).

"The day" so frequently referred to in Scripture does not mean a period of twenty-four hours. It covers the entire period of God's suppression of evil in order that He may establish peace and blessing. The heavenly places will first be cleared of rebels: we learn this from Isaiah 24:21, and Revelation 12:7-12: the clearance of earth will follow.

When God sent drought into Egypt He laid His whole plan before Joseph in advance. This Joseph communicated to Pharaoh. There were to be seven years of plenty before the seven years of drought. The pagan king was thus made to feel that the God of heaven was greater than all the gods of Egypt. They could neither foretell the circumstances, nor provide for them when they came (Genesis 41:1-57). But it did not please Jehovah to tell Elijah and the widow when the longed-for day would dawn. They waited in faith for Him to fulfil His word, and they were not disappointed. In God's gracious time everything around them would smile once more. Meanwhile, His "until the day" would ring in their ears, and rejoice their hearts. God's "untils" should be noted as we read the Word, for they suggest hope. He who has all things at His command tolerates evil 'until. “ Read Romans 11:25: Isaiah 32:15

God has not been pleased to tell us when the greatest of all days will open the turning point in the history of man and the earth: but we hear the Holy Spirit's words: "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand" (Romans 13:12) All God's ways from the moment sin came into the world have been leading onward to "the day" of which we speak The Man of God's purpose will act for Him. and He will do the will of God perfectly. Isaiah 24:1-23, Isaiah 25:1-12, Isaiah 26:1-21, Isaiah

27:1-13 have been called "Isaiah's little Apocalypse." It would do every reader good to lay down this book for an hour, and read those four chapters carefully. They speak of sorrow and judgments yet to come upon Israel and the nations, but they also speak of the healthy exercises of faith through which godly ones will pass, whose hope is in God, and who long for "the day."

Politicians may promise their people "a new and better world"; and they may be quite sincere in what they say. but the true remedy for all the ills of creation is in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. When He shines forth in glory, and all His saints with Him (all sinners saved by grace), Satan's malign rule over men will end, and the will of God will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. In the light of "the day," which will bring recompense and honour to all who serve loyally now, let us watch our steps, and labour with godly care: "for the day will declare" what manner of servants we have been here for God (1 Corinthians 3:13).

Hope of our hearts, O Lord, appear,

Thou glorious Star of day!

Shine forth, and chase the dreary night,

With all our tears, away.

(Sir Edward Denny).

The God of Resurrection.

After some time a dark cloud gathered over the home in Zarephath where God's goodness was daily experienced. where His word was honoured. and where doubtless the voice of prayer was daily heard. The only child of the woman fell sick and died! It was not a sudden death, thus there were days of deep anxiety for both the mother and her Prophet-guest. Remarkably, it was the only Son of a widow whom the Lord Jesus raised at the gate of Nain (Luke 7:12); it was an only child whom He raised in the house of Jairus (Luke 8:42); and it was an only brother whom He called out of the tomb in Bethany (John 11:1-57). This character of visitation. which seems to empty the home of its choicest, is always particularly painful; but while we remain here sickness and death are never very far away from God's saints as well as from others. When the Lord Jesus returns, everything will be changed. Martha was quite right when she said, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:21). Death cannot subsist in His presence. He is death's master. How blessed is the Christian's hope! "Behold, I show you a mystery. “says the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 15:51. This means that he was about to tell his readers something which had never been told before. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed. Then "death will be swallowed up in victory, “ and in the light of this hope, we can send forth the double challenge: "O death, where is thy sting! O death (not "O grave"), where is thy victory?"

The Lord Jesus set before Martha the power that resides in His person: "I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and he that liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die"(John 11:25-26 Whether the sorrowing woman to whom He addressed Himself understood Him or not, in the light of such a revelation as that in 1 Corinthians 15:1-58. His meaning is blessedly clear. As the Resurrection, He will raise all His sleeping saints

at His descent into the air: and as the Life, He will change the Mortal and corruptible bodies of His living ones, and will make them like His own body of glory (Phil. 3:22). These latter will never die at all. Romans 8:11 speaks of those whom the Lord will find at His return waiting for His coming: "if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies because of His Spirit that dwelleth in you. “From this wonderful passage we learn that one reason why believers will be changed at the Lord's coming is that our mortal bodies are the very habitation of the Holy Spirit. Thus they have a sacred character in the eyes of God. Death should not be an object of dread to the Christian; but it wore a different aspect to the saints who lived prior to our Lord's great victory. "Through fear of death they were all their lifetime subject to bondage"(Hebrews 2:15). Our position differs from theirs in that we are able to look back at the empty sepulchre of the Son of God, and then look up to the throne, and behold Him seated there, crowned with glory and honour. To John in Patmos, the Lord said, with His right hand laid upon His trembling servant: "Fear not; I am the First and the Last and the living One: and I became dead; and behold, I am living to the ages of ages, and have the keys of death and Hades" (Revelation 1:17-18 — Darby's Translation). Having to do with such a One, we are consciously on the side of victory. "Death is yours, “ wrote the Apostle exultingly to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3:22); and to the Romans he wrote that nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even death! (Romans 8:38).

The home in Zarephath was probably quiet and peaceful for many weeks. There was sufficiency there, and a sense of Jehovah's special interest and care. Then suddenly the cloud arose. Sickness entered the home which terminated in the death of the widow's only child. How many homes of believers in the Lord Jesus have had the same painful experience! How often have we said at the throne of grace, "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick"; then perhaps later we have been constrained to say through our tears, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here . . . !"

Sickness and death are frequently used by the Lord in a disciplinary way: and perhaps these things have more frequently this character than our dull hearts realize. Certainly. some of the Corinthian saints experienced this; their careless ways brought down the hand of the Lord upon them. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you. and many sleep"(1 Corinthians 11:30). These things being true we need spiritual discernment in praying for a sick fellow-Christian. "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give life for them that sin not unto death. There is sin unto death: I do not say that he should pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin; and there is sin not unto death" (1 John 5:16-17). Sometimes perplexed souls ask, “what is the particular sin that is unto death?" No particular sin at all. Two brethren possibly may err in the same way, yet the Lord, taking into account all the circumstances, may lay one upon a sick bed, and take the other out of the world. There is no question of the salvation of the soul in these dealings; it is divine chastening. But “if we would judge ourselves. we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Corinthians 11:31-32). The latter would be eternal damnation, which can never be the portion of even the most faulty believer in the Lord Jesus.

We need to exercise ourselves more than perhaps we do with reference to sickness. We are too ready when trouble comes, to send for the physician; and also when a fellow- Christian falls sick, to ask the Lord to heal him. Should we not, first, exercise our hearts and consciences before God, and enquire of Him why these things have come about? There are sometimes moral reasons why

we or our loved ones are laid low. The affliction may be preventive in character, as in the case of Job, or it may be corrective. In any case, exercise of heart and conscience before God is good and cannot fail to yield blessed results. Another has said: "As long as life flows quietly, and our daily needs are met, we may live with little exercise as to much that, in. God's sight, calls for self-judgement. But under the exercise of some special trial, conscience becomes active, the vision is cleared. and much that may have been wrong in the past in thoughts, words, habits and ways, is seen, dealt with, and judged in God's presence."

This exactly describes what happened at Zarephath. The stricken mother seemed to recognise at once that the hand of God was in the sickness and death of her child. "She said unto Elijah, what have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" (1 Kings 17:1-24, 1 Kings 18:1-46). Zarephath means "smelting furnace"; the woman was now experiencing its heat: but, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who only got rid of encumbrances (bands) in the fire, this woman emerged from the affliction a happier soul, and with a fuller knowledge of God. There was evidently something in her past life, or in her innermost soul at that very moment which she was seeking to cover. but God in His goodness to her brought it out into the light in His own way.

"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,

My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply:

The flame shall not hurt thee: I only design

Thy dross to consume. and thy gold to refine."

G. Keith.

Elijah felt the position. He realized that his coming into the house had something to do with this blow. He said to the mother, “Give my thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into an upper chamber, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed. "There is a suggestion of tender feeling in his prayer to God. This stern man who could face an angry king and a wicked nation, and pronounce sentence of judgement felt deeply for this poor woman whom he had come to know, and whose heart was now very sore. The prophet spoke to Jehovah twice. In his first utterance, in which we think we discern tenderness, he said: "O Jehovah my God, hast Thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, in slaying her son?" Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, as if he would acknowledge that in himself he was as weak as he who was dead; then he spoke to Jehovah a second time, and we note that both in 1 Kings 17:20-21 the Holy Spirit says "he cried unto Jehovah." This word "cried" should never be lightly passed over in our reading of Scripture, for it expresses intense longing. Thus our Lord, 'at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, "stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink"(John 7:37). How He yearned over needy souls!

Such a prayer as Elijah uttered over the dead child, had probably never ascended to heaven before: "O Jehovah my God. I pray Thee. let this child's soul come into him again." Wonderful! There is no previous record in Scripture of any person, Jew or Gentile. old or young, ever having returned from the dead. Yet the prophet prayed thus! His faith was in advance of Abraham's on Mount Moriah. when he laid Isaac upon the altar "accounting that God was able to raise him up

from the dead: from whence also he received him in a figure" (Hebrews 11:19). Both Abraham and Elijah believed that nothing was impossible with God, and that even death would present no difficulty to Him; but it was one thing for Abraham to reckon that God could raise a lad from the dead, and quite another for Elijah to ask definitely that this great miracle might be wrought.

Be it observed that Elijah's prayer was brief and definite. Shall we not learn a lesson from this? Do we go to our prayer meetings with something definite before our minds? Or do we attend from mere force of habit (a good habit, admittedly), with minds unexercised and unprepared? If it be so, need we wonder that the dreary round of words to which we sometimes have to listen have no set purpose; and, in consequence lead nowhere? Prayer is sorely needed. shall we not seek to learn how to pray?

Jehovah heard and answered Elijah's brief prayer, “and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived." With calm dignity the prophet led the lad down from the upper chamber, and said to the mother, "See, thy son liveth." The woman's reply is arresting: "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of Jehovah in thy mouth is truth." We cannot but compare this with what the Shunammite woman said (to her husband) concerning Elisha: "Behold, now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God which passeth by us continually" (2 Kings 4:9). Elisha had sometimes, in the course of his travels, called at their home for a meal, and his deportment suggested the woman's remarks. But the Shunammite was on higher ground spiritually than the Zidonian in that she discerned in her visitor a man of God before any miracle was wrought; the Zidonian needed a miracle to lead her to that conclusion. But both women are included in God's gallery of witnesses in the words. "through faith... .women received their dead raised to life again"(Hebrews 11:35).

We must not leave this subject without reminding ourselves that me know God specifically as the God of resurrection. He has brought back from amongst the dead our Lord Jesus, "who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25). This secures every blessing for those who believe, and it reminds us also that our blessings lie outside this world altogether. We do not know "Christ after the flesh" (2 Corinthians 5:18): we know Him as risen and exalted to the right hand of God. God views us as risen with Christ, and would have us set our minds on things above, and not on things on the earth (Colossians 3:1-2). Paul the Apostle was so deeply impressed with this that he longed to know "the power of His resurrection" (Php_3:10). Probably no one ever knew this more than Paul; still, he longed to get a firmer grip of where the resurrection of Christ had set him that he might be wholly influenced by it day by day.

Obadiah.

Elijah's long rest at Zarephath was ended by a call from Jehovah to show himself to Ahab. because He was about to send rain upon the earth (1 Kings 18:1). When the prophet told the king that there should be neither dew nor rain but according to his word, he knew not how long the drought would continue. That was in the hands of Jehovah. Rut the drought was long, “for it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months" (James 5:17). When the rain at last came, it was in answer to Elijah's prayer, as in 1 Kings 18:42.

But matters were now to be brought to an issue. Jehovah was about to display His power, to the confusion of Ahab and all his idolatrous prophets. Such striking miracles, as the calling down fire

from heaven upon the sacrifice on Mount Carmel, and later upon the captains and their fifties (2 Kings 1:1-18) were not wrought in the kingdom of Judah. There Jehovah was still acknowledged, although some of the Kings were evil men, and led the people astray; but the prophets who witnessed there could at least appeal to the 'Word of God. In the Northern Kingdom another line was necessary. The people were in open apostasy; Jehovah was no longer acknowledged as the God of Israel. This being so, God who was still interested in His erring people ("how shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" Hosea 11:8) sometimes put forth His power, thus bringing home to the people that He is God, and mightier than all the deities of the heathen. Jehovah was now about to assert Himself on Mount Carmel, on an occasion that will be memorable as long as the earth remaineth.

When Elijah set out to find Ahab (no more fearing the wrath of the king than Moses before him (Hebrews 11:27), he first met Obadiah who was governor of the palace. The Holy Spirit records that "Obadiah feared Jehovah greatly. “ It is happy to note that this is stated before the story of Obadiah is unfolded. In like manner, the Lord Jesus commended all the good that He could see in the assemblies in Asia before rebuking that which was grievous in His sight (Revelation 2:3). Along this line we are frequently terribly lacking in our dealings with one another. That which is evil, or at least unsatisfactory, becomes so large in our eyes that we quite overlook that which is good in those who displease us. Of Barnabas it is written years after his failures as in Galatians 2:13 and Acts 15:37 : "he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (Acts 11:24).

It is written of Obadiah, that he "feared Jehovah greatly." The word "greatly" must not escape us; for God always notes degrees in the piety or activity of His saints. In Romans 16:12 we read of Tryphena and Tryphosa who laboured in the Lord, and also of the beloved Persis who laboured much in the Lord. In the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem after the return from the captivity, it is recorded of some that they "earnestly" repaired, and of some that they undertook a second piece of work (Nehemiah 3:20-24). It is encouraging to us to be reminded of these things, and we shall doubtless hear more about them at the Judgement seat of Christ.

There are some important lessons to be learned from the story of Obadiah; but first it may be well to compare him with some of his contemporaries. Elijah and Obadiah were both saints of God; so also were Micaiah the son of Imlah and Jehoshaphat King of Judah. We shall meet them all in the glory of God ere long, like ourselves, sinners saved by grace. These four men fall into two pairs, thus: — Elijah and Micaiah; Obadiah and Jehoshaphat. The first two were bold and Unflinching in their testimony. Ahab called Elijah "mine enemy"(1 Kings 21:20). and of Micaiah he said, "I hate him"(1 Kings 22:8). It is really a compliment to be disliked by the wicked. "Woe unto you, when all men speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26). Obadiah and Jehoshaphat were the opposite of Elijah and Micaiah. They were not bold and unflinching, but weak, and given to compromise for the sake of advantage. Ahab hated neither of these. for they were useful to him. The Lord Jesus once said to His Own unbelieving brethren, "the world cannot hate you: but Me it hateth. because I testify of it that its works are evil" (John 7:7). The Lord in His prayer to the Father in John 17:1-26 spoke of His disciples as loved by the Father, but hated by the world. The comfort of the one strengthens us to endure the painfulness of the other.

Obadiah had never learned the importance of separation from the world. Have we learned it? Are we true to our baptism? Do we regard ourselves as dead to sin and the world by the death of Christ? Have we really taken up our cross in. order to follow in the footsteps of the One whom the

world cast out and crucified! Have we indeed gone forth "to Him without the camp, bearing His reproach!" (Luke 11:23; Hebrews 13:13). There was much in Obadiah that was excellent. and the inspired historian tells us of it. When Ahab sought to destroy all the prophets of Jehovah. and thus stamp all divine testimony out of his dominions. Obadiah took a hundred of them, "and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water." He feared Jehovah, but was too timorous to confess Him. He sympathised with the hunted prophets, but lacked faith to identify himself with them in their sufferings. His kindness will doubtless be rewarded in the day of Christ: but God would have been better pleased had he stood with His servants instead of being content to patronise them. Moses forsook the honours and comforts of the king's palace, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God"(Hebrews 11:24-25). Obadiah chose to remain in the palace. and benefit the persecuted from thence. All the professing saints in Asia turned away from Paul when he fell into disgrace with the authorities for Christ's sake (2 Timothy 1:15). How should we stand in days of peril? In 2 Corinthians 6:1-18 we are definitely charged not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, but to come out from among them and be separate; and in Ephesians 5:11 we are instructed to " have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. “ Are we willing to take up a stand which may cost us something?

When Obadiah crossed the path of Elijah, he was not occupied with business for God. The land was doubtless full of stricken hearts; mothers knowing not how to nourish their children; and all in a condition of despair. What precious words of consolation he should have been able to take to them from the heart of God! Instead. he was searching the land for food for animals in order to preserve the royal stud! Ahab said to Obadiah: “Go through the land, to all the fountains of water and to all the torrents, perhaps we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive. so that we may not have to destroy some of our beasts" (1 Kings 18:5, Darby). Sorry words from the lips of Israel's king; paltry business for a God-fearing man to engage in! The divine ideal for a king is described in the Spirit-filled words of Asaph in Psalms 78:70-72 : “He chose David His servant. and took him from the sheepfolds: from following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob His people. and Israel His inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands." God's ideal king is thus neither selfish nor tyrannical; but a wise shepherd of the people, serving in the consciousness that the people belong to God, and that he, the king is just God's honoured servant in rule. In this spirit David prayed for the people when pestilence was raging. He pleaded with Jehovah to spare the sheep. and punish him instead (2 Samuel 24:17). None but the Lord Jesus have been perfect in shepherd-rule and of Him it is written: "He shall stand. and feed [His flock] in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the name of Jehovah His God; and they shall abide: for now shall He be great unto the ends of the earth" (Micah 5:4).

There is not a hint that Ahab cared for the suffering people, but he was troubled lest he should lose his horses and mules. So he arranged that he would go in one direction, and Obadiah in another. and find grass somewhere, if possible. The position was serious indeed when the king himself undertook the foraging!

In the pursuit of this humiliating business, Obadiah met Elijah. Using modern terms, the two men were brethren; but there was no cordial greeting, as when Moses met Aaron and kissed him (Exodus 4:27). Obadiah was troubled, and Elijah was cold and reserved. Although the one was an exalted Government official. and the other a humble villager, Obadiah trembled before Elijah; and

indeed he fell upon his face, saying, “Is it indeed thou, my lord Elijah? “Communion with God, and obedience to His will imparts moral dignity to anyone. We see this in Stephen when confronting the Jewish Sanhedrim: and in Paul when standing before royalty and political and military leaders in Caesarea (Acts 7:26 In each case the prisoner took full command of the situation! Obadiah lacked this. With all his honours and high salary, he felt that the man who stood before him in hairy clothing was his superior. Else, why should he address Elijah as "my lord?"'

When the prophet bade him go and tell his master, “Behold, Elijah is here," he was terrified. He feared his very life would be in danger. He poured out a veritable torrent of words to the prophet. First, he spoke of the danger to himself; then he told how Ahab had enquired of every known kingdom and nation concerning Elijah, determined to slay him if he could get hold of him. To mention the hated name to the furious king would stir his devilry to its depths. So Obadiah feared; and, as if begging to be excused carrying such a message, he pleaded his kindness to the prophets. "Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of Jehovah, how I hid a hundred of Jehovah's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water" It is suggestive of a low spiritual condition when any servant of God makes much of his own work. Paul says a good deal about his own labours and sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11:1-33 : It was the bad condition of things at Corinth that made it necessary, but he calls it "folly," nevertheless. But how wonderfully God works! We should never have known how varied and severe were the sufferings of the apostle, had not the story been wrung from him by the ill-behaved Corinthians. It does one good to read 2 Corinthians 11:1-33 it is a holy stimulus to our souls; but Paul and every other true-hearted labourer would infinitely rather speak of Christ — the glories of His person the perfection of His sacrifice, and the greatness of His triumph — than speak of his own work. and thus seem to be magnifying himself.

Going along with the world is injurious to the soul at all times. Thus Obadiah feared the wicked Ahab, Elijah did not: he humiliated himself before Elijah instead of greeting him warmly as a valuable witness for God and His truth; and, worse than all. he even hinted that the Holy Spirit might act unworthily! "It shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of Jehovah shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear Jehovah from my youth." Elijah was perfectly straight forward in the path that he was pursuing; he was charged by Jehovah to see Ahab. and he intended to do so. The Holy Spirit. who delights to guide the servants of God, would never lead him to be false to a divine commission.

Elijah's answer to Obadiah sounds like a rebuke. "As Jehovah liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself unto him today." Whatever Jehovah might be to Obadiah. He was a living God to the proscribed prophet; and he was standing — i.e. speaking and acting — in the consciousness of His presence.

Obadiah must have been far removed from Elijah's spirit to have been tolerated, and even honoured, for years in the royal circle. He must have kept his lips close sealed concerning his God, or the blood-thirsty Jezebel would have treated him as she treated the prophets. Obadiah could scarcely have said: —

"I'm not ashamed to own my Lord

Or to defend His cause. “

In Isaiah 59:15 we read: "Truth faileth, and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey. Obadiah was not quite willing to be a prey. In Jeremiah 15:19 he who would separate himself from the evil around is assured by God, “thou shalt stand before Me; and if thou know how to take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as My mouth." This is exceedingly precious: — nearness to God, and ability to give utterance to His mind to others. Obadiah, alas, knew nothing of this. What do we know of it?

Obadiah comes upon us in the Scriptures as abruptly as Elijah; but while the one passes off the sacred page abruptly (sixteen verses. and no more!) the other lingers in the mind of the sacred historians, and his service and testimony continue right onward to the great day of the Lord!

"God of all grace, mercifully preserve both writer and reader from becoming Obadiahs! The rather help us to become Elijahs. not indeed in fiery judgement, but in holy zeal for Thy Glory, and in stern separation from everything contrary to Thy will. Amen."

Prophet and King.

When Ahab learned that Elijah was in the neighbourhood, he did not hasten towards him with a "firing squad" (or whatever was the equivalent in those days); on the contrary, he approached him with a measure of deference. The wicked king had some sense of the greatness of God whose irresistible power His servant could wield. The whole country was suffering severely under the sentence pronounced by Elijah's lips. The people were proving that it is "an evil thing and bitter" to forsake Jehovah and worship other gods (Jeremiah 2:19). Ahab's son Ahaziah lacked even the measure of respect and dread that his father had for Elijah. He ventured to defy him and the power of God that was with him (2 Kings 1:1-18). But the results were very serious!

Ahab's greeting is very suggestive. "Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel!" (1 Kings 18:17 R.V.). We have here a clear illustration of how Satan beclouds the minds and perverts the judgement of men who believe not. There certainly was trouble in Israel; but apparently it did not occur to Ahab's mind to trace it to the idolatry which had spread everywhere. Temples, altars, prophets, and priests of an evil character covered the land. There was no disposition either in king or people to get down before Jehovah, and acknowledge the wickedness of all this, with the determination to put it all away. Accordingly, Ahab blamed the servant of God for the widespread distress. Had Satan not blinded his eyes he would have perceived that the fault lay with the king, not with the prophet.

When Paul and Silas went to Philippi there was insurrection against them, and it was said. “these men do exceedingly trouble our city" (Acts 16:20). But "these men" had carried into Philippi the Gospel of the Grace of God; they were telling men and women who were living in the darkness of Heathenism, and who were hastening to perdition, of the Saviour who died for the ungodly. They were putting immense blessings in the way of the people, all "without money and without price." They were proclaiming the true and only remedy for all creature ills. Those who received their words would become supremely happy, even as Paul himself was when he wrote his Epistle to the Philippians a few years later. No truer friends of the people ever visited the city, yet the preachers were charged before the magistrates with being troublers, and were forthwith flogged, and cast into prison!

At every period faithful witnesses for God and His truth are regarded as troublers. Men and women who are all wrong with God do not care to have facts set before them. They prefer to live undisturbed in a dreamland of their own. He who presses upon their attention the gravity of sin, and the reality of God's judgement of sin is a troubler. He disturbs their false peace and spoils their pleasures. Felix cut short his conversation with Paul when his words became very pointed (Acts 24:25). Yet no true preacher would speak only of sin and judgement; he would delight to go further, and tell of the one Mediator between God and men, who gave Himself a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Elijah, with divine bluntness, put the truth before the king. "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of Jehovah, and thou hast followed Baalim." Men who are willing to rebuke sin in high places are scarce. Nathan dealt faithfully with David (2 Samuel 12:31); and John the Baptist, every time he found himself in Herod's presence, put his finger upon the fatal spot saying. "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife" (Mark 4:18). It is said of the British king Charles II, — as vile a king as ever disgraced a throne that he was once offended with a Chaplain for his plain preaching. "I will thank you." said he, "to alter your manner of preaching." "So I will your Majesty," replied the Chaplain, "if you will alter your manner of living." This was as it should be. If in our own day there were religious leaders faithful enough to rebuke Dictators and others who are leading millions to ruin how good it would be. It is alas! too frequently the habit of professional clergy to accommodate their words to the wishes of the ruling powers. They thus become instruments in their hands for deceiving the people. Solemn thought!

The real trouble in Israel was not Elijah, but Ahab, and Ahab's own conscience must have felt that it was true. The prophet now made a proposal to the king. "Send and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred which eat at Jezebel's table" (2 Kings 18:19). Amazing, when we consider the relative position of the two men. Ahab — a powerful despot, with all the military resources of the kingdom at his disposal, backed too by a resolute and ruthless wife; now being virtually commanded by a feeble and friendless individual to convene a meeting of the nation! We have already remarked upon the moral dignity which communion with God imparts; we see it here again in Elijah the Tishbite. The condition of things throughout the country was desperate; it could not continue indefinitely; hence the king consented to Elijah's proposal for a meeting, the outcome of which he could not imagine, but he hoped there would soon be rain!

Prophet and People.

So the great meeting was arranged. "Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel" (1 Kings 18:20). The omission of any mention of Jezebel at this critical juncture is remarkable. We can only think of one gathering in the Holy Land more momentous in its results than that on Mount Carmel. All four Evangelists record a multitude gathered outside Pilate's palace in Jerusalem, led by the highest ecclesiastics of the nation. A great decision had to be made. Barabbas the robber, and the blessed Son of God, Israel's Messiah, were set before the people for their choice. "Not this man, but Barabbas," was their united cry. Yet that multitude were not Baal worshippers as those with whom Elijah had to do; they were the professed worshippers of Jehovah, and they regarded with abhorrence the idolatries of

their fathers! Yet they would not have Jehovah's Christ; a robber was more to their taste! Fatal decision, from which the blinded nation is suffering to this day. His blood be on us, and on our children," said they (Matthew 27:25); and the God of righteousness has held them to their word.

We borrow the words of another concerning the meeting on Mount Carmel. "There are few more sublime stories in history than this. On the one hand the solitary servant. of Jehovah, accompanied by his one attendant; with his wild shaggy hair, his scanty garb, and sheepskin cloak, but with calm dignity of demeanour and the minutest regularity of procedure, repairing the ruined altar of Jehovah with twelve stones, — on the other hand the eight hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and Ashtaroth, doubtless in all the splendour of their vestments, with the wild din of their vain repetitions and the maddened fury of their disappointed hopes, and the silent people surrounding all" (Dr. W. Smith). It is not quite certain that the prophets of Ashtaroth were present, possibly Jezebel was able to protect her own protégés, although the feeling amongst the people was too strong to allow her to prohibit the gathering altogether. Elijah wished the two hosts of misleaders to attend, but mention is only made of Baal's four hundred and fifty (1 Kings 18:19, 1 Kings 18:22, 1 Kings 18:40).

Elijah addressed himself to the people direct. When rulers transgress against God, and bring down His chastening hand, it is always the poor who suffer most. Probably Ahab and Jezebel had not been short of wine and meat during the famine; and false prophets can always be trusted to look well after themselves. So Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions! If Jehovah be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). This day must be a day of decision, and the people doubtless felt the reasonableness of what Elijah said. The nation was at that time divided into three classes: — there were hordes of evil religious leaders; there were at least a few thousand who were still true in heart to Jehovah (although did not seem to be aware of their existence): and there was the mass of the people who were apparently indifferent to what form religion might take, but they wanted rain! These three classes are represented today in the nations of Christendom. There are religious misleaders, some of whom, pompously describe themselves as "Higher Critics," who would destroy all faith in God and His Word; and others, ritualistically inclined, would. enslave the multitudes to the Italian clique in the Vatican. These two groups are largely responsible for the terrible disasters of our time. In contrast with these, God has in every land a pious remnant who love His Word, although perhaps they are not as outspoken in testimony as they should be. There then are the masses, who care nothing for religion. “ Christianity, Judaism, Mohammedanism, etc. are much alike to them; but they do not wish to be disturbed, and they cannot see why God should punish the nations for this condition of things. These people need to be brought to the point of decision. Is there a God; why not obey Him? Is there a Saviour; why not trust Him! To which of these three classes does the reader belong? Reader, is your mind. made up that the God of Heaven is the only true God: that the Lord Jesus, His beloved Son, is the only possible Saviour; and that His precious blood can alone cleanse from sin, and give you a title to eternal bliss!

Elijah spoke a second time to the people, again ignoring both king and prophets, and also any officials who may have been in attendance upon the king. His proposal was very simple: two bullocks were to be provided, one for Baal's four hundred and fifty prophets, and one for himself-Jehovah's solitary witness that day. (Where was Obadiah!). Each bullock was to be cut in pieces and laid on wood. with no fire under, and the prophets of Baal were to call upon the name of their

god. and Elijah would call upon the name of Jehovah; and the God that answered by fire was to be Israel's God. The people, well knowing that Baal was the reputed god of fire, said. "It is well spoken." To Elijah's appeal. "How long halt ye between two opinions?" they answered not a word; but the proposal to submit the great question to a trial by fire was so reasonable that "all the people answered and said. it is well spoken."

Elijah then turned to the prophets of Baal, and said, "Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first: for ye are many; and call on the name Of your gods, but put no fire under" (1 Kings 18:3-5). It was important to stress the last clause when dealing with unprincipled villains. Priestly "miracles" have a bad reputation for imposture. In the calmness of faith. Elijah could afford to allow the emissaries of Satan to move first, knowing quite well that the god they served had no power.

What a day it was! From morning until noon the prophets cried. "O Baal, answer us!" realising that for them everything was at stake. The silence of their deity threw them into a frenzy, and they leaped about the altar they had made "The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of men's hands They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not, they have ears, but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths They that make them are like unto them: so is every one that trusteth in them" (Psalms 135:15-18).

With the multitudes looking on, when noon came Elijah mocked the unhappy prophets. He suggested that they were not crying loudly enough; perhaps their god was occupied with other business. and could not attend to them; possibly he was away from home; or he might be asleep! Goaded by these taunts, the false prophets gashed themselves with swords and spears until their bodies streamed with blood! This unholy farce on the part of men made in the image of God was suffered to continue three hours longer.

At "the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice" Elijah judged that his opportunity had come. It was 3 p.m., and the evening lamb was being placed on the altar of Jehovah in Jerusalem, with its accompanying Meal offering and Drink offering, all speaking to God of Christ whose death at Calvary took place at that hour (Exodus 29:41; Matthew 27:46). It was the hour of divine blessing: compare Ezra 9:5; Daniel 9:21 The hour had struck for Elijah's sacrifice to be offered, and for the blessing which followed.

"Come near unto me." said Elijah to the people. so long led astray like foolish sheep. There is a sound of tenderness in the prophet's words. reminiscent of Joseph's invitation to his guilty and trembling brethren in Genesis 45:4. Elijah would soon now lead the poor misguided people back to their long-suffering: and faithful God. In their presence he repaired the long-dishonoured altar of Jehovah. He would teach them the true way of approach to God. If blessing was ever again to be enjoyed in Israel, it must be in virtue of the divinely accepted sacrifice. When the remnant returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel "they set the altar upon his bases for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto Jehovah, even built offerings morning and evening" (Ezra 3:2-3). In their weakness they felt the altar would be a better protection than walls and weapons. They were right, for the altar and sacrifices spoke to God of Christ, and God always responses to faith of that character.

Elijah built his altar of twelve stones "according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of Jehovah came, saying, Israel shall be thy name. “ This act is proof of the

prophet's spiritual perception. The twelve tribes were no longer walking in unity: their unity has not been restored to this day, nor will it be until the kingdom of the Lord Jesus (Ezekiel 37:21-23). Elijah was standing on ten tribe ground: but his twelve stones tell us that he entered into God's thoughts about His people. The people were still one in His mind. Although the temple in Jerusalem was now only recognised by two tribes, the High Priest still bore the names of all the children of Israel on his breast plate before Jehovah, and twelve loaves were still placed on the table of shewbread in the holy place (Exodus 28:29: Leviticus 24:5-8). Two centuries after the great gathering on Mount Carmel, Hezekiah, king of Judah, at the Passover that he held in Jerusalem commanded that atonement should be made for all Israel (2 Chronicles 29:24). Yet only two tribes acknowledged his sway, and the deportation of the Northern tribes had already begun! After the return from Babylon "the children of those that has been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel (Ezra 8:35) Six; centuries later still. James addressed an epistle "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting." All this was very precious to God. as showing that Elijah, Hezekiah Ezra, and James entered into His thoughts concerning His faulty people. Are we as spiritually intelligent today? As we look around us, we see Christ's members, not in two parts as Israel in the days of the kings, but in division almost innumerable. Do we sorrow about this before our God. and do we seek to contemplate His saints (however faulty they may be) as He contemplates them? Do we refuse to sanction this unholy confusion? Are we able to say in faith "there is one body and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling!" (Ephesians 4:4).

Elijah having built his altar. made a trench around it; and when he had laid his burnt sacrifice upon it, he commanded to pour four barrels of water over it. He repeated this three times. until the bullock and the wood were drenched, and the trench became a moat! He would thus appear to put every possible difficulty in the way that the impending miracle might be the more convincing. The prophets of Baal did not venture to use water thus, but Elijah used it freely. He then drew near and offered his simple prayer: "Jehovah. God of Abraham. Isaac. and of Israel. let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel. and that I am Thy servant. and that I have done all things at Thy word. Hear me. O Jehovah. hear me, that the people may know that Thou art the Lord God (Jehovah Elohim). and that Thou hast turned their heart back again" (1 Kings 18:36-37). It should be observed that the prophet sought no honour for himself (unlike Simon of Samaria who gave out that himself was some great one "Acts 8:9): he kept his true place as a mere servant acting at the Word of his God. Like Paul, he would have said, "I am nothing ' (2 Corinthians 12:11; 1 Corinthians 3:7). Do not miss the lesson, good reader!

Elijah proved the truth of Isaiah 65:24 : "it shall come to pass. that before they call, I will answer and while they are speaking, I will hear. “ Israel must wait for this blessed experience until the glorious age when — "the wolf and the lamb shall feed together." Elijah had it while facing a whole pack of wolves with teeth undrawn! It is good to have to do with God. His answer to the lonely man's prayer was prompt and decisive. "Then the fire of Jehovah fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench."

Let not the reader miss a word of this remarkable verse. The fire-the emblem of the righteous judgement of God might well have fallen upon the disobedient nation, or, passing by the nation, it

might have fallen upon Ahab and his hundreds of idolatrous prophets — all servants of the Devil; but it did nothing of the kind. The fire fell upon the unoffending bullock which Elijah had placed upon the altar! What a picture of the great sacrifice of Calvary! where the righteous judgement of God fell, not upon the wicked masses of men, nor even upon the unprincipled leaders who were primarily responsible for that cross being set up; the judgement of God in all its terrible severity fell upon the Holy One who hung there, so that He was constrained to cry. "My God. My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). That stupendous sacrifice. the full value of which is only known to God. has made blessing possible for sinners everywhere; and the first preachers of the Gospel were even commanded. to begin at Jerusalem with their proclamation of repentance and remission of sins in the Saviour's Name! (Luke 24:47). Faith sees Him now risen and glorified at God's right hand, clear proof that for Him, and for all who trust Him, the judgement of God is past for ever. The effect of the fire from heaven at Carmel was marvellous. "When all the people saw it. they fell on their faces: and they said, Jehovah, He is the God; Jehovah, He is the God." The great decision was made; and God, who is compassionate for nations as well as for individual sinners, could now grant blessing. The rain would soon descend!

But what about the prophets of Baal! They were not destroyed by the fire of God; there was thus, for a brief moment, a door open for repentance. Their exhausted and bleeding bodies were sufficient proof that Baal was worthless. He could do nothing for his most ardent votaries in their hour of peril. They stood publicly convicted of having practised fraud upon the people. Why did they not immediately fall upon their faces, and confess their-great sin before God and the nation! They did nothing of the kind; sullen and defiant, they stood upon the mountain in the presence of the people they had cruelly deceived for many years; and even the king's partiality for them could not now save them from destruction. In obedience to Deuteronomy 13:1-5 (which meant nothing to Ahab), Elijah commanded that all the prophets were to be arrested. Willing hands obeyed, and the whole ghastly host, four hundred and fifty in number, were led down to the brook Kishon, and slain. Have we learned to distinguish between the ways of God in different dispensations, from Moses until Christ was the age of law. Among other righteous enactments, death was the penalty for false teaching. It is otherwise in this day of grace. Those who would mislead souls concerning the fundamentals of the faith must be sternly rejected; even a widow and her children were admonished by John in his Second Epistle not to show such persons even the courtesies of life; but beyond this we have no authority to go. Rome has judged otherwise in her ignorance of divine grace, and blind disregard of the Word of God. Many a choice servant of Christ has been cruelly slaughtered under the pretence of getting rid of "dangerous heretics." When the servants in the parable of the tares in the wheat field enquired if they should gather up the tares, the Lord replied: "Nay: lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest" etc. (Matthew 13:20-30). Perhaps no words from our Lord's lips have been more generally misunderstood than these. They have frequently been quoted as a plea for retaining unsound persons in Church fellowship. But the Church is not in view in the parable of the wheat and the tares; indeed the Church had never been spoken of up to that time. The parable is found in Matthew 13:1-58; but the Lord's first mention of the Church is in Matthew 16:1-28. "Grow together" does not mean "fellowship together"; impossible that He who is Holy and True should appear to sanction such confession (Revelation 3:7). The wheat and the tares are to grow together in the field, and the Lord Himself has taught us that "the field is the world" (Matthew 13:38). In other words, those who are true to Christ and love His truth must not put to death false teachers,

even if they had power to do so. Such delicate work as weeding God's wheat field could not be entrusted to fallible men: terrible miscarriages of justice would inevitably follow.

If any would inquire as to what is meant by the "destruction of the flesh" in 1 Corinthians 5:5, it is not the body that is referred to, but the evil moral principle that is connected with the body in us all. "Delivering unto Satan, “ as in 1 Corinthians 5:5 and 1 Timothy 1:20 is apostolic action; in the first case operating in conjunction with the assembly and in the second apart from the assembly altogether. The evil persons in question, having failed to learn their lessons in God's gracious school, had to be broken and humbled by Satan s cruel instrumentality. Divine discipline in all its forms is a deeply serious matter, but always with ultimate blessing in view, "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Our duty is to "put away" from amongst ourselves wicked persons. Further we must not go.

The Prophet and His God.

The people having given their decision, and the idolatrous prophets having been slain, Elijah knew that rain was near. Accordingly he said to Ahab "Get thee up eat and drink. for there is a sound of abundance of rain"(1 Kings 18:41). Let us observe that the welcome rain did not begin to fall immediately the people shouted, "Jehovah, He is the God." In the divine ordering, Elijah must first pray for it. He was, so to speak, God's administrator towards Israel at that crisis. His lips pronounced the judgement; and his lips must announce the blessing; but both blessing and judgement were preceded by prayer. Thus we have the prophet going up to the top of Carmel to speak to God. Ahab, in his selfishness, prepared to go home; not to pray, but to feast. He had the feeling that the long-continued drought was ending. That was all that mattered: there would soon be food again for his horses and mules! Meantime, a banquet was more to his liking than a prayer-meeting.

But where was Obadiah? The Lord has taught us in Matthew 18:19 the preciousness of two praying together; but the two must be in harmony; they must both be alike in separation to God. and walking in His ways for their prayers to be effectual. Alas there was no bond of sympathy between Elijah and Obadiah. although both were men born of the Spirit! Obadiah did not stand by Elijah when he confronted the foe nor did he bow the knee with him when he made supplication to God. How much Obadiah missed by pandering to the world accepting ease and honour in the midst of the ungodly! Also how much Jonathan missed by not separating himself from the divinely rejected Saul — order of things to go outside with David! He could never have written David's psalms! "Ye are honourable," wrote the Apostle to the ease-loving Corinthians "but we are despised" (1 Corinthians 4:10 But Paul was more happy than they. Nevertheless, to stand apart from the world system is admittedly loss, as men judge; but the spiritual gain in communion with God is immense.

Surely Elijah needed to eat and drink as well as Ahab! The events of the day were exhausting. and the servants of God get hungry and tired as well as other men. Even the Son Of God sat in weariness on the well of Sychar while His disciples went into the town to buy food. But the spiritual rises above the physical. The immediate needs of the body are forgotten when powerful spiritual interests are operating. When the disciples returned, and begged the Lord to eat, He replied, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." His spirit had been deeply refreshed by His conversation

with the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-54). In like manner Elijah rose above his bodily needs, and gave himself to prayer.

The knowledge that God means to give does not make prayer unnecessary. Thus in Ezekiel 36:1-38, Ezekiel 37:1-28 Jehovah, after having declared in a very full way His purposes of grace concerning Israel, said, "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them. “ Elijah bowed himself upon the earth. and put his face between his knees. A becoming attitude surely! He who stood bold and erect before king, prophets. and people now takes the lowest possible place before God. His success had not elated him. His name would become famous when the report of Carmel got abroad throughout Israel, Judah, and other lands, but the prophet was not seeking glory for himself. He was just Jehovah's servant, and had acted according to His word. Having fulfilled his commission, he got down low at the feet of Him who sent him.

Brethren. prayer is no light matter. It is a wonderful thing to enter into the presence of the Divine Majesty! His greatness and our littleness should be remembered; but oh the privilege in this day of being able to draw near to the Father in the name of the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit!

The prophet who three and a half years previously, prayed "withhold the rain." now prays "Send the rain." But even so (and doubtless Elijah had intercourse with Jehovah about the matter before the great gathering took place), the answer to his prayer was not immediate. He said to his servant (was it the widow's son whom he had raised from the dead?) "Go up now look toward the sea." He returned saying, "There is nothing." It frequently pleases God to test the faith of His people; but He encourages us to "continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2); also to "pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18). The widow of Luke 18:2-5 was probably not a mere parabolic character, but an actual person whom the Lord had observed. Her perseverance attracted Him. She had a grievance, and she took it to the judge; but he was not disposed to burden himself with the matter. But the woman persevered. Morning after morning When the doors of the Court were opened, in walked that widow! Let no reader misunderstand the application. God is not indifferent, and unwilling to bless; and certainly He would not despise a suppliant because she was poor and a widow; it is the woman's perseverance that He bids us remember and emulate. One wonders what would happen if some person accosted us when coming away from a prayer-meeting, and were to ask what we have prayed for? Could we always give a coherent answer! The widow could have given a very plain reason why she attended the Court.

Elijah said to his servant. "Go again seven times." Seven is God's number of perfection. The seventh time the young man said. "Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." The Lord Jesus said to the people in His day, "when ye see a cloud rise out of the west (and Elijah's servant was looking towards the west) straightway Ye say. there cometh a shower; and so it is" (Luke 12:54). The "man's hand" is suggestive. Belshazzar saw the fingers of a man's hand writing upon the plaster of the wall of his palace, and it pronounced his doom (Daniel 5:5). There is a Man into whose hand God has committed both judgement and blessing for men; judgement bye-and-bye, blessing now (Acts 17:31). Israel having become repentant, and having judged the evil that was amongst them, blessing was now to be granted.

The little cloud was enough for Elijah. He sent a message to Ahab, who apparently had not yet left the mountain: "Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not." The longed-for

rain fell heavily. "It came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heavens were black with clouds and wind and there was a great rain." Elijah was so overjoyed that he did a remarkable thing. "The hand of Jehovah was on Elijah: and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel" (1 Kings 18:46). He must have been both tired and hungry. and he was probably a man advanced in years; yet he made himself the king's footman in the joy of his heart. Things seemed to be getting right again amongst the people of God; and that was everything to the man who loved Jehovah and His people. In like spirit David danced before Jehovah with all his might when the ark of the covenant was carried up into Zion (2 Samuel 6:14). Neither prophet nor king thought of dignity on those great occasions! The Lord has told us there is joy in the presence of God over one sinner that repenteth; and John writing to his friend Gaius says. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth" (3 John 1:4). These are pure joys of which this unhappy world, in its estrangement from God knows nothing; but unless we, God's saints, are walking in communion with Him, such joys will not appeal to our hearts as they should.

FLIGHT.

We may perhaps wonder that Elijah, a man so morally superior to Ahab, should run before his chariot from Carmel to Jezreel — no mean journey. He would "honour the king," as we are exhorted to do in 1 Peter 3:17. This is always the becoming attitude of God's saints towards the supreme ruler, irrespective of what his personal character may be. The ruler, whoever he may be at any time or in any land is God's representative. He may be too ungodly to understand this himself; but faith understands it and acts accordingly.

We picture the prophet arriving in the city drenched with mire, very hungry and very tired; but should he have gone there at all? He doubtless meant well even as Paul in his last journey to Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-40). The express word of Jehovah took Elijah to Cherith, to Zarephath, and twice into Ahab's presence; but the word of Jehovah is not mentioned in connection with his run to Jezreel. Had he forgotten Jezebel? That violent woman was a force to be reckoned with, but not at all to be feared by a man of faith conscious that God was directing his steps. The Lord taught His disciples to pray, "lead us not into temptation " (Matthew 6:13); for we do not realize how weak we are until we are tested. If it be urged that "the hand of Jehovah was on Elijah, “ thus giving him strength for the journey, that does not prove that Jehovah was sending him. For an angel was sent from heaven to provide a meal for him when he was fleeing to Horeb, n journey which was most certainly not undertaken by the word of Jehovah.

Poor weak Ahab, on his return from Carmel, told Jezebel all that had taken place there, and particularly the destruction of the prophets. In her fury, Jezebel sent a message to Elijah: "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time" (1 Kings 19:2). This appears to have followed quickly, and thus the messengers would find, the prophet at a low ebb physically. He seemed unable to view the threat calmly, or even to spread it out before Jehovah. A little reflection would have suggested to him that the threat was practically empty, for why should Jezebel give him a day's notice of her intention to kill him! Her messenger could easily have slain him at once, as Herod's executioner beheaded John the Baptist (Mark 6:27). It rather looks as if Jezebel's real aim was to drive Elijah out of the country, lest his influence became too strong to suit her evil purposes. Public opinion was in favour of the prophet at this juncture, and it might not be polite to murder him! It is said of Chrysostom of

Constantinople that when the Empress Eudoxia sent him a threatening message, he replied, "Go, tell her Majesty that I fear nothing but sin." But nothing of this seemed possible for Elijah at this critical moment. It has been truly said that faith in us is never more feeble than immediately after a great victory. We see this in David. He gained a moral triumph over himself in 1 Samuel 26:1-25., when he had Saul in his power, and refused to hurt him; the next thing we read is: "David said in his heart, I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines" (1 Samuel 27:1). What a collapse of faith! God had carried David safely through many perils; now confidence seemed at an end! So with Elijah in 1 Kings 19:1-21. With calm courage he had confronted multitudes on Mount Carmel; now he is terror-stricken by the voice of a woman! Peter was bold enough in the garden in the presence of soldiers; but became an abject coward when amongst the servant-maids! Real danger he faced boldly; where no danger appears to have been, he feared the worst! What poor creatures we are! King, prophet, and apostles thus broke down! Are we better than they? Let us watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation (Matthew 26:41). Certain Pharisees approached the Lord Jesus one day saying: "Get Thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill Thee." God's perfect Servant saw through the move, Herod himself had inspired that message. He wished to get rid of Jesus out of his borders; but he had no wish to repeat the crime of murder, for the death of John the Baptist still troubled his conscience. But the Lord refused to be deflected from the path of duty (Luke 13:31-33). When the last evening arrived. He went, as He was wont, to the mount of Olives, well knowing what awaited Him there (Luke 22:39).

Jezebel's threat overwhelmed Elijah, "When he saw that, he went for his life. “ Unlike Paul, who said: "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself" (Acts 20:24). "I am ready to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13).

"When he saw that!" Everything depends upon what our eyes see whether we are strong or weak. The sight of the glorified Christ strengthened Stephen to suffer and die: and Paul to suffer and live (Colossians 1:11). Elijah was no longer able to say, "As Jehovah the God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand. “ For the time being, his eyes were not upon God His departure from Jezreel was no mere retirement, as when our Lord went into the country in John 11:54; it was panic! It did not even occur to him to seek shelter in the dominions of pious King Jehoshaphat. He rushed through the kingdom to Beersheba in the far south. There he left his servant, and went still further, right outside God's land altogether!

Let us not miss the lesson of this. It is always possible for a man's personal faith to be unequal to the greatness of his testimony. In that case, the pressure of painful circumstances will cause a break-down sooner or later. Do we really mean all that we say! Is God indeed to our souls all that our preaching would suggest? These are serious- questions, which every witness for God should face. We must watch and pray lest circumstances arise which would reveal that we are not the men of faith we seem to be.

Elijah having gone a day's journey into the wilderness sat down under a juniper tree and spoke to God, probably his first word of prayer since he left Jezreel. "He requested for himself that he might die." Unbelief is always unreasonable and inconsistent. If the prophet really wished to die, why did he flee from Jezebel? Why not die a martyr's death in the midst of the people of God! Jehovah was no longer uppermost in his thoughts. The divine glory was not before his mind, but some fancied

advantage for himself. Life was now a disappointment! His work in Israel had gone all wrong! How gracious of our God not to take His poor perverse servants always at their word! It was His intention that Elijah should not die at all; that he should have an exit from the world such as no-one ever had before, or has had since! Paul in Php_1:1-30 took a totally different line from Elijah. His work also had gone wrong (as men would judge), and he was in prison, with martyrdom threatening. Calmly in the presence of God he considered the situation. He was in a great "strait." If he put his own interest first, he would desire to depart and be with Christ, which would be happier for him than the happiest experiences here. But he thought of the need of the saints; therefore he desired to remain on earth a little longer: but in any case his one ambition was that Christ should be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death.

Elijah's prayer was brief and pointed as his manner was, "It is enough; now, O Jehovah, take away my life: for I am not better than my, fathers." In the concluding words perhaps is contained the secret of his failure. Who ever said that he was better than his fathers? Possibly his success on Mount Carmel had inflated him. All alone he had accomplished great things for God. Did this really make him feel somewhat important and even indispensable! This is a condition of mind which can easily develop in any of us; but it is fatal to our usefulness. Many years ago, the writer called to say farewell to an aged servant of Christ just passing into the presence of his Lord. As we clasped hands at parting he said: "Goodbye, beloved brother; remember, few men are important, and none are necessary." Wholesome words, not to be lightly forgotten! It is an unspeakable honour for the great God to make use of any of us in His work; but let us never imagine that He cannot do without us.

Elijah fell asleep. Well we might, for surely he was badly over-wrought. After some time (not too soon, we may be sure) an angel touched him, saying, "Arise and eat." Looking around, he saw a cake baken on hot stones and a cruse of water; having refreshed himself, he slept again. Here we have a truly wonderful manifestation of the kindness of God. An angel sent from heaven to provide a meal for a faulty servant who had forsaken an important post of duty, and who was now completely outside the path of God's leading!

To those who fall, how kind Thou art!

How good to those who seek!"

When we compare this angelic ministration with the prophet's experience at Cherith the conclusion is this: — when he was right with God, it was simply the need of his stomach which had to be considered, and the ravens sufficed for that service; but when he was all wrong with God, something more serious than his stomach was in question; God would reach his heart. The attentions of the angel would be a definite assurance to Elijah that Jehovah loved and cared for him still spite of his deep failure. Elijah should have learned from this. God's feelings towards His erring people Israel. The prophet's complaints at Horeb will tell us that he did not feel towards the people as God did. A second time the angel awoke him, saying, "Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. A journey that he should never have undertaken!

John 21:1-25 furnishes with another instance of a meal provided by divine love for disobedient servants. It was not an angel but the Lord Jesus Himself, who prepared that fish breakfast. Cold, wet, and hungry, the seven disciples who went fishing in self-will instead of waiting patiently for

their expected Lord were warmed and fed with no word of censure from His holy lips!

It is a precious thought that God never gives up His saints, however faulty they may be. At a Bible Reading long ago where it was being taught that the believer in Jesus stands in the eternal sunshine of God's favour, the question was asked, "But what if I turn my back upon Him." The reply was given "He will shine on your back!" God knew that His poor servant Elijah was physically over-wrought, and He handled him in suitability to his condition. Our contemptible foe delights to attack the children of God at such times, and too often he gains an advantage. The Lord Jesus had been forty days without food when Satan approached Him in the wilderness and suggested to Him to make stones into bread. but he had no success with God's Holy One. Whether full or hungry, He refused to act in the smallest matters without a word from God (Matthew 4:4).

These pages are being written during times of greater stress than men have known since the world's foundation. Many beloved children of God are over-wrought. Frequent alarms; destruction of property; loss of loved ones; combined with lack of help in the duties of daily life, are telling their tale. With lowered physical vitality, the temptations of the Devil are serious; faith can only be maintained at its true level by moment by moment dependence upon God. No circumstances are too serious for His abounding grace.

At the Mount of God.

Strengthened by the food so wonderfully provided, Elijah proceeded further into the wilderness. John the Baptist chose the wilderness for its possibilities of quiet communion with God (Luke 1:80): there is no evidence that Elijah went there with anything so commendable in his mind. For the time being, he had practically forgotten God. Terrible possibility for any of us in times of discouragement! After forty days the prophet reached Horeb, the mount of God- a place of peculiar interest. There Jehovah had dealings with Moses, forty years after his premature attempt to deliver His people. At Horeb Moses learned precious lessons which fitted him for his future service in Israel (Exodus 3:1-22). In the same neighbourhood was Mount Sinai, where Jehovah had dealings with the nation. and set before them His holy law (Exodus 20:1-26). It is significant that Elijah in his indignation against the people should have gone there. It was as if he desired judgement upon them for their unfaithfulness. The Holy Spirit in Romans 2:2 says "he pleaded with God against Israel."

The prophet took shelter in a cave, and soon he heard the voice of Jehovah. He had heard the kindly words of the angel, but he had been out of touch with Jehovah for some time. The divine voice was a challenge: "What doest thou here, Elijah!" This reminds us of the Creator's call to disobedient Adam in the garden, "Where art thou!" (Genesis 3:9), and also of His challenge to Cain, "What hast thou done!" (Genesis 4:10). Elijah heard no divine challenge either at Cherith or at Zarephath; for he went to both places by the Word of Jehovah. But his presence at Horeb was a different matter. Jehovah did not send him there; but, being there he was taught lessons of the deepest possible importance and the record of them has been preserved for our instruction today.

We note the word "doest." "What doest thou here?" Great stirrings were taking place in the land of Israel; for the mighty events on. Mount Carmel must have made a deep impression upon the minds of the people. Jehovah was now the confessed God of Israel, and no longer Baal. How useful Elijah might have been as a worker and instructor amongst the masses at such a time; and

there was indeed no-one else who could have done the work. But here is Elijah far away from the habitations of men. and sheltering in the quietness of a cave! When the Lord says to His servants, "Come ye apart and rest awhile," it is the right thing to cease labour and retire (Mark 4:31); but no such words had been addressed to Elijah. He was an absentee from an important post of duty at one of the most critical moments in his nation's history. Philip left Samaria when the tide of blessing was in full flow, and went down to a desert road; but the angel of the Lord directed him there, and he went unhesitatingly. although he probably wondered why (Acts 8:26).

Brethren, let us seek to be subject at all times to the controlling hand of God. Let us never move without His guidance and when we get it, let us go forward, like Paul and his friends in Acts 16:9-10, when they crossed the sea from Troas into Macedonia. One of the vital principles of Christianity is the presence on earth of the Holy Spirit in testimony to the absent Christ. He employs as instruments whomsoever He will, and He is the true Director of all the operations. If we go where we should not, either for service or for pleasure, we may hear the divine challenge. "What doest thou here?" and what can we say in reply!

Elijah's reply was deplorable. "I have been very jealous for Jehovah the God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away." Thus the disgruntled prophet spoke well of himself, and ill of God's people, and virtually called upon God to judge them. He had got a long way from God in his soul in expressing himself thus. The contrast with Moses after the people's worship of the golden calf is startling. When Jehovah proposed to wipe out the stiff-necked people, and make a fresh start with Moses. Moses would not hear of it. He pleaded the honour of Jehovah's great name; he entreated Him to remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; and even prayed God to blot him out of the book of life, if thereby the people might be forgiven! (Exodus 32:1-35). It was music to Jehovah to hear His servant pleading thus in the spirit of self-sacrifice for His erring people. What an anticipation of Christ! Moses never shone more brightly than on that day of matchless intercession. Would that we could catch the spirit of it!

God spoke again to Elijah. "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before Jehovah." Great manifestations of divine power followed. "Jehovah passed by, and a great strong wind rent the mountains. and brake in pieces the rocks before Jehovah; but Jehovah was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake: but Jehovah was not in the earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire; but Jehovah was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice" (1 Kings 19:11-12). Manifestations of power are from God, but they must not be confounded with God himself. Elijah had witnessed His power at Carmel; but because he no longer beheld such displays, it seemed difficult for him to realize that God was working at all. But he presently learned that a quiet gracious work was proceeding in many hearts in Israel of which he was unaware. God had use for the whirlwind, for out of it He spoke in majesty to Job and his friends (Job 38:1; Job 40:6) and Nahum tells us "Jehovah hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm." He has use "for the earthquake": What blessed results followed the shaking at the midnight hour in Philippi (Acts 16:1-40). An earthquake was one of God's witnesses to His Son at the moment of His death (Matthew 27:51). He has also use for the fire, as the people of Israel had so recently proved on Mount Carmel. But although Elijah witnessed at Horeb the great and strong wind. the earthquake. and the fire. it was the still small voice which made him feel that he was having to do with God.

It is possible for us today to get discouraged if the work of God in our hands does not move in striking ways. Persons of energetic disposition, such as Elijah certainly was, are more likely than others to feel thus. Where there are no visible manifestations we are apt to conclude that nothing is doing at all! The Book of the Acts is instructive in this connection. God used the violence of an earthquake to arouse the Philippian jailer, He opened the very heavens to reach and lay low Saul of Tarsus; but Timotheus and Lydia were reached by the quiet influence of the Word of God with nothing notable connected with their conversion. A prominent London business man in the last century, who was a lover of the Gospel (as we all should be) threw himself very zealously into the great inter-denominational campaigns of his day, but in the evening of life he said to me: "If I had my time over again, I would let all such movements alone. Enormous expenses were incurred, and I do not feel sure of the results. Upon mature reflection I think perhaps the best work is done in the constant plodding in modest halls." I replied "I told you that years ago." Those who want great things and who are filled with Elijah's zeal and energy, would do well to remember what the London merchant said. Too often the great things involve the use of worldly methods, and also the sacrifice of divine principles which we profess to hold dear. These remarks are not intended to discourage enterprise for God. Far from it. If there are no signs of blessing in connection with the work we are doing. let us get down before God about it, and ask Him why our labour appears to be in vain. But the comparatively few souls that we can show as the result of quiet Scriptural preaching may be worth more in the long run than the crowds who are registered as converts because they have signed "decision cards." or have shaken hands with the preacher! Some of these souls may possibly be injured for life by such flippant handling.

There were no great things to show in Jerusalem after the return from the captivity; but real solid work was wrought which delighted the heart of God. By the hand of Zechariah the prophet Jehovah sent this encouraging message to the leader of the people. "This is the word of Jehovah to Zerubbabel: not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). Again we say it was the still small voice which made Elijah feel that he was having to do with God. It is the same today. God speaks now to consciences and hearts in the written Word. The band, the choir, the solo. and other forms of religious excitement are unlikely to lay bare the conscience, and create in the hearer a horror of sin and its eternal consequences; such unapostolic methods would rather tend to hinder the voice of God reaching the inner man at all.

Jehovah's manner of approach to His fugitive servant was very gracious. He did not address him angrily in tones of thunder. The "soft gentle voice" (J.N.D.) did not terrify Elijah. It drew him to the mouth of the cave with his face reverently wrapt in his mantle. Servant and Master were now as it were, face to face. A second time He who alone should control the movements of His servants put the question, "What doest thou here Elijah?" The poor prophet repeated word for word what he said when first challenged. The children of Israel were so evil, they had forsaken Jehovah's covenant, thrown down His altars, and slain His prophets. Elijah alone remained; and he also they sought to kill! Such words were very grievous to Him who loved His people with everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3). Since Elijah's day they have murdered the Son of God; even so, we are told in Romans 11:28 they are still "beloved for the fathers' sake." Let us tread softly when we examine the failures of the servants of God. Elijah at Horeb, and Paul in Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-40) were out of the path of divine leading. The story of their faults is written for our warning. We do not feel worthy to stand alongside such devoted servants of God, but we must face the fact that they were

not perfect. The Lord Jesus could have said all that Elijah said concerning rebellious Israel, and more! Was He not tasting the bitterness of malignant rejection? Yet not a word of complaint passed His lips, not a word that pleaded for judgement upon His enemies. Instead, He wept over them; and even when on the way to Calvary. He said Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Centuries before His coming the Spirit of prophecy put these words into His lips: "I have laboured in vain; I have spent My strength for nought, and in vain" (Isaiah 49:4). But His labour was acceptable to the One Who sent Him, and there His heart rested. Although treated by the people of Israel worse than Elijah. He did not flee away. We have seen already that when a hint was sent to Him to depart hence; or Herod would kill Him. He refused to do so. because His work was not finished. At the same moment He spoke of the people (of Jerusalem particularly) as having killed the prophets, but He said it in grief, not In anger (Luke 13:31-35). Psalms 16:8 explains the difference between the Lord Jesus and Elijah: "I have set Jehovah always before ME; because He is at My right hand, I shall not be moved. “ "Always" was not true of our prophet. When Jehovah was indeed before him, he was bold as a lion: but when he lost sight of Jehovah, and got Jezebel before him, be collapsed utterly. Truly, God has only had one perfect Servant. Let us follow Him!

Jehovah's reply to Elijah's complaint is deeply solemn in all its parts. "Go return!" Every false step with any of us must be retraced. Abram should not have gone down into Egypt, and he enjoyed no more communion with God until he returned "unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first; and there Abram called on the name of Jehovah" (Genesis 13:4). But false steps and careless walking involve loss of time; so we are taught in the law of the Nazarite (Numbers 6:12). Life is too short to allow of wasted time! Life on earth is our great preparation for ETERNITY!

To proceed with Jehovah's words to Elijah. "Go return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." The judgements which Elijah seemed to feel were necessary should be executed. The forsaken covenant the desecrated altars, and the murdered prophets, should all be avenged; the circumstances of the judgements should be analogous to the whirlwind, the earthquake, and the fire. A ruthless destroyer from without and a fierce reformer within. should be let loose upon the guilty nation.

Elijah was now to go to Abel-Meholah (in Naphtali) to anoint Elisha to be prophet in his room. He probably did not expect anything quite as serious as all this when "he made intercession to God against Israel" (Romans 11:2-5). The principal lesson that he learned at Horeb was that Jehovah had seven thousand in Israel that were still true to Him, and refused Baal. Elijah had seen the terrible evils which covered the land, but somehow he had over-looked the good that was there. Had he known that Jehovah still had thousands of true hearts in Ahab's dominions, he would scarcely have said: "I, even I only am left!" Self-occupation is a spiritually ruinous thing, whatever form it may take; but it is highly objectionable when it leads any servant of God to imagine that he is the last true man upon earth! The testimony of God has never yet depended upon the slender thread of a human life, and it never will. God Himself will take care of the testimony; and in His own

infinite wisdom He always knows where to find instruments through whom He can speak to the consciences and hearts of the people. The prophet said nothing in response to the solemn words of Jehovah. What could he say!

God's Seven Thousand.

Elijah left Horeb, and started on his long journey Northward with the words of Jehovah ringing in his ears (and we may hope in his heart also): "I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." God has always had a loyal remnant, even in the darkest days of Israel and of Christendom. In Thyatira, where blasphemy and wickedness prevailed there were those who had not "this doctrine," and had not known the depths of Satan (Revelation 2:24). To the angel of the Church in dead Sardis the Lord said: "Thou hast a few names which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white; for they are worthy" (Revelation 3:4). When the tide of evil is flowing strongly, some timid souls fear to declare themselves. Joseph of Arimathea believed in Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews. Nicodemus was somewhat like him; but the appalling wickedness of the crucifixion gave these men courage, and brought them out into the light (John 19:38-42). Our Lord's chosen disciples who had professed loyalty to Him, one of them being particularly strong in his protestations, were all missing at the critical hour. One of the twelve-Matthew records that when John the Baptist was murdered "his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it" (Matthew 14:12). Surely Matthew's heart smote him as he penned those words! He and his fellow-disciples did not do for the Lord Jesus what the disciples of John did for their teacher. It is undisputably the will of God that those who revere His name and value His truth should stand forth boldly in testimony, whatever the danger may be: but if in their timidity any lack courage for this, God does not despise the true faith which reigns in their hearts.

Now here is an interesting thing: — no sooner had Jehovah told Elijah of the loyal seven thousand than He began to bring some of them out into prominence. Elijah, of course knew of Obadiah, and of the prophets whom he had befriended; now Elijah was sent to seek out Elisha the son of Shaphat. Here then is one of the seven thousand. In the following chapter — 1 Kings 20:1-43 — we read of three more although their names are not given (1 Kings 20:13, 1 Kings 20:28, 1 Kings 20:35). Then in 1 Kings 21:1-29 we find faithful Naboth: and in 1 Kings 22:1-53 we have Micaiah the son of Imlah, whom Ahab hated for his outspokenness, and kept in prison. These are a few samples of the true hearted minority living in the midst of apostate Israel.

It was a peaceful scene at Abel-Meholah. The rain for which Elijah had prayed had done its work, and the land was ready for ploughing. The man to whom he was sent was thus engaged. "he fact that twelve yoke of oxen were in use indicates that Elisha's father was a farmer in a large way. Elisha thus turned his back on good prospects when he accepted the call to follow Elijah. This is what God loves to see in those who serve Him. There are many in our day say they are "out in the work." This means that they no longer evangelise after office hours, but now devote their whole time to the service. Certainly if their ambition is to go from door to door and from town to town in search for souls, it is well that they should be free from everything else. But, my brethren, what has the step cost you? Have you surrendered something substantial (as men speak) in order to serve the interests of Christ in a needy world! Many years ago a brother in an English town wrote me confidentially for advice. He could not make his shop pay, and he wondered whether the Lord

would have him close it, and go forth to preach. What did I think? I replied that the Lord has no use for ne'er-do-wells. A poor grocer would not be likely to make a good preacher. If his business were at the height of prosperity, and he felt the urge of the Gospel, the Lord would be delighted with the sacrifice. A different case was that of a young Englishman who held a good post with fine prospects who had China upon his heart. Just as he was posting his letter of resignation, a notification came from his employer that he was to be promoted to higher work with a considerable increase of salary! He hesitated not, but posted his letter and in due course sailed for China. What God wants is men who are ready to tread the path of His beloved Son who "sold all that He had."

Elisha had nothing to gain as far as this world is concerned by following Elijah. The prophet was a proscribed man, and his life in continual peril. The Lord Jesus warned those who would follow Him that it might involve the loss of everything. Foxes had holes and birds had nests, but the Son of man hath nowhere to lay His head (Matthew 8:20). Men called Him Beelzebub; what could His followers expect to be called (Matthew 10:25). He was going onward to a cross; were His disciples willing to carry one? (Mark 8:34). Paul rejoiced to be treated as the filth of the world, and as the off-scouring of all things for Christ's sake (1 Corinthians 4:13). Do we seek ease and honour in the scene of our Lord's rejection?

It has been said that Elijah was now to be superseded by Elisha. This seems hardly correct. Jehovah still had use for him as subsequent chapters show. But meantime He would teach His servant that the testimony was in no real peril, and He granted him the honour of training the man who should continue it. In the days (or perhaps years) that followed, Elijah had the comfort of Godly companionship. His sense of loneliness had been too much for him, and' had bred unbecoming thoughts in his mind. It is written of Elisha that "he poured water on the hands of Elijah" (2 Kings 3:11). Simple imagery, telling us how the younger man refreshed the elder. Paul experienced something of this in the loving ministrations of his son Timothy (Php_2:19-22).

We must not leave the subject of God's seven thousand without making, its application to ourselves in these closing days of the Christian era. Some who will read these pages have taken a definite stand in separation from the growing evils of Christendom. Popery, religious infidelity ("Higher Criticism"), and other forms of disobedience to the Word of God are marching on ; and these separated ones abhor them all. This is good. Beware lest you allow discouragement, or anything else, to weaken the stand. you have taken. But also beware how you speak of your brethren who (unaccountably to your minds) remain where they are. God knows their hearts; you do not. They are His saints; dear to Him for Jesus' sake. They cost Him more than you will ever fully understand, and in His own time He will cause them to shine forth in all the divine perfections of His Beloved Son. Speak no ill of them ; judge them not. Some of their works, wrought amidst difficulties, are doubtless precious in His sight. It was so even in corrupt Thyatira (Revelation 2:19). It may he that the inconsistencies of some professedly separated ones have stumbled them — a most serious confederation which should cause the deepest heart-searching before God.

Elijah blundered in speaking ill of God's people. Terrible words; "he maketh intercession to God against Israel" (Romans 11:2). God will never tolerate this in any one. Love them; pray for them, and instruct them in meekness as God may give opportunity (2 Timothy 2:25). A censorious attitude may lead some to say: "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you" (Job 12:2). The spirit that is characteristic of Philadelphia is delightful to God; let us cultivate it. But

a suppositious Philadelphia may easily degenerate into a very real Laodicea!

Naboth's Vineyard.

Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 2:4 : "I made me great works; I builded houses; and I planted vineyards." Ahab could have said the same; but what blessing did he get out of it all? The humble prophet Elijah, whom he persecuted, is in Heaven; but Ahab, alas! is not there. His father Omri built Samaria, and made it the capital of his kingdom, not being satisfied with Tirzah. Ahab also built new cities, but he seems to have preferred Jezreel as a place of residence. In 1 Kings 22:39 we read of "the ivory house which he built," which was probably in Jezreel. He cast eyes upon the vineyard of a neighbour, Naboth by name, and demanded it; offering to give him a better vineyard in exchange, or money if he wished. Naboth brought Jehovah's name into the matter. It was not Ahab's custom to think of Jehovah, still less to seek His guidance about his doings. Naboth said: "Jehovah forbid it me that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee" (1 Kings 21:3). Let us be quite clear what was involved in this reply. Our God would not wish His servants to be disobliging and un-neighbourly, but it was not such sentiments as these that guided Naboth in his refusal of the King's demand. The land of Israel was unique in the earth. It was Jehovah's land in a very special sense (had He not a house there!), so much so that in Jeremiah 12:14 Jehovah speaks of the nations round about as" My evil neighbours. " The land had been distributed amongst the tribes by His direction, and every individual Israelite was responsible to regard himself as a tenant under his God. He was thus not at liberty to alienate his portion. If he became poor, he might sell it until the Jubilee. “The land shall not be sold for ever, for the land is Mine for Ye are strangers and sojourners with Me. And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land" (Leviticus 25:23-24). Moreover, we gather from Numbers 36:1-13 that even such a temporary sale must take place within the limits of the tribe, so that Jehovah's original distribution might not be disturbed. Ahab had no fear of God before his eyes; the Word of God had no place in his heart; and the year of Jubilee meant nothing to him. Had Naboth yielded to the king, it is not at all likely that the property would ever be returned. Also, Ahab probably belonged to a different tribe. In Ezekiel 47:18 it is enacted that the prince who will rule for God in the holy land during the Millennial era must not take of the people's inheritance by oppression, “that My people be not scattered every man from his possession."

Naboth was thus a man of faith. His father valued what Jehovah had given him, and Naboth valued it also. He would die rather than surrender what really belonged to God. The Naboth spirit seems rare in our time. Divine principles which our fathers prized, and for which many suffered the loss of everything, are very lightly regarded by their children. The worthies of past years are even regarded as over-scrupulous. A little of the accommodating spirit of the Twentieth Century would have been to their advantage! To be spoken of as a "Puritan" is considered a great reproach today!

In the early days of the Nineteenth Century holy men with hearts aflame to learn the will of God, recovered for us priceless treasures of truth which ecclesiasticism had long obscured. Once more God's saints (or at least a remnant of them) realized their union with Christ risen and glorified, and became detached in heart from things here. The blessed hope of His coming for His Heavenly saints was disentangled from the judgements of God Church re-appeared to their soul's vision in its true relationships. It is Christ's body, to be in intimate association with Him in His glories. but

meantime it is a vessel for the manifestation of His perfections here amongst men. It is God's house. the temple of the Holy Spirit in which He graciously dwells, and where He delights to work sovereignly for the blessing of the members of Christ. Dr. C. I. Scofield. in the introduction to his well known Bible, refers with appreciation to the "intensity and breadth of interest in Bible study unprecedented in the history of the Christian Church." Thus our "fathers" have handed down to us a priceless heritage: but do we value it, Have we sought to develop it further? Do we pore over the sacred page individually? Is it to us more to be desired than gold, and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb? (Psalms 19:10). Also do we delight to read it collectively; or have we sunk so low that we need to be entertained? Conferences. Rallies. Lantern lectures. and Solos are poor substitutes for the quiet. reverent. conversational Bible Readings in which our" fathers" delighted. ..and from which they drew their strength. Have we in contrast with Naboth, sold our inheritance for "a better vineyard." or for money? Brethren, where are we? Have we really gone forth to Christ "without the camp. bearing His reproach" (Hebrews 13:13); or have we merely exchanged a "Church" for a "Hall?"

Ahab returned home sulky after his talk with Naboth and refused to eat. When Jezebel learned the cause, she moved promptly. She wrote letters to the Town Council. using the king's name and the royal seal. Her orders were peculiarly diabolical. The elders and nobles were to proclaim a fast, set Naboth at the head of the gathering, and bring in two sons of Belial (i.e.. sons of worthlessness) to charge him with having cursed God and the king. We understand this to mean that they were to imagine some divine displeasure against their city: at the fast the cause was to be inquired into, with Naboth presiding; he whom they thus professed to honour was to be denounced as the "Achan" of the place, and hurried off to execution (Joshua 7:25). The whole business seems too horrible for belief; yet such was the moral degradation of Israel that all this was done by queen and elders in God's Name! (Baal had for the time being gone into the shade). It will be remembered that two wicked men were hired by the religious chiefs of Jerusalem to falsely accuse the Lord Jesus. that they might have some appearance of justification for putting Him to death (Matthew 27:60).

Jezebel's action in the case of Naboth was a dark foreshadowing of what Christendom's Jezebel has frequently been guilty of. Time-serving rulers and governors have been all too willing to put to a cruel death choice saints of God at the bidding of the so-called "Church." But God will remember all that has been done in Israel and in Christendom in the coming day of recompense. Innocent blood will yet be avenged (Revelation 18:24). "Thou hast seen it, for Thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with Thy hand" (Psalms 10:14).

Not only was Naboth murdered, but his sons with him (2 Kings 9:26). The wicked elders would make certain that no heirs should arise to challenge what they had done.

When Ahab was told by Jezebel that Naboth was dead, he went to the vineyard to take possession of it. Jehovah acted swiftly. He bade Elijah go and confront him in the blood-stained plot. The wicked king quailed before the messenger of God. “ Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee; because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of Jehovah" (1 Kings 21:20). Ahab then had to listen to as fearful a sentence as was ever passed upon a sinner. It was in three parts. (1)" Behold, I will bring evil upon thee. “ He personally must suffer. He came to a miserable end, as we know. (2) His whole family was to be

destroyed, like the families of his evil predecessors Jeroboam and Baasha. He had wiped out Naboth's family: God would wipe out his. (3) Jezebel was to be eaten by dogs. The fearful sentence concluded thus: "Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat." Hardened sinner though he was, Ahab was overwhelmed as he listened, and he rent his clothes, put sackcloth upon his flesh, and went softly. He knew that there was power in the words of God as uttered by Elijah. The God of all grace responded to Ahab's humiliation, and the greater part of the sentence was postponed in its execution. Jehovah said to Elijah: "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before Me? Because he humbleth himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring evil upon his house." God took into account the evil influence under which he lived — "whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." But he should never have married the woman, and he must be held accountable for her iniquities (1 Kings 21:19); for the man is the divinely appointed head of the woman, whatever kind of woman she may be (1 Corinthians 11:3). Let none of us overlook this!

Ahaziah and His Captains

Men should learn lessons from the past. but do they? Particularly where God's dealings are involved men should profit; but the mind of man is very obtuse in all things relating to God. Belshazzar was quite aware of how Jehovah had humbled Nebuchadnezzar; he knew also how Jehovah took up the challenge when the proud king presumed to cast three of His servants into the burning fiery furnace, Yet he openly defied the God of Israel. Ahaziah knew quite well when he began his reign of the great drought which an indignant God had inflicted upon the nation because of its idolatry. He knew also of the solemn event on Mount Carmel, when Baal's prophets were publicly confounded, and then slain; yet his short reign of two years was marked by defiance of Jehovah. 1 Kings 22:52 records that "he did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother "for Jezebel still lived, and was still influential in the land). He copied Jeroboam's sins, and "served Baal, and worshipped him." Various events which followed one another quickly should have spoken to his conscience: — first, the tragic death of his father; second, the revolt of Moab after 150 years subjection to Israel; and third, his own accident. Wisdom would have taught him to enquire of God "is there not a cause?"

Finding himself a sick man through his fall out of a window, Ahaziah sent messengers to enquire of Baal-zebub. the god of Ekron whether he should recover (2 Kings 1:1-18). This was flagrant, for the recognition of Baal had been discouraged in the land, and Jehovah was (at least nominally) Israel's God. When Ahab's false prophets encouraged him to go to war with the Syrians. it was not Baal's name that they used. but the name of Jehovah (1 Kings 22:6). Baal-zebub means "lord of flies." The belief that flies carried disease led blind heathen to turn to this particular god for help: but Ahaziah should have known better. To enquire at Ekron was really to enquire of demons. Idols are nothing in themselves, but there are demons behind them, as 1 Corinthians 10:1-33 teaches us. Traffic with demons is painfully common in our day. Men call it Spiritualism; "demonism" would be a more correct name for this great sin. This is unpardonable where Bibles abound, and where the Gospel of Christ is freely proclaimed. The moral and spiritual consequences of this unholy traffic are very serious.

An angel of Jehovah bade Elijah meet the messengers of the "king of Samaria" (he disdained to call such a man "King of Israel"). and ask then whether there was no longer a God in Israel that

they must needs go to Ekron. They were to go back to their master, and tell him he would not recover, but would surely die. The messengers apparently awestruck, but without knowing that it was Elijah who had spoken to them, went back to the king with the message. When Ahaziah enquired what kind of man it was who had thus intercepted them, they said it was "a man in a hairy garment, with a girdle of leather about his loins." The King at once recognised his father's dread monitor, he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite!"

Not ashamed of his impiety, and in no wise humbled, Ahaziah ordered the arrest of the prophet. But why send a captain with fifty men (presumably armed) against a helpless old man! Conscience told the king that there was a mysterious power connected with Elijah which must be reckoned with. But what could soldiers do against the power of God! The captain found Elijah sitting on top of a hill. He said to him: "Thou man of God. the king hath said. come down." The prophet replied: "If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty." The terrible thing took place forthwith. Such a disaster should have warned both the king and his officers that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). But a second company was sent, as numerous as the first. The second captain was irritable. "O man of God, the king hath said come down quickly." Military discipline is doubtless important. Officers and men, generally speaking, must obey their superiors; but every man, in every land, whether soldier or civilian. is first of all a servant of God and he should on no account surrender his conscience. It will be no answer in the day of judgement that the king or government commanded this or that. "We ought to obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29). The fact that both captains addressed Elijah as "man of God" proves that they had some idea that they were contending with God. It was no secret to any in Israel that at Elijah's word rain was withheld and fire descended: in other words, this humble man wielded the judgements of God. It was one thing to reject his testimony; it was quite another to attempt to destroy the man himself. God's name having been brought into the matter, He must needs take up the challenge. Ahaziah's father once benefited by the folly of the Syrians in this respect. The Syrians having said that Israel's God was God of the hills but not of the valleys, Jehovah asserted Himself, and granted Ahab a great victory, wicked man though he was (1 Kings 20:28). Thus, in the controversy between Ahaziah and Elijah, Jehovah again asserted Himself, and made the king and his people feel the might of His hand. The second captain was less excusable than the first. Knowing of the destruction of his predecessor, he impiously attempted the same thing, with the same fatal result.

What a contrast between Mount Carmel and the unnamed hill! At the one the fire of God consumed the sacrifice, but spared the people; at the other there was no sacrifice and the fire consumed the ungodly. The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is a safe shelter for sinners, apart from that sacrifice, nothing but judgement is possible for any of us. Our Lord's disciples once referred to the destruction of Ahaziah's men. They were in the neighbourhood of that disaster; and they were indignant because the Samaritan people refused a welcome to the Lord. He was on His way to Jerusalem a city of which they were jealous, "Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven; and consume them as Elias did!" (Luke 9:51-56). The Lord rebuked their mistaken zeal. God had not at that time sent Him to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:17). At His second coming, "He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked" (Isaiah 11:4).

The poor human heart is slow to understand grace. Both Peter and Paul possessed miraculous powers, they could even raise the dead, but never once did either call down judgement upon his persecutors. With meekness they accepted all that came upon them for Jesus' sake, assured that in the wisdom of God everything would turn out to the furtherance of the Gospel. The cross of Jesus explains this. That blessed One could easily have smitten His foes; the fact that His captors fell to the ground at the sound of His voice was a warning to them as to this (John 18:6). When Peter became violent in the garden, He told him that a word of prayer to the Father would bring twelve legions of angels to His aid. But such a prayer He would not offer (Matthew 26:53).

The cross of Jesus was a necessity in the ways of God. Only on the ground of that great sacrifice could He give effect to His eternal counsels of grace. Righteousness having had it's way, grace flows freely, yea. "the exceeding riches of His Grace" (Ephesians 2:7). The cross will yet be divinely avenged; but until the solemn day when God will change His attitude towards men, those who Serve Him must be content to suffer. We cannot too frequently remind ourselves that we are followers of a rejected Christ. When He gets His vindication, we shall get ours also.

A third captain was sent against Elijah. He — wise man — fell upon his knees, and pleaded for his life and for the lives of his men. He realized that it was vain to contend with God. In David's day three companies of men were sent by Saul to take him. and all three were equally willing for their evil work. But God had His own way of turning their efforts to folly (1 Samuel 19:21). Ahaziah's third captain took very humble ground with the man of God. "I pray thee. let my life, and the lives of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight." (2 Kings 1:13). Submission to God, represented by Elijah, saved those fifty one men. "Thy servants"; note the words addressed by a military officer to a humble Gileadite peasant. In like manner, no sinner need perish if he will but humble himself under the mighty hand of God (1 Peter 5:6).

The honour of the God of Israel having been fully vindicated, Elijah was told by the angel to go with the captain, fearing nothing. Behold then the prophet with his rough hairy mantle going with his considerable military escort to the royal palace! To his face he told the wicked king that there would be no recovery for him; he would surely die. "Thus saith Jehovah." unmolested the prophet walked out!

Note the sequel: — "So he died according to the word of Jehovah which Elijah had spoken" (2 Kings 1:17). "And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2 Kings 2:11). Tremendous contrast!

In the world's last crisis, after the removal of the heavenly saints, heavy judgements will reappear at the call of the servants of God. In Revelation 11:1-19 we read of witnesses in Jerusalem who will perform the same terrible miracles as Moses and Elijah in the past. Also, the martyrs of that period will pray for judgement upon their persecutors (Revelation 6:10). But that period is not Christianity.

Elijah's Translation.

The Holy Spirit delights to tell us in Hebrews 11:1-40 that the worthies of old time preferred Heaven to Earth. Heavenly counsels had not yet been revealed, nor could they be until after the death and resurrection of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit. Old Testament saints were partakers of an earthly calling; but they were so deeply sensible of the ruin of everything re as the fruit of sin, and of the impossibility of flesh ever repairing the mischief it has wrought, that their

hearts rose up to Heaven. God was their hope, and their affections were set where He dwells. They "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" they desired "a better country. that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city" (Hebrews 11:13-16). In that city we shall meet them all ere long.

The manner of Elijah's departure from this scene of toil and strife is noteworthy. We recall a moment when he sat under a juniper tree disappointed and depressed, and requested for himself that he might die. Yet the God of all grace had purposed for him a departure from this world such as no other has ever had. the blessed Son of God alone excepted. "Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and he was not, for God took him "(Hebrews 11:5: Genesis 5:24); but nothing spectacular is suggested in the Holy Spirit's brief record. We-God's present saints-are expecting something far more wonderful than either Enoch or Elijah experienced. Not individually. but in a countless throng we shall be caught up. For this the Lord will come in person (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Oh, the unspeakable blessedness of " the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him!" (2 Thessalonians 2:1). What an end to all the anxieties and sufferings of earth!

Elijah's removal was known in advance by many persons. At least fifty-one men were interested in the great event, but only one witnessed it (Elisha); and he only, so far as we can gather, got a blessing out of it. The sons of the prophets were very sceptical about the miracle; and although they were discouraged by Elisha. they sought diligently to find Elijah's body. Why are men so dubious of divine miracles? Why should they doubt the power of God! Alas, the fifty young men who searched for Elijah's body were all "candidates for the ministry!" What a foreshadow of what has become very common in our day.

Elijah's translation must be regarded as a mark of Jehovah's approval of His servant who witnessed for Him so bravely in a very evil time. His dealings with Elijah at Horeb, when for a moment his faith broke down, were private. The record of what passed there was afterwards written for the instruction of others who might come after.

The prophet's last journey requires careful examination. It commenced from Gilgal. Elisha. accompanying him. Jehovah could easily have taken up, His servant from Gilgal itself; instead, He led him about; first to Bethel; next to Jericho, and then across Jordan. It was a kind of retracement of Israel's steps in the days of Joshua. God would in this way present vividly to Elijah's mind the hopeless evil of the people he had served so well. and who had caused him so much grief and disappointment. Gilgal was Israel's first camping ground after they crossed the Jordan. There they signified their dependence upon God by circumcising themselves in the very presence of the foe (Joshua 5:1-15). The place was now one of Israel's chief centres of idolatry. "All their wickedness is in Gilgal" (Hosea 9:15). "At Gilgal multiply transgressions" (Amos 4:4). BETHEL had sacred associations as the place where Jehovah made himself known to Jacob in His faithful love. He said: "this is the house of God. and this is the gate of heaven " (Genesis 28:17). Now one or Jeroboam's calves stood there in public defiance of Jacob's God! JERICHO witnessed the power of God at the beginning: its rebuilding was glaring evidence of the people's infidelity (1 Kings 16:34 Thence Elijah crossed the Jordan; and from outside the limits of the land he was rapt by divine power to heaven. His years of testimony. with striking miracles accompanying were a warning to the nation; the conduct of Ahaziah and his officers was a solemn proof that the warning was

unheeded. But God delights in long-suffering. He is never hasty in judgement. He even granted respite to wicked Ahab when He saw him lying low in sackcloth after the murder of Naboth; and even now, although He was withdrawing Elijah from the scene of testimony. He gave His wilful people another opportunity in the gracious ministry of Elisha. But it was all of no avail; and in due course the blow fell. The kingdom was destroyed; and the people were swept out of their land into captivity. The terrible "Lo-Ammi" sentence has not yet been recalled; nor will it be until the appearing of the Lord Jesus.

There was not only a voice to Elijah in the steps of his last journey; there was also a voice to Elisha, who was to witness for God in the land after Elijah's departure. Elisha had an impression that there was a meaning — a meaning of spiritual value — in the movements of that day. Thus he kept close to the departing one, not permitting himself to be deflected, either by the words of the prophet, or by the remarks of the sons of the prophets. Three times Elijah said, "Tarry, here. I pray thee": but Elisha replied each time with holy fervour: "As Jehovah liveth. and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. “ It was not that Elijah wished to get rid of his friend; but he would test his constancy. Barnabas counselled the converts in Antioch to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart (Acts 11:23). Blessed counsel; may we all heed it! Both joy and power depart when we allow anything to come in between our souls and the Lord. Paul walked once from Troas to Assos — about 25 miles alone. sending his companions round by sea (Acts 20:13). He had his own reasons for avoiding conversations just then. With Elijah and Elisha it was different. "They still went on, and talked" (2 Kings 2:11). Elisha was bent on getting the full blessing of that wonderful day. Like Paul later, he would have said: "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind . . ." (Php_3:13).

GILGAL, as we have seen, was the starting point. There the men of Israel used sharp knives upon themselves after they had crossed the Jordan. This was God's way of teaching them that He can give no recognition to the flesh; it is evil in His sight beyond repair. Have we in spirit crossed the Jordan? Have we definitely accepted the death of Christ as our own, so that we can intelligently hear the apostle saying to us, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). As surely as Elisha was appointed to represent the prophet who had gone up to heaven, so we have been divinely set to represent the glorified Christ. But in order that this may be we must be severe with all the workings of the flesh. hence the words in Colossians 3:5. "Mortify your members which are upon the earth." After the men of Israel had circumcised themselves, Jehovah said: "This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you" (Joshua 5:9). Gilgal means "rolling." Everything that is suggestive of the world; everything reminiscent of our ways when we were in and of the world is a reproach to us. Let us never forget this.

BETHEL was the next halting-place. What a lesson of God's faithfulness could be learnt there! When Jacob was in flight from home because of his lying and deception, Jehovah appeared to him by night, and assured him of His continued interest and care. He spoke of the land; his seed; and his own personal needs (Genesis 28:1-22). Thus if we learn at Gilgal that flesh is always evil, we learn at Bethel that God is always good. The late J. B. Stoney once said: "I know enough of flesh to mistrust it utterly; I know enough of the blessed God to trust Him fully." It gives strength to any witness for God to be able to speak thus.

From Bethel the two prophets went to JERICHO. When Joshua led the hosts of Israel into the land Jericho was a key city, strongly fortified. They could not by-pass it; but they had no need of military machinery for its destruction. Jehovah manifested His power by causing the walls to fall down flat. Hiel the Bethelite rebuilt it in Ahab's day. In like manner men are frequently seeking to rebuild that which has crashed as the fruit of their sins (Isaiah 9:9-10). But all the wit of man could not lift the curse which lay upon Jericho. The situation of the city was pleasant; but the residents were obliged to confess "the water is bad. and the ground barren " (2 Kings 2:19). God is the great restorer; oh, that men could understand it!

After Jericho, Elijah and his friend reached the Jordan, and by the power of God they passed through the river dryshod. Jordan being a type of death, Elijah and Elisha typically passed through death that day on to resurrection ground. The lessons of all these places should be grasped by our souls if we are to be efficient witnesses for the absent Christ. The badness of the flesh which calls for the knife continually (Gilgal); the faithfulness of God (Bethel); the power of God over all the might of the enemy (Jericho); and the great lesson of death and resurrection with Christ as taught in Colossians 2:1-23 and Colossians 3:1-25.

On the eastern side of Jordan Elijah said to Elisha " Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee. “ A test question, assuredly, reminding us of Jehovah's word to Solomon in 1 Kings 3:5. Elisha's reply was prompt and decisive: "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. “ Elijah spoke with authority. At this point he typifies the risen Christ who has boundless blessings to bestow upon His own. Elisha could have what he desired on one condition; he must see Elijah when taken from him. Faith now sees Christ risen and glorified. Had we known Christ after the flesh, i.e. as a living Messiah, we know Him as such no longer (2 Corinthians 5:16). He has "gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God " (1 Peter 3:22). We are "in Him" there. This makes us heavenly as He is heavenly (1 Corinthians 15:48). Elisha did see his master taken up, and received his mantle as it came down upon him. The risen Christ has sent down to us the Holy Spirit (John 16:7). We thus have the same power for life and testimony as the man Christ Jesus had when here amongst men.

What a sight Elisha beheld! "There appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder: and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." The one who was left exclaimed — "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel. and the horsemen thereof!" He felt that the people of God had lost their surest defence, although the people themselves were too blind to understand it. In like manner the saints are today the world's most precious asset, whether men perceive it or not. Having received Elijah's mantle, Elisha rent his own clothes in two pieces. If we, God's present saints are truly conscious of our union with the risen Christ, we will desire that nothing of ourselves shall again be seen. Our whole deportment should speak to men of Christ.

Elisha recrossed Jordan in order to begin his great work in Israel. Smiting the waters with the mantle, he cried: "Where is Jehovah. the God of Elijah?" and the waters parted before him. The honoured servant had gone but God remained. This is always true. Men fill their little day. and pass from us; their memory is precious; but God ever remains with His people. Elisha enjoyed angelic ministry as well as Elijah; for when the Syrians besieged Dothan with a view to taking him prisoner, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about him (2 Kings 6:17).

The sons of the prophets said of Elisha when they saw him, "the spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha, “ and they bowed low, respectfully before him. May it be ours to be respected, not for our learning or wealth, or social dignity, but for the power of the Spirit of Christ manifested in our lives.

On the Holy Mount.

Very few men have been sent back to earth after having left it. Three are noted in Scripture: - Samuel was sent (not in response to the call of the witch) to pronounce the doom of Saul (1 Samuel 28:1-25); and Moses and Elijah were sent to greet the Father's well-beloved Son on the Mount of Transfiguration. A great honour for them. and full of meaning for us.

There was a general feeling in Israel that Elijah would come back. Malachi 4:5 was ample authority for this expectation. Among the questions put to John the Baptist was. "Art thou Elias! And he saith, I am not" (John 1:21). When the Lord Jesus challenged His disciples as to what the people were saying about Him, they replied, "Some say thou art. Elias" (Matthew 16:13-14). When He cried out in anguish upon the cross, the bystanders said "He calleth for Elias... let us see whether Elias will come to save Him" (Matthew 27:45-49

Well — Elias (Elijah) did come to our blessed Lord, not to Calvary to save Him, but to the holy mount to honour Him. That wonderful outshining of glory was witnessed by three of His disciples for the strengthening of their faith: for they were perplexed by His lowly bearing amongst men, and also by His references to a cross, all so contrary to what they looked for in the promised Messiah. Peter, when referring at a later date to the great scene on the mount, said, "we have the prophetic word made surer" (2 Peter 1:19 J.N.D.)

Several days before the Lord took Peter and John and James to the mountain top He sought to prepare His disciples for a life of self-denial and daily cross-bearing. For their encouragement He spoke also of a day of recompense when He will come in glory, and then added, "Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death. till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom" (Matthew 16:24-28). These words give us the key to the great vision of glory. It is a picture in advance of the Millennial kingdom, presented more particularly in its heavenly aspect. Matthew and Mark say "after six days"; Luke says "about eight days after." Six is man's number; it speaks of his week of labour; it is refreshing to know that after all man's toil and travail there will be an era of rest and glory. Eight is the number of resurrection; the risen Christ will bring the blessing in, and make it divinely secure. Matthew, says "and His face did shine as the sun." How suited to the Kingdom Gospel! For God's King, when He appears, will be "as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, a morning without clouds" (2 Samuel 23:4). To the God-fearing remnant of that day He will "arise as the Sun of righteousness, with healing in His wings (Malachi 4:2). Mark and Luke dwell upon our Lord's clothing. Mark tells us that "his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them." Mark and Luke present our Lord in His lowly character as Man and Servant; hence the emphasis on that which suggests His perfect purity. John — the only one of the four Evangelists who witnessed the glory on the holy mount — omits all reference to it; for it was to him given by the Spirit of inspiration to set forth, not our Lord's conferred glory, but the glory of His divine person.

To the astonishment of the three disciples, Moses and Elijah appeared, and entered into conversation with the Lord. These prophets could enter more than many into the feelings of the

rejected Christ; for both suffered severely from those to whose service they devoted their lives. Luke says the theme of conversation was His "decease (exodus) which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." Here we have the only basis of blessing. Moses brought down from God the law to a people to whom he was obliged to say at the close of his life: "Ye have been rebellious against Jehovah from the day that I knew you (Deuteronomy 9:24). Elijah appeared amongst the people at a critical time and sought to lead them back into the path of obedience. Both Moses and Elijah failed, for flesh is an evil thing. But the One who was about to give His life for sinners could not fail. A Saviour who has passed through death and risen again is the only hope of ruined men. Blessed be His holy name!

Peter was so delighted to see Moses and Elijah in the company of his Lord that he proposed to make three tabernacles, "one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias"; for he would fain prolong this wonderful meeting. Peter meant well; but in his thoughtless outburst he really dishonoured the Lord. He was almost putting Him on a level with Moses and Elijah! Yet not long before in contrast with the gossiping multitude who thought that Jesus might be Elijah or one of the old prophets risen again, Peter said fervently, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God " (Matthew 16:13-16). It was true that the three disciples fell asleep when they reached the mountain-top; waking up, they saw the Lord in His glory — the glory of the promised kingdom. As Peter spoke, the bright Shekinah cloud enveloped them all, and the voice of the Father was heard, saying, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased — hear ye Him." It was right to hearken to Moses and Elijah in their day, for they spake from God: but One who was infinitely greater than all the prophets had now come. All others must stand aside, and HE must be heard. Remarkably, when Peter wrote his second epistle, and described. the vision on the holy mount, he made no mention of Moses and Elijah being present! He had learned his lesson. God was not exalting mere prophets that day. it was upon His beloved Son, despised and rejected by men, He would put "honour and glory." "We were eye-witnesses of His majesty," says Peter enthusiastically, "and the voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with Him in the holy mount."

The outstanding elements of the glory of the coming kingdom were present that day. Jesus was seen in His majesty; with Him were two men, Moses representing the saints who have fallen asleep and who will be raised at the Lord's coming: and Elijah representing those who will be caught up without passing through death at all. A brilliant host of glorified saints will shine forth with the Lord Jesus when He shows Himself once more to the world. The heavenly saints are seen in Moses and Elijah: and the earthly in Peter, James and John. In mortal bodies they beheld the glory of God. The believing remnant of Israel, when they gaze upward at the opened heavens, will say, "Lo, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is Jehovah: we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isaiah 25:9).

While glory was being displayed on the holy mount, a painful scene was being enacted below. A poor child writhing in agony possessed with a demon and the poor father bowed down with grief. The coming down of the Lord Jesus changed everything. Satans powers were overthrown, and tears gave place to thanksgiving and joy. Even so will it be in the great day for which we wait, and for which the whole creation groans (Luke 9:37-42; Romans 8:17-22).

"Farewell, Elijah! In our meditations we have followed thee through storm and calm up to the rest and peace of the home of God. It was a great day when thou wast carried upwards in the whirlwind; it was a great day when thou wast sent back to earth for a moment to greet the Son of God: it will be a still greater day when in a mighty throng we shall all surround the throne of God and the Lamb, and fall prostrate before the Lamb, and pour forth the new song that will never grow old: "Thou art worthy..for Thou wast slain. and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tribe, and people, and nation" (Revelation 5:9). No more moments of depression and discouragement; no more peevish longings to die; no more self-occupation; all hearts concentrated upon Him who was the centre of the glory on the holy hill, and who will be the centre of still higher glory for ever. AMEN!"

Chapter 99

Elisha, the Prophet.

Elisha, the Prophet.

W W Fereday.

Elijah's Successor

The Call to Service

The Double Portion

The New Cruse

Scoffers Judged

The Three Kings

The Pot of Oil

The Shunammite

Death in the Pot

The Firstfruits

Naaman, the Syrian

Is It a Time to Receive

The Iron Did Swim

God and the Kings

Chariots of Fire

The Lesson of War

The Four Lepers

The Returned Shunammite

Ministers of Wrath

The Lesson of the Arrows

Life Out of Death

Elijah's Successor.

There was no room for a prophet in the order of things established by Jehovah for Israel when normal conditions prevailed. At the close of the ministry of Moses, the high priest was the link

between Jehovah and His people, and the civil leader was directed to walk under his guidance (Numbers 27:18-23); when the priesthood failed, the king became the link, and the high priest fell into the second place (1 Samuel 2:35); then, when royalty failed, prophets were raised up, for our God will have some means whereby He can reach His people for their instruction and blessing. But prophets were brought forward intermittently as God saw the need; there was no line of them, as of priests and kings. Each prophet stood in his own responsibility; he fulfilled his mission, and passed away.

But there was an exception to this in the case of Elijah. He had a successor. "Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room." Elisha was thus supplementary to Elijah. The contrast between the two was remarkable. The one terrible in his bearing, the other gracious; the one an ascetic; the other homely and accessible to all. Elijah's miracles were characterised by judgement; those of Elisha, with one exception, were marked by mercy. The very manner in which each is introduced to us arrests us by its contrast: the Tishbite bursts upon the scene abruptly, like a bolt from the blue (1 Kings 17:1); the son of Shaphat is seen peacefully ploughing a field (1 Kings 19:19).

Elijah and Elisha remind us of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus. The stern ministry of Elijah was akin to that of the Forerunner (Luke 1:17); the gracious ministry of Elisha is suggestive of that of the Saviour Himself (Luke 7:33-34). The name, too, is eloquent in its meaning: "God is Salvation."

Elijah's intercession to God against Israel (Romans 11:2) led to the anointing of Elisha to be prophet in his room. His deeply tried spirit burst forth into sore complaint against God's people. He recounted their sins before Jehovah. They had forsaken His covenant, thrown down His altars, slain His prophets with the sword, and were now seeking the destruction of Elijah himself (1 Kings 19:10). How unlike Moses in Exodus 32:31-32! Moreover, in his extraordinary assertion, "I, even I only, am left," the prophet seems to have fallen into the error of supposing that not another loyal heart was left in the land. God cannot accept this from any of us. True, others were not so pronounced in their separation from evil as Elijah; but Jehovah would have His servant know that there were nevertheless seven thousand knees which had not bowed down to Baal. Remarkably, from this point in the narrative, other witnesses are brought out into the light — samples of the seven thousand (1 Kings 19:19-20; 1 Kings 19:13-22, 28-35; 1 Kings 21:3; 1 Kings 22:8).

Let us take warning from Elijah's failure. Our own times are deplorably evil, and the apostasy hastens on. God appreciates those who, like Elijah, take a firm stand against the evil, at whatever cost to themselves in the way of ease and honour here. But let none of these entertain a thought of their own faithfulness in contrast to others. Humility becomes us, and extreme tenderness of spirit towards those who, however strange their associations, in their hearts really value Christ. All such are very precious to God; and however gravely He may Himself rebuke in them what is not well-pleasing in His sight, He will never tolerate in us censorious spirit towards them. To fall into this is to sacrifice our own usefulness at this critical moment in the history of the Church of God. If so excellent a witness as Elijah failed in this particular, the danger for ourselves is exceeding great.

The Call to Service.

ELIJAH journeyed to Abel-Meholah to find a successor, and lo, in the goodness of God, he found a companion. For the fiery prophet's trials were not yet ended, and he was henceforward to be comforted by the fellowship of a kindred heart. "Two are better than one, for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). How truly Elisha refreshed his master's spirit is suggested by the words in 2 Kings 3:11 : "He poured water on the hands of Elijah." In 1 Kings 19:21 it is said: "He arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him."

A pleasant picture is exhibited to us in 1 Kings 19:19-21. In the midst of Baal worshippers a pious farmer pursued his course, his soul doubtless sorely grieved by the apostate condition of God's people, yet himself wholly separate in heart and mind from the prevailing unfaithfulness. His call to service and testimony came to him when Elijah passed by. The call is given in 1 Kings 19:19; his anointing is found in 2 Kings 2:9. In like manner, the apostles of our Lord heard the call in Matthew 4:18, etc. and received the anointing in Acts 2:1-47.

It was but the work of a moment, Elijah's casting of his mantle upon Elisha, but it was the turning Point in his spiritual history. It the great crisis of his life. If he had failed to Perceive the significance of that moment his whole after career would have missed the divine intention Similar crises occur in the history of souls today; what we need is the spiritual sensibility to recognise them when they come Thus a disciple may hear the distinct call of the Lord to forsake all and devote himself to the work of the Gospel in a wild land. If he hesitates, the honour may pass by him for ever. If, on the other hand, he humbly submits himself to the divine mandate, his whole course is "Forward" from that moment. Our lives, as far as usefulness is concerned, are either made or lost by ability to discern these crises when they arise. We are only really useful when in the place where God would have us.

Elisha left all to follow devotedly the footsteps of another. Here is our example. "Follow thou Me" is the voice of Christ (John 21:22). Let us cultivate the spirit of Ruth in her fervent outburst to Naomi: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me" (Rth_1:16-17). This is devotion indeed.

Further, Elisha left all to tread a path of loss. Elijah was a proscribed man, and danger tracked his every step. From the quietness and security of the farm, Elisha went forth to be his disciple. His complete breach with the past seems indicated by the fact that he not only slew the oxen, but also "boiled their flesh with the implements." So to speak, he burned his boats behind him. From that day there was to be no looking back. We, brethren, are followers of a rejected Christ. Loss, not gain; suffering, not ease, are the appointed accompaniments of true discipleship. Are we really prepared for these things! Our apostle trod an unparalleled path (his account of it will be found in 2 Corinthians 11:12); but what sustained him therein! Hear him in Php_3:7-8 : "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but rubbish, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him."

The Double Portion.

Whatever services Elisha may have rendered (Timothy-like) in association with Elijah while the latter remained on earth, his testimony proper began after Elijah was rapt to Heaven. Their last journey together is full of spiritual significance. Starting from Gilgal, they proceeded west to Bethel; thence they turned back towards the east and visited Jericho; and from Jericho they passed to Jordan, and across to the other side. All these points spoke of a blessed past and an evil present. Israel's Canaan history commenced at Gilgal (Joshua 5:1-15). There their camp was formed; there the reproach of Egypt was rolled away; and thence they marched forth at the divine bidding for conquest. The associations of the place were thus very precious to a pious Israelite. But Gilgal was now one of the chief centres of national iniquity (Amos 4:4; Amos 5:5; Hosea 4:15). The place of Israel's early consecration to God had become the place of gross unfaithfulness to God. How sadly we are thus reminded of what the Church was in the beginning and of what it is today.

Bethel, meaning "House of God," was sacred as the spot where God manifested Himself to Jacob, and graciously pledged Himself to His servant (Genesis 28:10-22). Now one of Jeroboam's calves stood there (1 Kings 12:28-29), causing Jehovah to speak of the place in contempt as Bethaven - "house of folly" (Hosea 4:15).

Jericho once witnessed a marvellous display of divine power when Jehovah caused the walls to fall down flat; it was now a standing proof of the nation's apostasy from God (Joshua 6:20; 1 Kings 16:34).

Jordan once opened to let Israel into the land; now it opened to let Elijah out. Jehovah seemed thus to sunder link after link all that which once bound the people to Himself. They had rejected Him; He now rejected them. It is as if He was saying to His servant: "They do not want Me, and they do not want you; let them alone."

The holy persistency of Elisha on that memorable journey is very remarkable. At the start Elijah gave him the opportunity of remaining at Gilgal while he went on to Bethel (2 Kings 2:2). But Elisha protested: "As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." At Bethel and at Jericho further opportunities were given, but Elisha refused them in the same determined manner. Was the departing prophet really desirous of getting rid of his companion, or was he instead testing him as to how far he entered into the circumstances of that moment! We believe it was the latter. As the words of the sons of the prophets show, there was an impression abroad that Elijah was about to be taken away, and Elisha was bent upon remaining with him until the end. His soul felt that blessing was connected with association with Elijah, and he was determined not to miss the blessing. So "they two went on." Oh, that we clave to Christ with the same set purpose that Elisha clave to Elijah! Herein is the secret of power for life and testimony.

Arrived at the river, Jordan fled before the prophet, "so that they two went over on dry ground." Expressive type of Christ — death's master. But His death is also ours, and we find ourselves, in consequence, with Him outside of the present evil world. Do we indeed realise that this is our true position?

Jordan being passed, Elisha's great opportunity came. "Ask what I shall do for thee," said his master, "before I be taken away from thee." Like Solomon at an earlier date (1 Kings 3:5), his purpose of heart expressed itself in his reply. "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." The "double portion" was the portion of the firstborn (Deuteronomy 21:15-17), whereby he

was enabled to worthily represent the dead, and maintain the honour of his name. All in the Church are firstborn ones (Hebrews 12:23), and as such are endowed with blessings such as saints in former dispensations never knew. Nothing could exceed the wealthy portion which is ours in the risen Christ, that "better thing" which God has "provided for us" (Hebrews 11:16). By the power of the Spirit we are enabled to enter into the realisation of it, and so become fitted to worthily represent the absent Christ in the scene of His rejection.

Not until Jordan was passed did Elijah propose blessing to his disciple. In like manner, Calvary must be left behind in resurrection power ere the Spirit could be given from above, and full Christian blessing be enjoyed.

But there was a condition imposed upon Elisha. "If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." Elisha did see the glorious sight, and so the longed-for power and blessing became his. Do we see the Man who has gone up to God! Is the eye of our faith upon Him! The apostle prayed for the Colossians (Colossians 1:11) that they might be "strengthened with all might, according to the power of His glory, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness." Strengthened in this manner, Stephen could die in triumph, and Paul could live and serve dauntlessly.

From the departing prophet there fell the mantle. This Elisha took up, and forthwith rent his own clothes in two pieces. We must put off in order to put on. We must be divested in order to be invested. In measure as the old "I" is practically renounced (God's sentence of death upon it really accepted) so Christ is manifested in us. The apostle describes his own experience thus: "We which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus sake, that the life also of Jesus might be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Corinthians 4:11).

He even welcomed the most painful circumstances when they contributed to this grand result (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Possessed now of power, Elisha turned back towards Jordan, "And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah! and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither, and Elisha went over" (2 Kings 2:9) Elijah had gone, but God remained. What we all need is faith in the Unseen. Israel failed in this when Moses disappeared in the mount (Exodus 32:1). The Church has likewise failed in its faith in the invisible Head, and in the invisible Spirit. Men come and go, but God is ever with His people. Let us not live in the past, lamenting that "the former days were better than these" (Ecclesiastes 7:10); but let us rather lay hold upon God for today, assured that we shall find Him as good to us as ever He was to His saints in ages past.

The New Cruse.

The ministry of the "Son of thunder" being ended, that of the "Son of consolation" began. Its general character savoured of the grace of Christianity, and no wonder, for it flowed (typically) from death and resurrection, as we have seen. Mark here the goodness of the divine heart. Sentence had been already passed upon guilty Israel, and its very executors had been named Hazael and Jehu (1 Kings 19:15-17) yet God instituted a new ministry of grace. The avenging sword was held back awhile in forbearing mercy. Even so is it with the world at this time. Its doom was long ago pronounced (John 12:31; John 16:11) yet no sooner had it been pronounced than

the Holy Spirit was sent down from Heaven with that wonderful message of love and mercy with which our hearts are so blessedly familiar, and which far exceeds all other divine overtures in earlier ages of the world's history. But when the present divine mission is finished, the stroke will fall irremediably.

After the rapture of Elijah, Elisha tarried at Jericho, and there a very serious complaint was addressed to him by "the men of the city" (2 Kings 2:18-19). "The situation of this city is pleasant, as my Lord seeth; but the water is naught, and the ground barren." Thus man's infidel pride, while it could rebuild the city in defiance of the Word of God, was powerless to remove the curse which lay upon it. And what are men able to accomplish in their little world today! With many schemes, long and laboriously matured, they are constrained everywhere to acknowledge that the world is very far from what they would like it to be. A blight manifestly rests on every creature device. The high hopes of today are the bitter disappointments of to-morrow. The "pleasantness" is there, for God has created it, but "the water" - the spring from which men would draw satisfaction and pleasure — "is bad and "the ground is barren" — no fruit is produced for God. Both for God and for man everything is the exact opposite of what it should be.

God's man was the only hope of the needy men of Jericho, even as the Man of God's right hand is men's only hope today, though they understand it not. Elisha called for a new cruse, with salt therein, "and he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith Jehovah, I have healed these waters, there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land." The remedy was thus "a new cruse, with salt therein," with its contents cast into "the spring of the waters." Here we learn God's way of blessing for man. It is not by the patching up of an old thing, but by the introduction of something altogether new. Those who have not lost confidence in flesh are all the time seeking to repair its glaring defects. It is frequently said at the present crisis that we should have more confidence in humanity, i.e. in flesh. But God has long since declared flesh to be incurable in its evil, and He condemned it as such in the death of Christ (Romans 8:3-8) Nothing avails but a new nature. Hence the Lord Jesus speaks in Luke 5:36-38 of a new garment, new wine, and new bottles; and the apostle: tells. us in Ephesians 4:24 of a "new man, which, according to God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Nicodemus was taught in John 3:1-36 that his great need was to be born wholly anew. Apart from this, religious person though he was, he could neither see, nor enter into the Kingdom of God. God thus puts something "new" into the very "spring" of a man's moral being .

Elisha's cruse was full of salt. This great preservative represents the power which separates a man from evil, and keeps it far away. Only the man born of the Spirit possesses this. The religious man may indeed escape "the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," but such a one is always in danger of being again entangled therein. There is no capacity for moral resistance, and so it happens to him "according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Peter 2:20-22). The man born of the Spirit escapes "the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4), a much deeper thing than the world's pollutions, which are but external.

At Jericho fruit followed the application of the salt. So in our case having "salt in ourselves" (Mark 9:50), we are enabled to be fruitful for God in the midst of a barren world.

Scoffers Judged.

Only at Bethel do we find Elisha calling down judgement upon his foes (2 Kings 2:23-24). Grace derided and rejected must of necessity be avenged, whatever the dispensation may be. Men in Christendom are in even graver peril than the young People of Bethel. "Little children" is an improper and misleading translation. In many other Old Testament passages the same Hebrew word is rendered "young men." The offenders were similar in character and years to many who stand loutishly at our street corners today, with no respect for either God or man. Bethel ("house of God") had truly become Bethaven ("house of folly") when God's venerable servant could be pursued with the mocking cry: "Go up, thou baldhead; go up, thou baldhead." Not one of Jeroboam's priests intervened to protect God's witness; how, indeed, could it be expected! What cared they for the wonderful story of God's rapture of His despised prophet! As little did they care for the new witness whom God had raised up in his stead. Accordingly, Elisha turned back, and looking upon his tormentors, he "cursed them in the Name of Jehovah." The chronicler adds: "And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them." Whether "tare" means killed or simply injured is not stated. It is a solemn thing to join issue with God. The heavy judgement of 2 Kings 1:1-18, when two captains with their fifties were destroyed for their impiety, had no deterrent effect upon the scoffers of Bethel. How often is the rod of God unheeded But however long drawn out this longsuffering may be, the judgement of God upon rejecters is sure in this dispensation as in every other.

The Three Kings.

Three kings were in sore trouble; two of them ungodly men, the other a backsliding servant of Jehovah (2 Kings 3:1-27). Jehoram, King of Israel, was at least a religious professor. On occasion he could wear sackcloth upon his flesh, and make use of Jehovah's name (2 Kings 6:27-30); and he could even purge away some of the grosser evils introduced by his parents (2 Kings 3:2); The King of Edom was just a man of the world, with no pretension whatever to relationship with God. How could Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, associate himself with such a pair, with any expectation of aid or blessing from Jehovah! This was neither the first nor the second time that he had weakly allied himself with evil men. When he returned from helping Ahab at Ramoth-Gilead, the Prophet remonstrated with him thus: "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate Jehovah!" (2 Chronicles 19:2). When he joined himself with Ahaziah in a commercial enterprise, he was divinely informed that Jehovah would break his ships, a catastrophe which really happened (2 Chronicles 20:35-37). What is sorely needed amongst God's saints is the spiritual energy to say "No" (at whatever cost) when invited by the world to co-operate with it in its schemes, of whatever character the schemes may be.

The three kings sought to subjugate Mesha, King of Moab, who had repudiated the suzerainty of the King of Israel after the death of Ahab. Instead of exercising his conscience before God as to why this had been permitted, Jehoram had recourse to arms. This is the only remedy known to men who are destitute of the knowledge of God. When Jehoshaphat was invited to help, he replied: "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses." Oh, the shame of it! Should he not rather have replied: "By the grace of God, I am the opposite of what thou art!"

The allied sovereigns took a circuitous route in order to avoid Moab's fortified cities, and presently they found themselves with no water for their host. Jehoram cried out in despair: "Alas! that Jehovah hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab!"

Jehoshaphat asked if there was available a prophet of Jehovah by whose means they might inquire of Him. One of the King of Israel's servants remarking that Elisha was within reach, the three kings went down to him, Jehoshaphat saying, "the Word of Jehovah is with him." If the King of Judah had sought the Word of God before venturing forth, he would not have found himself in such a strait. Elisha at first bade Jehoram go to the prophets of his father and mother, knowing well that he sought water, not God; but presently he said, "As Jehovah liveth, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the King of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee." Elisha thus distinguished between God's saint (even though in a backsliding condition) and the evil men with whom he was associated.

His next words are remarkable: "But now bring me a minstrel." Why was this! The fact is, his spirit was checked while the ungodly were before him, and he felt it imperative to abstract himself in order to get into proper touch with God. What a lesson is here Oh, that we all understood it! How different would Jehoshaphat's course have been had he understood it! While the minstrel played, the hand of Jehovah came upon Elisha, and he said, "Thus saith Jehovah, make this valley full of ditches," etc. This being done, the valley should be filled with water, an ample supply for both men and beasts. Moreover, victory should follow over rebellious Moab. How good of our God! What an appeal to the consciences of all the confederate kings!

God's way of blessing on this occasion contains some very important principles. Note, the scene of it was a valley. The low place is the place of repentance and self-judgement. When God's people get down low enough before God, the blessing is never lacking. Ditches must be dug in order to receive and hold what God had to give. The deeper the ditches, the more energy thus displayed, the more water they got, the greater the blessing from God. There is tremendous need of spade and shovel work today. Brethren, there is a vast amount of earth to be got rid of as the blessing of God can really fill our Souls. 'Dare we deny that earth has taken large possession of us! Has not the extraordinary prosperity of recent years affected even God's saints adversely? It may be that now God is withdrawing it from us in order to uplift our souls. Christ is the Christian's only true object. Not to this world of sin and death, but to the other world of life and glory, where Christ is, does: the Christian really belong. By the Spirit's power we are enabled to enter even into the enjoyment of things invisible and eternal. But earthly-mindedness is grave hindrance to this. The blessing came "in the morning, the meal-offering was offered" (9 a.m.). Frequently in Scripture do we the blessing vouchsafed at the hour of (compare 1 Kings 18:36; Ezra 5:1-17; Daniel 9:21; Acts 2:15; Acts 3:1; Acts 10:3). has no good thing for man apart from cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. The work of God for the kings was in parts: (1) water for themselves and their hosts; and (2) victory over the enemy. is but a light thing in the sight of Jehovah: He will deliver the Moabites also into your hand." The refreshment of the army was thus only a means to an end. In like manner today the work of the Spirit goes far beyond getting Christians right. He does indeed meet our need most blessedly, ministering Christ to our souls, and rebuking and restoring us when ever we go astray; but He does more than this. He strengthens us for God, that we may be enabled to war successfully against His foes and ours. The life of the believer should be characterised by victory from first to last.

The victory being gained over Moab, the kings were told: "Ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones." An unsparing judgement assuredly. The lesson for us is plain. Our only

safeguard is to overthrow for ourselves all that in which flesh might trust or delight itself, for God would have us find our all in Christ. We dare not give quarter to anything that might draw our hearts away from Him.

The Pot of Oil.

In 2 Kings 3:1-27 we have Elisha ministering to the necessities of kings; in 2 Kings 4:1-7 he ministers to a widow and her sons, for there is room in the divine compassions for both the exalted and the lowly. Remarkably both Elijah and Elisha had dealings with a widow, and in each case a little oil in a vessel constituted an important item in their worldly possessions.

"Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear Jehovah: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bonds-men" (2 Kings 4:1). A pitiful story is here, a story suggestive of the meditations which drove Asaph to the very verge of infidelity (Psalms 73:1-28). That the godly should suffer while the ungodly prosper has frequently been a sore puzzle to tried hearts. In the present case the widow laid emphasis upon the fact that her husband feared Jehovah, yet he had been snatched from her by death, with no remainder but debts, slavery for her children being the only possible result, so far as the eye could see. Unbelief is apt to cry in such circumstances, "All these things are against me" (Genesis 42:36); faith quietly says, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to purpose" (Romans 8:28).

The greater the emergency, the greater the opportunity for God to show Himself on behalf of His people. When the men of Israel magnified the prowess of the nations of Canaan, Joshua and Caleb, true men of faith, said, "They are bread for us; Jehovah is with us; fear them not" (Numbers 14:9). Bread indeed! for every difficulty surmounted by faith in God yields strength and nourishment to the soul. Our wonder-working God is able to make the eater yield meat, and the strong one sweetness (Judges 14:14). It is a great reality to have to do with God. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). the widow of our chapter proved the truth of this most blessedly. Let us note that in her trouble she sought the aid of "the man of God." This is a title more frequently applied to Elisha than to any other Person named in Holy Scripture. Seventy times we read of "the man of God" in the Old Testament, twenty-two Of the passages referring to Elisha. What are we to understand by the title! Is it the equivalent of "Saint," and therefore applicable to, only man born of the Spirit? The Spirit's Sparing use of the term forbids the thought. It is first applied to Moses in Deuteronomy 33:1. This gives us the key to its meaning. Moses was one who cut himself entirely adrift from the world, renouncing absolutely all its honours and advantages in order that he might be Wholly for God. Only persons of this Stamp may rightly be regarded as men of God. In the midst of general ruin and departure, the, man of God is God's emergency instrument. It is open to us all to be in this blessed position, if so our hearts desire. The Church in these days needs men of God.

But what had Elisha for the distressed widow? Nothing, as far as his own resources were concerned, and yet he more than met her need. He could have said with the apostle, "As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Corinthians 6:10). And what have we wherewith to meet the need of souls? The amount contained in our pockets is a

small matter; the question is, what have we in our hearts! Blessed be God, we have that enshrined there which is capable of meeting every form of human necessity. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Our hearts have thus been illuminated by the knowledge of God, and from us that knowledge should radiate to others. Herein lies an immense opportunity for spiritual usefulness in a dreary world.

But Elisha asked the woman, "What hast thou in the house" She replied, "Thine handmaid hath not anything in the house, save a pot of oil." But there were great potentialities in the pot of oil, though the widow knew it not. Whatever else we lack, every Christian has his pot of oil. In other words, every Christian has the power of the Holy Spirit within him. Let us use it in faith, and all our difficulties become as nothing. So the widow must beg empty vessels of her neighbours not a few. "And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full."

Picture the scene in that humble house. What had the widow to look upon that day? Just a small vessel of oil, a number of empty receptacles, and two poor orphan lads earmarked for slavery. This was what the eye saw; but there was something else that no natural sight could behold — God. In Matthew 6:1-18 we are taught that the Father's eye is upon us, and in Matthew 6:19-34 that our eye should, in consequence, be solely upon Him. In this is rest and peace.

Now observe a remarkable thing. The oil flowed while a vessel remained to take it. It was only when the son said "there is not a vessel more" that the oil stayed. What a lesson is here! The blessing is limited by man only. In 2 Kings 3:1-27 the kings obtained water according to the depth of the ditches that were prepared. In 2 Kings 13:18 Joash, King of Israel, missed the opportunity of his life, when in the presence of the dying prophet, and with full knowledge that the actions of that day were significant, he smote upon the ground thrice only. This meant three victories over his enemies instead of total annihilation. Abraham, in Genesis 18:1-33, when making intercession for the guilty cities of the plain, paused at ten persons, though God had given no indication of weariness in listening to His servant's voice. Alas! alas! It is always man who limits the blessing.

"Oft we credit not, that God e'er gives as God."

But the widow's need was now met, so the prophet bade her "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest." Brethren, we have a debt to discharge, which only the power of the Spirit can enable us to discharge. Paul felt this deeply in Romans 1:14 : "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise." How he paid the debt is described in Romans 15:19 : "Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ." How far have we entered into the spirit of the devoted apostle, as expressed in these words! The cold principle of formal ministerialism has doubtless damaged the zeal of many a child of God. What is needed is to get our souls so divinely full of the things that we profess to believe that our lips must speak. Like Peter and John when they said to the Jewish council, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Like Paul again, when he exclaimed in 2 Corinthians 4:13, "We believe, and therefore speak." Men who are profoundly convinced of the truth of the Christian verities, and who are persuaded of men's deep need of the knowledge of them, will surely seek to "repay their debt." And for this the power of the Spirit is

divinely sufficient.

But Elisha added: "Live thou and thy children of the rest." Testimony to others However important is not everything. There is a life to be lived, with all its hard facts and varied circumstances. For this none of us possesses the smallest power in ourselves. But the power of the Spirit of God is our competency. It enables us to worship, suffer, and bear fruit at all seasons. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

The Shunammite.

The adjective "great," as applied to the woman of Shunem, doubtless refers in its first significance to her position in the world as a person of substance; but she was also "great" in that which alone counts for greatness with God — in faith (2 Kings 4:8). In this she was conspicuous in her generation. We find a number of God's Great" ones in Hebrews 11:1-40 — men and women "of whom the world was not worthy."

The Shunammite was spiritually superior to the widow of Zarephath, in that she was persuaded that Elisha was a holy man of God before the miracle was wrought; the widow got the same assurance concerning Elijah after the miracle (1 Kings 17:24). "I perceive -said the woman of 2 Kings 4:9. Oh, that we were all more keen in our spiritual perception!

As a lover of hospitality, the Shunammite frequently lodged Elisha. Those who are unable to bestow loving attentions upon the Son of God Himself, as Martha and Mary did, may always lavish care upon those who represent Him, if they have the heart for it, and this is good and acceptable with God (2 Kings 3:3; 1 Timothy 5:10). It was her reading of Elisha's life which constrained the Shunammite to say to her husband: "Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually." It is well when a man's ways are this eloquent for God. The apostle could remind the. Thessalonians of what manner of men he and his fellow-labourers were among them for their sakes. Indeed, he could say, "ye are witnesses and God also" (1 Thessalonians 1:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:10). With Timothy he could appeal, not only to his doctrine, which was sound, but also to his "manner of life, purpose, faith," etc. (2 Timothy 3:10). In his last conversation with his Ephesian friends he was able to review his whole course amongst them as in every way an example for them to follow (Acts 20:18-35). Faithful servant True ambassador for the absent Christ!

One day, when Elisha was in the Shunammite's house, he bade Gehazi, his servant, call her to him. He expressed the desire to do something for her in recognition of her many kindnesses to himself. "Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king or to the captain of the host?" (Possibly Elisha's services at the time of the expedition to Moab had given him some influence at Court.) The woman's reply was excellent: "I dwell among mine own people." Worldly honours had no attraction for her; she loved the simplicity of her own proper surroundings. How would we have replied to a similar inquiry! What is the world to anything or nothing! would we be spoken for to the king For the Christian, "mine own people," means the Assembly. Is it really there that we find our truest joys, albeit the Assembly is composed of "the poor of the flock," the weak, the base, the despised, etc. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29) Sometimes the blunder is made of regarding the saints as they are naturally instead of regarding them in the light of the infinite grace of God. What they are to Christ, and the fact that His presence is known in their midst should endear the saints to our hearts

beyond everything else. Happy are we if our souls are so fully satisfied with the communion of saints that each one of us is able to reply to every overture: "I dwell among mine own people." In the shade with God, apart from the world, is the safest place for us all, and the only proper place.

If worldly honours were nothing to the Shunammite, her family joys should be increased. Accordingly, Elisha promised her a son, and in due time the son was born. A few Short years of domestic bliss followed, and then the dark shadow of death entered the home. But the death of the lad brought out all that was spiritually noble in the mother. Her reticence to her husband concerning the great sorrow is suggestive that he was either not born of God at all, or that his faith was not up to the level of her own. Behold her hastening across the plain of Jezreel (perhaps thirty miles) in order to spread out her grief at the feet of the man of God at Mount Carmel. Such was her confidence in God that in reply to the inquiry: "Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband! Is it well with the child?" she could reply, "it is well." Brethren, it is always "well." "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Contrary to the principle laid down in Amos 3:7, Jehovah had not seen fit to acquaint Elisha beforehand with the object of the woman's errand. As soon as he understood it, he bade Gehazi take his staff, and lay it upon the face of the child. This, however well meant, did not satisfy the Shunammite. She said to the prophet: "As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." She preferred the living person to the lifeless staff, symbol of power though the latter might be. Perhaps Elisha was testing her, as Elijah tested him on the day of his translation. If so, her faith responded nobly. Alas, how many in our time cling to lifeless forms (sacraments, etc.) to the neglect of the living Christ! On their way to Shunem the prophet and the mother met the returning Gehazi with his report, "The child is not awaked." Entering into the house, Elisha "went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and he stretched himself upon the child, and the flesh of the child waxed warm." Even so, it is only contact with the living Christ that Can give life, and also sustain the life when it has been received.

"Call this Shunammite," said Elisha to Gehazi. "Take up thy son," said he to the mother. "Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out." The scene is full of moral grandeur: No expression of rapture and surprise at what had happened nay, she expected it. Her faith had gripped the God of resurrection. "Through faith women received their dead raised to life again" (Hebrews 11:35). The Shunammite could but fall at the feet of the one who had brought life to her. In like manner we prostrate ourselves before Him who has shattered the power of death on our behalf, and secured for us life for evermore.

"Death in the Pot."

This incident, and that which follows, furnish us with a sort of typical picture of man's history from the Creation to the Millennial age. Christ in His two comings is suggested in the deliverances wrought by the man of God.

"And Elisha came again to Gilgal" (2 Kings 4:38). Gilgal was originally the place of blessing. There the presence and power of God were experienced by Israel in a remarkable degree. The earth could once be described in the same way. But for man's defection it might be so described still.

The sons of the prophets being assembled around Elisha, he said to his servant, "Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets." "And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pottage; for they knew them not." The gourds were poisonous. The man had gathered a lapful of colocynths, really a wild cucumber, though in appearance like a vine. His eyes deceived him, and so he introduced a death-dealing element into the food of his fellows. How like to what happened in Eden! The forbidden tree was pleasant to the eyes, and in every way so desirable that the woman yielded to the temptation of the Evil One, and so ate thereof, "and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat" (Genesis 3:6). Death followed. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Romans 5:12). "O thou man of God," cried the sons of the prophets, "there is death in the pot."

But the remedy was at hand, for God is very good. He desires not the death of any. Elisha said, "Then bring meal." "And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat.' And there was no harm in the pot." The meal (as in the Levitical sacrifices) typifies Christ. He is God's great remedy for all the mischief which man's sin has brought into the world. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 5:20-21). His death is our deliverance from the old sin-stricken order of things to which once we belonged; it has become the means of life to us; and eternal life is ours now in Christ risen. We belong to another sphere where death can never come, and where the power of Satan is unknown.

For the Christian, while walking here, there is always "a dearth in the land." There is absolutely nothing that can satisfy the new man. Whatever men provide for their own satisfaction, there is always "death in the pot." The simplest things that men devise they spoil. Science, art, music - all those occupations with which men seek to delight themselves, and which are not necessarily sinful, yet contain in them the element of death, as many unwary saints have proved to their hurt. Only when the meal is cast in is anything fit or safe for the people of God. Everything earthly that we venture to handle apart from Christ is to our spiritual damage. When shall we learn the lesson for ourselves, and for our children? How many once faithful witnesses lie scattered and wrecked upon the rocks through lack of vigilance and care; and how many of the children of God's saints have been ruined from the same cause! There is "death in the pot" at every turn in this scene where Christ is not, yet how often do we forget it!

The Firstfruits,

The feeding of the hundred men follows suitably. The two incidents seem de- signed to be considered together, if only because, in each case, the miracle was wrought in connection with eating. "And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men! He said again, Give the people, that they may eat; for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof. So he set it before the men, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord" (2 Kings 4:42-44). The first fruits were properly the portion of the priests (Numbers 18:8-12), but everything was in disorder in Israel. Aaron's sons were in exile, Jeroboam's priests doing duty instead at his idolatrous altars; the first fruits were accordingly presented to the man of

God, as Jehovah's true representative in the land. Observe that the offering came "from Baal-shalisha." From the place of Baal's abode, where Satan reigned, something was brought to God. Even so will it be in the Millennial age. This poor world, where Satan's throne now is, will yet yield its true offering to God. The usurper is destined ere long to be overthrown, in order that the Man of God's good pleasure may be established in the place of power and glory. "The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:7).

Then the feeding time will come. No longer will there be "dearth in the land;" never again will there be "death in the pot." Of Zion it is written: "I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread" (Psalms 132:15). The Lord Jesus gave an earnest of this when He fed the five thousand. So enthusiastic were the people after that marvel that they were disposed to take Him by force and make Him King (John 6:15). He refused their desire, and retired to the mountain alone. When the hour for the appointed Kingdom comes, He will receive it neither from men nor from Satan, but from the Father, who alone has authority to delegate it to any.

In Elisha's day, "They did eat, and left thereof, according to the Word of the Lord." There was plenty for all. In the Millennial age "There shall be abundance of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains (surely a most unlikely place); the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon" (Psalms 72:16). To Israel "The Lord hath sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of His strength. Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine for the which thou hast laboured; but they that have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the Lord; and they that have brought it together shall drink it in the courts of My holiness" (Isaiah 62:8-9).

How blessed when all the woes of Israel and the nations are healed, and when all men's wants are fully met! "According to the Word of the Lord;" so shall it be. But this awaits the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Naaman, the Syrian.

There are two men of this name spoken of in Holy Scripture, the one a son of Benjamin, and the other a Syrian officer (Genesis 46:21; 2 Kings 5:1-27). Doubtless, to contracted Jewish minds, the Benjamite was much more to God than the Gentile; and, in fact, our Lord's audience in the Synagogue of Nazareth were so enraged at His mention of the Syrian that they forth- with cast Him out (Luke 5:29). Our Lord cited the case to show that there is goodness in the heart of God for strangers, and also that Israel's rejection of Himself would have the effect of diverting the stream of divine grace in their direction. This is how the blessing has reached to us, reader and writer alike.

In Naaman we see man at his best estate. He was successful in his undertakings, highly esteemed by his master, and evidently capable of winning the affections of those who served him. But everything was blighted by the terrible disease which afflicted him, for he was a leper. Other foes trembled before him; to this foe he was a helpless victim. Leprosy is ever in Scripture a type of sin that loathsome moral disease which unfits every man for the divine presence, and from which no man is able to deliver himself.

The captive maid is an attractive character. She was a true child of faith. The graciousness of her spirit is remarkable. Though a victim of Naaman's military operations, no resentful feeling was

permitted to lurk in her mind. Her sufferings became fruitful in blessing to others. She might almost have said with the apostle in 2 Corinthians 1:6, "If we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation." Assured that there was goodness in the heart of God even for the Gentile, and longing that her master might be blessed, she said, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." But when had God ever done such a thing? From the day that Leviticus 12:1-8, Leviticus 13:1-59, Leviticus 14:1-57 was written, no case is recorded of any man being recovered of his leprosy. Even at that very time there were "many lepers in Israel" (Luke 4:27), and none of them were cleansed. We are reminded of Abraham at Moriah, who accounted that God was able to raise up Isaac even from the dead, though no person had been raised since the world's foundation (Hebrews 11:19). It is blessed to note the confidence that faith has in God. Faith refuses to believe that anything is impossible with Him.

But Naaman knew not God as the maid knew Him. Accordingly he went armed with a letter from his own sovereign to the King of Israel. The healing, if it could be brought about, must come through official channels, with all due pomp and ceremony. But the maid said nothing about the King of Israel. The latter was dismayed at the letter, suspecting only an excuse for a quarrel. This was really shameful in Jehoram. Jehovah had taken great pains with this man in order to teach him that He is GOD. Had the king quite forgotten the water in the desert? (2 Kings 3:20). Had not Jehovah said, "I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal?" (Deuteronomy 32:39). Why did not Jehoram at once think of the prophet of God! Alas, flesh learns no lessons, let divine favours be ever so abundant.

How often in our own time do souls turn in wrong directions in their search for good! Law keeping, sacraments, etc.--anything and everything but the Christ of God.

Presently, however, Naaman found him- self at the door of Elisha. The prophet, hearing of the king's alarm, sent him a messenger, saying, "Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." Now behold the famous captain at the prophet's door. He had his own thoughts as to how the cure should be effected, and he was prepared to pay a big fee for the blessing. He had already humbled himself considerably in order to be blessed. He was following the advice of a mere servant girl, he was seeking a favour in the land of a beaten foe, and he was now halting with his equipage at the humble lodging of Elisha. Surely nothing more in the way of condescension could be expected! But he must come down a great deal lower ere God could meet him. Flesh in all ages resents this coming down. A toilsome pilgrimage, a burdensome pledge, or a huge fee would suit flesh today better than God's simple terms of salvation by grace alone, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Men's devices put honour upon the flesh. But God's plan is to utterly abase it, "that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:29).

It was a tremendous set back for Naaman when the prophet sent a messenger out to him, saying "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." This was more than flesh and blood could bear. The Syrian was deeply affronted. As he turned away in rage, he said, "Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the Name of Jehovah his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." We all have our own ideas as to how God should work. But He has said, "MY thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways" (Isaiah 55:8). How blessed to come to the end of

ourselves, and give up "I thought" once and for ever! The soul only then begins to truly learn.

If men in Israel felt scorn for the uncircumcised Syrian (as evidenced by the anger of the men of Nazareth in our Lord's day), the Syrian returned the scorn upon them to the full. He could even rail against their streams! "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel! May I not wash in them, and be clean?"

Naaman may well be eternally grateful to his servants who forthwith pleaded with him, venturing to point out the unreasonableness of his wrath. "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it! how much rather then, when he said to thee, Wash, and be clean?"

To Jordan then. Let the word of Jehovah through the prophet be tested. When did His Word ever fail! When were any disappointed who had staked little or much, or even their all, upon His Words "Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." Let us not misunderstand this type. Not blood, but water was the element in which Naaman dipped himself. Cleansing by blood has reference to what a man has done (for nothing but atoning blood can put away sins); cleansing by water has reference to what a man is, as scion of a ruined stock. In God's great plan, the sinner must be got rid of as well as his sins. Now Jordan is typical of death. In the picture before us we have the man of military fame, the man who would have purchased with money the gift of God; the man of "I thought," taking his plunge into death, and seen as such no more. "His flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child." So to speak, he made a new start with God. In like manner, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The believing soul endorses the sentence of death upon himself, and gratefully accepts the death of Christ as the door out of his former sinful state, that hence-forward he may "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). Baptism is connected with this truth.

The soul which has entered into the significance of it delights to say with the apostle: "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son ~f God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). The old "I" has gone (for faith) with all its appurtenances, and Christ alone remains.

Is It a Time to Receive

He who has received blessing from God is of necessity grateful, and his lips hasten to make their due confession. Accordingly we find Naaman returning from Jordan to the house of Elisha. In the presence of all his retinue he said, "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15). This was a great deal for the famous captain to say after all his victories over that people. But God, not men, was now before his soul, and God had become his light and his salvation. How could he do aught but publicly confess Him! Moreover, in his gratitude he would leave a tangible blessing behind him. Had he not brought ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment with him from Syria! Payment was doubtless his thought when he started out; to leave behind him a grateful offering was now his heart's desire. But the circumstances forbade Elisha to accept it. "As Jehovah liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive

none." Even urgent pressure from Naaman would not induce him to touch what he had brought. The healing of the Syrian was intended to be a picture of absolutely free grace to Gentiles (a great lesson to Israel and a notable testimony to the nations), and it must not be marred by the passing of gold and silver.

Naaman then asked the favour of two mules' burden of earth, "for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto Jehovah." He would raise a testimony to Jehovah on his return home, and that not with hewn stone (product of human effort); his altar should be of earth only, according to the divine command in Exodus 20:24. Whatever the cost, he would confess Jehovah in the face of all the idolatry of Syria. This is the spirit that is a delight to God in all ages.

But Naaman had a difficulty, and this he frankly laid before the prophet. His official duties required him to attend his sovereign when he went into the house of Rimmon to worship there. This would naturally be painful to him in days to come, and so he pleaded, "When I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon Jehovah pardon thy servant in this thing Elisha replied, "Go in peace." Every new born soul has his exercises as he returns to his former surroundings. A teacher taught of God, as was Elisha, would never grant a license in connection with doubtful matters, but he would be equally unwilling to impose a burden upon the conscience by demanding a pledge. Left to itself with God, the soul that only desires to please Him will soon learn what is comely, and grace will infallibly be granted to carry out. "The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Proverbs 4:18).

So the Syrian started for home. Alas there was one (connected with the testimony of God) who watched his well-laden equipage with covetous eyes. It was Gehazi, "the servant of the man of God It was too much for him that so willing a giver as Naaman should be allowed to return to Syria as rich as he came. As Jehovah liveth (said he), I will run after him, and take somewhat of him." Sin aggravated a thousand fold when the divine name is brought into it. Covetousness led to lying, for sins seldom travel alone. The fabrication concerning the two young men from Ephraim secured a fine booty for Gehazi. Yet another lie followed to cover these transgressions. Challenged by Elisha as to his errand, he denied that he had been anywhere at all. Then followed the terrible denunciation: "Went not mine heart with thee when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee! Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants! The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever." "And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow."

Gehazi is here a type of his nation, once outwardly near to Jehovah, but evidencing by their behaviour that their hearts were far from Him. As His responsible witness in the earth, Israel has utterly misrepresented Him to the nations (Isaiah 42:18-20; Isaiah 43:8-10; Romans 2:24); and as a consequence His hand has come down upon the people in judgement, and for the time being they have been put outside the place of testimony altogether. Gehazi's case reminds us somewhat of Miriam in Numbers 12:1-16. She was smitten with leprosy for her rebellion against Moses in the matter of the Ethiopian woman whom he had taken to wife. Both Miriam and Gehazi were utterly out of harmony with the mind of God concerning Gentiles. Their contracted hearts objected to Gentiles having a free share in the goodness of God to His people. Thank God, Israel's heart will

yet be changed, and they will gladly disseminate blessing far and wide. But they must themselves be restored to God on the ground of mercy ere this can be (Romans 11:26-32) .

Let us take warning for ourselves. We stand in the place of the smitten witness, and we are here to represent the gracious God who has revealed Himself so wonder- fully in the Man Christ Jesus. Our ways must correspond to our words. If our words are to have weight with men, our lives must be eloquent for God. A censorious or covetous spirit absolutely belies the God of all grace. The departing apostle could appeal in Acts 20:1-38 to his manner of life; could we do the same! The ministry with which he was entrusted moulded the minister. Is it the same with ourselves! The ministry of the unveiled Christ (2 Corinthians 3:1-18) produced an unveiled man (2 Corinthians 4:1-18), i.e. he walked transparently before both God and man. God was truly represented in his life. From him radiated the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Hear his appeal to ourselves: "Brethren, be imitators of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample" (Php_3:17). "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

"The Iron Did Swim."

To the man who knows not God it may seem puerile to introduce the story of a lost axe head into a volume of so exalted a character as the Bible. But the fact that it is able to stoop to small matters as well as unfold the highest themes is one of the many proofs to the believing heart that the Bible has really come from God. For it is a most precious fact that every detail concerning His own who are in the world is of the deepest interest to Him with whom we have to do. He numbers our hairs; He takes account of our tears; He remembered Paul's need of a cloak; and He considered the weak condition of Timothy's stomach. A petty raid is of greater importance in the divine sight if saints are involved in it than the mightiest military campaigns if they do not affect them. This is why a whole chapter is devoted to Chedorlaomer's attack upon Southern Palestine (Genesis 14:1-24), while many of the great military movements of antiquity (dilated upon by historians) receive no notice in Scripture whatever.

In this materialistic day it is considered childish to accredit miracles. An axe head fetched up from the bed of a river by the simple expedient of casting a stick into the water (2 Kings 6:1-7). Here indeed is food for the contempt of the proud. But the narrative presents no difficulty to faith. No reverent mind believes that the Lawgiver of the universe is limited by the natural laws which He has Himself established. While allowing those laws to have their full ordinary operation, He is quite able to act apart from, and in superiority to, them whenever it pleases Him to do so.

The physical miracle of recovering a lifeless axe from the depths may indeed be great, but the moral miracle of recovering for God a man dead in trespasses and sins is immeasurably greater. The latter may well be pictured in the former. The axe head which broke away from its proper position, where alone it could be really useful, and which then became an instrument for mischief, is strikingly suggestive of revolted man. If he were still standing in his original God-appointed position, he would be of service for God in the universe; having broken away from that position, he is Satan's most efficient tool for evil.

"Alas, master," cried the hapless wood- man, "for it was borrowed." To lose what belongs to another is more serious than to lose what is really our own. Now all that constitutes man what he

is, is derived from, and belongs to, Another. No man has anything that he can properly call his own. This truth was pressed upon guilty Belshazzar by the prophet Daniel on the last night of a wasted life. "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified" (Daniel 5:23). To many another the same strong words might be addressed with equal suitability.

"The axe head fell into the water," i.e. into Jordan, the familiar Scripture type of death. Is man a fallen creature, or is he not? The wisdom of the twentieth century objects to saying "Yes," and yet men cannot deny that something is radically wrong with the race in every quarter. Civilised Europe, with its barbarous conflict, wherein every convention is ruthlessly trampled under foot, cannot with decency again reproach the uncivilised heathen. Let none deny it - man is fallen, and away from God. Jordan speaks of death, and death unquestionably lies upon men everywhere in consequence of their fallen condition.

And the man of God said, Where fell it?" Having learned, "he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim." In like manner, as the living branch was cut down and cast in where the lost iron lay, even so was the living Christ cut down, and went right down into death where lost men lay. We are thus reminded of the words of the apostle in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again." Readers should beware of the Revisers' rendering of this passage. The Point before the mind of the apostle is this, the fact that Christ died for all is the proof that all men were in a state of death (spiritual death, of course). He who would deliver men must go where men were; nothing else could avail. The modern Ritualist attaches all possible importance to the Incarnation; but by so doing, he would rob us of the benefit of Redemption. Such was men's condition by nature and practice that Christ's death and blood-shedding alone could meet it.

Physical miracles may today be absent, but moral miracles are being wrought amongst us continually. Men dead to- wards God are being quickened into new 'life by the Spirit's. power, the instrument used for the mighty transformation being the old Gospel concerning the Saviour who died for sinners upon Calvary's tree, and rose again. Miracles of this description will continue to be wrought while the dispensation of grace lasts.

God and the Kings.

In 2 Kings 6:1-7 we have divine goodness to saints; in the verses which follow we have the same goodness extended to others also. This is on the principle of 1 Timothy 4:10, where the living God is declared to be "the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." Only folly would introduce the salvation of the soul into such a passage. It simply affirms the truth of God's providential interest in all His creatures. With this agrees Psalms 145:9 : "The Lord is good to all; and His tender mercies are over all His works."

Continuing our study of 2 Kings 6:8, we have first Jehovah addressing Himself once more to Jehoram, King of Israel's ten tribes. He took great pains with this man, yet we have no reason to believe that anything resulted from it, so hopeless is flesh. We are reminded of the apostle's warning in Hebrews 6:7-8 : "The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and

bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God; but that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned." The "rain" of God's goodness fell "oft" upon Jehoram, but no fruit for God is discoverable in the record of his life in consequence of it.

War having again broken out between Syria and Israel, the King of Syria found that his plans were becoming known to his antagonist in some mysterious way. Being much perplexed thereat, he charged his staff with treachery, and was informed by them, "Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the King of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bed-chamber." And indeed this was true, for several times the man of God had sent messages to Jehoram, saying, "Beware that thou pass not such a place, for thither the Syrians are come down." "And the King of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there not once or twice."

Let none suppose that the divine interest is confined to the Church. The Church is indeed a very special thing in the earth, united as one body to Christ its Head in Heaven; and being such is tenderly cared for with all the strength of infinite love. But all men, even though unappreciative of the wonderful grace of God revealed in the Gospel, are nevertheless the creatures of His hand, and He cannot but feel an interest in their welfare. It was intended that Jehoram should learn that deliverance does not depend upon "men, money, and munitions." There is at all times a God to be reckoned with, who is well able to circumvent all the designs of the mightiest enemy, and to give deliverance apart from military efforts altogether. Kings and their advisers should remember that the secrets of the council chamber (however carefully kept from the people) are all known to God. "With Him all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and He doeth according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, What doest Thou!" (Daniel 4:35). These are lessons that God would teach the leaders of men in this day; happy would it be for all concerned if they would but learn them! One of the mightiest monarchs of antiquity was given to understand that "the heavens do rule." Being unwilling to acknowledge it, fearful disaster fell upon him. Ultimately the broken king was enabled to say: "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgement, and those that walk in pride He is able to abase" (Daniel 4:37). The schemes of the haughty are speedily frustrated when God is pleased to act. Surely such a God is worthy of men's faith and prayers!

Chariots of Fire.

The special interest of the living God in those who are in relationship with Himself is amply shown in connection with the efforts of the Syrian King against Elisha. Being desirous of getting rid of one whose warnings to Jehoram so thwarted his operations, he sent a great host with horses and chariots to Dothan to apprehend him (2 Kings 6:13, etc.). What could a helpless man do against such an array! Clearly nothing. But the King of Syria should have known, from the remarkable way in which his secrets had been revealed, that he was really contending with God, a very serious matter assuredly. The God whom he entirely overlooked soon covered his fresh schemes with confusion.

To the terror of Elisha's servant, when he arose one morning the city was encompassed with an army. "Alas, my master, " said he, "how shall we do!" "Fear not," the prophet replied, "for they that

be with us are more than they that be with them." The eye of faith in the man of God could see what the eye of nature could not see. When the young man's eyes were opened, in answer to his master's prayer, he beheld the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. The man who saw the heavenly vision when his leader was translated had Heaven always very near his soul. His whole course as a servant of Jehovah was deeply coloured by the circumstances of its commencement. It was so with Isaiah. He saw the glory of the Lord (Isaiah 6:1-13), and received his commission from thence, and in how many passages does he speak of the glory of Jehovah in his writings The apostleship of Paul is even more to the point in this respect. The fact that he saw Christ in glory at the beginning of his career stamped a special character upon his whole subsequent ministry. Christ glorified is more the theme of Paul than of any other writer.

There were two hosts around Dothan that day. The servant saw the Syrians, and was dismayed; the prophet saw the heavenly armies, and was confident. In like manner when the angels of God met Jacob, as recorded in Genesis 32:1, he called the name of the place Mahanaim — "two hosts." As the Psalmist puts it in Psalms 119:150-151, "they draw near that follow after mischief, (but) Thou art near" Danger may indeed be imminent, but God is nearer to us than all our foes. We may well ask ourselves, which host do we see today — the assemblage of those who hate us, or the company of "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of (inherit) salvation!" (Hebrews 1:14). In all our perplexities and perils, surely we can say with Elisha, "They that be with us are more than they that be with them."

A remarkable thing then happened. Elisha prayed that the Syrians might be smitten with blindness. This was as truly mercy as the smiting of the Sodomites with blindness was judgement (Genesis 19:2). The Syrians were to be taught two great lessons: (1) the impossibility of harming God's people; and (2) the goodness of the heart of God even towards Gentiles. The Wording of Genesis 19:19 in the Authorised Version has caused Elisha to be suspected of untruthfulness by some; substitute "and" for "but," and all is plain. When the Syrians reached Samaria, and had their eyes opened, they were indeed in the presence of the man they sought, i.e. Elisha, there was no subterfuge whatever. The King of Israel was willing on this occasion to obey the directions of the prophet, with the result that the captives were feasted, and then sent away to their master. "So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel." This astonishing incident closed the campaign. If Israel learnt nothing from the wonderful ways of God, Syria did at least for the time being.

It is interesting to us as Gentiles to observe in the Old Testament these occasional flashes of divine grace to men outside of Israel. Truly the heart of God is good and gracious. It is significant that the exhortation to Christians in Romans 12:20, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink," is a quotation from the Old Testament from Proverbs 25:21-22.

Our chapter (2 Kings 6:1-33) assuredly teaches us that there is a God who is able to outwit every enemy device, and to bring to naught all his strategy. This is the God to whom His people are entitled to look in all the trying circumstances of wilderness life.

The Lesson of War,

"It Came to pass after this." Note the words. Not for long does the enemy allow the people of God to enjoy quietness. His restless hatred watches every opportunity to stir up trouble for them. So it

was in Elisha's day, and so it is in our own time also. Still, 2 Kings 6:24 reads strangely after the remarkable story related in the preceding verses. We might almost have supposed that after the feeding of the Syrian host by Israel, for very shame they would not have attacked them again, and in that generation. But the human heart is incorrigible in its evil. The richest grace produces no effect upon it apart from new birth. This alone explains the world-wide revolt spoken of in Revelation 20:7-9 as following our Lord's thousand years reign. Even the marvellous blessing of that era of glory will not reconcile flesh to God.

But nothing happens without a cause. The Syrians' new war against Israel was altogether evil. God was not taken into account in their mischievous plans. But, while this is true, there was also that in the condition of God's people which called for discipline, and which could only be corrected by the stern ordeal of war. So we find the citizens Of Samaria reduced to direst extremity, the awful need of the hour being vividly brought home to the king by the pitiful story of the woman who bad been compelled to boil her son. How true is God's Word, in its warnings as well as in its promises! In Leviticus 26:1-46 and also in Deuteronomy 28:1-68, the calamities which would result from disobedience were solemnly described to the people by Moses before they entered into the promised land at all; now in Jehoram's reign we find them literally fulfilled.

We are now passing through a grave crisis ourselves. In these favoured islands, whatever our inconveniences, losses, and sorrows, we are hardly able to realise what is taking place in lands more directly touched by the ravages of war. (Written during the Great War, 1914-1918.) In the midst of all the suffering, experiencing weariness and painfulness, cold and nakedness, the people of God are found. Is it without a cause that affliction has thus fallen upon the Church as well as upon the world? What has our record been during many years of tranquillity and prosperity Half-heartedness, worldliness, and division. Are we learning the lessons of this terrible time! If men at large will not hear the rod, and Him who has appointed it, are we, the redeemed people of God, willing to hear! Have we yet humbled ourselves before God concerning our shortcomings and sins! Jehoram was not the worst of Israel's kings. He wrought evil in the sight of Jehovah, but not like his father and like his mother (2 Kings 3:2). There was with him even a show of piety. He made use of Jehovah's Name, and wore "sackcloth within upon his flesh." But his heart was never right towards God. Accordingly the fiery trial of war only served to bring out the terrible evil of his heart. Like the rocky ground hearers of Matthew 13:21, he could not face tribulation. Thus when he heard the painful story of the woman and her son, he exclaimed, "God do so to me, and more also, if the head of Elisha, the son of Shaphat, shall stand on him this day." Instead of humbling himself before God in dust and ashes, and so drawing down mercy from on high, he lifted up his hand to strike. Who would he strike? God, if he could reach Him; but, as that was impossible, he would murder the man who represented Him.

"Why does not God stop the war!" is the irritable demand of our own time. "If there be a God, why does He allow all this sorrow!" That their own sins have made war inevitable, and that it might not be for their good for the cloud to be lifted too soon, does not seem to occur to the mass of our fellowmen. In their eyes God is a sort of public officer who should hasten to the rescue, asked or unasked, whenever men get into trouble. In their blindness they forget that instead He is a moral governor, whose claims they have set at naught, and whose very existence they have practically ignored. Men have sown to the wind, and they are now reaping the whirlwind. It could not have been otherwise. The road to deliverance lies along the line of repentance. "But where sin

abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20). Behold the instrument of Jehoram's wrath, with his master at his heels, proceeding to the home of the prophet. Unlike his predecessor, who fled at Jezebel's threat, Elisha sat still in the house. When the would-be murderer appeared, instead of a divine denunciation, lo! a wonderful announcement of divine grace was sounded forth. Elisha said: "Hear ye the Word of Jehovah, Thus saith Jehovah, To-morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria" (2 Kings 7:1)

Our minds travel to the cross of Calvary, and to all that followed that dark scene. As in Elisha's day, so it was then; when man's worst was fully told out, God brought forth His very best. Not judgement, but the Gospel of the grace of God was the immediate result of the murder of the Lord Jesus. When Jehoram was about to slay Elisha, God declared His glad tidings concerning deliverance and plenty; when men had actually slain His beloved Son, God declared the glad tidings with which we are blessedly familiar in the Gospel. Moreover, the city in which the dreadful deed was committed was to have the message first of all (Luke 24:17). Truly there is none So good and gracious as our God!

The Four Lepers.

It is most remarkable, the persons who first experienced the goodness of God to the starving people of Samaria — four lepers! These poor creatures were sitting at the entering in of the gate in the last stage of exhaustion and misery. They felt (indeed, they said as much one to another) that if they pressed their way into the city, it was but to die of famine; if they remained where they were, death was certain; but one course seemed open to them, to cast themselves upon the mercy of the Syrians. "If they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die" (2 Kings 7:3-4). It was the counsel of despair. As regards those within, they were outcasts; and as regards those without, they were enemies. Yet these were the men to whom first of all Jehovah showed His salvation.

We are reminded of 1 Corinthians 1:26-30. In this Gospel day, it is not the wise, the mighty, and the noble who are called, but God has chosen the foolish, the weak, the base and despised, yea, and the things which are not, in order that no flesh may glory in His presence. In His grace He loves to show mercy to the helpless and hopeless, to the lost and undone. By so doing He makes it abundantly plain that His salvation is altogether of grace alone. Behold the poor Samaritan lepers venturing forth in the twilight in the direction of the Syrian camp! Hope and fear alternated in their breasts when they reached the enemy's tents; to their utter astonishment they found no man there. Their dread foes were gone! Who had scattered them! Men! No! It was God. The victory was absolutely His. He had caused the Syrians to hear a great noise, as of the rushing of chariots and horsemen. Both from the north and the south the noise came. Panic stricken, they concluded that the King of Israel had hired against them the Hittites and the Egyptians. Caught as they supposed, between two armies, they fled by the only road that seemed open to them -eastward across the Jordan. When the matter was investigated, the road to the river was found strewn with garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast from them in their flight. But Jordan rolled between Israel and their foes.

Jordan is to us a type of the death of Christ. By His death all our foes have been vanquished for ever. Sin has been expiated, and the power of Satan and of death has been shattered. The death

of Christ, like Jordan of old, stands between us and all that was against us. Our God loves to say to those who have no might: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord" (Exodus 14:13).

It only remained for the poor lepers to enjoy the fruits of Jehovah's great victory. Even so it is with us, both now and evermore. The lepers "went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it." Their deep need was thus fully met. First, they "did eat and drink." Every poor sinner who comes to God comes famished, like the prodigal of Luke 15:1-32, for a Christless world is a hungry place for all who have to do with it. But the call of grace runs thus: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1). The fatted calf is not too good, in God's account, wherewith to feast the sinner who The lepers found raiment also. Likely enough they were in rags. Our very righteousnesses are likened in Scripture to filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6); what then are our sins! But with joy we hear the Father's voice, saying, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him" (Luke 15:22). The best robe is Christ. In Him the believer stands, justified for ever. The apostle, who knew by experience the difference between the righteousness that is wrought by human effort, and that which is of God by faith, spurned the one because of the surpassing excellence of the other (Php_3:9).

But the lepers also gathered gold and silver. Not only was their resent urgent need met, but their future was thus made sure. Never again would they be paupers, dependent upon the charity of their fellows. If the raiment speaks to us of "the gift of righteousness, the gold and silver suggests the abundance of grace" that accompanies it for us (Romans 5:17), God enriches for eternity those whom He receives. It is not the manner of men to enrich either transgressors whom they may pardon, or beggars whom they may relieve, but such is the amazing grace of God. With all the blessing of Christ He endows His own for ever. No wonder the apostle exclaimed: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

Being now filled and satisfied, the four men began to think of others. They said one to another: "We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace." Accordingly they arose and reported the matter to the porter of the city, and presently the news reached the king himself. Those whom God has blessed have a deep responsibility resting upon them. Do we realise that the world is perishing for lack of the knowledge that we possess? The four lepers felt they dare not settle down to the enjoyment of their abundance and leave others to their fate.

How do we feel about this! Sometimes it happens that the saints who are the best fed are poorest workers. They would Prefer endless Bible readings to a vigorous Gospel campaign. Is this right Peter and John were so Profoundly convinced of the importance of the facts of the Gospel that when they were told to proclaim them no more, they replied: "We cannot but Speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). As well bid the sun to cease its shining and the river its flowing as tell such men to be quiet. In 2 Corinthians 4:13 Paul and Timothy give as their reason for preaching: "We believe. and therefore speak." Paul was possessed Of a special divine commission, as we know, but he does not mention it in the passage quoted. Every Christian should be able to say the same words. Brethren, do we really believe! Are the mighty facts of

Christianity just articles of a creed with us, or, have they indeed taken possession of our souls! Do we believe that "Christ died for the ungodly?" Do we believe that "God raised Him from the dead?" Do we believe that "through this Man is now proclaimed the forgiveness of sins!" If so, let us not "hold our peace." This day is a day of good tidings.

The king was sceptical when the news was brought to him; he suspected a stratagem on the part of the enemy in order to gain possession of the city. Though Elisha had distinctly stated in his hearing that "to-morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria," he yet hesitated to believe it when it came about. It seemed really too good to be true. This character of unbelief, however regrettable, is pardonable, else where would any of us stand! In how many things do we hesitate to accredit the Word of our God! How frequently we fail to plant the foot of faith firmly upon that which He has spoken! Much of Scripture is treated by us as almost too good to be true. This is exactly where the two disciples stood who poured out their tale of disappointment on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:1-53). They did not openly reject the story of the women that the Lord was alive, but their faith faltered in the acceptance of it. Far different was the unbelief of the nobleman upon whose hand the king leaned when Elisha uttered his prophecy of grace. Though it was prefaced by "thus saith Jehovah," the man said to the prophet, "Behold, if Jehovah would make windows in Heaven, might this thing be?" This was positive contempt. He absolutely flouted the Word of Jehovah. The doom of the Scorner is certain in all ages. Accordingly Elisha pronounced sentence upon him thus: "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." Alas! so it happened. Within twenty-four hours, as the prophet foretold, Plenty prevailed in Samaria once more, "according to the word of Jehovah" (2 Kings 7:16). But the solemn part of his Prophecy was also as punctually fulfilled. So great was the rush for the food that it was necessary to appoint someone to supervise the administration of it. This office was allotted to the scornful lord, who was simply trampled to death by the hungry people.

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). His judgments are as sure as His favours. No word of His can ever fall. The scornful lord found Elisha's words literally true: "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." Very similarly did the Lord Jesus warn the unbelieving men of His own time: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out" (Luke 13:28). Awful thought! They see others blessed, and themselves outside of it for eternity.

It is the fashion in our day to speak with contempt of the judgement of God. The Judgement Throne and the Lake of Fire have been practically eliminated from the text-books of Christendom. But let all sceptics beware, whether religious or irreligious. God's Word stands true, spite of all their unbelief.

The Returned Shunammite.

Let us adopt the Revised rendering of 2 Kings 8:1, for it will help us in the under- Standing of the passage. "Now Elisha had spoken unto the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn, for Jehovah hath called for a famine; and it shall also come Upon the land seven years." The incident was thus earlier in time than the doings recorded in chapter 7 When ever it was, the departure of the

Shunammite from the land of Israel took place by divine command through the instrumentality of Elisha. A time of trouble was approaching, "and surely the Lord God will do Nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). Such was Jehovah's care for the pious Shunammite that He sent her away beforehand. Is it not good to have to do with God! The emigration of this family was thus on an altogether different principle from that of Elimelech and Naomi (Rth_1:1-22). Their move was just a matter of human expediency, and great sorrow was the result. The true line for us all is indicated in our Lord's words in Matthew 4:4, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Behold the hungry One in the wilderness, possessed of power to supply His need, yet refusing to act without a word from God! If we could but wait in times of perplexity our God may be trusted not to fail us, and He will give the suited words of guidance in His own time. Saul lost his kingdom through a little impatience in an emergency (1 Samuel 13:11-14).

Observe that the trouble was limited — "seven years." He who sits upon the throne will never suffer the reins of government to be seized by the enemy. His controlling hand measures everything that must needs fall upon His own, and the enemy is powerless to exceed that measure. Thus the sufferings of the elect during the great tribulation are for 1260 days (Revelation 12:6), and Satan could not make it 1261 were he ever so desirous. When he sought the ruin of Job he was only allowed to afflict him step by step as prescribed by God. "Times and laws" (religious institutions) may be given into his hand, but not God's people (Daniel 7:25).

When the Shunammite returned from her seven years exile she appealed to the king for the restoration of her house and land, and she obtained it really through the instrumentality of her son, the story of whose restoration to life so deeply interested the king. She is thus a picture of Israel, away from the land during the present dearth, but yet to possess all things again in virtue of the dead and risen Christ. In that happy day they will say: "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). It will be to them as life from the dead.

Gehazi happened to be near at the moment of the Shunammite's appeal to the king. The hand of God was in this. The man was actually relating her own story. Jehoram was just then in the humour to be entertained; thus he said to Gehazi, "Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done" (2 Kings 8:4). He was not seeking divine instruction from this one-time servant of Jehovah, but (as we have said) entertainment. In like manner many in Christendom today, who would refuse a plain talk about the realities of eternity, would have no objection to discuss preachers and their doings. If Jehoram had sought such talk from John the Baptist, or Paul the Apostle, he would have heard such words concerning "righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come" as would have made him quiver in his shoes (Acts 24:25). But Gehazi was useless for such work now. He had been associated with the testimony of God committed to Elisha, but he was, alas! out of it, and could only dwell upon the past. For him the present was a spiritual blank. Oh, the sorrow of it, and the danger that his case suggests for us all! Our God have mercy upon us!

Money was his ruin. How very solemnly does the apostle warn us concerning this peril in 1 Timothy 6:1-21. He distinguishes between those who desire to be rich (1 Timothy 6:9-11) and

those who are rich (1 Timothy 6:17-19). Those who desire to be rich expose themselves to fearful danger, and those who are already rich have a great responsibility resting upon them in view of the coming day.

Scripture presents to us a number of spiritual wrecks. Amongst them are the old prophet of 1 Kings 13:1-34, and Demas. We need not raise questions as to the salvation of such persons, for it is not the point before the mind of the Spirit. The point is that, through paltering with the world, they lost their testimony for God in the present scene. Any of us may do the same. In that case, how solemn will be our manifestation before the judgment seat of Christ! The Lord keep us all walking in humility before Him!

Ministers of Wrath.

When Elijah made his complaint against Israel at Horeb three persons were named to him by Jehovah as the executors of His will upon the guilty nation — Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha (1 Kings 19:15-17). Of these Elisha was brought forward first with his wonderful ministry of grace. This is so like our God. Had Israel possessed eyes to perceive it, Elisha's service amongst them was the divine interlude between the sentence and the execution of the judgement It was for Israel to say whether the sentence should take effect or not; for Jehovah is ever willing to turn aside the threatened stroke when men really humble themselves before Him. This is His declared principle of action in Jeremiah 18:7-8, and we get an illustration of it in Jehovah's dealings with Nineveh in the time of Jonah.

Elisha's ministry of grace was practically fruitless. Israel sinned more and more. The time had come therefore for the sword to be unsheathed. Accordingly we have the ministers of wrath appointed Hazael, in 2 Kings 8:7-15; and Jehu, in 2 Kings 9:1-10.

When Elisha visited Damascus King Benhadad, who was sick, sent Hazael to him to inquire if he should recover of his disease. Possibly the merciful deeds described in 2 Kings 5:1-27 and 2 Kings 6:22-23 had given the prophet favour in the eyes of the Syrian monarch, if only for a season. Like Naaman, he was prepared to pay largely for any benefit he might receive, and so he sent the man of God "a present of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden." That God is not a trader, but a giver (and a very generous giver) seems a fact exceedingly difficult for men's minds to grasp. In every dispensation men are disposed to barter with God — so much money or labour for so much blessing.

When Hazael came before him with his message Elisha realised that a fateful moment had arrived for Israel. Hence, after he had informed his visitor that though there was no real reason why the sick man should not recover, but as a matter of fact he would not do so because Hazael was destined to be king over Syria, he wept. All the barbarities attendant upon war rose up before his mind, and though he knew Israel richly deserved the chastening rod, he loved the people, and mourned over their impending desolation.

When the weeping prophet told Hazael what he would do to the children of Israel in burning their strongholds, slaying their young men with the sword, and massacring their women and children, the Syrian exclaimed in amazement: "What, is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?" Hazael is not the only person apparently incapable of realising all the evil of which flesh can be guilty. It is likely that he had never hitherto perpetrated such enormities, and so he recoiled

from the terrible suggestions. But the result proves that when he found himself in the place of power he committed all the ferocious deeds of which Elisha warned him. It has been truly said that many of us are harmless only because our position in society does not permit us to be other- wise.

Perhaps some of our readers have not yet learned the hopeless evil of flesh- their own flesh. To such it may be staggering to find the offensive things mentioned in Colossians 3:5 described as "your members." Or again, it may be painful to ponder the horrible list of the works-of the flesh as given in Galatians 5:19-21. The poor, shocked heart is apt to exclaim: "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?"

Let us note it well, there is no evil of which flesh is not capable. It met its end in judgement before God in the cross of Christ, and they that are Christ's have, by their acceptance of the divine sentence, crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts (Galatians 5:24). Henceforward for us confidence in flesh is impossible. Christ is all.

However startled Hazael might be by the prophet's announcement, in the sequel he did everything that was predicted of him. First, on his return to Damascus he murdered his master in his bed, and usurped his throne; then during many years he waged pitiless war with both Israel and Judah, inflicting frightful suffering upon the people. The following passages chronicle Hazael's destructive work: 2 Kings 8:28-29; 2 Kings 10:32-33; 2 Kings 12:17-18; 2 Kings 13:3-7, 2 Kings 13:22-24. But all the anguish and ruin might have been averted had God's rebellious people humbled themselves before Him.

The Lesson of the Arrows.

It is remarkable perhaps that so evil a Person as Joash, King of Israel, should visit Elisha upon his death-bed, yet so it was (2 Kings 13:14-19). He seems to have had some respect for the man of God, as Herod at a later date respected John the Baptist, though quite unwilling to conform his ways to his teaching. The sight of the stricken prophet brought tears to the eyes of the king, and he exclaimed: "Oh my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" A truly wonderful thing for a Sovereign to say of a humble subject, possessed neither of wealth nor power. But the king rightly felt (and wicked though he was, he could not but acknowledge it) that the presence and prayers of such a man as Elisha was valuable asset to his nation. The king was right, and the same principle applies today. Who can estimate the priceless value to the British nation of the presence and prayers of God's saints at this tremendous crisis! When the history of earth is fully known it will be found that Britain owes much to the Christians in her midst But men of time and sense cannot be expected to understand this; with them "men, money, and munitions" are all in all

The dying prophet sought to turn the king's mind towards Jehovah as the only true Deliverer of his people. Israel was being sorely harassed at that time by the depredations of Hazael, King of Syria Elisha bade Joash take bow and arrows He would teach him by a parable. The prophet put his hands upon the hands of the king. The prophet's hands are suggestive of the power of God, without which all human efforts are in vain. Both John in Patmos (Revelation 1:17) and Daniel at the River Hiddekel (Daniel 10:18) were strengthened when the Lord's right hand was laid upon them.

"Open the window eastward," said Elisha. If the shut door of 2 Kings 4:4 speaks of the soul's seclusion with God the opened window of 2 Kings 13:17 speaks of the soul's expectation from God. Oh, that we all knew more experimentally of these things! Daniel opened his window when he prayed daily towards Jerusalem (Daniel 6:10). "Shoot," said the prophet, and the king shot. The interpretation was then given: "The arrow of Jehovah's deliverance, and the deliverance from Syria; for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them." Joash had reached a critical moment in his history, and in the history of his kingdom, had he been able to perceive it. The very suggestion that blessing and deliverance from his dreaded foes was signified in the arrows should have Prepared him to act worthily at the next stage. Alas, for him, and for man everywhere and always! God always so willing to bless, and man always so blind to his true advantage!

Elisha next bade the king take up the arrows and smite upon the ground. "And be smote thrice, and stayed." Oh, the pity of it! Need we wonder that the man of God was wroth with Joash? "Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it; whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice" (2 Kings 13:19). The man by his slackness had limited the deliverance of his people. God gave him as much as he had faith for but no more. "And Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, took again out of the hand of Benhadad, the son of Hazael, the cities which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz, his father, by war; Three times did Joash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel" (2 Kings 13:25).

What a lesson is here for us all! We have to do with a God who is boundless in resources, and who delights to bless His people, yet so poor are our thoughts and expectations that we limit Him continually. So little satisfies us. So slow are we, so lacking in spiritual energy, to go in boldly, and "possess our possessions" Would that there were among us more of that holy Yearning which filled the soul of the apostle when he wrote, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfected, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Php_3:12-14).

Elisha might well be angry with Joash, as Nehemiah with the faulty Jews of his day (Nehemiah 13:25). Lack of faith in the one case, and unholy alliances in the other, dishonoured God, and hindered the blessing of His people. Similar holy indignation (though not perhaps so vigorously expressed as by Nehemiah) is not unsuitable for our time also.

Life Out of Death.

We have now reached the end of the gracious ministry of Elisha, with all its instructive lessons for the men of his own day, and for us also. "And Elisha died, and they buried him." But a remarkable thing happened a little later. "The bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet" (2 Kings 13:20-21).

How wonderful are the ways of God! Contact with the dead prophet restored life to the dead. Even so will it be with Israel at the end. In one of His many characters the Lord Jesus is the Prophet like

unto Moses, unto whom Israel should have hearkened when He came amongst them in grace (Deuteronomy 18:18-19). Both Peter in Acts 3:22-23, and Stephen in Acts 7:37, urged this upon the people after His departure. National scattering and death have come upon them as the fruit of their rejection of Him. But Israel will yet come into contact with the Prophet like unto Moses. In the tremendous crisis which seems near at hand, compared with which the Moabite invasion was a trivial matter, Israel will be led into touch with the Christ who died. National revival will be the result, likened over and over again in Scripture to life from the dead (Ezekiel 37:1-14; Daniel 12:1-2; Hosea 6:1-11.

Upon the same principle has God dealt with us who now believe in the Saviour. Contact with Him as the One who was slain has brought life to us who once were dead in trespasses and sins. It is labour in vain to proclaim Him to the spiritually dead as the pattern Man and the model Preacher, whose teaching all should follow. Nothing of this will meet the sinner's need. Expiation is wrought by blood alone, and life -eternal life- can only be our portion as the fruit of death. This is what the Lord taught in the synagogue in Capernaum, and which many, even of His disciples, declared was "a hard saying" (John 6:60). The saying is no less hard for carnal religionists of the twentieth century; but the true believer delights to say, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

But we may carry the lesson still further. If Christ has through death become fruitful in life to others; in the same way may Christians become fruitful also. So the Lord Himself tells us in John 12:24 : "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except the corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." The language here is purposely abstract. In its first application the reference is to the Lord Himself, but in its more general application it refers to Christians also. We are all grains of wheat, and if God's garner is to be filled at the end, every grain must be fruitful and multiply. After the pattern of the parent plant each grain must fall into the ground and die. He leads the way in the path that all should follow.

It is the practical application of death to ourselves. In God's account we have all died with Christ, and our life is hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). This has to be practically applied daily if we would be fruitful for God. We see this exemplified in the devoted apostle. Hear him in 2 Corinthians 4:11 : "We which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." The result for others comes out in the following verse: "So then death worketh in us, but life in you." In so far as the man Paul was put out of sight, and Christ manifested in his words and ways, blessing followed for those to whom he spoke. How is it with us? Are we spiritually fruitful! Are other grains of wheat being produced as the result of our presence in the world! Alas! how many heads must be bowed in shame when such questions are raised! Personal obtrusiveness in preaching, and fleshly indulgence in living, renders so much of our testimony null and void. God ever has had use, and still has use; for those who are willing to hide themselves in death that Christ may be magnified. Life out of death is the great lesson of the ages taught everywhere in the Word of God, May both reader and writer learn the lesson well.

Jonah

Jonah

W W Fereday.

Jonah and His Book

Jonah and His Experiences

Jonah and Christ

In the Fish's Belly

Grace to the Fallen

The Second Commission

In the Great City

Elohim and Jehovah

A Strange Dove

On the East Side of the City

The Compassionate Creator

A Type of Israel

The Destruction of Nineveh

Jonah and His Book.

It has been remarked by others that the Book of Jonah is as singular amongst the books of the Old Testament as the Epistle of James is amongst the writings of the New.

The Old Testament is occupied largely with God's gracious purposes concerning Israel; yet there we find the story of a special mission of mercy to Gentiles! The New Testament unfolds the purposes of God concerning Christ and the Church, yet amongst the Apostolic epistles we find one addressed to the twelve tribes! From Jonah's book we may learn that in the dispensation in which Israel was the centre of God's ways He nevertheless had a heart of compassion for those outside the chosen race. From James' Epistle we may gather that, although a change of dispensation has set in, and God is now engaged in gathering out sinners from all the nations for heavenly bliss in association with the risen Christ. He has not forgotten His ancient people.

Apart from the inspiration of the Spirit of God, the very existence of the Book of Jonah is difficult to understand. That a highly conservative people, who were accustomed to look down with contempt upon the uncircumcised, should admit such a book as Jonah's into the Sacred Canon is proof that

it was given by God. However distasteful its contents might be to their prejudiced minds. Israel regarded the book as divinely authoritative.

No one could have written the Book of Jonah but the prophet whose name it bears. Another might conceivably have told of his mission to Nineveh and its amazing results; but who but himself could have told of his conversation aboard ship, or who could have given the very words of his prayer to Jehovah in the fish's belly, and of his peevish complaints afterwards, and the gracious remonstrances of God with him? In some later period in his life, when he had learned his lesson, Jonah was guided by the Holy Spirit to write his most interesting story, which reflects the deepest discredit upon the prophet himself, while containing the most wholesome instruction for all who seek to witness for God in any age. Surely no more frank confession of grievous faults was ever published!

Everyone shines brightly in the book of Jonah but the writer The heathen mariners were reluctant to deliver him up to death (Israel's leaders had no such scruples concerning the Lord Jesus) and they turned with sacrifices to the one true God when the storm so abruptly ceased. The King of Nineveh, with his nobles and people, trembled at the word of God, and humbled themselves, before Him, thus averting the threatened judgement. The fish was obedient to its Creator, for when Jehovah spake to it, "It vomited out Jonah upon the dry land," (Jonah 2:10).

And God what shall we say of Him? What consideration for the mariners! What care of His disobedient servant during the mysterious three days! What prompt response to the repentance of the wicked Ninevites! What thoughtfulness for children and cattle! What condescending remonstrances with His most faulty servant after all His dealings with him! These records bring home to our hearts the greatness and graciousness of the God with who we have to do.

The question has been raised whether the book of Jonah is sober history, or merely a "story" written by someone for a moral purpose. No question could be more evil, for it challenges the truthfulness of no less a person than the blessed Son of God. On various occasions in the course of His ministry He alluded Old Testament records as pointing a warning to men of His own day. When defending the divine institution of marriage, He spoke of the creation of Adam and Eve as the first pair (Matthew 19:4-5 : He spoke also of the murder of Abel (Matthew 23:35); of the flood (Matthew 24:38); and of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:29). To all these He added a twofold reference to Jonah First to his preaching, and the repentance of the men of Nineveh This was intended as a solemn rebuke to the heartless men who heard the voice of our Lord and heeded it not. Then He referred to Jonah's three days imprisonment in the belly of the fish. The was meant as a warning to our Lord's hearers that as Jonah disappeared from view for three days and three nights. so would the despised Greater than Jonah become lost to Israel and the world (Matthew 12:39-41). For the prophet's strange experience were typical of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

It is unthinkable that the all knowing Son of God should seek to warn men by reference to the flood, the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrha, and the experiences of Jonah if none of these things really happened. If the One to whom both writer and readers look for salvation from ruin is not to be trusted when speaking of mere historical events, how can we trust Him when He speaks of those things which belong to our eternal peace? A man once urged upon me that he should be accepted as a "good Christian" even though he rejected the story of Jonah! I refused the

suggestion with indignation. He who casts doubt upon the trustworthiness of the Son of God courts disaster for himself, and is a peril to all who come under his influence. The hiss of the serpent is all around us. The dispensation has grown old, and the predicted apostasy draws near. Let us cleave confidently to Him who when on earth spake as no other ever spake (John 7:6), and who concluded His public ministry with the emphatic and unmistakable words of John 12:49-50 : "I have not spoken from Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me commandment what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, as the Father hath said unto Me, so I speak."

Jonah and His Experiences

"The prophet Jonah." This is our Lord's own description of Him in Matt. 2:39; but the cursory reader of the book may be disposed to ask, "Where are the prophecies?" Certainly Jonah's book differs in character from those of Isaiah and other prophets. Their rich and full unfoldings of glories yet to come are lacking in Jonah's chapters; but prophecy is there nevertheless, the fact is that the man himself, and Jehovah's remarkable dealings with him constitute a prophecy, and that of a deeply interesting character. In this unfaithful witness God gives us an illustration of His ways with the unfaithful nation to which he belonged. Thus there is a prophetic as well as moral instruction in the book of Jonah. It is a prophecy in picture.

"The word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me." Jonah had already been entrusted with messages from Jehovah to Israel (2 Kings 14:25); now he has the unique distinction of being sent "far hence unto the Gentiles "(Acts 22:21). It is an unspeakable honour to be a messenger for God at any time. Have we all learned this? Are we all in the spirit of Isaiah's words 'Here am I, send me?'

Jonah, alas, was not well pleased to be sent to preach to Gentiles He had been God's willing mouthpiece to proclaim good things to his own nation; but a foreign nation a Power withal dangerously hostile to Israel that was a different matter! Even after the Holy Spirit came from heaven consequent upon the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. Peter had scruples about carrying the Gospel to the Roman garrison in Caesarea! Acts 10:1. These lines are written while many Powers are engaged in the most terrible war the world has ever known. National feelings are running high; and even Christians although divinely separated by grace from the world and united to Christ in heaven, are sometimes influenced by what is being said and done around them. How slow are we to learn the blessed meaning of God's "whosoever"! The heart of God most assuredly goes out equally to men of every country and colour, and He desires that they may "be saved, and come to, the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). Do we desire also?

Jonah, on hearing the word of Jehovah, made a dash for the port of Joppa. He would flee from His presence! Vain effort! Psalms 139:1-24 stresses this very definitely. But why did Jonah refuse the divine commission to preach to the men of Nineveh! Jonah 4:2 tells us. The known goodness of God was his difficulty. He was sure that if the Ninevites repented of their wickedness God would show mercy. In that case Jonah felt that his dignity would be affected to proclaim a judgement which was not executed! Rather let a whole vast city perish than that his credit should suffer! It seems almost incredible that a man born of the Spirit could be so self-important and behave so contemptibly! This story, so simply told, is written as a warning to us all. If we get out of

communion with God, His tender compassions become foreign to us; harsh feelings develop, and we behave abominably. We shall doubtless meet Jonah in the glory of God ere long (like ourselves, a sinner saved by grace): but meantime let us seek to be as unlike him as possible in our service and testimony for God.

It seemed quite providential that a ship was about to sail for Tarshish when the wayward prophet reached Joppa, but circumstances are not always a safe guide for God's saints. Let us never forget this. It does not follow that because circumstances fit in nicely with our own wishes that God has ordered things so for us, Jonah, tired with his journey, like Elijah after his flight from Jezebel. went below, and was soon in a sound sleep. But 'Jehovah sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken'. At a later date, Paul was exposed to a great storm in the same Mediterranean sea, but the contrast between Paul and Jonah when danger arose was very striking (Acts 27:1-44). The Apostle was travelling towards Rome in accordance with the Lord's words in Acts 23:11 : "Be of good cheer, for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou also bear witness of Me at Rome"! With these words ringing in his ears, Paul moved confidently. His moral dignity throughout the storm was wonderful. He almost took command of the ship, even though both owner and "skipper" were on board. "Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me." Yet Paul was no ordinary passenger, he was a prisoner in custody. By contrast, Jonah was a mean figure amongst the ship's company, and fully merited the rebuke of the master (Jonah 1:6).

Let us not miss the lesson of this contrast. A Christian walking in communion with God is on a high level, but a Christian out of communion is a degraded spectacle. Men respect the one, but they despise the other. The one will be a blessing to men; but the other may be a stumbling-block, and even a curse!

Jonah and Christ

The Lord's words in Matthew 12:39-40 show plainly that He regarded Jonah's descent into the depths as a foreshadowing of His own impending death. "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." But how great the contrast between Jonah's experience, and that of our Lord! Our Lord tasted death in all its terrible reality as the righteous judgement of God against sin, your sin and mine, beloved reader. Not so Jonah. The perverse critics of the Lord asked again for a sign in Matthew 16:1-28, and again He referred them to the story of Jonah. But He rebuked their hypocrisy thus: " When it is evening, ye say, it will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, foul weather to-day, for the sky is red and lowering. Ye can discern the face of the sky: but can ye not discern the signs of the times" It was indeed "fair weather" for the Jewish people at that moment, for the Sun was shining brightly, in their midst; but 'foul weather' was approaching judgement from God for their evil unbelief. "He left them and departed" significant words! The doom of the people was certain.

Jonah is an interesting type of Christ. He belonged to Galilee. Gath-Hepher was not far distant from Nazareth. The Jewish Counsellors were in error when they said to Nicodemus: 'Search and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John 7:52); but probably they ignored Jonah because his mission was to Gentiles a thought abhorrent to their pride.

When Jonah bade the seamen cast him into the sea, he was apparently not afraid to die. Backslider though he was, he had not lost all confidence in God. Jehovah could do (and did) great things for His erring servant. Here we must contrast Jonah with our blessed Lord. Disobedience led the one into the depths; Obedience led the Other.

"Jonah was in the belly of the fish, three days and three nights." God says so: let no-one doubt His word. In 1 Corinthians 15:4 we read that Christ was raised the third day according to the Scriptures! No Old Testament prophecy says this definitely. Hosea 10:2 may occur to our minds; but if Christ is intended there. the language is certainly vague. But He who knew all things from the beginning kept Jonah three days and three nights in the depths in order to present to us an expressive picture of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The "third day" is found also in the story of Isaac the son who was raised from the dead "in a figure." (Hebrews 11:19 saw the place of his typical death and resurrection on the third day of his journey with his father (Genesis 22:4).

Thus Jonah was "cast into the deep, in the midst of the seas, and was constrained to say. "all Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me." His unfaithfulness brought him to this; nevertheless the fruit for others of all that he passed through was marvellous. The heathen mariners, who at first prayed every man to his god, were brought to know Jehovah; for Jonah, although in the path of disobedience, did not hesitate to say, "I am a Hebrew. and I fear Jehovah. the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land." The mariners forthwith cried to Jehovah, being reluctant to throw their troublesome passenger overboard; and when the storm abruptly ceased, it was so manifestly divine doing that "the men feared Jehovah exceedingly. and offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah, and made vows," This looks like true conversion. for prayer in an . hour of peril does not always yield results after the peril is past. How wonderfully God works in order to turn men's hearts to Himself! A storm at sea, an earthquake at midnight, and the quietness of a Gospel meeting all serve His purpose. He works as seems good in His perfect wisdom.

But this was not all in Jonah's day. When the prophet emerged from his watery tomb, and at last went to Nineveh, his preaching brought the whole population from the king downward, low before God, and the threatened overthrow was averted. Alas, for the contrast when Jonah's Lord preached in Jerusalem! No repentance was there, and He who will in due time sit upon the Great White Throne said, "the men of Nineveh shall rise in judgement with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here!"

But as sure as Jonah's experience and preaching brought blessing and deliverance to many who were not "of Israel, so our Lord's very real death and resurrection has brought salvation to millions everywhere. While still on earth, He maintained His position as Israel's Messiah, and refused the appeal of a woman of Tyre who addressed Him as Son of David; and when He sent forth the twelve He bade them go not into the way of the Gentiles, nor enter into any city of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel "(Matthew 10:5-6) But, risen from the dead, "He said unto them; Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature: Mark 16:15). Israel's unbelief has caused "salvation to come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy" (Romans 11:11). The good news that Christ was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification have reached our ears and our hearts, and brought us into peace with

God (Romans 4:25; Romans 5:1 "Blessed be God, our God! "Let us spread abroad the good news with all holy earnestness.

In the Fish's Belly

The path of obedience is the path of blessing. Peace and communion are found therein. Disobedience and self-will may seem to prosper for a time, but He who loves us infinitely will not suffer His own to continue thus. Disaster ensues from His all wise chastening hand. In the midst of the storm, while others were praying, Jonah was sleeping. Conscience was being stifled by his self-will. How different with the Lord Jesus! When the storm burst upon the Sea of Galilee, He slept peacefully in the stern of the vessel. As the perfect Man of faith, He could repose His weary head, assured of the Father's care. His sleep astonished the disciples as much as Jonah's sleep astonished the heathen mariners; but how great the contrast between the fugitive prophet and the Man Christ Jesus!

When Jonah was cast out of the ship, a great fish swallowed him. "Prepared" does not mean specially created for the purpose. (although that would be an easy matter for the Maker of the sea and the dry land"); it simply means that the fish was" appointed" for this service. The same word is thus rendered in Daniel 1:5 with reference to the food intended for Daniel and his companions. Much labour has been expended upon the great fish, as to what it was, and also upon Paul's thorn in the flesh as to its precise nature (2 Corinthians 12:1-21); in both cases there are spiritual lessons of the highest importance, which such discussions tend to obscure. Jonah could certainly have said after his weird experience, "Before I was afflicted I went astray", but now have I kept Thy Word." (Psalms 119:67).

"Jonah prayed unto Jehovah his God out of the fish's belly." "His" God, be it noted; for all sense of relationship was not lost (contrast 1 Samuel 15:21; 1 Kings 17:12; 1 Kings 18:10). From many unlikely quarters prayer has ascended to God through the ages, but never anything quite like this. Prisons, caves, mountains, etc. have resounded with cries of anguish, but not the belly of a fish The chastened prophet owned the divine hand in what had befallen him. Jonah 1:15 says of the sailors. "they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea": but in Jonah 2:3, Jonah says to God Thou hast cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas." He thus owned the divine hand, and humbled himself under it. He put in practice 1 Peter 5:6-7 several centuries before the verses were penned He was thus in the way of recovery. Deliverance can only come to souls in distress when the hand of God is acknowledged. Jonah although in the belly of the fish, looked in faith towards God's holy temple. and he was sure that He who dwelt therein would hearken to his cry." When my soul fainted within me, I remembered Jehovah: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thy holy temple. (Jonah 2:7). This is very beautiful, as showing that even when a saint gets into a backsliding condition he knows to Whom to turn in his trouble, and is confident that God will not forsake him.

The prophet's reference to the temple is remarkable in another way. Jehovah's temple stood in Jerusalem, and Jonah belonged by birth to the revolted ten tribes who had turned away from God's centre. and Who Were identified with idolatrous sanctuaries in Bethel and Dan. (1 Kings 12:25-33; Amos 7:1-3). Nevertheless in spite of the religious confusion which disgraced Jehovah's land in his time, Jonah's heart turned towards the centre which was divinely established in happier days. To Solomon Jehovah said at the dedication of the temple," Mine eyes and Mine heart shall

be there perpetually" (1 Kings 9:3). The glory cloud still remained there, and thither the hearts of the faithful ever turned, wherever might be their abode. It was in this spirit Elijah set up an altar of twelve stones, although Carmel was in the territory of the ten tribes (1 Kings 18:31). God's principles, and the thoughts of His heart towards His people although in grievous failure, influenced both Elijah and Jonah.

In like manner, souls who to-day are taught of God maintain, there is one Body and one Spirit" (Ephesians 4:4) and firmly refuse to recognize any other religious unity of any kind whatsoever; and for His saints now God's centre is not a material structure, but the name of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 18:20). Do our hearts respond to this?

Jonah's prayer in his second chapter is largely made up of quotations from the Psalms. His mind was evidently saturated with the written Word. Is this true of us also? lt. was not a day of pocket Bibles, nor indeed were the Scriptures all yet written; but if Jonah was unable to read in his strange prison, he could feed upon the Word already learned and stored up in his mind and heart. Let us not be behind him in this. The whole revelation of God is in our hands, containing wonderful counsels of grace and glory unknown in Old Testament dispensations; shall we not seek to possess the whole in our inmost souls, so that if ever our Bibles are torn from us, we shall still have that which will nourish and sustain our faith?

Meditation upon the Psalms, and the deliverances wrought for the writers, gave Jonah confidence. In his apparently hopeless condition he expressed his confidence in God given terms. He was sure of deliverance! He was persuaded that he would once more worship in the house of Jehovah! "Salvation is of Jehovah," was his triumphant finish! The work was done; the lesson had been learned; pride and self-will had received a heavy blow; the prophet was at the end of his resources; and his hope was in God alone. Every sinner has to learn this when he first draws near to God; and the erring saint has to come back to it whenever he goes astray.

Grace to the Fallen

The words of the poet are certainly true, and we frequently sing them with real delight-

"To those who fall how kind Thou art,

How good to those who seek."

The proof of this is found in both Old and New Testaments. When Elijah fled from the post of duty, terrified by Jezebel's threat, an angel was sent from heaven to prepare for him a fire and a breakfast (1 Kings 19:1-21.). Nothing like this happened while he walked in the path of obedience. At Cherith ravens were employed to supply his need, and that for a long period. But when he was all wrong with God he was granted special angelic service. The heavenly messenger apparently remained by him while he ate and drank and slept, and then a second time he urged him to eat more, adding compassionately, "because the journey is too great for thee." Yet the journey should never have been undertaken! All this was divinely intended as a proof to the fugitive prophet that God had not forgotten him, spite of his break-down in service. What a God is ours!

Again, when Peter denied his Lord so painfully (after solemn warning) Luke tells us "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter" (Luke 22:61). That tender glance broke his heart, and "Peter went out and wept bitterly." After the Lord's resurrection, an angel bade the women (by divine authority,

assuredly), "Go your way, tell His disciples, and Peter, that He goeth before you into Galilee" (Mark 6:7). This touching introduction of Peter's name was intended to assure him that his Lord had not cast him off, notwithstanding his great sin. This was followed by a private conversation with the fallen Apostle, which put everything right (Luke 24:34). Accordingly, when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, Peter was able to stand boldly and testify to the resurrection of his Lord, with mighty results (Acts 2:41).

Jonah. when imprisoned within the fish. said, "I am cast out of Thy sight" (Jonah 2:4). Surely he had no ground for complaint in this respect, seeing that he fled to Tarshish expressly to get away from the presence of Jehovah! He even told the shipmen that this was the meaning of his voyage in their vessel (Jonah 1:3, Jonah 1:10). Possibly Jonah familiar as he was with the Book of Psalms, had in mind David's words in Psalms 31:22, "I am cut off from before Thine eyes," but David said this in haste! We must quote the whole verse: "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Thine eyes: nevertheless Thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto Thee." Oh, that precious "nevertheless"! It is not the way of our God to cast off His saints, however deeply they may fail; but He is always willing to hear the voice of their supplications when they cry. But let us beware of speaking in haste. Such utterances are seldom wise. Peter on the holy mount spake "not knowing what he said" (Luke 9:33). There is "a time to keep silence" as well as "a time to speak" (Ecclesiastes 3:7).

Our brethren are not always as merciful in their dealings with us as our gracious God. When David was given the choice of three forms of chastisement after his proud blunder in numbering the people without reference to God, he said, "I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of Jehovah; for very great are His mercies; but let me not fall into the hand of man" (1 Chronicles 21:13). The "hired razor" can be very cruel (Isaiah 7:20); and was not David himself unnecessarily cruel when he cut the Ammonites "with saws and with harrows of iron, and with axes"? "Even so dealt David with all the cities of the children of Ammon" (1 Chronicles 20:3).

Even after the Day of Pentecost, when the Assembly of God had come into being, with the Holy Spirit dwelling therein, and when the fullness of divine grace was being proclaimed as never before in the world's history, Paul had to admonish the Corinthian brethren to seek out, and forgive and comfort the man they had been obliged to put away for grievous sin. First, they were careless and indifferent to the evil; then after they had been roused to action. they were disposed to have done with the man for ever. But he was repentant, and must not be "swallowed up with over-much sorrow." (2 Corinthians 2:6, 2 Corinthians 2:8). "I beseech you," says the Apostle, "that ye would confirm your love toward him." When shall we learn these lessons of divine grace towards the erring? The merciless tyrant of Matthew 18:28-34 was meant to be a warning to all who bear the name of the Lord Jesus. and that to the end.

Jonah came up from the depths of the sea humbled and chastened Scarcely broken, for the concluding chapter of his book shows that he still had much to learn. But he had experienced the power of God to lay low those who rise up against His will, and he was also assured that, come what may. God will never cast off His own Jonah was one of the earliest of the prophets whose writings have, come down to us; but from his short book we may learn that God chastens His messengers as well as those to whom He sends them but with a heart full of mercy which only seeks the blessing of it objects. May the messengers of God in this Gospel dispensation walk

humbly before Him. and not misrepresent His character by ways of disobedience. Those who demand obedience from other! should be models of obedience themselves. Moses was sharply dealt with by Jehovah because he had neglected to circumcise his son (Exodus 4:24-25). He had apparently yielded to his wife in the matter; but until this was put right, Moses could not consistently summon Pharaoh to be obedient to the divine commands. The lesson for us is the more important when we remember that circumcision signifies the judgement of the flesh. Only those who have learned to mortify their members which are upon the earth (Colossians 3:5) are competent to stand forth as witnesses For a holy God.

Listen to the words of the Lord Jesus, "if any will do His will, he shall know of" the doctrine" (John 7:17) " I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me" (John 6:38).

The Second Commission.

We need not suppose that the great fish remained stationary during the three days and three nights of Jonah's imprisonment; but whatever might have been its movements, the eye of the Creator was upon it, and it was guided to drop the prophet just where Jehovah wanted him. The fish might have deposited him in Italy or Greece; more probably it was in the land of Israel that Jonah set foot upon dry ground again. The obedience of the humblest creatures, as recorded in Scripture, is deeply instructive. The Lord Jesus when on earth wanted a fish which possessed a shekel, and that particular fish, and no other, caught at Peter's hook (Matthew 17:27). The colt upon which never man sat — an untamed novice for work obediently carried the Lord through the streets of Jerusalem, although surrounded by a shouting multitude (Matthew 21:7). lt. might not have been wise for either reader or writer to mount that colt! In like manner, the Mediterranean Sea monster was at the appointed plaice when Jonah was cast Out Of the ship; it took care of him for the divinely appointed period, and then released him in God's time, and in the place where God required him. Alas, that man, the most gifted of all earthly creatures, should be the arch rebel of this planet! The revolt of its head has involved the whole creation in groans and travail throughout the ages, which will only end at "the manifestation of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19-22).

Once more Jonah was commissioned by Jehovah to go to Nineveh (Jonah 3:1). Similarly, Peter, when restored from backsliding, was divinely appointed to carry a great message from God to men Acts 2:1-47). Jonah knew not what his message was to be when he set out. He proceeded "under sealed orders," as men say. "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching. that I bid thee." The spirit of obedience having returned to him (at least in measure) Jonah did not venture to reason with his Lord, after the manner of Ananias in Damascus when told to call upon Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:13-14); but he "arose and went according to the word of Jehovah." This is as it should be, and it reminds us of Elijah when told to go and hide himself by the brook Cherith, "He went and did according to the word of Jehovah" (1 Kings 17:5).

This is the line that is proper for us all. The Apostle, when referring to his own movements, burst into praise thus: "thanks be unto God who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ (see R.V.). and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place" (2 Corinthians 2:14). He felt like a captive in a triumphal procession (such as the Romans were accustomed to give successful Generals on their return from the wars); but it mattered nothing to him where God led him Troas, Corinth or elsewhere, so long as the will of God was carried out, and the savour of Christ was

spread abroad. This made his life a great spiritual success.

Abraham's servant furnishes us also with a lovely example in Genesis 24:1-7. He went abroad in the spirit of prayer to seek a wife for his master's son. Having found the right person, he bowed his head, and worshipped Jehovah, saying, "I being in the way, Jehovah led me."

The only perfect servant and messenger was the Lord Jesus. When the anxious sisters sent from Bethany to tell Him, "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick"; the Evangelist records, "when He heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was." Why the delay? Because He had as yet no word from the Father; but when the word came, even the warnings of His disciples that trouble awaited Him in Judea, could not hold Him back. (John 11:1-57).

We are only of use to God when we are just were He wants us. He knows the right country in which we should serve, and the right town. and the right time. office. factory, workshop or home. wherever it may be, if that is His place for us, there only can we be spiritually useful. And even when we are in the right place, we need the Spirit's guidance every hour as to what we should do or say. Simple lessons indeed; but not necessarily learned and practiced by us.

When Jonah set out for Nineveh "according to the word of Jehovah," it is to be feared that there was some uneasiness in his mind as to the real object of his mission. Jehovah's new charge was vague: "preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." When he was first commissioned, the word was, "Arise, go to Nineveh that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me." This was pure denunciation, which might reasonably be expected to be followed by judgement. But nothing of this is suggested in the new charge, and when Jonah arrived in Nineveh, he was told to cry, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 2:1-4). Here we detect the grace of the divine heart. Time was granted for repentance. Alas, this did not suit the Galilean prophet! Patience and grace for erring Israel — yes, but not for Gentiles! When shall we learn that God has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, whatever his nationality may be? (Ezekiel 18:32).

In The Great City

Jonah's visit to Nineveh, with its amazing results, was perhaps unique in the world's history. The entire population of the greatest city of that time brought low before God, their despotic ruler setting the example.

Let us endeavour to realize the situation. The prophet apparently went quite alone. Fellowship in service is very sweet, as Paul and many others could testify. but there is no hint of a companion for Jonah. He faced the consequences of his terrible message alone. No organising committee was behind him, no flaming advertisements announced his coming; neither choirs nor notable singers were secured in order to draw the multitude together. Many modern witnesses appear to consider these things necessary if the masses are to be reached. When shall we all learn that the power of God is worth more than all the machinery that the wit of men can devise. Even penniless men, such as Peter and Paul. have accomplished great things for God as the fruit of simple dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

Jonah "cried" his solemn message through the streets of Nineveh. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). He was not regarded as a public nuisance, and arrested and jailed as such: nor did the inhabitants scoff at him. as the dissolute youths of Bethel (not "little children") scoffed at Elisha at an earlier date (2 Kings 2:23-24); his message was heard with all due gravity. "The people of Nineveh believed God." This is good. It was not the mere speaker who was accredited; the people felt that their Creator was speaking to them in him. This is exactly what is recorded of the Thessalonians: "We thank God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God. which effectually worketh also in you that believe." (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

The King of Nineveh doubtless lived in the seclusion of a palace, surrounded by officials all ready to obey his commands, however arbitrary and cruel they might be. It was not easy for any subject to approach an Oriental despot. Esther, although Queen, felt that she would endanger her life by venturing into the presence of the King without a summons (Esther 4:11). But Jonah's serious message was carried right into the throne room of Nineveh, and reported to the King. He acted promptly, for conscience told him that the wickedness of his people well deserved divine judgement. Accordingly the King stripped off his robes, "and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes." The whole population were charged to do likewise, and even the beasts were to have both food and drink withheld from them that they might join the people in their cry of distress. The people were not only to "cry mightily unto God," they were also to turn every one from his evil way, and from his deeds of violence. Prayer without action is worthless. Repentance is an absolute necessity with God. The King concluded: "who can tell if God will turn and repent. and turn away from His fierce anger that we perish not?" This proclamation. and that by Nebuchadnezzar telling the story of his conversion (Daniel 4:1-37) are perhaps the most remarkable proclamations ever sent forth. Would God the rulers of men in the Twentieth Century would address their peoples in like manner! What change would come about in world conditions! What disasters would be averted!

Luke 9:30 suggests that God's dealings with Jonah were known. "Jonah was a sign unto the Ninevites." This would give point to his message, and who could so well warn of impending overthrow as the man who had proved in his own experience the power of God to lay low those who presume to oppose His will? The repentance of Nineveh and its King is as great a miracle in the moral sphere as Jonah's experience in the physical. In a later book than that of Jonah, God states plainly His principles with regard to the nations. "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a Kingdom, to pluck up and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against which I have pronounced, turn from their evil I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them" (Jeremiah 18:7-8). No nation but Israel has ever been in direct relationship with God; but this does not mean that He is not interested in the masses outside the seed of Abraham. The time had not yet come for the sweet "whosoever" of the Gospel to go forth, for the Son of God had not yet been given as God's great love gift to the world; but His heart nevertheless yearns at all times over men everywhere, not desiring the ruin of any. Therefore when "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; God repented of the evil that He had said He would do unto them; and He did it not." Even so would it be at the terrible moment in which we live; if any nation that seems doomed to destruction would get down humbly before God, His heavy hand would be lifted, and respite would be graciously granted.

Elohim and Jehovah

The Spirit's use of divine names and titles in the Scriptures is most instructive, and should be observed carefully by all who seek to understand the ways of God throughout the ages with men, and especially with Israel. Unfortunately our generally excellent Authorised Version does not help us in this as it should. The words "God" and "the Lord" (the latter sometimes in capitals and sometimes in small letters) really hide important truths. In the book of Jonah we read of "God" and "the Lord." "God" stands for the Hebrew "Elohim," and occurs 15 times; "the Lord" stands for "Jehovah," and occurs 26 times. Divine names are abundant throughout the sacred Word, each having its own meaning; each therefore having its own sweet message to the heart. Psalms 68:1-35 is particularly rich in divine names and titles. At least twelve will be found there. The latest and fullest revelation of God is the name "Father," brought down to us by the Son of His love, and it is under this name the saints of this era are in relationship with Him His children, sons, and heirs.

The Bible opens with "Elohim." No other title is found until we pass Genesis 2:3. This title tells us of the divine supremacy God as the mighty cause of all. "Jehovah" is His title of relationship (wonderful indeed that He should condescend to enter into relationship with His humble creature man); accordingly throughout Genesis 2:4-25 we read "the Lord God," i.e. "Jehovah Elohim." Note the various relationships in that chapter: —

Genesis 2:4-6 — The heavens and the earth in relation to Him. He created them. They are the work of His hands.

Genesis 2:7-15 — Man in relation to Him. The special inbreathing.

Genesis 2:16-20 — Man in relation to the lower orders. Their lord.

Genesis 2:21-25 — Man in relation to woman. Her head.

In the book of Jonah we observe that when the mariners first spoke of God it was as "Elohim." They were not conscious of any special relation to Him; but they acknowledged Him as the Supreme Being. who could quell the storm if it pleased Him. Many alas! in this day of Gospel light, have no higher thoughts of their Creator than these seamen. When His divine hand became plainly manifest, and after they heard Jonah's confession of faith as in Jonah 1:9, "they cried unto Jehovah," "they feared Jehovah," "they offered sacrifice to Jehovah and made vows." This looks like true conversion. "The God of heaven, Who made the sea and the dry land" became something more to them than a mere Creator; they came to know Him as far as He could be known before the Son of the Father's love came from heaven to declare Him fully. The simple faith of those shipmen might well shame many of Jonah's own countrymen who, with the word of God in their hands, were following the idolatrous ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

Now observe how Jonah spoke of God. Throughout the book the name "Jehovah" is upon his lips. The name so suggestive to every instructed Jew of divine faithfulness (Malachi 3:6) Under this great name God took the nation into relationship with Himself at the deliverance from the land of Egypt (Exodus 6:1-30.) Although Jonah is shown to us in a more or less undesirable spiritual condition throughout his book, he never lost the sense of his relationship to God. "I fear Jehovah," said he. The Spirit says, "Jonah prayed unto Jehovah his God out of the fish's belly." At the close of his prayer, he cried out in faith, "Salvation is of Jehovah," and even when he peevishly objected

to the divine mercy shown to Nineveh, "he prayed unto Jehovah" (Jonah 4:1). This is worthy of note. The God with whom we all have to do knows how to keep alive within us the spark of faith, and the sense that we belong to Him, even when we get sadly astray. But let us nevertheless heed Peter's exhortation in the first chapter of his second Epistle, and cultivate a vigorous and progressive faith. This is our responsibility.

In contrast with Jonah, the King of Nineveh and his people, although repentant, spoke only of God ("Elohim.") The name under which Israel had to do with Him came not to their lips. It was a national movement. The people became conscious that they bad sinned grievously against their Maker; they trembled at the mention of His judgement; and they humbled themselves before Him. Jeremiah 18:7-10, as we have already seen, lays down the principles of God's dealing with nations. His eye sees their doings, and He visits them from time to time in His wrath, but is always prepared to show mercy. God's government must not be confounded with His grace. Such respite as the Ninevites experienced is not the same thing as the eternal forgiveness of sins; proclaimed to men everywhere in the Gospel message (Acts 13:38-39). We shall not necessarily meet the whole population of Nineveh in Heaven because of the repentance described in Jonah 3:10; although it is not unlikely that some individuals (possibly many) found eternal blessing as the result of the great alarm.

At the present crisis the nations of the earth are suffering as never before. He who sits upon the throne judging righteously is displeased with them all, but if any nation (if only one) would face up to its own condition in His sight, and acknowledge its manifold transgressions and its long contempt for things divine, He would forgive, and peace and quietness would return. Mutual recriminations lead nowhere. To nations disposed to accuse and destroy their neighbours, the prophet Obed's words in 2 Chronicles 28:9-11 may well have a voice. When the victorious ten tribe army brought back 200,000 Jewish captives, the prophet met them boldly, saying, "Behold because Jehovah God of your fathers was wrath with Judah, He hath delivered them into your hand, and ye have slain them in a rage that reacheth up unto heaven. and now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondmen and bondwomen unto you; but are there not with you, even with you, sins against Jehovah your God?"

A Strange Dove

It is not only Divine names that have meanings; there is also meaning in human names at least in Scripture history. Sometimes they were expressive of the faith of those who conferred them; Eve. Noah, and Joseph are examples of this. Sometimes new names were given as marks of lordship or proprietorship. Thus Pharaoh renamed Joseph (Genesis 41:45); Nebuchadnezzar did the same to Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1:7); and the Lord Jesus granted the surname Cephas to Simon the fisherman (John 1:42). And what shall we say of the Saviour's own name and the meaning of it? "Thou shalt call His name Jesus (Jehovah the Saviour); for He shall save His people from their sins " (Matthew 1:21).

Jonah means "dove." What was in the minds of his parents when they named him is not recorded; but the fact reminds us that it was in a bodily form like a dove the Holy Spirit descended upon the man Christ Jesus (Luke 3:22). This lovely emblem of purity, gentleness, and peace perfectly suited Him upon whom it came. But Jonah, Where do we discover anything dove-like in his ways and words relative to the people of Nineveh? Surely his cruel talons are suggestive of a very

different bird!

We cannot help contrasting our prophet with Joses the Levite of Acts 4:36-37. So kindly were his deeds, and so gracious was his ministry, that the Apostles surnamed him Barnabas which being interpreted, means "son of consolation." Barnabas deserved his name before he received it; Jonah received a sweetly suggestive name that he never seems to have deserved at all!

Nineveh repented; king, nobles, and people fell low together at the feet of their justly indignant Creator. Heaven was thus filled with rejoicing as the Lord teaches us in Luke 15:1-32. But while heaven rejoiced, it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry" (Jonah 4:1). Alas, what is man! What an exposure of the narrowness and selfishness of the human heart, even in a divinely chosen and specially favoured servant of Jehovah! He would have preferred the whole population of a vast city to perish than that his own reputation as a prophet should suffer! He was amazed that he should have gone through the streets of Nineveh denouncing judgement within forty days, and then find the divine sentence withdrawn! Yet why should God have given forty days notice, unless He desired to give time for repentance? Does not Peter tell us that He is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish. but that all should come to repentance"? (2 Peter 3:9). Did He not say, long before Peter's day. "I have NO pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; therefore turn yourselves and live ye." (Ezekiel 18:32.) Even ecclesiastical Jezebel (Popery), the foulest evil upon which the eye of a holy God ever rested, has had space given her to repent of her fornication (Revelation 2:21). Had Jehovah dealt with Jonah's own nation as he would have liked Him to deal with Nineveh, not an Israelite of any tribe would be found on earth today. Jonah's behaviour reminds us of the churlish elder son of Luke 15:25 who "was angry and would not go in," because the father was lavishing grace upon a returning sinner. Where should we have been — reader and writer alike — if the God against whom we have all sinned were like some of His poor faulty servants.

The disappointed prophet — by no means a friend or neighbour (at least for the time being) of the God who delights in mercy (Luke 15:7) — prayed that he might be allowed to die. If death was so desirable, pity that he ever asked to be released from the fish's belly! Elijah also once asked that he might die, because his testimony was not prospering as he expected (1 Kings 19:4). Happily God intended for him a triumphant translation, without passing through death at all. A similar wonderful departure is the proper hope of all Christians today.

Although as wrong as he could be spiritually when he prayed his peevish prayer, Jonah had not lost all sense of his true relationship with God. Thus he addressed Him as "Jehovah," and said, "I pray Thee, O Jehovah, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness,' and repentest Thee of the evil? "If he really knew all these delightful things about God, it should have been his joy to proclaim them to sinners everywhere. We know God more intimately still. The cross of Calvary has revealed grace and mercy such as Jonah could not have imagined. Is it our joy to proclaim it to young and old? If we are to be successful in our testimony, bur hearts must be in tune with the great compassionate heart of God. We must develop a yearning over the perishing, and it should be our prayer and labour that we may "by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

Now mark the contrast between Jonah and the servant of Matthew 25:24. The latter looked his Lord in the face and said. "Lord. I know that Thou art a hard man, reaping where Thou hast not sown, and gathering where Thou hast not strawed." But Jonah said. "I knew that Thou art a gracious God. and merciful." Is there anything so perverse and contradictory as the heart of man? He of Matthew 25:1-46 charged his Lord with being hard and unreasonable; and Jonah complained that He was too good! We are reminded of the children in the market place of whom the Lord spoke in Luke 11:32. Neither John the Baptist nor the Lord Jesus suited their carnal taste. John was too austere, standing aloof from the people, and Jesus was over gracious, mixing too freely with all sorts and conditions seemingly giving the preference to publicans and sinners. "But wisdom is justified of all her children." (Luke 7:35). This means that wisdom's true children, i.e., all who have been born of God understand and approve wisdom's ways; while the wise ones of earth expose their folly by their failure to understand what God is doing. Unhappy Jonah! He was doubtless born of God. but He was utterly out of harmony with His great heart of mercy. His mercy to the Ninevites was therefore vexation to him, instead of delight. Let us not miss this serious lesson. The Lord's own disciples were slow to learn it (Matthew 14:15; Matthew 14:15-23) although His companions from day to day.

"On The East Side of the City."

Jehovah, instead of sharply disciplining His refractory servant, graciously condescended to reason with him " Doest thou well to be angry?" Oh, the contrast between our God, Sovereign in the universe, and the petty despots of earth! Such peevish rebelliousness as Jonah manifested might have cost him his life at the hands of the latter. But God always seeks to win men's hearts. both in dealing with sinners without and with wayward saints within.

The gracious question of Jonah 4:4 was repeated in Jonah 4:9. To the first enquiry the prophet appears to have made no answer but we have the astonishing statement "Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow till he might see what would become of the city." What a picture! A man who has been handled with the utmost grace by his God positively sitting down (making himself comfortable withal) in the hope that God would change His mind and destroy the city! Thus would his vanity be gratified and his reputation as a true prophet be maintained! Wretched self importance, almost without parallel in the history of the world!

Our thoughts travel to Another Prophet "greater than Jonah" and "greater than Moses" (Deuteronomy 18:15) Who at a later date sat on a hillside overlooking a different city, guilty before God beyond any other if only because it had been for many centuries the most favoured. Our Lord's last approach to Jerusalem was from the east. He followed Joshua's route from across Jordan. Arrived at Jericho (Rahab's Descendant, be it remembered Matthew 1:5), the city did not fall before Him as before Joshua, for He had "not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them!" Blessing tracked His footsteps, as Zacchaeus and Bartimaeus will be able to testify eternally. Then as He descended the Mount of Olives, and the long loved, but grievously guilty Jerusalem came into view, tears filled His eyes. "If thou hadst known even thou at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round and keep thee in one every side and shall lay thee even with the ground and thy children within thee, and they shall

not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knowest not the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19:41-44).

Lovely manifestation of tender feeling, and that on the part of the Judge of quick and dead! He who wept over Jerusalem is the same august Person who said in Hosea's day "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee up, Israel. Mine heart is turned within Me" (Hosea 9:8). If judgement must need be, it was nevertheless painful to the divine heart to be constrained to execute it. Judgement is "His strange work" (Isaiah 28:11). To such gracious sentiments the heart of Jonah was a stranger. How is it with ourselves? As faithful witnesses for God, it is our duty to warn an evil world of the judgement appointed (woe unto us if we neglect to sound the warning!) but how do we do it? Is it in the stern spirit of denunciation, or is it with trembling lips and compassionate hearts? Are we unmindful of the fact that but for the infinite grace of God and the costly sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, we should ourselves be in the lake of fire? May God preserve us from the spirit of Pharisaism as we proclaim the fearful things which are certainly coming upon the world of the ungodly.

Jehovah had not yet finished with Jonah. Accordingly He prepared a gourd. and made it to come up over Jonah that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceedingly glad of the gourd." Again we say. what a God is ours! Here we have a man who deserved severe chastisement, and whom God might justly have banished from His service for ever, granted special divine relief from the effects of his own bad temper. But this was not the end. The relief was short lived. for God prepared a worm the next morning. which smote the gourd that it withered." Job, after immeasurable losses property. servants. children. etc. "fell down upon the ground and worshipped. And said. Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah" (Job 1:20-21). And He who suffered more than either Jonah or job, when all was painful around Him, said, "I thank Thee, O Father; Lord of heaven and earth . . . even so, Father, for it seemeth good in Thy sight" (Matthew 11:25-20).

But Jonah was rebellious. Twice he tells us in his book that he prayed unto Jehovah; in the fish's belly, and in the neighbourhood of Nineveh. The first was a genuine outpouring of the heart under the mighty hand of God, and it brought a speedy reply; the second was a peevish outburst because his journey to Nineveh did not result as he expected. Twice the angry man said, "it is better for me to die than to lived. It is true enough that any of us had better die than live if we are not willing to "show forth the excellencies of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). A witness who misrepresents the character of Him who sends him is worse than useless in a needy world.

The worm by the will of God did his destructive work in the early morning. Then the sun waxed hot and a sultry east wind arose. Poor Jonah was overwhelmed, and dared to say to his Lord. "I do well to be angry, even unto death." This drew forth Jehovah's final remonstrance: "thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

The book thus closes abruptly. Jonah was left to answer the challenge as best he could, and the reader of to day is left to answer it for himself. The God whom we know blessedly revealed to us in Christ could do no otherwise than spare a repentant city. But this did not suit the surly preacher. His personal dignity was at stake (at least so he judged). and he would prefer Nineveh to be destroyed, with its immense population of old and young, rather than his words should fall to the ground. He had pity on the gourd, a creature of a day, because it was of advantage to himself, but there was no pity in his heart for hundreds of thousands of precious souls. If Jonah wrote his book in later life, as seems probable, surely he blushed with shame as he penned its concluding chapter under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Let us not miss the lesson. Away with all pride and self importance. Let us learn to say with Paul, "I am nothing" (2 Corinthians 12:11). The Apostle had learned the meaning of his baptism. He had with all simplicity of faith accepted the death of Christ as his own, and he willingly passed out of sight. His dignities and attainments he counted loss for Christ. It was henceforward his earnest expectation and hope that Christ might be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death. (Php_1:20). " For me to live is Christ." "Be ye therefore imitators of me, as I also am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1.)

"The Compassionate Creator".

The last verse of the Book of Jonah should be carefully considered, for it gives us a delightful insight into the heart of God as Creator. His love and compassion for perishing sinners is happily familiar to us. It has reached us in the Gospel message. The cross of Christ tells out, as nothing else could, God's earnest desire for the salvation of men, and His unwillingness that any should perish eternally; But Jonah 4:11 is not quite as John 3:16. In the latter passage we hear the voice of the Son of God speaking on earth; but in the former it is the Creator who is speaking, and that in terms of remonstrance with His ungracious servant. "Should not I spare Nineveh that great city, wherein there are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" Thus God in His government of the earth took account of 120,000 helpless children in Nineveh, "and also much cattle"; and it rejoiced Him that the repentance of the King and his people enabled Him to sheathe the sword of judgement, at least for the time being.

It is deplorable when the servants of God are not in sympathy with His dealings. When the Lord Jesus was on earth there were two occasions when the compassion of His heart specially went forth. In Matthew 9:36 He felt for the people's spiritual need. The land was full of religious leaders, but the people were unfed. "When He saw the multitudes. He was moved with compassion, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." In Matthew 14:15 He was concerned about their temporal need. He "saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them." Thousands of hungry men. women. and children were around Him. with nothing obtainable in the wilderness. But His disciples did not share the distress of their Lord. Indeed, they urged Him to send the multitudes away, regardless of consequences. The pressure of the people annoyed them, and interfered with their comfort!

A great lesson is here! We live and serve in the midst of a suffering creation, and the suffering increases with the growing violence of men: but are our hearts really moved by the serious universal need? God's heart yearns over the masses, young and old, but do our hearts yearn in

sympathy with Him? It is terribly possible to become formal and stereotyped in our service, and thus to serve out of harmony with the One who has sent us. Let us seek to keep near the heart of the God of infinite compassion.

One of Jonah's faults was his intense nationalism. He could rejoice in divine forbearance towards his own people, although deeply guilty, but he felt unable to rejoice in God's forbearance towards others. We are reminded of the Apostle's query in Romans 3:29 "Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles?" Note the answer: "Yea, of the Gentiles also, seeing God is one" "Neither is there respect of persons with Him." (Ephesians 6:9).

Paul loved his own nation. and longed for their blessing (Romans 11:1). At one moment of exceeding fervour he had even wished himself accursed from Christ for his fellow countrymen (Romans 9:3). The self sacrificing prayer of Moses in Exodus 32:32, and the passing wish of Paul in Romans 9:3, were doubtless acceptable to God; but in no circumstances can sinners be saved by the self sacrifice of preachers.

But Paul did not love Israel only. His heart went out after the uncircumcised to the world's end. He delighted to preach Christ where He had never been named (Romans 15:20). He could scarcely have told out the largeness of divine grace more explicitly than in Romans 10:12 : "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him, for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." But the largeness of the Apostle's heart was bitterly resented by the Jewish people. When he addressed them from the stairs of the Castle in Jerusalem. they listened quietly until he quoted the Lord's words to him, "I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." Then their fury burst forth, and they cried, "Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live" (Acts 22:21-22). When detailing offences in 1 Thessalonians 2:16, he solemnly concluded thus, "forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." National feeling could scarcely go further; even the unwanted Gospel must not be published abroad!

The whole World is ablaze while these lines are being penned. God in His righteous government has let loose the wild beasts of the earth and the havoc that is being wrought is incalculable. But has God ceased to care for His creatures? Is He not still the "King of nations?" (Jeremiah 10:7). Does He not now, as always, "do according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth?" (Daniel 4:35). His hand has gone forth against the guilty nations of all Continents because of their neglect of His word; yea, because of their ever increasing contempt for everything that is divine.

The heart of God yearns over men notwithstanding all. His interest is not confined to any one nation, nor to a group of nations. He never was in special relationship with any nation but Israel, and against Israel the "Lo-Ammi" sentence ("not My people") went forth long years ago, and has not yet been recalled. But the compassionate Creator can never cease to care for the afflictions of His creatures, however wayward, and He would have His saints share His compassion. Isaiah was deeply distressed when obliged to utter judgement against Moab, the bitter enemy of his own people. "My heart shall cry out for Moab" (Isaiah 15:5). "My bowels shall sound like a harp for Moab, and my inward part for Kirharesh "(Isaiah 16:11). Similarly, when Babylon's doom came before him in prophetic vision. he cried out. "My loins are filled with pain: pangs are taken hold

upon me as the pangs of a woman that travaileth" (Isaiah 21:4). Jeremiah also howled for Moab, "mine heart shall sound for Moab like pipes." (Jeremiah 48:31-36).

Where do we stand with reference to such sentiments in this day of unparalleled' devastation and sorrow? The public Press, and also the "wireless" would fill our minds with national feeling if we were to allow ourselves to come under their influence. Against this, God's saints must be continually on their guard. The house of God ("whose house are we" Hebrews 3:6) was intended to be "a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 9:17; Isaiah 56:7); and we are exhorted in 1 Timothy 2:1-15 to make supplications, prayers, intercession and giving of thanks for all men, irrespective of nationality, and for kings and for all that are in authority whether friendly or unfriendly. Only as we are able to rise to this shall we be really helpful to men in their calamities. The great distinguishing principle of Christianity should aid us in this. God is at this time (while Christ sits on high and the Holy Spirit is on earth) visiting the nations "to take out of them a people for His name" (Acts 15:14). Consequently, we have brethren in every land. and if all these conscious of their union with Christ the Head, were to cry to God with one accord, the relief to the nations, amongst whom we all live and serve would be incalculable.

God's heart is full of compassion towards all; shame on us if we feel otherwise.

"A Type of Israel"

It has already been remarked that Jonah's book is prophetic in character although it contains no such predictive utterances such as are found in Isaiah, Ezekiel, etc. The Christ who was to come is clearly foreshadowed in Jonah's three days sojourn in the belly of the fish: and the history of Israel may be clearly perceived in the disobedience of the prophet and its results for himself and others.

It was a great honour for Jonah to be divinely selected to carry a message from God to Nineveh, the imposing capital of the greatest earthly power in his day. Jonah should have endeavoured to enter into Jehovah's thoughts and feelings in the matter, so that he might faithfully represent Him to the dark heathen. In this the prophet most miserably failed. In like manner, the nation of Israel was divinely chosen and separated to be God's channel of blessing to all the people of the earth. "Ye are My witnesses, saith Jehovah, and My servant whom I have chosen" (Isaiah 43:10). The most cursory reader of the Old Testament cannot fail to see that Israel occupies the central place therein. About four centuries after the flood when all the newly formed nations had gone into idolatry God called Abram and blessed him; but this was with a view to universal blessing. "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). This word was confirmed and expanded after the offering up of Isaac: "Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:17-19).

It was never intended that this highly favoured stock should be exclusive. Their very sanctuary was to be "a house of prayer for all peoples" (Isaiah 56:7). It does not appear that Israel was meant to be a missionary people, earnestly propagating what they knew of the one true God, but they were certainly meant to be a model people. Possessing laws that were perfect, having been received direct from Heaven, all their ways should have been well pleasing to God, and a rebuke to the nations around them. But, alas, they were untrue to their privileged position of separation to God (which alone could have made them a blessing to the world); they copied the evil ways of their

neighbours; and so brought down upon themselves the stern censure: "the name of God is blasphemed among the nations through you" (Romans 2:24). It will be a great day for the world when Zechariah 8:23 becomes true "thus saith Jehovah of hosts: In those days ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying. We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you"

As surely as the unfaithfulness of Jonah brought a storm upon the pagan mariners. so the unfaithfulness of Israel has brought sore trouble upon the nations in general as well as their own guilty heads. When Jehovah could no longer bear with the iniquity of the chosen people, He employed Nebuchadnezzar to chastise both them and all the nations around them. The whole system of nations, of which Israel was the divinely established centre, was broken up. Abraham's seed thus became a curse in the earth, not a blessing.

Jehovah's patience with both Jonah and his nation is arresting. How graciously did He plead with the perverse prophet! And how graciously did He bear with the hypocrisy of the Jewish remnant from the days of Ezra to the coming of the Lord Jesus! Even when, in full view of their hatred He pleaded that the unfruitful fig tree be granted one year more (Luke 13:6-9). But the further testimony of the Holy Spirit after our Lord's return to heaven was all in vain, and once more the people were cast out of their land, and flung amongst the nations. The casting forth of Jonah typifies this. The chosen people are now most unlovable and unloved of all. and the whole earth has been plunged into confusion and disaster by the terrible transgressions in which Israel has led the way.

But the outflow of God's grace is not checked by the sin of man; thus, while Israel continues obdurate, the Holy Spirit is working amongst the Gentiles, gathering out from amongst them millions for heavenly blessing. All these will stand in relationship with Christ as His body and bride for ever. Israel's fall has become the riches of the world and their loss the riches of the Gentiles (Romans 11:12). While hundreds of thousands of people in Nineveh were rejoicing in the mercy of God, Jonah was displeased and angry. Similarly, when a number of Gentile believers in Antioch were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit, the Jews "were filled with envy, and spake against the things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming" (Acts 13:44-52).

A great and wonderful change is coming. Israel's blindness is not total; when the fullness of the Gentiles is gathered in "all Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:25-26). This means the believing remnant, "for they are not all Israel which are of Israel" (Romans 9:7). Obstinate rebels will be purged out (Ezekiel 20:38). The restored nation will stand before the world as though risen from the dead. Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones shows this (Ezekiel 37:1-28). Daniel 12:2 (a passage frequently misunderstood) teaches the same thing. The physical dead are not in view; the nation as such is meant. After centuries of degradation in the dust they will come upon the political stage once more. The believing remnant will enjoy eternal life (in earthly conditions) and the rebels will be consigned to shame and everlasting contempt. Jonah's reappearance after being "three days in the heart of the seas" is typical of this. The following Scriptures should also be read in this connection: — Romans 11:15; Hosea 6:2. Being then in the enjoyment of mercy themselves. the people. unlike Jonah, will gladly dispense blessing to others. Psalms 67:1-7 gives us their joyous language in that great day. Note the words "all the nations;" "all the ends of the earth:" "all rejoicing and singing for joy." "O sing unto Jehovah a new song: sing unto Jehovah. all the ends of the

earth" (Psalms 96:1). Alas, Jonah was not in singing humour as he contemplated the goodness of God to the Ninevites!

The whole earth will be fully blessed at the appearance of the Lord Jesus; and Israel, completely purged of the Jonah spirit, will rejoice in it. God will be known, not merely as Creator, but as the faithful covenant keeping Jehovah. "I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am Jehovah" (Ezekiel 38:23). This blessed result was reached in the case of Jonah's ship-mates. They turned from their own empty deities. and they "offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah, and made vows" (Jonah 1:16).

When Israel, after ages of antagonism to God and His blessed ways, perceives how marvellously He has wrought, they will say with the Apostle. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33). In deplorable imitation of Joseph's brethren they have intended evil in all that they have done to Christ and to His saints; but God in His perfect wisdom has turned it to good (Genesis 41:20). He will be victorious at last over all the workings of the enemy; and every purpose of His grace will reach glorious fulfilment.

Alas, that the book of Jonah should close with the prophet murmuring outside while within the city there was gladness and peace In this he was not a type of his nation. In the coming age of universal blessing Israel will be the centre and heart of it all. With the long rejected Christ honoured in their midst, the people will be happy themselves, and will be delighted to see everyone happy around them even to the uttermost parts of the earth.

May the God of all grace grant to us all true largeness of heart. Thus shall we understand and approve His ways and find pleasure and profit therein for our souls.

The Destruction of Nineveh.

These studies would scarcely be complete without some reference to the after history of Nineveh, the great city in which Jonah preached, with results that will never be forgotten. It was founded by Asshur not long after the flood, apparently as a rival to Nimrod's Babylon (Genesis 10:11). The latter was built on the Euphrates, and the former on the Tigris (otherwise Hiddekel), both rivers being branches of the river which watered the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:13-14). But where is Nineveh to-day? Opposite the town of Mosul there are miles of ruins from which many objects of interest have been excavated, and which are now in the Museums of Europe and America. The city was taken and destroyed by the Medes in B.C. 625. There has been no effort to rebuild it since that time, and it is not the will of God that it should ever be rebuilt. Its destruction was predicted with much detail by Nahum remarkably, a Galilean prophet, as was Jonah. Nahum's book was written about 100 years after Jonah's mission, and the ruin therein foretold was still another century ahead. Who told Nahum about the great disaster? The very principle is largely discredited in our time; but if God be God, it is as easy for Him to speak of the future as of the present. This was His challenge to the deities of the heathen: "Let them bring forth and show us what shall happen: let them show the former things, what they be, that we may consider them and know the latter end of them; or declare us things to come" (Isaiah 41:22).

Nahum's book begins thus: "The burden of Nineveh." The word "burden" occurs a number of times in the books of the Old Testament prophets. It means a heavy message a message of judgement,

a message which tends to weigh down the soul of him who has to deliver it. Nineveh was the capital of the Kingdom of Assyria. It is the city rather than the Kingdom that is denounced in Nahum; whereas in Isaiah the Kingdom is condemned, with no special mention of its capital. This distinction is important. In the wonderful ways of God Assyria is to be restored and blessed in the Kingdom age (Isaiah 19:23-25), but its proud capital will never rise again. Why is this. The reason is that Nineveh was singularly favoured by God in its day. He sent Jonah there on a special mission, and the whole population trembled at the preaching, and cried to God for mercy. It does not appear to have led the Ninevites to the knowledge of Jehovah, as the great storm led the sailors in Jonah's vessel: but the merciful Creator does not despise national repentance at any time. What wonderful results might be seen to-day if any' of the Contending nations were to humble themselves before God! In His righteous Government He is chastening many nations as we write. for all deserve it in a greater or lesser degree. What joy it would give to the hearts of those who know God could we hear that any King. President or Premier has called upon his people to repent, and that all have humbly responded!

Nahum says that "God is jealous, and Jehovah avengeth: Jehovah avengeth. and is furious; Jehovah will take vengeance or, His adversaries and He reserveth wrath for His enemies; "but he also says that "Jehovah is slow to anger," and that "Jehovah is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble: and He knoweth them that trust in Him" (Nahum 1:2-3, Nahum 1:7).

God is indeed "slow to anger." The evil of the Canaanitish nations was great in Abraham's day; but even so He held back their judgement 400 years, "for;" said He "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Genesis 15:16). From Rahab's words to the spies we learn that the guilty nations were aware that God's executioners were on their way. She said, "I know that Jehovah hath given you the land, and your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you " (Joshua 2:9). They had heard of God's heavy hand upon Egypt, and of the destruction of Sihon and Og, Yet their was no repentance on their part.

Nineveh was granted forty days respite, with blessed results but the people soon returned to their wicked ways. Hence Nahum 3:1 : "Woe to the bloody city: it is full of lies and robbery." This, as we have already remarked, was about 100 years after Jonah's visit, and even then the execution of judgement was delayed another century. We have said that Nineveh will never rise again, but in contrast with this, Sodom and her daughter cities are to be divinely restored for Millennial blessing (Ezekiel 16:55). Does this strike any reader as strange? The explanation is that Nineveh was favoured with a special message from God and submitted to it; but the generations that followed profited nothing by the fact, and returned to the old vomit. But Sodom was never favoured as Nineveh was. In Matthew 11:25 we hear our Lord saying that it shall be more tolerable . for the land of Sodom in the day of judgement than for Capernaum, which city was honoured by His presence, ministry. and miracles. Favour divinely granted but despised brings heavy judgement from. God. In Luke 12:47-48 the Lord distinguishes between those who know His will and do it not, and those who sin without knowing: His will. He says: "Unto whosoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much. of him they will ask the more." What could be more equitable? In the light of our Lord's words where do the people of Great Britain stand? Where in all the earth has the Gospel been so fully preached and the Scriptures more abundantly circulated? The responsibility of people so privileged is great, and judgement will be meted out accordingly.

It is said. that the. overflowing of the river facilitated the capture of Nineveh by the Medes. Nahum 2:6 seems to teach this. Assyria — the nation — is to be blessed; but to the once favoured city of Nineveh God has said: "Jehovah hath given commandment that no more of thy seed be sown." Deeply solemn words! Truly. "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

Jonah's behaviour as Jehovah's witness to the wicked city was most reprehensible. He was evidently puffed up with a sense of his own importance as he marched through the streets of Nineveh. the most famous city on earth at that time, and pronounced its impending overthrow. When the sentence was cancelled in answer to the people's repentance, Jonah should have rejoiced. Instead he felt piqued! His dignity was touched! Oh, the pettiness of poor flesh! How ready it is to clothe itself with importance even in connection with the ministry of the word of God! Had the prophet been right with God, he would have delighted to proclaim that He is a gracious God, merciful. slow to anger. and repenting Him the evil (Jonah 4:2). Jonah's own nation, so persistently unfaithful has proved this repeatedly; why should not others, less favoured, and therefore less guilty, also taste the mercy of a pardoning God?

How blessed to be living in this Gospel age! Let us feast our souls upon the words of our Lord Jesus: "God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not judged: but he that believeth not is judged already, because he hath not believed in the name of the Only Begotten Son of God" (John 3:17-18). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word and believeth Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but is passed from death unto life " (John 5:24).

Jonathan and His Times

Jonathan and His Times

W W Fereday.

There is a remarkable similarity between Jonathan in the Old Testament and Barnabas in the New. Both were gracious and affectionate; both were signally used of God in their day; but both manifested deplorable weakness in a moment of crisis. Barnabas broke with Paul, special vessel of the Spirit in his time; and Jonathan parted with David, Jehovah's choice for the throne of Israel. In both cases, natural affection was the snare; Barnabas could not give up John Mark, and Jonathan could not give up Saul.

The break-down of these truly excellent saints is recorded for our instruction. Perhaps there is nothing that so hinders full loyalty to Christ as natural affection. We find it so difficult to give Him the place of absolute supremacy in our hearts and lives. Levi is specially commended in Deuteronomy 33:8-11 because in the day of the golden calf he "said unto his father and mother I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren nor knew his own children." In Luke 14:26, the Lord Jesus points out a similar path for all who would be His disciples. The natural must be subservient to the spiritual if we would follow Him. The rejected One — our God in "the likeness of sinful flesh" laid it down emphatically, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." (Matthew 10:37) What a test for our hearts!

Jonathan — "Jehovah hath given" (as real a gift from God to Israel as Paul to the Church) — came forward at a very evil time in Israel. The King of the people's choice was already a failure, The very enemy that he was specially appointed to save Israel from (1 Samuel 9:16) was oppressing the nation sorely. The people had everywhere been disarmed (the King and his son being alone permitted to keep their swords), and even the black smiths' shops were closed by order of the Philistines lest they should forge weapons. God's time had not yet come for David to be brought upon the scene, and the whole position seemed utterly hopeless. The awfulness of this will only be realised as we remember that Israel was God's chosen people for the blessing and guidance of all the nations upon earth. They had become utterly degraded and impotent by unfaithfulness to God. Is there any picture here of the present forlorn and powerless condition of the Church of God?

But God is never without resource. In every emergency He has His man. So Jonathan was raised up, that fair flower which God caused to blossom in the wilderness of Israel at that sorrowful moment" (Darby). His story may be divided into three parts thus: —

1. His relation to Jehovah.

2. His relation to David.

3. His relation to Saul.

The second part covers the largest space in the inspired record. In 1 Samuel 14:1-52 : he so acquitted himself that the people declared "he hath wrought with God this day" (1 Samuel 1:45). It is a great thing to work with God, and it must not be confounded with working for God: To work with God is to have His mind for the moment, so that the worker moves as God moves, and along the line that He marks out. We see this illustrated in the Acts of the Apostles, and it is the secret of spiritual success. Such discernment is the fruit of exercise of heart before God. It cannot be acquired otherwise.

Jonathan was distressed by the condition of things in Israel. We doubt not prayer was behind it when he said to his armour-bearer one day. "Come and let us go over to the Philistines' garrison that is on the other side." It was a step of faith. Two men with but one sword between them, marching out to attack a powerful foe, encamped on craggy heights, practically inaccessible!

"HE TOLD NOT HIS FATHER"

There was no real wish to hide anything, but men who have no faith themselves are apt to discourage and hinder those who have. David would certainly never have gone down into the Valley of Elah had he paid heed to Saul (1 Samuel 17:33) It was better to have the co-operation of a lowly soul such as the unnamed armour-bearer, if possessed of like faith, than the sanction and support of a monarch who had no faith at all. Saul had the forms of religion about him. Jehovah's priest was there, wearing an ephod, and the ark was not far away. But What is the value of forms if power is lacking? The past and present history of Christendom is a sufficient answer.

Be it be noted that both Jonathan and his armour-bearer were

YOUNG MEN

We are apt to connect conspicuous faith with age and experience. But Scripture abounds with extraordinary faith in young men. David wrote the majority of his Psalms before he attained the age of thirty; Daniel and his pious companions were still in their youth when they made their stand for God, Elihu gave utterance to sounder wisdom than Job's more venerable friends, and of Timothy Paul was able to say, I have no man who will naturally care for your state . . . ye know the proof of him," etc. (Php_2:1-30.). We would therefore encourage younger brethren to exercise themselves spiritually about the condition of things around them, and also concerning the deep deep need. They may then be prepared to say with Isaiah, "Here am I, send me" Isaiah 6:8). The only person expressly called "a man of God" in the New Testament was the comparatively youthful Timothy (1 Timothy 6:11). Yet he was a timid, sensitive character, not unlike Jeremiah in an earlier day. But grace knows how to strengthen and make bold the one whose heart is right towards God, and who yearns to be used of Him.

Jonathan and his armour-bearer set out that day with

A VERY SIMPLE BIT OF REASONING

in their souls. "Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that Jehovah will work for us: for there is no restraint to Jehovah to save by many or by few" (1 Samuel 14:6). To Jonathan the Philistines, whatever their numbers and prowess, were simply "these uncircumcised," i.e they were men not in relationship with God. On the other hand, Israel was in relationship with God, hence the twice-repeated covenant name "Jehovah." Faith in Jonathan

therefore could see no difficulty. If God was not with the Philistines, they had no real power; and if God was indeed with Israel, then almighty Power was at hand, if only there was faith to use it. How charmingly simple is all this! Have we learned the lesson' Do we deplore the lack of power visible in the Church to-day? Is not the Church still the temple of God, and does not the Spirit of God still abide therein? (1 Corinthians 3:16). What do we want more, but just the simple faith to go forward in dependence upon Him?

Jonathan felt, and rightly, that if God was moving, numbers mattered nothing. "There is no restraint to Jehovah to save by many or by few." Gideon accomplished the deliverance of Israel with but three hundred men, furnished, not with weapons, but with pitchers, lamps, and trumpets (Judges 7:1-25.). Paul reminds us that neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:7). Two or three humble men, without visible resources, moving about Preaching the Gospel of Christ, were once described as "these that have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6).

Moreover, Jonathan had the consciousness in his soul of his link with the people of God — with Israel. Hence his words in 1 Samuel 14:12, "Jehovah hath delivered them into the hand of Israel." We observe the same feature in David when he went forth to encounter the giant, "that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel . . . He will deliver you into our hands" (1 Samuel 17:46-47) In both cases there was no independent action. The faith was indeed their own, but they acted for and with the nation that God owned as His. Saul was utterly destitute of this feeling: hence his words in 1 Samuel 14:24 — "mine enemies." In all our labours and conflicts, let us never forget that we are part of a great divine unity, the body of Christ. The mass of our brethren may possibly be in a spiritually low condition, but they are our brethren nevertheless, and the Church, whatever its state, is still owned of God in the earth. We serve therefore as representing it, and for its edification and blessing.

Jonathan asked God for a sign, and He was graciously pleased to grant it. The two men proposed to discover themselves to the enemy, and if the enemy said, "Tarry until we come to you," they would remain where they were, and see what God would do; but if the enemy said, "Come up unto us," they would accept the call as assurance from God of a complete victory. Let us not miss the lesson of this sign. "Come up unto us" was the language of complacent security. A single boulder would have easily destroyed two men clambering painfully up rugged rocks, yet no boulder was rolled down upon them, so secure did the Philistines feel, and so deep was their contempt for the two. climbers. Nothing is more deadly than a human sense of strength and security; but nothing is more blessed than a spiritual sense of weakness and dependence upon God. Let us cultivate the latter increasingly.

As soon as Jonathan and his armour-bearer reached the top they began to slay, and simultaneously Jehovah caused an earthquake. Panic ensued. The Philistines fled hither and thither, apparently killing one another as they went. Thus did God work for the discomfiture of the insolent foe.

Saul's watchmen reported the commotion, but the king was not in the secret. Neither was the priest, who at the King's bidding brought thither the ark, and began to inquire of God, receiving however no answer. God was not interested in these religious formalists, but was acting altogether apart from them, as He has frequently done down to our own day.

SUCCESS INVARIABLY ATTRACTS NUMBERS

Those of God's people who had gone over to the Philistines (the inspired writer calls them in contempt "Hebrews," not "Israelites"), and others who had hid themselves, now turned out to share the victory. Both traitors and cowards were now willing to identify themselves with God's side, now that side was triumphant. It has ever been so; but immeasurably more pleasing to God are the godly minority who cleave to Him, and are willing to accept both reproach and peril for His name's sake. The God-fearing ones of Malachi 3:16, and "the rest in Thyatira" (Revelation 2:24) are examples of this.

The remainder of 1 Samuel 14:1 : is rather the story of Saul than of Jonathan. The poor benighted King almost turned the victory into disaster. The meddlesomeness of flesh in divine movements is always to be dreaded. Saul's foolish prohibition of all food until the work was finished led to frightful licence on the part of the people as all unnecessary prohibitions are apt to do. Jonathan had his eyes opened by disobeying his father (for he ate some honey); David says, on the contrary, "the commandment of Jehovah is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalms 19:8.). This means that true enlightenment is found in the path of obedience to God.

The forms of religion were still acknowledged by the King He built an altar — (the first he ever built to Jehovah), and instructed the priest to inquire of God about the further pursuit of the Philistines. Finding himself divinely ignored, he suspected divine displeasure somewhere; but he was so utterly far from God that the thought never occurred to his mind that he was the offender. How deceitful is flesh!

When the lot was taken, he positively passed sentence of death upon Jonathan! Ignorance and folly could scarcely have gone further. But the common sense of the people revolted against the King's stupidity. "Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid." So the matter ended. Saul went home, and the Philistines got away without further chastisement. The whole chapter is deeply humiliating in its exposure of the helplessness and folly of religious flesh, and withal is blessedly exhilarating in its precious assurance of what God can do with even the feeblest instruments who are right in heart towards Him, and who are able to trust Him wholly.

From this point the history of Jonathan is interwoven with that of David. For some reason he played no part in the valley of Elah, although he appears to have been in the camp of Israel at the time. Was he not at that moment a vessel "meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work"? (2 Timothy 2:21). It does not at all follow that because a man is ready for God at one time he is ready at another. Faith in the choicest saints fluctuates seriously. We see this in Elijah very distinctly. But the sovereignty of God is the more likely explanation of Jonathan's inactivity in the presence of Goliath. One of the great lessons of the Book of the Acts is that God acts as and when He pleases, using whomsoever He will. His time had come to introduce David to the people; accordingly the lad was brought forth in all the sweet simplicity of his faith, contrasting so completely with the ponderous formality and spiritual deadness of the man of the people's choice.

When David returned from the conflict with the head of the Philistine in his hand, Jonathan's affections went out towards him. David could say of him after his tragic death, "Very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (2 Samuel 1:26).

There is

NO SUBSTITUTE FOR LOVE.

Nothing that the wit of man can devise can ever take its place. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned" (Son_8:7). Jehovah lamented concerning Israel, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest out after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto Jehovah... Thus saith Jehovah, What iniquity have your fathers found in Me, that they are gone far from Me ... Thou said'st, there is no hope; no; for I have loved strangers, and after them I will go" (Jeremiah 2:1-5, Jeremiah 2:25. In Revelation 2:1-29. we hear the Lord's rebuke to Ephesus, "I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love." Works were there; orthodoxy and ecclesiastical order also; but the decay of love spread its dismal blight over them all.

David returning from the slaughter of Goliath is a type of the risen Christ. Only thus does the Christian know Him (2 Corinthians 5:16). In His death He made expiation for our sins; He brought to an end, as before God, the old man of sin and corruption; and He overthrew the might of our every foe. He is now Man exalted in heaven. He who once descended into the lower parts of the earth, has ascended up far above all heavens that He might fill all things (Ephesians 4:10). Surely our souls are exhilarated as we think of Him thus! Surely our affections follow Him to the place where He has gone! What place can the world hold in the minds and hearts of those who have the blessed knowledge of Him who man rejected here, and who is honoured there?

JONATHAN LOVED DAVID

as his own soul, and forthwith gave proof of his love by stripping himself for him. The extent of his surrender is remarkable. "Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle" (1 Samuel 18:4) It was a great thing to give David his robe and garments, but for a soldier, and a royal prince withal, to yield also his weapons was extraordinary. How great then was the affection of Jonathan for David!

We find Paul in the stripping-room in Php_3:1-21 : If any other person in his day thought he had whereof he might boast in the flesh, he had more. Every natural, racial, religious, and moral advantage was his. But the first sight of the glorified Christ knocked the value out of it all for him for ever. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." It was not the impulsive act of momentary enthusiasm with Paul, but the cool calculation of a man who was learning with God the true value of things both above and below. Paul no more went back upon his first devotion to Christ than Jonathan from his first devotion to David. Both loved their object until life's end. After years of unparalleled suffering and reproach for Christ (and the story may be read in an abbreviated form in 2 Corinthians 11:1-33.) Paul could say, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him" (Php_3:8-9.)

"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Romans 15:4). Brethren, what have we learned from Jonathan and from Paul. The latter writes appealingly to us all, "Be followers (i.e. imitators) of me" in 1 Corinthians 11:1, adding, "even as I also am of Christ," and in

Php_3:17, "and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an example." Let us review our Christian path. What have we really surrendered for the One we profess to love. What cherished idols have we abandoned for Him? To what extent have we shared His rejection? It was clearly seen that Paul and his fellows were treading a path of loss; they were made "a spectacle (or theatre) unto the world, and to angels, and to men" (1 Corinthians 4:9). Is it as clearly seen in us? May God by His blessed Spirit exercise our hearts and consciences as to this: —

Oh, let thy life be given,

Thy years for Him be spent;

World-fetters all be riven,

And joy with suffering blent;

Bring thou thy worthless all,

Follow thy Saviour's call.

The contrast between the attitude of Saul and Jonathan towards David was very great. The poor jealous king, now frequently plagued with an evil spirit (typical of the last king who will reign in Jerusalem before the great Appearing) hated him, and would destroy him, and even instructed Jonathan as well as his servants to kill David (1 Samuel 19:1). Jonathan. on his part "delighted much in David." This was the rock upon which father and son split, and the cleavage was irrevocable. In like manner to-day every man's eternal destiny is determined by the attitude of his soul towards the Son of God. "He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God" (John 3:18) "What think ye of Christ?" is the great question which will either make or break every person to whom it is presented. The rich young ruler of Mark 10:1-52 was all that could be desired, morally and otherwise; the difficulty was as to Christ. He did not see sufficient in Him to let all go for His sake.

The cleavage between those to whom Christ is everything, and those to whom He is little or nothing, is indeed most serious. Witness His own words in Luke 12:51-53 : Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth. I tell you, Nay, but division; for from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother, etc. Whatever matters of contention there were amongst men before His coming to earth, all have been eclipsed by His coming and rejection. Half-hearted Christians dropped Paul in the hour of his deepest need because they were not prepared to identify themselves with the disgrace and deprivations which came upon him for Christ's sake (2 Timothy 1:15; 2 Timothy 4:16-17).

Jonathan was willing to speak up for David. His remonstrance as given in 1 Samuel 19:4 is deeply touching: "Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good; for he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and Jehovah wrought a great deliverance for all Israel; thou sawest it, and did rejoice; wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without cause." In these words we can almost bear the Christian speaking up for his Saviour and

Lord. The hated one's words and works had been very good, and a great salvation had been wrought for Israel by his hand. Who dare impeach either the words or works of the Son of God, and who can deny that He has wrought for His people "so great salvation"? (Hebrews 2:3). David "put his life in his hand"; our blessed Lord went immeasurably further, for He laid down His life for the sheep. "No one taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power (authority) to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father" (John 10:18).

Jonathan reminded his father that at the moment of David's Victory over Goliath — "thou sawest it, and did'st rejoice." But it was a mere passing emotion; not a vestige of divine sentiment had any lodgment in his soul. Rocky ground hearers are very emotional, and seem to be filled with divine joy as the wonders of divine grace are set forth, but it quickly passes as the dew before the sun (Matthew 13:20-21).

It was good that Jonathan should speak up for David, and it is also good that we should be ever ready to speak up for the Lord Jesus; but the weakness of Jonathan lay in the fact that he was not prepared to follow David in his rejection.

He reminds us somewhat of Nicodemus in the New Testament,

THE MIDNIGHT TALK

with the Son of God as recorded in John 3:1-36 evidently left its impress upon his soul, for we find him later pleading His cause before the Council in John 7:50, and bringing down upon his own head the contempt of his fellows. But he was not yet prepared to throw in his lot with the Nazarene, and to share the reproach and shame that came upon Him from day to day. Thank God, Nicodemus shone out brightly at the finish. When all others had fled, boastful Peter doing worse still, Nicodemus proffered his assistance to Joseph of Arimathea for the burial of his Lord. His righteous soul was stung to the quick by the unrighteousness that he had witnessed. Delay was no longer possible; timidity was thrown to the winds; and he allowed it to be seen by all that he loved and honoured the outcast Son of God. Truly, "the last shall be first, and the first last". (Matthew 20:16)

God is never limited in His resources. Accordingly, He had instruments other than Jonathan for the help of His persecuted servant. Michal by a ruse enabled David to escape when Saul would have murdered him in his bed, and Samuel sheltered him in Naioth when his own home was no longer tenable. When Saul essayed to fetch him thence, the Spirit of God came upon him in a remarkable manner, thus witnessing to the wilful King of the uselessness of waging war with God (1 Samuel 19:11-24).

But soon the friends met again, and David challenged Jonathan: "What have I done? What is mine iniquity, and what is my sin before thy father that he seeketh my life"! (1 Samuel 20:1). It was then arranged that David should absent himself from the royal table on a forthcoming special occasion under the pretence of going to Bethlehem to keep a yearly sacrifice with his family, and that Jonathan should report to him what: the King said about it. Readers of Holy Scripture are sometimes startled when they read of

ACTS OF DUPLICITY

committed by persons generally commended by the Spirit of God, and they wonder how these things can be. Rahab's falsehood concerning the whereabouts of the spies, and David's conduct in the incident before us are examples. But why need we wonder? Is flesh anything better in the saint than in the sinner? Can any number of years of communion with God improve it, or render the saint less liable to temptation from it? As well expect the Ethiopian to change his skin, or the leopard his spots! The language of the Holy Spirit in Romans 7:7 is clear and unequivocal as to this. "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Its hopeless depravity, and inveterate hostility to all that is of God, is thus declared.

But nothing is further from the mind of the Spirit than to sanction or excuse outbreaks of evil in those who are near to God. Indeed, the very opposite principle is found in Scripture. Thus to Israel of old Jehovah said: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2); and believers now are warned that if they call Him Father who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, they must pass the time of their sojourning here in fear (1 Peter 1:17) And the same Epistle tells us that "the time is come that judgement must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17).

THE SHORTCOMINGS OF SAINTS

both in the Old and New Testament dispensations are recorded because the Spirit of God is a faithful biographer, and would tell us the worst as well as the best about those in whom He is interested, and their sorrowful misdeeds are usually recorded without comment, in order that we may exercise our minds and hearts as we read, and so form a judgement from what we know of Scripture generally, as to what is pleasing to God, and what is not.

Until the great change takes place at the coming of the Lord Jesus, every conceivable evil is possible, even for the most devout. But our shortcomings are immeasurably more serious than those of Rahab, David, and Jonathan, because we have seen God's judgement of flesh in the death of His Son (Romans 8:3), and have ourselves professedly accepted His judgement. In the words of the Apostle, "They that are Christ's have crucified. the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 5:24).

To return to Jonathan. He imperilled his life by repeating David's story to the King, for the javelin was hurled at him, as twice before it had been hurled at David (1 Samuel 19:11). The incident of the arrows which followed need not be detailed here, The breach between Saul and David was now hopeless and final. Deeply moving was the parting between Jonathan and David, "they kissed one another, and wept with one another until David exceeded" (1 Samuel 20:41). The love was indeed wonderful, but the weak point was serious beyond degree. Jonathan would strip himself for David; he would speak up for him; he would kiss him; but he was not willing to share his rejection. Accordingly the one went whither he could, to the hill-side and the cave, and the other returned to the comforts of the city. But Jonathan finished on the wall of Bethshan, while David ascended the throne!

The paramount question for our souls to-day is this: How far are we prepared to go in our identification with Christ. The true path is clearly indicated for us by the Lord Himself in John 12:24-26. He, as the true grain of wheat, was about to "fall into the ground and die," for only thus could God's garner be filled. Apart from death, He must remain for ever alone. But we who derive

from Him are

OURSELVES GRAINS OF WHEAT

and we are expected to accept death also. Only thus can we be fruitful for God. "He that loveth his Life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve Me, let him follow Me, and where I am there shall also My servant be, if any man serve Me, him will My Father honour." We accepted death in principle in our Baptism, but have we really accepted it in practice? If so, how comes it that the world's fashions and follies are promptly adopted amongst us as they appear? How can it be explained that some seek the worlds honours, Municipal, Parliamentary, and otherwise. Why the rush of so many to join with the ungodly in Co-operative Societies? And why the wave of militarism that has passed over the Assemblies of God in recent pears, due to the influence, not of Holy Scripture, but of the world's inflammatory Press.

The call for a well defined separation rings out clearly enough in the words, "Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Hebrews 13:12-13). Mark the words. He suffered, not to save His own from Hell (although that is true), but that he might sanctify them. He wanted a people who should be absolutely His own, and standing apart from the whole order of things from which He is excluded. This involves reproach," but shall we refuse it. Is He not worthy of the intense devotion of these poor hearts of ours?

THE LAST MEETING

of David and Jonathan is noted in 1 Samuel 23:16-18. It took place at an opportune moment. Saul, the man who might have been throneless had not David confronted Goliath, was pursuing him with relentless energy; and the men of Keilah, whom he had recently rescued from the Philistines, were treacherously betraying him. Who could be trusted? To whom could David turn? The ground seemed to quake beneath his feet. Just then, Jonathan, Saul's son, arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. Spiritual fellowship and brotherly sympathy is as refreshing as the dew of heaven. Don't let us look for it, beloved brethren. but let us show it, for many are in need of it. The coming of Titus to Paul in Macedonia was as divinely timed as the coming of Jonathan to David in the wood (2 Corinthians 7:5-6).

The parting of the ways had now come. Jonathan was fully aware of Jehovah's purpose concerning David. So was Saul (1 Samuel 24:20). So Was Abigail (1 Samuel 25:30) So were many others (2 Samuel 3:18). Jonathan, knowing what the issue must be, had already pledged David to show mercy to his seed (1 Samuel 20:15). This being the position, David might well have said, as his Lord later, "He that is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30). To contend with David was to contend with God. Every man's choice must now be made. Alas, for Jonathan! Much as he loved David, and sincerely though he believed the divine purpose concerning him, he felt unable to follow him. Obadiah would befriend the prophets of Jehovah, but he was not willing to abandon Ahab's palace to share the cave with them (1 Kings 18:4). Moses, on the contrary, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and he identified himself once for all with the people of God in their poverty and contempt (Hebrews 11:23-27) The Holy Spirit gives his action a meaning and value far greater than Moses ever imagined. He calls it "the reproach of Christ."

We would speak tenderly of such a man as Jonathan. No more attractive figure can be found on the sacred page, and his devotion to David will read its lessons to God's saints while time lasts. But the failure must not be ignored. In the day of Christ all that is divinely excellent in us will be commended and rewarded; and all that is otherwise will be mercifully cast into eternal oblivion. But meanwhile the Spirit records the weaknesses and shortcomings of those who have trodden the path of faith before us, for our present instruction and blessing. The solemn lesson is ever before our eyes that only One has been perfect in all His ways.

We listen now to

JONATHAN'S LAST WORDS

to David: "Fear not, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee: and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also my father knoweth." The weak points of Jonathan's words are sadly clear. First, he still thought of David as connected with the Saul order of things, i.e., he would be Saul's successor — Jonathan was wrong in principle in speaking thus. David would be no mere successor to Saul, but the beginning of an absolutely new order. In Psalms 78:1-72, which has been called the 'parable of the prodigal nation,' the Saul episode is completely ignored by the inspired writer. The evil and ruin of Israel is traced down to the days of Eli (Psalms 78:64); then David and Zion are introduced as Jehovah's resource in grace. One of the most serious blunders of our time is the effort to connect Christ with man's order of things. The world is still regarded by many as mendable, and they would fain bring Christ into the working of it. What is not perceived is that the old man, the world, and the prince of this world (Satan) are all under judgement. The risen Christ is the second man and the Last Adam, the beginning and the head of a new order of things that will never pass away.

Jonathan also erred when he said to David, "I shall be next unto thee." It is those who suffer that will reign (2 Timothy 2:12). Humbler men than the King's son were destined to be near David in his exaltation; Jonathan was destined to be disgraced to the uttermost. Moreover, was it for him or any other to say in advance who should be next to the new King. Surely that Is a matter for the King himself to decide! Zebedee's sons failed similarly when they asked for right and left-hand places in the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 20:21).

It may be that "I next" had much to do with Jonathan's reluctance to tread a path of reproach and loss. He seemed unwilling to surrender all his dignity for the one he loved. David's band was certainly a motley crowd (1 Samuel 22:2). Jonathan was not quite prepared to make one with them. Shall we not pray that we may be preserved from a respectable Christianity? To the carnally-minded Corinthians who loved ease and honour here, the Apostle wrote, not without a tinge of sarcasm in his tone: "We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst; and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labour, working with our own hands; being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat; we are made as the filth of the world, and are the off-scouring of all things unto this day" (1 Corinthians 4:10-13). It is men of the Paul type whom the Lord will honour in His Kingdom.

It remains to be added that "David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house." Not to the royal camp, not to the ranks of the persecutors of the man of Jehovah's choice, but "to his house."

Psalms 63:1-11 fits in here. David is in the wilderness. So many things were lacking there, but he had GOD.

Chapter 102

"Bring me a minstrel."

"Bring me a minstrel."

W. W. Fereday.

(Extracted from Truth for the Last Days, Vol. 4, 1905, page 124.)

Ever since sin came in, the children of faith have found the present scene an uncongenial one to the spiritual life that divine grace has implanted within them. The moral atmosphere around the godly is not conducive to heavenly-mindedness; communion with God is not helped thereby, but the reverse. Hence the soul that should really enjoy those unseen and eternal things that are properly its own must abstract itself; it must put itself outside of its existing environment (as far as that is possible "while in the body pent.")

In 2 Kings 3:1-27, the Spirit of God puts before us an instructive lesson as to this. 'the King of Israel — Jehoram, son of the wicked Ahab — was setting forth on an expedition to subdue the King of Moab who had revolted against him. He sought the co-operation of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, who, accompanied by his vassal, the King of Edom, consented to go with him to the war. Alas for Jehoshaphat! True servant of God though he was, it was the third time he had suffered himself to be ensnared into fellowship with the ungodly (1 Kings 22:10; 2 Chronicles 20:35-37). As on a former occasion, so now also, he had qualms of conscience about what he had undertaken, and so proposed to seek the mind of Jehovah at the hand of one of His prophets. Accordingly the three kings waited on Elisha in Samaria. To the king of Israel the prophet said severely, "What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother;" adding, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee nor see thee." The prophet of Jehovah thus drew a sharp distinction between Jehoram and Jehoshaphat, even though the latter was pursuing a path of disobedience at that time.

"But now bring me a minstrel." Why was this? "And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of Jehovah came upon him." The presence of Israel's ungodly king was an offence to Elisha's spirit. He felt restrained and hindered by reason of it. The holy atmosphere of communion with God which the prophet was accustomed to breathe was, as it were, polluted by the very fact that Jehoram was before him. The "still small voice," which was the express symbol of Elisha's ministry of grace, could not be heard amid the clamour of the wicked (1 Kings 19:12). Hence he felt it necessary to abstract himself; he judged it incumbent upon him to get in spirit outside of his surroundings before he could ascertain the mind of Jehovah, in order to give it forth to the only really godly man who would value it. "When the minstrel played the hand of the Lord came upon him. And he said, Thus saith the Lord," etc.

Balaam never knew such an experience as this. Though he -gave expression to some of the divinest thoughts contained in Holy Scripture, he did it merely as the instrument of a power superior to his own. His own affections and sympathies were by no means engaged in the service;

indeed he would most willingly have said the opposite of what he did say about the people of God, if God had permitted him to do so. Hence the presence of the ungodly was no affliction to him; he experienced no godly restraint of spirit by reason of it, and he felt no need to abstract himself from the influence of evil surroundings in order to get into the mind of God.

Our sympathies are with Elisha. We all prove experimentally day by day the many hindrances to communion with God with which this world is full. "The cares of this life" affect some, and the deceitfulness of riches affect others, even amongst the true saints of God. They clog our steps, they dim our eyes, they weigh down our spirits, and keep us on a low spiritual plane, if we allow them to do so. But faith does well to spread its wings and soar above all surrounding influences, that its delight in the things of the unseen Christ may be full and complete. 2 Corinthians 12:1-21 presents us with a wonderful experience once granted to the honoured apostle of the Gentiles. He does not name himself, but tells us of "a man in Christ," who was caught up to the third heaven, there to listen to words which could not possibly be communicated to men in a merely earthly condition. So completely abstracted was he, that he affirms twice that he could not tell whether he was in the body or out of the body at the time. While recognising fully the miraculous element in the apostle's happy experience, is there not a voice to our souls in it? Is it not among the things that are written for our learning?

The life that is ours in Christ is an essentially heavenly thing. Full understanding and enjoyment of it cannot be until God's full thought concerning us is realised, and we find ourselves in the Father's house, with our bodies fashioned like unto the body of the First-born Son, all that is mortal being swallowed up of life (2 Corinthians 5:10). But eternal life is really ours now, many a divine statement assuring us of it, yet it is an exotic in this world, and we need to live in spirit outside of this world if we would enjoy in any measure the rich spiritual portion that God has given to us in His Son.

The apostle's words in 1 Corinthians 7:35, have often powerfully impressed me: "that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction." What do we know of this? The language supposes the soul living by faith within the precincts of the heavenly sanctuary, holding communion with the Lord without a burden and without a care. This is the Spirit's desire for us all. He is the ever-present divine link between our souls here and Christ there, and it is His deepest delight to make good to faith now those things which will only be entered upon as an actual possession when the Lord returns.

Will any suggest that these remarks are impractical? The reverse is the truth. It is in occupation with the unseen that our souls gather strength for all the circumstances of the way; it is this, and this alone, which renders our hearts buoyant in the midst of all that of necessity comes upon us in an evil world and a fallen Church.

Josiah and Revival

Josiah and Revival

W W Fereday.

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Foreword

There is a widespread feeling of disappointment amongst the children of God at the present time because of the apparent non-success of their Gospel labours. The masses are less and less disposed to accept our Invitations, and come together to hear the marvellous story of God's grace. The Sunday Newspaper, the radio, and the many facilities for fleshly indulgence such as our fathers never dreamed of, are doing their deadly work in every direction. Even Britain, so long favoured with an open Bible, is rapidly becoming a pagan land. In conversation with individuals, one is frequently amazed at their absolute ignorance of even the outlines of Divine truth. An officer

recently asked me who Moses was, for he had never heard the name before! Possibly the people in Central Africa are now more familiar with the things of God than the people of Britain. The need for revival is anxiously expressed. The following pages may serve to point the way to a true revival in spiritual things.

Some years ago the English religious denominations organised a “Come to Church” Campaign. The aim was to fill the “Churches" for at least one occasion. But much more than this is needed if souls are to be eternally blessed. In our Lord's familiar parable of the Great Supper in Luke 14:1-35, the man who spread the feast said, "that my house may be filled" Generous grace! But the house of the parable is not a Parish Church, but the festal hall above. God wants that place filled.

Josiah was able to accomplish wonderful things for God in a particularly difficult time, because (1) he sought the Lord with all his heart; (2) because he was determined to be obedient in every detail to the written Word of God; and (3) because he set himself diligently to cast away from himself and from the sphere of his influence everything that was inconsistent with the divine law. Given these conditions in any locality, we might see great things yet, so gracious is our God. But shortened addresses, solos, choruses, and other unapostolical methods are poor substitutes for the spiritual features which characterised king Josiah, and which drew forth such blessing from God in the closing days of Israel's national history.

The careful reader will probably notice some repetitions and a few minor errors in this book. Kindly consideration for old age and infirmity will excuse these things. Even the youngest reader may become old himself some day and lose his alertness!

The Child King

Solomon, in his book of Ecclesiastes (which contains much sound wisdom concerning “things under the sun") says "Woe to thee O land, when thy King is a child Ecclesiastes 10:16). In earlier days than those of Josiah, Jehovah said with regard to Israel: I will give children to be their princes, and with childishness shall they rule over them. Isaiah 3:4 This was judgement upon a people who did not value His word and who had no desire to walk in His ways. It is hard to say which is worse for a nation, a child in years, or a man with a childish mind. In the book of Ecclesiastes we read again: Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished Ecclesiastes 4:13. God's thought in connection with kingship is expressed in His description of David Psalms 78:72 "He fed them according to the integrity of his hearty: and guided them with the skilfulness of his hands." A land blessed with such a ruler is blessed indeed, but David was far from perfect, and God's ideal king will not be seen until our Lord Jesus returns from heaven.

It is startling to read in 2 Chronicles 34:1 "Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign." This was surely not as it should be. Every nation needs strong and sound leadership, that evil may be suppressed, and that righteousness may prevail, What could a child of eight do with a turbulent people far advanced in iniquity, and dangerously near to overwhelming judgement? The sequel will show that Jehovah had mercy on the child, and also upon the nation. Josiah shines upon the page of inspiration as one of its brightest lights. His name means "Given of Jehovah," This is suggestive. Such a pious and conscientious king was a priceless gift to the people of Judah at a

critical juncture. Through him Jehovah made a last tender appeal to his erring people before expelling them from the land. Would that the reign of Josiah could have been a long one! Alas, his own folly cut it short!

This young king's father Amon was murdered at the early age of twenty-four. He was a very wicked man who profited nothing by Jehovah's stern dealings with his own father Manasseh. (The doings of these kings must be kept in mind if we would understand the wonderful work of the Spirit of God in Judah during the thirty-one years of Josiah's administration (2 Chronicles 33:21-25).

Manasseh was twelve years old when he succeeded his father Hezekiah. He was therefore born during the fifteen years of extension of life which were granted to Hezekiah in answer to his prayers and tears (Isaiah 38:5). There can be no doubt that Manasseh was carefully instructed in the ways of God, for Hezekiah said: "the father to the children shall make known Thy truth" (Isaiah 38:19). Let every Christian father note this carefully, and follow Hezekiah's good example (read also Psalms 128:1-8). In spite of his early advantages Manasseh became the wickedest king that Judah had ever known. His enormities made it impossible for Jehovah to tolerate the presence of the people in His land. Manasseh practised every form of idolatry; he indulged deeply in Spiritism; and he freely slaughtered all who dared to oppose his evil ways. After many years of these devilries, in defiance of many warning messages sent to him by Jehovah, the king of Assyria was allowed to come up against him. In the days of Hezekiah, an earlier king of Assyria came against Jerusalem and its king to his own ruin. But it was otherwise with Manasseh: the invader dragged him from his throne, and carried him away to a prison in Babylon. Babylon at that time was not an independent kingdom, but was subject to the king of Assyria). Manasseh's downfall brought him to his senses. "When he was in affliction, he besought Jehovah his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him: and He was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that Jehovah He was God" (2 Chronicles 33:12-13).

His energy after his return to his own country was remarkable. He sought to extirpate all the evils that he had set up; he repaired the long disused altar of Jehovah, and “commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel" (2 Chronicles 33:16). But whatever good Manasseh may have accomplished in his later years he failed to influence Amon his son, He had taught him to serve the Devil, and he persisted in that dread service. “He humbled not himself before Jehovah as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more" (2 Chronicles 33:23). When he ascended the throne of Judah after his father's long reign of fifty-five years, his ways were so abominable that he was murdered within two years. It is written of both these kings that “he was buried in the garden of Uzza” (2 Kings 21:18 and 2 Kings 21:26). Thus beneath centuries of accumulated rubbish there lie these two kings — Manasseh and Amon, father and son The father sixty seven years old when he died, and the son was twenty-four; the father has gone to heaven and the son has gone to Hell and, awful though his father taught him the way to Hell. Gladly would Manasseh have undone the mischief that he had wrought in his unconverted days, but it was impossible. The evil had gone too deeply into the hearts of the people and of his own son in particular, to be eradicated by his influence. It is easier to put souls upon the downward road than to pull them off it again.

The early manifestation of piety in Josiah arrests us. His father, as we have seen, was an exceptionally wicked man, and of his mother we know nothing, save that she was “Jedidah, the daughter of Adiaah of Boscath" (2 Kings 22:1). From whence then did the child Josiah get spiritual instruction? From his grandfather Manasseh, undoubtedly. The thoroughness with which the latter sought to undo the evil work of his former years would fill him with concern for his grandson. If Amon scoffed at his father's entreaties and plunged still more deeply into iniquity, there was hope that the child would pay heed.

Josiah was six years old when Manasseh died. What is implanted in the mind during the first six years of a child's life is not easily uprooted. Timothy owed much to his pious mother and grandmother. Of his father nothing is recorded save that he was a Greek. So carefully was Timothy trained spiritually that Paul could say to him later on: “From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto Salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:5, 2 Timothy 3:15). It has been said that filling the mind of a child with the Scriptures is like the laying of a fire, which a simple match will cause to blaze up. Let a Christian parent who may read these lines not neglect this service. Children are a serious responsibility concerning which we must give account in the day of the Lord Jesus.

A number of years ago I baptised a man eighty-five years old and a lad of fifteen. The contrast impressed me deeply, and in my address I remarked that I scarcely knew for which of these we should be most thankful to God. In the one case we had a soul saved, but a life lost, and in the other we had not only a soul saved, but a life saved also. In Manasseh and Josiah we see something similar. The former we shall undoubtedly meet in Heaven — a sinner saved by grace, but his life was largely wasted; we shall also meet Josiah in Heaven, but with him there was a life saved, which was fruitful for God during many years.

Many Gracious Revivals

Israel's history after the death of Joshua was a very sorrowful one. His conquests put the people in possession of the land of promise. It was divided up under the guidance of Jehovah, and many cities were allotted to the various tribes that were still occupied by the enemy; but divine power was available for the expulsion or destruction of all those, if only the people of God had faith to use it. In Judges 1:1, we read: “Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked Jehovah, saying, who shall go up for us against the Canaanites' first, to fight against them? And Jehovah said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand." Had Israel continued on this line, all would have been well, but poor flesh can never be trusted. Accordingly the Book of Judges is a story of miserable failure. Again and again Israel turned their back upon Jehovah, and worshipped idols, and as frequently He delivered them into the hands of their foes. But the Book of Judges not only tells us of repeated failures; it also tells us of various spiritual revivals in the mercy of God. From time to time men of faith were raised up (Gideon being the brightest of them all) who laid hold upon God on behalf of His wayward people, and they were used of Him to deliver them from their oppressors, and to lead them back to their God.

David's day was the greatest revival of all, Everything was in ruins when Jehovah took him from the sheep folds, and made him king over His people. The priesthood had broken down both morally and spiritually, and the king of the people's choice had been slain, and the excellent Jonathan with him. “Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that

shouteth by reason of wine” (Psalms 78:65). In David and Mount Zion He gave His people a new start in grace, But the effects of every revival were but transient. Of later revivals those in the days of Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah may be specially mentioned. Josiah was the last instrument thus graciously raised up by God before He suffered “the boar out of the wood to waste His vineyard, and the wild beast of the field to devour It (Psalms 80:13). Since that awful catastrophe, which upset the whole order of nations as established by the Most High, the people of Israel have not been in possession of the land. All claim to it has been forfeited, whatever Jewish pride and self-will may say in our time. The people will not again possess the good land until He comes whose right it is to reign. Then grace will give what righteousness now refuses, and the seed of Abraham will enjoy rest and peace forever.

In speaking of Josiah as Israel's last revivalist, I am not overlooking the fact that he was King of Judah. His little Kingdom included (territorially) the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, which alone remained to the house of David after the great disruption which followed the death of Solomon. The ten tribes which revolted at that time and made Jeroboam the son of Nebat their king have not been re-united to their brethren to this hour. At various times the Kingdom of Judah received valuable additions in exercised souls who left the Northern Kingdom because of its appalling evils, and migrated to the south, where at least under certain pious kings, the Word of God was still somewhat respected (2 Chronicles 11:13-17). The spiritual enemy that leads to separation from real evil is always precious in the sight of God (2 Timothy 2:19-22). Mere quarrelsomness He hates 2 Timothy 2:24

Although the majority of the people of God did not acknowledge his authority (and indeed many of them were no longer in the land, having been carried away by the Kings of Assyria) Josiah, being a man of faith, regarded his tiny remnant of a nation which was once as numerous as the sand of the sea, as representative of Israel. The unity of the people of God was very real and precious to him, notwithstanding, centuries of grievous failure. Upon the holy table in Jerusalem's sanctuary there still stood the twelve loaves with pure frankincense upon them Leviticus 14:5-9; 2 Chronicles 13:11, teaching that His own are always under the eye of God and covered with the acceptability of Christ. What God saw in His grace, Josiah saw in the simplicity of his faith. On the same principle Paul, several centuries later, spoke of "our twelve tribes" (Acts 26:7), and James addressed his Epistle to "the twelve tribes that are scattered abroad, greeting” (James 1:1).

Josiah lived in the late evening of Israel's national history; we are living in the late evening of the history of the Church. For Israel, the time of divine repudiation and banishment was near (Hosea 1:9; Hosea 13:3). For Christendom something analogous is impending. He who is Holy and Pure will shortly spue out of His mouth the unreal mass who profess to be Christians and are not (Revelation 3:16). The fruitless branches will be cut out of God's olive tree (Romans 11:22). All who are truly Christ's will be caught up to meet their Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 2:17). In his day, Josiah was confronted with division, confusion and every evil work. The same things confront us now. The young King was profoundly moved by the written Word of God when it was brought before him and he was determined to be obedient in all things thereto. The feeling that the hour was late, and that the position was hopeless, did not check in Josiah's soul the sense of responsibility. Hoary customs were cast aside, and every trace of evil in the land was stamped out to the best of his ability. Many professed to follow the King in his holy zeal, but Jehovah who knows the secrets of all hearts, said, "Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but

feignedly” (Jeremiah 3:10). in all ages the people love to move with the tide. If the tide is flowing in the right direction (as in the Protestant Reformation) many will go with it outwardly; but if the tide is flowing in the wrong direction the mass will go with it eagerly. The latter was seen in the days of Israel's worst kings, and we have seen it also in Christendom.

The Scriptures which influenced Josiah so wonderfully were principally the five books of Moses. We are immeasurably more favoured than he, for we hold in our hands the complete revelation of God. Is it our habit to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest? Or is it possible that the bustle of the twentieth century, with the many side attractions that the restlessness of flesh has provided for everybody, is diverting us from the study of the Word of God? Foolish souls are we, if this is so. The Scriptures, as we meditate upon them, bring us into the presence of God; they lay bare our consciences and they quicken our spiritual affections. They enrich us divinely. Enjoyment leads to action. Every evil thing in our lives is cast out. We scrutinise our ecclesiastical associations; will they stand the test of the Word of God? Religious organisations and fellowships which betray the human hand we renounce as earnestly as Josiah renounced and destroyed the many religious evils which filled his realms. The Church rises up before our souls, in its wondrous unity as Christ's body and God's habitation, and in the light of it we seek by grace to walk while we wait for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Seeking the Lord

Having been brought to God myself in early youth, it has been somewhat of a habit with me, in moving about in the world, to inquire of any friends at what age they were converted, and it has been deeply interesting to learn that the great majority of them were saved in their “teens" Some could trace their spiritual history even further back. A lady of exceptional piety living in a town in Staffordshire told me in her seventy-eighth year that she had been “breaking bread" seventy years! This means that she confessed the name of the Lord and was accepted by her brethren for Baptism and Assembly fellowship when only eight years old! Such a case is doubtless very rare, but it proves to us what the grace of God can do. In October, 1945, I was told of the triumphant death of a man who was saved through my instrumentality in London in 1883! He was twelve years old at that time. Many years ago I baptised two girls, each thirteen years of age. Some feared that I was somewhat venturesome in doing so; but their after history. as in the two cases already mentioned, proved that they were true disciples of the Lord Jesus. One died of consumption after several years of bright Christian life; and the other, at the moment of writing, is an exemplary Christian in her fifty-seventh year.

Our Saviour-God delights to pardon and bless transgressors advanced in years. Manasseh in the Old Testament, and the Philippian jailor in the New, are examples of this. But our Lord's attitude towards children when here upon earth shows how deep is His interest in the young. Many who were rescued early by His grace have distinguished themselves in His service later. We recall David and Jonathan in the Old Testament, and Timothy in the New. No more pious persons have ever sat upon the throne of England than Edward VI and Lady Jane Grey the nine-days Queen; but both were only about seventeen years old at the time of their death.

I write these things for the encouragement of workers amongst the young. It has long been my conviction that our best Gospel work is wrought in the Sunday Schools and Bible Classes. Let none regard these as mere side-lines of service, for they are indeed our most fruitful fields.

Concerning Josiah we read: "He did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young he began to seek after the God of David his father 2 Chronicles 34:2-3

There is no mention of any spiritual helper for Josiah as in the case of Joash more than a century earlier. The latter was favoured to have about him for many years his pious uncle Jehoida (2 Chronicles 24:2). With Josiah there was probably more direct dealings with God. This would account for his sturdy faith and his amazing energy in service for God. But whether it were Joash or Josiah, or the present writer and his readers, all is grace. Every scrap of good that has ever been seen in any of us is the work of the Holy Spirit

Thus at the interesting age of sixteen Josiah began to seek after the God of David his father. Man being a lost sinner, having by his love of sin strayed from his Maker into hopeless darkness, is always under responsibility to return to God, who has a righteous claim upon the love and obedience of all His creatures, as He has Himself expressed it in the law of Sinai, Seek ye the Lord while He may be found," is His command to the wayward. His forbearance with sinners will not continue indefinitely. Some day men may wish to "find" Him, and will discover that He is no longer “near" (Isaiah 15:6). Paul, when addressing the wise men of Athens, told them that men should seek after God, and he added “though He be not far from everyone of us" (Acts 17:27). Precious words, when rightly understood! The many shrines which met the Apostle's eyes in the Greek capital suggested to him that one god was as good as another in the minds of the people there. Therefore he preached unto them the one true God and Jesus whom He raised from the dead.

But although it is ever the duty of men to seek after God, actually they refuse to do so. How tremendously solemn are the words of Psalms 53:2 : “God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Everyone of them is gone back: they are together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." The great and gracious Creator surveyed the whole human race and He could not see one that wanted Him, or that even understood the purpose for which he was created! This is confirmed in Psalms 14:2-3 and Romans 3:11-12. To this we would add Psalms 10:4 : “The wicked through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts."

This being the true condition of things, all would perish in their appalling folly, but for the activity of God in grace. If men do not want Him, He wants them! Immediately after the rebellion in the garden, the voice of God was heard, saying, "Adam, where art thou?" (Genesis 3:9). The Gospel tells us (Oh, blessed thought!) that God is now the Seeker after men. This is the meaning of the coming amongst us of His beloved Son. Accordingly in the New Testament sinners are never charged to seek the Lord although it is still their responsibility to do so; in stead, they are told that God is seeking them. When the Lord Jesus was found fault with for receiving sinners and eating with them, He gave utterance to the delightful parables of Luke 15:1-32, wherein He delineated the grace that seeks the lost, and that welcomes the penitent. He likened Himself to a shepherd “going after that which is lost until He find it." When again complained of for entering the house of Zacchaeus the tax-gatherer, He said: “the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost” (Luke 19:10). The grace which seeks (oh, so unweariedly!) those whom righteousness might

well condemn, is marvellous! What a God is ours! Yet how cruelly misrepresented by Satan to foolish men whom he would fain keep in eternal distance from the God who loves them! It is noticeable that when the Lord Jesus spoke of little ones He omitted the word “seek." All He said was: “the Son of man is come to save that which is lost." (Matthew 18:11). Even the Youngest is lost by nature; but some have not had time enough to wilfully stray from their God. Yet they need to be saved.

Well, it is an unspeakably happy thing to be led to Christ in early youth, before the diabolical tendencies which are in all our hearts lead us into transgression and sin like the prodigal of Luke 15:1-32. C. H. Spurgeon, the most notable Evangelical preacher of the last century preached his first sermon at the age of sixteen! He subsequently described his spiritual history as follows: - "I looked to Him: He looked on me: and we were one for ever." Simple, sweet, and expressive! But the position would be more correctly stated thus: -

He looked on me:

I looked to Him:

And we were one for ever."

Man being at enmity with God, not God at enmity with man, the first step towards reconciliation should come from man, but it never does. God is the seeker, not man. What a God! How marvellous is His grace! The grateful Paul, once bold in his hostility, but now rejoicing in God's salvation, said: "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord . . . . the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant" (1 Timothy 1:12-14).

Israel's "High Places"

At the age of sixteen (as we have seen) Josiah turned to God. Then followed four years of spiritual exercise. concerning the condition of things around him. His position as king made Josiah feel that it was not sufficient for him to be right with God personally; he also felt that he must purge the land of its abominations, and lead the people back to God. In this day we are not called upon to be iconoclasts. It is not our duty to go round with axes and hammers and destroy images and other things which we know to be hateful to God. All this will be dealt with by the Lord Jesus when He shows Himself from heaven in Kingdom-power and majesty. Our present duty is twofold: (1) to get our own souls right by testing all our ways and associations by the written Word; and (2) to use our influences to help others to return to the "old paths" (Jeremiah 6:16) The latter we can do by personal conversation, and by definite public ministry if God has qualified us for such work. Mere addresses, carefully planned, with points, divisions, anecdotes, and alliterations may be entertaining; but it is doubtful if they reach hearts and consciences concerning the evils from which men should purge themselves. Time was when many Christians carried in their pockets a supply of booklets some suited for Christians and others for unbelievers. We wonder if this is done to any extent to-day?

At the age of twenty Josiah began to move. Five verses in 2 Chronicles 34:3-7 are packed with the Holy Spirits record of his courageous deeds. Although surrounded by people whose attitude was doubtful, he went forward energetically. Images were smashed, altars were broken down, and the bones of idolatrous Priests were burnt upon their altars. Thus the young king expressed his

abhorrence of evil Practises and of the men who led the way in them. Josiah did not limit himself to the territories of Judah and Benjamin, although he commenced there. At all times the servants of God should first testify near home. Having done this, Josiah pushed Northward, and acted with vigour in Manasseh, Ephraim, etc. The ruling power in the North must have been weak for such action to be possible; but the young King took risks, confiding in God. Bold testimony in regions where the truth is most needed is called for to-day; but how far are we willing to move away from the warm shelter of Gospel Halls and other places of comfortable service. Yet, why should 'evangelists' abandon their earthly calling if they are unwilling for pioneer work such as the apostle speaks of in Romans 15:18-24.

It is particularly noted that Josiah “began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places. These were very offensive to Jehovah, because they were the expression of the people's neglect and even contempt for His chosen centre. He definitely commanded the people to destroy all the images of the Canaanites and to devastate their high places (Numbers 33:52). At this point the reader would do well to lay down this book and read Deuteronomy 12:1-32. In that chapter Moses told the people before he died that they would find the land full of idols, with places of worship "upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree." All this was the expression of self-will of people who knew nothing of God and who were under the blinding influence of Satan. But the people of God must not be like them. They must listen to His voice, and obey Him in all things, especially in mattes relating to divine worship. He would choose His own centre, and thither the tribes of Israel were told bring their sacrifices and offerings. Shiloh, in Ephraim, was Jehovah's first dwelling-place (Jeremiah 7:12), later, he chose Zion (Psalms 78:60-68).

The sin of the people, which caused the ark of the covenant to fall into the hands of the Philistines, threw the relationships of the people with Jehovah into confusion, for the ark never returned to the Tabernacle. David brought it up to Zion out of the house of Obed-Edom to a tent that he had prepared for it (1 Chronicles 15:1-29), but the Tabernacle was at Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16:39). During the years of confusion, even pious People worshipped at “high places." Samuel did this 2 Samuel 9:12-25). But such irregularities became sin after the Temple was built, and filled with the cloud of Jehovah's presence. The very builder of the Temple led the way in this great sin. Solomon built high places for Chemosh and for all the gods of his pagan wives (1 Kings 11:1-8).From Solomon's day onward, worship at high places became intermittent. Some kings sanctioned (or, at least tolerated) it; and others suppressed it. Sennacherib in his heathen ignorance, thought that Hezekiah had displeased his God by destroying the high places which the people had dedicated to His worship (2 Chronicles 32:12).

Coming now to ourselves, have we learned to be obedient in all things to the Word of God, or are we in any degree held by the unscriptural practises of Christendom? It has been said that just as a man is entitled to choose his own lawyer and his own baker, so he is entitled to choose his own “minister” and place of worship! This is rank self-will. Not only is God dishonoured by it, but it is injurious to the soul. The marvellous blessings and privileges which are characteristic of Christianity are to a large extent unknown to those who pursue such a course, Surely He has not left us to our own devices in matters of the utmost sacredness! Surely He has spoken! He who was so precise in the smallest details connected with the worship of His earthly people is not indifferent in His dealing with His heavenly saints! Shall we not, then, in the spirit of deep humility,

search His Holy Word with care and seek grace from Him to obey what is written therein, cost what it may?

No more delightful unfolding of the subject of worship, with special reference to our own time, can be found than in our Lord's words to the Samaritan woman in John 4:21-24. His pointed and heart-searching words made the woman feel the seriousness of having to do with God; and she desired to learn from Him where God could be found, for there was much controversy in the land concerning this subject. Her fathers had worshipped for centuries on Mount Gerizim, but the Jews affirmed that in Jerusalem was the place where men ought to worship. She was stating her difficulty to the One who could best answer it. He was the Father's well-beloved Son, Who had come from heaven to lead willing hearts into sweeter intimacies than had ever before been known. He said “Woman, believe Me" Oh, that men had been willing then: oh, that men were willing now, to listen to the Son, and believe every word from His gracious lips! Instead, many listen to the voice of religious leaders, and follow them blindly. "Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." The day for material religious centres is past. Those who point to a building and speak of it as the "house of God" are two thousand years behind the times in their thoughts. God being now revealed as Father, He will be satisfied with nothing but the overflowing of the heart from those who are in the conscious relationship of children. Worship in spirit and in truth "is what He desires, and "the Father seeketh such to worship Him." Costly buildings, gorgeous ritual, and elaborate vestments are an offence to Him, for they are relics of Paganism and Judaism. Any simple building, even a private house, will suffice as meeting-places for God's saints during the Christian era. The true rallying centre is together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Let us beware of men's “high places." We are not called upon to destroy them, as Josiah did in his day; but it is our duty to reject them, and to be obedient in all things to the Word of our God.

The Land Purged and the House Repaired

The more we meditate upon the activities of Josiah, the more remarkable it seems that a young man of twenty should attempted and accomplished such great things for God. There is no hint in the sacred records of any backing on the part of the leaders of the people; and as for the people themselves, the early chapters of the book of Jeremiah reveals that their hearts were not with the king in his godly efforts, although they did not actively oppose him. It is a story of individual faith in God, on the part of a young man who perceived that things were very wrong round about him, and who earnestly desired, by the help of God, to put them right.

The word of God contains much encouragement for young men. Some of the outstanding characters in the Bible were young. It is sufficient to mention that Joseph, Jonathan, David, Elihu and Timothy in addition to Josiah (Jeremiah and Zechariah, among the prophets, were both young men,) We are living far down the dispensation, and departure from God and His truth is widespread. Also there is a deplorable lack of spiritual energy in the work of God. We would appeal to the young men to get to their Bibles, and exercise their minds and hearts about what they find there. You must not allow yourselves to be discouraged in your efforts by the criticisms of old men. We should always treat with respect what others may say to us, but we must not allow it to break our hearts and cast us back from useful service. Old men are apt to become set in their ways, and limited in their outlook. With them too often what has been should still be; no

reconsideration of the situation can be tolerated! The grip of tradition can be firm and injurious even over those who have long stood aloof from the evils of Christendom. It is to reject traditions a thousand old and yet be slaves to tradition of scarcely fifty years standing.

Dear aged brethren, it is an old man of long and wide experience who is addressing you. Do not discourage young men. Do not snub the Josiahs of twenty years old. You may perhaps feel within yourselves that things are not as they should be, and possibly there is with you a feeling of weariness due to declining strength which may dispose you to settle down to things as they are rather than speak and act boldly for God. Give yourselves to prayer that God may be pleased to raise up faithful young men; but beware how you damp their energy when it begins to operate. It is admitted that young men can be forward and troublesome in the assemblies; but so can men who are far from being young. Have we not seen brethren assuming the work of oversight with no spiritual qualifications? And have not such men, by displays of petty authority sometimes blocked spiritual activities? Young men should never despise the counsel of the aged, and the aged should never discourage the zeal of the young. Let us help one another to a better understanding of the will of the Lord.

Josiah was desirous of keeping a Passover unto Jehovah. This was Israel's great foundation feast. Under the shelter of the blood of the lamb the people were spared the judgement Which fell upon the Egyptians. God would have this kept in Perpetual remembrance by a grateful people. Alas, the feast lapsed frequently. The paschal lamb was typical of Christ who "has been sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7). The Lord's Supper differs somewhat from the Passover in that it is not a mere memorial of a great deliverance, but a remembrance of the Person who wrought the deliverance for us. "Do this in remembrance of ME," were our Lord's words (Luke 22:19). Josiah's Passover was kept in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he was twenty-six years old (2 Chronicles 35:19). The purging of the land and of the temple took a considerable time.

The king rightly felt that Jehovah must be worshipped in pure surroundings. "Exalt Jehovah our God, and worship at His holy hill; for Jehovah our God is holy." Thus spake the Psalmist (Psalms 99:9). In Hosea 11:9, God spoke of Himself as "the holy One in the midst of thee." Every householder in Israel was responsible to search his house for any trace of leaven before the Passover could at any time be properly kept (Exodus 12:15). In Josiah's day the land was full of abominations; not only the idols themselves, but also the filthy practices which are always connected with idolatry. It apparently required eight Years of energetic action to clear all this away. No evil should be glossed over if Josiah could prevent it; but he could not look into the hearts of the people, where, alas, in many cases the evils were still loved. Josiah's order of procedure is instructive; first, he purged the land and the temple; next, he "repaired the. .house of Jehovah his God;" then he felt ready to call the people together to keep the feast. A century earlier Hezekiah kept a great Passover in Jerusalem; but there was much irregularity connected with its observance, for which Hezekiah humbly sought the pardon of Jehovah for His people (2 Chronicles 30:18-20). But Josiah was careful that everything should be done strictly according to the written Word. Jeremiah commenced his prophetic ministry in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (Jeremiah 1:2). His seventh chapter should be carefully read at this point. Jeremiah was divinely commanded to stand in the gate of Jehovah's house and speak solemnly to the people about their unreality, and of the judgements which must come upon them. The house in Jerusalem would soon be divinely forsaken as was the tabernacle in Shiloh long before. But it is always God's

gracious way to give warning before He lifts His hand to destroy.

The story of Josiah's activities has a voice to us to-day. Christendom has long been filled with religious abominations, and seeing that brighter light has shone there than Israel ever experienced, the guilt is greater. The call to separation in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 has primary reference to religious admixtures; “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean things." Paul's last inspired Epistle makes plain the path that faithful souls should tread now. After speaking of dangerous doctrines, and the deplorable confusion of vessels to honour intermingled with vessels to dishonour, the Apostle says; "If a man purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Timothy 2:21). As in Josiah's day, so in ours, purging is necessary if God is to be glorified. The Corinthian Assembly was charged to "purge out the old leaven" (1 Corinthians 5:7). The words of the Holy Spirit through the Apostle stirred their consciences, and the wickedness was judged. In his second Epistle, he was able to say, "In all things ye have proved yourselves to be clear in this matter." 2 Corinthians 7:11 But when evil becomes established individual action is imperative, and the man who would go on with God must purge himself out. This is the plain teaching of 2 Timothy 2:1-26. But he (or she) who is brought to this painful necessity must then look around for others who are likewise desirous of walking in "the ways of the Lord." "Follow righteousness, faith, love, peace with them that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart." It is not the mere taking up of a more correct ecclesiastical position. A deep inward spiritual work is indicated which affects one's whole deportment in every sphere of life. The neglect of these moral excellencies in those who boast of separation from ecclesiastical evil is inconsistency of the greatest possible character.

No purging, however, is once for all. Those who have publicly repudiated Christendom's grievous departures from the will of God, should watch their conduct continually, "cleansing themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God "(2 Corinthians 7:1). Particularly is this necessary when we go up into the assembly of the Saints. We should examine ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:28). A servant of Christ once said that it would be well if all God's saints would spend a quiet hour every Saturday evening in spiritual exercise and preparation for the services of the Lord's Day. This is worth considering. Josiah would have said, "Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, forever” (Psalms 93:5). To this let us add our own reverent AMEN.

"Faithful in that which is Least"

Concern for His house and its due order is always precious in the eyes of God. Since the notable Pentecost of Acts 2:1-47. when the Holy Spirit came down from heaven, the house of God has not been a material structure such as the Temple in Jerusalem; it is a spiritual building, composed of living stones, men and women partakers of eternal life through grace. The Apostle Paul in his first epistle to Timothy tells us plainly what the house of God is in the Christian era: "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." God delights to dwell amongst the people whom He has redeemed, whether Israel or Christians; but He insists upon purity and order. Oh, that we all may be as zealous as the young king Josiah that God may be glorified in His own house!

The repairing of the Temple was carried through most expeditiously. The work appears to have been commenced in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, and the Passover was kept in the same year (compare 2 Chronicles 34:8, with 2 Chronicles 35:19). Yet the Passover was a Spring feast, appointed to the month Abib. In Hezekiah's time the feast had to be deferred until a month later because neither Temple nor people were ready (2 Chronicles 30:13-15); but Josiah and his people “killed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month" (2 Chronicles 35:1), according to the original divine order (Exodus 12:18). This proves that the workmen put their hearts into the work of getting the house ready for Jehovah their God. It is written in Ecclesiastes 9:10. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." In Colossians 3:23, even slaves are told, “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not unto men." This is not acceptable doctrine in our day. The "working" classes (so called) seem bent on squeezing the maximum of pay for the minimum of work! Let God's saints beware of the disorderly spirit prevailing around them, and give heed to yet another exhortation from the pen of Paul the Apostle: "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by Him" (Colossians 3:17). This puts everything in its true place, and faithful workers may be assured that the Lord will commend them in His day, which will be ample recompense for any reproaches which may come upon them from their fellow-men meanwhile.

When the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt after the return of the remnant from captivity, Nehemiah records, "the people had a mind to work” (Nehemiah 4:6). Josiah would have said the same of the men employed by him. Some years ago a number of brethren in a Scottish town built an excellent Hall for their services with their own hands. When they had put aside a good sum of money for the purpose, the works in which they were all employed had to close down for lack of orders. The brethren judged that this was God's time for building the Hall.

Accordingly they wrought with a will early and late for many weeks in order to get the roof on, and the building as far as possible finished before the works re-opened. Fifty or more men whose wages were at a standstill toiling for love's sake! What a spectacle for men and angels! "The people had a mind to work." A Popish priest in the locality is reported to have said that if he had a band of men about him like those builders he would move Scotland! In the mercy of God, no such men were available for him. The less of Popery the better for Scotland, and for every other land.

What a contrast in the condition of things in the days of Haggai! Because the people met with some discouragement in the re-building of the Temple, they ceased operations, and laboured to build houses for themselves instead. "Thus speaketh Jehovah of hosts, saying, This people say, the time is not come, the time that Jehovah's house should be built." Such indifference was very displeasing to the One who had been so good to His erring people, and He sent them a remonstrance by Haggai the prophet, saying: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses and this house lie waste?" (Haggai 1:1-4). Jehovah found it necessary to chasten His people for their apathy, and all blessing was withheld until they recommenced their work upon the Temple, and proceeded vigorously with it in faith. Then their barns filled up again with good things.

We are impressed with the Holy Spirit's record that in Josiah's, day the men were so conscientious that no account was kept of the money expended, the amount of which must have been considerable. The word "faithfully" is used in a two-fold way: (1) "the men did the work faithfully" (2 Chronicles 34:12); and (2) "there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was

delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully" (2 Kings 22:7). Such men are worthy of imitation. Theirs was no mere "eye-service as men pleasers"; they worked "in singleness of heart fearing God" (Colossians 3:22). Britain could do; with millions of such workers to-day. The housing problem would then be quickly solved, and what excellent work would be put into the houses! And if also the men could be trusted. to use the money subscribed, purchasing the best possible materials, and taking no more in wages than is just — but perhaps we are dreaming! If such conditions may not be expected generally until the Millenial age, may all who fear God and reverence His Word seek to be like Josiah's workmen meantime.

In nothing perhaps are the children of God so commonly unfaithful as in the stewardship of money. Too much spent on luxuries, and too little dispersed abroad, and even that not always wisely. When shall we learn to neither spend nor give without seeking the guidance of God? In Luke 16:1-31: the Lord Jesus, after speaking of the unjust steward who so skilfully manipulated his circumstances for his own advantage, said: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." "Least?" Is that how men regard money? Note also our Lord's further words: “that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God!" In 1 Timothy 6:1-21. the Apostle has much to say about this serious matter. In 1 Timothy 6:9-11 he warns saints who are not rich, but who aspire to be, that there are dangers ahead. Men in the world who pursue such a course frequently "drown themselves in destruction and perdition" and money-loving saints "pierce themselves through with many sorrows." In 1 Timothy 6:17-19 the Apostle charges those who are already rich not to "trust...in uncertain riches, but in God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy," and to be ready "with open hand for every good work." There is nothing wrong in possessing wealth (mark the word "enjoy") if the wealth comes to us. honourably; but when we consider that He to whom we owe our eternal all had not where to lay His head, and when we also remember that He is still "despised and rejected by men," to be holders of large sums of money puts us in a position of grave responsibility, in the discharge of which we need daily and hourly grace. Referring again to Luke 16:1-31. we can “make to ourselves friends by the mammon of unrighteousness," if our hearts so dispose us (Luke 16:9) or we may make enemies by the same means. Those who are generous and kind are beloved; but those who are selfish and haughty by reason of their wealth are disliked. Oh, that it may be said of us, as of Josiah's workmen "they dealt faithfully! "

No Accounts Kept!

The condition of the Temple was deplorable when Josiah moved to refit it for divine worship. His wicked predecessors, in their contempt for everything that was of God, had wrought havoc with the sacred building; but willing hands and devoted hearts quickly put things right, as we have seen. We gather from 2 Chronicles 34:8-13, that the relations between the carpenters and masons and their overseers were cordial and harmonious. These verses make pleasant reading, and they remind us of how agreeably Boaz and his harvest-men wrought together (Rth_2:4). What lessons these records contain for all who would please God in these turbulent days!

We return to the statement that there was no reckoning with the men who handled the money "because they dealt faithfully." This is found in the "King's" account, written earlier than the books of the Chronicles. It is noticeable that the same thing is said of the workmen in the days of Joash and Jehoiada (2 Kings 12:15; 2 Kings 22:7). The question will naturally arise: "Is this how God

would have things done habitually? Should the example of these people of long ago be the pattern for us to follow to-day? The answer is “No." The times of Joash and of Josiah were exceptional. In each reign a great spiritual revival was in progress. After many years of grave transgression the people or at least a remnant of them were turning back to their God. Hearts and consciences were in exercise concerning His Holy will. This being so, precautionary measures against fraud were scarcely necessary.

But our God is above all things, a God of order, and He delights to see His people careful in all their ways, and particularly where money is concerned. It is of course possible to become methodical in such matters, and the assembly of God should never be shackled by mere forms and rules. But appearances must be considered; we must "provide things honest in the sight of all men" Romans 12:18). In Mr. Darby's excellent translation there is a footnote to the word "provide”: “taking care by forethought that there should be what is comely and seemly." In the days of the Apostle Paul, large sums of money were contributed by various Gentile assemblies for the relief of their needy brethren in Judea. It was not unnatural that they should desire Paul to carry their gifts to Jerusalem, for he was the Spiritual father of these Gentile Christians, and those were not days of Bank drafts and Postal orders. But Paul. although delighted to have part in this work of grace, insisted upon having companions, men carefully chosen by the assemblies for the purpose. Chapters 8 and 9 of his second epistle to the Corinthians are worthy of very careful reading. These chapters have been described as "Paul's charity sermon." The tone throughout is delightful. The Lord Jesus is brought forward as our great example in the matter of generous giving.

“Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." With such words ringing in our ears and in our hearts we shall be liberal, realising that we owe infinitely more than we shall ever be able to give. David said: “Who am I, and what is my people that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of Thee and of Thine own have we given thee" (1 Chronicles 29:14). Paul says concerning the Macedonian saints who had given money for brethren in Judea, "They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” (2 Corinthians 8:5). Deborah said of some in her day, “the people willingly offered themselves" (Judges 5:2, Judges 5:9). It is recorded of one of Jehoshaphat's officers that he "willingly offered himself unto Jehovah" (2 Chronicles 17:16). In all these cases it was God who was uppermost in their minds; they yielded themselves and all that they had to Him, in appreciation of His grace to them.

The Macedonian saints were poor by comparison with their brethren in Corinth, but their "deep poverty" was accompanied by abundant joy in the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:2). It has frequently been observed that the poor give far more in proportion to their means than the rich, the widow with her two mites leading the way in this grace (Luke 21:1-4). About fifty-five years ago, when a general collection was being made for a special object, the brother who consented to act as Treasurer in the matter called at my office in London one morning and produced two letters for me to read. One was from a brother holding a good Government post, (with no family to support), enclosing sixteen shillings with an apology for the smallness of the amount, because (as he said) "our assembly is not large!" The other was from an aged woman, who subsisted by taking in washing (for there was no Old Age Pension in those days), enclosing five shillings with deep regret that she could not send more! I am not ashamed to confess that the brother who brought the letters, and I also, dropped a few tears in my office that morning. "God bless the dear woman," we said with one

accord. Brethren, don't be mean! Remember that your Lord gave His all — yea, Himself for you!

The Apostle said of the brethren who were to accompany him to Jerusalem with the offerings of the Gentiles, "they are the messengers of the assemblies, and the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians 8:23) What higher commendation could any of us have this side the Judgement Seat of Christ? The men referred to had been carefully selected by their brethren as stewards in whom they could have full confidence. In contrast to this, the case of Judas Iscariot comes to our minds. How came he to be Treasurer for the apostolic band in the days of the Lord Jesus? It is unthinkable that the Lord Himself chose him for such service. Did He not once say "one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70). Was He not aware, as the reader of all hearts, that love of money was the particular snare of Judas? Would He, who is always tenderly considerate and compassionate because of the frailty of poor flesh, expose any man to special temptation? Did He not teach the disciples to pray “lead us not into temptation?(Matthew 6:13). How then did Judas become keeper of the bag? His companions must have chosen him for this service; certainly not for his spiritual grace, but rather for his business ability. Fatal blunder! It worked disastrously as we know. Many years after the unhappy Judas had "gone to his own place," the Apostle John wrote of him: "he cared nothing for the poor; but he was a thief and had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (John 12:6).

Possibly it was with the terrible case of Judas before their minds that the Apostles bade the saints in Jerusalem to look out amongst themselves seven men to distribute their funds; but they must be "men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). These are admittedly high qualifications, but God can only be acceptably served by men of spiritual power and grace. Men should not be allowed to push themselves into positions of prominence merely because of their standing in the world. This is sheer carnality, and no good can result from it. It is as important to have Spirit-filled men to handle the finances as to preach and teach publicly the things of the Lord Jesus. Many companies of God's saints would do well to exercise themselves before God about this matter.

We conclude therefore that God would have His saints orderly in their accountancy, both individually and collectively. Our own books should be so kept that the Inspector of Taxes, if he has occasion to examine them, may see at a glance that we are honourable men; and the books of the gathered saints should be so ordered that everything may be above reproach. Once more we would remind ourselves that Josiah's labourers in their work and in their handling of the people's money "dealt faithfully." The Holy Spirit says in 1 Corinthians 4:2, "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful."

The Book of the Law Found

It was a blessed thing for young King Josiah to “seek after the God of David his father." God is readily found by those who want Him; but the full revelation of Who and What He is could not be until the Only Begotten Son Who is in the bosom of the Father came from heaven to declare Him. Before His coming the faithful in Israel knew and trusted God as the covenant-keeping Jehovah. We who live on the resurrection side of the Cross, and who have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit know God as Father, and we have the assurance that we are His children, sons, and heirs. The Father loves us as He loves His Son. We have learnt this sweet truth from the lips of the Son Himself (John 17:23).

But although Josiah came to know God early in life, and soon, began to serve Him amongst the people, it was some time before he came into contact with God's written Word. Those were not days of printed Bibles, making it possible for all who will to possess copies of the Scriptures. neither were the Scriptures yet fully written. Do we realize how favoured we are in this day, with God's Word in it's entirety abundantly printed, and obtainable at a reasonable cost? Are we alive to the fact that immense spiritual wealth is within our reach if only we have the sense to value it? Gold and diamonds are not found without labour, and how willingly will men endure hardships in order to fill their bags with these precious things, which, after all, only have a time value! Oh, that we were half as diligent in our search for the great and wonderful things contained in the book of God. These have eternal value.

While the Temple repairs were proceeding, "Hilkiah the priest found the book of Jehovah given by Moses" (2 Chronicles 34:14). He reported his great discovery to Shaphan the scribe: "I have found the book of the law in the house of Jehovah. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it" (2 Kings 22:8). Shaphan did wisely, for a Bible unread is useless to anybody. This man's son became a leader in idolatry (Ezekiel 8:11). Over him evidently the Word of God had no power.

What was it that the High Priest found, and which so deeply moved the King when Shaphan read it before him? Was it the original book of the law written by Moses in the wilderness? After the return from captivity in Babylon copies were made of the law, and were read on the Sabbath days to the people in synagogues built for the purpose. Our Lord freely used these buildings, in which liberty was given to any one to exhort the congregation if competent to do so. The Apostles also used the synagogues for the same purpose (Luke 4:17; Luke 4:44; Acts 9:20; Acts 13:14). But there is no clear evidence that synagogues with copies of the Word of God in them, existed in the days of the Kings. Was then the book that Hilkiah found in the Temple the original work of Moses? An interesting question, but difficult to answer.

The early history of the written Word may profitably be considered here. The first recorded command to put Jehovah's commandments to His people into writing is found in Exodus 17:14 "Jehovah said unto Moses, write this for a memorial in a book and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua; for I will. utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." Soon after this, Jehovah Himself put something into writing. The tables of stone, containing the ten commandments were written with the “finger of God." These (the second tables were called “the testimony," for in them God spoke to men, and they were deposited in the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:16; Exodus 28:18). When Moses completed his fifth book he "commanded the Levites, which bare the Ark of the Covenant of Jehovah saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the Ark of the Covenant of Jehovah, your God that it may be there for a witness against thee" (Deuteronomy 31:25). We learn from this that the book of the law was preserved in the house of God, in the Most Holy place. Thus Hilkiah found the sacred book just where it might be expected to be found. But it was evidently very little known for many years prior to the reign of Josiah. It appears to have been lost, covered over with rubbish in the very house of God, and so little valued that no search was made for it! What a picture of what has happened in Christendom! The house of God as established on the Day of Pentecost is "the Assembly of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). In the days of the Apostles the truth was loved, and earnestly propagated in every direction; but as the centuries passed, "the Church" became so grossly unfaithful and worldly that the truth was well-nigh lost. Priestly pretensions and

ecclesiastical ordinances governed the whole situation, displacing the Word of God almost entirely. For all practical purposes the Word was buried under accumulations of rubbish, very much as in the days of King Josiah.

One of the happiest results of the Protestant Reformation was that the Scriptures became available to the people in many lands. Once more men were allowed to listen to the voice of their God apart from human interpolations. How eagerly did the poor resort to English Parish "Churches," where Bibles were chained by order of the King, with permission for all to read them who desired to do so! With what delight did those who could not read for themselves listen to those who could read! The memory of these doings is a reproach to us to-day. Bibles are plentiful and cheap, but it may be that in some homes they exist only on the top shelf, as dusty as the precious volume which Hilkiah found in the Temple! Brethren, let us consider carefully our attitude towards the Word of God. Therein is written the whole story of God's dealings with man, past, present and future. The counsels of His love are revealed therein, the knowledge of which makes humble children of God wiser than statesmen and others who are sorely bewildered by the problems of their times. Such knowledge imparts moral dignity to all who possess it. Yet, although all this is true (and much more might be said) these do not appear to be days of careful Bible study.

Returning to Hilkiah's important "find." The God of Israel told Joshua, the leader of His people after the death of Moses: “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do all that is written therein, for then shalt thou make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Joshua 1:8). This notable military commander, with great responsibilities resting upon his shoulders, must make time, not only to read, but to meditate on God's word. It was vital to his prosperity in every way, Do we "make time" for reading and meditation?

Although the existence of the book of the law seemed unknown to the men of Josiah's time until the eighteenth year of his reign, it was known to earlier rulers. Of Asa it is written that he "commanded Judah to seek Jehovah the God of their fathers, and to do the law and commandments" (2 Chronicles 14:4). Jehoshaphat sent the Levites throughout his dominions, "and they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of Jehovah with them” (2 Chronicles 17:9). Amaziah, when he came to the throne, put to death the murderess of his father," but he slew not their children, but did as it is written in the law in the book of Moses, where Jehovah commanded, saying, the fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin" (2 Chronicles 25:4). This King was far from being a good man, but he had respect for the book of the law and its divine instructions. When the boy king Joash was crowned two hundred and fifty years before the time of Josiah, as part of the coronation ceremonies, they "gave him the testimony" (2 Kings 11:12). These Scriptures suffice to refute the assertion of some in our time that the book which Hilkiah found in the temple was of comparatively recent compilation, with the name of Moses attached to it to give it authority in the eyes of the king and his people. The assertion is as absurd as it is wicked. That which was brought to light once more was God's own revelation to His people, against which, unhappily they so frequently transgressed. In the stirring times of Josiah, when the Spirit of God was working to give Jehovah's poor fickle people one more opportunity, the rediscovery of the book of the law had tremendous effect upon the heart and conscience of the king; and, we may hope, upon the hearts and

consciences of many of his subjects.

"The more we consider the Word the more we shall see its importance. Analagously to Christ the living Word, it has its source on high, and reveals what is there, and is perfectly adapted to man down here, giving a perfect rule according to what is up there, and, if we are spiritual, leading us up there, our conversation is in heaven." (J. N. Darby).

Thine Heart was Tender

It was a great moment in the spiritual history of Josiah when his Secretary of State brought in the book of the law and read it before him. Would that we could hear of similar doings in high places in this Twentieth century! Josiah had never seen the sacred scroll before, nor had he heard it read. How different from ourselves who possess the complete Word of God, and who may read it as often as our hearts desire! The book of the law had a great effect upon Josiah. He realized, as never before, how unfaithful Israel had been, and how seriously the commandments of Jehovah had been neglected. Worse — they had been openly defied! “It came to pass, when the King had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes" (2 Chronicles 34:19). He did still more — he "wept." (2 Chronicles 34:27); These particulars are recorded in both the "Kings" and "Chronicles" accounts of Josiah's reign, proving how acceptable to God was the humiliation of His servant. (Not every detail of Josiah's doings is written in both books). Yet this king was no mere sentimentalist. He was a strong character, at that moment in the prime of life, and he was despotic in rule, accustomed to carrying all before him — happily in the right direction. High station and the possession of power, tend to puff up poor flesh, and make it undisposed to listen to rebuke, even though it may come from the Creator Himself. It is said of the first Napoleon that on one occasion when he was speaking of his ambitious plans to a group of his Marshals, one of them gravely remarked, “Sire, man proposes, but God disposes," Napoleon retorted, "I propose and I dispose." But he finished in St. Helena in spite of all his boastful pride. But Josiah, like Hezekiah before him, was child-like before his God. Delightful examples for us all to follow!

Jehovah appreciated the attitude of Josiah. In answer to his anxious inquiry, He said: "Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, concerning the words which thou has heard, because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God when thou heardest His words. . . and humbledst thyself before Me and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before Me; I have even heard thee also, saith Jehovah" (2 Chronicles 34:26-27). The heart of man is naturally hard in relation to God. Note the Apostle's words in Ephesians 4:18 : "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart." The Lord Jesus, in His parable of the Sower, spoke of the good seed of the Word falling by the wayside (Matthew 13:4).

What could be harder, or less likely to be productive? In contrast with this, Josiah's heart was impressionable, gracious work of the Holy Spirit of God, assuredly. The divine Word is likened to a hammer in Jeremiah 23:29 : “Is not My Word like as a fire? saith Jehovah, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" The Philippian jailor needed the hammer when Paul and Silas first had to do with him: not so King Josiah. His heart was already tender.

Those of us who are privileged to live in Bible-reading lands need to exercise ourselves as to our attitude towards the "living oracles" (Acts 7:38). That which is easily obtained is apt to be lightly

regarded. Familiarity with sacred things may cause them to become common in our eyes. Every time we open our Bibles, we enter (as it were) into the presence chamber of the Divine Majesty. In the written Word (which suits every age, for it is never out-of-date) we hear the voice of God. This being true, we should seek preparation of heart (which only the Holy Spirit can give) before we read even a single page. "My heart standeth in awe of thy Word," says the Psalmist (Psalms 119:161), "Receive with meekness the implanted word," is the counsel of James (James 1:21). In the days of Isaiah, when the land of Israel was full of hypocrisy — men boasting of their religious privileges but utterly regardless of their spiritual condition — Jehovah said: "to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word" (Isaiah 44:2), Let us not miss the word “trembleth." It is not slavish dread but a sense of the greatness of the One who speaks to us, and of the gravity of disobedience to His voice. After the return from the captivity, when it was found that some in Israel were again setting at nought the commandments of God concerning intermarriage with the heathen, Ezra records: "Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the Words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice" (Ezra 9:4). This holy trembling led to prayer and confession resulting in drastic action to clear away the evil. In the Lord's messages to the assemblies in Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22 we meet repeatedly with the word "Repent." Even to Loadicea, the last of the series, the Lord said: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Revelation 3:19). Love waits for repentance as long as it is righteously possible. The door stands open until the last hour before righteousness must act in judgement. If Josiah felt so keenly the grievous disobedience of Israel through nine centuries, how should we feel as we review our own history during nineteen centuries since Pentecost? What a record of departure from the Word of God! And what is the condition of things around us at this moment? Are our hearts tender? Do we know anything of holy trembling at the Word of God?

It will be good for us to consider a little further the solemn subject of repentance, especially in its relation to ourselves. The principle of corporate responsibility throughout the dispensation is not as well understood as it should be. We may learn a lesson from Daniel as to this. Although personally a holy man. reverencing God and His Word above many, he felt keenly the guilt of the nation to which he belonged. Israel was God's chosen heritage. As a people they stood in a relationship to God such as no others have ever known. Upon Israel He lavished His favours; to Israel He entrusted His Word; and upon Israel as His vine in the earth Jehovah bestowed all the care that divine Wisdom could devise (Isaiah 5:1-30). But it was all in vain. Thus we hear Daniel pouring out his soul in humble confession of guilt. "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from Thy precepts and from Thy judgements” (Daniel 9:5). In his Prayer the prophet traced the history of his people from the deliverance from Egypt until the destruction of Jerusalem and its sanctuary by Nebuchadnezzar. From first to last Jehovah had been faithful and gracious; but Israel had been persistently rebellious and evil. But Daniel, knowing something of the heart of God, nevertheless pleaded for mercy.

This is the spirit that we should cultivate. Daniel looked back over the centuries, and we should do likewise. The Spirit of God came from heaven at Pentecost to form something far more blessed and favoured, and therefore far more responsible than the nation upon which the Lo-Ammi sentence was then resting, and is still resting. The Church is the body of Christ, set up in the world

to represent Him during His absence, and to be the vehicle by means of which He could work for the glory of God, and for the blessing of men. The Church is also the house of God, in which He dwells, where His power is known, and from which His power goes forth for the good of all. No one pressed these important truths more earnestly than the Apostle Paul, yet he lived to see unfaithfulness spreading in every direction. His warnings to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:17-35, and his second letter to Timothy are full of foreboding. What has been the history of the succeeding centuries? The will of God has been set at nought, and the will of man has prevailed. Ecclesiasticism with its heavy hand has oppressed the people of God. The divine call to REPENT has been ringing out through the years, but how few have responded to the call! As surely as Josiah lived in the late evening of Israel's' national history, so are we living in the late evening of the Church on Earth. But it is never too late for those to return to God and His Word who desire to do so. Josiah felt this and acted accordingly. Shall we not do the same?

"Cease to do evil; learn to do well" (Isaiah 1:16-17). Do not be satisfied to follow the footsteps of your fathers. Such a life will not do for God. Each individual confessor of Christ has his own personal responsibility to Him. Examine all your associations and practises in the light of Holy Scripture. Resolutely abandon everything that will not stand this test; and then God who guided Abraham step by step when he followed Him out into the unknown, will not fail to guide you also (Hebrews 11:8)."The meek will He teach His way" (Psalms 25:9). We need not doubt that the Lord will preserve for Himself a remnant true to His Word until the end. Until His coming there will still be the two or three gathered in His name. But repentance means far more than a mere change-over from one order of things to another. It involves a severe judgement before God of all the unscriptural things in which we have participated, and a humble casting our selves upon His grace to preserve us from ever countenancing them again. Truly repentant souls are not difficult to walk with; mere camp-followers can be a burden too heavy to be borne.

Huldahs Solemn Message

With heart and conscience thoroughly aroused, Josiah sought guidance from Jehovah concerning the words which had been read to him. It was clear that the people had long been disobedient to the law of their God, and Josiah rightly felt that the position was grave in consequence. It should be equally clear to us that the Church has long been disobedient to the Written Word. As we read of the spiritual power and order of Apostolic days, and compare those days with our own, grief should fill our hearts, and we should turn as anxiously to the One against whom we have offended, as did the King of Judah long ago.

But the course that Josiah adopted arrests our attention. He sent a deputation of five leading men in his realm to consult Huldah the prophetess as to what Jehovah would have done. The leader of the deputation was Hilkiah the High Priest! The religious head of the nation sent by the King to a woman for counsel! Why was this? When priesthood was first established in Israel, Jehovah warned Aaron and his sons against the use of strong drink that they might be able to "put difference between holy and unholy and between unclean and clean." They were to “teach the children of Israel all the statutes which Jehovah had spoken unto them by the hand of Moses" (Leviticus 10:8-11.) At a much later date it was said, “The priest's lips should keep knowledge and they should seek the law at his mouth, for he is the messenger of Jehovah of Hosts” (Malachi 2:7). Here the high privileges and the spiritual distinction of the priesthood stands out clearly. Their

special nearness to God should fit them to be His mouthpiece to the people. This would be particularly true of the High Priest. Yet Josiah sent the High Priest with others to learn the mind of God from a prophetess! Hezekiah did something similar in a time of national peril. The powerful Assyrian was at the door, and the King "sent Eliakim who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz" (2 Kings 19:2). Although in this instance, the elders of the priests formed the bulk of the deputation, they were not sent to the High Priest, who is not even named in connection with the matter!

These facts must be understood if we would have intelligence in the ways of God. They show us how completely the priesthood had lost its original standing as the medium of communication between Jehovah and His people. The unfaithfulness of Eli and the wickedness of his sons brought about an entire change in God's dealings. The priesthood passed into the shade. Instead of the King walking by his counsel, the High Priest, was placed in subordination to the King. "He shall walk before Mine anointed for ever"(1 Samuel 2:35). Doubtless in the days of the child-king Joash, Jehoiada the High Priest stood well to the fore, and was indeed the saviour of the royal house, and of the nation, but this was exceptional (2 Chronicles 24:2, 2 Chronicles 24:16); and the case of Jehoiada illustrates two important principles, (1) the sovereignty of God, who works through whomsoever He pleases, and (2) the honour that He delights to put upon individual fidelity wherever He sees it. But God never re-establishes an order of things which has failed in the hands of men. In His exceeding grace He goes on to something better; and all that in which man has proved so incompetent will be seen in perfection in Christ in the day of His manifestation.

Hezekiah in his need sent to a man (Isaiah); but Josiah sent to a woman! Huldah had a husband; his name is recorded, but nothing more is said about him. The prophetess Deborah, in an earlier day, also had a husband, but in his case also nothing is stated but his name (Judges 4:4). Neither Lapidoth nor Shallum were used of God in moments of national emergency. Does not this perplex the reader, particularly in viewing the words of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:10-11? In these passages of Scripture women are charged to be silent in the assembly of God, and to learn “with all subjection." Such Scriptures need to be carefully considered by all who fear God and tremble at His word. Lawlessness is increasing in the world, and the Church is affected by it in a greater or less degree, due to the unwatchfulness of saints and neglect of the Word of God, Women are becoming less and less disposed to fulfil the duties which properly belong to their sex, and are determined to push into positions of leadership and rule. The nations of the world are yielding to this; "the emancipation of women" has become a popular cry. In the professing Church we hear now of women "ministers" and "elders." Such positions are a degradation to the women and a still deeper degradation to the men who "sit under" them, for the man "is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of the man" (1 Corinthians 11:7). God in His wisdom has placed the woman in the delightful position of nearness to the man as his counsellor and helper; but headship belongs to the man alone. Eve was built up from a rib taken from Adam's side (Genesis 2:22); a simple fact with a great lesson. Several reasons are laid down in Scripture why the woman should be subject to the man, and in no wise intrude into leadership.

1: “Man is not of woman, but woman of man" (1 Corinthians 11:8). "Adam was first formed, then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:13). These passages carry us back to the beginning of our race.

2: "Man was not created for the woman, but woman for the man" (1 Corinthians 11:9). Thus the woman was intended to supplement the man, not the man to supplement the woman.

3: “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in transgression" (1 Timothy 2:14). It does not lessen Adam's guilt that he was not deceived (it rather increases it); but the fact is placed before us that it was the woman who was beguiled by the serpent. Throughout human history, women have proved themselves particularly susceptible to deception, and in cases where they have gained the ears of the public, their influence has been disastrous. Witness Madame Blowatsky, Mrs. Besant and Mrs. Baker Eddy. The spiritual devastation wrought by these dupes of Satan is incalculable.

In the days of Isaiah, Jehovah said of His poor foolish people Israel: "My people! children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths" (Isaiah 3:12). This is the language of divine sorrow. Christian women — whoever may read these lines — seek to be obedient in all things to the Word of your God. Be content. with the place which He has assigned to you. Follow not the ungodly in rebellion against His will. Cover your heads in the presence of men in recognition of their headship; dress neatly, be willing to learn, and do not seek to teach. One of the Lord's gravest rebukes in the early days of our era was addressed to the assembly in Thyatira thus: "Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess, to teach" (Revelation 2:20).

But although the foregoing is true, the sovereignty of God must never be lost sight of. He works as He pleases, and gives no account of His matters. Particularly is this the case when everything is in confusion amongst His people. Why Jehovah chose to speak through Huldah to the King, and to the High Priest is known to Himself alone. Jeremiah was already in His service, for he began his prophetic ministry in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (Jeremiah 1:2). and the book of the law was not found until five years later. Yet Jehovah spoke through Huldah on that occasion with which we are dealing and not through Jeremiah! God's saints need spiritual judgment in order to discern His sovereign actings. If it is important not to "lay hands suddenly" on a man, it is still more important that we should not "lay hands suddenly" on a woman (1 Timothy 5:22). This laying on of hands is not ordination, but sympathetic identification with the worker. After the war of 1914-1918, a woman who had been a political agitator ("Votes for Women") suddenly became a lecturer on prophecy, and attracted many hearers. There was no time after the great change in her life to digest the great principles of God's ways, which lead to separation from the world, with humility of spirit; but the lady's alert brain nevertheless grasped a good deal of Prophetic truth. Evangelical leaders sat behind her on Public platforms, and acclaimed her as the “modern Deborah." Much disappointment ensued for many of them.

The word of Jehovah was undoubtedly with Huldah the prophetess. She was the divine mouthpiece at a most serious moment in the history of Israel. Storm-clouds were gathering over the guilty nation; everything was breaking up; the kingdom was about to be extinguished; and David's throne was soon to be overturned, not to be set up again until the day of the Lord Jesus. At such a moment the word of prophecy flowed from the lips of Huldah. Her message was in two parts: The word of Jehovah to the man who sent the deputation is given in 2 Chronicles 34:23-25; and her message to "the King of Judah who sent you to enquire of Jehovah" is given in the three verses which follow. The first part spoke of the ruin impending for the nation. Its cup of iniquity had

been filling up for centuries; Manasseh's defiance of Jehovah's Word, and his excessive evil had caused the cup to overflow. In 2 Kings 21:10-15, we have a summary of Jehovah's messages to that wicked king. He had gone beyond the Amorites in sin, and in consequence Jehovah was "bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle." Jehovah would "wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down." He would forsake His people, and cause them to "become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies." They had provoked their God to anger "since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt." It was thus persistent and hopeless evil. Josiah's personal piety was a delight to God, but it could not annul His righteous judgement. "Notwithstanding, Jehovah turned not from the fierceness of His great wrath wherewith His anger was kindled against Judah because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked Him withal. And Jehovah said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said My name shall be there." (2 Kings 23:26-27).

Leviticus 26:1-46 and Deuteronomy 28:1-68 are two of the most terrible chapters in the Word of God. Therein, with a mass of fearful detail, Jehovah set before His people ere they entered the land what must be the consequences if they rebelled against Him. It was probably those very chapters which so alarmed Josiah, causing him to rend his clothes and weep before God, Israel's course from first to last had been sinful. From time to time Jehovah had sent messengers to them, "rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place" (2 Chronicles 36:15). But it was all in vain." They mocked the messengers of God and despised His words, and misused His prophets until the wrath of Jehovah arose against His people until there was no remedy." Pious kings had sought to lead the people aright, but their hearts never were with their kings in their endeavours. This is specially recorded of the days of Josiah (Jeremiah 3:10). Judgement must now take its course. Manasseh, who over-filled Israel's cup of iniquity is doubtless in Heaven, a sinner saved by grace late in life; but the governmental consequences of his transgressions remain unto this day. Josiah was told by Huldah that "wrath was about to be poured out upon this place and shall not be quenched" (2 Chronicles 34:25).

While this page is being written the Jews are clamouring with violence for the possession of Palestine. They have no claim, either politically or religiously, to the land. What their industry has accomplished there since 1918 is truly marvellous; but all their labour will be destroyed in the world's last crisis by the King of the North (Daniel 11:40-43; Joel 2:1-11). God is not in the movement of our time, but He is watching it with interest (Isaiah 18:4). The Jews who may get possession of the country (for a Jewish State will doubtless be set up) will prepare it for the Anti-Christ, not for the Christ of God. The unbelieving mass will share the overthrow of the arch-deceiver. A remnant only will be saved (Romans 9:27). Pray for the benighted children of Jacob who long for a home in Palestine, but will only find there a grave. That land will be the greatest of all sufferers when the judgements of God are abroad.

The second part of Huldah's prophetic message was personal for Josiah. The kindness of the heart of God is expressed in it. We must quote it in full: — "Thus saith Jehovah the God of Israel, concerning the words which thou hast heard, because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest His words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before Me, and didst rend thy clothes and weep before Me, I have even heard thee also, saith Jehovah. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou

shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same." (2 Chronicles 34:26-28).

God deeply appreciated the piety of individual souls, particularly in days of abounding evil. Shall not both writer and reader cultivate to have always a heart tender and humble before God? The value of Josiah's personal piety was inestimable to the nation. He had the promise of God that the judgements should not be poured out while he lived. He was twenty-six years old when Huldah spoke. Humanly speaking, many years of sovereignty lay before him. Oh, why did he not walk warily, knowing that so much depended upon his life? Oh, why did he, at the age of thirty-nine, plunge into a quarrel which did not concern him, and risk — yea, sacrifice — his precious life? How foolishly can even the choicest of God's saints behave if they get away for a single moment from the controlling influence of the Word of God! What sorrow they can bring upon themselves and upon others! But the fact is thus emphasised that no one is absolutely trustworthy but God's blessed Son, our Lord Jesus. "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29).

A Fresh Covenant

Josiah did not sit down in despair because of the serious things which Huldah made known to him. The judgements would not descend just yet; meantime, the energetic young King would do his utmost to lead the people back into “the old paths." It is never too late to be obedient to the Word of God. Our own position is solemn indeed. The spueing out of Revelation 3:16, the cutting off of Romans 11:22, is near, with the total apostasy of all that now calls itself “Christian”; but it is our responsibility to learn and do the whole will of God as long as we remain here. Philadelphian faithfulness will continue alongside Laodicean heartlessness until the last. Let us seek to be Philadelphian in character that the Lord may be able to say to us, “thou hast kept My Word, and hast not denied My name." (Revelation 3:8).

Josiah convened a great national gathering in Jerusalem. Elders, priests, Levites, prophets, and a multitude of people small and great responded. The plural word prophets should be noted. Evidently other men besides Jeremiah were active in the land for God, yet He chose to speak through Huldah! We are quite unable to interpret all the details of the ways of God but we desire to be subject to His perfect wisdom.

"The king went up into the house of Jehovah. . . . . and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of Jehovah” (2 Kings 23:2). Delightful spectacle for God and the angelic host to behold! What a joyful thrill we should experience if we could read in the public Press of Kings and Presidents calling mass meetings in their respective capitals that they might read to them the sorely neglected Word of God, pointing out with all earnestness and gravity those things wherein the people have gone astray, and appealing to them to return humbly to their God! This would Produce incomparably better results than the anxious discussions of statesmen who endeavour to find formulas whereby they may bring about the semblance of peace for a season. The times in which we live are more serious than those of Josiah. Then one Kingdom was tottering to its fall (dragging other Kingdoms down with it), but now the whole world-system is rushing to its doom.

All the words of the law suggests a considerable amount of reading. The meeting was thus lengthy. What a contrast to the short sermons that are barely tolerated in the Twentieth Century!

This is the more deplorable seeing that we now possess the complete Word of God, containing the revelation of all His wonderful counsels of grace and glory which find their centre in Christ. Why are we satisfied with so little of the spiritual wealth that is within our reach?

Josiah not only read to the people the law of Jehovah, but he declared his own intention to be obedient to it. "The King stood in his place, and made a covenant before Jehovah, to walk after Jehovah, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul. to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book" (2 Chronicles 34:31). This is excellent. An ounce of example is worth more than a ton of precept. Joshua, in his final address to Israel, spoke similarly: "As for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah" (Joshua 24:15). Paul urged Timothy to "be an example of the believers, in word, in conversation: in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). When the Lord Jesus was on earth the Jewish people had many teachers- Scribes and Pharisees- whose teaching was good, but their own lives were bad. "All therefore whatsoever they bid you, observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not" (Matthew 23:3). Mr. Spurgeon once spoke of a Minister who was so good in the pulpit but so questionable in his manner of life, that the people said that when he was in the pulpit it was a pity he should come out of it, and when he was not in the pulpit they said it was a scandal that he should be allowed to enter it! Brethren, let us above all things be real! God forbid that we should proclaim to others truths of which we know not the power in our own souls. Paul could say to one who knew him intimately, "Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, patience" (2 Timothy 3:10)

Josiah, in his earnest zeal, went beyond telling the people of his own intentions; "he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it." The King meant well, but how feebly he understood the fickleness of the human heart! Other pious kings before him had caused the people to utter good resolutions before God; but how quickly they returned to their wallowing in the mire" (2 Peter 2:22). Yet Josiah's subjects expressed no misgivings; "all the people stood to the covenant" (2 Kings 23:3). It was the old sad story of Sinai repeated. Never having learned the depths of their own evil, nor the holiness of God, at the burning mount "all the people answered together and said, "All that Jehovah hath spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8). Paul learned to have "no confidence in flesh" (Php_3:3), but his nation has not to this day learnt the lesson. While Josiah lived the people's behaviour was outwardly correct. "The inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. . . . they departed not from following Jehovah, the God of their fathers" (2 Chronicles 34:32-33). But outward correctness will not do for God; Jeremiah's sad pages tell us how little the people's hearts loved the will of God. Quite a wave of enthusiasm passed over Jerusalem during one of our Lord's early visits to that city; but He who was able to look beneath the surface put no confidence in the people's words. "Many believed in His Name, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men and needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man" (John 2:23-25). The famous Lord Protector of the British Commonwealth — Oliver Cromwell — sought to create a "Christian" nation by statutes and restrictions; but how fearful was the reaction, the plunge into licentiousness, when his powerful hand was removed!

After the return from Babylon, Nehemiah, perceiving that things were very wrong with the remnant, made a great effort to put the people upon a sound footing with God. In the ninth chapter of his book we have a great meeting in Jerusalem similar to that in the days of Josiah. The book of the

law of Jehovah was read publicly to the people; they confessed their sins from the beginning of their national history; and they solemnly vowed to do better in future. Their vow is given in seven parts in Nehemiah 10:1-39. “We make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites and priests seal it." Eighty-four persons, as representatives of the people, signed and sealed the solemn deed: — Nehemiah himself, 17 Levites, 22 Priests, 44 Chiefs of the people.

Alas for good Nehemiah's expectations! Even such a strong body of signatories could not make the covenant sure. We have only to turn over two pages of Nehemiah's book to find the people as lawless as before. Neither royal decrees nor documents solemnly signed and sealed will make flesh anything different from what it is: " the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God " (Romans 8:7-8).

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It is one of the cardinal truths of Ghristianity that God, in the work of the Lord Jesus, has not only dealt with our sins, but also with the life and nature which produced them. These two points are dealt with separately in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, which another has described as "the most weighty document which ever was placed in the hands of men." This description is just, because this Epistle lays down the foundations of our relationships with God. Until this is understood, at least in measure, there will be no settled peace and joy, and the great matters of Divine Councils will not be apprehended. The question of our sins — or personal guilt — is dealt with by the Apostle down to Romans 5:11. This is very properly treated first, because the soul when awakened by the Spirit of God, becomes alarmed about guilt and its righteous judgment. The evil of his nature will be learned later. So perfectly have our sins been expiated by the blood of Jesus (Romans 3:23-26), that God is able to say " your sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17), and the believer himself is entitled to say (with all his brethren): "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Thus we no longer dread the One against whom we have offended, but we exclaim, “We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Romans 5:11). Blessed climax to the first part of the Apostle's great subject."

But many souls who are clear as to the question of their sins are sorely troubled concerning the evil life and nature which produced them, never having learned the completeness of the work of God on their behalf through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Sin is defined in 1 John 3:10 as “lawlessness.” (Darby's translation). Lawlessness is just self-will — the love of having our own way, and the determination to get it, if possible. This wretched principle is inherent in "flesh"; hence the Apostle's words "sin in the flesh" in Romans 8:3. In the sacrifice of Christ God “condemned" this. On the awful day when His blessed Son hung upon Calvary's tree, God took into account all our evil, and disposed of it righteously. Tree and fruit were both judged. The believer in Jesus, accepting this in faith, not only sees his sins gone, but himself — the man born of Adam's stock — gone also. “I am crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20).

This being so, he seeks no more to improve his flesh; its evil is as ineradicable as the leopard's spots. His confidence in flesh is finished. Although the flesh is within him still, and must remain there until the great transformation at the Lord's Coming. He no longer regards it as an integral part of himself, but as an alien foe to be kept in chains perpetually. Instead of looking at self, and

hoping for better things there, the instructed Christian looks away from self to Christ risen and glorified, to Whose image he will ere long be conformed. Thus holiness, i.e., Christlikeness, develops. The man described in Romans 8:7-24, had not learnt this lesson. Until he reaches the end of the chapter he is occupied with self. Personal pronouns, "I," "Me," "My," abound. He longs to do the right thing, but finds himself continually doing the wrong thing. All his efforts, by rules and regulations, to curb the workings of his flesh produce no good result. Instead, the poor distressed soul finds himself as it were, sinking ever more deeply into the mire. In Romans 8:24 he cries out, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" The pronoun "Who" reveals that he realises that help must come from outside himself. Soon he is able to say, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." This is not victory over self — of which some pious souls dream, but deliverance from self — a very different matter. Having learned that God dealt with all his evil in the death of Christ, his mind and heart now live in a new world. "To me to live is Christ" says Paul in Php_1:21.

The question is sometimes asked, "Does Romans 7:1-25 describe Paul's experience?" Doubtless in the early days of his spiritual life he learnt these great lessons with God; but when he wrote the Epistle to the Romans he was certainly not in the gloom and perplexity of Romans 7:1-25; he was in the liberty and joy of the great chapter which follows. The God of all grace has not called us to make us "wretched," but the rather to "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Peter 1:8).

It was not possible for either Josiah or Nehemiah to know the wonderful things which come before us in the New Testament Epistles. The Saviour had not yet come to earth; His great sacrifice for sin had not been offered; and His mighty triumph over every foe had not been effected. But they should have known enough of poor flesh not to saddle it with fresh restrictive covenants. Nothing but disappointment could be expected. But in the happy day that is not far distant, when Jehovah establishes His new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah He will write His law in their very hearts. This means new birth; then the will of God will be their real delight.

From Dan to Beersheba

For earnest zeal in the work of God, and for steady perseverance therein, it would be difficult to find a man who could excel Josiah, king of Judah. From such a one we can all learn valuable lessons; also remembering the words of the Apostle in 2 Thessalonians 3:13, "Brethren, be not weary in well doing." The work of Josiah was very different from that which has been entrusted to us to-day. We have not been charged by the Lord Jesus to go through the earth with axes and hammers and destroy every abominable thing that meets our eyes; our service is to proclaim the sweet story of God's grace to a world of perishing sinners. We shall find, as we pursue our studies that Josiah did not limit himself to his own small kingdom, but went far beyond Judah's boundaries in his zeal for God. What have we to say concerning the regions beyond the land of our birth? Beloved Christian reader, think of the many lands where Christ is scarcely named, where the need is desperate, where souls are passing into eternal darkness every hour. Why go over and over again ground which has been well traversed? Why not cultivate the pioneer spirit that was seen in the Apostle Paul? Why not sit down quietly before God, and ask Him what "the world" means in the familiar John 3:16? France, for example, is very near the shores of Britain. Popish superstition and Atheism fill that fair land, but to what extent are the favoured Christians of Britain exercised about the need of the French people?

The zeal of Josiah recalls to our mind another zealous king, Jehu, the son of Namshi; but the contrast between the two men is very great. Each was a divine Commissioner for the work of destroying Baal-worship, and other horrible things which disgraced the land of Israel; but the motives of the two men differed considerably. With Josiah the Word of God was the governing factor. The reading of it in his ears laid bare before him the evil of many things by which he was surrounded, and it was as a man obedient to the Word that he set to work. But in Jehu we behold considerable fleshly activity, for personal ambition had a large place in his mind even when he was doing that which was right in the eyes of God. When he met his friend Jehonadab the son of Rechab, he said, “Come with me, and see my zeal for Jehovah" (2 Kings 10:16). True souls do not parade their good deeds thus. Men's approval and admiration matters little to them (1 Corinthians 4:3); it is enough that the Lord sees their zeal in His service. Note the Lord's words in Matthew 6:1-4. Jehu's heart was never right with God. Baal-worship had been re-introduced amongst the people after Elijah's departure. Jehu, by divine command, destroyed it utterly, but he “took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin” (2 Kings 10:31). He maintained and worshipped the golden calves! Such glaring inconsistency is a warning to us. It is possible to denounce sternly certain evils in ourselves and others, and yet tolerate other things equally serious in the eyes of God. How treacherous is flesh to "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). Let us seek to be whole-heartedly obedient to the will of God in all our ways, after the pattern of Him who said "I do always those things that please Him” (John 8:29).

The reader is aware that the Holy Spirit has given us two accounts of Josiah's reign. As we compare them with each other, certain differences are observable. In the “Chronicles" record prominence is given to the notable Passover which Josiah held in Jerusalem, while in "Kings" it is mentioned quite briefly; but his energetic purging of the land from its idolatries from Dan to Beersheba is dealt with at great length in "Kings," and is barely noticed in “Chronicles."

To 2 Kings 23:1-37 then we turn for our present purpose. We have noticed already that Josiah purged the temple before he repaired it (2 Chronicles 34:8), yet we read in 2 Kings 23:4; “The King commanded Hilkiah the High Priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of Jehovah all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel." This appalling list of abominations still in the house where Jehovah had set His name suggests that the first purging was not very thorough; but the second purging cleared every vile thing out. But why was the second purging more thorough than the first? Because the Book of the law had come to light between the two movements, and the hideousness of things which had long been tolerated was now perceived, at least by the King. He now had divine understanding to keep the law, and he sought to observe it with his whole heart (Psalms 119:34). Josiah could have said with David: “Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined mine heart to perform Thy statutes alway, even unto the end” (Psalms 119:111-112).

Energetic action must needs follow when the heart is thus going out towards God and His Word. “I made haste, and delayed not to keep Thy commandments" (Psalms 119:60). It may be that some believers to-day continue in unscriptural associations because the Word of God has not been set before them concerning these things. Evil is none the less evil because, through inattention to the

teaching of scripture, its true character is not perceived; but when once the Word is brought to bear God expects prompt action from His saints. Leviticus 5:1-19 lays down this principle clearly.

The task which Josiah undertook in faith was colossal, and he gave himself no rest until he had destroyed every vestige of idolatry out of the whole land of Israel, although he was only ruler over Judah and Benjamin. Jerusalem — Jehovah's chosen centre-was first cleared. It is specially noted that “he brought out the grove from the house of Jehovah without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burnt it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people." (2 Kings 23:6). “The grove” appears to have been an image of Astarte. Imagine such a horror being set up in the house of Jehovah, concerning which He once said that His eyes and His heart would be there perpetually! (2 Chronicles 7:16). Adjoining the temple were the house of the Sodomites! Horror upon horror; how low Israel had fallen that such bestiality should be found in the most sacred spot on earth! The history of Christendom has been quite as fearful. One writer has said that its annals are “the annals of Hell!” Idolatry, blasphemy, immorality, and cruel persecution of the godly all practised by men who, with high-sounding ecclesiastical titles, claimed to be the successors of the Apostles, and the only authoritative ministers of the Word of God and the Sacraments!

In the Spirit's record of Josiah's activities special mention is- made of the accumulation of abominations which his predecessors of David's royal line had set up in and near Jerusalem. “He took away the horses that the Kings of Judah had given to the sun at the entering in of the house of Jehovah. . and the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the Kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of Jehovah, did the King beat down, and brake them down from thence, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron” (2 Kings 23:11-12). But still worse! We wonder not at the enormities of such men as Ahaz and Manasseh, but one of the greatest of Israel's royal transgressors was Solomon, the man who built the temple of Jehovah, and whose prayer at the dedication thereof seemed to anticipate every evil and danger that might arise! His wide range of monstrosities are set before us. “The high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the King of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the King defile" yet all this was left untouched by such pious Kings as Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah! Neglect of the Word of God is the only possible explanation of this. Our own experience of Christians around us proves that pious persons are not necessarily painstaking students of Holy Scripture.

Before Israel entered the land Jehovah enacted that when the time came for the people to have a king, “it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his Kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites; and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life that he may learn to fear Jehovah his God, to keep all the Words of the law and these statutes, to do them: that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment to the right hand, or to the left, to the end that he may prolong his days in his Kingdom, he, and his children in the midst of Israel” (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). If each successive ruler in Israel had obeyed this injunction, and had prepared his own copy of the law, and had read therein all the days of his life, the formidable array of devilries with which Josiah had to deal would never have existed.

Nor would the original of God's holy law have become buried under rubbish, so that the finding of it was a real discovery! Neglect of the Word of God is an evil more serious, and more disastrous in its results than is generally realised. Things are tolerated in ourselves, and also adopted without question from our fathers, which would be judged and abandoned if we were more familiar with the Scriptures, and if the Scriptures had supreme authority over our souls. The growing habit of reading a short “Union" portion, with a few comments from persons not too well instructed in the mind of God must not be confounded with Bible study. The latter involves careful examination of every book in the Bible (not mere portions selected for us by others), seeking enlightenment from the Holy Spirit as to the scope of each book, and also as to the relation of each book to every other, for the Holy Scriptures are an organic whole. Thus we are led into the counsels of grace and glory, earthly and heavenly, which our all-wise God has placed in the sacred volume for our instruction and delight.

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In his great work for God, Josiah dealt with what some might regard as a small evil compared with the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth. We refer to the high places for religious purposes which seemed to abound in Jehovah's land. It was apparently the custom of the Canaanitish nations to establish places of worship for their false gods on various heights which they selected according to their own Satan-controlled desires. Deuteronomy 12:1-32 should be carefully examined by the readers of these pages. Jehovah told His people of the ways of the heathen, and forbad them to imitate them. The Word must alone govern them in all matters relative to divine worship, as indeed in everything else. Jehovah would choose His own centre, and thither His people must come with their burnt-offerings and sacrifices. The Israelites were to destroy all the high places of the heathen, and thus express their abhorrence of their wicked ways. But flesh is no better in those who are near to God than in those who are far from Him. The time soon came, alas, when Israel chose high places for themselves. Some of these were for idolatrous worship, and some for the worship of Jehovah. But all the high places, whatever might be the motives of those who established them, were offensive in His sight, for they were the expression of creative self-will, of hearts not subject to His commandments. Some of Judah's choicest kings tolerated high places, not those which were dedicated to idols, we may be sure, but those at which Jehovah was professedly worshipped. This weakness is specially recorded of Jothan (2 Kings 15:35), Asa (2 Chronicles 15:17), and Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20:33). Asa's doings were strange indeed in their inconsistency. He deposed the queen-mother from her exalted station because of her idolatrous practises, and he utterly destroyed her works, yet the high places of the people were allowed to remain (2 Chronicles 15:16-17). When shall we learn that God expects obedience in all things from the souls that He has redeemed?

The energetic Josiah cleared away all the high places, and he brought away from them all priests who had burned incense upon them, but in view of their disobedience to the Word of Jehovah they were not allowed to exercise priestly functions in Jerusalem. "The priests of the high places came not up to the altar of Jehovah in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren” (2 Kings 23:8-9). Even unfaithful men must not be left to starve! Shall we not learn from all this that God expects His Word to be obeyed by His people? Is every reader of these pages able to quote “chapter and verse” concerning his religious exercises? Or is it possible that some choose for themselves where and how they will worship and serve their God? Josiah has left us a

fine example. When the long- neglected law of Jehovah was brought before him, he was determined to carry out all that was written therein. Never was the written Word more respected than by Josiah, and never was Jehovah's land and sanctuary more thoroughly purified of everything that was contrary to His will. How pleasant to God! “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Romans 15:4).

Josiah at Bethel

The great work of destruction, to which Josiah committed himself in faith, must have occupied considerable time; how long is not recorded. The earnest young king swept through the land from the territory of Simeon in the South to territory of Naphtali in the North (2 Chronicles 34:6), smashing up and consigning to the flames everything that he knew was detestable in the sight of the Holy One of Israel. It was the book of the law, and nothing else, that influenced his movements. No false motives are discernible in the Spirit's report of what he did. With Jehu, as we have seen, it was otherwise. By him a useful work was performed but his motives were not pure.

It may surprise some that Josiah was able to act so freely in. Northern Palestine seeing that it had been for about one hundred years a province of the Kingdom of Assyria. The explanation is that the latter Power was declining; its day was drawing to a close. In Ezekiel 31:1-18. the Assyrian is described “as a cedar in Lebanon, with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of a high stature." The system of nations that existed in that day by divine permission is called “the garden of God." The Assyrian exalted himself exceedingly amongst the other trees (i.e., nations), but his downfall was approaching. Assyria. had striven for world-supremacy ever since the days of Asshur (Genesis 10:11). Such a position properly belongs to Israel in the ways of God. Israel's unfaithfulness was now causing God to hand over supreme power to the Gentiles; but it was not to Assyria that He intended to give it. Babylon was the destined head of the great image which set forth symbolically Gentile Imperialism as a whole, from first to last. Assyria had a solemn warning when Jonah marched through the streets of Nineveh with his terrible message of judgement. The King was moved by it; and the nation (or at least its capital city) bowed low before the Creator, and was spared in mercy. But nothing permanent resulted. Evil returned in full force, and in Josiah's day Assyria's destruction was near. The central government was no longer strong enough to hold effectively its distant conquests; hence Josiah's liberty of action in Northern Palestine. Proud Nineveh was soon to be a desolation, never to be rebuilt while the earth lasts. "Jehovah hath given a commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown” (Nahum 1:14). Such was the divine decree.

In the goodness of God no external complications arose while Josiah was engaged in his good work. The movements of nations are under divine control. Elihu said truly: “When He giveth quietness, who can make trouble?" and he added that this applies to nations as well as to individual men (Job 34:29). When David gave his charge to Solomon he told him what Jehovah had said concerning him: "Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build an house for My name” (1 Chronicles 22:9). A warless reign enabled Solomon thus to serve his God. In Jehoshaphat's reign “the realm was quiet for his God gave him rest round about” (2 Chronicles 20:30). On the contrary Jehovah allowed Israel to be invaded at a moment when Saul had almost captured David. "There came a

messenger unto 'Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land. Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines" (1 Samuel 23:27-28). Is it not better to confide in God than to seek safety in treaties and alliances? Useful work, even of a social character is hindered by the waste and turmoil of war. Even God's saints find their important service hampered by the world's strife; although in their case God graciously overrules the circumstances to send the Gospel where otherwise it might not have gone. Josiah had thirty-one years of peace in which to serve God in Israel Alas, it was his own folly which brought the peace to an end!

Amongst the many idolatrous centres which were visited by Josiah, Bethel is specially mentioned, and some remarkable incidents are noted. Bethel had an important place in the ways of Jehovah, and it had tender associations for the hearts of the godly in Israel. Nearby was Abraham's first camping-ground when he entered the land. In that neighbourhood he pitched his tent and built his altar (Genesis 12:8). After his mistaken journey into Egypt, Abraham returned to the place where he built his altar at the first (Genesis 13:3-4). Communion with God was thus restored. It was at Bethel where Jacob rested for the night on his journey from Beersheba to Haran. The vision of the ladder set up from earth to heaven, with the angels ascending and descending upon it, and Jehovah speaking to his poor wayward servant from the top of it, is familiar to us all. Early in the morning Jacob “took the stone which he had put for his pillows and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of the place Bethel" (Genesis 28:10-22). Bethel means “house of God." After years of wandering Jacob returned thither, and learnt precious lessons concerning the God with whom he had to do (Genesis 35:1-15). Several centuries later Jehovah referred very touchingly to Jacob's second visit to Bethel: "There he spake with us, even the Lord God of hosts; Jehovah is his memorial" (Hosea 12:4-5). Mark how the Triune God appreciated the fact that “there he spake with Us." Bethel became one of Jeroboam's chief seats of idolatry. He did his utmost to prevent the people speaking with their God, as their father Jacob did. Indeed the proximity of Bethel to Jerusalem looks as though Jeroboam deliberately established Bethel as a religious centre in order to obstruct the way of the people to the sanctuary of Jehovah.

Bethel was a hot-bed of iniquity from the time of Jeroboam to the days of Josiah. In Amos 4:4, Jehovah says sarcastically to His wayward people, "Come to Bethel and transgress," But in the next chapter of the same prophet we hear a pleading voice: “Thus saith Jehovah unto the house of Israel, Seek ye Me, and you shall live; but seek not Bethel.... Seek Jehovah, and you shall live, lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it; and there be none to quench it in Bethel” (Amos 5:4-5). When Jeroboam was granted dominion over the ten tribes because of the unfaithfulness of Solomon, Jehovah told him that if he would hearken unto His commandments and walk in His ways, and do that which is right in His sight, He would be with him, and build him "a sure house" (1 Kings 11:38). But who can God trust save the Lord Jesus? Solomon was unfaithful; so likewise was Jeroboam. When the latter fled into Egypt to escape the wrath of Solomon, he saw the people there worshipping the god Apis; this probably suggested to him the golden calves that he set up in Bethel and in Dan. From the same source Aaron and the children of Israel got the idea of the golden calf (Exodus 32:1-35). Egypt is a type of the world in its independence of God; let the children of God beware of copying its ways!

The general condition of the Northern districts of Palestine was deplorable when Josiah marched through on his mission of judgement. When the Kings of Assyria removed considerable numbers of the ten tribes from the land, they replaced them with colonists from Babylon and other provinces, who brought with them their heathen gods. This sorry admixture is described in 2 Kings 17:1-41. From that time there was a strange blend of Israelites and Gentiles, and of paganism and Judaism in the land which Jehovah loved, and over which His beloved Son will yet reign gloriously. What confusion as the result of disobedience to God!

Never was idolatry so thoroughly extirpated anywhere as by Josiah throughout the length and breadth of the land of Israel. He slew all the priests, burnt their bones upon their altars, and then destroyed the altars themselves, reducing them to powder. Such thoroughness God loves. The Corinthian saints were very slow in dealing with wickedness in the Assembly while active in avenging their personal wrongs, even taking one another into the world's courts (1 Corinthians 5:6). A world-wide clearance will be effected by the Lord Jesus at His appearing. “The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:41-42).

When looking around the sepulchres in Bethel, one in particular attracted Josiah's attention. “What title is that that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things which thou hast done against the altar of Bethel. And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet, that came out of Samaria” (2 Kings 23:16-17). A remarkable story is here recalled. The men of Bethel were speaking of a visit to their city three and a half centuries earlier. The memory of it lingered in the district, and the people recognised the fulfilment of the words of the man of God in the terrible doings of Josiah.

Is there such a thing as prophecy? The modern mind rejects the suggestion with scorn. But the Scriptures are full of prophecy. That which has been already fulfilled constitutes a great mass of divine testimony. Concerning Christ Himself: — His birth — the fact and the place of it; His ministry and miracles; His rejection by Israel; His sufferings at the hands of men and of God; His death, burial, resurrection and ascension; and His present session in manhood at the right hand of God, were all put into writing by the Holy Spirit centuries before He came into the world. Concerning Israel and the nations in general: — their downfall and sufferings were predicted while they were at the height of their prosperity, and in some instances long before they rose to power at all. If so much has been fulfilled to the letter, faith confidently expects the full accomplishment of all that yet remains. Man is incapable of forecasting the future, for he is but the creature of a day; God, on the contrary “calleth those things which be not, as though they were” (Romans 4:17). Men who in their pride and independence of heart reject the prophetic lamp which God has graciously placed within the reach of all who can appreciate it, must of necessity grope in darkness. Light from God, which cheers the spirit and guides the steps, is not far away; but they desire it not. Never was the word of prophecy more necessary for the people of God than in this Twentieth century of the Christian era, with its manifold complications and perplexities (2 Peter 1:19).

Three Wrecked Lives

The reply of the men of Bethel to Josiah's enquiry concerning a particular sepulchre which caught his eye carries us back to one of the most serious chapters in Holy Writ — 1 Kings 13:1-25 : Three men are set before us therein, and the governmental dealings of God with them. Although three thousand years have passed away since the incidents that are there recorded, the lessons of the chapter are as important as ever for all who have to do with God, and especially for any who stand forth in public testimony for Him. Three wrecked lives! In no other way can we justly speak of Jeroboam, King of Northern Israel, The man of God out of Judah, and The old prophet of Bethel.

In Jeroboam we see the worthlessness and hopelessness of flesh, however divinely favoured. Lifted out of obscurity by the God of Israel, and granted dominion over ten of the tribes, Jeroboam commenced his reign with every advantage. Jehovah promised to be with him, and build him a sure house if he would pay heed to His commandments, and walk in His ways. Solomon had grievously failed in this, and was (with his heirs) chastened by God in His righteous government, Jeroboam should have profited by Jehovah's stern dealings with the King that He loved so well, and upon whom He heaped wisdom, riches, glory, and blessing. But when did flesh ever profit under the hand of God? It is irremediably evil, and the word of God to every man is, “Ye must be born anew." (John 3:7). When Jeroboam became established in his kingdom (for Jehovah forbade Rehoboam to attack him) in his desire to make his throne secure, he devised a new religion for his people. The will of God was nothing to him. Because he feared that if the people continued to go up to Jerusalem to worship Jehovah they would ultimately return to their allegiance to the house of David, he appointed new religious centres for them. Yet the word of Jehovah through Ahijah the prophet should have made it clear to him that he had nothing to fear if he kept the commandments of God (1 Kings 11:35-38). Hence his sin was great in setting up golden calves in Bethel and in Dan for the people to worship. Repeatedly we hear the dismal refrain concerning his corrupt successors that they “walked in the sins of` Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin” (2 Kings 13:2-11). The malign influence of this man reached to the Captivity.

On a day that will never be forgotten a man of God out of Judah appeared in Bethel while Jeroboam was burning incense upon his idolatrous altar. Not only had he diverted the people from Jehovah's chosen centre, he had also set aside the Aaronic priesthood and had appointed priests of his own choosing, even acting as a priest himself! (1 Kings 13:33). Christendom has been guilty of all this. Religious centres have been set up in abundance and God's holy priesthood, consisting of all believers in the Lord Jesus (1 Peter 2:5), has been rejected in order to make room for a host of men who know nothing of the grace of God, and who are guilty of the sin of Korah in their pretentious ministrations (Numbers 16:4-7; Jude 1:11).

The man of God was sent to Bethel to denounce Jeroboam's doings. His message was addressed to the altar rather than to the King himself. “O altar, altar, thus saith Jehovah, Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee." Now this is prophecy. Why make a difficulty about it? If God be God, if He be indeed the “I am," it is easy for Him to speak about men and their doings centuries in advance if He chooses to do so. We, creatures of a day, can only speak of things which are transpiring before our eyes. Tomorrow is quite unknown. This prophecy is very precise in that the man who would destroy Jeroboam's altar is named. In like manner Jehovah named Cyrus hundreds of years before his birth (Isaiah 45:1). And pray why not? We ask again, where is the difficulty? Away with the stupid unbelief that would

deprive us of the inestimable benefit of the vast range of prophetic truth that is enshrined in Holy Scripture!

The prediction that judgement would reach Bethel by a prince of David's line must not pass unnoticed. Jehovah was very displeased with that Royal house, yet he had not abandoned His purposes in connection with it. Josiah, in his work of destruction, is typical of Christ (all scripture points to Him), Who at His appearing will judge and clear away all evil from Israel, and from the earth Generally. Cyrus also typifies Christ, but in a different character. Josiah pulled down, but Cyrus built up. It was he who published the famous decree which encouraged the Jewish people to return to the land of their fathers, and to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:1-11). Thus in Josiah, Christ is suggested as the judge and destroyer of all that is evil, and in Cyrus as the restorer of the people so long strangers from the land of promise.

The man of God gave Jeroboam a sign that the word of Jehovah through him would come to pass. The altar should be rent, and its ashes scattered; and so it happened, to Jeroboam's dismay. "Lay hold on him," cried the angry king; but the hand which he extended withered up by the judgement of God..

"Pray for me," said Jeroboam in alarm. Alas, the unhappy man had never learned to pray for himself. In this he reminds us of Pharaoh in Exodus 8:8, and Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:24. The exercise of the power of God that he had experienced should have led Jeroboam to repentance, but flesh learns nothing. He felt the consequences of his sin, but not the evil of it. “After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way” (1 Kings 13:33).

The central figure of 1 Kings 13:1-34. is the “man of God out of Judah"; and the words upon which all the instruction of the chapter turns are “the word of Jehovah," ten times repeated. To Jeroboam the word of Jehovah meant nothing, self-will was his rule of life; to the old prophet who lived in Bethel, the word of Jehovah meant something, but it had lost its power over his soul; to the man of God the word of Jehovah meant everything until the fatal moment when he allowed himself to be seduced from it.

Let it be emphasised that the messenger who finished his course so tragically was a man of God. This title is used very rarely in Scripture, and it is only accorded to divinely selected persons. Yet the man of 1 Kings 13:1-34 is thus described fifteen times, not merely by the scribe who wrote the chapter, but also by the Holy Spirit who guided his pen! On the same principle Barnabas, after his false steps, is divinely described in Acts 11:24 as “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." A man does not lose his whole character in the eyes of God because of one or more failures. In this our God is more merciful (and more righteous) than His people, who, in forgetfulness of their own frailty, are sometimes merciless towards those whom Satan has tripped up. Sin should never be regarded lightly, and God will certainly deal with it in those who are near to Him; but critics should remember the warning, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

God has not been pleased to tell us the name of the witness who failed so seriously at Bethel, nor has He told us the name of the man who led him astray. We shall meet them both in the glory of God ere long, and they will join with us in proclaiming the worthiness of the Lamb that was slain. None of us dare boast of anything in ourselves; “He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord" (1

Corinthians 1:31).

We again draw attention to the fact that the man who failed at Bethel is described fifteen times in 1 Kings 13:1-34. as “a man of God." He was all that the title implies, or the Spirit of God would not thus designate him. His holy soul revolted against the wickedness which covered the land of Israel; he desired to stand in complete separation from it; and he denounced it with all the fervour at his command. The word of Jehovah was precious to him, whatever it might be to others. Why then did he fail? Because, dear Christian reader, he was no more perfect than you and me. In the books of Scripture the faults of even the truest of God's servants are not overlooked. Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and others all broke down at times in the presence of the enemy. In these solemn records God would teach us that the only perfect Servant and Witness is the Son of His love. As for ourselves, we only walk steadily when the eye of our faith is upon Him, and when the word of God is supreme in our souls by the power of the Holy Spirit. May God in His infinite mercy keep us steady in a world that is rushing to its doom, and in a Church which has but little respect for His holy will!

Jeroboam was so relieved by the restoration of his hand that he invited the man of God to his home for refreshment and reward. But the “man of God said unto the king. If thou wilt give me half thine house I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: for so was it charged me by the word of Jehovah, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest" (1 Kings 13:8-9). All this is excellent. There was firmness in the tone of Jehovah's messenger. He clearly understood the nature of his commission, and he was determined to be obedient in every detail. Royal patronage should not deflect him from the Word of God. Eating and drinking is expressive of fellowship; so we are taught in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22; and there could be no fellowship between the people of Bethel and the man who represented Jehovah and His truth. Let us not miss the lesson of this. The need for bold testimony against religious evil becomes increasingly urgent as the apostasy draws near; but the testimony of our lips will lose all its value if we tolerate for a single moment that which we know to be contrary to God. "But surely I may attend my own daughter's wedding in the Cathedral?” What sort of instruction have you given to your daughter that she should wish to be married in a Cathedral? If you have taught her correctly, and she persists in setting at nought your counsel, would you not do well to spend the wedding hour quietly at home in prayer for your wayward child? Why descend to her level by giving sanction to that which Cathedrals and clergy represent? Our Lord's brethren after the flesh marvelled that He was not making preparation to attend “the Jews feast of tabernacles” in Jerusalem. But His heart was not there. It would be simply a great worldly religious gathering, so different from what “the feasts of Jehovah” were intended to be (Leviticus 23:1-44 “The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil" (John 7:7). Let us range ourselves alongside the blessed Son of God, even though faithful separation from all that is contrary to God may cause us to be hated even as He was hated.

So the man of God “went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Bethel." But the eye of Satan was upon the man. When face to face with an angry King, he stood calmly in faith; when the seductive voice of a religious "friend" reached his ears, he failed dismally. Had he gone straight home, all might have been well, but his seducer found him “sitting under an oak." The Christian life is a race. While our souls are in motion we are secure; but even a brief relaxation may be our undoing. In Php_3:1-21. we find Paul straining every nerve (spiritually speaking) to

reach the goal which God had set before him — conformity to Christ in glory. "I press toward the mark for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus." (Php_3:14). Amongst his last words we read, 'I have finished the course" (2 Timothy 4:7). We are exhorted to "lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and to run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the beginner and finisher of faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2). Satan's most successful weapon is deception. Note the words "deceive" and "deceived" in Revelation 20:1-15. "We are not ignorant of his devices," says the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 2:2. This states the Christian position ideally but it may not be true at every moment of every individual believer. Constant watchfulness is necessary.

The seducer of the man of God out of Judah was himself a prophet of Jehovah. The Holy Spirit calls him "an old prophet" (1 Kings 13:11). The adjective arrests our attention. In 1 John 2:1-29 : the family of God is divided into three grades; "babes," "Young men," and "fathers." "Fathers" are saints in the highest condition of spiritual development; old men (in the spiritual sense) suggest decay. It is written of Ephraim in Hosea 7:9 : "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, and he knoweth it not." It is deplorable when this has to be said of a believer in the Lord Jesus, but it appears to have been really true of the old prophet. Like Lot before him, he lived in bad surroundings and "evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Large numbers of pious people had forsaken their all in the Northern Kingdom in order to get away from Jeroboam's idolatries. They went South into Judah and Jerusalem where there was still some regard for the law of Jehovah (2 Chronicles 11:13-17). But the old prophet remained in Bethel! As Hosea 7:9 expresses it, strangers had devoured his strength, and gray hairs were upon him. He was not the type of man whom God could use to publicly denounce the devilries of Jeroboam and his followers; hence the special mission of the man of God out of Judah, whose work the backsliding old prophet cruelly marred.

When the prophet's sons came home from the town and told their father of all that had happened his spirit was stirred, as it might well be. Having ascertained which way the man of God had gone, he went after him, desiring to bring him back into his house for a season. Let us be reasonable in our criticism of the old prophet at this point. He probably knew nothing of the strict divine command that Jehovah's witness must neither eat nor drink in Bethel. What is probable is that he longed for some intercourse with a man who feared God. What the Holy Spirit so graciously says of unfaithful Lot would be equally true of the unfaithful old prophet: "that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds" (2 Peter 2:8). Not for many a day had a "brother" sat at the old prophet's table; what pleasure it would be to receive one now! It is possible also that he sought some recognition from the man who had acted so wonderfully in the presence of the King and his people. But why had he not long before turned his back on Bethel? Separation from evil is vital for the development of the spiritual life. Only in healthy surroundings can any of us increase in the knowledge of God.

When the man of God told the old prophet what his orders were "by the word of Jehovah" the most critical moment in the life's history of both men was reached, little as either realized it. Oh, the importance of watching every word, and every step! First the old prophet failed, for he lied; then the man of God failed, for he was not sufficiently alert to discern the seductive voice of Satan. Do we wonder that the prophet lied? His environment is sufficient explanation. No one could live in Bethel without his whole spiritual tone becoming lowered. Thus he said: "I am a prophet also, as

thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the Word of Jehovah, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread, and drink water" (1 Kings 13:18). Paul the Apostle would quickly have disposed of such an utterance. Mark his vehement language in Galatians 1:8 : “though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." If an angel at any moment dared to contradict, or even modify, any explicit word from God, it would be a sin of the first magnitude. We commend to our readers a, few words from a wise counsellor long gone to his rest, but who "being dead, yet speaketh": "Whenever God has made His will known to us we are not to allow any after-influence whatever to call it in question, even although the latter may take the form of the word of God. If we were morally nearer to the Lord, we should feel that the only true and right position is to follow that which He told us at first” (J. N. Darby "Synopsis" Vol. 1: page 506).

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Sorrowful spectacle! Two disobedient servants of the living God turning back to Satan's chief stronghold in the land to eat and drink! Surely each had a bad conscience; with each: one the word of the Lord had no power, at least for the present The government of God, which cannot tolerate sin in those who are near to Him, moved quickly. In His divine sovereignty God put the sentence of death against the deceived one in the mouth of the deceiver himself! “He cried unto the man of God that came from Judah (note the word “cried"), saying Thus saith Jehovah, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of Jehovah, and hast not kept the commandment which Jehovah thy God commanded thee, but camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place of the which He did say to thee, Eat no bread and drink no water thy carcass shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers (1 Kings 13:20-22). There was no such severity towards either Jeroboam or the old prophet. It is a blessed thing to be in intimate relationship with God by grace; but it is a solemn thing if we dishonour His holy name. In the city of Corinth in Paul's day there were probably persons far more wicked than any in the Assembly, yet certain in the Assembly were divinely laid low in sickness, and some were put to sleep. Strange as it may seem, they were fit for heaven but they were not fit for Corinth!

The parting at the door of the prophet was solemn. Each knew that they would not meet again in this world; but both men, with ourselves, will “be manifested before the judgement-seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10). The man of God had not gone far when a lion met him, and slew him. The Holy Spirit notes the facts that the lion did not harm the ass, nor did he devour the carcass; moreover, he allowed passers-by to observe what he had done without molesting them. What a lesson is here! The animal obeyed the divine commission, and did not exceed it in any detail. It is humiliating to reflect that the humblest of God's creatures can be more obedient to their Creator than man made in His image! In Isaiah 1:3, the ox and the ass are cited as rebuking the people of Jehovah, and in Jeremiah 8:7, four birds are mentioned from whom disobedient men and women might learn something. The ravens were faithful in their service when they carried bread and flesh twice daily to Elijah at Cherith (i.e., they did not eat the food); the fish that swallowed Jonah obeyed his Creator in putting out the prophet when his lesson was learnt; and the colt submissively carried the Lord Jesus through shouting crowds into Jerusalem. When the old prophet heard of the disaster to the man of God, he saddled his ass and rode quickly to the spot. What a sight he beheld! The lion and the ass standing guard, as it were, over the dead body! Surely a parable is here! The dead messenger of Jehovah was a strange blend of the lion and the

ass; with the king so bold, but with the old prophet so foolish! Similarly, Peter was bold in the presence of armed men, but terrified when amongst servant-maids! All the circumstances proved that the road-side tragedy was the hand of God. Jeroboam was spared the consequences of his sin in answer to prayer (1 Kings 13:6), but the fault of the man of God was outside the range of prayer, it was “sin unto death" (1 John 5:16). It was left to the old prophet to carry back the body to Bethel, and bury it in his own tomb, with the lamentation, “Alas, my brother!” But he was led to confirm all that the dead man had said concerning Jeroboam's iniquities: “The saying which he cried by the word of Jehovah against the altar in Bethel, and against all the high places which are in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass” (1 Kings 13:32).

This was the tomb concerning which Josiah inquired when he visited the spot three and a half centuries later. The dead man had mentioned his name thus long before his birth as the destined executor of God's judgements, and he had fulfilled the word of God. With the tenderness of heart that was characteristic of him, Josiah should have profited by the story; but alas! a few years hence his own life (so valuable to the nation) ended in shame, because, like the man of God, he got out of the path of entire subjection to the Word of Jehovah.

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Let us not hasten away from the tomb in Bethel. A few moments of further meditation upon its solemn lessons will be wholesome for us all. It is possible for an aged brother to become a spent force; shall we not guard against this? Advanced years do not necessarily imply increased spirituality. A long course of useful service for God may easily breed in us a spirit of self-satisfaction, than which nothing is more dangerous both for ourselves and for all who come under our influence. In that case, our words of counsel may have weight and value with younger brethren which they do not deserve. Humility and self-judgement become us until our latest breath. We shall not be free from danger until we find ourselves in the safe shelter of the Lord's presence. The old prophet — a man whom apparently God could no longer employ ensnared a younger man to his ruin. The younger men of our time must not overlook this danger. Respect for age and experience is good; but our only authority for action in any sphere of life is the Word of God. "A brother advised me," or” an angel spake to me," will not sound well at the judgement seat of Christ, Both old and young must maintain themselves in direct touch with God and His truth!

It is but a little while until the great gathering of saints to the Lord in the air. The man of God out of Judah will be in that brilliant throng; likewise the old prophet of Bethel, and King Josiah; also all the readers of these pages who believe in the Lord Jesus. We shall glory for ever in the grace which has saved us; but our service we must leave the Lord to appraise when we stand before Him. All that is faulty He will graciously put out of remembrance; but all that is good (wrought in us by the Holy Spirit) He will commend and reward. Meantime, each one of us must humbly say: —

“That Thou should'st have delight in me,

And be the God Thou art,

Is darkness to my intellect

But sunshine in my heart." — (F. W. Faber)

The Great Passover

It is refreshing to turn away from the contemplation of three wrecked lives and to meditate upon the notable Passover which Josiah held in Jerusalem. The sands of time were running out for guilty Israel, and soon their "place and nation" would be extinguished by the righteous judgement of God, not to be restored until the appearing of Christ; yet, before the stroke fell, the remnant left in the land experienced one of the brightest moments that Israel had ever known. This was due instrumentally to the faith of the King, whose mind and heart had been reached by the Word of God, and who desired that both himself and his people might be wholly obedient thereto. All this is encouraging to us to-day. We are living in the late evening of the Church dispensation; but God is as willing as ever to grant blessing and joy to those whose hearts are true to Him. The gloom which surrounds us has arisen from the mists of our own disobedience and folly; but God is to-day towards His people as ever in grace and love.

In both records the Holy Spirit stresses the fact that Josiah's Passover was unprecedented in character. In 2 Kings 23:22 we read: “Surely there was not holden such a Passover from the days of the Judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the Kings of Israel, nor in the days of the Kings of Judah? In 2 Chronicles 35:18 (written after the return from the Captivity) we are told: “There was no Passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the Kings of Israel keep such a Passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem." The date of this precious memory has been carefully preserved; in both “Kings” and “Chronicles” we are told that it was “in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah."

That which made this Passover different from all that had gone before it was the scrupulous observance of the Word of Jehovah by both King and people. God had spoken through Moses, David and Solomon concerning the ordinances of divine worship, and Josiah was determined that it should all be carried out, The failures and shortcomings of earlier days were not allowed to influence things now. Hezekiah kept the Passover in the second month; but Josiah kept it in the first. In Hezekiah's day the purification of the people and the sanctuary was but partial; Josiah saw to it that the purification was thorough and complete. Jehovah graciously pardoned the irregularities in the reign of Hezekiah; but since then the book of the law had come into renewed prominence, and Josiah desired that its every enactment should be carefully observed. Listen to his exhortation to the Levites: “Kill the Passover, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that they may do according to the Word of' Jehovah by the hand of Moses” (2 Chronicles 35:6).

With such a spirit working we are prepared for the words: “Josiah kept a Passover unto Jehovah in Jerusalem” (2 Chronicles 35:1; 2 Kings 23:21). It was not an occasion for mere priestly pomp and display. Poor flesh loves such things! Magnificent buildings, costly vestments, entrancing music and the odour of incense attract multitudes in our own time. But it is all deeply offensive to Him with whom we have to do. “God is a spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Jehovah was in the mind of Josiah. His whole soul was going out to Him; and his one desire was to please Him in all things. Passing to the Gospel of John, what strange language we find there! "The Passover, a feast of the Jews was nigh" (John 6:4); “the Jews feast of Tabernacles was at hand” (John 7:2). The language of the Apostle is cold. Both Passover and Tabernacles were “feasts of the Jews"; not, as in Leviticus 23:1-44, the “feasts of Jehovah."

The ritual of those great days was duly carried out, but JESUS was in the land, and unwanted. Fearful hypocrisy! The God of Israel walking up and down amongst the people, a near neighbour in His condescending grace, yet unwanted! "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world. knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:10-11). When the great festivals of His own appointing were in progress, Annas and Caiaphas were welcome; one or both would attend in state; but Jesus was outside it all. Some of the simple folk might enquire whether He would be present, and might argue with others concerning Him but there was no move to exalt Him of Whom every detail in the feasts of Jehovah spoke eloquently to all who had ears to hear and hearts to understand (John 7:11-12).

Are our hearts going out towards God and Christ as fervently as the heart of Josiah went out to Jehovah long ago? Concerning the place of separation which many profess to have taken, have we really gone forth "unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach?" (Hebrews 13:13). When we set out for a meeting on any given occasion, is the thought uppermost in our mind that we are going to meet the Lord, or are we merely attending a religious service? We may be truly Scriptural in what we do, as the priests and Pharisees were in our Lord's day, and yet give no pleasure to the heart of God.

A very important step had to be taken before the Passover could be rightly held in Jerusalem — the ark of Jehovah had to be restored to its place. Josiah "said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto Jehovah, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David, King of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: serve now Jehovah your God, and His people Israel" (2 Chronicles 35:3) This command is startling to read! There has been no previous mention of the ark being displaced. Who did it? What King was evil enough to remove the sacred vessel from the Holy of Holies? How low had the people of God fallen that such profanity could be tolerated? And where was the ark during the years of its dishonour? It is true that the ark was but a chest made of shittim wood, overlaid with gold, with a cover upon which the atoning blood was intended to be sprinkled.

But the ark spoke to God of Christ, and Josiah very properly spoke of it as "the holy ark." It was the most expressive of all the types of the Levitical economy: our Lord's incorruptible humanity is set forth in the shittim wood; His Deity in the gold which covered it, and His accomplished sacrifice is suggested in the blood on the Mercy Seat (or, propitiatory) upon which the golden cherubim looked down. Typically, it was Christ in His person and work which had been utterly rejected in Israel until Josiah was divinely raised up to put everything in its true place. Christ is God's true centre, and this must be made clear (at least in type) before the Passover could be acceptable to Jehovah.

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Early in the Nineteenth century there was a movement of the Spirit of God in Christendom which went far beyond the great work of the Protestant Reformation. In the Sixteenth century the important truth of justification by faith was recovered, and multitudes rejoiced in it. But not much more was recovered at that time. But in the "twenties" of the last century there were quiet stirrings in many hearts concerning the Assembly its true relationships to God and to Christ, and the walk that is proper for those who, by grace, have part therein. Pride in denominational prosperity, and boasting in religious leaders was abundant; but for all practical purposes Christ was displaced. He

is everything to God, and He should be everything to us. He sits on high as Head of His body the Church; what other head dare we acknowledge? He is the only true gathering centre for His saints on earth, according to His own words in Matthew 18:20 : "Where two or three are gathered together unto My Name, there am I in the midst of them." When these precious realties are made good to the soul by the Holy Spirit emancipation from human traditions results. Beloved Christian reader, is Christ all this to you — the Head with whom you are in conscious union, and the Centre to whom you delight to gather with others who love His peerless name?

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What a week of joy and blessing Josiah and his people experienced in Jerusalem! It was a revival indeed. We have already seen that in both "Kings" and "Chronicles" we are told that there had been nothing like it for several centuries. But why did Josiah convene a Paschal week rather than a week for the feast of Tabernacles? Because the Passover was Jehovah's great foundation institution for His people, and His people must begin where He begins. It was the memorial of His marvellous deliverance of Israel in the days of Moses. It was intended to have a three-fold appeal: - (l) to the individual; (2) to the family; and (3) to the nation corporately. Every first-born in Josiah's time would recall how the first-born was spared in Egypt, and he would thus learn something of the value of the sprinkled blood. So with the individual now. It is good to sing with the assembly: -

"Worthy the Lamb that's gone on high

To be exalted thus;

Worthy the Lamb that died, we cry,

For He was slain for us." — Dr. Watts.

but each individual also delights to say, “The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Personal pronouns are very acceptable upon our lips when we sing to God individually; but personal pronouns are out of place in the assembly. "My Redeemer! Oh how sweet to call Thee mine!" is more suitable for the home than for the assembly.

Every family in Israel would feed together upon the roast lamb. Are we careful to have family worship? Do we so train our children that with one accord in the home we speak and sing in terms of appreciation of the Lamb that was slain! But beyond the appreciation of the individual and of the family there is also the gathering up of the congregation to bless God and the Lamb — in Israel's case, the whole nation; and in this era the whole Assembly of saints.

The Paschal gathering in Jerusalem in Josiah's day was a small affair compared with the gathering in the days of Solomon to keep the feast of Tabernacles. “At that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt before Jehovah our God" (1 Kings 8:65). But Solomon's day was the time of Israel's glory; the nation was undivided; and it was suitable that the feast of Tabernacles should have prominence, for it speaks typically of millennial glory and blessing. In Josiah's day the nation was broken; and large numbers of the people had been removed from the land by Gentile Powers. Only a remnant was left, but it was very precious to Jehovah to see them coming together at that late moment in the history of the nation to place themselves once more in their danger and need under the shelter of the blood of the lamb. Precious lesson for us in this day!

We must remind ourselves that the Passover proper was a one-day feast — but inseparably connected with it was the feast of unleavened bread for seven days more. The whole was concluded with a holy convocation. “On the seventh day ye shall have a holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work therein” Numbers 28:25). Nothing of this was overlooked by Josiah. How anxious he was to be obedient to the Word in every detail! "the children of Israel that were present kept the Passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days" (2 Chronicles 35:17). In Jehovah's original instructions concerning the Paschal week leaven was absolutely forbidden. He who dared to eat leavened bread during that season was to be cut off from Israel (Exodus 12:14-20). No work and no leaven were the divine rules for the Paschal week (Leviticus 23:6-8).

No work, for the great Calvary work of Christ was in view (typically), and no human efforts must be placed alongside it, Christ is not a mere helper of sinners, making up for their deficiencies; He is Saviour, doing all that is necessary to save us from eternal ruin. Every day during the feast of unleavened bread burnt-offerings were to be offered to Jehovah, for they spake to Him of the perfections of Christ in life and in death, in virtue of which we are accepted and blessed. The contrast between what man is and can do, and what Christ is and has done was thus strongly presented typically.

No work and no leaven. No leaven, for it is suggestive of evil throughout the Scriptures. The application of these instructions to Christians is shown in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. The Corinthian saints resident in a particularly vile city, and not long converted had low thoughts of what is suitable to God. The old Testament types of the Passover and unleavened bread were therefore brought to bear upon them by the Apostle. "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leavening of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." The Lords Supper is not in view in this passage. The Lord's Supper is dealt with in 1 Corinthians 11:1-34, and the fellowship connected therewith in 1 Corinthians 10:1-33. The teaching of 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 goes far beyond the Supper, which indeed is never called a “feast" in the New Testament. The Apostle had in mind the whole life of believers in Jesus. Israel's seven days of unleavened bread are typical of the whole period of our “sojourning here” (1 Peter 1:17). We are to keep ourselves free from everything that leaven suggests, not only on the first day of the week, but also every day in every week in every year. All that is hateful to God, and which cost His beloved Son His precious life must be absolutely excluded from our lives.

Returning to 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 the Holy Spirit uses homely figures which are nevertheless very instructive. “Ye are unleavened," says the Apostle to the Corinthian Assembly. Grace thus likened them to a lump of pure dough — a character which they were responsible to maintain, especially in view of the impurity all around them. But their state did not correspond to their standing. "Old leaven" — bad Corinthian habits — had crept in amongst them, to the Lord's dishonour and to their own hurt. They must "purge out the old heaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened." Moral evil was active in their midst. Elsewhere we are warned against doctrinal evil (Galatians 5:9; Matthew 16:12). The latter is the product of minds insubject to God, and it may work more disastrously than open immorality. Leaven in its every form must not be tolerated by those who profess to appreciate the grace of God and the blood of the Lamb.

Israel's next Passover will be held in the millennial kingdom. Instructions concerning it will be found in Ezekiel 45:21-24. Restored to their own land, not by the political schemes of Gentile Powers, but by the infinite grace of God, the people will once more place themselves gratefully under the shelter of the blood of the lamb. The animals that will be sacrificed then will speak to them of Christ. The veil having been removed from their hearts, they will see and understand all that has been so long obscure to their fathers (2 Corinthians 3:15-16).

During Josiah's Paschal week the rich helped the poor to provide all that was necessary for the great feast; the singers led the praises of the congregation; and the porters guarded the door against all intruders. (2 Chronicles 35:7-8, 2 Chronicles 35:15). When the hearts of the people are right with God they are generous, praiseful and watchful. May the Holy Spirit make all these things true of us at this time also.

Sad Megiddo

Thirteen Years of silence on the part of the Holy Spirit! Nothing is recorded of Josiah from the eighteenth year of his reign until his thirty-first and last year! Men's biographical works are not written thus, but it is the usual way of the Holy Spirit. He brings before us many interesting characters, but in no single case have we a full life-story. The story of the blessed Son of God and of His sojourn amongst us is noteworthy in this respect. Although four men were divinely employed to write of Him. His wonderful ways and words are only recorded in modest measure. (John 21:25).

It is not a little remarkable that the next thing we are told after the keeping of the Passover is Josiah and his people confronting the power of Egypt. This is reminiscent of the first Passover; but how different the circumstances now! At the beginning, Jehovah was delivering His people from bondage, and all the might of Pharaoh was unavailing against those who had placed themselves in faith under the shelter of the blood of the lamb. In Exodus 12:54 we have a very complete picture of God's salvation as we now realize it. Spared from divine judgement, conducted safely through the Red Sea, with Pharaoh's hosts overthrown, Israel presents a picture of our own wonderful position and blessing through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In Moses' day Israel did not seek conflict with Pharaoh — nay, they dreaded it! — but in Josiah's day conflict was deliberately entered into. How true are the wise man's words in Proverbs 26:17 : “He that. . . meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears."

"After all this" says the inspired historian, with a tinge of sorrow in his tone (2 Chronicles 35:20). After years of walking with God, after years of strict obedience to His word, King Josiah, so excellent until now, plunged heedlessly into war. Brethren — old and young — let us heed the warning! After years of good service for God, and blameless conduct, it is possible for us to make fools of ourselves and blast our lives. Every step needs to be watched in dependence upon God if we are to finish well. Josiah had now reached the age of Hezekiah (thirty-nine) when Jehovah sent him the message by Isaiah: “Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live" (Isaiah 38:1). But Jehovah did not thus bid Josiah prepare for death; but, alas! he rushed blindly into it. How can we account for his folly? Had he become puffed-up by the success of his undertakings hitherto? This is always a possibility for the servants of God — even for you and me, good reader. Amaziah erred in this way, and brought disaster upon himself and upon his people (2 Chronicles 25:17-24).

There is no mention of prayer on Josiah's part before he led his army out to war, and there was no divine command so to do. This man, so devoted until now, appears to have got completely out of the path of dependence and obedience. The position was admittedly a difficult one. Egypt and Assyria were at war, each desiring world-supremacy. Pharaoh's best route against his enemy was through Palestine, as Germany in our day judged that the best way to reach France was to march through Belgium. It may be urged that it was natural for Judah to resist this. Agreed; but that which is natural to flesh is not always right for men in relationship with God. Why did not Josiah spread the matter out before God, and seek His guidance and protection?

He had in this the good example of Hezekiah, who, when his little kingdom was in danger from a mighty foe, placed the whole matter in the hands of Israel's faithful God (Isaiah 37:1-38) It has been said that Judah was under treaty obligation to help Assyria in case of war. Even if this be true, Josiah was not justified in moving out without a word from Jehovah. Israel was never to be reckoned as one of the nations (Numbers 23:9). Israel stood in special relationship with Jehovah, and only at His word should any step be taken at any time. In this they were meant to be a testimony to all who observed their ways.

Judah was no match for Egypt. Both Egypt and Assyria a few years later were humbled and broken by Nebuchadnezzar; but that hour had not yet come. Assyria was declining, the tall cedar of Ezekiel 31:3, was tottering; Egypt, the great eagle of Ezekiel 17:7, was soon to have its wings clipped; but in Josiah's day Egypt was far too strong for Judah. Pharaoh's hosts might possibly have passed through the land as peacefully as Israel's hosts proposed to pass through Edom several centuries earlier (Numbers 20:14-20). But Josiah's kingly pride could not tolerate this, Had Jehovah commanded him to withstand the Egyptian armies, the superior numbers of the latter would have mattered nothing. Jonathan once said, "There is no restraint to Jehovah to save by many or by few" (1 Samuel 14:6). When God is working victory lies with the few rather than with the many. Gideon's three hundred men accomplished great things for God (Judges 7:7); but the three thousand poltroons of Judah's royal tribe who sought to hand Samson over to his enemies for the sake of a false peace were worse than worthless (Judges 15:11).

Had Josiah weighed up the situation quietly in the presence of God, and gone forth at His bidding he might have used David's words in Psalms 27:1-14 : "Jehovah is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? Jehovah is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?.... Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." When our blessed Lord went into danger to the dismay of His disciples, He was calmly confident. He had the Father's word for what He was doing, and He was thus walking in the light (John 11:7-10). But Josiah had got out of touch with God, and was making the greatest mistake of his life, for which the whole nation suffered as well as himself.

Josiah had a remarkable warning addressed to him — by the King of Egypt himself! Pharaoh Necho "sent ambassadors to him, saying, What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commandeth me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that He destroy thee not" (2 Chronicles 35:21). Amazing words! Does it strike Christian readers as strange that God should speak through a heathen King to one of His own choicest servants? The Holy Spirit adds His own comment to Pharaoh's message: "Josiah... hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the

mouth of God." We have here a remarkable example of the sovereignty of God, who works and speaks through whomsoever He pleases. Did not the Holy Spirit come upon wicked Balaam and constrain him to say most blessed things concerning His people? (Numbers 24:2). Had not Josiah himself experienced the sovereignty of God when He sent him an important message by a woman prophetess? (2 Kings 22:14). When Rabshakeh was sent against Jerusalem by his master the King of Assyria, he said: "Am I come up without Jehovah against this land to destroy it? Jehovah said unto me, Go up against this land, and destroy it" (Isaiah 36:10). Awful words as proceeding from such lips! It was falsehood and blasphemy, which Jehovah resented and speedily judged.

Josiah a few years earlier had a sensitive conscience concerning the Will of God. When the book of the law was read before him he quietly recognised the divine voice, and obeyed it. Why did he not recognize the same voice speaking to him through Pharaoh Necho? How easy it is, beloved brethren, for any of us to fall into a condition of spiritual dullness, so that the voice of God. although clearly sounding forth through some chosen instrument, or text of scripture, fails to move us! It is true that there are siren voices around us. Even in the religious circle men speak "lies in hypocrisy" (1 Timothy 4:2); "many false prophets have gone out into the world," animated by evil spirits (1 John 4:1). All this calls for spiritual alertness that we be not led astray. But the soul that walks humbly with God, with a heart subject to His Word, will readily distinguish between His voice and the voice of the deceiver.

Josiah had enjoyed thirty-nine warless years, during which he had been able to do much good to the sheep committed to his care; now he rushes into a needless conflict! The fact that he disguised himself proves that he had not a good conscience about the matter. We are not surprised that Ahab wore disguise on the battle-field (while basely urging his friend Jehoshaphat to expose himself in his royal robes), for he was aware that God's sentence of judgement hung over his head (1 Kings 22:30), and he would evade it if he could; but Josiah should have known better. The God who has revealed Himself so fully to us in the person of His Son is not served by methods of subterfuge at any time. Let us never forget this. In all our ways, whether in the world or in the Assembly, let everything bear the full light of day. "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5:11).

Josiah's life was of immense value to Israel. He was fully aware that the sins of his predecessors, and of Manasseh in particular, called aloud for judgement (2 Kings 23:26), and that his life alone stood between the nation and the outpouring of the Wrath of Jehovah. Huldah's communication should have made him act with less precipitation, and with a more exercised heart than he manifested when he went up against the King of Egypt. The knowledge that their well-deserved judgement was soon to overwhelm Israel, and that there was no remedy for their sins, ought to have prevented him going up against Pharaoh, when the latter did not attack him, and even warned him to forbear; but he would not hearken, and was lost through a hardihood which was not of God" (J. N. Darby). A chance arrow (guided doubtless by the God of Judgement) smote Ahab in spite of his disguise; something similar happened to Josiah. "The archer shot at King Josiah; and the King said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded" (2 Chronicles 35:23). His servants lifted him out of his fighting chariot, and put him into another but alas, he was soon dead! Megiddo was the scene of a great victory when Barak and Deborah moved in faith against the Canaanites, for God was with them (Judges 5:19); Megiddo was now the scene of a disastrous defeat, for God was not with Josiah in his foolish enterprise.

"All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day" (2 Chronicles 35:24-25). They might well mourn, for the disaster in the valley of Megiddo was the end of the Kingdom of Judah. The crash must needs come, for Jehovah had spoken of it years before; but it is sorrowful that the folly of one of the brightest saints that ever lived should have hastened it! This reflection should serve to take out of us all every vestige of self-confidence, We are sorry stewards of God at the best! Only His grace can keep us right for a single hour. The uniqueness of Josiah is set forth in 2 Kings 23:25 : "Like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to Jehovah with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him." Yet such a fine servant of God ended badly!

At the judgement seat of Christ everything will come out in the light of God. "The rest of the acts of Josiah and his goodness .... and his deeds first and last, behold they are written" Thus our goodness is divinely recorded as well as our badness; and our first deeds, when love was fresh and warm, will not be obliterated by any unfortunate last deeds. Everything will be remembered and divinely estimated. "Jehovah is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed" (1 Samuel 2:3). Not "counted" as if quantity is everything with God, but "weighed"; quality is the chief thing with Him. "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but Jehovah pondereth the hearts" (Proverbs 21:2).

Poor Josiah! He finished badly, but in spite of his sorry blunder, he is "absent from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). We shall meet him in the presence of the Lord Jesus at His coming. No blunders there; each saved one will bear the image of the First-born Son for ever. It is all of grace. To Him be all the glory!

The Wreck of the Kingdom

Josiah's reign was a happy experience for the remnant of the people still in the land. The faith of the King caused the lamp of David to shine brightly for a season (1 Kings 11:36); but it will not shine again until the appearing in glory of "great David's greater Son." Twenty five centuries have passed away, but the promised One has not yet come, and Israel's sorrows continue and deepen. A few years of chaos followed the death of Josiah, and then the remnant of the people were swept out of the land by Nebuchadnezzar. Josiah was the last king worthy of the title. Three sons and a grandson succeeded him, mere puppets of their Gentile masters. Later, the Herods masqueraded as kings in Jerusalem, and in a day that is still. to come the Anti-Christ will take his seat there Daniel 11:36); but the accomplishment of God's purposes of love await the coming of Christ. "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion" (Psalms 2:6). Every attempt to re-establish the fallen nation prior to His return can only end in disaster, and intensify the sufferings of the people.

After his victory at Megiddo Pharaoh-Necho took possession. of the country. When he arrived in Jerusalem he found that the people had anointed Jehoahaz (otherwise, Shallum), Josiah's second son to be their king. Necho deposed him, and carried him prisoner in chains to Egypt. Necho then installed Eliakim whose name he changed to Jehoiakim (2 Chronicles 36:1-4). Eliakim means "God will raise up"; Jehoiakim means "Jehovah will raise up." The reason for this change of name is not apparent, but it was at any rate an exercise of authority. The giving of names is a mark of lordship. Thus Nebuchadnezzar gave new names to Daniel and his three friends when he took them into his service (Daniel 1:7); and he also changed Mattaniah into Zedekiah when he set him

upon Judah's tottering: throne. What humiliating details! How low the chosen people had now fallen as the fruit of centuries of persistent transgression against Jehovah! The land which was intended to be the centre of God's ways in government was now at the mercy. of rival Gentile Powers, and the heirs of David's royal throne, who should have been the leaders of the nation in righteousness, and blessing, were now objects of universal contempt. How degrading is sin! Pharaoh-Necho held the Holy land for a short time; then Nebuchadnezzar dispossessed him. Necho was not to be the head of the Gentiles, however ardently he may have desired it. He Who sits upon the throne above does as He pleases in the affairs of men; happy would it be if all competitors for Power would learn this lesson. Since the sorrowful days which followed the death of Josiah the land has been held by Persians, Greeks, Romans, Saracens, Turks, and now the British, and the despised seed of Abraham have sighed for it in vain. Oh that they would humble themselves before God, and own their many sins — their violation of the law, their murder of the prophets, their rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah, and their persistent opposition to the testimony of the Holy Spirit! When this comes about, every blessing will be theirs, and peace and prosperity in the land of their desire.

Josiah's sons were all wicked men, and we wonder why. His family was not large-only three names come before us in Scripture. Amongst earlier rulers in Israel we read that Gideon had seventy sons (Judges 8:30); Jair had thirty (Judges 10:4); Abdon had forty (Judges 12:14); and Rehoboam had twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters (2 Chronicles 11:21). Such numbers are considerable; how could fatherly care be bestowed upon them all? But Josiah had but three sons and all wicked! Yet the father was a particularly godly man, and had deep reverence for the Word of God! Is it possible that Josiah's public work, involving journeys into every corner of the land for the extirpation of evil led to neglect of the family? This is a question which should be carefully considered by all who feel called to a travelling ministry in this day. At the moment of writing I hear of a servant of Christ sailing for Africa and leaving a wife and six young children in Scotland. No servant of Christ has right to judge another; but such facts do raise questions in our minds. Children are a great responsibility entrusted to us by God. It was never His original intention that our children should be brought up by others.

We learn more about the evil ways of the sons of Josiah from the prophetical books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel than from the historical books of the Kings and the Chronicles. Concerning Shallum we read in Jeremiah 22:10-12 : "Weep ye not for the dead (i.e., Josiah), neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away (i.e., Shallum), for he shall return no more, nor see his native country." This suggests that something worse than mere deportation was in store for Josiah's worthless successor. Jehoiachim, a few years later, went into easy captivity but no such portion awaited Shallum. Possibly Necho inflicted upon him what he would have liked to inflict upon the man who opposed his march to Carchemish. Shallum's short reign was cruel according to Ezekiel 19:1-4.

Concerning Jehoiakim a great deal is recorded in the prophetical books. Three sins in particular are laid to his charge. (1) oppression of the people. Pharaoh Necho laid upon Judah a heavy war indemnity, which Jehoiakim was obliged to raise. "Jehoiakim gave the silver and gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give the money according to the commandment of Pharaoh: he exacted the silver and gold of the people of the land, of every one according to his taxation, to give it into Pharaoh Necho" (2 Kings 23:35). As if this was not enough for the suffering people to bear,

Jehoiakim compelled them to build palaces for himself without wages. Evil as the people were, Jehovah resented this tyrannical cruelty. Woe unto him," said He in His indignation. Jehovah loves to see a shepherd leading the flock, but Jehoiakim was a wolf, ravaging the sheep. The contrast between this monster and his father is divinely noted in Jeremiah 22:13-17. “He judged the cause of the poor and needy: then it was well with him: was not this to know Me? saith Jehovah? The remnant of Israel might well mourn the loss of Josiah when his callous son thus held them in bondage. The moral grandeur of Israel and of David's royal house had departed; but Jehoiakim would still affect material splendour. Let God's saints today beware of attempting to keep up outward appearances when spiritual power has gone. God wants reality at all times.

(2) Jehoiakim not only oppressed the people, but he persecuted to the death those who witnessed against his deeds. He chased the faithful prophet Urijah into Egypt, fetched him back with an armed force, and put him to death (Jeremiah 26:20-23). He would have treated Jeremiah in the same way had not the princes resisted him. "When He maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them: He forgetteth not the cry of the humble" (Psalms 9:12).

(3) In addition to all the foregoing, Jehoiakim wickedly threw into the fire Jeremiah's manuscript containing the words of God. Even his unholy companions were shocked but their pleading was in vain (Jeremiah 36:1-32). When we recall Josiah's great reverence for the Word of God the behaviour of his son appears the more terrible. The whole nation mourned when Josiah died; but Jehovah decreed that there should be no mourning for Jehoiakim. When Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem, he bound Jehoiakim in fetters, to carry him to Babylon" (2 Chronicles 36:6). But he never went to Babylon, for Jehovah had said some time before "concerning the son of Josiah King of Judah; They shall not lament for him, saying Ah, my brother! or Ah, sister! they shall not lament far him, saying, Ah, lord! or Ah, his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jeremiah 22:18-19). Thus did the indignant God of Israel express His abhorence of this infamous son of a godly father.

Concerning Zedekiah, the last of the lion's whelps (Ezekiel 19:5-9), the youngest of Josiah's sons. He succeeded his nephew Jehoiachin, who, after an evil reign of one hundred days, was carried into captivity in Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:9-10). His short reign was so bad that Jehovah said that no man of his seed should ever sit upon the throne of David (Jeremiah 22:24-30).

When speaking of these vile occupants of Israel's throne the Holy Spirit said, “Oh earth, earth, earth, hear the Word of Jehovah." He would have the rulers of every nation and in every age understand how hateful to God are the unrighteous ways of those, who, as His responsible stewards rule over the children of men. Zedekiah profited nothing by the calamities which befell his predecessors. He was Israel's last hope. He was “a spreading vine of low stature” (Ezekiel 17:6). a very humiliating figure of speech indeed! But there might still have been crumbs of blessing for the unhappy people had he walked humbly with God. After his overthrow Jeremiah said of him “The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of Jehovah, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the nations" (Lamentations 4:20). Poor creature though he was, he counted for something with the people that were still in the land. With Zedekiah's downfall Israel's hopes were extinguished until the coming in power of the Lord Jesus. Zedekiah was a weak character, easily influenced by his courtiers and even by women. His outstanding sin was his violation of his oath of fealty to his over-lord Nebuchadnezzar. The Chaldean “made him swear by

God, but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel" (2 Chronicles 36:13). Nebuchadnezzar thought to secure him by making: him swear by the sacred name; but the sequel proved that Jehovah's name was less to the Jew than to the Gentile! “Thou shalt not take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain; for Jehovah will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7). Had he been true to his covenant, Zedekiah's. kingdom, poor and despicable though it was, might have stood (Ezekiel 17:14); but now, “As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king,. whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die." Again, “Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, as I live, surely Mine oath that he hath despised, and My covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head" (Ezekiel 17:16-19).

When Nebuchadnezzar discovered that his pledged vassal was negotiating with Egypt with reference to a revolt (Ezekiel 17:15), he turned all his forces against him, and so completed the ruin of Judah and Jerusalem. If Zedekiah really felt that he should be free from the domination of Babylon, he should have sought help from God; instead, he treacherously turned to Egypt. Egypt, typically, represents the world as that from which God has delivered His people in grace, to seek its help in anything is a grievous offence in His sight. Let us remember this. Judgement fell first upon Judah; then, a few years later. upon Egypt also. Jehovah considered that wages were due to Nebuchadnezzar for his service in destroying Tyre. That opulent commercial city did not yield rich spoil to its captors, much treasure having been carried away to the west in Tyrian ships. The wealth of Egypt, including the silver and gold carried thither by Necho from Jerusalem, was Jehovah's recompense to the instrument of His righteous judgements (Ezekiel 29:18).

It is interesting to note that both Assyria and Egypt, Israel's two vain hopes at various times, fell under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar; but Israel, Assyria, and Egypt are all to be blessed together at the last, so gracious is our God (Isaiah 19:18-25). Meanwhile, it is sheer wickedness for the Jews to clamour for possession of Palestine. They have no claim whatever to the land. The God against whom they have sinned has definitely given the vineyard unto others (Mark 12:9). This will be reversed when the people bow humbly at the feet of their long-rejected Messiah. Pardon and blessing, with full possession of the land from the Nile to the Euphrates will then become their portion for ever (Genesis 15:18).

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The following reprint of an article of mine which appeared in "The Witness" June 1942 may interest our present readers: —

THE COVETED, BUT MISSING DIADEM

The downfall of the petty Jewish State two thousand five hundred years ago, was doubtless a small matter in the eyes of the politicians of that day. It would scarcely have made front-page news in the press of any country. For many years Judah had been tributary to Assyria, Egypt and Babylon, and the last occupant of the throne was a very despicable character. Yet the downfall of Judah was an event of the greatest possible importance in the history of the Earth. It meant the suspension for ages of the Creator's gracious purpose for all nations. Jerusalem and its people had a place in the mind of God never accorded to others. David's throne was “the throne of Jehovah" (1 Chronicles 19:1-19, 1 Chronicles 20:1-8, 1 Chronicles 21:1-30, 1 Chronicles 22:1-19,

1 Chronicles 23:1-32). It was meant to be the divine seat of government and blessing for the whole earth. The years of David's rule, followed by Solomon's forty years of peace and glory furnish a picture of what Jehovah desired. But the evil of the royal house, and the idolatries of the people made it impossible for God to go through with His gracious purpose.

While David's throne stood, however feeble and contemptible might be its occupants, it was still “the throne of Jehovah." The last king, Zedekiah, brought on the ruin by his perfidy. Nebuchadnezzar “made him swear by God" (2 Chronicles 36:13), but he despised the oath by breaking the covenant" Ezekiel 17:17-18). Nothing was sacred in his eyes. Now note the words of Jehovah to him: “And thou profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, at the time of the iniquity of the end. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: his shall not be the same (or, what is, shall be no more). Exalt that which is low, and abase that which is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until He come whose right it is, and I will give it Him" (Ezekiel 21:25-27). Ever since that day David's throne has lain in the dust, and the diadem of rulership over the nations has been removed (Ps. 139:27-32).

No one has held the world-sceptre since the overthrow of the throne of Jehovah in Jerusalem, and the removal of the diadem from the head of David's unworthy heir. A limited measure of supremacy was granted to Nebuchadnezzar, and that only for a time. Babylon's evil led to the subjugation of that Empire to another. “After thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee." Others followed as allowed by God. But of no man yet has it been true: “He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. . . . Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him: all nations shall serve Him” (Psalms 122:8-11).

Aspirants for world-dominion have never been lacking, and some have achieved for a time a measure of success. But against all such persons there stands the solemn sentence of Ezekiel 28:1-32 : "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it." He who sets his mind upon universal sway courts ruin for himself, and for all who are associated with him.

At the present fearful juncture in the world's history many are peering into the future anxiously. The word of God to Zedekiah answers all questions. God has One in His mind, once born in grace of David's royal line, for Whom world-wide rule is purposed. Convulsion must follow convulsion until He appears. Mark the words, "until He come whose right it is." How often, when partaking of the Lord's Supper, have the words, "till He come" delighted our hearts! In Ezekiel 21:1-32 : we have another “till He come." In 1 Corinthians 11:26, our removal to the Father's house on high is in view; in Ezekiel 21:1-32 the adjustment of all earth's disorders, and the firm establishment of blessing from pole to pole. David's Heir — He who suffered for our salvation — will yet take up the diadem which many have coveted, but could not obtain; and from Jehovah's long-loved centre in Zion He will rule for His glory, and for the good of all creation.

Chapter 104

Samuel — God's Emergency Man.

Samuel — God's Emergency Man.

W W Fereday.

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Preface

A period of peculiar interest in the history of a people of peculiar interest is dealt with in the following pages.

The nation of Israel has a place in the ways of God such as has been accorded to no other. Israel forms the centre of all God's plans for the government and blessing of the earth. This poor disordered and suffering world will never enjoy true righteousness and peace until Israel gets right with God. This happy event will take place when the Lord Jesus returns from heaven in power and great glory.

The Samuel period was transitional in character. The priesthood, which was the divinely established link between Jehovah and His people after the death of Moses, had utterly collapsed, both morally and spiritually, and kingship in the person of the man after God's own heart had not yet been established. During this period Samuel more or less exercised the functions of prophet, priest, and king. He certainly was a prophet (1 Samuel 3:20); his ephod, sacrifices, and intercession were priestly (1 Samuel 2:18; 1 Samuel 10:8), and his judgeship was somewhat kingly (1 Samuel 7:15-17). Thus God graciously met the need of His people in difficult days.

Samuel's personal character is an example to us all. His simple, unaffected piety; his blameless administration; his service of intercession; and his faithful reproving of evil in ruler and ruled, furnish a delightful picture. Both writer and reader might well aspire to be a Samuel.

The Man of God

The man of God has been defined as "God's emergency man." In times of peculiar difficulty and need, such have arisen both in the Church and in Israel. If the order Divinely established were working correctly, there would be no necessity for the man of God. No persons thus described appear in the Spirit's records of the earliest days of Christianity. For a time all was well. There was indeed a moment when the whole church was "filled with the Holy Ghost," and when it could be said that "great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:31-33). But when first love declined and disorder set in, we read of the man of God, and Timothy is the first person thus designated in the New Testament Scriptures (1 Timothy 6:11): There have doubtless been many such during the succeeding centuries, and their faithfulness is written on high, and it will be rewarded in the day of Christ.

There are openings today for the man of God. Gifts abound. these have been regularly given ever since the risen Head took His seat on high, and the supply will be maintained as long as the body of Christ continues on earth (Ephesians 4:7-16). Such is His faithful love. But a Christian could be evangelist, pastor, or teacher, or, indeed, all three in one without being a man of God. The truth of this will hardly be disputed.

What is a man of God? Moses is the first servant of God who bore this honoured title, and it is given to him four times (Deuteronomy 33:1; 1 Chronicles 23:14; 2 Chronicles 3:16; Ezra 3:2). His whole course was one of singular devotedness to Jehovah. Gladly did he surrender the honours and comforts of the Egyptian palace that he might identify himself with God's downtrodden people; willingly did he carry the burden of them during the forty years of "the provocation"; and with

marvellous patience did he bear their murmuring and ingratitude. What is still greater, he pleaded for them with God, even going so far as to pray that he might be blotted out of God's book if thereby their sin might be pardoned. His jealousy for God's holy name in connection with His people was truly marvellous. His familiar intercourse with God on their behalf, as recorded in Exodus 32:33, is almost matchless. Not that Moses was perfect — only One was ever that — but his disinterestedness and devotion mark him out as one of the most conspicuous characters in Bible history. In him we get some idea of what is involved in the title — "the man of God."

Samuel was regarded in his day as a man of God (1 Samuel 9:6-10), and rightly so. Matters were critical in Israel when he appeared upon the scene. When Moses laid down his charge the priesthood was established as the link between Jehovah and His people, the civil and military leader holding but the second place. "He shall stand before Eleanor, the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgement of Urim before Jehovah" (Numbers 27:18-21). But in the person of Eli, the priesthood had utterly broken down. Although personally a pious man, he permitted iniquity of the gravest kind in those nearest to himself (1 Samuel 3:13). "His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." Natural affection predominated in his mind rather than faithfulness to Jehovah, to the ruin of all.

The people were as wrong as their high priest. Those were the days when "there was no king" in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). The closing chapters of the book of Judges reveal to us the appalling conditions that prevailed in the land.

Nor were things right in the household from which Samuel sprang. His father was a Levite, descended from Korah, whose children were so mercifully spared from destruction in the day of their father's rebellion (Numbers 26:11), and who were afterwards made doorkeepers and singers in the house of Jehovah. Such grace should have filled their hearts with the deep gratitude to God, and should have disposed them to be devoted to His will. But what do we find? Elkanah "had two wives the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah" (1 Samuel 1:2). Did he not know better than this. It bred unhappiness in the home, reminding us of the unrest in Abraham's surroundings when he took Hagar in addition to Sarah.

Thus we have a Korahite in failure, a high priest weakly tolerant of gross iniquity; and a nation utterly lawless. Should judgement descend from an offended God? Nay; instead He raised up an emergency man, by means of whom He might reach, recover, and bless His unfaithful people. This was Samuel's place in the ways of God.

Hannah: Her Prayer and Her Song

The fact is noteworthy that in no single instance was the Spirit of God pleased to use a woman for the writing of Holy Scripture; neither did the Lord place a woman in the apostolic band, although He was surrounded by women not one whit behind the twelve in love and devotion to His person. But it is also a fact that some of the noblest poems found in the Word of God poured from devout female lips. The utterances of Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, and Mary of Nazareth constitute spiritual treasures of priceless value.

Hannah both prayed and sang, and she became the mother of praying Samuel (Psalms 99:6), and the ancestress of Heman the temple singer (1 Chronicles 6:33). First, she prayed for a son, in her distress weeping as she prayed (1 Samuel 1:10). The man who should have been, of all people, in

close touch with God was so thoroughly out of communion with Him that he could not discern the difference between a sorrowful woman and a drunken woman. God's priest should be both compassionate and sympathetic (Hebrews 5:2). The risen Christ is all this and more; Eli, alas, was but a poor foreshadow of Him. Being corrected for his error, he could only vaguely say, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him."

Jehovah graciously heard the cry of His handmaid, and in due time the son was born, and was named Samuel, which means "asked of God." Forthwith the mother dedicated him to Jehovah, according to that which she vowed when she prayed. He was to be a Nazarite of God. Precious example to believing mothers in all ages. Let us pause a while just here, and ask ourselves — we who are parents — whether we desire for our children above all things separation to God? Or is it possible that we wish them to distinguish themselves in this scene where Christ is not?

How often we read in the records of Israel's kings that "his mother's name was." Is this meant to be suggestive that the mothers have pre-eminently the shaping of the character of their offspring? It is certain that Timothy owed immensely to his grandmother Lois, and to his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5).

When Hannah had weaned the child, she took him to Shiloh, and on the ground of sacrifice dedicated him to Jehovah. The slain bullock for the burnt offering speaks of Christ in the absolute devotedness of His death, the ephah of flour of what He was in His lowly manhood under the eye of God, and the bottle of wine of the joy that Gad ever found in Him. Thus typically in the value of all that Christ is to God was the boy Samuel presented to Jehovah. "And he worshipped Jehovah there.

Hannah now breaks forth into Prophetic song. The careful reader will observe a striking resemblance between Hannah's song and Mary's "Magnificat." Both were fitting representations of the faithful remnant of their time. Both felt deeply the condition of things among God's people; both felt that there was no hope in man. Of God's generous grace to those who count upon Him both were assured, and of His triumph at the last over all adversaries they could confidently sing.

Hannah's song may well be transcribed here: —

"My heart rejoiceth in Jehovah, mine horn is exalted in Jehovah; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because: I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy as Jehovah for there is none beside Thee; neither is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so exceedingly proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for Jehovah is a God of knowledge and by Him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. They that were full have hired themselves out for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath borne seven: and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. Jehovah killeth, and maketh alive. He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. Jehovah maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the Throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are Jehovah's, and He hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of His saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness: for by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of Jehovah shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall He thunder upon them; Jehovah shall judge the ends of the earth; and He shall give strength unto His king, and exalt the

horn of His anointed” (1 Samuel 2:1-10).

Wonderful outpouring of faith, in its language going immeasurably beyond the circumstances of the moment. The gift of a son to Hannah we might suppose scarcely called for this. But God ever has Christ before His mind, and His Spirit through the humble instrumentality of Samuel's mother spoke of Him as the ultimate resource of Israel and of the earth.

A king was thus in God's mind. The fallen priesthood was no longer His link with men. A change was impending. The closing verses of the Book of Ruth have prepared us for this. That charming production is at once an appendix to the Book of Judges, and an introduction to the Books of Samuel and Kings. David's pedigree fittingly concludes it.

Although the birth of Samuel was the occasion of Hannah's prophetic outburst concerning the king, it was not he who was destined for the royal office. The man of God's choice appeared in God's time, after the man of the people's choice had brought disaster upon the nation. Yet not David, but Christ, is God's true Anointed. When God's time comes to bring Him upon the scene He will indeed thunder out of the heavens, and all adversaries shall be broken to pieces. For Him we wait: at this late hour in the world's history, assured that nothing can really be right here until the iron sceptre passes into His firm competent hand. "Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day. Isaiah 2:11.

The Child in the Ephod

It is somewhat startling to read in 1 Samuel 2:18 that the child Samuel was "girded with a linen ephod"; for Samuel, although a Levite, was not of the priestly house. Only one other person outside the family of Aaron is ever spoken of as wearing an ephod — David, on the occasion of his bringing up the Ark of Jehovah from Kirjath-Jearim to Zion (2 Samuel 6:14) These circumstances make the more vivid Jehovah's change of attitude towards Israel. The Aaronic priesthood under the head continued to Perform their functions on behalf of the people in the sanctuary, but the High Priest was no longer the medium: of communication from Jehovah. Samuel and David, prophet and king, suggest the glorious One Who is coming, in Whom all the offices that man's need requires will be blessedly combined

In a solemn message to Eli by an unnamed man of God Jehovah confirmed the promise of a king and showed plainly where the priesthood would stand henceforward. "I will raise Me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in Mine heart and in My mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before Mine anointed for ever" (1 Samuel 2:35) Let the reader compare this with Numbers 27:18-23 There Joshua is bidden to "stand before Eleanor the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgement of Urim before Jehovah: at his word (i.e. Eleazar's word) shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in." Now, the priest, albeit faithful, and working according to Jehovah's mind and heart must walk before the king. Moreover, the title "the anointed. hitherto understood to appertain to the High Priest should henceforward belong to the king.

In the Book of Judges it is the condition of the people that is shown, but the writer is strangely silent concerning the priesthood. Only once is it mentioned, and then somewhat casually (Judges 20:28). The influence of the priesthood seems to have been practically nil. The first Book of Samuel opens, not with the condition of the people, but with the condition of the priesthood itself. It

was truly appalling. Eli scandalously weak; his sons (one of whom might be expected to succeed him) grossly wicked. Jehovah's patience had reached its limit. The order of things established by Himself when Moses passed away must now end in judgement. Here let it be noted that Eli and his sons were not in the line of succession from Phinehas, to whom Jehovah promised an everlasting priesthood because of his faithfulness at Baal-Peor (Numbers 25:10-13). Somehow during the disorderly period of the Judges the true line had been thrust aside by the family of Ithamar. This Jehovah overlooked for the time being, but the hour had now struck for judgement. Eli and his sons must lose their priesthood; Phinehas' line was to be restored; but the king was henceforward to be God's anointed, and the priesthood must serve under him.

A few touches concerning Samuel are found in 1 Samuel 2:1-36 interwoven with the story of the terrible wickedness of Eli's sons, as if the Spirit would show the contrast between God's newly chosen vessel and those men of Belial. We read in 1 Samuel 2:11, "The child did minister unto Jehovah before Eli the priest" then follows the corrupt practices of the priests, whereby all respect for divine things was destroyed in the minds of the people (1 Samuel 2:13-17); then we are told, "but Samuel ministered before Jehovah, a child girded with a linen ephod" (1 Samuel 2:18); Samuel's purity amidst the vilest surroundings is thus emphasised; this is followed by Eli's final remonstrance with his sons; in 1 Samuel 2:26 we are told that "the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with Jehovah and also with men." (comp. Luke 2:52); then comes the pronouncement of the solemn sentence that was about to be executed upon the priestly houses; and we read next, "the child Samuel ministered unto Jehovah before Eli"(1 Samuel 3:1).

Thus everything now turned upon 'God's emergency man," who was rapidly being fitted for the grave position that he was to fill. The priesthood must be deposed from its former position of privilege and honour as the link between Jehovah and His people; the king was in mind, but not yet called; Samuel was to be the medium of communication meanwhile. To some extent he was to hold Moses' place of Mediator. The spotless ephod was not only symbolical of the personal purity of the one whom Jehovah had chosen; it also spoke of the peculiar place that he must occupy as filling the awful gap created by a corrupt priesthood.

Blessed be God, He is never without resources. If one order of things breaks down, bringing sorrow upon men rather than blessing, He creates another. The subsequent history will show us the miserable failure of kingship. In whatever position God may place man, and however highly He may favour him, failure quickly ensues. We must learn from this that there is but One whom God can trust — our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is our rest and confidence today and for ever.

The Night Revelation (1 Samuel 3:1-21)

The story of the night revelation to the child Samuel has always appealed touchingly to devout readers of Holy Scripture. There are lessons in it of the deepest importance to us all. When the disciples asked the Lord, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? He called a little child to Him, and set him in the midst of them, saying, "Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:1-5). He said more than this. Following up the thought He showed that the spirit of the little child is always delightful to God. Perhaps if we were more simple in our attitude, more unquestioning in our faith, and more ready to obey, we should learn the mind of God more rapidly than we do.

In this chapter Eli presents a solemn contrast to the child Samuel. It is not without significance' that it is stated that, "his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see"; the physical infirmity was only too sadly a picture of his 'spiritual condition. We read in 2 Peter 1:1-21 of the man who is not "adding" to (or in) his faith, that he is "blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." Oh, the terribleness of it There is no standing still in spiritual things; one is either going forward or going backward, continually. Let both reader and writer beware.

It is also suggestive that the lamp of God was going out in the sanctuary. Aaron and his sons were to "order it from evening to morning before Jehovah" (Exodus 27:21). Why the failure in Eli's day? The lamp is the symbol of testimony, and Israel's testimony to the nations was at a low ebb at that time through the sinful condition of the people, and the corruption and weakness of their leaders. Very soon after this a dying saint exclaimed, "The glory is departed from Israel" (1 Samuel 4:21), and she was right. Nothing is a testimony for God unless it be pure and holy. This is true both of assemblies and of individuals.

Eli's lack of discernment is also noted. He did not recognise that God was speaking to the child. Yet the call was thrice repeated. Poor Eli blundered quite as seriously in his dealings with Hannah. He supposed her to be drunken, when in reality she was a sorrowful woman pouring out her heart to her God (1 Samuel 1:13-16). Nearness to God was intended to give the priests good judgement concerning holy and unholy, unclean and clean, so that they might instruct the people (Leviticus 10:9-11). The divine arraignment of the priesthood in the closing book of the Old Testament might well be studied here with profit: "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of Jehovah of hosts. But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law," etc. (Malachi 2:7-8). How is it with us? Grace has put every believer into the priestly place, but are we in the power of it? Are we spiritually discerning?

Doubtless that which happened in Shiloh that night was altogether without precedent. Indeed there had been no divine manifestations of any kind for some time in Israel, So this chapter tells us in its opening verse. But had Eli been spiritually alert, he would have recognised the act of God sooner than he did. The poor old man was sleepy, and could only say repeatedly, "Lie down again." "Let us not sleep as do others says the Apostle, "but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:6). Nothing is more easy than to develop a drowsy spiritual condition. To all who are in that condition, the voice sounds like a trumpet-call, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from among the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee" (Ephesians 5:14). The Lord in His infinite mercy preserve us from that deplorable state which would lead us drowsily to quiet others who are awake. God forbid that we should ever say to one to whom He is speaking, "Lie down again."

At last the aged priest realised that Jehovah had called the child and so bade him say, if the voice came again, "Speak Jehovah, for Thy servant heareth." It was an appalling message to which Samuel listened. Jehovah was about to visit in wrath Eli and his house because of the vileness of his sons, and because he restrained them not. It may strike some readers as strange that such a message should have been given to a child. Could not Jehovah find an older person for this service? John's Second Epistle comes to mind here. It was written to give us the mind of the Lord concerning false teachers and their destructive doctrines. But to whom is it addressed? not to "the well beloved Gaius," but to "the elect lady and her children." These must be instructed to make a

stand for the truth. They must close their doors, and refuse even the ordinary civilities of life to those who "abide not in the doctrine of Christ." National amiability might suggest that this is men's work, and that women and children might well be spared such stern action but it is important to understand that when evil is stalking abroad none can be permitted to excuse themselves. Neither age nor sex is a plea for unfaithfulness.

It was a painful shock for the lad Samuel to have to tell next morning what Jehovah had spoken. No further sleep had he that night. It was his first introduction to the solemn realities of service and testimony for God in an evil world. In reply to Eli's inquiry, Samuel told him all; but he simply bowed the head, saying, "It is Jehovah, let Him do what seemeth Him good." there was no rousing up to energetic action; no real sense of the evil and dishonour of the whole sorrowful business.

This was the beginning of many revelations to Samuel. Samuel grew, and Jehovah was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground . . . And Jehovah appeared again in Shiloh: for Jehovah revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of Jehovah" (1 Samuel 3:19-21). Had the circumstances been normal, God would have spoken to the people in and through the High Priest, according to His own appointment. But this being impossible, He spoke to and through the man with the willing ear. This is His way still. Our Lord said when giving utterance to His parables, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 13:9). Seven times in the addresses to the churches in Asia we meet with the words, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches." This is clearly an individual thing. The mass in Christendom are more than ever indifferent to the will of the Lord, and the leaders in too many cases feed their followers with lies, for the predicted apostasy comes on apace. But the man who has the willing ear shall we say, the circumcised ear?) will not fail to make advance in the knowledge of God and His word, to his own deep blessing, and to the spiritual advantage of all who are privileged to listen to his testimony, Each one of us might well pray: —

"O give me Samuel's ear —

The open ear, O Lord,

Alive and quick to hear

Each whisper of Thy word;

Like him to answer at Thy call,

And to obey Thee first of all."

The young prophet did not fail to get the respect of the people. To every exercised heart it became apparent that although God in His righteousness was judging the priesthood He was not abandoning His people. In the sovereignty of His love He had established a new link between Himself and them in the person of Hannah's first-born. "All Israel from Dan even unto Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of Jehovah."

In his subsequent ministry of intercession, Samuel is remarkably reminiscent of Moses Jeremiah 15:1), and as the forerunner of the King he is equally suggestive of John the Baptist.

The Capture of the Ark

Samuel had no part in the sorrowful doings which culminated in the loss of the ark, but it is quite impossible to pass over the disaster, while meditating upon the life of the prophet. In Darby's Translation, 1 Samuel 4:1-22 : opens with the words, "What Samuel had said happened to all Israel." We thus learn that the defeat of the people, the death of the sons of Eli, and the loss of the ark were Jehovah's fulfilment of the heavy message which he gave to the temple child in the midnight revelation.

The people were utterly wrong with God, and the evil of their leaders was glaring, yet they were so insensible to their condition that they ventured upon a war with the Philistines only to be abandoned by Jehovah to calamity and disgrace. About four thousand men of Israel were slain at a place which afterwards, in happier days, became known as Ebenezer, which means, "Hitherto hath Jehovah helped us" (1 Samuel 7:12). A faithful and compassionate God is always ready to help those who first judge themselves, and then make their humble appeal to His mercy. But fleshly pride and insensibility of heart He will lay low; Let us not forget, beloved brethren, that "Israel's God is ours," and that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Romans 15:4).

When the defeated host returned to camp, the elders said "Wherefore hath Jehovah smitten us today before the Philistines?" "Wherefore," indeed. Was not the reason apparent? Can a holy God sanction evil in His people, and also deliver them from their foes? They acknowledged Him in terms ("Jehovah hath smitten us"), but they had no real sense of having to do with Him at all.

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2) is a principle of the greatest importance. To be in special relationship with God is at once deeply blessed and deeply solemn. "Begin at My sanctuary," said the God of the Old Testament (Ezekiel 9:6); "Judgement must begin at the house of God," says the God of the New (1 Peter 4:17). If His people lose sight of what is due to Him, it is ever present to His mind, and He will not fail to judge the dishonour to His holy name.

Israel's leaders had a remedy. "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of Jehovah out of Shiloh unto us, that when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." Mark the word "it," twice repeated. It is true that the ark went before them when they crossed the Jordan, and also went with them when they compassed the walls of Jericho, but was it the ark that wrought for them on those occasions, or was it GOD? God was now forgotten, and a mere symbol had taken His place in their wayward minds. The ark was to them a mere charm or mascot.

A terrible evil is before us in this record. God displaced by an outward and visible sign — the very essence of idolatry! Even the light of the Gospel has not Preserved Christendom from this folly and sin. Baptism and the Lord's Supper — precious ordinances of divine institution, blessedly suggestive to the spiritual mind, are the very real dependence of multitudes in our day. Not these only. "Sacred" images and pictures have been brought forth on many a day of disaster (such as a volcanic eruption or an outbreak of disease), and have been paraded through the streets in order to ward off that which the People feared. Oh, the horror of it to Him Who has made Himself known in the person of His Son, and Who has withal given to men His Written word.

Israel added to the evil by bringing amongst them Hophni and Phinehas. These vile men were in charge of the sacred vessel, an affront which an indignant God was not slow to avenge.

Israel's shout of exultation when the ark arrived, and the dismay of the Philistines when they heard of it, testified that neither the one nor the other had any sense of the reality of having to do with God. The Philistines said, "God is come into the camp." They forthwith reminded themselves how Israel's mighty God had broken the might of the Egyptians, and they nerved themselves to fight as they had never fought before. But upon their own showing they were now going to fight God! In their superstitious ignorance they mistook a symbol for the very Deity itself! Only Israel's frightful condition explains the second victory, when "there was a very great slaughter: for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen." Philistine defiance would have met its just due had not God's own people needed to be taught a terrible lesson. The ark in which they trusted was taken, "and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain." In Psalms 78:1-72, it is recorded, He "delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand" (Psalms 78:61). The disaster was overwhelming. Could Moses and Aaron ever have believed that "the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth" (Joshua 3:11) could have become the spoil of a pagan foe?

The news of the capture of the ark caused the death of Eli. But why did he suffer it to be taken to the war? Weakness and irresolution were the ruin of the aged priest. Barnabas, one of the choicest of New Testament saints, resembled Eli in this. May God in His mercy preserve us from this snare, so congenial to ease-loving nature. May He grant us grace to put the foot down firmly where divine interests are at stake.

Yet Eli was at heart a pious man. It was the mention of the ark of God rather than the slaughter of his sons which overcame him. In like manner, it was the loss of the ark which brought premature labour and death upon the wife of Phinehas. Whatever the character of her husband, she formed part of the true hearted remnant of that day. "Ichabod," said she, when her son was born, "the glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken." The blood-stained mercy-seat was in the hands of the enemy; on what ground did Israel now stand with God? Both Eli and the dying woman felt that everything was ruined.

Do we feel dishonour to the name of the Lord, and the condition of God's people, as deeply as these devout souls of old! Let us exercise our hearts and consider.

The Arkless Tabernacle

The ark having gone into captivity, Israel's whole religious system lay in ruins. The ark was the visible symbol of Jehovah dwelling in grace in the midst of His people. No more expressive type of the promised Christ existed in Old Testament days. The materials of which it was made spoke of His Person; the Shittim wood of His incorruptible humanity, and the gold of His deity. The mercy-seat spoke of His great propitiatory sacrifice accepted by God, for the atoning blood was never absent from it; and the contents of the ark — the budding rod the pot of manna, and the tables of the Covenant — spoke of the various offices which He is graciously pleased to fill. When the tabernacle became arkless, it might justly be said that Jehovah had departed. The proper ministry of the priesthood became impossible. How could the ordinances of the Day of Atonement be observed, seeing that the throne of Jehovah was no longer in the sanctuary to receive the sprinkled blood! Yet this was the basis of all God's dealings with His people. The foundations were now truly out of course, to the intense grief of every pious soul in the nation.

Be it noted that the ark never returned to the tabernacle. It found no resting place again until Solomon built the temple. Thus there was no resumption of proper priestly services until the reigns of both Saul and David had run their course.

Israel's loss was judgement to the foe. The Philistines in their pride of heart carried the ark into the temple of their fish-god Dagon. In their benighted minds Dagon had triumphed over Jehovah. But the God of Israel soon vindicated His majesty, and made His presence felt. First, Dagon fell before the ark, and then, on being set up again, was broken before it. Moreover, God plagued the inhabitants of the temple-city, Ashdod, so that they were glad to pass the ark on to Gath. Gath also suffered, so that it was removed thence to Ekron. Ekron's cry of dismay led to the suggestion to return the ark to Israel, their mode of procedure — the use of two milch kine with their calves tied up at home — making it abundantly clear that it was no mere epidemic that had broken out amongst the Philistines, but that Jehovah's hand had come down upon them.

Again Jehovah's hand went forth in judgement, this time upon His own people, for their irreverence in peering into the sacred vessel. Accordingly the ark of God had to move on again, and for many years it abode in the house of the pious Abinadab in Kirjath-jearim, to the great blessing of his household (1 Samuel 7:1-2). These people felt they had God with them of a truth, albeit they did not confound the symbol with the reality.

The priesthood was never restored to its former position. It was never again the chief link between Jehovah and His people. The unfaithfulness of Eli and his sons not only caused the holy office to Pass into the hands of another branch of Aaron's family, but it brought about the forfeiture of the exalted position which the priesthood had enjoyed since the death of Moses (see Numbers 27:18-23). When the king came upon the scene — not Saul, the man of the people's choice, but David, the man of Jehovah's choice — it was he who became the link between the people and their God, and the priesthood fell into quite a secondary place. This was foretold in 1 Samuel 2:35 It has frequently been remarked that God never repairs a ruined order. Instead, in its place, he sets up something new — something that will yield even greater blessing to His people, and which marks also, a further development in His blessed ways.

We pass over the ruinous episode of Saul, and what do we find? The King is the prime mover in everything pertaining to the worship of God. Unlike Joshua, he did not stand before the priest, going out and coming in at his word. It was the King who proposed to bring up the ark from Kirjath-Jearim to Zion, and on that memorable occasion he danced before Jehovah clad in a linen ephod, and when the offerings had been offered, "he blessed the people in the name of Jehovah of hosts” (2 Samuel 6:1-23). Delightful type of Him, who, when all the purposes of God concerning Israel are brought to completion will bear the glory and be a priest upon His throne (Zechariah 6:13). It was the King, not the High Priest, who appointed Asaph and his brethren to minister before the ark continually; while the High Priest and his associated priests were appointed to serve at the tabernacle in Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16:37-43). When the plague came upon the nation as the result of the numbering, it was David, not the High Priest, who stood in the breach and offered sacrifice. Contrast 1 Chronicles 21:26; with Numbers 16:46-48. When the time came for the temple to be built, it was one king who charged another king (David and Solomon — 1 Chronicles 22:6), and the High Priest appears to have had no say in the matter. It was the king again who numbered the Levites and appointed to them their services (1 Chronicles 23:24-27), and it was he

also who distributed the priests with reference to their work (1 Chronicles 24:3). The singers were separated to their service by the king and the captains of the host (1 Chronicles 25:1). In 1 Chronicles 28:16, the chief priests are named among the chief officers of the kingdom, as if they were that only. What a transformation as compared with the days of Moses and Aaron. What a significant change in the ways of God.

But it was long after Eli's failure before the new order was established. What was the divine provision meanwhile? Samuel. He — the man of God, "God's emergency man" — filled the gap, and became the link between Jehovah and his desolate people. Truly our God is never without resource. The erstwhile temple child entered into the mind of God about the condition of things; the ruin of everything by the unfaithfulness of man gripped his soul, and he gave himself up to a ministry of intercession (1 Samuel 7:5, 1 Samuel 7:8; 1 Samuel 12:23). This at all times is very precious in the eyes of God. Many centuries later, when the kingly order had grievously failed, and was about to be set aside until the day of the Lord Jesus, Jehovah made reference to Samuel thus: "Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people; cast them out of My sight," etc. (Jeremiah 15:1). Mark the link with Moses. When the people ruined themselves by the worship of the golden calf they were saved by Moses' pleading (Exodus 32:33). Later, when the priestly order broke down, and ruin once more ensued, the people were maintained before God by the intercession of Samuel.

The value of a ministry of intercession thus stands divinely emphasised. It is God's delight. But this Precious ministry can only really be exercised by those who enter into God's thoughts concerning the times in which they live. Thus, those who today have before their souls the divine pattern — the Church as the Holy Spirit established it at the beginning, and who realise its utter failure as a witness for God in the world, are alone able to intelligently have dealings with God about it. But this is open to us all. May the Lord graciously increase the number of those who are spiritually able to fill Moses' and Samuel's part in these last days of the Christian era.

The Gathering at Mizpeh

The Singular position of our prophet in relation to the people of God is clearly seen in connection with the spiritual revival and national deliverance so graphically described in 1 Samuel 7:1-29.

While the ark was in Kirjath-jearim the people realised little by little the calamity which had befallen them, and how disorganised in consequence were all their relations with their God. Ultimately, "all the house of Israel lamented after Jehovah. This is truly delightful. Welcome discipline which can produce such a result! They missed God. They felt the distance that now subsisted between themselves and Him.

The twenty years referred to is not the length of time that the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim. As a matter of fact, it was there more than forty years. David in his childhood "heard" of it when living in Ephratah (Bethlehem); during his afflictions he vowed to Provide a resting place for it; when he became established upon the throne he found it (Psalms 132:1-18) and brought it up to Zion with rejoicing.

The twenty years was the period of divine working in Israel's heart, which led to the complete restoration to Jehovah that is now before us. Mark it well, it was really Jehovah they wanted, and no mere symbol, for the ark is not once mentioned in connection with the wonderful doings in

Mizpeh. Israel was at that juncture spiritually in advance of multitudes in modern Christendom, with their reliance upon sacramental symbols, not to mention pictures, images, and other follies.

Jehovah had delivered His ark from the hand of the Philistines, but He had not yet delivered His people. The time had now come. Note the humiliating contrast with Joshua's day. Then the people were able to go forward, conquering and to conquer, no enemies being too Powerful for them; now their highest expectation was that they might be strengthened to cast off the yoke of but one of Canaan's many peoples. Similarly, we read in the Book of the Acts, with its story of the all-conquering Church of God, and we lie low as we contrast it with what we behold in our own day.

Samuel's voice is now heard. "If ye do return unto Jehovah with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto Jehovah, and serve Him only: and He will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines." Observe the words, "with all your hearts" and "prepare your hearts." Note too the word "only." Nothing external or superficial could be accepted. Out of the heart are the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23), and the heart must be really reached.

We must pause here. Brethren, has our God our affections in their entirety. Do we "serve Him only"? Remember the reply of the Blessed One to the tempter in the wilderness, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve” (Matthew 4:10). ONLY! ONLY! Has the world any place with us. Has self? Have we indeed seen the displacement of everything in the death of Christ. Paul saw this, and could say with holy enthusiasm, "This one thing I do” (Php_3:13).

No deliverance came to Israel until they put away Balsam and Ashtaroth. In like manner today, if aught has been suffered to come in between our souls and God, so that the joy that once we experienced has fled, there is nothing for it but the complete abandonment of the evil, or the casting out of the intrusive thing. It is not sufficient to sing lustily at a Public meeting: —

"Revive Thy work, O Lord,

Thy mighty arm make bare."

Action — vigorous, stern action, is required. God ever waits to bless His people, and lead them on from victory to victory, but the platform must first be cleared of every offensive thing.

Samuel next summoned the nation to Mizpeh, "and I will pray for you unto Jehovah." Here is one who kept right with God during the years of Israel's deplorable declension. He did not suffer himself to be carried along by the prevailing current. Thus he was ready for service to the people of God when the time became ripe for it. Beloved Christian reader, if the whole Church of God wax cold, and turn aside from the right ways of the Lord, why should you not Personally be right with God, and so "be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work?" (2 Timothy 2:21)

The procedure at Mizpeh was remarkable. "They gathered together at Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before Jehovah, and fasted on that day, and said there, "We have sinned against Jehovah." We know of no precedent for this, but we are persuaded that the out-poured water gave pleasure to the heart of God. If there is one thing more dear than another in the Book of the Acts, it

is that the Spirit of God is absolutely sovereign in His actings. What He is graciously pleased to do at one time furnishes no clue to what He may do at another. He may use Peter awhile, and then turn abruptly to Stephen. He may commission Philip, and quickly send forth Peter again. Then He calls out a new labourer in the person of Paul, and acts through him more extensively than through any other. The gift of the Spirit also to Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles differs widely in its manner (Acts 2:1-47; Acts 8:8). With regard to the deliverance of imprisoned witnesses, on one occasion the doors were opened the same night (Acts 5:19); on another not until the night before the promised execution (Acts 12:1-25); and on yet another, no angels were employed but an earthquake (Acts 16:1-40). Truly, "the wind bloweth where it listeth" John 3:8), but the Church has never learned the simple lesson, or she would never have clogged herself with routine and officialism.

The pouring out of water was the acknowledgement of utter weakness and emptiness. This figure was employed by the wise woman of Tekoah in her reasoning with David. "We are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again" (2 Samuel 14:14). The action being altogether without precedent serves to show that Israel perceived what was morally suitable to the circumstances of the moment. Such an acknowledgement of weakness cannot fail to bring blessing from God. In the spiritual realm, felt weakness is power, as the Apostle lets us know in 2 Corinthians 12:1-21. As Hannah also said, "they that stumbled are girded with strength" (1 Samuel 2:4). Is it not a singular lesson to have to learn that our self-sufficiency is our undoing? God can use those who are "not anything," i.e, nothing (1 Corinthians 3:7). God alone counts, whether now or in ages past. When weakness calls Him in, all is well.

Samuel at Mizpeh is wonderfully suggestive of Him who is our all in all. As prophet, he admonished the people, as priest he offered sacrifice on their behalf; and he judged them as though he were the king. God's "Emergency man," most assuredly.

"Ebenezer" Indeed!

When God moves, Satan becomes active. A spiritual revival arouses his intense hostility. Nothing is so distasteful to him as to see the people getting right with their God, and placing themselves in a position in which He can bless them. His invariable practice is, first to endeavour to destroy the work of God, then when it becomes apparent that the thing cannot be done, he seeks to corrupt it. In the history of the Church both methods have been employed.

When the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together at Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel" (1 Samuel 7:7). Here we have the marshalling of the hosts of the enemy, urged on by Satan, who understood better than they the significance of the happenings in Israel's camp. "And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines." Happy change from 1 Samuel 4:1, when, in utter insensibility to their evil condition, they presumptuously provoked conflict with the foe. More happy still their language in the presence of danger. After their first defeat in Eli's day, they said, "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of Jehovah out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." Now they appeal to Samuel "Cease not to cry unto Jehovah our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines." There is a gulf of difference between "it" and "He." Moreover, they now say "Jehovah our God." The sense of relationship with Him has at last been recovered.

Woe to the enemy when he confronts a people who are wholly cast upon their God! Praying Jehoshaphat, surrounded by women and children, secured a victory over the Moabites and their confederates (2 Chronicles 20:13), greater far than his one-time million of armed men would have gained by ordinary military methods (2 Chronicles 17:12-19). Hezekiah was more dangerous to the Assyrians clothed in sackcloth than if he had been clad in a coat of mail. An overwhelming disaster ensued for the insolent invader (Isaiah 37:1-38). In like manner, Israel's very real dependence upon God at Mizpeh brought them a divine deliverance as remarkable as they had ever known. Let us not forget, beloved brethren, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort (or encouragement) of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

Samuel now became the mediator between Jehovah and His people. He "took a sucking lamb and offered it for a whole burnt-offering unto Jehovah: and Samuel cried unto Jehovah for Israel, and Jehovah heard him" (1 Samuel 7:9). The outpoured water had already testified to their sense of utter weakness; the fast was the expression of their self-abasement; the sucking lamb spoke to Jehovah of the Christ who was to come, in and through Whom alone, men are delivered and blessed. This is the only express mention of a sucking lamb being offered to Jehovah in sacrifice, and its moral suitability at this juncture is very apparent. It typified Christ as the One Who was obedient and devoted to God from His youth, offering Himself as a sweet savour on behalf of men who had nothing but wilfulness and disobedience to show.

What lessons are here! Have we ears to hear, and hearts to understand? Is not Israel's Plight in 1 Samuel 7:1-17 a picture of the Church's forlorn condition today? Have we not sinned against our God? Have we not in large measure lost contact with the invisible and the eternal? Are we prepared to lie low before our God concerning these things? And will He not come to the help of those who take the place of self-judgement in His presence, and who plead the Name of His Christ alone?

A great deliverance ensued for Israel. The word in Isaiah 65:24 relative to the day of Millennial blessing, "before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear," became literally true in their case. "And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel — but Jehovah thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfitted them: and they were smitten before Israel." In the very p]ace where they experienced their former disgraceful defeat, involving the loss of the ark, they now experience the delivering power of God. The contrast is great between their carnal shout of confidence when the ark came into the camp, and Jehovah's thunder out of the heavens. Laodicea is suggested in 1 Samuel 4:1-22; Philadelphia in 1 Samuel 7:1-17.

"Israel's God is ours." So we frequently sing, and it is blessedly true. We may, indeed, be very far down the dispensation, and the Church's darkest moments may be upon us, but deliverance and blessing await those who are willing to take a sufficiently low place at the divine feet. The Lord knows how to show Himself strong on behalf of those who put their trust in Him. Our part is to heed the call, to be "zealous and repent" (Revelation 3:19); He will do the rest.

The victory at Ebenezer left no room for human boasting. It was Jehovah's thunder that overwhelmed the enemy; Israel had but to Pursue them, and complete their ruin. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:30). With becoming gratitude, the people erected their

memorial stone between Mizpeh and Shen, saying, "Hitherto hath Jehovah helped us." The Philistines gave no more trouble until the unfaithfulness of Israel's chosen king furnished the opportunity, when again God let them loose upon the guilty nation. The very cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored. Peace prevailed all round, not with the Philistines only. The people were sustained by Samuel's intercession. Who can estimate the value of a man of prayer, whether in times ancient or modern?

Prophet and Judge

An interesting picture of Samuel's general manner of life is afforded us in. 1 Samuel 7:15-17 "And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places. And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto Jehovah." The utter collapse of the old order in Israel is clearly seen. The tabernacle was in the land, and doubtless some successor of Eli, with his Aaronic associates, exercised priestly functions therein, but it is all completely ignored in the passage before us.

Samuel lived in Ramah, which means "heights." There, "above the restless world that wars below," he built an altar for himself, where he enjoyed hallowed communion with Jehovah. It was as if patriarchal conditions had returned (Genesis 12:7: Genesis 26:25). From Ramah, Samuel went forth from time to time instructing and doing justice amongst the people of God, helping to put things right here and there as opportunity offered. But where was the priest, whose moral responsibilities are so plainly shown in Leviticus 10:8-11; Malachi 2:7? He is omitted from the record as though he had no existence.

Samuel's life was characterised by intercession, and the value of it is emphasised in Psalms 99:6 : "Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call upon His name; they called upon Jehovah, and He answered them." The power of it is referred to again just before the people were swept out of the land. "Then," said Jehovah unto me, "though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people; cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth” (Jeremiah 15:1).

Acts 3:22 speaks of Samuel as the first of a line of prophets in Israel. Although there was no ordered succession of them,* as with kings and priests, prophets were never lacking from Samuel's time onward. As the evil of the people developed, God always found for Himself an emergency man, through whom He could address their consciences. This is strikingly seen in such passages as 2 Kings 19:2 and 2 Kings 22:12-14. In the first case, we have Hezekiah sending two of his officers, with the elders of the priests, all covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah concerning the blasphemous words of the haughty Assyrian. Note carefully, that although "the elders of the priests” formed the bulk of the deputation, they were not sent to the High Priest of the day, but to one quite outside their order, viz, the son of Amoz. In the second case, the position is much more remarkable. Josiah, perturbed about the contents of the book which had been discovered in the temple of Jehovah, sent the High Priest himself (with others) to inquire of a woman, Huldah, the prophetess!

{*There appear to have been efforts made to create an ordered succession, for the sons of the prophets are frequently found together in groups, as though for training (2 Kings 2:3, 41, etc.). It is

possible that from amongst these arose the many false prophets who spake in the name of Jehovah, while having no message from Him. These men were greater plague to God's true Prophets than the avowed prophets of pagan deities (Jeremiah 28:1-17). The sovereignty of God, in His choice of instruments, is clearly seen both in Old and New Testament times, but the desire to organise and systematise is inherent in the minds of men, to the hindrance of the testimony of God.}

There is a great principle in all this. It is not officialism that counts with God, but piety. Not through the great ecclesiastics of Christendom is God pleased to speak today to His people's hearts and consciences, but through far humbler souls, who walk before Him, trembling at His word, and who seek to learn His mind and will therefrom. A man may be "on the oversight" (as some express it) and yet not be one through whom God can speak in the spirit of the prophet to His saints. Shall not both reader and writer seek to be a Samuel?

Samuel seems to have made some preparations for the new order that Jehovah meant to introduce when the Kingdom was established, for he dedicated treasure to maintain the house of Jehovah, as David did soon after him (1 Chronicles 26:28). It is interesting to observe also that from him sprang some of those who led the praises of Israel when the service of song was set up in the temple (1 Chronicles 6:33).

We have thus a pious soul, entering with spiritual intelligence into the circumstances of the times, standing apart from the evils which disgraced the people, maintaining his own soul in blissful touch with God, and making ceaseless intercession for his failing brethren. What an example is here ! Need we wonder that this singularly devoted servant of Jehovah has his name recorded by the Spirit in the list of worthies in Hebrews 11:1-40. The memory of such a one is imperishable.

The Demand for a King

It is deeply sorrowful now to discover failure in the man of God, especially when we remember the terrible object-lesson which had come before him in Eli and his sons. But where is there not failure in poor frail flesh? Only in Christ has God seen from first to last that which has given joy to His heart; and, blessed be His name, in Him will be gathered up all the broken threads of human history at the finish. All that Adam, Noah, Moses, Aaron, David, etc., should have been, and were not (albeit they were all types of Christ) will be realised at the end in God's Second Man and Last Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Samuel beginning to feel the weight of his years, "made his sons judges over Israel" (1 Samuel 8:1). No mention of any word from Jehovah. and no record of any prayer on the part of the prophet! Yet this was the man who was conspicuous in his day for his powerful intercession! But why appoint his sons? Moses did not so. When he felt that his term of service was drawing to a close, he said, "Let Jehovah, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in, that the congregation of Jehovah be not as sheep which have no shepherd" (Numbers 27:15-17). This is beautiful, and it shows that a true shepherd heart was found in Moses. But he did not venture to appoint anyone, neither did he suggest his own sons for the service. Indeed, he willingly acquiesced in Jehovah's choice of Joshua. Why did the thought of family succession enter the mind of Samuel? Had not the sovereignty of God been strikingly

manifested in his own case when the successional priesthood was in utter failure? In the Book of Acts, the principle of Divine sovereignty in our own era is repeatedly shown. Stephen and Philip were chosen by the Assembly in Jerusalem to look after widows, and were quickly called of God into the very forefront of the testimony, the one in Jerusalem, and the other in Samaria; Barnabas and Saul were selected by the Holy Spirit from amongst a group of prophets and teachers in Antioch to go forth and evangelise the Gentile world. Apollos was abruptly brought upon the scene quite apart from all other labourers; and so on. This is the way of the Spirit of God, but how feebly has Christendom understood it! Successional order has been the established ecclesiastical principle, to the damage of God's saints, and to the hindrance of the work of God.

Yet Samuel's institution of his sons into the judgeship was well meant. His one desire was to make adequate provision for God's people when he himself could serve them no longer But did not Jehovah know the age of His servant? And did He not care for His people. Let us remember that the people belonged to God, not to Samuel. Do we sometimes feel anxious about the future of those amongst whom we labour? Are we disposed to make provision for them according to our own thoughts? Let us learn the lesson of Samuel's blunder. Creature hands need not be stretched out to support the ark; God is quite able to take care of it Himself (2 Samuel 6:6). Remarkably, the man who spoke of getting old lived nearly fifty years longer He lived to see his sons run their course, and pass into obscurity he saw Saul rise and fall; he anointed David to be king in his room; and he afterwards sheltered him when driven from home by his would-be destroyer. It is important to emphasise these facts. The sin of the people in demanding a king is obvious but it must not be forgotten that the error of the man of God contributed to it. Had Samuel gone quietly on with his service ministering to the people with such strength as God might be pleased to give, the episode of Saul, with all its disastrous results, might never have been. He Who kept Moses strong and vigorous until he was 120 years old (Deuteronomy 34:7) could have sustained Samuel until God's time arrived for the establishment of the new order. We have already seen that it was God's intention to give Israel a king, and apparently Samuel might have continued to serve the people until David — the man of Jehovah's choice — was ready to occupy the throne. Brethren, let us get on with our ministry as helped by God, and leave the tomorrow of His work to Him. The Head of the body, the Church, is still enthroned on high, and from His own hand and heart gifts will continue to be given to His saints on earth until the need is no more.

It is sorrowful to learn that Samuel's sons "walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgement" (1 Samuel 8:3). One wonders that the sons of one so pre-eminently godly should be so evil. With the lessons of Eli and his sons before him, Samuel surely sought that his own household should be a true testimony for God. Is it possible that his going on circuit from year to year explains the breakdown. May God have mercy upon the families of those who, in our own day, are called to travel hither and thither proclaiming the Word of God.

The elders of Israel now waited upon Samuel in Ramah, and said unto him, "Behold, thou art old and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." The bearing of the man of God at this moment was delightful. There was no word of resentment at the charges made against his sons, neither was there any effort put forth to bolster up the order that he had so mistakenly established. "Samuel prayed unto Jehovah." How different everything would have been had he prayed before he made his sons judges. Brethren, is it our holy habit to take everything to God in prayer' Have we really learned that we are utterly dependent upon Him for

every step?

The hand of Satan is surely discernible in Israel's demand for a king, and especially in the wilfulness with which they persisted in the demand after the seriousness of it was pointed out to them. The malignant adversary is ever seeking to forestall God — for mischief of course. The divine purpose concerning a king had now been revealed; Satan would then furnish a king. In like manner he will bring forward the Beast of Revelation 13:1 just before God's time comes to bring out His King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But whatever the measure of forbearance, God always has His way at the last, and every purpose of His love for His own glory, and for the blessing of men is carried into full effect. What rest to the heart to be assured of this.

Saul and the Asses

The man of the people's choice — the man who personated their carnal tastes — now appears. Remarkably, he first comes before us in connection with asses, in striking contrast with the man of Jehovah's choice, who had the care of sheep, and lambs (Psalms 78:70-72). Even the asses Saul lost, and although they were ultimately recovered, it was not he who found them (1 Samuel 9:20). David, on the other hand, at serious risk to himself, recovered a lamb from two ferocious enemies, a lion and a bear (1 Samuel 17:37). How suggestive are the lessons here! The ass is the symbol of poor, turbulent flesh, "For vain man would be wise, though man be born a wild ass's colt" (Job 12:12); and the offspring of man in Israel had to be redeemed with a lamb equally with the offspring of the ass (Exodus 13:13). Sheep and lambs, on the contrary, are the symbols throughout the Word of God of God's own true people. For these, Saul had neither the heart nor the fitness to care. A captain he might be; a shepherd he was not.

He came too of Benjamin — a tribe notorious for its stubbornness in evil (Judges 19:21), and now the smallest of Israel's tribes in consequence (1 Samuel 9:21). His name means asked, for he was the answer to the people's carnal demand. He thus represents the flesh in a remarkable way; but was such a one really fitted to curb the restless evil of a revolted people? Flesh can never put down flesh; have we learned this in our Assembly difficulties? But that which flesh can only aggravate, the power and grace of the Holy Spirit can entirely remove. How often the Church of God has proved this?

Saul seemed unaware of the existence of Samuel, and of the wonderful ways of God in connection with him. In this he reminds us of Belshazzar, who, in his moment of stress, seemed ignorant of the existence of Daniel, spite of the fact that Nebuchadnezzar, his father had some very remarkable experiences in connection with him (Daniel 5:11). But: then Belshazzar was a pagan, while Saul belonged to a people in relationship with Jehovah. The fact is, flesh is never interested in what God is doing, nor in the instruments that He is using. Flesh may hear of them in a languid sort of way, but no impression is made upon the heart. In reality, Jehovah was more interested in Samuel at that moment than in any other person in the world, for he was the man who stood before Him on behalf of His erring people continually. Yet to Saul he appears to have been unknown!

In his difficulty. Saul had apparently no, notion of inquiring of God. It is delightful to us to know that our God is interested in small matters as well as in great. The true child of faith today, if he lost his asses, would not consider the thing too trivial for the Divine notice, for are we not invited in

everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make our requests known to God? (Php_4:6). But Saul was favoured with an excellent servant, who told him there was a man of God in the city to which they were approaching, and he suggested that they should consult him about their journey. Servants played an important part in the blessing of Naaman, the Syrian (2 Kings 5:1-27), from which we may learn never to despise the counsel and ministry of even the humblest messengers.

But Saul had a difficulty. Would not Samuel require payment for his services? “Behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? for the bread is spent in our vessels, and there is not a present to bring to the man of God: what have we" Their resources were well nigh exhausted, for they had been some time from home. The servant replied, "Behold, I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver, that will I give to the man of God to tell us our way. It is hard for poor benighted flesh to rise above the thought of payment. Grace is foreign to its mind. God as a giver is inconceivable to flesh. Yet it is in this blessed character that all the objects of His favour know Him. He gave His only begotten Son (the basis of all other giving); with Him He freely gives us all things; from the same generous grace proceeds the gift of the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). But although flesh always thinks of God as demanding something (read especially Matthew 25:24), it never considers that He should expect much. The best that can be said for Saul's coin is that it was at least a larger sum than the modern small coin with which Christendom's ecclesiastical treasurers are all too painfully familiar.

But it might have occurred to Saul, had he possessed the least idea of the greatness of God, and of the moral dignity of the man who represented Him, that it would have been more becoming to crave a favour than endeavouring to Purchase the information that he required for "a fourth part of a shekel of silver." But flesh is as insensible to moral propriety where God is concerned as it is to grace! The conduct of Saul and his servant suggests that neither the one nor the other had any real sense of having to do with God. This did not augur well for one who was soon to be Israel's King.

Saul's visit to Samuel has furnished us with a glimpse of the usual mode of life of the man of God. But first let us notice the two designations "prophet" and "seer." "He that is now called a prophet was before time called a seer." Put quite simply, the Seer sees something (Ezekiel 13:3); and the Prophet tells something, for it has been frequently remarked that the Prophet is rather a "forth-teller" than a "foreteller." Brethren, what do we see? Can we really say, "We see Jesus, Who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death?" (Hebrews 2:9). are we in the good of our Lord's words in John 16:14-15 concerning the Holy Spirit. "He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine and shall show it unto you"! If the risen and exalted Christ fills our soul's vision, and if by the Spirit's power there lies spread out before us that new world of life and glory of which He is the Centre and the Sun, then we have something to tell. In that case, "we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen" (John 3:11). Let us seek to be, not preachers or lecturers merely, but spiritually Seers and prophets.

The Manner of the King

Why did it not occur to the elders of Israel that as Samuel's sons had proved a disappointment to them, the King might be no better? Is a change of government, whether in times ancient or

modern, a necessary cure for every ill? Why turn from flesh in one form to flesh in another? are we not sometimes as foolish as they when difficulties arise' "It is better to trust in Jehovah than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in Jehovah than to put confidence in princes" (Psalms 118:8-9). Have both reader and writer learned this simple lesson?

In answer to Samuel's prayer, Jehovah laid before him the true nature of the people's demand. It was not so much the rejection of Samuel and his sons as the rejection of Jehovah Himself. The people had grown weary of the theocracy. The wonderful privilege of being in direct relationship with God, and of being under His direct rule was nothing in their eyes, and they were willing to have done with it, and copy the practice of the nations. In like manner has the Church long lost the sense of the exceeding blessedness of union with the invisible Head in heaven, and of the guidance and control of the invisible Spirit in God's house on earth. Hence the insistence on all hands upon the necessity for a clergy, chairmen, and others to take visible control amongst God's people.

"Jehovah said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me and served other gods, so do they also unto thee" (1 Samuel 8:7-8). Jehovah thus shows that the demand for a king was but the climax of centuries of discontent with the position in which His grace had set them. They appear to have been confronted at the time with the threat of an Ammonite invasion (1 Samuel 12:12). Forgetting altogether the lesson of Ebenezer (1 Samuel 7:12), they turn, not to God, but to the arm of flesh. We observe. something similar in Judges 11:1-40. There also the Ammonites were assailing them, and in their distress they turned to Jephthah for aid. When will men — when will we — learn to turn to God alone in the difficulties and perils of life?

"Like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5) were really painful words from the lips of Jehovah's chosen people. It was their glory, could they have appreciated it, that they were not like the nations. Remember what Balaam said concerning them in the first of his four parables. "It is a people that shall dwell alone; and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Numbers 23:9, K.V.). The people of God have always found it difficult to maintain the position of separation to God. The Church has failed as signally in this as Israel. What is now called Christendom is a sorry compound of paganism, Judaism, and Christianity. The arrangements and practices of the religious mass are modelled after the world's pattern, and are as unlike the charming simplicity of the days of the apostles as they could possibly be. Happy are they, however few and humble, who have learned the true nature and character of the Church of God and who seek to walk apart from all that is of the world, the flesh, and the devil. How blessed it will be at the last if the Lord is able to say to any of us, "Thou hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name" (Revelation 3:8).

In answer to the people's demand for a king, Samuel gave them Jehovah's message, wherein is set forth in vivid terms that man in power is. There is monotony in the six times repeated words "he will take." Their sons would be required for the army, their daughters must become his cooks, the produce of their fields and of their flocks would be demanded for the king's support, and so on. It could scarcely be otherwise. How else could the dignity and majesty of the Kingdom be maintained? In the highest days of Israel's prosperity this became intolerable. Accordingly we hear

them saying to the son of Solomon, "thy father made our yoke grievous" (1 Kings 12:4). The greater the glory of the Kingdom, the greater the burden upon the people of necessity.

It is refreshing to turn from the description of man's king in 1 Samuel 8:1-22 to the gracious words of God's king in Psalms 132:1-18. Speaking of Zion He says, "I will abundantly bless her provision, I will satisfy her poor with bread." In the day of John 6:1-71 He gave them a taste of this. Seeing the famished multitudes around Him, He opened His bountiful hand, and with five barley loaves and two small fishes, He satisfied the need of five thousand men: besides women and children, with twelve basketfuls of fragments left over. Do we wonder that the people sought to take Him by force, and make Him King? How delightful for men, after ages of kingly rapacity and oppression, to have found One Who could be a giver to His people! But neither from men nor from Satan would the Christ of God receive the Kingdom: from the hand of God alone will He take it. Then will commence that long era of prosperity and peace which so filled the mind and heart of the writer of Psalms 72:1-20 and which constrained him to conclude with an outburst of praise: "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, Who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be His Glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen" (Psalms 72:18-19. No wonder he added, "the prayers of David the son of Jesse, are ended." From the standpoint of an earthly saint, what could he ask beyond this?

The Coming of Saul

Saul now enters Samuel's home city inquiring, "Is the Seer here?" Jehovah has already prepared His servant for his coming, just as, at a later date, Peter was divinely prepared for the coming of Cornelius' messengers (Acts 10:19-20). Jehovah had even told Samuel the hour Saul might be expected (1 Samuel 9:16). Truly, "Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off" (Psalms 139:2).

The new king had arrived, and Samuel, although knowing how utterly foreign to the will of God the whole business was, must put no difficulties in the way. The man of Israel's choice must be anointed, and take his place at their head. No king ever commenced his reign under more favourable circumstances than Saul. Both Jehovah and Samuel were at hand for his counsel and help if he could appreciate it. Thus the break-down, when it came (and it came all too soon), was altogether the fault of the King himself. The goodness of God in thus placing all His resources at the disposal of the representative of the people's self-will is very wonderful, and might well read us a salutary lesson. For it cannot be denied that we sometimes pursue a vastly different course ourselves when things arise that we are unable to approve. A spirit of dogged opposition is apt to manifest itself, which utterly defeats the end that we really have at heart. Oh, that we could leave matters more completely with God that He may work as seems good in His sight For He never fails to come, sooner or later, to the help of faith.

The maidens told Saul and his companion that they would presently meet Samuel going to offer sacrifice in the high place. These words arrest us, remembering as we do the instructions given in Deuteronomy 12:1-32 and elsewhere, that Israel when come into the land were not to offer sacrifices wherever they pleased, but instead were to bring all their offerings to the place which Jehovah their God should choose to cause His name to dwell there. Shiloh was the divinely appointed centre at the first (Jeremiah 7:12). But everything was now in disorder, through the people's sin. The Tabernacle indeed stood where Joshua established it, but Jehovah had forsaken

it. The ark was elsewhere, so that whatever priestly functions the family of Aaron might be performing on behalf of the people, there was certainly no carrying in of the blood of the sin-offering for sprinkling on the mercy-seat, yet this was the very foundation of all God's dealings with the nation. The new centre had not yet been named. Zion came into view when David became King. It formed part of the new order of things which God then established in sovereign grace. When the temple was built in the days of Solomon, Jehovah deigned once more to dwell amongst His people, filling the sanctuary with the glory of His presence. But for the time being, the pious must walk with God somewhat Abrahamically, and this is what Samuel did. In all simplicity he lived, enjoying personal communion with his God, and serving His failing people as opportunity offered. It was, of course, a very different thing to worship at high places at a later date when the Temple was in being and owned by God. Yet this transgression became common, and even some of the best of the kings tolerated it (2 Kings 12:3; 2 Kings 14:4; 2 Kings 15:4, etc.). It was really serious neglect of the written word of God.

Unless under the stress of most exceptional circumstances, we must not individualise ourselves today. The Church is Christ's body and the Spirit's habitation, and the fellowship of saints is an unspeakable privilege. Indeed, it is one of the outstanding privileges of the dispensation. Those whose consciences are really exercised concerning the will of God may in some instances find fellowship very restricted, but the Lord has graciously said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). The reality and the sweetness of this has been abundantly proved. But if it is really so that in some locality a faithful soul finds not even one willing to walk with him in the right ways of the Lord, he must not "follow a multitude to do evil" (Exodus 23:2). In such a case, he must be prepared to stand alone, assured that God will not forget him. But such a path calls for special grace, and needs to be trodden with the deepest possible humility and self abnegation, lest Elijah's "I, even I only, am left" develop in the soul (1 Kings 19:14). Nothing could be more spiritually disastrous.

"When Samuel saw Saul, Jehovah said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over My people" (1 Samuel 9:17) Had Samuel remembered these words when he went to the house of Jesse at a later date, he would not have said so hastily when he saw Eliab's fine physique, Surely Jehovah's anointed is before Him" (1 Samuel 16:16). He blundered. Eliab was not Jehovah's anointed. One commanding personality was already in failure; Jehovah was not in search of another; the ruddy shepherd lad was more to His taste. "The Lord seeth not as man seeth."

Samuel at once told Saul two things: — (1) that the asses were found, and (2) that he was the destined King over Israel. Such words from a perfect stranger, to whom he had as yet addressed no Inquiry, were a testimony to Saul that he had to do with God from Whom nothing could be hid. Asses and Kingdom were both of interest to Him. What a help it would have been to him in after years had he remembered this! Do we remember it At the feast that followed, Samuel bade the cook set the shoulder of the sacrifice (the Peace Offering) before Saul. What a lesson for his soul, could he have read it as a type, a shoulder speaks of the strength of Christ, upon which faith counts and feeds Paul was in the reality of it when he said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Php_4:13) Saul was about to have tremendous responsibilities placed upon him he would need more than creature strength to carry them aright for the glory of God, and for the blessing of His people. But no man seeks the support of divine grace until he has learned

his own nothingness and insufficiency. Poor Saul never at any moment got down to this.

Zelzah, Tabor, and Gilgal.

At break of day Samuel took Saul apart to the housetop, and said, "Stand thou still awhile, that I may show thee the word of God" (1 Samuel 9:27) Thus God's own voice inaugurated a new day for Israel, but was it to be a better day? Jehovah had said the day before to Samuel, "Thou shalt anoint him to be prince over My people Israel, that he may save My people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon My people, because their cry is come unto Me." The tender compassion of the heart of God comes out here. Whatever the waywardness of His people, however badly they may requite His goodness, He only desires their blessing. Remark, Israel said, "Give us a king to judge us" (1 Samuel 8:6), Jehovah says, "anoint him that he may save My people." Alas for the experiment. Whatever other foes Saul might overthrow, he was helpless in the presence of the particular enemy from which he should have delivered the nation. At the last the Philistines had his head!

Samuel anointed Saul, and gave him the first kiss of allegiance. He forthwith sent him on a journey as instructive in its way as that of Elijah on the day of his translation. He was to meet "signs" (1 Samuel 10:7); but was he able to read them, and profit by them? The Lord once said to His disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear." The mass around them were gross of heart, dull of hearing, and their eyes were closed. The Lord also said, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 13:9-16). Are our eyes and ears spiritually alert in this day? Are we able to enter into the mind of the Lord, and so walk intelligently in a dark world?

Samuel told Saul in advance who he would meet, and what should take place at Zelzah, Tabor, etc. An homely but valuable lesson for the new King. Would that he had learnt it Let us remember that we too have to do with a God from Whom nothing is hid, and with Whom there is no yesterday and no tomorrow. The knowledge of this gives rest to the heart, for it assures us that however surprising some of the circumstances of life are to us, they are not surprising to our God.

At Zelzah, by Rachel's sepulchre, Saul would meet two men, who would say to him, "The asses which thou wentest to seek are found and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son?" The man who had been labouring in vain would thus learn that everything had been done apart from him, and should also be assured of his father's yearning after him, and this at the place which spoke of death and resurrection. When Rachel was dying she called her son Benoni — "son of my sorrow," for she saw the death side of things, but Jacob called him Benjamin — "son of my right hand," speaking of life and power (Genesis 35:18). He who would rightly serve God must first suffer these lessons to penetrate his soul. Our own works are worse than futile-God calls them "dead works": the death and resurrection of Christ is all-sufficient to meet our deepest need; and the Father's heart yearns over every lost one as Luke 15:1-32 assures us. These are the great fundamental principles of Christianity.

Passing from Zelzah, Saul would meet three men at the oak of Tabor (see R.V.) Going up to God at Bethel. Happy proof that although everything was as wrong in Israel as it could be, there was still a remnant who clave to God. Bethel speaks of God's faithfulness; it was there that He told erring Jacob He would never leave him nor forsake him (Genesis 28:15). From the sepulchre

(death) Saul passes on to the oak (strength). What strength it is to one who would walk and please God in an evil day, to know that God has preserved for Himself at least a few who are able to lay hold upon Him, counting upon His faithfulness! Elijah missed this, hence his complaint at Horeb, "I, even I only, am left." The despondent prophet was soon given to know that there were seven thousand besides himself who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:13-18) Somehow the prophet had overlooked them!

Two men met Saul at Zelzah. Two is the number of testimony, and thank God, the testimony is adequate that He Who died for our sins is risen again. At the oak of Tabor, three men came before him. The thought of fellowship is here. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). The three men were not merely going up to Bethel, they were "going up to God." Is the Lord's presence in the midst the paramount thought with us when we assemble with our brethren? Are we able to see beyond the company to the invisible, Faithful Lord?

Faith was not quite extinct in Israel, nor is faith quite extinct today, although the predicted apostasy is now very near. Each of the three men whom Saul met was laden with good things, "One carrying three kids, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine." Here is sufficiency indeed, in which Saul was invited to share. The kids speak of Christ in death; the loaves, of Christ incarnate; and the wine, of His precious blood. The two or three who may come together in any given place today, in dependence upon the Lord may count upon being fed. We share God's good things together. Holding the Head, "all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (Colossians 2:19)

Thus refreshed by the fellowship of pious men, Saul pursued his journey, and presently he found himself in the presence of Israel's most dangerous enemy. "After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, which is the garrison of the Philistines." The enemy encamped upon "the hill of God" — what a condition of things. We also must expect to meet the power of the enemy, and operating, not only outside, but also amongst those who "profess and call themselves Christians." But Saul would meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place (note, "Two" at Zelzah, "three" at Tabor; "a company" now), with instruments of music — "a psaltery, a tabret, a pipe, and a harp." Remarkable. this! Music and song in the presence of the enemy. Why not? The enemy's power is serious, but it need not dismay us. The prophets were prophesying, and when Saul met them, the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him, and he prophesied also. Thus, as an offset to the devil's working, there is the power of the Holy Spirit. John reminds us of this when warning us against false prophets and evil spirits; he says, "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). The victory is thus with God and His own, but meanwhile we must walk in humble dependence up"" the indwelling Spirit. Only thus can we sing in the midst of danger, and only thus can we be preserved.

The lesson for Saul was "God is with thee" (1 Samuel 10:7). What king ever had so favourable a commencement to his career? The Holy Spirit, not dwelling within him, but coming upon him as in the case of the soothsayer Balaam (Numbers 24:2); ever available for his help could he have appreciated it. Alas, for the hopelessness of flesh! Every divine provision is in vain. "Ye must be born anew" (John 3:7).

Saul's present journey finished at Gilgal, the place of Israel's first encampment, when the sharp knives of circumcision were freely used (Joshua 5:1-15). This is the lesson of self-mortification, and no one can render any service to God, be it Saul or any other, who has left unlearned this great elementary lesson. Let Colossians 3:1-25 be carefully and prayerfully read, and let us humbly ask ourselves before God how far we have trained ourselves to carry out its solemn instructions.

Saul was still to be dependent upon Samuel; thus he was instructed to wait at Gilgal seven days, until the man of God arrived, when burnt offerings and peace offerings should be duly offered. Waiting times are a sore test for restless flesh. Two years later, a similar waiting time was the undoing of Saul (1 Samuel 13:12). Patience! Patience! Patience. Everywhere pressed in the New Testament as the most necessary of lessons for souls to learn who would walk with God, and serve Him here below. (Romans 5:3 James 1:3; 2 Corinthians 12:12; 2 Corinthians 6:4; 2 Timothy 4:10)

The Lot at Mizpeh

The place where Israel gathered with contrition and fasting, which resulted in an overwhelming victory over their most dangerous foe (1 Samuel 7:1-17), was again the gathering point for the people that they might have introduced to them the King whom they had demanded (1 Samuel 10:17-27). Samuel put the position very faithfully before them. They had by their demand rejected Jehovah their God who brought them out from the land of Egypt and who had saved them continuously out of all their adversities and tribulations. 'Thus it was not merely the setting aside of their faithful monitor Samuel; it was the setting aside of their God. The theocracy was at an end until the coming in power of the Lord Jesus. Israel henceforth was to be "like all other nations." Low ground indeed for the elect people of Jehovah. But it is ever sadly true that the people of God prefer to walk on lower ground than that which God has marked out for them. Where are we with regard to this?

But matters must go forward now. Accordingly the people were to present themselves before Jehovah by their tribes and by their thousands that the lot might be taken. This was necessary in order that no questions should be raised afterwards. It was true that Jehovah had looked out for them just such a man as they desired; and It was also a fact that the prophet had already anointed him, but not until the Mizpeh gathering did any public dealing take place. The lot was the familiar appeal of the people to God, settling all controversy. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah." (Proverbs 16:33) The last mention of the lot in Scripture is in connection with the appointment of Matthias to fill Judas' place in the apostolic band (Acts 1:26). The Scriptures being now complete, and the Holy Spirit being in personal residence in the Church on earth, the lot has ceased to have any place in the ways of God.

As the lot proceeded, first the tribe of Benjamin was taken, then the family of Matri, and finally Saul the son of Kish. And then the man could not be found! Diligent search having failed to discover him, Jehovah was inquired of, who told them, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff (baggage). This was scarcely kingly dignity, neither was it true modesty. It was rather hypocrisy. Flesh is ever insincere. It hides itself when it should stand forth, and it makes itself very evident when it should be entirely out of sight. We see this sadly illustrated in two of the choicest saints in Bible history. Moses in the Old Testament and Peter in the New. Moses was hasty enough when

he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand, but painfully slow and unwilling when called of God to go into Pharaoh's presence, and demand the release of His people: (Exodus 2:12; Exodus 4:10). Peter was bold enough in the garden laying about him with his sword, but he was cowardice itself when amongst the servant-maids in the High Priests Palace (John 18:1-40.). Never under any circumstances can flesh be trusted to do the right thing for God. It is one of the characteristics of the Christian that he has "no confidence in the flesh" (Php_3:3). When Saul was at last found, "When he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward." To the carnal mind of the people this was admirable, and the earth rang with their shout, "God save the king." We are reminded of another Benjamite, remarkably bearing the same name as Israel's first king, who was strikingly conspicuous amongst his fellows. Hearken to his words. "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more; circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Php_3:4, Php_3:6). Yet more — "I profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers” (Galatians 1:14) But one sight of Christ showed him. the worthlessness of it all, and he was content to lay all his honour in the dust. Having learned that with God nothing counts but Christ, henceforward nothing but Christ counted with him. Happy man!

"Then Samuel told the people the manner of the Kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before Jehovah. And Samuel sent the people away, every man to his house." The book became the standing record, useful indeed when the people became unfaithful in their new position. In like manner God keeps His book today in which is recorded everything relating to us all, and which will be opened to us, as it were, at the Judgement Seat of Christ.

Saul commenced well. He made no effort to assert himself. At the moment he sought no pageantry, but went quietly home to his house and to his farm. A few men "whose hearts God had touched" went with him. Certain factious spirits spoke of him with contempt, "but he held his peace." Samuel, we may be assured, went home to pray. The people might be jubilant but his heart felt solemn and sad. A serious position had been created, the gravity of which Israel was too dull to understand.

The Deliverance of Jabesh-Gilead

Saul's first opportunity to distinguish himself came when peril developed for the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead. The Ammonite King besieged the place, and in response to the people's appeal for terms, he proposed to thrust out all their right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel (1 Samuel 11:1-15).

Numbers 32:1-42 comes to mind here, and the singular request of the two and a half tribes to Moses. Jordan had not yet been crossed, the real enemies of Jehovah and His people had still to be overthrown, yet these tribes sought a portion for themselves where they were. The place was the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, and in their eyes was good for cattle. Material prosperity for themselves, not the glory of God, was the governing motive in their request. “Wherefore," said they, "if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan." Moses was deeply grieved, for he personally longed to go over, and participate in the goodly inheritance that a gracious God had searched out for His people.

Nevertheless he granted the tribes what they asked for.

Jordan is a familiar type of death, but not (as supposed by some) the death of the body, but the death of Christ as applied experimentally to ourselves while still "in the body pent." Thus the Apostle says in (Colossians 2:20, "dead with Christ," and in Colossians 3:1, “risen with Christ." Have we really accepted this position? If we have, then we are already in our soul's consciousness across Jordan. We realise union with Christ in the heavenly places, and we know something of the sweetness of the Apostle's marvellous outburst in Ephesians 1:3 : "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ.'

It is a sorrowful fact, however, that in all ages the people of God have been willing to settle down with something seriously short of the calling of God for them. Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh wished to make their home in the land of Gilead, and many of God's true saints today are satisfied to regard themselves as still belonging to man's order of things, albeit they gratefully acknowledge their indebtedness to Jesus and His blood for their deliverance from eternal ruin.

But to live on the wrong side of Jordan is dangerous. The two and a half tribes experienced this frequently, for in troublous times they were the first to meet the assault of the invader, and they were the first to be led away captive by the King of Assyria (2 Kings 15:29). The men of Jabesh-Gilead were now in sore trouble.

World-bordering is perilous for our souls in this age. It exposes us unnecessarily to the enemy. We are only safe as we take our place definitely outside everything here, as dead to it. When our minds are really set upon things above, with the risen Christ as our sole object, we are proof against the seductions of the world and the devil. A position of compromise, once accepted, lays us open to trouble at every turn.

Nahash the Ammonite had apparently the most profound contempt for the people of God. When he proposed to put out the right eyes of the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel, and furthermore, when he granted them seven days respite to seek help if they could obtain it, it is evident that he considered the nation utterly impotent. To such a condition had Israel's unfaithfulness reduced them in the eyes of their neighbours. How blessed to read, by way of contrast, what is recorded of the early Church — "of the rest durst no man join himself to them, but the people magnified them" (Acts 5:13). This effect was produced by the manifest presence and power of God operating amongst the saints.

But God is ever merciful to His own, whatever sorrows and complications we may bring upon ourselves by our folly. Accordingly the Spirit of God came upon Saul, and all Israel was summoned to go "forth after Saul and after Samuel," and so complete a victory was granted "that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together." Oh, the goodness of our faithful God, Who, whatever the fickleness and evil of His people, never forgets them in their hour of need!

Saul did well in the moment of his triumph. When the people suggested to Samuel that the men who had said that Saul should not reign over them should be put to death, the new King in his clemency said: "There shall not a man be put to death this day: for today Jehovah hath wrought salvation in Israel." He exercised patience towards certain children of Belial in 1 Samuel 10:27; he

showed clemency in 1 Samuel 11:13, and he acknowledged Jehovah in the great deliverance that the nation had experienced. Such was the fair start of the King of Israel's choice. But, alas, for flesh; who can trust it? It was not long ere its evil was fully manifested and the new Kingdom brought to ruin.

Samuel invited the people to go forth with him to Gilgal and renew the Kingdom there. Sacrifices of peace-offerings were offered before Jehovah, and "there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly." Gilgal was the place of the people's first encampment when they entered the land under Joshua, and to which they repeatedly returned in his day. There the sharp knives of circumcision were used, typical of the practical application of death to every working of the flesh. It was fitting therefore that Israel should resort thither after their great victory over the Ammonites. If Saul and the people could have entered into the spiritual significance of the place, and had walked before God accordingly, their whole subsequent history would have been different from what it was.

In like manner, we may indeed have accepted death and resurrection with Christ, but still more is needed; hence the exhortation in Colossians 3:5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness," etc. Here lies the secret of a happy and fruitful life for God.

The End of Judgeship

The King being now established, the Judgeship of Samuel was at an end. It was moreover the close of an era. Paul when addressing his audience in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia tracing God's ways with Israel, said, "He gave them judges...until Samuel the prophet" (Acts 13:20).

Samuel accordingly now retired from the active leadership of the people. The responsibility now rested upon the shoulders of the King. Henceforward he would act simply as the power behind the throne. He would pray for the people, indeed they asked him to do so (1 Samuel 12:19), and he would instruct them as opportunity might be afforded. "God forbid that I should sin against Jehovah in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way" (1 Samuel 12:23). Such quiet service is not to be undervalued in any age. The men who stand forth the most prominently in the work and testimony of God, are not the only factors that count. Even sick persons, who have learned the value of intercession, and who can only serve in the privacy of the home, are a precious asset to the Church of God. The day of Christ will declare how much of the blessing experienced publicly is due in part to the supplications and prayers of those whose faces are never seen, and whose voices are never heard. The time may come when both the writer and the reader of these pages may be denied the honour and privilege of public service for the Lord Jesus, but the time will never come when the honour and privilege of prayer will be taken from us. Epaphras in the Roman prison is an illustration of this (Colossians 4:12-13)

Samuel's final address to the nation is recorded in 1 Samuel 12:1-25. He pointed out to them the constant faithfulness of Jehovah to them from the deliverance from Egypt until that hour. He had never failed them, although they had frequently failed Him. In all the distresses which had come upon them from time to time as the fruit of their sin, He had readily responded to their cry of need, and had granted deliverers to them. Samuel assured them that all would yet go well if they judged once for all their rebellious spirit, and became amenable to the word and will of God. The past could not be recalled, and the King of their carnal desire was before them; it was theirs now to walk humbly in the new circumstances.

He spoke also of himself, and of the manner of his going in and out amongst them from his youth up. "Behold here I am: witness against me before Jehovah, and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken, or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? wham have I oppressed, or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith, and I will restore it unto you." To this the people could only reply, "Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand."

Paul was able similarly to appeal to those who knew him. Witness his parting words to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:18-35), his words to his spiritual children in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:9-11) and his words to Timothy in the last of his inspired epistles (2 Timothy 4:10-11). Our expositions and exhortations have no more value than our lives give them. Of the scribes and Pharisees in our Lord's day, He was constrained to say, "They sit in Moses' seat, all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not according to their works; for they say and do not" (Matthew 23:1-3) How deeply solemn The teaching was good, but the teachers did not correspond to the teaching. Happy the man, be it Samuel, Paul, or any other, who, when the term of his service is drawing to its close, can conscientiously draw the attention of those who know him best to his manner of life from first to last. May God grant us one and all a good finish!

The Downfall of the King

Saul acquitted himself creditably in the matter of the Ammonite invasion, but the real test, whether or not he could walk with God in his new position of exaltation, was yet to come, and it came very soon. After the victory at Jabesh Gilead, he dismissed his huge army of 330,000 men; but two years later he established a small standing army of 3,000, 2,000 of which formed his own personal bodyguard in Michmash, the remaining 1,000 being with Jonathan his son, in Gibeah of Benjamin (1 Samuel 13:1-2). We discern prudence in this arrangement certainly, but scarcely faith, for (as Jonathan said a little later "there is no restraint to Jehovah to save by many or by few" (1 Samuel 14:6). Faith needs no guards.

The real test for Saul developed when the Philistines again got the upper hand of the people of Israel. It was especially for the overcoming of these enemies that Saul was anointed King (1 Sam. 11:16). But in this connection Saul was a miserable failure, and, in the sequel, the Philistines cut off his head, and fastened his dishonoured body to the wall of Bethshan (1 Samuel 31:1-13).

There is a solemn lesson for us all here. It is possible for us to do well in some particulars, and fail deeply in others. There is something that will test every reader of these pages more than anything else. Each one knows in the privacy of his own soul where the weak point lies. Let us profit by Saul's utter collapse, and set a watch against every aperture by means of which the adversary may get at us and overcome us.

The Philistines were more dangerous enemies than the Ammonites or any others, being established on the west side of Jordan in Jehovah's land holding the sea-coast withal. Their name remains stamped upon the country to this day. "Palestine" is a more familiar name to the world than "Canaan." It was in vain for Saul to be victorious over more distant foes, whilst helpless against the Philistines. In like manner, there is but little value in our victories over some evils, while we suffer others more grave in character (could we but see it) to lead us captive at their will.

Jonathan made a move in faith, and smote an enemy garrison, which caused the oppressors to stir. Saul promptly summoned a national gathering, perhaps expecting that the people would come together "with one consent," as when the Ammonites were aggressive (1 Samuel 11:7), and with the same good result. His language, however, was extraordinary. 'Let the Hebrews hear." The Spirit says in the following verse, "All Israel heard say," etc. "Israel" was the name of grace (Genesis 35:10); "Hebrews" was a term merely reminiscent of the fact that Abraham, their father, originally came into the land from across the Euphrates. But many things had happened since Abraham's day. His seed had, by the grace of God, crossed both the Red Sea and the Jordan, and were now God's covenant people in the land of promise. Did not these mighty facts count for something? But Saul had no real sense in his soul of the people's true relationship with Jehovah. It is not surprising that the Philistines should speak of them in contempt as "Hebrews" (1 Samuel 13:19; 1 Samuel 14:11); and it seems morally suitable that the Holy Spirit should so describe the cowards who fled eastward across Jordan when danger threatened (1 Samuel 13:7), and also the traitors who allied themselves with the enemy (1 Samuel 14:21); but should Israel's King so speak of the people of God?

However, the tribes gathered up, but there was no faith, for when they heard that the Philistines were in motion with "thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude," they trembled and scattered, some even hiding themselves "in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks." We are not always prepared for the consequences of a movement of the Spirit of God. There are dangers to be faced, and reproach to be borne, and faith in God's true saints sometimes falters at such moments. The disciples trembled for the consequences when the Lord spoke so trenchantly against hypocrisy and unreality in Matthew 15:1-39, and they said to Him: "Knowest Thou that the Pharisees were offended after they heard this saying? The enemy always will be offended when God is moving, but true faith goes forward, and fears no foe.

But trembling in Gilgal of all places (1 Samuel 13:7) How utterly insensible were Saul and the people to the meaning of that spot. It was there the sharp knives of circumcision were used when the people first entered Canaan — the place where, at least in figure, flesh met its unsparing judgement. Brethren, we have nothing to fear when flesh is duly mortified with us. God's presence is known in power where evil is thus disallowed, and those of the contrary part are made to feel that the power is really there. Gilgal is a sure starting-point for victory.

Now came the test for the unhappy King. Samuel had promised to come within seven days. As the seventh day wore away, and the prophet did not arrive, Saul's Patience utterly gave way. Poor flesh, ever restless, unbelieving and turbulent. Saul recalled how Samuel offered a burnt-offering on an earlier occasion in Gilgal (1 Samuel 10:8); he would now do the same. But Saul was not Melchizedek. What place had the burnt-offering in his mind that he should act thus? It could have been little else than a talisman, as the ark was to the people in the day of Hophni and Phinehas (1 Samuel 4:6). Brethren, it is GOD that counts, and if the outward and visible things of His own ordinances are suffered to displace Him in our minds, they become positively mischievous in our carnal hands.

What were Saul's fears? These are expressed in his string of excuses to Samuel who came upon the scene as the offering was concluded. First, "I saw that the people were scattered from me." He

dreaded being left alone. But what was the value of men who had no faith? The Tachmonite lifted up his spear with success against eight hundred (2 Samuel 23:8), and Jonathan and his armour-bearer assaulted the whole host of the Philistines. Do we fear to be left alone, forsaken, it may be, in our service and testimony for God? Second, Saul said, "I saw ... that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash." His eye was thus upon the might of the foe. Third, "I saw . . . that thou camest not within the days appointed." He thus had confidence in Samuel, but alas! the human prop was not there. But GOD was there: The poor king thus saw the defection of the people, the power of the enemy, and the absence of the man upon whom he leaned, but he saw not God. By way of contrast, listen to Paul in 2 Timothy 4:16-17 "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." The brave old veteran could moreover face the possibilities of the future thus, "and the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom: to Whom be glory for ever and ever. — Amen." What a contrast between these two men of the same nation, of the same tribe, and bearing the same name.

Paul felt increasingly that the greatest and most important of all lessons for the soul to learn is patience. "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience" (2 Corinthians 12:12). "Signs and wonders, and mighty deeds" follow in the verse, but "patience" holds the foremost place. "In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience" (2 Corinthians 6:4). "Let patience have her perfect work," says another Apostle, "that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:4).

Saul found himself after all, spite of desertions, surrounded by Six hundred men (1 Samuel 13:15). Gideon had but half that number when he ventured forth to attack the camp of Midian (Judges 7:7). David's band of heroes numbered but four hundred (1 Samuel 12:2), but see what they accomplished.

The kingdom was now forfeited. It only remained for Samuel to Pronounce the divine sentence. "Thou has done foolishly: thou has not kept the commandment of Jehovah thy God, which He commanded thee: for now would Jehovah have established thy Kingdom over Israel for ever. But now thy Kingdom shall not continue: Jehovah hath sought Him a man after His own heart, and Jehovah hath commanded him to be captain over His people, because thou hast not kept that which Jehovah commanded thee." The righteousness of the sentence was fully demonstrated by the wilfulness of the unhappy king in the subsequent expedition against Amalek (1 Samuel 15:1-35). The man of the people's choice must now give place to another.

There is but One Whom God can absolutely trust in the place of power. David was but a feeble type of Him. He who was patient and obedient during the years of His humiliation, will rule in perfect righteousness for God in a day soon to come. Then the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Come, Lord Jesus.

Samuel's Last Visit to Saul

The utter hopelessness of the man of the people's choice now became manifest. The failure to exterminate the Amalekites, root and branch, proved that the will of God had no real place in his

heart. It was to his own advantage to retain rich spoil, and so it was retained. In Saul is illustrated the truth of the solemn words in Romans 8:7-8 : "The mind of the flesh is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be, so then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

1 Samuel 14:47-52 gives us an epitome of Saul's accomplishments as King over Israel. He was essentially a man of war, and was in the main successful in his campaigns. But he did nothing thoroughly. He never reached the root of things. for example, he vexed" the Philistines amongst other foes, but he never subdued them, else there would not have been "sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul," and he “smote the Amalekites," but he did not destroy them. Surrounded thus by enemies vexed but not broken, "when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him." It is impossible to discover the exercise of faith in this; it is simply flesh making use of flesh

The Spirit now devotes a whole chapter to the expedition against Amalek, in order to make it absolutely clear why Jehovah rejected Saul, and the righteousness of it. The sentence of God had long gone forth against this inveterate enemy of His people. At Rephidim, Jehovah said that He would have "war against Amalek from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16): and Moses, in his parting charge to Israel said, "Thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it" (Deuteronomy 25:19). All that was wanting was a word from Jehovah as to the precise moment for the execution of the terrible sentence, and the needed word was sent to Saul by means of Samuel.

The instructions were clear and unequivocal. Samuel said to Saul, "Jehovah sent me to anoint thee King over His people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of Jehovah. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." Thus nothing whatever was to be spared. Adversaries of Holy Scripture have sometimes declaimed against the severity of Jehovah's instructions to Israel concerning their foes. If God is love, why should He bid His people act in such a manner? The answer is very simple, "God is light," as well as love. The nations in and around Canaan were so deeply impregnated with such terrible evils that they constituted a moral ulcer in the midst of the earth, and it was mercy to others, as well as righteousness in God to destroy them utterly, after enduring them with much long-suffering. How much of a cancer does the knife of a skilful surgeon spare? It was largely due to Israel's failure to do their work thoroughly that they soon became so corrupt themselves. The evil influence of their neighbours in time brought down the judgement of God upon His own people.

Amalek is a type of the flesh, and with flesh God can make no terms. In it dwells no good thing (Romans 7:18); the sin that is inherent in it was divinely condemned in the sacrifice of Christ (Romans 8:3); and Christians are viewed as having for themselves, “crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 5:24), Which means that they have accepted the sentence of God against the evil thing. Nothing remains but to be unsparing with all its workings day by day (Colossians 3:5-9).

Saul and the people "utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword," and "Everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly"; but the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, they would not utterly destroy them." Alas, for Saul When his murderous heart went out against Ahimelech for his supposed sympathy with David, he was far more thorough in his work. At Nob he smote "both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword" (1 Samuel 22:19)

Saul's behaviour suggests terrible possibilities for ourselves. It is easy to condemn the gross manifestations of flesh, as drunkenness, fornication, and such like, while tolerating other manifestations as vanity, levity, gossip, etc. Who but the Spirit of God would have put variance, emulations, and envyings in the same category with fornication, murders, and revellings (Galatians 5:19-22)? Yet all these things spring from the same root of incorrigible evil.

When Jehovah told Samuel what Saul had done, and that he could be no longer king, the prophet was so grieved that "he cried unto Jehovah all night." In Jeremiah 15:1, Samuel is divinely quoted as one of Israel's conspicuous men of prayer. But prayer was in vain now. Saul had been fully tried, and had been found wanting. With every conceivable advantage he had hopelessly failed, and nothing remained but to pass sentence. Sad work for Samuel, who apparently sincerely loved the erring king. When he went in search of him, he heard that he had been to Carmel, and had "set him up a place," presumably a memorial pillar to commemorate his victory, for flesh ever seeks its own glory. Samuel at last found him in Gilgal, the place of circumcision (Joshua 5:1-15). If Saul had only known the lesson of Gilgal-self-judgement, how different his history would have been. With pious gush he met the prophet saying, "Blessed be thou of Jehovah: I have performed the commandment of Jehovah." This was a lie, and Saul knew it well. Asked what was the meaning of the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen, he replied that the people had spared the best of them to sacrifice unto Jehovah. In 1 Samuel 15:9 the sacred historian says "Saul and the people, spared," etc. Like Adam in Eden, rather than confess his own sin, he put the blame elsewhere.

But Such a plea could not be accepted. A king must rule, or abdicate. He must teach the people what is right, and also get the right thing done. "Vote-catching" will not do for God. "I feared the people," says Saul 1 Samuel 15:24, "and obeyed their voice." The chief priests and elders feared the people in our Lord's day (Matthew 21:23-27). All such persons, by their own confession, are utterly unfit for the seat of power. David in his "last words" describes the ideal king thus: He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (2 Samuel 23:3). In the matter of Jonathan eating the honey, we have the people withstanding the king, and insisting upon what was comely and right (1 Samuel 14:41); now to Samuel he complains that they constrained him to do what was disobedient and wrong. How deeply humiliating for an anointed king! The perfect ruler will not be seen on earth until the Man at God's right hand comes forth in all His majesty and power. But shall we not seek meanwhile to walk in the fear of God, and seek above all things to do that which is well-pleasing in His sight? "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso trusteth in the Lord shall be safe" (Proverbs 29:25).

To Obey is better than Sacrifice

In few but telling words Samuel reminded Saul of Jehovah's dealings with him in the past, and of his flagrant disobedience to His word. It was no mere expression of his own opinion: I will tell thee what Jehovah said to me this night" (1 Samuel 15:16) When Saul was little in his own sight, God made him head over the tribes of Israel. There was indeed a day when Saul spoke of himself as belonging to the smallest of Israel's tribes, and to the least of the families in that tribe (1 Samuel 9:21), but that day was a long way in the background as far as his feelings were concerned. He was now, in his own esteem, a great military commander, able to call more than 200,000 men to his standard. He had become one of the notables of the earth, a man to be feared. Uzziah fell into the same snare, after some remarkable victories. "When he was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (2 Chronicles 26:16). With Paul, on the contrary, the sense of his own insignificance and unworthiness grew upon him as the years passed. "I am less than the least of all saints," said he to the Ephesians (Ephesians 3:8); "chief of sinners," said he to his son Timothy (1 Timothy 1:15). At a certain point in his history he abandoned the name of Saul, preferring henceforward to be known as Paul, which means "little."

Brethren, while we keep small, God has some use for us, but if perchance we become swollen with a sense of our own ability and importance, or even get occupied with our divinely granted gifts, we shall assuredly be passed by when the Spirit is in search of an instrument for His work. He has come from heaven to magnify Christ, not men. The lesson of the little child was set before the disciples by the Lord, in Matthew 18:1-4. Have we learned it' Let us examine ourselves and see.

It was useless for Saul to blame the people for what had occurred, and to plead that the sheep and oxen which had been spared were to be offered in sacrifice to Jehovah. Samuel brushed the excuses aside sternly, saying, "Hath Jehovah as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of Jehovah Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Here we have a principle of vital importance to the people of God in all ages. There is no substitute for obedience. The Man Christ Jesus delighted from first to last in all the will of God, and He has left us an example that we should follow His steps. Our innermost thoughts; the motives of our hearts, and our actions both at home and abroad, should be under the control of the revealed will of God. No plea for usefulness in service can be accepted in extenuation of what we know to be contrary to God and His word. Toleration of evil in our ecclesiastical surroundings, in the hope that good may somehow be wrought, will not do for God. Whatever the consequences to ourselves and to others, we must obey.

Samuel stripped the disobedience bare, and revealed it's true character as God saw it. "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness (i.e., self-will) is as iniquity and idolatry. Saul himself in his better days recognised the evil of witchcraft, and sought to suppress it (1 Samuel 28:3-9) and no graven image appears to have been set up during his reign. But he is now told that his self-will was the equivalent of both witchcraft and idolatry. Why? Because it displaced God for something else. The supremacy of God was thereby challenged by a creature. Self-will — the refusal to hear the divine voice — is as serious an evil today as when Saul stood arraigned by the prophet of God in Gilgal.

"In Gilgal," be it noted. In that place above all others it was proposed to offer the fruit of self-will to God. It was Israel's camping ground at the first, the spot where the sharp knives of circumcision

were used, abiding lesson of the supreme importance of self-judgement on the part of all who would have to do with God. The people later, as insensible of the significance of the place as their earliest king, made Gilgal one of the chief centres of their transgression against God (Hosea 4:15; Amos 4:4-5), Samuel's faithful words produced no repentance in Saul. It is time he said, "I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of Jehovah and thy words," but the emptiness of the acknowledgement was shown in that he said immediately, “Honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel." The truly contrite heart is willing to take the lowest possible place before God. It is inconceivable that honour before men should enter into the mind of one who truly feels his sin. No one could think worse of him at such a time than he thinks of himself. David in Psalms 51:1-19 after being rebuked by another prophet, presents a great and instructive contrast to Saul in 1 Samuel 15:1-35.

The truth is that an uncomfortable position had been created by the intervention of Samuel, and Saul would end it with the minimum of delay. The lesson of the two shavings on the third day and on the seventh day, as in Numbers 6:9, were unknown to him. It is observable that twice he speaks to Samuel of "Jehovah thy God" (1 Samuel 15:21, 1 Samuel 15:30). All sense of relationship to God, and of having to do with Him for himself, seems to have departed from him. Unhappy man.

It is deeply solemn to notice that Samuel uses language concerning the rejection of Saul similar to that which Balaam used concerning the blessing of Israel. Balaam said, "God is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent" (Numbers 23:19). The blessing of Israel was therefore assured, whatever the enemy might do or say, or whatever unfaithfulness might manifest itself in the people themselves. Samuel said, 'The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, for He is not a man, that He should repent" (1 Samuel 15:29). The divine rejection of Saul was thus as irrevocable as the blessing of the nation; for when once God has pledged His word, He never goes back upon it. This blessed fact is the true resting place of faith in all ages.

The execution of the Amalekite king concludes this solemn chapter. Let none doubt the righteousness of this. It is God's great governmental principle that "whatsoever a man soweth, that Shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7), and Agag's cruel sword had filled many a mother's heart with grief. His own turn had now come in the justice of God. So lightly did he feel his position, so utterly unrepentant of his enormities was he, that he approached Samuel quite jovially. "Gaily," is the word employed by Darby "cheerfully" by the Revisers in their margin. But "Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before Jehovah in Gilgal," for God is light as well as love. Another pagan king acknowledged the equity of that which befell him when his captors cut off his thumbs and great toes. To no fewer than seventy kings had he been similarly distressful (Judges 1:6-7)

"Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul: and Jehovah repented that He had made Saul king over Israel."

The Man after God's Own heart

Samuel's famous dictum that to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22) will never be forgotten. If Saul learned nothing from the prophet's words, multitudes have profited by them since his day. "To obey,"' and "to hearken" give the essence of holy living. The most costly sacrifices are no substitute for "obeying the voice of the Lord."

The wilful King — the man of the people's choice — being divinely rejected, Jehovah brought forward the "man after His own heart." How different David was from Saul may be seen in Psalms 119:1-176 (which, being an amplification of Psalms 19:1-14, is almost certainly from the pen of David): "Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments; for therein do I delight" (Psalms 119:35). 1 will delight myself in Thy commandments, which I have loved" (Psalms 119:47). I love Thy commandments above gold; yea above fine. gold" (Psalms 119:127). I opened my mouth and panted: for I longed for Thy commandments" (Psalms 119:131). Oh, that there were such a spirit in both the reader and the writer of these pages.

Not that the psalmist was perfect (only the man Christ Jesus was that), but whatever his failures, his heart was ever towards God, that he might please Him, so he concludes his long psalm thus: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant, for I do not forget Thy commandments."

Samuel mourned deeply and long over Saul, and no wonder, for he could not but be interested in the King he had anointed, and the disappointment was great. But in due course Jehovah aroused him from his grief, and bade him fill his horn with oil and go to the house of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, "for I have provided Me a King amongst his sons" (1 Samuel 16:1-23.).

Bethlehem was the village of Boaz — the Kinsman-Redeemer — the One who took up the cause of the hopeless and ruined. This shows the ground upon which everything was now to be built. Boaz was himself a type of the risen Christ; and David also typifies Him, but as the suffering and rejected by men yet chosen of God, and exalted in His due time. Samuel, inquiring of Jehovah how he could safely go to Bethlehem upon such an errand, was told to take an heifer, and call the people, or at least their elders and Jesse's family, to a sacrifice. Here again we are reminded of Christ. Everything for God's glory and for the blessing of men is founded upon what He is, and what He has done. The greatness of His person, and the infinite value of His sacrifice makes everything sure and stable for ever.

Samuel's visit to Bethlehem was regarded with apprehension by the elders, and they asked him tremblingly, Comest thou peaceably!" What a condition of things then existed in Israel that such a question should be addressed to one who loved the nation so well. But when people are not right with God, even the visit of a messenger of God is dreaded. The Corinthian Assembly would probably have viewed with alarm an unexpected call from the Apostle while they were tolerating gross evil in their midst. He might bring "a rod" (1 Corinthians 4:21).

Arrived at Jesse's house, the prophet was about to make a serious blunder. When Jesse's sons came in, Samuel was struck by the fine appearance of Eliab, and said, "Surely Jehovah's anointed is before Him." But a man “higher than any of the people from his shoulders upwards" (1 Samuel 10:23) was at that very moment on Israel's throne, and a deplorable failure. The divine reply to the prophet's thought is instructive far beyond the circumstances of that day. "Look not an his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for Jehovah seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh on the heart." "Let no man glory in men" (1 Corinthians 3:21).

When did God ever choose the first-born of flesh. The one who by reason of his birth has the appearance of claim is throughout Holy Scripture expressly set aside, that all may learn that blessing is altogether of grace. Not Cain, but Abel; not Ishmael, but Isaac; not Esau, but Jacob; not

Reuben, but Joseph; not Ephraim, but Manasseh; not Aaron, but Moses; and so on invariably in the ways of God.

Jehovah's anointed proved to be one who was regarded as of no account, for the lad David was not even invited to meet the prophet. How suggestive of Him Who was "despised and rejected of men!" His occupation should be noted, "Behold he keepeth the sheep." Again suggestive of our blessed Lord, and in marked contrast with Saul, whose interest was in asses, and even them he lost.

When Samuel learned of the existence of the shepherd lad, he said to Jesse, "Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither." Note the margin: "Hebrew — sit round." The circle would not be complete without David, and he must be in the centre.

Christ is the centre of everything with God. His present place is in the midst of the Assembly. There He leads the song of praise to God (Hebrews 2:12). The consciousness of His presence brings blessing to those gathered, and it is His presence that gives power and validity to their acts. "Where two or three are gathered together unto My Name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). In the in-coming Kingdom age, He will take the place in the midst of "the great congregation" (Psalms 22:25). This means the nations and their kings, all happily submissive to His sway, and all blessed according to the earthly counsels of a gracious God. "All the kings of the earth shall praise Thee, O Jehovah, when they hear the words of Thy mouth. Yea, they shall sing of the ways of Jehovah: for great is the glory of Jehovah" (Psalms 138:4-5)In a yet higher sphere, He will be seen as the Lamb in the midst of the throne, with elders and living creatures gazing in wonder at the glorious sight, and giving utterance to the new song of redemption through His blood (Revelation 5:1-14). Thus will a righteous God give due recompense, both above and below, to Him Who once was willing, in His fathomless grace, to hang between two thieves upon Calvary's tree. He Who was the central Object on that day of shame, will be the central Object in both heavenly and earthly glories in the ages that are yet to come.

"Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of Jehovah came upon David from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16:13). From the gracious Reader of Isaiah's prophecy in the synagogue of Nazareth, we hear the words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me" (Luke 4:18). Others besides Himself may experience the anointing of the Spirit (1 John 2:27); but in this, as in everything else, He must have the pre-eminence" therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows" (Hebrews 1:9)

David, although anointed, did not forthwith ascend the throne of Israel, but like the One of whom he was both the progenitor and the type, he must needs first pass through the bitter ordeal of years of suffering and rejection. In God's time, the man of the people's carnal choice was overthrown, and the man after God's own heart was exalted. In like manner, God has His set time for the Kingdoms of this world to pass into the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ. The need for this mighty revolution becomes increasingly apparent to observant eyes. The world's agony deepens every hour.

The Power of the Spirit of God

Having anointed both Saul and David — the man of the people's choice, and the man after God's own heart Samuel's public work was finished. Henceforward he lived in quiet retirement at Ramah. But one thus constrained to live in quietness has not necessarily ceased to be of value to his brethren. The ministry of intercession is open to all who have the heart for it. To this ministry Samuel devoted himself until his life's end. "God forbid that I should sin against Jehovah in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23).

Aged brethren, crippled brethren, imprisoned brethren, take courage! Although you can no longer run the Lord's errands, you can still serve the people of God at the throne of grace. Paul in his Roman prison ceased not to give thanks for his Ephesian brethren, making mention of them in his prayers (Ephesians 1:16); the Philippians also he remembered, in every prayer for them making request with joy (Php_1:4); for the Colossians too he prayed regularly, and doubtless also for saints in other places, both known and unknown. Epaphras, when deprived of his liberty, laboured fervently for his brethren that they might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12).

The prophet who felt that he was getting old and past active service, and who appointed his sons judges over the people (without a word from Jehovah) lived not only to anoint both Saul and David, but also to shelter David when the persecution of his enemy became dangerous. Accordingly we read in 1 Samuel 19:18 : David fled and escaped, and came to Samuel in Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him." But what could a feeble old man do for David in his distress? Saul quickly set his forces in motion. He was now so completely under the power of the devil that all respect for Samuel had departed from him. He would now invade his very home, and tear David thence. But the power of God was with His aged servant, and this Saul experienced in a truly remarkable way. He sent three bands of messengers, doubtless armed, to arrest David; but when they came within sight of Samuel and his group of budding prophets, the power of God so came upon them that they prophesied with them. This reminds us of Ahaziah in his rage against Elijah (2 Kings 1:1-18). He also sent three companies to take him, but the third captain of fifty humbled himself in the presence of the power of God as exercised by Elijah, and pleaded for his life. In Saul's day things were worse, for his third company were as willing to do their master's evil work as those who went before them. Then, solemn to say, Saul went himself. He braced himself up, and was confident that he would be strong enough to resist the holy influence to which his messengers had succumbed. He was determined to fight things out with God! poor blind dupe of Satan! The unhappy man is painfully suggestive of the self-willed king of the last days (Daniel 11:36), who will be found reigning in Jerusalem when our Lord appears.

Behold the angry king then coming to "a great well that is in Sechu," and inquiring for the whereabouts of Samuel and David. Would he kill the prophet as well as his own son-in-law! This is not clear, but it is certain that when he came within sight of Samuel and David with murder in his heart, the mighty power of the Spirit of God overwhelmed him. For many hours he lay prostrate, helpless to do what he intended. Well might observers say, perhaps sarcastically, knowing the character of the man, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

"How are the mighty fallen!" (2 Samuel 1:27) At Ramah we see the King lying low in the presence of the power of God; at Endor he is prostrate in the house of a witch (1 Samuel 28:20); and at Gilboa he is found dead on the battle-field (1 Samuel 31:4). Miserable end to an unhappy life, a life

which began with every advantage that a gracious God could bestow.

The remarkable experience at Naioth in Ramah had a voice for both David and Saul. David could thereby be assured that although years of wandering lay ahead no creature power could ever harm him seeing that Jehovah was with him. Saul might well have returned home convinced of the uselessness of opposition to God. But, alas, flesh never learns divine lessons! Another Saul did heed the voice of the Lord speaking to him out of heaven, to his eternal blessing (Acts 22:1-30.). Happy Saul of Tarsus!

We are living in the day of the Spirit's personal presence on earth. The Church is His habitation. From thence He pursues His gracious work for the blessing of men. The power of Satan is opposed to it, but we need have no fear. He who broke down the Saul of the Old Testament (although he was nothing the better for it); and Who also broke down the Saul of the New Testament, transforming him into a bright witness for Christ is able still to deal with every form of Satanic hostility to the work of God. Certainly, our God never knows defeat.

Samuel's Death

It is twice repeated that when Samuel died “all Israel lamented, him, and buried him in his house at Ramah.” (1 Samuel 25:1; 1 Samuel 28:3) A State funeral, with public mourning, for the man whose faithful words were unheeded while he lived, and whose later years were embittered by the wickedness of both king and people! It was a great day — "all the Israelites were gathered together," we are told. Was Saul present? It is not stated, but flesh can be inconsistent enough even for that.

Many prophets followed Samuel before our Lord appeared, but they all fared badly at the hands of men. "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" said the indignant Stephen, "and they have slain them which showed before the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:52). Our Lord said to the religious leaders of His day: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves that ye are the sons of them which killed the prophets." He proceeded to tell them that He would send fresh messengers to them, and that they would persecute, scourge, and kill them (Matthew 23:29-34) The Book of the Acts records the terrible fulfilment of His words. (Read also 1 Thessalonians 2:3; John 16:2)

It is easy to honour dead men whose faithful admonitions no longer sting the conscience; flesh can even get a certain amount of gratification to itself in doing so; but what God appreciates is willing obedience to His servants' messages while they live, and loyal remembrance of their words after their departure (Hebrews 13:7).

Be not over-anxious to hold memorial services over us when our lips are silent in the grave. Say a few kind words to us while we are with you, and encourage our hearts by such obedience to the truth that in our prayers we may give account of you "with joy and not with grief" (Hebrews 13:17). To laud the dead while refusing their teaching is one of the worst forms of religious hypocrisy, and the world is full of it.

Take a case in point. Throughout Christendom great honour is professedly paid to Peter; magnificent buildings have his name attached to them; but if the fisherman-apostle could come back to us, and were to teach in the pulpits of "St. Peter's" the truths taught in his Epistles, he would probably be flung out with scorn like his Master from the synagogue at Nazareth. For it is indisputable that Peter tells us that new birth is the fruit of the incorruptible seed of the word of God received by faith into the heart (1 Peter 1:23); but Christendom affirms that new birth comes through Baptism administered by priestly hands. Peter also tells us that all believers in Jesus are priests, "a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5), but Christendom insists that priesthood is the exclusive privilege of an official few, and thus God's saints are thrust into darkness and distance from their Father and God.

Viewed in the light of Eternity, men's buildings erected in honour of the dead, whether tombs or cathedrals, are worth very little; but who can estimate the value of the Spirit's words concerning the "great cloud of witnesses," of whom Samuel was one, "of whom the world was not worthy" (Hebrews 11:38).

Samuel at Endor

Some years after his decease Samuel had the unique experience of being sent back to earth with a message from God. The battle of Gilboa was impending, and Saul was in a desperate plight, having the dismal feeling that ruin would result. He tried to get through to God for counsel and help-the God whom he had so grievously slighted throughout his reign. But "Jehovah answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets" (1 Samuel 28:6). "God is departed from me," he wailed, "and answereth me no more." This reminds us of Hosea 4:17 : "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." It is a serious thing for anyone to refuse to hear the voice of God, for even His patience has limits. All Christendom will prove this shortly when divinely given up to the delusions of the Man of Sin (2 Thessalonians 2:1-17).

Feeling the urgent need of a word from some quarter, "Saul said unto his servants, seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her." Earlier in his reign Saul had endeavoured to stamp out this appalling evil but apparently it was still practised secretly. What an inconsistent thing is poor flesh! It can wax indignant at one form of iniquity and labour to suppress it while freely indulging in other forms equally offensive to God. Even God's true saints are not free from this danger. Samuel told Saul after his disobedience in the matter of Amalek "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Samuel 15:23). Why? Because it puts something in the place of God; and this Saul was continually doing in his career of self-pleasing.

Learning that there was a woman practising witchcraft at Endor, Saul disguised himself, and with two of his servants went to her by night. When requested to bring up the man that he would name, the woman protested that it was against the law of the kingdom, and that she might be put to death for her deed. Saul had the audacity to "swear to her by Jehovah saying, As Jehovah liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing." The wretched man could not possibly go further in sin than thus to pledge Jehovah's holy name in connection with a matter so hateful in His sight. All sense of the reality of having to do with God had utterly departed from him.

Witchcraft — sorcery — "Spiritualism" — for this great evil has many names, is very ancient. Early in the history of the race, when men turned their backs upon God, they sought to get into communication with the invisible world by illicit means. Satan was, of course, their instructor in this, for thereby he gained ears which should have been ever open to the voice of God. Deuteronomy 18:1-22 is stern in its commands to the people of Israel to deal unsparingly with this great evil when they got into the promised land. They would find Canaan full of it, but God's own people must neither learn it nor spare it.

This evil has an increasing fascination for men as the ages pass, and as the end draws near. Men have a natural desire to know something of the life beyond, and it is alleged that Spiritualism is a ready means of acquiring first-hand information from departed relatives and friends. It is even said that these are eager to communicate with us; but this is not borne out by the story before us, the only true record of a departed man ever speaking again to persons on earth. Samuel positively rebuked Saul for disturbing him. "Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?"

Samuel undoubtedly appeared to the terrified king, and addressed him with audible voice. But did the woman's movements produce him? Most assuredly not. The keys of death and of Hades are not within the reach of any mere creature (Revelation 1:18). Departed saints are in the Lord's own presence, enjoying without hinderance His favour; and the lost are "Spirits in prison" awaiting their final sentence in the great day. Saints are not at the mercy of wicked practitioners, and liable to be disturbed at any moment in order that such may earn a fee; and sinners are closely guarded by the power of God. If it be alleged that voices are sometimes heard coming from the world of spirits, the explanation is that demons personate the dead, and their aim is to deceive foolish listeners to their eternal ruin.

In Isaiah 8:19 God asks indignantly why people should even wish to inquire of the dead, when they could, if they were willing, inquire of their Maker. "When they shall say unto you: seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that chirp and mutter: should not a people seek unto their God. For the living to the dead?" No one could have been more shocked and horrified than the witch of Endor when Samuel actually appeared. She had never had such an experience before. Ere she could commence her incantations the person named stood before her. The astounding fact suggested to her mind that her visitor could be no less a person than the king. Only for him would God be likely to disturb the repose of the faithful prophet. What could Samuel do but pronounce the doom of one who so persistently sinned against light and privilege? For this solemn purpose God was pleased to send His servant back to earth that day. There was nothing of pity or mercy in his words “Because thou obeyedst not the voice of Jehovah, nor executedst His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath Jehovah done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover, Jehovah will also deliver Israel with thee into the hands of the Philistines: and to-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me" (1 Samuel 28:18-19). The following day would thus be Saul's last on earth. What then? "With me" does not mean that Saul would share Samuel's bliss, but that he would he numbered amongst the dead even as the prophet. Even Saul and Jonathan parted company in the hour of death. Jonathan we shall meet in the presence of the Lord Jesus at His coming, but not Saul.

Note the distinction between body and spirit. Saul's body (with those of his sons) was nailed by the Philistines to the wall of Bethshan (1 Samuel 31:12), his spirit, ere that indignity was perpetrated,

was in Sheol.

The Endor episode has a loud voice to men today. Nothing is to be gained by even the attempt to communicate with the dead; but everything is to be gained by giving attention to the voice of God. The Holy Scriptures, now happily complete, tell us all that we need to know concerning both Heaven and Hell. He who turns away from the divine voice speaking therein lays himself open to the worst deceptions of Satan, to his eternal ruin.

Samuel figures in Hebrews 11:32 as one of God's worthies. David is also there; but the once-favoured and greatly privileged Saul is missing.

Chapter 105

Solomon and His Temple.

Solomon and His Temple.

W W Fereday.

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The commanding theme of Holy Scripture — of Scripture in its every part, is Christ. He is everything to God, and His Spirit delights to make known to us the glories of His person, the

perfection of His work, and the Father's eternal counsels respecting Him. Our principal interest in Solomon lies in the fact that he was a foreshadow of Christ. The peace of his reign, his righteous and wise administration, the prosperity of the people, and the homage of all the kings round about, all suggest conditions that will be true on a larger and more glorious scale when God's true Anointed sits upon His holy hill of Zion (Psalms 2:6). Solomon's administration, alas, finished sadly, due to his own unfaithfulness. Far otherwise will it be with Christ. At the end of His long reign, "He will deliver up the kingdom to Him who is God and Father, when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.... Then shall the Son Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:24, 1 Corinthians 15:28). He who was faithful when here in poverty and humiliation will also be faithful in the day of His Kingdom exaltation.

When Solomon was born his father named him Solomon, which means "Peaceable" (2 Samuel 12:24). Jehovah thus named him before his birth (1 Chronicles 22:9). But when he was born He sent Nathan the prophet to David with a second name for the child — Jedidiah, which means "beloved of Jehovah" (2 Samuel 12:25) It is added, "Jehovah loved him." Another has remarked, "Nathan, with a marked reference to the meaning of the King's own name (David=the darling, the beloved one) calls the infant Jedidiah (Jedid-yah), that is, the darling of the Lord." Loved by God; chosen by God; preferred by Him above all others for the throne — what an expressive type of our blessed Lord! He is God's true beloved (Isaiah 42:1), who in His due time "will speak peace to the nations, and His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth" (Zechariah 9:10).

The inspired historian — Moses, we doubt not — tells us in Genesis 36:31 that "kings reigned in the land of Edom before there reigned any king over the children of Israel." He who wrote the Chronicles after the return of the remnant from the Babylonian captivity repeats the statement (1 Chronicles 1:43). Edom as a people was very nearly related to Israel; but although not God's chosen for supremacy in the earth Edom had kings (an honour, as men judge) before Israel. Kings developed rapidly after the break-up of the human family into nations. Nimrod came first as founder of the dominion of Babylon (Genesis 10:8-10); Egypt comes next in the sacred record as ruled by a king (Genesis 12:15); and in Genesis 14:1-24 we read of two confederacies of kings at war with each other. Unhappy foreshadow of worse things to come.

But why was Israel so long without a monarch' God certainly spoke of a king for the nation while they were still in the wilderness, and gave instructions and warnings as to his conduct. He must not multiply horses, nor wives, nor silver and gold; but he must write out for himself a copy of the law, which he was to read all the days of his life that all might be well (Deuteronomy 17:14-20) Balaam, when constrained by the Spirit of God to say against his will good things about the people he hated, declared: "Jehovah his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them." Further, "His king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted" (Numbers 23:21; Numbers 24:7). Hannah in her prophetic song was led to say, "Jehovah shall judge the ends of the earth; and He shall give strength unto His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed" (1 Samuel 2:10).

Why, then, was Israel several centuries in the land of promise before kingship was established! For the very blessed reason, if the people could have appreciated it, Jehovah was their king. It was their glory to be living under a theocracy. Jehovah Himself personally directed their affairs. No

nation has ever been thus honoured, and no nation will ever have such an honour until the seventh trumpet is sounded in Heaven, and great voices say, "The Kingdom of the world of our Lord and of His Christ is come, and He shall reign to the ages of ages” (Revelation 11:15 J.N.D.). Then all the nations (not Israel only) will come under direct divine rule. This will be the final solution of all earth's difficulties and sorrows.

Israel, as the people of Jehovah's gracious choice, was meant to be different in every respect to all others, and to be Jehovah's witness to them. Balaam, in his first utterance said, "Lo, it is a people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned amongst the nations" (Numbers 23:9). It was therefore deplorable when the people demanded of Samuel, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5).

Let us pause here and take account of ourselves. The Church is a company divinely called out and separated from the world. It is the body of the absent Christ here to represent Him), and the house of God, the Assembly of the living God (Acts 15:14; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 1 Timothy 3:15. Do we appreciate the inestimable honour and privilege of being a people separated to God? The history of the Church since the days of the Apostles reveals the grossest unfaithfulness in this respect. The Church and the world have long been friends, to the Lord's dishonour, and to the spiritual injury of the saints. Further, the Church has been distinguished from the beginning as having its Head in Heaven, with the Holy Spirit dwelling on earth to act for Him. With respect to these great realities we have also been long unfaithful. Faith in the invisible Head in Heaven, and in the invisible Spirit on earth has lapsed; hence the hordes of Popes, Bishops, clergy, chairmen, etc. The Church, like Israel before her, has wished to be "like all the nations." It is not even yet too late for some at least to recover themselves, and return repentantly to the right ways of God.

Israel's wilful descent from the high level upon which Jehovah in His grace placed them at the beginning of their national history has been recorded as instruction for us today (Romans 15:4). For as surely as the people of Israel were divinely intended to be the aristocracy of the earth, those who are now being blessed and who compose the Church are the aristocracy of the universe. Our conduct should be consistent with our dignity.

Samuel felt deeply the people's demand for a king "like all the nations," but Jehovah said to His servant, "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Samuel 8:7). The theocracy was thus at an end until the day of the Lord Jesus.

The Spirit's words through Balaam and Hannah make it certain that Jehovah always had it in His mind to give Israel a king. Ultimately the prince: of His choice is Christ, but it was His intention that men typical of Him should occupy the throne meantime. Both David and Solomon, each in his own way typify Him. But the impatience of the people could not wait for God to act; they would have a king forthwith. God knew where to find the sort of man that they wanted; thus Saul was anointed first king of Israel with disastrous consequences for all concerned.

Scripture numerals are instructive. Forty is the number of full trial (Psalms 45:10; Matthew 4:2). For forty years Saul reigned. The trial ended with the dead bodies of the king and his sons nailed to the wall of Bethshan by the insolent foe, and the people scattered as sheep having no shepherd (1 Samuel 31:1-13) What confidence dare we have in flesh?

David and Solomon

The youthful Solomon had not to wait until the death of his father to sit upon his throne. "When David was old and full of days, he made Solomon his son king over Israel" (1 Chronicles 23:1). The usurpation of Adonijah, not mentioned in the Book of Chronicles, led to a second enthronement. "They made Solomon the son of David king the second time, and anointed him unto Jehovah to be the chief governor." At this point David's throne is called "the throne of Jehovah" (1 Chronicles 29:22-23). Title of exaltation indeed, and acknowledged by the Queen of Sheba on the occasion of her visit (2 Chronicles 9:8). David's throne has a place in the ways of God that no other has ever had, or can have. It is the centre of divine administration for the earth, and can only be filled in perfection by the Lord Jesus. It was a sad day for all the nations as well as for Israel when Jehovah in righteousness was constrained to "make his glory to cease, and cast his throne down to the ground" (Psalms 89:44) Then commenced "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24),

The enthronement of Solomon while David yet lived meant that for the time being both reigned together. Thus we have a twofold picture of Christ. David typifies Him as the man of war, and Solomon as the man of peace. Our Lord at His appearing will fulfil the David type in His warrior judgements; and afterwards He will fulfil the Solomon type in His sessional judgements. The white horse is the symbol of the one and the throne is the symbol of the other.

Revelation 19:11-21 gives us a vivid description of our Lord coming forth from heaven in His David character. The white horse is the symbol of victorious power, contrast to the ass's colt upon which He rode in the day of His lowly grace (Mark 11:7). His name is Faithful and True. What He was in testimony for God He will also be in the execution of His judgements. Let all deniers of the judgement of God beware. "In righteousness He doth judge and make war." Here at last we have an unquestionably "righteous war." Through dreary ages men have striven to keep the Man of God's choice out of His rights. "Let us seize upon His inheritance" Matthew 21:38). "The inheritance shall be ours" (Mark 12:7). Such has been the language of creature-arrogance, and God has borne with it! The King's eyes are "a flame of fire" — holy discernment in wrath. "On His head are many diadems." Satan has seven (Revelation 12:3); and the Beast ten (Revelation 13:1). The King of Kings and Lord of Lords has "many," for His glory is without limit. Armies follow Him, also riding "upon white horses, clothed in fine Linen, white and clean." These are the glorified saints, previously "caught up" at His descent into the air (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). There is no suggestion of mercy in the terrible vision of Revelation 19:1-21. Out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations: and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God." The fowls of the heavens are angelically summoned to the greatest feast yet known. Kings, captains, mighty men, horses, etc., go down at the word of Him who rides the white horse. The vast hosts of the Roman group of Powers will be impotent before Him, and their leaders, the Beast and the False Prophet will be "cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone,"

Isaiah 63:1-6 describes another terrible incident in our Lord's warrior judgements. He comes up from Edom with garments dyed with the blood of the enemies of His redeemed (i.e. Israel] These are the Northern and Eastern Powers who will over-run God's land in the last crisis (Zechariah 14:1-3). The groups of Revelation 19:1-21 and Isaiah 63:1-19 are hostile to each other, each

seeking world-supremacy; but all are equally opposed to the Christ of God, and would frustrate, if they could, the accomplishment of the divine counsels concerning Him. But their schemes are laughable to the Almighty. (Psalms 2:4).

There are other fearful incidents in the judgement of the "Quick" at the Lord's appearing upon which we will not dwell Ezekiel 38:1-23 and Ezekiel 39:1-29 speaks of the overthrow of the hordes of Russia and her many Allies (or satellites); Isaiah 11:14 tells of the judgement of Edom, Moab, and Ammon by Jewish instrumentality, and the following Scriptures suggest much more activity of this painful character — Micah 4:13; Micah 5:8; Ezekiel 25:14; Zechariah 9:13: Zechariah 14:14; Psalms 149:6-9 All these prophecies bring home to us the solemn meaning of our Lord's words, "Those Mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither, and slay them before Me" (Luke 19:27)

David having subdued all the enemies of Israel round about bequeathed to Solomon a peaceful throne. Only one military incident is recorded. "Solomon went to Hamath-zobah, and prevailed against it" (2 Chronicles 8:3). Then profound peace during the remainder of his forty years' reign. Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river (Euphrates) unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt; they brought presents and served Solomon all the days of his life" (1 Kings 4:21). But Solomon was no believer in disarmament. It is twice repeated, "Solomon gathered together chariots and horse men, and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem" (1 Kings 10:26; 2 Chronicles 1:14). Truly every type fails! When He who is "greater than Solomon" reigns in Jerusalem, men "shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" Isaiah 2:4) His presence will cause "the name of the city from that day to be Jehovah Shammah — Jehovah is there" (Ezek. 47:35). "I, saith Jehovah, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her" (Zechariah 2:5).

At this point it would be a delight to transcribe the whole of Psalms 72:1-20 but we refrain. In days of universal distress such as our own, it is refreshing to the spirit to read that Psalm. David began it as a prayer for Solomon, but the Spirit of God soon led him far beyond his immediate successor to the One who will bring all blessing in, and establish it upon immutable foundations. David begins with righteousness (in both king and subordinate rulers), and in his seventh verse he arrives at peace — "abundance of peace as long as the moon endureth." Justice for all; every oppressor broken in pieces; all enemies subjugated; kings from afar bowing low at the feet of David's greater Son; widespread prosperity; city life purified and made healthy; and men everywhere calling Him blessed — these are the themes of which the Psalmist wrote with joy. We need not wonder that he turned to praise. "Blessed be Jehovah God, the God of Israel, Who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be His glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory: Amen and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." This does not mean that David never prayed after he wrote Psalms 72:1-20. What is meant is that from his standpoint as a saint with an earthly calling he could ask nothing beyond an earth filled with righteousness, peace, and glory under the rule of the Man of God's pleasure. Heavenly saints look for much more — a "vast universe of bliss," of which Christ: will be the "Centre and the Sun."

David's last words (2 Samuel 23:1-7) are in subdued tone. He could see in prophetic vision a just king ruling in the fear of God, who should be "as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, a morning without clouds. But that king is no Solomon, but Christ. The dying king added, "Although my house be not so with God: Yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow. Solomon's hand was not steady enough to hold the full cup of blessing which God placed therein, and for three thousand years Israel and all nations have suffered through his unfaithfulness.

Adonijah's Usurpation

The first mention of Jerusalem in the Word of God brings before us a delightful type of Christ in the person of Melchizedek, King of righteousness and King of peace (Genesis 14:18-20; Hebrews 7:1). The second mention of Jerusalem is startling by its contrast. Joshua found Adonizedek reigning there, and determined to hold the city in defiance of Jehovah's purpose for His people (Joshua 10:1). This king suggests the Antichrist who will defy the Lamb at His appearing. Adonizedek perished ignominiously; with his confederate kings he was hanged. The Antichrist (described in the Apocalypse as "the false prophet") will be consigned with his partner in iniquity, the ten-horned Beast, to the lake of fire a thousand years before even Satan is sent there (Revelation 19:20).

The revelation of a divine purpose arouses the opposition of the Devil, and he labours forthwith to frustrate the accomplishment of it. 1 Chronicles 22:1-19 describes an important gathering in Jerusalem when David made it known that Solomon, although one of his youngest sons, was Jehovah's choice for the throne. He forthwith charged him to build a house for God (how delighted would David have been to have built it himself!); and he also charged all the princes of Israel to help Solomon his son (1 Chronicles 22:17). The young man was then solemnly enthroned.

It was after this, and thus in full knowledge of the purpose of God, that "Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king," and in his vanity "prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him" (1 Kings 1:5). As surely as Solomon prefigures Christ, Adonijah prefigures the Antichrist. Mark the fatal words, "I will." In Isaiah 14:13-14 we hear Lucifer saying five times, "I will." Here we have the very essence of sin. 1 John 3:4, correctly translated, teaches us that "sin is lawlessness." Lawlessness is self-will. James tells us that we should always say, "if the Lord will ... we shall do this or that" (James 4:17). Self-will has been the undoing of the human race, and its full evil is not yet developed.

All who have been born of the Spirit should abhor the restlessness of flesh in every form, and find delight in doing the will of God. The Man Christ Jesus is our perfect example of will-lessness. When He came into the world He said, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God" (Psalms 40:8); in the night of His sorrow He desired only the will of the Father to be done (Matthew 26:39); and in the midst of His service He told the people around Him, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that: sent me" (John 6:38). Every bit of self-will in which we indulge savours not of Christ, but of Antichrist.

Adonijah was apparently a "spoilt child." The Holy Spirit says, "His father had not displeased him at any time in saying Why hast thou done so? and he was also a very goodly man" (1 Kings 1:6). The handsome Absalom, slightly his senior, was similarly treated by David. Good-looking children

are in special danger when in the hands of foolish parents. The wise king's words in Proverbs 19:18 are true for all time: "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying." There are many broken hearts amongst God's saints due to the neglect of parental discipline; and the dishonour to the name of the Lord is still more serious, for the house of the Christian should be like unto the house of God, where the divine will alone should be done.

Adonijah's usurpation was short-lived. So will it be with the sinister figure of whom he was a pitiful foreshadow. When self-will rises to its full height, and man proclaims himself God judgement will fall speedily. Solomon appears to have been quiescent while the rebellion was in progress. It was his father who acted against the aggressor. In like manner the Christ of God looks with long patience at what His enemies are doing, but He will make no move until the Father gives the word. Ultimately Adonijah perished by command of Solomon; and the man of sin will be destroyed by the “breath of the lips” of the One against whom he will exalt himself (Isaiah 11:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:8).

Let us briefly examine a few Scriptures relative to the man in Jerusalem in the last days of whom Adonijah was a type. Daniel 11:36 speaks of him as the King — Isaiah 30:33; Isaiah 57:9 also. The concluding revelation to Daniel concerning his people extends from Daniel 10:12 to the end of the book. Down to Daniel 11:35 everything has been already fulfilled. We read of plots and wars between successive kings of the North and of the South (Syria and Egypt), with the holy land as their battle ground. There is a gap of more than twenty centuries between Daniel 11:35-36. From the days of the Maccabees we pass to the world's last crisis. A king is seen ruling in Palestine, whom only carelessness would confound with the kings of the North and the South, for both make war upon him.

Mark the description of this man — Palestine's last king before the establishment of the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus. "The king shall do according to his will: and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous (or monstrous) things against the God of gods." Every detail is the very antithesis of Christ. He did not His own will but the will of His Father and God; He did not exalt Himself, neither did He magnify Himself. On the contrary He humbled Himself, and magnified (glorified) Him who sent Him. But He did not suit the carnal taste of Jehovah's fallen people; the man of Daniel 11:36 will be more welcome, as the Lord warned the Jews in John 5:43

Like Adonijah, he says, "I will be King." The will of God and the well-being of the people are both alien to his thoughts He will sweep aside every divine institution; he will seek the destruction of the pious few who venture to oppose him; and he will honour and reward the wicked (Daniel 11:37-38) His end is not mentioned in Daniel 11:1-45. The one whose "end" is referred to in the last verse is the king of the North, the powerful and implacable foe of the Jews' apostate ruler.

Now compare 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 with Daniel 11:1-45. The language is so similar that there can be no doubt that both chapters refer to the same person. “The man of sin, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped: so that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." The scene is clearly laid in Jerusalem, where the Jewish temple was still standing when the Epistle to the Thessalonians was written. Another temple will be seen there in the last days erected by returned Jews. It has been remarked that the Antichrist is "Adam fully developed." To Adam it was said, "Ye shall be as God";

Antichrist says, "I am God." In Daniel 11:1-45, we see him in Jewish connection; and in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 as the leader and consummation of the apostasy of Christendom. In 1 John 2:22, where alone we find the title: "Antichrist," the two things are combined. "Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is Anti-christ that denieth the Father and the Son." The Jews have from the first denied that Jesus is the Christ, and Christendom will ere long repudiate the Father and the Son. Both Jews and the multitudes who today "profess and call themselves Christians" will then unite in their worship of the man of sin. Solemn thought, the same city from which the truth of Christ went forth, and which has brought blessing to millions, will yet send forth the lie of the Antichrist to the ruin of all who receive it. Judicial blindness from God will settle down upon those who have had the truth within their reach, but have not loved it (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12)

God will know how to subdue all proud pretension in the day of His wrath. "The day of Jehovah shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low. . . . and the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day" (Isaiah 2:12-17). The Lord preserve us all from the Adonijah spirit of pride and self-exaltation!

The King's Dream

Nebuchadnezzar went to bed one night in Babylon with the might and majesty of his Empire upon his mind, and wondering what would be the development of it. God graciously answered the poor pagan's thoughts by showing him in vision Gentile Imperialism as a whole and its ultimate destruction by the superior power of the Kingdom of God. Daniel 2:1-49), This was intended to act upon his conscience for his blessing, but no such effect was produced at that time. He was blessed Later Daniel 4:1-37).

Solomon went to bed in Gibeon with very different thought exercising his mind. He had become the most exalted person on earth, head of God's chosen people, now triumphant over every foe. He felt the seriousness of his position, and the great responsibilities connected with it (he was scarcely out of his teens), and his heart turned to God. Happy would it have been for the nations throughout the centuries if rulers everywhere had felt as Solomon did that night in Gibeon (1 Kings 3:5-15

"Jehovah appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee." A dream is not God's most intimate way of communicating with men, as He Himself told Aaron and Miriam in Numbers 12:6-8; but it seems certain that Solomon never knew God as his father knew him. He lacked David's deep spiritual experience, never having suffered as he suffered. David's years of affliction gave him a knowledge of God from which we all benefit at this day as readers of his Psalms. David could have said like a later poet:

"Deep waters crossed life's pathway,

The hedge of thorns was sharp."

Such language would be foreign to Solomon. With reference to the Temple, although denied the honour of building it, it was to David that Jehovah gave all the necessary instructions which he passed on to Solomon (1 Chronicles 28:1-12). It is also noticeable that David is named in God's

list of men of faith (Hebrews 11:32), but not Solomon.

It was after a busy day in Gibeon when a thousand burnt offerings were offered upon the altar that "Jehovah appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, Ask what I shall give thee." The young king's answer delighted the heart of God. First, he acknowledged His loving-kindness in giving David a son to sit upon his throne. Then he confessed his own insufficiency for the heavy responsibilities which now lay upon him. Jehovah's people were a great people, distinguished as His chosen. To guide and direct them aright in their unique relation to God was beyond his power. "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in." The spirit of the little child — humble, confiding, and teachable — is becoming in us all. The Lord Jesus lays this down in Matthew 18:1-35. The concluding verses of chapter 17. give us a wonderful setting for this instruction. Peter made himself foolish with the tax-collector in Capernaum, but the Lord took occasion by it to declare the exalted position in which Peter and every other believer stand in relationship with Himself through grace. We are sons of the Sovereign of the universe in association with the First born (Hebrews 2:10).

The believer in Jesus is thus a very dignified person, according to grace. Note the sequel. "In the same hour (the correct rendering of Matthew 18:1) came the disciples unto Jesus, saying who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Thus we have to become very small in order to enter into blessing. The next verse teaches us to continue small "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 17:24-27 shows us the dignity of grace; Matthew 18:1-35 follows suitably instructing us to keep small and insignificant in our own esteem Even King Saul was little in his own sight to begin with (1 Samuel 15:17); exaltation and power drew out his inherent pride and stubbornness, to his ruin. A later king — Uzziah — walked well "till he became strong. And when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (2 Chronicles 26:16).

Self-importance was the plague of the apostolic band. Even at the Last Supper "there was strife among them which of them should be accounted the greatest" (Luke 22:24). The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to take charge of the Assembly for Christ should have made this impossible in the new order, but flesh is ever restless. The Apostle's plain injunction in Romans 12:3 has been but little heeded: "I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." The vastness of the divine immensities that he ministered made Paul feel personally very small — "less than the least of all saints" (Ephesians 3:8). In 1 Corinthians 14:20 we find a truly impressive appeal: "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye babes, but in understanding be men." He had no desire that his readers should be childish, but he longed that they might be childlike. "I am among you as He that serveth," said the Lord to His self-important followers (Luke 22:17). Did He not wash their feet that very night? (John 13:1-38).

Solomon felt that he was "but a little child"; accordingly he seized the golden opportunity divinely given to ask for "an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this Thy so great people?" His Speech pleased Jehovah well. He

might have asked for long life or riches, or the life of his enemies; instead he asked for an understanding heart that he might rule well the people of God. Our blessed Lord once said: 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.' On this principle Jehovah dealt with Solomon. "Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour: so that there shall not be any amongst the kings like unto thee all thy days" (1 Kings 3:11-13). This seemed to make the blessing of Israel secure, but God went on to say, "If thou wilt walk in My ways, and keep My statutes." The priesthood having been in a secondary place since the breakdown of Eli and his sons, everything depended upon the fidelity of the king. The "if" to Solomon in 1 Kings 3:1-28. If was as fatal as the "if" to Israel in Exodus 19:5, for, poor flesh can never be trusted, and Solomon's failure was truly catastrophic. Blessed be God, all that has been lost by the unfaithfulness of men will be taken up by the Lord Jesus, God's faithful Second Man, on the principle of grace, and on the ground of redemption. This makes all things sure for ever.

Ere we pass from Gibeon, let us ask our own hearts what reply we would give if God were to say to us, "Ask what I shall give thee;" It would be a testing moment assuredly, yea, it would be the turning-point of our lives. Elisha had a moment of testing in 1 Kings 19:19-21, and he responded well to it. He left his farm and forthwith shared the path of the persecuted prophet. Matthew was similarly tested and he abandoned a lucrative calling and followed the rejected Jesus (Matthew 9:9). What do we desire more than anything earth can give? Is it to "know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death?" (Php_3:10)

Righteousness

Solomon is best known for his wisdom. With this divine quality his father connected righteousness. When charging his son respecting certain offenders who had hitherto been spared, David said, "Thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do.... Do therefore according to thy wisdom" (1 Kings 2:6-9). Righteousness was to be exercised with divine wisdom; thus there would be no mistakes.

Long after Solomon's day Isaiah wrote, "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness" (Isaiah 32:1). That: King is Christ. Isaiah's prediction follows several dreary chapters exposing the unrighteousness both of Israel's King and people He goes on to say, "the work of righteousness shall be peace and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. Surely our hearts cry, "Lord Jesus, come" This poor distracted world needs the righteousness and peace that He alone can establish. Jeremiah gives us a similarly delightful word concerning Him: "Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that: will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as King and do wisely, and shall execute judgement and justice in the earth" Jeremiah 23:5 — R.V.). The Gospel of Matthew presents to us our Lord as the King; and, remarkably, His first utterance recorded therein contains the word "righteousness." At Jordan, when John was disposed to refuse Him baptism, He said, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Thus He would Himself practise what in the day of His power He will administer to the world. In David's great Psalm of the King, we read, "Thou lovest righteousness and hatest

wickedness" (Psalms 45:7).

In the matter of righteousness David signally failed. Joab was allowed to murder both Abner and Amasa, and pass unpunished. David's own sons Amnon and Absalom were guilty of grievous sins, and they also passed unpunished. With reference to Joab, David said, "these men the sons of Zeruiah are too hard for me," and he even said, "I am this day weak, though anointed king" (2 Samuel 3:39) Pitiful language from one who had frequently experienced the sustaining power and grace of God. But Joab was a capable military commander, and thus useful to the state. This is by no means the only occasion on Which the sins of public men have been condoned. But it is not righteousness.

There is yet another explanation which covers all these sad cases. David's own sins in the matter of Uriah and Bathsheba had weakened his hands. It has been truly said that "a maimed hand cannot wield a heavy sword." Besides, had he not used Joab as his tool for the murder of Uriah? When he lay dying, he charged Solomon to deal with Joab and others whom he had spared; but the whole story is humiliating nevertheless (1 Kings 2:1-9)

Psalms 101:1-8 must here be transcribed:

A Psalm of David

I will sing of mercy and judgement; unto Thee, O Jehovah, will I sing.

I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt Thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.

I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.

A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person.

Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath a high look and a proud heart will I not suffer.

Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me.

He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.

I will early (i.e. every morning) destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of Jehovah.

These were David's noble resolutions before he ascended the throne. How grievously he failed we have seen. Solomon's sentiments may be learned from his Book of Proverbs: "A king sitting on the throne of judgement scattereth away all evil with his eyes" (Proverbs 20:8). "Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness" (Proverbs 25:5). When Solomon had executed judgement upon Joab and others, the Holy Spirit says, "the Kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon" (1 Kings 2:46)

But in neither David nor his son do we see perfection. When penning Psalms 101:1-8 David was carried by the spirit of inspiration far beyond himself and he was led to describe the King who is yet to come. His first action will be to "send forth His angels and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:41-42). "The sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorn: thrust away" (2 Samuel 13:6). Throughout His administration every act of insubordination to the will of God will be dealt with in righteous judgement. "Righteousness shall go before Him, and shall set His footsteps on the way (J.N.D.). Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven" (Psalms 85:11-13), Nothing will in that age be seen on earth that will offend the eye of God.

Psalms 101:1-8 is rather negative in its statements. We learn from it the sort of persons the King will not tolerate; Psalms 15:1-5 and Psalms 24:1-10. are more positive, and they describe those in whom the King will find pleasure, and with whom He will surround Himself in Zion. The Kingdom of God as we know it today "is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17). May these divine excellencies characterise our lives. We stand before God in righteousness divine through the work of the Lord Jesus; let righteousness be seen in all our ways before men (1 John 3:7; Titus 3:8).

If we are not called upon in this day of grace to cut off wicked doers from the city of the Lord," we can at least cast off from ourselves the works of darkness, and also mortify our members which are upon the earth (Romans 13:12; Colossians 3:5). Thus, and thus only shall we be righteous ones in the eyes of both God and men.

Wisdom

Wherever the Bible is known, Solomon is famous for his exceptional wisdom. Alas, that one so profoundly wise should have degenerated into a great fool. As the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes, he expressed the fear that his son might be a fool (as indeed he was), but he did not appear to have been apprehensive for himself (Ecclesiastes 2:10). Well does the Apostle say, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall(1 Corinthians 10:12).

Job in his ninth and last discourse, which occupies six chapters, speaks of the excellency of wisdom (Job 28:12-28). Having spoken of men's skill in mining and engineering (at that early date), and their diligent search for the treasures of the earth, he exclaimed, But where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding." The bowels of the earth will not reveal it, and its value far exceeds that of gold and rubies. God alone can declare its true nature and value, "and unto man He said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Solomon added to this later: "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10). Therefore until God gets His rightful place in a man's mind and heart he is incapable of viewing anything wisely. His thoughts are out of centre. His beginning is all wrong.

Since the days of Job and Solomon the eternal Wisdom has come into the world in the person of the Son of God. Every thing must now be considered in relation to Him. "Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24) What can man show in the way of power in comparison with the "exceeding greatness" of the power of God "which He wrought in Christ,

when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places"? (Ephesians 1:20) What wisdom can man show, with all his research, that will compare with what God revealed when He turned Calvary's disgraceful gibbet into the means of salvation and blessing for countless myriads? Men denied His beloved Son the petty dignity of kingship over the Jews, and God has given Him the headship of the universe; and all that has come to Christ, and will yet come to Him, was settled in the counsels of infinite love ages before men imbrued their hands in the blood of the Holy One! His enemies will yet be confounded at their own folly and be constrained to acknowledge the surpassing wisdom of God "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:25). "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (1 Corinthians 3:18-19 : The man who leaves God and Christ out of his life's scheme is as hopelessly adrift as a vessel in a storm without chart and rudder.

Solomon was probably the most versatile monarch that has ever lived. Many of the kings who ruled England and Scotland centuries after his time could neither read nor write. Their ignorance may explain their subserviency to papal delusions, to the injury of their people as well as of themselves. But no subject seemed outside the range of Solomon's knowledge "He spoke three thousand proverbs"; good would it be for all if we read through at least once every year those which the Holy Spirit has preserved for us. "His songs were a thousand and five"; but only one remains. Its theme is Christ, and thus it could not be allowed to lapse. It is indeed "the Song of Songs"; no other metrical composition will compare with it, The believer in Jesus, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, must be in a pitiful condition if unable to read it with sacred joy. The 'song' has been the delight of the pious through the ages. What was it to Samuel Rutherford in his afflictions?

Solomon spoke also of trees, from the stately cedar of Lebanon to the humble "hyssop that springeth out of the wall." Beasts, birds, creeping things, and fishes came likewise into his discourses. He surrounded himself with all the wise men he could hear of. Several outstanding ones are named in 1 Kings 4:31, some now unknown, and some still known to us. But God's unique servant surpassed them all — expressive type of Him with whom none in heaven or earth will compared* "Never man spake like this Man," was said of Him even in the days of His humiliation (John 7:46)

{*Ethan the Ezrahite is specially named. It was he who wrote Psalms 89:1-52, a wonderful unfolding of Jehovah's loving-kindness and faithfulness with respect to the throne in Zion. The writer was carried far beyond David and Solomon to Christ. What stores of spiritual wisdom were in Ethan's heart. Yet Solomon was wiser than he!}

At this point let us listen to Solomon's own testimony. "I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments and live. Get wisdom, get understanding; forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee" (Proverbs 4:3-9). To this we must add the young king's comment, "Happy is

the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding" (Proverbs 3:13).

David's earnest counsel will account, at least in measure, for Solomon's answer to Jehovah in Gibeon. How remarkably He met his desire. Solomon pleaded that Israel was "so great": how could he carry the responsibility of guiding such a nation? Now compare 1 Kings 4:20 and 1 Kings 4:23, "Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by 'the sea in multitude"; "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart even as the sand which is on the seashore." Wisdom according to the need!

A great lesson is here. The greater the responsibility and need, the greater the divine provision to meet it. Let us take courage! Solomon's God is ours, and He may be trusted to stand by us in all the sufficiency of His wisdom and grace in any position in which He is pleased to set us, however difficult it may be. Faith can say, "I have strength for all things in Him that gives me power" (Php_4:13 — J.N.D.).

"In much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." So we read, Solomon being the writer, in Ecclesiastes 1:18. There is truth in his words. The thinking man necessarily suffers more than the frivolous multitude. His studies give him an understanding of the evils that operate around him which others lack! Men sometimes say, "Ignorance is bliss." The man who increases his knowledge increases his capacity for suffering. But is this true where GOD is concerned? A thousand times No. The better we know our God the more we enhance our joy; and the better we understand His purposes for this poor devastated world, the more fit we are to live and testify therein.

The story of the two harlots and the living babe is recorded at length as a sample of Solomon's wise administration. The suggestion to divide the babe with the sword was novel and bold, and probably without precedent in the world's history, but it brought out with such a gush the feelings of the true mother that it became perfectly clear to whom the child belonged. The king's action produced a profound impression upon the people in general. "All Israel heard of the judgement which the king had judged; and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgement" (1 Kings 3:17-28). But the incident reminds us that perfection was not reached in Solomon's glorious reign. It is inconceivable that such a sordid case could be submitted to the arbitrament of Solomon's greater Son, God's "Holy One" (Psalms 89:19)

Supremacy and Prosperity

Our blessed Lord once spoke with appreciation of "the lilies of the field." "Consider them," said He. "I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matthew 6:28-29). From His holy heaven He had seen Solomon in his magnificent coronation robes, wrought by skilful hands; but to His mind the modest lily, work of God, presented a more attractive picture. God's saints are likened to lilies in the Song of Songs (Son_2:2-16). May the gracious Spirit of God work in us all the lily character. No "outward adornment" will compare with it (1 Peter 3:3).

On another occasion, in view of Jewish unbelief, He said, "In this place is One greater than the temple"; and further, "a greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:6, Matthew 12:42). The temple with its "goodly stones," and Solomon in his glory and wisdom, gave less pleasure to the heart of God than the lowly Man Who came to earth to do all His will.

Bur Solomon's glory, although the veriest tinsel when viewed in the light of the heavenly glory of the exalted Christ, had nevertheless a typical character and so is instructive. Never had Israel and the nations seen the like. In Solomon's day the blessing of the people reached its climax. They had:-

1. The land of Jehovah's promise.

2. The city of His choice — His resting-place (Psalms 132:14.)

3. The King of His appointment.

4. The Temple.

Land, City, King, Temple! alas, that all should have been enjoyed for so short a time! Everything was soon lost by the sins of both king and people, never to be restored until the day of the Lord Jesus.

Psalms 89:1-52 may well be carefully pondered at this point. Ethan sings and speaks with rapture of Jehovah's purposes concerning His people. Both Solomon and Christ will be found in the Psalm. Solomon held the blessing of God on terms of responsibility, and thus everything was forfeited. When could God ever trust flesh! The failure of Solomon and of every other into whose hands God has entrusted great things only make it clear that Christ is the only hope. In His day He will take up all that men have handled and lost, and He will carry through to perfection every desire and purpose of God.

Solomon's glory and power were phenomenal. "The king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold There were six steps to the throne, with a footstool of gold which were fastened to the throne, and stays (arms) on each side of the sitting place, and two lions standing by the stays and twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps. There was not the like made in any kingdom" (2 Chronicles 9:17-19). His drinking vessels were of gold — "silver was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon." His dominion covered the whole extent of the land of promise. It was not all occupied by Israel, it was at least brought under the authority of the king. "Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents and served Solomon all the days of his Life . . . for he had dominion over all the region on this side the river, from Tiphsah even to Azzah, over all the kings on this side the river: and he had peace on all sides round about him" (1 Kings 4:21-24). He not only ruled the kings but he had their respect. "His fame was in all nations round about . . . there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom" (1 Kings 4:31-34). Faint picture of the gathering up to Jerusalem from all quarters when our Lord is there What wonderful words He will have for them all.

Solomon's daily provision was immense, for his household was large, and his hospitality was lavish. Nehemiah's doings in Jerusalem after the great break-up were humble by comparison The latter entertained frequently "an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from the nations about." For this he required one ox and six choice sheep daily keeping everything low because of the poverty of the returned remnant (Nehemiah 5:17-18). This devoted governor sought nothing for himself: only the good of the people. But Solomon required daily "ten

fat oxen and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep, besides harts, and roe-bucks, and fallow-deer and fatted fowl" (1 Kings 4:22-23). Again a picture of Christ who; when He reigns in Zion," will abundantly bless her provision and will satisfy her poor with bread" (Psalms 132:15). His entertainment of five thousand men, besides women and children in the wilderness, made the people desirous of establishing Him forthwith as their king (John 6:15). But God's time was not yet.

The prosperity and tranquility of the people was as phenomenal as the glory and power of the king. "Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry ... [they] dwelt every man safely under his vine and under his fig-tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon" (1 Kings 4:20-25). Thus was fulfilled the word of Jehovah in Leviticus 26:5 : “Your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in the land safely. And I will give peace to the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid.' The people, as well as the king, were the head of the nations, not the tail; and they lent to many nations, but did not borrow. Said Jehovah: "All people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of Jehovah, and they shall be afraid of thee" Deuteronomy 28:10-13).

In Isaiah's day we hear the sigh of Israel's God: "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken Jehovah, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward" (Isaiah 1:4). When the Saviour approached Jerusalem for the last time, He wept over it, as He spoke of the calamities that were near at hand (Luke 19:41-44). The foolish people threw away all that they enjoyed in the golden days of Solomon in order that they might "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Well-nigh three thousand years of banishment and anguish have been their portion, and the worst has yet to come. Did space permit, we would transfer' the entire Lamentations of Jeremiah to these pages; for they bring home to our hearts what a pious man, taught of the Spirit, felt concerning the disasters which have overwhelmed the erring people of Jehovah.

"If" is a small word, but tremendous issues hang upon it. All Israel's blessings were conditional upon the faithfulness of both king and people; and everything was forfeited by their evil ways, despite the earnest warnings and protests of their God. Jehovah even speaks of Himself as "rising up early, and sending messengers to them, because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling-place" (2 Chronicles 36:15; Jeremiah 35:15, etc.). But it was of no avail. Here are a few of God's solemn "ifs": To the people —

"If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of Jehovah thy God" (Exodus 15:26).

"If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant" (Exodus 19:5).

"If ye will fear Jehovah and serve Him" (1 Samuel 12:14).

"If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of Jehovah thy God"(Deuteronomy 28:2).

To Solomon —

"If thou wilt walk in My ways, and keep My statutes" (1 Kings 3:14).

Now listen to the divine lament in Psalms 81:13, "Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had walked in My ways!"

But mercy is in store for Israel yet. God will never go back upon His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the people are still "beloved for the fathers sake" (Romans 11:28). Woe to those who would do them harm!

The same grace which has saved both writer and reader, once guilty sinners, will yet save guilty Israel. The people will yet own their folly, and take the lowest possible place before God. The law, so long gloried in although not kept, will be surrendered as an impossible principle of blessing. Two great sins lie at Israel's door — the violation of the law and the rejection and murder of Christ. Psalms 1:1-6. shows us God's controversy with the people concerning the law, and Psalms 51:1-19, His dealing with them concerning Christ. In Isaiah's prophecy, Isaiah 40:1-31, Isaiah 41:1-29, Isaiah 42:1-25, Isaiah 43:1-28, Isaiah 44:1-28, Isaiah 45:1-25, Isaiah 46:1-13, Isaiah 47:1-15, Isaiah 48:1-22 deal mainly with Israel's idolatry (in defiance of the law), and Isaiah 49:1-26, Isaiah 50:1-11, Isaiah 51:1-23, Isaiah 52:1-15, Isaiah 53:1-12, Isaiah 54:1-17, Isaiah 55:1-13, Isaiah 56:1-12, Isaiah 57:1-21 are principally occupied with the people's rejection of Christ. Each section concludes with the solemn refrain — "there is no peace to the wicked." Israel has proved the truth of this painfully. I Will remember My covenant with thee in the days of thy youth," says Jehovah, "and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then shalt thou remember thy ways, and be ashamed" (Ezekiel 16:60-61).

Peace will return when the true Solomon sits upon "the throne of His father David." Once more they will "sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of Jehovah of hosts hath spoken it" (Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10). "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing" (Isaiah 35:1-2). Men shall say, "The land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced and inhabited. Then the nations that are left round about you shall know that I Jehovah build the ruined places, and plant that which was desolate: I Jehovah hath spoken it, and I will do it" (Ezekiel 36:35-36). Jewish industry apart from God seeks to antedate this, but the overwhelming Northern invasion in the day of the Antichrist will devastate the land again, but for the last time Joel 2:1-3 The coming of the long rejected One cannot be much longer delayed. In His hands is fullness of blessing, even for the most unworthy.

The Daughter of Pharaoh

It is considered by some estimable brethren that Solomon's marriage with the daughter of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, is a picture of the union of Christ and the Church — a Gentile wife sharing the throne of Jehovah with the man of His choice This suggestion, however, presents a difficulty. When Solomon brought up the ark of Jehovah into the city of David, he felt constrained to remove his Egyptian wife elsewhere. 2 Chronicles 8:11 tells us, "Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had built for her: for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David King of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of Jehovah hath come." The reason assigned for the change is startling. Solomon felt that there was nothing in common between this Egyptian woman and the holy things of God. She was as completely out of fellowship with Solomon spiritually as Michal was with his father (although Michal

was of the chosen nation — 2 Samuel 6:20). If Solomon was sensitive to the extent of removing Pharaoh's daughter from proximity to the holy places, why did he marry her? "Can two walk together, except they be agreed." (Amos 3:3). Do not his own words suggest that he had blundered in this union? 1 Kings 3:1-28 suggests that the affair was political in character. The sacred ordinance of marriage should never be used for such ends. True, Solomon gained the important frontier city of Gezer as dowry with his wife. The place was still held by a remnant of Canaanites, whom Egyptian forces exterminated for Solomon's benefit (1 Kings 9:16). But should not, the Ephraimites have taken the place long before, trusting in God. (Joshua 16:10). The whole business was on a low level, not in keeping with Solomon's unique position as the man of God's choice. Faith is nowhere discernible in the matter, and '(whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23).

It is refreshing to turn from Solomon to Christ. In Ephesians 5:25 we read that He "loved the Church, and gave Himself for it." None of those whom His grace is bringing thus nigh to Himself possessed naturally any fitness either for His holy company or for those surroundings of glory into which He will introduce His bride at the last. Solomon felt it was impossible to suit the Egyptian to the holy places of Jerusalem, her tastes being at variance with them. Christ, on the contrary, is rendering His own a continuous loving ministry in order to fit every one for all that He has in store. "He has delivered Himself up for it, that He might sanctify it, purifying it by the washing of water by the Word" (J.N.D.). The result: "that He might present the Assembly to Himself glorious, having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things; but that it might be holy and blameless." His Bride, composed largely of Gentile sinners, will be perfectly suited to all His desire, so perfect is His work.

There was, alas, a background to Solomon's Egyptian marriage. He was in transgression even before he ascended the throne. Although very young, he had already taken to wife an Ammonitish woman, and Rehoboam was the fruit of the union. Seeing that Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, he was a babe of twelve months old when Solomon began to reign. It is twice repeated in 1 Kings 14:21, 1 Kings 14:31 that "his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess". The Holy Spirit mentions the fact again in 2 Chronicles 12:13. Solomon's first marriage was flagrant sin. Here is the divine command: "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of Jehovah; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of Jehovah for ever." This was thus the beginning of an evil course which led ultimately to Solomon's ruin, and also to the ruin of the whole order of things of which he was the divinely appointed centre. First, a woman from Ammon; then a woman from Egypt; and later a whole host of women from near and far, who brought their abominable idolatries into Jehovah's land, and into Solomon's heart. The Egyptian princess is again expressly mentioned in 1 Kings 11:1 as if she were the advance guard of this host of evil. "King Solomon loved many strange (or foreign) women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh."

Brethren, let us watch against the beginning of fleshly indulgence in any form. In the light of the great truth that in God's account we have "died with Christ," let us mortify our members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). If fornication is no special snare to us, its twin-brother covetousness may be. Let us beware. It has been truly said: "The slippery path of sin is always trodden with accelerated steps, because the first sin tends to weaken in the soul the

authority and power of that which alone can prevent our committing still greater sins — that is, the Word of God, as well as the consciousness of His presence, which imparts to the Word all its practical power over us."

Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an unbeliever? 2 Corinthians 6:14-15

Be ye Holy, for I am Holy. 1 Peter 1:16.

Provision for the House

When the people of God are in a healthy spiritual condition, the funds are healthy also and the Treasurers have no anxiety. The spiritual affections being in full flow; all that is required for the maintenance of the Lord's work is in full flow also. When Jehovah asked Israel in the wilderness to prepare Him a habitation, the offerings were so abundant that the people had to be restrained. Bezaleel and his helpers reported to Moses, "The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which Jehovah commanded to make" (Exodus 36:5). Their hard-earned Egyptian wages, secured for them by Jehovah Himself before they left that land (Exodus 3:22), were willingly laid at the feet of their Saviour-God. Even so, their devotedness will not compare with that of the poor widow upon whom the eye of the Lord Jesus rested in the days of His flesh (Luke 21:2-4).

There was a pitiful contrast in Malachi's day. The remnant returned from Babylon, to whom God had shown much favour, became so cold and indifferent in their religious exercises that even the prescribed tithes and offerings were not brought in (Malachi 3:8-10). Voluntary offerings — the "extras" which manifest the love of the heart, were absolutely non-existent.

When Hezekiah appealed to the people concerning the needs of the house of Jehovah, he was delighted with the result. "When Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed Jehovah and His people Israel" (2 Chronicles 31:8). The pious king's feelings were similar to those of Paul in Php_4:17 — "Not that I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account."

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost produced a marvellous wave of surrender amongst the newly saved. Their joy was great. Behold how they stood with God! Having been convicted of the awful crime of killing the Son of God, they had come to understand that His death was part of a divine counsel of grace, and that in virtue of His death and resurrection they were forgiven and blessed. Their affections followed earth's rejected One to the place where He had gone, and this made the things of earth of but small value in their eyes. Accordingly, they "sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:45). They did not understand union, for the Mystery had not yet been revealed, but they practised unity most blessedly. There were no suffering poor in the early Church in Jerusalem. Barnabas is specially named in connection with this remarkable wave of surrender. "Having land, he sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the Apostles' feet" (Acts 4:37). This community of goods was not demanded of them; but the voluntariness of it made it very precious in the sight of Him who for our sakes became poor that we through His poverty might be rich (2 Corinthians 8:9)

A community of goods was only practicable while the Church was limited to one city. As the truth spread, and Assemblies sprung up elsewhere, a different condition of things obtained. Some were rich, and others were poor. The Corinthians were wealthy, but the Assemblies of Macedonia were poor (2 Corinthians 8:1-2). When need arose in one quarter, it was met from another, for the Church of God is one throughout the earth. The first example of this is recorded in Acts 11:27-30. A general famine was predicted by Agabus, and the brethren in Antioch, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea." The threatened trouble was to be "a great dearth throughout the world." Thus Antioch was in danger, as well as Judea, yet they sent their gifts. Unselfish love, assuredly. This is a greater and more enduring bond than ecclesiastical regulations, however well intentioned they may be. Judea might well have replied to Antioch, "the things which were sent from you are an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God" (Php_4:18).

Coming now to the Temple, Solomon was the man chosen by God to build it. "Solomon thy son, he shall build My house and My courts, for I have chosen him to be My son, and I will be his father" (1 Chronicles 28:6). But the plans were nevertheless given to David. "All this," said David, "Jehovah made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, even all the work of this pattern" (1 Chronicles 28:19). These plans David entrusted to Solomon, the pattern of the porch, and of the house thereof," etc. (1 Chronicles 28:11). David stood upon higher ground in relation to Jehovah than his distinguished son. He was as truly a vessel of divine inspiration as Moses in the wilderness. What honour will compare with conscious nearness to God?

In all his afflictions David delighted in the thought of a house for God. The humble tabernacle was very dear to him meantime. "Jehovah, I have loved the habitation of Thy house and the place where Thy glory dwelleth" (Psalms 26:8). When his wanderings ceased, and he dwelt in peace in "a house of cedar," it did not please David that the ark of God still abode in curtains (2 Samuel 7:2). The intensity of his desire is expressed in Psalms 132:1-18. But however godly his desire, and however acceptable to God, the man of peace, not the man of war, must be the builder of God's house (1 Chronicles 22:8-9). Psalms 132:1-18 looks far beyond the day of Solomon to Christ's millennial reign Then a Temple will be reared that will excel in glory anything that earth has yet seen. Ezekiel's last nine chapters describe with much detail the new conditions.

But if David must not build the house for God, he could at least make preparation for it, and this he did with all his heart. Hear him: "I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God. . . . I have set my affection to the house of my God" (1 Chronicles 29:2-3). This is what God loves to see in His people. Yet the day came when He had to say to Israel, "Who is there among you that would even shut the doors for nought. "Behold, what a weariness is it!" (Malachi 1:10, Malachi 1:13) said their poor wayward hearts. All their sorrows have come upon them because they "served not Jehovah their God with joyfulness. and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things (Deuteronomy 28:47). When David brought the ark up to Zion he "danced before Jehovah with all his might" (2 Samuel 6:14 : The same holy enthusiasm manifested itself in him in old age and imparted itself to Solomon, the princes, and the people generally. The whole of the two concluding chapters of Chronicles should be read, for they describe the unity of mind and heart amongst all classes in Israel concerning the great project of building a house for Jehovah.

David's attitude towards the people while encouraging them to build for God is very beautiful. "Hear me, my brethren" (1 Chronicles 28:2). Jehovah desired Israel's king, when the time came that they would have one, to read the book of the law daily "that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren" (Deuteronomy 17:10). There is nothing of the Oriental despot in this. God's king must not tyrannise over, but "feed Jacob His people and Israel His inheritance" (Psalms 78:71). The great King of Kings, when He sits upon the throne of His glory with angels in attendance will acknowledge lowly men who have preached His word as "My brethren" (Matthew 25:40)

The offerings for the work of the Temple were immense. David had stored up vast sums, partly the spoil of his conquests; from his own fortune he gave largely; and the princes and people added their quota. The figures (in talents) stand thus:

From the Treasury, 100,000 gold. 1,000,000 silver. 1 Chronicles 22:14

From the King, 3,000 gold. 7,000 silver. 1 Chronicles 29:4

From the Princes, etc., 5,000 gold. 10,000 silver. 1 Chronicles 29:7

Reckoning the gold at £5,475 per talent of 114 lbs. (1 cwt or 50Kg.) weight, and the silver at £342 per talent, the total amounts to £591,300,000 gold, and £347,814,000 silver. This is the value of the precious metals. The brass, iron, and precious stones would swell the amount further. {About 1945.}

The people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to Jehovah, and David the king also rejoiced with great joy." The king in his public thanksgiving took no credit for this lavishness, saying, "Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee" (1 Chronicles 29:9, 1 Chronicles 29:14)

He then called upon the people to bless Jehovah. "And all the congregation blessed Jehovah God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads and worshipped Jehovah and the king." Burnt-offerings followed on a large scale, and the people "did eat and drink before Jehovah on that day with great gladness" (1 Chronicles 29:20-22). Why? Because their faithful God had consented to dwell in their midst, and had allowed them the honour of building the house for His name.

Thus everything was prepared before David's death for the first of the five Temples which are connected with Jerusalem in the sacred records.

(1) Solomon's Temple, now to be constructed.

(2) Zerubbabel's Temple, erected by the pious remnant after The return from Babylon (Ezra 1:3).

(3) Herod's Temple, built in vainglory by the alien king (John 2:20).

(4) Antichrist's Temple, built by Jews in his day, and desecrated by him (Revelation 11:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Matthew 24:15).

(5) The Millennial Temple, specifications given in Ezekiel 40:1-49, etc.

When the Lord Jesus died, the veil of the Temple was rent in the midst, God thus signifying that the old order was abolished. The time has now come when neither in Jerusalem nor in Samaria's

mountain should men worship the Father (John 4:21-24).

A few words may well be added here concerning worship in "the hour that now is" (i.e. Christianity). Its fullest expression is found in John 4:21-24. Those who suggest that the Samaritan woman raised the question of places of worship in order to turn aside the keen edge of the Lord's exposure of her evil life are not quite just. What she had in her mind more probably was the difficulty as to where He could be found of whose holiness the Speaker was making her conscious. The Samaritans said one thing and the Jews another; where then was the true religious centre? The Lord replied, "Woman, believe Me" — note His words. He speaks with authority; He knows God as no other could know Him; and He only can reveal His thoughts. "Believe Me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." Samaritan worship never had a divine standing — it was an abominable conglomeration from the beginning (2 Kings 17:41); Judaism, on the contrary, was originally of God. But both must stand aside now. The Father stands revealed in the person of the Son of His love; all distance is ended. Sanctuaries and ecclesiastics are worse than useless now. The place of assembly matters little — school-house, barn, private dwelling, etc. The Father seeks those who are conscious of intimate relationship with Himself, and who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Nothing else will satisfy Him "in the hour that now is." It was doubtless a delight to Him when Hezekiah reopened and repaired the slighted Temple (2 Chronicles 29:3); but such service could have no value today.

In John 4:22 the Lord said, "the hour cometh," for God had not yet definitely rejected the earthly sanctuary. Ere long the veil would be divinely rent, but the action was still future. In John 4:23 the Lord goes further, saying, "the hour cometh and now is." The subject here is not the place of worship, but the character of it. The Son having come, He who is now revealed by the sweet name Father, requires something more than forms, however scripturally correct. "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him." Precious thought! the Son was on earth seeking sinners; and the Father by His revelations in and through the Son was seeking worshippers. Thus, even before the Temple was divinely disowned, there was more for God in the adoration of Mary of Bethany than in all the gorgeous ritual of the Aaronic priesthood (John 12:3)

"In spirit and in truth" does not mean merely that all worship must be in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with revealed truth (although that is deeply important); it means also a spiritual and truthful condition. Hence the Lord's words in John 14:24 : "God is a spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Not now the "Father," but "God." Being what He is, He insists that those who approach Him should do so in this way and condition. "Must." Neither Peter nor Barnabas were in a spiritual and truthful condition when they dissimulated at Antioch; Paul, who was, faithfully exposed and rebuked their dishonesty (Galatians 2:11-14).

National worship, expressed in ritual, was once according to God, at least as far as Israel was concerned, and it will be so again in the millennial age, so Ezekiel's concluding chapters tell us; but both in the past and in the future for such worship a visible sanctuary and a priesthood are necessary. All this is entirely out of place in the hour that now is.

The gathering centre now is not a building, but a name. "Where two or three are gathered together unto My name there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). This supposes grateful souls attracted by what they have found in the Name of their Lord coming together to speak to God and

to one another about Him. This is heart-exercise, very precious to the Father and the Son, and very delightful to the worshippers themselves.

The Temple

The Tabernacle and the Temple differ considerably in the matter of interpretation. It has pleased the Spirit of God to give us the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews as His inspired commentary on the institutions of the former, but no New Testament book opens up, for us the matter. This is the more remarkable because the Tabernacle had long passed away and the Temple was functioning in Jerusalem. The explanation is that the position of the saints when the Hebrews were ad dressed answered more to Tabernacle than to Temple conditions. For the world had become a wilderness to them because of their identification with the rejected Christ. Nevertheless, as we meditate upon the Temple and its vessels as described in the Books of the Kings and Chronicles spiritual suggestions will not be lacking.

There is nothing superfluous in the Scriptures, although we are not always able to grasp the significance of its varied con tents. The question may easily arise in some minds, Why have we double accounts of the reigns of David, Solomon, and other kings? Why the Books of the Chronicles seeing that there were already existent the Books of the Kings! Examination will show that the Holy Spirit had His special aim and purpose in connection with each set of books. It is observable, for example that in the Chronicles the sins of David and Solomon are omitted while their triumphs and glories are emphasised. Also, as we look through the divine instructions concerning the Temple we shall find some striking variations between the two accounts As a general statement, it may be affirmed that the teaching of the Books of the Kings is moral, and the teaching of the Chronicles is typical. In the later books David and Solomon are foreshadows of Christ, but in the earlier books we see the men as they really were in their weakness and failure. It seems suitable that the typical should be prominent in the Chronicles for the books were written after the return from Babylon, when the Holy Spirit sought to cheer the faith of the pious remnant with the glories of the coming Christ by the ministry of Haggai, Zechariah, and others (Ezra 5:1).

The Threshing-floor Site

What was it that constrained David to say when standing upon the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, "This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel" (1 Chronicles 22:1). There was no direct word from God to this effect. David was a man of spiritual perception, and the pardoning grace of God expressed at that spot suggested to his heart that in that place Israel's Jehovah would delight to dwell. The grievous sin of numbering the people (mainly that the king might know how many soldiers he had!) brought down judgement. David's humble repentance, and his pleading for the suffering sheep, brought him an angel from Jehovah bidding him set up an altar in Ornan's threshing floor. As the smoke of the sacrifice ascended to heaven, Jehovah answered by fire, and He commanded the destroying angel to sheathe his sword (1 Chronicles 21:1-30). This intervention of God in grace suggested to David that Jehovah had thus indicated His choice of site for the sanctuary. Accordingly, when building-time came, we read, "Solomon began to build the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem in Mount Moriah, where He appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing- floor of Ornan the Jebusite" (2 Chronicles 3:1).

God delights to dwell with men, but it is only possible on the ground of accomplished redemption. In Patriarchal times He visited His own and communed with them, but He sought no dwelling-place with them. But when He took Israel into relationship with Himself on the ground of the blood of the lamb, He said, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). When the victorious Christ went up on high having finished His great redemptive work on earth, the Holy Spirit came down to build for God a habitation amongst the saints (Ephesians 2:22). In keeping with this great divine principle, Solomon was to build the Temple of Jehovah on the spot where the sacrifice was offered and accepted. It was in the same neighbourhood that Abraham laid Isaac upon the altar (Genesis 22:2).

We note also that the Temple was to be built upon the threshing floor of a Gentile. Hiram, King of Tyre, another Gentile, collaborated heavily with both David and Solomon in the great work (1 Kings 5:1-18). Thus Israel's God had Gentiles before His mind to share the blessedness of His presence on earth amongst His people. "Mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all the peoples" (Isaiah 56:7). Just a hint in advance of the largeness and universality of God's grace in this Gospel day.

Kings and Chronicles

It is not in vain that the Holy Spirit has given us four presentations of Christ in the New Testament. Each Evangelist, as surely we all know, had his own line given him by God; and in result we have all that the all-wise Spirit judged our limited capacity could receive concerning the wondrous theme John 21:25 In like manner the Books of Kings and Chronicles give us two views of the Temple. In Kings it is looked at as the dwelling-place of God, with special reference to the Millennial Kingdom; in Chronicles the Temple is rather the seat of divine government, and the place of approach for God's people. This will account for the omission of the Brazen Altar and the Veil in Kings, both being reserved for the Chronicles. The chamber that were built into the walls of the house round about are special feature of the Kings account. They were designed for the occupation of those who served in the sanctuary, for God delights to have men dwelling with Him. The attitude of the large Cherubim in the Holy of Holies, looking down the house as if they would fain look outside, is noted in Chronicles alone This suggests that when the Kingdom of David's greater Son is established righteousness will look abroad no longer in judgement, but in blessing upon men. Other points of difference between the two descriptions of the Temple will be noticed by the careful reader. Nothing in God's blessed Word is without significance.

Jachin and Boaz

The Holy Spirit in 1 Kings 6:1 dates the building of the Temple from Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Thus would He emphasise the fact that it was amongst a people saved by sovereign grace Jehovah was about to make His abode. The work was commenced in the fourth year of Solomon's reign "in the month Zif, which is the second month." This month corresponds with the British May. Zif means "splendour." Spring was in its glory, physically and otherwise. Israel was about to experience a glorious summer-time of blessing and prosperity. Alas, that it did not continue. The unfaithful nation has passed through a long dark night of sorrow since. But summer is approaching, for "HE is nigh, even at the doors" (Matthew 24:33)

The Temple was 60 cubits long, 20 cubits broad, and 30 cubits high. In it's breadth and length it was double the size of the Tabernacle. The Holy of Holies was 20 cubits long, and the Holy place 40 cubits. In the front of the house broadways was a porch 20 cubits long and 10 cubits broad 1 Kings 6:23 The great pillars are described in much detail in 1 Kings 7:15-22; much more briefly in 2 Chronicles 3:15-17. They were named Jachin, meaning "He will establish," and Boaz, "In Him is strength." These great pillars, each about 18 cubits high, were a public testimony that stability is found in Christ, and only in Christ. Early in the building operations, Jehovah spoke afresh to Solomon. "Concerning this house which thou art in building, if thou wilt walk in My statutes, and execute My judgements, and keep all My commandments to walk in them: then will I perform My word as to thee, which I spake unto David thy father: and I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake My people Israel" (1 Kings 6:11-13). Here again is the fatal "if." Everything at the moment depended upon the faithfulness of king and people. All was soon lost, never to be restored until the day of the Lord Jesus. But "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Romans 11:29) and He will yet fulfil all His promises of grace to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Such is the evil and instability of poor flesh. that each one of us must humbly say, "Saved by grace alone; this is all my plea."

The brass (more probably "copper" or "bronze") of which the pillars were made was brought from Syria by David in war, so we are told in 1 Chronicles 18:8. Brass signifies the righteousness of God in judgement. Hence its use in the Altar of Burnt-offerings. Four figures of righteousness are found in Scripture: —

Gold — Intrinsic divine righteousness.

Brass (or copper) — Divine righteousness as applied to man in judgement.

Linen — "The righteousness of the saints" (Revelation 19:8).

Filthy Rags — The righteousness of the flesh (Isaiah 64:6).

The ornamentations of the pillars suggest what Christ works for and in His own. "Nets of checker work": He has caught us out of the sea of humanity for Himself (Matthew 13:47; Luke 5:10). "Wreaths of chain work": He binds and secures all whom He acquires (Hosea 11:4). "Pomegranates" are frequently used in Scripture as emblems of fruitfulness. All who are Christ are meant to be fruitful. "Upon the top of the pillars was lily work": the lily character, purity and lowliness, is precious in His sight. Solomon's massive brazen pillars were in the Lord's thoughts in His promise to the overcomer in Philadelphia: I will make him a pillar in the house of My God and he shall go no more out. What an encouragement to all who with little strength seek to keep His word and not deny His name. Looked down upon today by the great ones of ecclesiastical Christendom: small here and now, but made great and notable in the day of recompense by our appreciative Lord. Where will others be then.

He will establish: in Him is strength — precious assurance both for Israel and for ourselves. He is willing, He is able. David's royal house has forfeited everything by unfaithfulness; but, Christ will restore it all in the day of His power. Meanwhile, Solomon's notable pillars have been broken up as scrap, and carried to Babylon (Jeremiah 27:19-22; Jeremiah 52:17-23). The Holy Spirit dwells mournfully upon their beauty whilst recording their destruction.

The Chambers

"Against the wall of the house he built chambers round about . . . both of the temple and of the oracle" (1 Kings 6:5). The Tabernacle had nothing answering to this; but the Temple in contrast with the Tabernacle represents a settled condition of things, for wars were at an end, and rest had come. Privileged indeed were the men who were thus permitted to dwell with God. We are reminded of the longing of David's heart as expressed in Psalms 27:4 : “One thing have I desired of Jehovah, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of Jehovah all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of Jehovah, and to enquire in His Temple." He spoke also of the joy of it. “Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple" (Psalms 65:4). The natural man understands nothing of this. The thought of God is repulsive to him. Gladly would he flee to the uttermost parts of the universe if thereby he could get away from God. Every atom of longing after God; yea, of delight in God that we discover within ourselves is the fruit of sovereign grace, The Apostle strikes a high note in Romans 5:11 : "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the reconciliation."

The Lord Jesus had the Temple-chambers in mind when He said, "In My Father's house are many mansions (abodes)." In John 2:16 He called the Jewish Temple "My Father's house and in John 14:2 He applies the same title to Heaven. His coming we shall find ourselves in the presence of God known to us as Father; we shall be in the company of the Son we shall bear His image; and we shall share with Him the infinite wealth of the Father's love.

The Temple-chambers were built in three stories, the higher being reached by winding stairs. The lowest stories were five cubits broad, the middle were six cubits, and the third were seven cubits. Is this meant to suggest continual progress in the Father's house above?

There is a beautiful notice of the chambers in 1 Chronicles 9:33 (Revised Version): These are the singers, heads of father's houses of the Levites, who dwelt in the chambers and were free from other service: for they were employed in their work day and night." Delightful picture! Elderly men, living with Israel's God in His house, and released from all other service but praise. The time may come when some of us may have to cease active labour, but we can still praise our God If our hearts are in tune!

In the midst of the instructions concerning the chambers in 1 Kings 6:1-38 we find these remarkable words: "the house when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building. A colossal work wrought without noise. How unlike man's methods. God is preparing a building for Himself today. It is composed of living materials — sinners saved by grace. "The whole building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:21). In the midst of all the clamour and turmoil of earth this work of God is proceeding. Unostentatiously, but surely the work grows, and it will be seen in glorious result at the Lord's return. Unlike Solomon's temple, it will never be overthrown.

The Walls

If the Church is to be God's holy Temple eternally, the walls of Solomon's Temple will show us something Pictorially of our future state. The stones for the walls were fully prepared away from

Jerusalem. God is today getting His stones out of nature's quarry by means of the Gospel. Evangelists are God's quarry men, and pastors and teachers are His masons, by their unfoldings of Christ shaping and fashioning the stones according to the mind of God. Direct divine dealing in the way of suffering also helps largely towards the desired end. David's afflictions moulded his character as uninterrupted prosperity could never have done. But no stone was seen in Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 6:18). All were completely covered with refined silver (1 Chronicles 29:4). In like manner, all that we were by nature is covered by Christ's redemption. The walls were also covered with boards of cedar. In the Tabernacle shittim wood is prominent. It was the incorruptible acacia of the desert, the only wood that was available there. In the Temple the principal woods used were the cedar and the olive. The shittim wood suggests what was true of our blessed Lord even when in wilderness circumstances; the cedar points to what will be true of the saints in glory. "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:53)

The cedar-wood boards were beautifully carved. Cherubim, palm-trees, and open flowers were wrought upon them, and all were covered with gold. The walls were treated exactly as the doors, which will come before us in due course. Seeing that the doors typify Christ, who is the only way to God, the carved doors remind us that we shall be like Christ when the work of grace is completed in glory. The whole house (Solomon) overlaid with gold" (1 Kings 6:22). "All was bright with the glory of divine righteousness that distinguished the throne of God which was placed there" (J. N. D.). Gold being the most precious of metals is frequently used in Scripture as symbolical of that which is of God.

Even the floor-boards were covered with gold. For the Tabernacle no floor was provided; the feet of the priests trod the desert sand. In the Holy City Jerusalem "the street is pure gold, as it were transparent glass" (Revelation 21:21). What a spectacle of glory and majesty was the interior of Solomon's Temple. Above, the ceiling was "overlaid with fine gold" (2 Chronicles 3:6); below, the priests walked upon gold — "gold of Parvaim," says the record, as if to suggest to us that only the best was used. All around the ministering priests gold glittered: and as if this mere not glorious enough, even the gold was "garnished with precious stones for beauty" (2 Chronicles 3:6). Truly, when me look around us in "God's eternal day," not at a mere material structure, but at the glorified saints who will form His holy temple, our eyes will behold everything that is expressive of Christ. None of His divine graces will be lacking in a single saint. "What hath God wrought!" (Numbers 23:23).

The Great Cherubim

One of the most unique features of Solomon's Temple was the great cherubim which were set up in the Oracle, or Holy of Holies. They were in addition to the gold figures which were upon the ark. The ark was exactly the same in the Temple as in the Tabernacle, save as regards its contents. The large cherubim were each ten cubits high (about fifteen feet); and each had two wings. "Five cubits was the one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the other wing of the cherub: from the uttermost part of the one wing unto the uttermost part of the other were ten cubits" (1 Kings 6:24) Thus the breadth of the wings was as the height of the cherubim themselves. They touched the walls of the Oracle on either side, and they touched each other in the middle. They were made of olive wood, and were covered with gold. (The four wings are put together in 1 Chronicles 3:11 — "twenty cubits long").

The cherubim have been well described as "God's judicial executive, to whomsoever entrusted, and in whatsoever circumstances displayed." They do not appear to be a distinct order in the creation of God; they are rather symbolical figures. In His ways of government and judgement God sometimes uses angels and sometimes men. Whichever it may be, the instruments employed would be God's cherubim for the moment.

Their faces (given not in 1 Kings, but in Ezekiel 1:1-28) suggest to us the varied qualities of God's dealings in government and in judgement. The man's face suggests intelligence; the lion's face power; the eagle's face rapidity of execution; and the face of the ox suggests patience.

The cherubim are mentioned for the fourth time in Scripture in connection with the Temple. (1) In Genesis 3:24 we see them placed forbiddingly at the gate of the garden after Adam's sin living creatures doubtless). (1) In Exodus 25:18-20 we see golden cherubim upon the ark, beaten out of the same sheet of gold as the mercy-seat. The contrast between these Scripture Passages is instructive. The executors of God's judgement who are seen opposed to transgressors in Genesis 3:1-24 are seen in Exodus 25:1-40 looking down peacefully upon the mercy-seat from which the blood of the sacrifice was never lacking. Blessed be God, the atoning blood of Christ makes blessing sure for sinful men, and puts judgement far away. (3) The cherubic symbol comes before us next (but in the singular) in 2 Samuel 22:11 : "He rode upon a cherub, and did fly: and He was seen upon the wings of the wind." This is really part of Psalms 18:1-50, a rapturous song written by David "in the day that Jehovah had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul." It is a remarkable outpouring. David was carried by the Spirit far beyond the circumstances of his own case. Israel's deliverance from Egypt is also in the Psalm; and, what is much more important, the Psalm speaks of the deliverance of Christ from the power of death, and from all other foes. He becomes "head of the nations." The cherub is introduced into the Psalm as expressive of the righteous government of God. acting on behalf of the objects of His favour.

In 2 Chronicles 3:13 we have the interesting statement that the Temple cherubim "stood on their feet, and their faces were inward." The margin reads "toward the house." Now, seeing that the cherubim were situated at the far end of the Temple, "towards the house" would in result mean “outwards,” for they were looking in the direction of the front door. Here we have the delightful suggestion, so fully taught in the prophetic word, that in the day of Kingdom-glory all that God is in righteous government will look abroad in blessing upon men — not Israel only, but all nations. Judgement will have done its needful work.

The Doors

The doors and the walls were alike in their beauty, and together they speak of Christ, and of what divine grace will work in those who are His. The pitiful lament of Psalms 74:1-23 comes to mind here. Asaph describes the desolation of the sanctuary by an outside foe. In measure this Psalm was fulfilled in the days of Nebuchadnezzar; but its complete fulfilment awaits the period of "the great tribulation." The King of the North will come down with overwhelming hosts; and because of the evil of the Jewish mass, he will be allowed to wreak his vengeance on the land and sanctuary (Daniel 11:40; Joel 2:1-32), The pious remnant Will feel the position keenly. A man was famous according as he had lifted up his axe upon a thicket of trees. But now they break down the carved work thereof with axes and hammers (Psalms 74:5-6). Men Once famous for felling trees now spending their strength in destroying the sanctuary of God. Heart breaking to those who loved the

house for the sake of the One who dwelt therein. Asaph was a contemporary of David. It is not certain that he lived to see the Temple built, yet he writes thus graphically of its destruction! The spirit of prophecy is divinely wonderful. By its means God "calleth the things which be not as though they were" (Romans 4:17).

But 1 Kings 6:1-38 speaks of palmy days when the blessing of Jehovah rested upon Israel, before the sin and folly of both king and people blasted everything. The recorder appears to speak of two sets of doors: in 1 Kings 6:31-32 folding doors into the Oracle, thus separating the holy place from the holiest of all and in 1 Kings 6:32-35 folding doors into the Temple itself, the entrance into the Oracle being slightly the narrower of the two sets. The Oracle doors were made from the olive tree and the Temple doors from the fir tree. The Revisers in their margin and J. N. Darby in his text, think the cypress to be meant rather than the fir. The following Scriptures connect this tree with desirability and beauty — Isaiah 55:13; Isaiah 60:13; Hosea 14:8. suitable type of Christ, assuredly. The doors were carved with cherubim, for this blessed One will rule and execute judgement for God; with palm-trees, for victory is with Him; and with "half-open flowers"(J.N.D.), suggestive that there are with Him always greater and more delightful things to come. Over all this was placed gold, typical of the righteousness and glory of God. Even the hinges of the doors were gold (1 Kings 7:50) The lintel and side posts of both sets of doors were made of olive-wood. The power of the Spirit is in mind in this. Only by His power are we able to avail ourselves of Christ for access into the divine presence. Ephesians 2:18 gives us a sweet statement in few words of our great privilege as men saved by grace. "Through Him (Christ) we have access by one Spirit unto the Father."

The Molten Sea

This great receptacle for water was placed in the outer court of the Temple. Its full capacity was 3000 baths (about 22,000 gallons); the usual quantity therein was 2000 baths. In 2 Chronicles 4:1-22. the molten sea follows the brazen altar, with which in its teaching it was morally connected; but in 1 Kings 7:1-51 it follows the pillars Jachin and Boaz, the brazen altar being omitted altogether.

The molten sea took the place of the laver in the Tabernacle, but there are interesting points of difference between the two vessels. The laver was made from the women's mirrors (Exodus 38:8); the sea was made from the spoils of David's conquests (2 Chronicles 18:8). The mirrors suggest renunciation on the part of those who gave them; the spoils speak of victory, in keeping with the Kingdom glories which are set forth in the reign of Solomon. The size and capacity of the laver is not stated; for the sea these particulars are recorded. Both laver and molten sea were for the use of the priests. From these vessels they drew water for the cleansing of their hands and feet when serving in the sanctuary of God. When Israel's priests were consecrated, they underwent a total washing (Exodus 29:4). In Hebrews 10:22 and John 13:10 this is alluded to as typical of what we have experienced spiritually. The New Birth is meant. But more than this is required in those who would draw near to a holy God. The New Birth has made us in nature meet for His presence; but the laver and the molten sea teach us that we must also be meet in practice if we would enjoy His presence. The Psalmist said when confessing his love for Jehovah's house. "I will wash my hands in innocency! so will compass Thine altar, O Jehovah" (Psalms 26:6). Grace has made "a holy priesthood" of the whole household of faith but holiness demands purity of thought and life in us

all. The Book of Leviticus was the guide-book of the Aaronic priests, and throughout purity is inculcated. Leviticus 10:1-20 is particularly solemn in its instructions and warnings, having been occasioned by the impiety of Nadab and Abihu. God resents irreverence and carelessness in the holy things, as the Corinthians experienced painfully (1 Corinthians 11:30)

The molten sea, unlike the laver, "stood upon twelve oxen three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea was set above upon them, and all their hinder parts were inward" (1 Kings 7:25; 2 Chronicles 4:4 : In all probability there were pipes running downward through the mouths of the oxen whereby the water, when needed flowed forth. Possibly the Lord had this in view when He stood and cried on the great day of the feast of Tabernacles "If any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38). In the great kingdom age the water of the Word will first be applied to Israel "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zechariah 13:1). "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you" (Ezekiel 36:25). The pious remnant, preserved through the great tribulation, nucleus of the new nation, will not then need to teach every man his neighbour and every man his brother. "Know Jehovah." for all will know Him, and that as a pardoning God (Jeremiah 31:34). Great spiritual activity will result. "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of Jehovah from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3). "They shall declare My glory among the Gentiles" (Isaiah 66:19) "The remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles as a dew from Jehovah, as showers upon the grass" (Micah 5:7). The ox is in Scripture a type of the patient labourer for God: twelve is the number of Israel's tribes. Under the mighty impulse of the latter-day outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Israel will be filled with desire that all the nations should know their God, and join with them in songs of joy (Psalms 67:1-7). Blessed contrast to their attitude during this day of grace. Their determined hostility, and their evil efforts to hinder the Gospel being preached to the Gentiles is described in 1 Thessalonians 2:16; Acts 13:45; Acts 14:2-19. But when the Redeemer comes to Zion, and their hearts are wrought upon by divine grace, they will realise the purpose of God in their election, and will gladly throw themselves into the current of the Spirit's operations, thus spreading blessing far and wide. Did not God say to Abraham, "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed?" (Genesis 22:18). For Israel's conversion the world's blessing waits.

Israel will in that day, as compared with other nations, stand in priestly nearness to God. At Sinai He said, "If ye will obey My voice . . . ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6). This has never yet been realised. In Hosea 4:6 we hear the voice of Israel's indignant God, "I will reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to Me." But in the day of kingdom- glory, "ye shall be named the priests of Jehovah: men shall call you the ministers of our God" (Isaiah 61:6). The knowledge of God and His great salvation will be spread universally. The twelve oxen under the molten sea looked north. west. south. and east.

Meantime, while Israel continues in obstinate unbelief, it is our privilege and responsibility to Preach the Gospel of the grace of God to every creature. Are we whole-heartedly in this blessed service?

There is an allusion to the molten sea in Revelation 4:6; but what John saw in heaven was not a sea of water, but "a sea of glass like unto crystal." The purity of heaven is fixed; no more shall we need to "cleanse ourselves" as we are exhorted in 2 Corinthians 7:1.

Ten Bases and Ten Lavers

Ten bases of brass, with wheels, were made upon which ten lavers rested, Remarkably, more is said about the bases than about the lavers. This would scarcely be man's method of writing; but the Holy Spirit's ways are always divinely wise whether we understand them or not. The bases and lavers are described at some length in 1 Kings 7:27-39; but their use is told us in 2 Chronicles 4:6. "Such things as they offered for the burnt-offering they washed in them; but the sea was for the priests to wash in." Every sacrifice that was brought to the altar spoke to God of Christ. This being so, they must be absolutely clean. When Noah came out of the ark, he "builded an altar unto Jehovah, and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings upon the altar" (Genesis 8:20). This action showed that he had been taught of God. When the leper was to be cleansed, a very lowly offering was prescribed — two sparrows; but it was stipulated that they should be clean (Leviticus 14:4). Thus would God teach us pictorially lessons concerning His Holy One:

"He did no sin" (1 Peter 2:22).

"He knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

"In Him is no sin" (1 John 3:1).

Well may we sing: —

"Thy life was pure without a spot,

And all Thy nature clean."

His spotlessness was necessary for His sacrifice. Prove one flaw in the Christ of God, and the blood of His cross loses its value, and nothing can save us from the damnation of Hell.

"Which of you convinceth Me of sin"' was His challenge soon after His pointed words to the accusers of an adulterous woman, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8:7-46). Men felt constrained to say of Him, "He hath done all things well" (Mark 7:37); and the Father said immeasurably more when twice He opened the heavens, and testified, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17; Matthew 17:5).

Ten Lampstands

The number ten and its multiples has a large place in the Temple arrangements. The Temple itself was 60 cubits long, 20 cubits broad, and 30 cubits high; the Oracle was 20 cubits long, 20 cubits broad, and 20 cubits high; and the porch in front of the house was 20 cubits long, 20 cubits high, and 10 cubits broad. Amongst the furnishings we find ten brazen lavers set upon ten bases; ten candlesticks (lampstands) of gold (1 Kings 7:49); ten tables of gold, and a hundred golden bowls for sprinkling (2 Chronicles 4:8).

Numbers in Scripture have meaning. Ten is the number of responsibility, evidenced in the ten commandments of the Law. The prominence of ten in Solomon's Temple is thus a reminder that everything was being set up on the ground of responsibility, and that the continuance of that marvellous system of glory and blessing depended upon the faithfulness of king and people. "The candlesticks of pure gold, five on the right side, five on the left, before the Oracle, with the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs of gold" (1 Kings 7:49). The Tabernacle had but one lampstand, and for the Millennial Temple none at all are mentioned. The ten in Solomon's temple are therefore particularly suggestive. Would the royal house of David be true to its trust as witness for God amongst the nations Alas, for the answer. Yet the forbearance of God was wonderful. When in His anger He told Solomon that his kingdom should be rent, He added, 'but I will give one tribe to thy son for David My servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen" (1 Kings 11:13). To Jeroboam He said that David His servant was to have a lamp always before Him in Jerusalem, "the city which I have chosen Me to put My name there" (1 Kings 11:36). When recording the unfaithfulness of Abijam, Solomon's grandson, God said, "Nevertheless for David's sake did Jehovah his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem" (1 Kings 15:4).

In 2 Kings 17:1-41 the whole situation as regards Israel is divinely summed up. After 260 years of separate national existence under nineteen kings, all evil, Jehovah gave the ten tribes up to the Assyrian oppressor. "Jehovah was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of His sight: there was none left but Judah only" (2 Kings 17:18). Judah learned no lesson from the ruin of their brethren. For 130 years longer Jehovah bore with their evil ways, and finally gave them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. "Judah kept not the commandments of Jehovah their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. and Jehovah rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hands of spoilers, until He had cast them out of His sight" (2 Kings 17:19-20). The “throne of Jehovah," established in Jerusalem, was overthrown; and David's lamp was extinguished. All is lost on the ground of responsibility, but grace will yet more than restore what Solomon and Israel so foolishly threw away. God has pledged Himself that David shall never want a man to sit upon his throne. Christ is the fulfilment of this. Rejected by the people in their blindness at His first coming, He now sits at Jehovah's right hand in heaven. "Sit Thou," is God's word to Him today; "Rule Thou" will be His mandate to Him shortly (Psalms 110:1-2). Until that great day Israel and the nations must continue to writhe in ever-increasing wretchedness. "The times of the Gentiles" must run on to their appointed end (Luke 21:24). Sin's wages are very terrible.

. . . . . .

John in Patmos was shown seven golden lampstands (Revelation 1:3). These represented seven local Assemblies then existing; and prophetically they show us the Church as a whole from first to last. It was a testimony set up in divine righteousness, but the failure is made painfully clear. The lampstand will be removed. Christ alone is God's "faithful witness" (Revelation 1:5).

The Veil

The Oracle was shut off from the Holy Place by folding doors made of olive wood, joined to the side posts by hinges of gold; But there was also a veil as in the Tabernacle, apparently hung with chains of gold (2 Chronicles 3:14-16). It is noteworthy that neither the veil nor the brazen altar are

mentioned in the "Kings" description of the Temple, but in the "Chronicles" account only. This is because in the earlier description the Temple is viewed primarily as the dwelling-place of God; but in the later it is rather the seat of divine government, and the place of approach for God's people. A somewhat similar distinction is found in the instructions concerning the Tabernacle. In Exodus 25:1-40, Exodus 26:1-37, Exodus 27:19 the manifestation of God is the great thought; thus we begin with the ark and other vessels of display. From Exodus 27:20 onwards we have the means whereby the people could have to do with God, and in those chapters we find the priesthood and the altar of incense. In the first section we have God drawing near to men, and in the second we have men drawing near to God. Let us seek grace and wisdom to "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

The veil was alike in both Tabernacle and Temple. Hebrews 10:20 teaches us that it typifies the flesh of Christ. A divine wonder is here. Hebrews 1:1-14 is occupied with the greatness and majesty of the Son. He has an eternal throne, and angels worship Him. Yet He took to Himself "the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3). He became truly man in order that He might undertake our cause. But He is nevertheless our Lord and our God (John 20:28). Not only is He the perfect and only manifestation of God to men, He is the only way of approach to God. "Through Him we have access."

No one but the priests ever saw the veil either in the Tabernacle or in the Temple. Others saw the entrance to the sacred enclosures, and they could enter through them in order to reach the altar of sacrifice; further, the people in general dare not go: When King Uzziah ventured into the Temple itself he was smitten with leprosy for his presumption" (2 Chronicles 26:16. Our privileges as believers in the One who has entered in in the power of His own blood are truly wonderful. Not only have we been permitted to draw near to God as sinners seeking pardon (this would answer to the Israelite approaching the brazen altar); we are now worshipping priests, and may enter freely into the holiest. We not only gaze upon the veil, we pass through it. The divine action at the moment of the Saviour's death, whereby the veil of the Temple "was rent in the midst" (Luke 23:45) "from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51) signified God's rejection of that order of things which kept His people at a distance from Himself. But how persistently has Satan laboured through the centuries to enslave men to priestly orders and ritualistic observances, to the dishonour of the work of the Lord Jesus and to the damage of their souls. Every believer should be able to joyfully sing: —

"So near, so very near to God,

I cannot nearer be;

For in the person of His Son

I am as near as He."

But this would raise a great outcry, and the unwanted officials might say as Demetrius of old to his fellows, "Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth." (Acts 19:15).

One verse describes the Temple Veil. "He made the veil of blue, and purple, and crimson, and fine linen, and wrought cherubim thereon" (2 Chronicles 3:14). Its very existence proclaimed that "the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest" (Hebrews 9:8). But it nevertheless spoke of Christ.

The blue reminds us that He is "out of Heaven," in contrast with the first man who was "out of the earth, earthy" (1 Corinthians 15:47) Such is our wonderful position in relation to God that we need a heavenly Priest (Hebrews 7:26). If the Aaronic priesthood existed today. it could not help a people who are nearer to God than themselves. Purple is suggestive, of His universal dominion Not yet is this in His hands; but we shall yet behold Him honoured and adored throughout God's wide creation. Crimson speaks of both suffering and glory. He who suffered here will in God's appointed time have glory here. Meanwhile, the harlot of Revelation 17:1-18 arrays herself with every mark of earthly splendour. The Fine linen into which the colours were wrought tell of the spotlessness of Him who suffered on the tree; the cherubim assure us that it is He who will judge righteously for God, when the present period of grace has come to an end.

"Within the Holiest of all,

Cleansed by His precious blood,

Before the throne we prostrate fall,

And worship Thee, our God."

The Brazen Altar

As with the veil, so with the altar of Burnt Offering, the Holy Spirit gives us but one verse concerning it in the Book of Chronicles. In the Book of Exodus fifteen verses are devoted to its predecessor in the Tabernacle, and in Ezekiel many verses are appropriated to the altar and its service in the millennial Temple. Solomon "made an altar of brass, twenty cubits the length thereof, and twenty cubits the breadth thereof, and ten cubits the height thereof" (2 Chronicles 4:1). Here we have no description whatever of this most essential vessel. But its great size is noted. In length and breadth it was four times as large as the altar in the Tabernacle. It was approximately 30 feet long, 30 feet broad, and 15 feet high! Its measurements in length and breadth exactly corresponded to the Oracle, "the most holy house" (2 Chronicles 3:8), thus giving us the sweet assurance that the sacrifice of Christ is equal to all the demands of the holiness of God. What rest and peace this gives to conscience and heart!

The altar of Burnt Offering was made of brass. Bronze or copper is perhaps the correct word for the metal used. Here is a quotation from a departed friend: "Gold is the righteousness of God for drawing near where God is; brass is the righteousness of God for dealing with man's evil where man is" (W. Kelly). This being so, the vessels within the house were made of gold, and those outside — altar, molten sea, bases and lavers, were made of brass.

The brasen altar leads us in thought to "the wondrous cross on which the Lord of glory died." No vessel in the Temple compared with the altar for size. Truly, there is nothing like the cross. When the great sacrifice was drawing near, "Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him" (John 13:31-32). Man's side of the cross — the shame and spitting, is not in view in these words. (1) The cross was the glory of the Son of Man. Perfect love and perfect obedience were expressed there. (2) God was glorified. All that He is shone out in the cross of Jesus — His righteousness, holiness, truth, grace, and love. In no other way could God have thus displayed His glory. (3) As surely as the Son of Man delighted to glorify God at all cost to Himself,

so God delighted to glorify Him. He has not to wait for the day when He will sit upon David's throne, God "'straightway" glorified Him at His own right hand in heaven.

Every sacrifice offered upon the brazen altar spoke to God of Christ. All the offerings prescribed in Leviticus 1:1-17, Leviticus 2:1-16, Leviticus 3:1-17, Leviticus 4:1-35, Leviticus 5:1-19, Leviticus 6:1-30, Leviticus 7:1-38 found their perfect and final answer in His death upon the tree. Calvary's cross became for Him, in His wondrous grace, the altar of sacrifice. The fire of God's judgement went forth against Him in the day of His grief, and the whole dread question of sin was settled by His sacrifice never to be raised again with those who believe in His name.

The GOLDEN ALTAR, upon which incense was burnt daily (Luke 1:9), is only mentioned incidentally in the Temple instructions, no description at all being given in the three brief notices of it(1 Kings 6:22; 1 Kings 7:48; 2 Chronicles 4:19). Yet fourteen verses are devoted to the golden altar in the Tabernacle. For the millennial Temple, no golden altar is indicated in Ezekiel.

In close proximity to the altar of Burnt Offering in Solomon's Temple stood the molten sea. Atoning blood characterised the one, and water for cleansing characterised the other. This recalls two utterances from the lips of the Lord Jesus on the night of His betrayal. As He sat down with His disciples at the Supper Table, having first washed their feet, He said: —

"He that is washed (bathed) needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit" (John 13:10).

After supper, He took up, not the bason again, but the wine-cup and said: —

"This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

The water and the blood thus meeting our whole need as guilty before God, and also in nature unfit for His holy presence. Nothing but the blood could make expiation for our sins. Solomon's multitudinous sacrifices were not sufficient to remove even one sin (1 Kings 8:63; Hebrews 10:4); but they spoke eloquently to God of the coming sacrifice of His beloved Son, by which He made an end of our sins once and for ever. In virtue of His one offering God is able to say to His people, "Your sins and iniquities will I remember no more," and we stand before Him "sanctified" and "perfected for ever" (Hebrews 10:12-17).

But this applies to our guilt. More than this, we are in nature evil irremediably. The life inherited from the first fallen man is corrupt. "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18). A new life as well as pardon for sins, is necessary ere any man can dwell with God. Blessed be His name, our whole need is met in the death of Christ. He died for the sinner as well as for his sins, and faith can say "our old man has been crucified with Him" (Romans 6:6). The Word of God brings this home with power to heart and conscience, and the believer henceforth lives before God in the life of the risen Christ. He "is our life" (Colossians 3:4). The proof of this is seen in new tastes and aspirations. The things once loved are no longer wanted, and the things once despised are the objects of deep delight. It is a moral purification — new birth. This can never be repeated. Hence the Lord's words to the impulsive Peter, who first refused to allow Him to wash his feet, and then said, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head, He that is washed needeth not, save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit" (John 13:9-10).

Aaron' and his sons on the day of their consecration were washed with water by Moses at the door of the Tabernacle (Leviticus 8:6). This typified new birth, and was never repeated. Hebrews 10:22 applies the reality of this to Christians. But Aaron and his sons needed daily cleansing, and for this they had recourse to the laver. In like manner we need continual cleansing for our feet, for we walk in a sinful world, and for this there is "the washing of water by the Word" (Ephesians 5:26).

The efficacy of the blood of Jesus has been applied to us by the Holy Spirit, and it abides. There is, no repetition of it, for our guilt has been cancelled for ever. But the water, by means of which Christ and His great work wrought on our behalf is brought before us, is a daily and hourly necessity. Only thus can we walk with God in unclouded communion.

The Ark of the Covenant

The ark was not a distinctively Temple vessel. It was the same as was placed in the Tabernacle, and which accompanied the children of Israel in all their vicissitudes. But amongst all the beautiful and costly things that Solomon made for the sanctuary of God none compared with the ark in importance. Indeed the Temple was the resting-place of the ark! Quoting the words of Psalms 132:1-18, we hear Solomon saying at the close of his great prayer at the dedication of the Temple, "Now therefore arise, O Jehovah God, into Thy resting-place, Thou, and the ark of Thy strength: let Thy priests, O Jehovah God, be clothed with salvation, and let Thy saints rejoice in goodness" (2 Chronicles 6:41).

The ark was the highest type of Christ in that age of types. The shittim wood (acacia), and the gold which covered it speaks of His person as both man and God; the mercy-seat upon the ark speaks of His sacrifice, for the blood of the sin-offering was always upon it. As the receptacle for the tables of the law, righteousness was expressed by it. Grace in God has found a way whereby transgressors can be blessed. That way is Christ and His atoning sacrifice.

The history of the ark may be briefly stated: —

Moses placed it at the first in the Holy of Holies (Exodus 40:21).

On the march it was appointed to be carried in the centre of the host (Numbers 2:17)

Moses' strange request to Hobab caused Jehovah to send the ark three days' journey in advance (Numbers 10:33).

The ark passed through Jordan before the people (Joshua 3:11).

It was carried around the walls of Jericho on the shoulders of the priests (Joshua 6:1-27).

Its first abode in Canaan was Shiloh, in Ephraim's territory (Joshua 18:1).

Having been used by Israel as a "mascot," Jehovah delivered the ark to the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:1-22; Psalms 78:60-61).

Dagon fell before it (1 Samuel 5:1-12), and Philistine cities were smitten: Jehovah thus asserted His majesty amongst the heathen.

Bethshemesh was smitten because of irreverence on the return of the ark (1 Samuel 6:1-21).

Kirjath-jearim, house of Abinadab, was its next halting-place (1 Samuel 7:1).

David moved to bring the ark up to Zion, but his error in placing it on a cart, and Uzzah's irreverence in touching it, caused it to be carried instead to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite (2 Samuel 6:10-11).

The report of the great blessing to the Gittite led to the ark being removed on the shoulders of the Levites to the city of David with great rejoicing (2 Samuel 6:14-19)

The ark never returned to the Tabernacle. Solomon offered sacrifices before it in 1 Kings 3:15.

When the Temple was completed, the priests put the ark into the Holy of Holies, and drew out the staves. Its travels were ended (2 Chronicles 4:7).

At the destruction of Jerusalem the ark was not specifically mentioned, but the following words may be noted: "The king of Babylon .. . carried out thence all the treasures of the house of Jehovah" (2 Kings 24:13).

Amongst the sacred vessels that were restored in the days of Zerubbabel, the ark is not mentioned.

Before the captivity, in the good reign of Josiah, Jeremiah was guided to write thus of days of blessedness yet to come: "It shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith Jehovah, they shall no more say, The ark of the covenant of Jehovah: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall it be done any more. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of Jehovah, and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of Jehovah, to Jerusalem" (Jeremiah 3:16-17). There is no mention of an ark for the Millennial Temple as described in Ezekiel.

. . . . . .

Amongst the visions shown to John in Patmos we find the following: "And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His Temple the ark of His covenant: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail" (Revelation 11:19). It was but a vision, but very sustaining to faith as assuring us of the immutability of divine counsels. In the opening verses of the same chapter we see the earthly city Jerusalem, with its Temple, at the mercy of Gentile oppressors; the concluding verse assures us that nevertheless the counsels of God stand. His ancient people are remembered in Heaven, and His covenant of grace is to be fulfilled. The world's last fearful crisis will revolve around Israel. The judgements of God will overwhelm all their enemies and the people will emerge from their afflictions the better fitted to lead the nations. The following vision (Revelation 12:1-17) shows us Israel in queenly splendour, adorned with all the symbols of authority — sun, moon, and stars. Satan's opposition to this divine purpose, and much more to the Christ in whom everything is centred is also shown with God's delivering power and grace.

Scoured Brass

If we understand 1 Kings 8:43-50 aright, Solomon personally superintended the making of all the vessels of gold for the house of Jehovah, and Hiram, King of Tyre, made all the vessels of brass.

Under him wrought a skilled man of the same name, "son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre" (2 Chronicles 2:14). The association of the Israelite and the Gentile in the two kings, and the union of both in the person of the skilled workman, reminds us again that Jehovah had Gentiles in His mind for blessing as well as His people Israel when He caused the Temple to be built. "Let not the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to Jehovah, speak, saying, Jehovah hath utterly separated me from His people. . . . Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon My altar; for Mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people". (Isaiah 56:3-7). How evil therefore were the zealots who assaulted Paul in Jerusalem because they supposed that he had taken Trophimus an Ephesian into the. Temple area! (Acts 21:18). Our Lord's warning in Matthew 8:11 might well have been thundered into their ears.

The brazen vessels for the Temple were numerous. The princes of Israel, before David's death, gave 18,000 talents of brass, in addition to their contributions of gold, silver, and iron(1 Chronicles 29:7). But this was not all. "Solomon left all the vessels unweighed, because they were exceeding many; neither was the weight of the brass found out" (1 Kings 7:47)

We are told that "all the vessels which Hiram made to King Solomon for the house of Jehovah were of bright brass” (1 Kings 7:45). "Bright brass," or, as the margin reads, "made bright," or "scoured." A small detail not to be overlooked by those who would learn the mind of the Spirit. Thus scouring makes bright. Surely a parable is here. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11). There are three ways in which chastening may be treated. We may despise it; we may faint under it; or we may be exercised by it. For the exercised soul there is a blessed "afterward." The scouring has done its work. Yet we all shrink from the ordeal. Paul, when first conscious of the thorn in his flesh, besought the Lord to remove it. He was persistent. No immediate reply being granted him, he besought the Lord thrice. But when the word of the Lord came to him, the suffering man was satisfied. "He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). If his afflictions, which tended to reduce him to a nullity, furnished opportunity for the power of Christ to spread itself like a tent over him, it was enough. Christ was seen, not Paul. This was as it should be.

God sometimes gets His best out of suffering saints. The late G. V. Wigram said, "With a heart broken, and a will subdued, I have given thanks for sorrows in which the iron entered into my very soul. I say not with levity, but as before God, 'Thou knowest that I could not have lived through this and that if Thou hadst not given me grace to receive it at Thy hand, and to find that out of the eater came forth meat.'" The philosopher Bacon reminds us that "the pencil of the Holy Ghost hath laboured more to describe the afflictions of Job than the felicities of Solomon." It is noticeable also that the Spirit of God has devoted more than treble the space to the history of David than to the history of Solomon. The suffering David has left us a priceless heritage in the Book of Psalms, but it is certainly true that

"David's psalms had ne'er been sung,

If David's heart had ne'er been wrung.

The Spirit has recorded the locality, and the character of the ground, in which Hiram did his work. "In the plain of Jordan did the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarthan" (1 Kings 7:46). We are all surely living in "the clay ground" while we await the coming of the Lord Jesus; but we are being formed and fashioned by His hand, and as certainly as Hiram at the end of his labours presented to Solomon a multitude of brightly shining sacred vessels fit for the sanctuary of God, so the Holy Spirit at the end of His present gracious work will present in heavenly glory a multitude of souls meet in every way for the companionship of the First-born Son.

It is painful to refer, if ever so briefly, to the after history of all that which Solomon and Hiram wrought. Only five years after Solomon's death, Shishak, King of Egypt, plundered the Temple. "He took away the treasures of the house of Jehovah, and the treasures of the king's house: he even took away all: and he took the shields of gold which Solomon had made" (1 Kings 14:26). There were probably some replacements, but the Temple was plundered more than once by unfaithful kings in order to pay tribute to Gentile Powers. In due course came the terrible day when Jehovah could no longer tolerate the evil nation, and everything was given up to destruction. With sorrow of heart the inspired historian tells us of the breaking up of the famous pillars Jachin and Boaz, the bases, the molten sea, the twelve brazen bulls, etc. — all then loaded up as "scrap" in a dismal convoy of wagons, and transported to Babylon! "The brass of all these vessels was without weight" (Jeremiah 52:20). Thus did "the times of the Gentiles" begin, and they are not ended yet. Israel still bleeds, and the nations of the earth find no rest Oh the folly of sin against God.

Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had walked in My ways. I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned My hand against their adversaries. Psalms 81:13-14.

Bringing up the Ark.

The Temple was pre-eminently the resting-place of the ark. When the building was finished, Solomon and the people brought up from Gibeon "the Tabernacle of the congregation ("tent of meeting")with all its sacred vessels (2 Chronicles 5:5). This is the last historical notice of the spiritually suggestive sanctuary which Moses built in the wilderness. None of its sacred vessels entered Solomon's Temple. With the ark it was different. It had not been in the Tabernacle since the sad days of Eli. David pitched for the ark a tent in Zion, the Tabernacle being in Gibeon. The ark was brought up from its Zion tent by Solomon and the people with all possible honour. In it (the Temple) have I put the ark, wherein is the Covenant of Jehovah that He made with the children of Israel" (2 Chronicles 6:11)

The ark was a great type of Christ. Its mercy-seat (or propitiatory) was Jehovah's throne. It was the sign of His presence in the midst of the people whom His grace had delivered from the bondage of Egypt. It was a notable day in Israel when the much-travelled ark reached its resting-place. The singers, who had served since David's institution of them in two companies, some with the Tabernacle and some with the ark (1 Chronicles 16:37-42), were now united.

There are points of difference between David's removal of the ark from Kirjath-Jearim to Zion, and Solomon's removal of it into the Temple. Both were days of national rejoicing, but there was a holy enthusiasm in David that was peculiar to himself, and which was very precious to God. "David danced before Jehovah with all his might: and David was girded with a linen ephod" (2 Samuel

6:14). This was not mere fleshly excitement, but unfeigned delight in God. God was coming nearer to His servant. Michal might despise his manifestations of joy, but God estimated them at their true worth. Whole-heartedness is surely due to such a God as ours.

"I will praise Thee, O Jehovah, with my whole heart" (Psalms 9:1),

"With my whole heart have I sought Thee" (Psalms 119:10).

"I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Jehovah" (Psalms 119:145)

Thus did David delight to speak to his God. Lord, save us all from dead decent formality in divine things; give us David's spirit.

"There was nothing in the ark save the two tables which Moses put therein at Horeb when Jehovah made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt" (2 Chronicles 5:10). The ark had also contained a golden pot full of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, as Hebrews 9:4 reminds us; but these spake of wilderness needs which were now past. The tables of stone remained, for they formed the basis of all the laws of the kingdom. Nehemiah in his confession (Nehemiah 9:13) acknowledged that they were "right judgements, and true laws, good statutes, and commandments- "The law is holy," says Paul the Apostle (Romans 7:12). What a different world it would have been had the Kings of Israel and all the nations carried out its every injunction!

When the priests came out of the holy place, having drawn the staves out of the ark, the Levitical choir arrayed in white linen, took their stand at the east end of the altar of burnt offering, and sounded with their cymbals; psalteries, and harps and with them 120 priests blew their trumpets. The voice of praise ascended to heaven. They "praised Jehovah, saying For He is good: for His mercy (loving-kindness) endureth for ever" (2 Chronicles 5:11-13). The terms of this divinely-taught ascription of praise, found frequently in the Psalms, are a guarantee of future restoration and blessing for Israel. The people and their kings have deeply failed; but Israel's God will never fail.

But what was the meaning of all this exuberance of joy when the ark was thus placed in the Temple? To the outward eye it was but a small gold-covered chest, beside which the brazen altar looked immense. The ark was the symbol of Jehovah's presence, and He who in Moses' day accepted the Tabernacle in the wilderness and took up His abode therein was now a second time coming to dwell in the midst of His people. But faith would not confound the symbol with the reality. Solomon showed in his prayer that he had GOD before him that day. In the evil days of Hophni and Phinehas the people sent for the ark "that when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies" (1 Samuel 4:3). We wonder, not that the benighted Philistines so mistook the symbol for the reality that they trembled when they heard the Israelites shout with triumph at the sight of the ark, and said, "God is come into the camp ... woe unto us!" But Israel should have known better, and God so resented their superstitious carnality that He let the sacred ark fall into the enemy's hand (Psalms 78:61). At a later date when the people cared nothing for Jehovah and His commandments, and yet gloried in their possession of sacred externals, He said, "The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that ye build unto Me' and where is the place of My rest? For all those things have My hand made, and all those things have been; saith Jehovah: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and

trembleth at My word" (Isaiah 66:1-2). Thus the heart of a humble man, right towards God, was a more agreeable dwelling-place for Him than Jerusalem's costly temple. Our God loves reality. Two or three humble souls who come together because they delight in Him are more to the Lord Jesus today than all the imposing ritual of Christendom. "There am I in the midst of them." But there must be reality of heart, and sensitiveness of conscience concerning His will, else the simple conventicle is no more acceptable to Him than that against which it protests. Nay, it can be even more offensive in His sight because of its high pretensions. The exercised reader would do well to read carefully Jeremiah 7:1-7.

Jehovah answered Israel's outburst of praise in a remarkable way. "The house was filled with a cloud, even the house of Jehovah, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of Jehovah had filled the house of God" (2 Chronicles 5:13-14). The same thing happened to the Tabernacle, so that even Moses could not enter (Exodus 40:35) Moses, as mediator, had privileges beyond those of Aaron, but even he could not go into the sanctuary at that supreme moment. Ezekiel gives us the sorrowful history of the departure of the glory when Jehovah felt constrained in righteousness to forsake His house. Ezekiel 9:3; Ezekiel 10:4, Ezekiel 18:1-32; Ezekiel 11:23 describe the stages of its departure, as if God was most reluctant to give up His people. Ezekiel 10:4 tells us that "the court was filled with the brightness of Jehovah's glory," and Ezekiel 11:23 records that the glory-cloud paused on the mountain on the east side of the city (Olivet) before its final removal. Hear the word of Jehovah: "I will go and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face: in their affliction they will seek Me early" (Hosea 5:15). What it cost the heart of Jehovah thus to deal with the people of His choice is beyond our understanding. "How shall I give thee up? ... Mine heart is turned within Me, My repentings are kindled together" (Hosea 11:8). "The Lord of all the earth" (Joshua 3:11) became as regards His governmental dealings 'the God of heaven" (Daniel 2:37; Ezra 7:23). The glory-cloud returned to the land for one brief moment when our blessed Lord was upon the Mount of Transfiguration, but only three men were favoured to behold it (Matthew 17:5). They testify to us that in Him God found that delight that He has never yet found in Israel. Ezekiel was not only shown the glory departing from the Temple, he was also shown its return in happier days yet to come, when the repentant nation will say to the long-rejected Jesus, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:39). Here is Ezekiel's prophetic vision, "the glory of Jehovah came into the house (the Millennial Temple) by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the East ... behold, the glory of Jehovah filled the house" (Ezekiel 43:4-5; Ezekiel 44:2. By the way of the East it went; by the way of the East it will return.

"Thick Darkness"

When the cloud filled the Temple, Solomon made a statement which demands some attention. "Jehovah hath said that He would dwell in the thick darkness" (2 Chronicles 6:1). The words recall Exodus 20:21 : “Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was." These passages suggest to us most vividly the contrast between knowing God as Lawgiver, and as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Such language as Solomon used is impossible for saints today. However intimate may have been the communion of Moses and Solomon with the God of Israel, they did not know Him as the humblest believer is entitled to know Him now. God was not yet fully revealed, for the Only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father had not come forth from heaven to declare Him (John 1:18). All that God is has come out in the person and sacrifice of the

Lord Jesus. Accordingly, God is said to be "in the light,' and Christians are in the light with Him (1 John 1:7). "God is light" is another thing. Light is His nature. "In the light," and "in darkness" are terms which set forth His relations with men dispensationally. Peter tells us that God "hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). We are therefore "sons of light, and sons of the day" (1 Thessalonians 5:5). "Ye were once darkness (says Paul), but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8). This is practical consistency with the exceeding grace of God. 1 John 1:7 (so frequently misunderstood) is not intended to teach us how we should walk, but where. The "how" is found in the following chapter. "He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

Solomon next publicly "blessed the whole congregation of Israel: and all the congregation of Israel stood" (2 Chronicles 6:3). Only three kings ever publicly blessed the people of God (so far as the records speak), and they were all outstanding types of Christ — Melchizedek (Genesis 14:19); David (2 Samuel 6:18); and Solomon. Then Solomon blessed Jehovah on the people's behalf. "Blessed be Jehovah, God of Israel, who hath with His hands fulfilled that which He spake to my father David" (2 Chronicles 6:4-11). In all the doings of the great day of the consecration of the Temple, the High Priest is never mentioned. Everything was under the direction of the king. This brings home to us the great change that took place in Jehovah's dealings with Israel when the priestly house broke down in the days of Eli. God said concerning the priest for days to come, He shall walk before Mine anointed for ever" (1 Samuel 2:36). The priest became secondary to the king. God's King ultimately is Christ. All blessing depends upon Him, and all authority is vested in Him.

Solomon's Great Public Prayer

A king upon his knees in public, leading the nation in humble supplication to God. Rare spectacle; but why? Kings are but men, even though their power is great; Millions may tremble before them; but what is any king in comparison with God? The haughty Nebuchadnezzar, who so insolently denied his Maker, and cast three of His faithful servants into the burning fiery furnace was brought to the lowest depths of degradation in order that he might learn his own littleness and the greatness and majesty of God (Daniel 3:15; Daniel 4:35).This divine dealing with the first head of Gentile Imperialism was meant to be a lesson to all who might come after him. The only real difference between king and subject in the matter of prayer is this: the king needs prayer more than any man in his dominion, because of the heavy responsibilities resting upon him for which he must some day give account to the Sovereign of the universe. All well-disposed persons should pray continually "for kings, and for all that are in authority" (1 Timothy 2:2).

God has looked down upon three delightful spectacles of kings humbly praying before Him in Jerusalem: —

(1) Solomon at the dedication of the Temple, when all was well (2 Chronicles 6:13).

(2) Jehoshaphat in a day of peril from a great invasion (1 Chronicles 20:1-8).

(3) Hezekiah when threatened by the blasphemous Rabshakeh, and the Assyrian hosts (Isaiah 37:15)

Had these prayers practical value? Yes, a thousand times YES. It has been truly said, referring to Hezekiah, that "a king in sackcloth was more to be dreaded than a king in a coat of mail.

Solomon "stood before the altars of Jehovah in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands: for Solomon had made a brazen scaffold (or platform of bronze of five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high and had set it in the midst of the court: and upon it he stood and kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation. of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven, and said, O Jehovah God of Israel, there is no God like Thee in the heaven nor in the earth" (2 Chronicles 6:12-14). It would be a pleasure to transcribe the whole of the king's comprehensive prayer, but space forbids. It can be read without irreverent haste by anyone in five minutes. It has been our misfortune to have to listen to public prayers which have taken much more time than Solomon's, but which have contained much less definite matter. When shall we learn the lesson that we are not heard for our "much speaking?" (Matthew 6:7). Why do we not follow the example of the man who said, “Friend, lend me three loaves," and who repeated his request until his need was met (Luke 11:5). Definiteness-and persistency in prayer are divinely commended in the Word of God.

Psalms 127:1-5 shows us how Solomon felt on the great occasion of the dedication of the Temple. The house was indeed finished, but only God could maintain it, and all that was connected with it. "Except Jehovah build the house, they labour in vain that build it, except Jehovah keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." Lovely spirit of dependence upon God!

Solomon began his prayer by acknowledging the incomparableness of Israel's God, always faithful to His word. He promised David that he should never want a man to sit upon his throne, but added, "if thy children take heed to their ways." On the ground of responsibility all is lost. David's throne has long disappeared; his family also. Even so, David does not lack a man to sit upon his throne. The genealogy of his true Heir is given in Matthew 1:1-25, and before His birth the angel said to the mother: "The Lord God will give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever: and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). On the Day of Pentecost Peter told his audience in Jerusalem that the promise of God to David centres in the One whom they had crucified (Acts 2:30-31). At present He sits at the right hand of God in heaven, rejected by Israel and by all; but He will yet enter triumphantly into Zion, welcomed by the heartfelt praises of His people (Psalms 118:26).

Solomon felt that it was wonderful that God should condescend to dwell with men upon earth. "Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee: how much less this house that I have built?" (1 Kings 8:27). Solomon's Temple has gone, but a more wonderful thing has taken its place. The Church, composed of sinners drawn from amongst Jews and Gentiles, is now His Temple (1 Corinthians 3:16); His house (1 Timothy 3:15); His habitation (Ephesians 2:22). No mere glory cloud fills this; the Holy Spirit has come from heaven to form the building and to take up His abode therein. Every believer in Jesus is a "living stone" in God's "spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5). Privilege and blessing too immense to be described in words; but Satan has laboured from the beginning to rob God's saints of the realisation and joy of it. The various brands of clergy which have crippled the spiritual life of the Church through the centuries would never have come into existence had the abiding presence of the Spirit of God been held in living faith. But to the end He suffices for every real need, and humble waiting upon Him will always reap a rich reward.

However favoured and glorious Solomon might be, Solomon was not Christ. The contrast between the prayers in 1 Kings 8:1-66 and John 17:1-26 is great: Both prayers were uttered in Jerusalem. Although surrounded by magnificence, and possessed of wisdom and power without precedent, Solomon felt that stability had not yet come. Hence his prayer is full of anticipations of trouble. No such sentiments will be present in the mind of Solomon's greater Son when He takes the throne. Knowing to some extent the possibilities of poor flesh, Solomon used the word "forgive" before mentioning any specific evil (1 Kings 8:30). The probable needs and troubles of the future are then stated: —

(1) Personal trespasses (1 Kings 8:31-32)

(2) Military defeat (1 Kings 8:33-34)

(3) Drought (1 Kings 8:35-36)

(4) Famine, pestilence, etc. (1 Kings 8:37-40)

(5) Danger in war (1 Kings 8:44-45)

(6) Captivity in a strange land (1 Kings 8:46-50)

In the midst of these forebodings of disaster the king prayed for the stranger from afar who might hear of Jehovah's great name, and come, to His house in search of blessing. The Queen of Sheba and the Ethiopian eunuch are examples of this; but with this difference: the Queen got the blessing in Jerusalem, for all was in divine order in her day; the eunuch got the blessing going away from Jerusalem, the Temple being then an empty shell, the Christ of God having been rejected.

Jerusalem was Jehovah's earthly centre, hence Solomon requested that every prayer directed towards the city and sanctuary might be graciously accepted by God. Daniel remembered this in his captivity. "His windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God" (Daniel 6:10). Here again we note a difference between Solomon and Daniel. Solomon said of Israel, "they be Thy people, and Thine inheritance" (1 Kings 8:51); but when Daniel said, "Thy city and Thy people" he was gently corrected by the angel, "thy people and thy holy city" (Daniel 9:19-24). The solemn "Lo-ammi" sentence having gone forth, Daniel's people were no longer the people of God (Hosea 1:9). The link of relationship must continue broken until Israel lies low in humble repentance at the feet of the long-rejected Messiah.

In the "Chronicles" account there is an important addition to Solomon's prayer. "Now therefore arise, O Jehovah God, into Thy resting-place, Thou and the ark of Thy strength: let Thy priests, O Jehovah God, be clothed with salvation, and let Thy saints rejoice in goodness. O Jehovah God, turn not away the face of Thine anointed: remember the mercies of David Thy servant" (2 Chron. 7:41-42). Solomon had Psalms 132:1-18 in mind as thus he concluded his prayer. The full and final blessing of Israel is in view in that Psalm, which Christ alone can bring in. This seems more suitably quoted in “Chronicles" than in "Kings," for the later record is more typical than the former.

Solomon rose from his knees, and "stood and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice" (1 Kings 8:54-61). He finished by exhorting the people: "Let your heart be perfect with Jehovah your God, to walk in His statutes, and to keep His commandments, as at this day."

Everything thus depended for the time being upon the faithfulness of King and people. This being so, Solomon was led to refer, not to the promises made by Jehovah to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but to those made to Moses at the time of the great deliverance from Egypt. The divine promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which contemplate full and final blessing for Israel and for "all the families of the earth," await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ for their fulfilment.

The Feast of Tabernacles

Solomon's prayer brought an immediate acknowledgment from God. "Fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices: and the glory of Jehovah filled the house." This public acceptance of the sacrifices caused the whole congregation to bow low in worship, and they celebrated in song the eternal loving-kindness of their God (2 Chronicles 7:1-3). Our realisation of the blessed fact that God has accepted Christ and His offering on our behalf stirs our affections, and fills our lips with praise. Our worship and praise exceeds in spiritual intelligence anything that was possible for the people of God in the age of types and shadows.

Days of religious festival followed the dedication of the Temple. From North to South of the land the people threw their whole heart into it. Alas, for the contrast in hypocritical Christendom. Days of cessation from labour bearing religious names are too commonly used for more fleshly indulgence than usual. The days described in 1 Kings 8:62-66 were a bright foreshadowing of the glory, prosperity and joy that will be enjoyed by Israel (and not by Israel only) when the KING comes. As the people commenced, so they might have continued had they paid heed to the commandments of their God Their whole course might have been prosperous and blessed unto this day. Not many years after their joyous feasts the most precious things of Jehovah's house were being transported to Egypt as spoils of war (1 Kings 14:26). Dismal sight for angels to look down upon.

The Temple was commenced in the spring of Solomon's fourth year, and was finished in the autumn of seven years later There was order in this, as we shall see. Israel's feasts (more correctly "appointed seasons," for the Day of Atonement was no feast) are described in Leviticus 23:1-44. They were in two main divisions. We may call them the Spring feasts and the Autumn feasts. Those appointed for the Spring were: —

(1) The Passover, with its accompanying days of unleavened bread.

(2) The Sheaf of First-fruits.

(3) Pentecost, with its "new meal offering" of two wave loaves.

These have already received their fulfilment in the ways of God. The Lamb has indeed been sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5:7); the Sheaf has been waved before God in the person of the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:20), and the Pentecostal loaves are seen today in the Christian company. We are now God's witnesses in the earth.

Israel's Autumn feasts were held in the seventh month, corresponding to the British October. They were: —

(1) The blowing of Trumpets on the first day.

(2) The Day of Atonement on the tenth day.

(3) The Feast of Tabernacles from the fifteenth to the twenty second day.

These await their fulfilment at the end of the age. Israel's tribes will yet hear the trumpet-blast that will call them back to the land of their fathers (Isaiah 27:13; Matthew 24:31); there will be wrought in their souls solemn appreciation of the atoning sacrifice of Christ (Zechariah 12:10; Isaiah 53:5); and the joy and blessing of the Millennial Kingdom will follow in the goodness of God.

Twice seven days were kept by Solomon and his people. They commenced with the dedication of the altar of burnt-offering. The sacrifices of that day almost stagger the imagination — 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. Although the altar was very large, it did not suffice for sacrifices so numerous. Accordingly "the king did hallow the middle of the court that was before the house of Jehovah," and there the animals were slain and burnt. Yet we read in Hebrews 10:4, "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." Oh, the value of the one offering of the Lord Jesus. On a Single Day, by the offering up of Himself, He settled the whole dread question of our sins once and for ever. "By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). "No more conscience of sins" is our happy experience. We are now God's worshippers purged once for all (Hebrews 10:2). Only God knows the greatness of the Person and the preciousness of the blood which has wrought this for us. But the blessing is ours.

The words "a very great congregation" in 2 Chronicles 7:8 remind us of Psalms 22:25. That precious Psalm, which describes our Lord's experiences as the Sin-offering in Psalms 22:1-20, also speaks in its concluding verses of the far reaching results of His sacrifice. Kingdom bliss is in view in Psalms 22:25 — "My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation." Earth's long-rejected Sovereign will return to Zion, and in the midst of Israel and of many nations, all at last at rest and in peace, He will lead the song of praise to His God: Earth's potentates. then willingly subject to Him, will form the choir: "All the kings of the earth shall praise Thee, O Jehovah, when they hear the words of Thy mouth. Yea, they shall sing of the ways of Jehovah: for great is the glory of Jehovah" (Psalms 138:4-5). Meantime the Lord Jesus has His Assembly. "My Assembly," said He in Matthew 16:18. Psalms 22:22 is quoted by the Holy Spirit in Hebrews 2:12, and applied to the present time. "I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the Assembly will I sing praise unto Thee." It is but a "little flock" (Luke 12:32) when compared with the great congregation of the Kingdom age; but the Assembly is all that He has during this period of His rejection, and it constitutes His present joy. How far do our hearts enter into this?

In the joy, or perhaps excitement, of those stirring days, Solomon and the people did not keep the Feast of Tabernacles quite scripturally. Leviticus 23:1-44 is explicit that on the first day of the annual feast they were to make for themselves booths of palm trees, etc. "Ye shall dwell in booths seven days: all that are Israelites shall dwell in booths: that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt." This was apparently overlooked, for we read in Nehemiah 8:17 that the returned remnant from Babylon "made booths and sat under the booths: for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so." Nehemiah was thus more attentive to the written Word than the great king Solomon with all his wisdom.

But our God is very merciful to those whose hearts are right towards Him, even though they fail to act strictly according to His truth. But inadvertencies in the holy things must not be regarded lightly when they become known (Leviticus 5:15). Hezekiah prayed for those in his day who "had not cleansed themselves yet did eat the Passover otherwise than it was written" (2 Chronicles 30:18). It is interesting to observe that in these great religious movements, both in the days of Solomon and of Hezekiah, the High Priest is not mentioned. The king led and acted, suggestive of the coming One who "shall sit and rule upon His throne: and He shall be a priest upon His throne" (Zechariah 6:13).

Everything earthly comes to an end — even the Millennial Kingdom has a time limit, and "on the eighth day (Solomon) sent the people away: and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that Jehovah had done for David His servant, and for Israel His people" (1 Kings 8:66). "Seven days and seven days, even fourteen days," yet the whole feast concluded "on the eighth day." Typically. "the eighth day" is Eternity, for the bliss and glory of the millennial age is but the vestibule into the kingdom which will know no end. This was the day when the rejected Messiah stood in Solomon's city and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me: and drink" (John 7:37). The ritual of the Feast of Tabernacles, all pointing to Himself, was in full swing, but HE was unwanted. It was true then, and it is true still, that hearts which cannot be satisfied with religious ceremonials can find full satisfaction and rest in Christ.

But neither in Solomon's day nor in the greater day of the Lord Jesus, did the people know the time of their visitation. they soon forsook the God of the Temple and served other gods; and when the God of the Temple visited them in love they cast Him out and crucified Him. Need we wonder at Israel's anguish, and at the sufferings of all the nations' The end is not yet. The evil must be traced to its very root, and judged there, ere the blessing of God can be again enjoyed

Jehovah Speaks Again

"Jehovah appeared to Solomon the second time, as He had appeared unto him at Gibeon" (1 Kings 9:2). It is good to hear the voice of God. But the contrast between Jehovah speaking to Solomon at Gibeon and now in Jerusalem is great. at Gibeon Jehovah said, "Ask what I shall give thee,' and the young king's answer was a real delight. But several years had passed — years of unparalleled prosperity in the goodness of God, and the Temple was now in being. Israel's blessing was therefore complete. Now Jehovah speaks solemnly to His servant about his responsibility. His prayer and supplication had been heard, and the house that he had built was now the acknowledged dwelling place of Jehovah. "Mine eyes and My heart shall be there continually" — wonderful divine pledge. Solomon's Temple has long been destroyed; other structures have succeeded it; but Haggai 2:9 teaches us that in God's sight the house has been one throughout. "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than of the former, saith Jehovah of hosts: and in this place I will give peace" (R.V.). In the same chapter we read, "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory?" Compare Ezra 5:11 Even the Temple that was built by Herod for his own aggrandisement was called by the Lord Jesus "My Father's house" (John 2:16). It is perhaps more remarkable that the Temple in which the Man of Sin will sit is called "the Temple of God" in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 and Revelation 11:1.

Jehovah's answer to Solomon's Prayer is given at greater length in 2 Chronicles 7:1-22 than in 1 Kings 9:1-28. First, He graciously promised to hear the supplications of His people in times of

trouble. Then He renewed His pledge that David should never want a man to sit upon the throne of Israel; but He pointedly added that this was no guarantee to the line of Solomon. That line has wholly disappeared, but Christ is God's resource. Men indeed crucified the One whom they hailed as "Son of David" (Matthew 21:3); but God raised Him from amongst the dead. He came of the Nathan branch of David's royal house (Luke 3:31), It will be a great day for Israel when they learn in the school of affliction that all their hopes are centred in Him.

This divine communication shows clearly how everything from that moment depended upon the King. "As for thee, if thou wilt walk before Me, as David thy father walked ... then will I establish the throne of thy kingdom . . . but if ye turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments ... then will I pluck them by the roots out of My land, which I have given them." The subsequent history of Solomon is the more terrible as we contemplate these plain words. He should have realised that his departure from God would wreck the whole magnificent order of things which surrounded him. His foolish son Rehoboam did not help matters. Several of Solomon's successors were pious men, and God graciously granted revivals in their time; but others of his line — notably Ahaz, Manasseh, and Zedekiah, were the vilest of the vile, and they filled Judah's cup of iniquity to the uttermost. Josiah was the last king: that was worth anything to the nation, and he foolishly threw away his life at the age of thirty-nine in a quarrel which belonged not to him (2 Chronicles 35:20). Not long after, the princes of the royal house were eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon, and "our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised Thee, is burned up with fire: and all our precious things are laid waste" (Isaiah 64:11). These calamities were set before the people as far back as the days of Moses, and in due time they came, to Pass (Leviticus 26:1-46; Deuteronomy 28:29-30). Passers by who might enquire as to the cause of the ruin would be told: "Because they forsook Jehovah their God, who brought forth their fathers from the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped and served them: therefore hath Jehovah brought upon them all this evil" (1 Kings 9:9).

The Lamentations of Jeremiah should be read at this point. There we have one who entered deeply into the mind of God pouring out his bitter grief for the ruin of His people. For Israel's captivity and desolation was no ordinary incident in the Sorrowful history of the nations. The tragedy of Israel is the tragedy of the world; thereby the world's deliverance and blessing is held up, and has become impossible until the appearing of the Lord Jesus. Alas, the world, although at this time is in the deepest distress, does not want Him yet!

"I made me great works"

Three Scripture books have come down to us from the pen of king Solomon — Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. The character of their contents suggest that these books were written at different periods in his life. The ardent language of the Song, describing the love of Bridegroom and Bride — Christ and Israel at the last, Points to Solomon's early days when his spiritual affections were alert towards God. Proverbs was probably written in the days of his maturity: and Ecclesiastes, with its language of chastened disappointment, was almost certainly Solomon's latest effort. The Spirit of God led him to record his painful experiences when in search of "good under the sun" for the warning of men in all ages who might be disposed to tread the same path.

Solomon tells us in his own words of the many public works in which he interested himself. Houses, vineyards, gardens orchards, etc. — never had the nation seen the like! "'Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them." But there was no satisfaction for his heart. "I looked on all the works that mine hands had wrought, and on all the labour that I had laboured to do: and behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit and there was no profit under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:4-11). The Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, etc., that were left in the land were pressed into service (1 Kings 9:20). New cities were built, and others were rebuilt (1 Kings 9:17-19). But all this meant heavy taxation. In due course the people groaned under the burden, while Solomon groaned with heart disappointment. It was probably the load of taxation that made the people appeal to Rehoboam to make their service less grievous and their yoke less heavy (1 Kings 12:4). Men will not thus complain when the Lord reigns in Zion. His glory will far exceed that of Solomon, but it will be as true then as now, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). Why do not the burdened nations of the earth join with us in the cry, "Come, Lord Jesus?" (Revelation 22:20).

Next to the Temple, Solomon's most important building was the house of the forest of Lebanon. This was set up in Jerusalem, but was erected with materials brought down from Lebanon, This house was much larger than the Temple. The latter was 60 cubits long by 20 cubits broad; the house of the forest of Lebanon was 100 cubits long by 50 cubits broad. Both were 30 cubits high. In this great building was kept Solomon's 300 shields of beaten gold (spoil for the Egyptians in the days of Rehoboam); and all the vessels therein "were of pure gold; none were of silver; it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon" (1 Kings 10:17-21). "There he made a porch for the throne where he might judge, even the porch of judgement" (1 Kings 7:7). This suggests the righteous administration of our Lord Jesus in the great Kingdom-age.

The use of the number six in the description of Solomon's glories is noticeable. His ivory throne had six steps; his importation of gold in a single year was 666 talents; 600 shekels of gold were used in each of his 200 targets; and "a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for 600 shekels of silver" (1 Kings 10:14, 1 Kings 10:16, 1 Kings 10:19, 1 Kings 10:29). Six is the number of man, and is expressive of incompleteness and imperfection. The super-man of the last days who will excite the admiration of the world has 666 for the number of his name (Revelation 13:18). Seven signifies completeness and perfection, but this can never be experienced on earth until the Man of God's eternal choice comes forth in His might.

The word "profit" occurs several times in the book of Ecclesiastes. As the disappointed monarch looked back over the many occupations of his life, he says wearily, "Behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:11). The Lord Jesus has ruled that if a man should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul, he would not be profited (Matthew 16:26). "But godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6). The man who penned these words found more than contentment — he found satisfaction, in Christ. In his early days he gloried in his fleshly advantages, which were neither few nor small. "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ" (Php_3:7). The knowledge of the Man in the glory of God, who first descended into the lowest depths for his salvation; the knowledge, too, that the place He has taken on high He has taken on behalf of His own, who are destined to be for ever with Him and like Him there, spoiled Paul for everything here He counted all things loss, and mere offal in the light of Christ glorified. The things that appealed to Solomon, gold buildings, women, etc. the abundance and combination of which were ultimately his undoing, had no appeal to the

apostle. Poor he might be, persecuted and despised, but he delighted to say, To me to live is Christ (Php_1:21). Let Paul be our model, not Solomon.

The Queen of Sheba

Kings and Queens have doubtless visited one another frequently from the beginning of national history. In days when rulers had absolute authority, such visits usually had political significance. Alliances and treaties were thus planned which had far-reaching results. But the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon was of a spiritual character. In her distant land she heard of Jehovah, the God of Israel, and her heart was attracted. She desired to learn more about Him from His servant who then reigned in Jerusalem. Serious questions exercised her heart, which none around her could answer; and she rightly felt that Solomon, with the wisdom given him by God, could help her. Thus she undertook the journey, and earned thereby the public commendation of the Lord Jesus a thousand years later. It is not absolutely certain just where her dominions lay, but it was probably in Southern Arabia in the regions settled by the descendants of Joktan of the line of Shem (Genesis 10:18).

This Queen's visit was the first answer to Solomon's prayer. In 1 Kings 8:41-43 he besought God to take notice of the stranger who was not of His people: Israel who might come to His house from a far country for His name's sake. The Holy Spirit expressly records that it was "concerning the name of Jehovah" the Queen of Sheba consulted king Solomon (1 Kings 10:1). Blessed be God, He has always had true sheep outside the fold, and some notable examples are shown us in the Word — the Queen of Sheba, Ittai the Gittite, Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, etc.; Whatever His dispensational dealings, and these in that age were with Israel, there has always been room in His great heart for those who wanted Him, wherever and whatever they might be.

What the Queen's "hard questions" were we know not, but they were all answered in divine wisdom. The woman of Sychar referred to the anxious problems of her own day when she said, "I know that Messiah cometh: when He is come, He will tell us all things" (John 4:25). How little she realized that she was actually conversing with the promised One! "I that speak unto thee am He." We cannot now speak face to face with Him; but His voice is to be heard in the Scriptures, and there all our soul's need is perfectly met. What the Queen heard satisfied her; but what she saw overwhelmed her. She found herself in the presence of the man whom God had exalted; she beheld his glory and majesty; she observed the dignity and happiness of those who served him; and there was no more spirit in her. In like manner our need drew us to the Christ of God, and His revelations of grace set our consciences at rest, and settled all our problems; then, being no longer harassed with a sense of need and danger, we were free to contemplate Himself. He is God's glorified Man, the One who finished the work He gave Him to do, the centre of His counsels of grace, Head of His body the Church, and of God's "universe of bliss." Stephen was so exhilarated by the sight of His present glory that he was strengthened to die in triumph; Paul was so filled and delighted with the same sight that he was strengthened to live, serve, and suffer for His name's sake. Do we not sometimes sing: —

"O fix our earnest gaze,

So wholly, Lord, on Thee,

That with Thy beauty occupied,

We elsewhere none may see."

How far do our hearts go with our words!

If dignity and joy marked those who surrounded Solomon, what shall we say of the portion of those who are identified with the exalted Christ? They (we) are the aristocracy of the universe, blessed beyond all present conception, and we shall ere long be displayed in glory in His company, to the wonder of all beholders (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

The Queen of Sheba perceived that it was love that prompted Jehovah to give Israel such a king. "Blessed be Jehovah thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel, because Jehovah loved Israel for ever, therefore made He thee king, to do judgement and justice" (1 Kings 10:9). The same love has provided us with a wonderful Saviour and glorious Head, and blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Him. Every favour that we now enjoy, and all that awaits us in "God's eternal day," is the fruit of His great heart of love.

Our blessed Lord put together two Old Testament characters as a testimony to the unbelieving generation around Him — Jonah and the Queen of Sheba. The preaching of Jonah was heeded by the heathen Ninevites; His preaching was rejected. The Queen of Sheba came a long way to hear the wisdom of a servant of God; the men around the Speaker were unwilling to listen to the wisdom of the Son of God. No toilsome journey was necessary in their case; the Eternal Son had come from Heaven into their very streets. The rejection of Him, greater than Jonah, and greater than Solomon, is the ruin of men. “He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the Only-Begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

Horses. Gold. Wives.

While Israel was yet in the wilderness, Jehovah anticipated the time when the people would have a king, and He caused instructions and warnings to be written for his guidance. The king was commanded to write out for himself a copy of the divine law; and he was to read therein daily that he might learn to fear Jehovah and be in all things an example to his subjects whom he must always regard as "his brethren." Israel being the special people of God must not be ruled after the pattern of Oriental despots. The king was warned not to multiply horses to himself, nor wives, nor gold (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). In all these particulars Solomon signally failed. As the years passed, the childlike simplicity which marked him at the beginning of his reign (1 Kings 3:1-28) faded away, and he became important and self-willed. Have we not seen something like it in the Church of God? The prosperity so graciously granted to Solomon was too much for his slender faith. The invisible and the eternal were never to him what they were to his father ; but: then he never had his father's training in the school of affliction. The thought is humiliating that we need affliction and sorrow to keep us right.

Solomon's Egyptian wife may have suggested horses to Solomon. for her father's kingdom appears to have been a land of horses (Isaiah 31:3). In David's day we read of mules and asses ; but these humble animals seem to have had no place with Solomon, if we except the day when he rode upon David's mule to be anointed at Gihon (1 Kings 1:38). Solomon himself tells us in Proverbs 21:31 that "the horse is prepared for the day of battle"; and he adds, what he afterwards quite forgot, "but safety is of Jehovah." Horses were thus used in his time for military purposes,

oxen being employed in agriculture (2 Kings 19:19); but David wrote before Solomon began to reign, "A horse is a vain thing for safety, neither shall he deliver any by his great strength" (Psalms 33:17), and again, Jehovah "delighteth not in the strength of the horse" (Psalms 147:10). In days of peril Jehovah is worth more to His people than regiments of cavalry, and concerning the enemies of His own, "at Thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep" (Psalms 76:6).

But Solomon gradually drifted away from these wholesome truths. Let us beware of drifting away from what we have learned from God. The painful repetition of the words "Know ye not?" in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians should suffice to bring home to our hearts the danger of doing so.

Solomon appears to have established a considerable business in horse-dealing. "The exportation of horses that Solomon had was from Egypt: a caravan of the king's merchants fetched a drove at a price" (1 Kings 10:28 — J. N. D.). The next verse tells us that he sold horses to the kings of the Hittites and of Syria. This trading may have been profitable, but Jehovah was not pleased with His servant for it. What a testimony to the heathen around, who should have learned from him that to trust in God is better than to trust in horses.

When Israel entered Canaan which was full of horses and chariots, Jehovah said, "Thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire" (Joshua 11:6), for Israel's God objected to the methods of the nations being employed in HIS work. His people's confidence must be in Himself alone.

At one period of Solomon's life he perceived the danger of riches. "Two things have I required of Thee; deny me them not before I die. Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches: feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is Jehovah? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Proverbs 30:7-9). As we follow the history of his reign we find the love of riches growing upon Solomon. God was too kind to His frail servant, and it cost him his soul. He had fleets at sea which brought him gold and silver in abundance. Gold was so common that he "made 200 targets of beaten gold:600 shekels or gold went to one target. And he made 300 shields of beaten gold: three pounds or gold went to one shield" (1 Kings 10:16-17). Surely these were not for use in war; just ornaments. But these costly ornaments were lost in war by Rehoboam, who in his vanity made shields of brass in their stead, and caused them to be brought out in display when he went into the house of Jehovah (1 Kings 14:25-28). Oh the pitiful vanity of poor flesh; appearances must be kept up even after the reality has departed. Blessed contrast when God restores His people in grace "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron: I will also make thy officers peace, and thy rulers righteousness" (Isaiah 60:17). All sham will be banished, and repentant Israel will enjoy God's exceeding grace.

The exercised reader should pause here and read the last chapter of Paul's first letter to Timothy. With reference to riches, two classes are indicated; those who are not rich, but who wish to be (1 Timothy 6:9-12); and those who are rich already (1 Timothy 6:17-19). The first class are warned that the pursuit of wealth leads to temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men who know not God in destruction and perdition. Such a course is unworthy of those who are in union with Christ and blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. Money is not evil in itself, but the love of it is a root from which every evil may spring. The Apostle

had observed some who, by their covetousness, had erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. He who would be a man of God (and there is great need of such) must flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience and meekness. If earthly pursuits leave no time for the cultivation of these seven divine graces all that the Christian may acquire is not gain but loss.

Those who are already rich are then wisely counselled. Mark the words "rich in this world," more correctly "in the present age." This is the time of Christ's rejection. Self — indulgence in a scene where He had no resting place for His head, and where all His rights are still denied Him is most unsuitable for those who own Him as their Saviour and Lord. Elisha's words to the Grasping Gehazi may well ring in our ears and in our hearts (2 Kings 5:26). Wealthy believers are reminded that riches are uncertain. and that their confidence should be in the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy. These last words assure us that up to a point God would have His own enjoy His bounty. Monasticism is not Christianity. But good works must abound; with liberality; should we assist the needy, "laying up for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come." The unjust steward of Luke 16:1-31 is an example of this. His dishonesty our Lord did not approve, but He did approve his prudence. While the opportunity was with him, he used it with reference to the future; the Christian should do the same; but with this difference, the steward had before him the coming dread days of unemployment, the Christian should keep in view the judgement-seat of Christ, where all our doings will be manifested in the light of God. The passage in 1 Timothy 6:19 should be read in the Revised Version. In 1 Timothy 6:12 we are indeed exhorted to "lay hold on eternal life" but in 1 Timothy 6:19 we should read "that they may lay hold on what is really Life.” Thus a life spent in good works and in gracious consideration for others is life indeed, in contrast with the words in 1 Timothy 5:6, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth."

Ten times in 1 Kings 10:1-29 we meet with the word "gold." Solomon loved it. But "that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). Let us remember this in our walk in the Assembly. To flatter the rich is a great offence, and to allow men to rule simply because they have more money than their fellows is disastrous; for a spiritually minded tinker is worth more to God and to his brethren than an unspiritually minded millionaire. Even to handle the Assembly's money in Jerusalem men were looked out who were "full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3).

Solomon's interest in horses was bad; his love of gold was dangerous; but his lust for women was a tragedy. All these things were forbidden by the God of Israel. as we have seen: but as opportunities for acquisition crowded upon him the once wise king became increasingly reckless, and so degenerated into the greatest fool of all time. He is a beacon set in the sacred page for the warning of men in all ages. He began badly. While yet in his teens he married an Ammonitess, and had a son — Rehoboam before he ascended the throne. Then he took an Egyptian, and later he gathered pagan women around him in hordes. Nehemiah spoke of this when he reproved the returned remnant for their unholy alliances. "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, even him did outlandish women cause to sin" (Nehemiah 13:26).

The contrast between the opening words of 1 Kings 10:1-29 and 1 Kings 11:1-43 is deeply solemn. 1 Kings 10:1-29 tells us of the visit of the Queen of Sheba with her spiritual difficulties, which Solomon was enabled to clear up by the grace of God given to him. His majesty, wisdom, the Temple and the King's ascent to it. and the happiness of all his servants overwhelmed her. She acknowledged the hand of God in it all and attributed it to His love for His people Israel. "But" — terrible words — 1 Kings 11:1-43 tells us of Solomon's host of unholy women, drawn from Moab, Ammon, Edom, etc. — "700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines; and his wives turned away his heart." The man who prayed so humbly to Jehovah at the dedication of the Temple became a worshipper of Ashtaroth, Milcom, and other heathen abominations. He who built the Temple for Jehovah's name sank so low as to "build a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem (Olivet), and for Molech the abomination of the children of Ammon. and likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods? Jehovah's loved Zion was girdled with all that was hateful in His sight. Jerusalem centre of spiritual light in 1 Kings 10:1-29, in 1 Kings 11:1-43 hot-bed of the grossest idolatries! Unhappy Solomon — "How are the mighty fallen!" (2 Samuel 1:27). "And Jehovah was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice" (1 Kings 11:9).

Let us not read the humiliating story in vain. It is written for our learning. The companionship of a holy woman, selected under the guidance of God, is an immense help and comfort to the Christian; but the influence of an unholy woman is sufficient to wreck the spiritual life and testimony of the very best. "The head of the woman is the man" (1 Corinthians 11:3), and the woman taught of God acknowledges it, and accepts the leadership of her husband; but the woman who knows not God too often rejects this, and gets control over the man. Solomon, in spite of his rich endowments, fell under this evil spell, to his own undoing, and to the ruin of his people.

Proverbs 31:1-31 presumably written by Solomon — describes with much detail the ideal woman, whose "price is far above rubies," but he never succeeded in finding her. “One man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all those have I not found" (Ecclesiastes 7:28). But God could have found one for him!

Apes and Peacocks

In the early years of his reign Solomon prized wisdom and understanding above all things, and God in His goodness responded to the desire of his heart and gave him wisdom "exceeding much." He excelled in wisdom all the men of the East and all the sages of Egypt. "He was wiser than all men . . . and his fame was in all nations round about." In consequence “they came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, for all the kings of the earth had heard of his wisdom" (1 Kings 4:29-34). In Proverbs 2:13 he commends wisdom thus: "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding." Rubies and fine gold, he tells us, are worthless in comparison. But as the material prosperity of his kingdom developed, we are told that his imports were "gold and silver, ivory, and apes and peacocks" (1 Kings 10:22). Every three years the supply of all these was maintained by ships of Tarshish. "Apes and peacocks." For a man pre-eminent in the earth for wisdom this is a descent from the sublime to the ridiculous. We find a strange blending of things that differ in Ecclesiastes 1:17 : "I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly." In Ecclesiastes 2:12 also: "I turned myself to behold wisdom, and

madness and folly." Not at the same moment, surely! First, he valued wisdom as more precious than rubies and fine gold; then he resorted to madness and folly. Apes are the synonym of folly, and peacocks of vanity.

We recall J. N. Darby's well-known lines :-

"O Lord, alas what weakness

Within myself I find;

No infant's changing pleasure

Is like my wandering mind."

Beloved Christian reader, we can scarcely refrain from holding Up our hands in amazement at the fickleness of Israel's great king; but what about ourselves? Wisdom such as Solomon never imagined is within our reach today, but do we long after it? The Apostle prayed for the Colossian saints that they "might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Colossians 1:9). He had in mind the great treasure which had been entrusted to him for administration, "the wisdom of God in a mystery" (1 Corinthians 2:7) — the mystery of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 3:1-21). God's greatest and grandest thoughts concerning the glory of Christ have been revealed since His rejection on earth and His return on high. What men refused Him the kingship of the Jews was a small thing compared with that with which the Father has invested Him. He has placed Him at the head of the universe, and — wonder of wonders He has given Him a body to share His glory, and that body is made up of sinners saved by grace. In the great mystery of God is "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3).What value do our hearts set upon this? Paul could not teach the mystery at Corinth because of the carnality of the believers in that city.

"Apes and peacocks" — folly and vanity! Yet Solomon desired them. We may not value these particular creatures as pets, but do we in any degree cling to things which correspond to them? We sometimes sing:-

"All the vain things that charm me most

I sacrifice them to His blood."

“But let us consult our hearts and examine our ways. What vanities have we surrendered in response to the appeal of the precious blood? In the bird world it is the male who flaunts his splendour. The pea-hen is modest in comparison with her mate. But in the world of men and women it is the female that is in special danger. Hence the Spirit's pointed words in 1 Timothy 2:9, "That the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety (or, with modesty and discretion); not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works." God appreciates "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. In His sight it is of great price” (1 Peter 3:4). Are these instructions always obeyed by women who profess to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ. Are men absolutely immune from the ape and peacock danger? Alas, no! The writer has sat alongside an "elder" at the Lord's Supper who had carefully waxed his moustache before leaving home, and this as recently as the year 1943!

Our God hates fleshly display. When Hezekiah displayed all his treasures to the messengers of the king of Babylon (probably feeling flattered by their visit) he was told that they should all be carried to Babylon, and that his sons should be eunuchs in the King's palace (2 Kings 20:12-19).

Closing days

It may surprise some when we say that the records of Solomon's forty years' reign are very scanty. It has pleased the Holy Spirit to give us sixty-five chapters about David, but only twenty about Solomon, and several of those are occupied with the Temple rather than with its builder. Although Jehovah heaped favours upon Solomon such as no other king ever had. He never had the pleasure in him that He had in his father David.

Solomon's reign of exaltation, glory, and prosperity had cloudy finish. Jehovah was faithful from first to last, but His servant was not. We cannot help contrasting the end of the great king with that of some others noted in the sacred page Jacob, after a stormy career (occasioned by his own crookedness had a glorious sunset. His last days were his best. With holy dignity he pronounced blessing upon the mightiest potentate of that period, and with spiritual discernment he blessed the son of Joseph. Enoch had a most delightful finish. "Enoch walked with God: and he was not: for God took him" (Genesis 5:24 Elijah, after years of discouragement and peril connected with his testimony, was carried up by a whirlwind into heaven (2 Kings 2:1-25).

But Solomon! David's latter-day utterances fill two long chapters (1 Chronicles 28:1-21 and 1 Chronicles 29:1-30), and the simple faith and delight in the things of God therein expressed is exhilarating to our souls as we read. His "last words" as given in 2 Samuel 23:1-39, although very subdued in tone, breathe unbounded confidence in the faithfulness of God. But no last words of Solomon are recorded. We have the terse statement that "Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead" (1 Kings 11:43 : More about him could be read in the writings of Nathan, Ahijah and Iddo (2 Chronicles 9:29); but no more space is devoted to this most faulty servant in the inspired Word. He was scarcely sixty years old when he died.

It is the end of the race that tells with us all. Happy is the man who, by the grace of God, continues to run well, and who, can say like Paul at the last, "1 have fought the good fight, have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

Once more, and for the last time, Solomon heard the voice of his God. When He appeared to him in Gibeon, He said, "Ask what I shall give thee," and He was pleased with the young king's reply (1 Kings 3:1-28); in Jerusalem He addressed him in words of encouragement and warning (1 Kings 9:1-28); now He could only pronounce sentence upon His grossly unfaithful servant. To Jerusalem He said later with reference to her idolatries, "Thou wast insatiable" (Ezekiel 16:18); the same was true of Solomon. Others selected their false gods; Solomon adopted them all. Truly, "the corruption of the best thing is the worst corruption." The kingdom of Israel should now be broken up. As a witness for God it had become worthless. During forty years David had typified Christ as the Man of war; during another forty years Solomon had typified Him as the Man of peace. Now all was over, and Israel's long night of degradation was about to commence.

"I will rend the kingdom from thee, and give it to thy servant" Yet the calamity should not happen in Solomon's time, but in the reign of his son, who by his folly proved himself as unfit to rule as his

father. In mercy one tribe should be left for a while, "for David My servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen" (1 Kings 11:9-13).

"When a man's ways please Jehovah, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Proverbs 16:7). So Asa proved, and Jehoshaphat his son. Both these kings had quietness and rest round about, because they did the will of God (2 Chronicles 14:7; 2 Chronicles 15:15; 2 Chronicles 20:30). Alas, concerning Solomon we read, "Jehovah stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite"; also, "God stirred up another adversary, Rezon the son of Eliadah" (1 Kings 11:14-23). "With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure: but with the froward Thou wilt wrestle" (Psalms 18:26 — margin). It is a solemn thing when God is obliged to enter into controversy with any of us, but "if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1 Corinthians 11:31).

When enemies rise up against us our first appeal should be to God as to why He has permitted it. The enemies themselves may have no thought of God, but they may nevertheless be His instruments for the discipline of His people. The cruel Assyrian was the rod of Jehovah's anger with respect to Israel — "howbeit he meaneth not so" (Isaiah 10:5-7). The sufferings of the Hebrew Christians, under which they were disposed to faint, were apparently due to the persecution of the ungodly; but they were also the Father's gracious chastening. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:1-13). Hadad and Rezon appear to have been troublesome for many years, — and Solomon could have crushed them; but in his greatness and majesty he apparently despised them. Jeroboam arose later, and became a much more serious foe. He was an ambitious young man, and even aspired to the throne (1 Kings 11:37). Solomon, in forgetfulness of his own words in Proverbs 16:7, already quoted, instead of exercising his conscience before God about this antagonist, sought to slay him, after the manner of Saul with David.

David's throne is guaranteed by God, not to Solomon or to any other unfaithful creature, but to Christ. Jeremiah 33:15-17 makes this clear. "In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David: and He shall execute judgement and righteousness in the land. For thus saith Jehovah; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of Israel." Instigated by Satan, Athaliah might endeavour to destroy the seed royal (2 Kings 11:1); and Rezin and Pekah might plot to replace the seed of David by the son of Tabeal (Isaiah 7:6); but the purpose of God stands nevertheless.

The downfall of such a man as Solomon was a tragedy of the first magnitude, for it involved the ruin and devastation of the land and the people for three thousand years, and the deferment of deliverance and blessing for all the nations of the earth. Everything has doubtless been according to the counsel and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23); but this does not lessen the guilt of sinful men. Before it pleased God to subject Israel to the domination of the Gentiles, He was graciously pleased to grant occasional revivals in response to the fidelity of good kings such as Hezekiah and Josiah, but the hearts of the people were never right towards their God. Excellent kings might draw the multitude after them, but they served Jehovah "but feignedly" (Jeremiah 3:10)

Blessed day that is coming, when the King of His choice will return, and be welcomed by the people, then fully reconciled to God. "It. shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God: we have

waited Him, and He will save us: this is Jehovah: we have waited for Him: we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (Isaiah 25:9).

"Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power" (Psalms 110:3).

In Solomon's Porch"

A thousand years have passed away, and Solomon's Temple has been superseded by another, built by a stranger. Only a remnant of Israel was in God's land, under the domination of a Gentile Power. In Solomon's porch walked One whose glory far exceeded that of the famous king, but He was unwanted and unacknowledged. He had given "many infallible proofs" that He was the long-promised Deliverer, yet He was obliged to emphasise His dignity before them. "I say unto you, that in this place is One greater than the temple . . . behold, a greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:6, Matthew 12:41). Alas, blind eyes can see nothing! (Matthew 13:14). The people were already saying in their hearts, "We will not have this man to reign Over us" (Luke 19:14). The Holy Spirit remarks, "It was Winter" (John 10:20). This describes the condition spiritually as well as physically. When Israel is in a better mood Summer will come, for themselves and for all nations (Matthew 24:32, Matthew 24:35). Then it will be said, "the Winter is past" (Son_2:10)

After all the mighty deeds which they had seen (even the dead raised!) the Jews came around the Lord in Solomon's porch and said, "How long dost Thou make us to doubt If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." It was hopeless to reason with obstinate unbelief accordingly the Lord set them aside as manifestly not of His sheep; but he added words concerning His true sheep, and their security as being both in His hand and in the Father's hand which have ministered immense comfort to believing hearts from that moment until the present. But when He affirmed "I and the Father are One," the Jews took up stones to stone Him, and not for the first time (John 10:22-31).

Another gathering in Solomon's porch is recorded in Acts 3:1-26. The Son of God was no longer there, having returned to His glory by way of the cross and the tomb; but the Holy Spirit's voice is heard speaking through the humble instrumentality of the fishermen Peter and John. By using in faith the name of Jesus of Nazareth these men had healed a cripple above forty years old who, had long lain at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple begging. "As he held Peter and John the people ran together unto them into the porch that is called Solomon's greatly wondering." The fishermen, by divine authority. made one of the most important pronouncements that afternoon that have ever been made in this world. After disclaiming all credit to themselves, they gave all the glory of the miracle to the Name of the One, whom Israel had recently killed, but whom God had raised again from the dead. Then they told the people that if they would repent of their terrible sin and turn to God. He would send Jesus Christ back. We quote from Mr. Darby translation: "Repent therefore and be converted, for the blotting out of your Sins. so that times of refreshing may come from he presence of the Lord, and He may send Jesus Christ, who was fore-ordained for you, whom heaven indeed must receive till the times of the restoration of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began” (Acts 3:19-21).

This amazing overture was in keeping with our Lord's own words concerning the barren fig-tree in Luke 13:6-9 As the dresser of the vineyard He pleaded for the condemned tree "let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, after that thou shalt cut down." The opening chapters of the Book of the Acts furnish the answer to His intercession.

Until the death of Stephen fresh opportunity of blessing was granted to the guilty people the Gospel was preached "to the Jew first" (Acts 13:46).

What a moment for this world as Peter's voice rang out in Solomon's porch! Alas, for the result! The people did not humbly and gratefully welcome it (individuals did); and the leaders were so furious that they put Peter and John into prison for daring to breathe the hated name of Jesus in Jerusalem.

What more could a long-suffering God do? He sent His Son His well-beloved, into the world with a message of peace, and men murdered Him. Then He sent His Holy Spirit with a fresh message of peace, and with the offer to send Jesus back if they would repent; but men would have none of it. This is why Israel and the nations suffer through the centuries, with no hope. God's intervention in power will end it all. When He says, "Give this man place," all pretenders will be put down, and the over-humbled Jesus will be exalted (Luke 14:9-11).

Chapter 106

Simon Peter — Apostle and Living Stone.

Simon Peter — Apostle and Living Stone.

W W Fereday.

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Foreword.

Reading of a biographical character is always interesting, and it is frequently profitable. But the Spirit of God, when recording the life-stories of men, differs from all others in the line that He pursues. Human biographers aim at presenting the commendable side of the characters with which they deal, and they either draw a veil over their ugly features, or touch them lightly or apologetically. But the Spirit of God tells us the whole truth about the men whose lives He is pleased to record. It could not be otherwise. The Bible is the revelation of God Himself all that He is told out there; and the same Book must needs also show us man as he really is. The goodness of God and the badness of man are there presented side by side for our instruction and blessing.

Critics have often found fault with the Bible for its frank exposures of human evil. But its fearlessness in this particular is one of the many proofs of its divine origin, and how thankful should we be to have the whole truth laid before us!

The Spirit of God has laid special emphasis upon the foibles of Simon Peter. We know his vagaries better than those of any of his companions. Indeed, if all the passages which present him

to us unfavourably were eliminated from the Bible story, we should know very little of this singular servant of our Lord Jesus. There is doubtless divine design in this. The Spirit knew (though His inspired penmen did not) the use that would be made of Peter's name at a later date, and so has taken pains to show us that the Apostle was not infallible, whatever his pretended successors may claim to be.

On the same principle the Spirit has carefully noted certain occasions when Mary, the mother of our Lord, asked favours of Him, and was refused (John 2:10; Matthew 12:48), while omitting altogether the many occasions which must have occurred when He did for her what she desired. So all-wise is our God!

Brought to Jesus.

Perhaps it is not too much to say that of all the apostles of our Lord, Peter has been most prominently before the minds of men in Christendom from the beginning. With many, esteem for this devoted labourer has been suffered to run into the gravest superstition. Positions in the Church, and even in heaven, have been assigned to Peter in the minds of some, from the very idea of which he would have recoiled with trembling. But the career of so eminent a servant of the Lord Jesus cannot but be of the deepest interest to us all. His life story, moreover, contains within itself principles of the greatest possible value.

We begin with his conversion. Doubtless John 1:40-42 gives us Peter's first meeting with the Son of God. Andrew his brother, with another whose name is not recorded (John, perhaps) had just been brought into blessed contact with the Saviour. Under the spell of the Baptist's ecstatic utterance, “Behold the Lamb of God," they had followed Him to His Own home. Filled with delight at what his own heart found in Him, Andrew found his brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah." There is a simplicity in this which arrests us. It was neither a new religion nor a new doctrine of which Andrew spoke so enthusiastically, but a Person. The Eternal Son was present upon earth — the long-promised Christ, and Andrew had come to know Him. He then longed that his brother should know Him also. The Evangelist says, “he brought him to Jesus." Why is not this scene being enacted every day? Why is it that Christian men are so commonly filled with zeal for the upbuilding of "a cause" rather than the bringing of men and women into personal touch with Jesus? How comes it, too, that the lips of even earnest souls are so frequently sealed in the presence of their own relatives? However important it may be for me to carry the Gospel to the heathen Chinamen, or to subscribe money for the helping forward of so excellent a work, my first responsibility is towards my own brother. Has every Christian reader of these lines realized this? Behold then these two fishermen coming to Jesus, Simon means “hearkener." Naturally men's ears are closed to God and to Christ; the brother of Andrew was that day getting his ears opened by the Spirit of God. “When Jesus beheld him, He said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone." The giving of names is a mark of lordship, or proprietorship. Thus Adam at the beginning gave names to the beasts. Pharaoh gave a name to Joseph, Nebuchadnezzar to Daniel, etc. (Genesis 2:20; Genesis 41:45; Daniel 1:7). Simon thus became Christ's liege man from that day forward. Indeed everyone will sooner or later have to acknowledge the same Lord.

Cephas, the Evangelist tells us, means “a stone." There was about to be a new thing commenced in the earth — the Church of God and Peter was, through grace, to have a place therein. Let us

note carefully his own words as to this — "To whom coming, as unto a Living Stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:4-5). Thus the Church of God is a spiritual structure, composed of persons who, like Peter, have come to Christ, and who, in virtue of the divine gift of eternal life, have been constituted living stones. Men's churches, Papal, National and Nonconformist alike, may contain many adherents who have never been in heart contact with Christ; the Church which Christ is building consists exclusively of those who have followed in the footsteps of Andrew and Peter, and who thus have life eternal in the Son of God. That no reader may misunderstand, let it be distinctly stated that that which Christ calls "My Church" in Matthew 16:18 is the aggregate of believing souls (of whatever name) from the day of Pentecost downwards.

John, as we have seen, gives us Simon's first acquaintanceship with Jesus. This is in perfect accord with the character of the fourth Gospel, which shows us the Father revealed in the Son, and the Son attracting souls to Himself, to be His brethren on high. For Simon's call to service we must look elsewhere. Matthew and Mark give it in connection with a similar summons addressed at the same time to Andrew, James and John; Luke (as his manner is) dwells upon the moral work that was wrought in Simon's soul that day (Luke 5:1-11).

The native place of our apostle was Bethsaida, on the sea of Galilee (John 1:44). He and his brother were in partnership with Zebedee and his sons in what seems to have been a large fishing business. At any rate, they had "hired servants" (Mark 1:20). This being so, we must not understand Acts 4:13 to mean that these men were altogether uneducated. "Unlearned and ignorant" would simply mean that they had had no such professional training as their ecclesiastical antagonists.

Our apostle will never forget that day by the sea of Galilee. The Saviour, thronged by the multitudes eager to hear the Word of God, asked the loan of a boat that He might address the people the more conveniently. The preaching being ended, He bade Simon launch out into the deep, and let down his nets for a draught. Simon replied that although he had toiled all night unsuccessfully he would do as the Saviour said. The nets were at once filled to breaking point, and the boats, when loaded, began to sink. The effect upon Simon's soul was electrical. He felt that he was in the presence of the One whose voice said ages before, "Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life" (Genesis 1:20). He realized indeed that God had come down from heaven to earth. His sinful condition rose up before him — his unfitness to abide in the divine presence. Accordingly he fell at Jesus' knees saying, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." This was deeper work than he had experienced in the day of John 1:41-42. Job and Isaiah, though true saints of God, had travelled the same road (Job 42:5-6; Isaiah 6:5); so likewise has every man who has ever preached the Gospel of Christ with divine qualifications. The first lesson learned in the school of God is one's own sinfulness. Apart from this, the profoundest knowledge of Hebrew and Greek and the most eloquent oratory are worse than useless.

Simon was so absorbed with his spiritual need that he entirely lost sight of the sinking boat. The greater danger made the lesser pale into insignificance. Has the reader been thus at Jesus' knees in similar soul-distress? The Saviour and His costly atonement can never be appreciated (still less preached) until a man has learned his personal guilt and ruin.

One so utterly humbled and broken as Simon was a fit witness for Christ. Accordingly the Saviour said to the trembling fisherman, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." In Jeremiah 5:26 we read of leaders in wickedness who “catch men"; here we have Simon commissioned to catch men for Christ and for heaven. For this great work God acknowledges no other means than the Gospel. No new story and no side attractions can ever be expected to receive His sanction. In Acts 2:1-47 we have an example of fishing with a net, when three thousand souls were blessed; in Acts 8:1-40 we see a man fishing with a hook — Philip landing the individual eunuch for Christ. Both public and individual work remain open to us to-day.

From the moment of the Saviour's "Follow Me," Simon and his friends threw up their business in order to preach the Word of God. Occasionally such calls reach men still, but they are probably more exceptional than appearances would seem to suggest. Many of those who occupy pulpits and platforms would be more suitably employed following a handicraft like Paul of old.

A Deed of Mercy.

Only two of our Lord's apostles appear to have had the unspeakable honour of welcoming Him under their own roof — Matthew (or Levi) and Peter. Matthew's home was a place of feasting on that occasion (Luke 5:29); Peter's home was rather a place of mourning. His wife's mother lay sick of a fever — "a great fever," adds Luke the physician. Peter's home appears to have been shared, not only by his mother-in-law, but also by Andrew his brother (Mark 1:29-31). A pious family circle, we may be assured.

It was an evil day for Christendom when the idea took possession of men's minds that Christ's servants should remain unmarried. Not only has frail flesh been exposed thereby to the gravest moral peril, but apostolic precedent and the plain injunctions of Holy Scripture have alike been defied by the idea. In 1 Corinthians 9:5, where Paul the apostle insists that he had the same right to a wife as to eat and drink, he cites the example of “the other apostles," and expressly names Cephas (Peter). In his first epistle to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:1-16), which is occupied largely with ecclesiastical order, he lays it down authoritatively that both Bishops and Deacons should be married men. If the question be raised, "Why then did not Paul take a wife for himself?" the answer must be that he was called to a life of incessant itineracy, and that over a very wide area. The devoted apostle felt that, under these circumstances, it would be better for him to be absolutely free. But this did not touch his right, upon which he insisted, while putting it aside in self-sacrifice for the furtherance of the work of the Gospel.

It was natural that Peter and Andrew should tell the Lord of their sick relative. He had come down from heaven “to bind up the broken-hearted" (Isaiah 61:1). and He was in fact moving up and down amongst men sympathetically taking their infirmities and bearing their sicknesses. Matthew's paraphrase of Isaiah 53:4, here alluded to, means that He took up men's woes as a burden upon His own spirit (Matthew 8:17). His sympathy with men in life is the point. It is a mistake to refer Isaiah 53:4 to His atoning death. He had not long entered upon His ministry of healing, and He had just cast a demon out of a man in the midst of a Sabbath-day gathering in the synagogue. Such a marvel filled Peter and Andrew with desire for the poor sufferer at home, “and anon they tell Him of her."

No second appeal was necessary. Attended by James and John, the former partners of Peter and his brother, the Saviour went at once to the fisherman's house. “He came, and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them."

The deed of mercy was soon reported abroad. As the day declined, multitudes came to the house with their sick and diseased ones. Mark says: “All the city was gathered together at the door," However numerous might be the applicants, or however great their desires, nothing could exhaust the Saviour's power and love. As the unwearied servant of God and men He ministered to every form of human need. But what joy it would have given Him had men been as keen for spiritual blessing as for physical benefit! Can bodily healing be compared for one moment with the inestimable boon of sins forgiven?

The Twelve.

Luke tells us it was after a night spent in prayer to God that the Lord Jesus chose His twelve apostles (Luke 6:12). These presently He sent forth, furnished with extraordinary powers as Matthew 10:1-42 shows. This action was altogether without precedent in the ways of God. No prophet of Israel had ever done the like. But a new thing had happened in the earth. Jesus of Nazareth was no mere prophet, like Isaiah and others, but the Son of God come down in divine goodness to tabernacle amongst men. He was therefore God's center here below, and from Himself as center He would send forth others to be the active expression of His grace, and to spoil the kingdom of Satan. For the present both His commission and theirs was to Israel only (Romans 15:8; Matthew 10:5-6); ultimately the glad tidings were to be heralded to the ends of the earth (Mark 16:15).

Mark tells us that He called the twelve up into a mountain, and there appointed them (Mark 3:13). There was moral suitability in this. All true ministry comes from above; from God, not from the people. Moreover, He called unto Him “whom He would." Here we have divine sovereignty. His will settled all. Neither popular election nor ambitious desire on the part of His servants had anything to do with the matter. Accordingly, Simon Peter stands at the head of the list, though he was not the earliest of the Lord's disciples. Andrew was his senior in the faith (and indeed the instrument of his blessing), yet he was required to fall behind his brother in service. The apostle Paul, in a later day gloried in the fact that man had had nothing whatever to do with his appointment to the ministry. To the Galatians he described himself thus: “Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father who raised Him from the dead" (Galatians 1:1) Since these words were penned, the will of man has so systematically intruded itself, in one way and another, into the realm of ministry that few in modern Christendom could truthfully speak thus of themselves.

The Lord Jesus ordained the twelve “that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach" (Mark 3:14). There are two things here companionship with Jesus, and the ministry of the Word, the first being immeasurable the more important and blessed. We are reminded of the Saviour's words to Peter in John 13:8 : “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." It is one of the most marvellous fruits of His grace that men should be called to be the companions of the Son of God. In two distinct senses the present day believer in Jesus has “part with Him": (1) in spiritual communion now, and (2) in actual presence in the Father's house eternally. “Part with Him" now has reference to the inner life of the soul. The inward is ever more

important than the outward. A man might preach as with the tongue of an angel, to the great admiration of the multitude, and yet be spiritually starved within. To be in hourly touch with Jesus by faith is more important to one's well-being than to be in touch with men, however appreciative. Let every preacher of the Word of life pay careful attention to this.

When all is ended here, there lies beyond the everlasting blessedness of the Father's house. There the Lord Jesus will hold the place of “Firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). Those He so graciously called to “be with Him” during the days of His humiliation (one only being lost, “the son of perdition") will be with Him in glory also, with no separation for eternity. And not they only, but also all those who have believed on Him through their word (John 17:20). This takes in every Christian from the beginning down to the present hour. The precious blood of Jesus is our title to be there; new birth by the Spirit of God is our meetness to be there. It is all of sovereign grace alone.

On the way to Jairus' House.

There were three occasions (all special in character) on which Peter and the two sons of Zebedee were alone privileged to accompany the Lord Jesus. We refer to His journeys to the holy mount, to the house of Jairus, and into the recesses of Gethsemane. Our present business is with His visit to Jairus, and with what happened on the way thither.

No sooner did the Saviour hear the appeal of this ruler of the synagogue than He set out for his house. The first tidings stated that his little daughter lay at the point of death; the next message reported that her spirit had passed away. A great multitude pressed around the Lord, curious to see how He would act in such a case. Amongst the people was a woman, who had suffered twelve years from an issue of blood, and who had spent all her living upon physicians, but in vain. She had come to believe that if she could but touch the Saviour's clothes she would be made whole. Forthwith she did so, and was healed according to her faith, Jesus, looking round, asked, “Who touched Me?” Peter (ever ready) objected to the question. Such was the crowd that many were necessarily touching the Lord (Luke 8:45); But divine omniscience was not likely to confound the touch of faith with the rude push of a curious multitude. In like manner He distinguishes to-day between the great mass of those who, from various motives, throng “places of worship” and those true hearts amongst them who really seek Him in humble faith. Presently the woman found herself at His feet in grateful confession of the blessing received.

This interruption of His journey to Jairus' house is very suggestive dispensationally. The dead girl was a type of Israel, already likened to a valley full of dry bones in Ezekiel 37:1-28. The Son of God, with life in Himself, had come into their midst with purposes of blessing, as we know. But His mission to Israel has been interrupted (by His rejection), not to be resumed until the end of the present age, when He will a second time visit Zion, and then give full effect to every divine purpose of grace. The people of Israel will in that day be called forth from their long spiritual and national death, to be henceforward God's channel of blessing to all the earth.

But what is happening during the period of interruption, now nearly nineteen centuries long? Souls of every sort are, like the woman of Luke 8:1-56, getting into touch with Jesus (by faith), and are rejoicing both in the blessing of healing, and in the knowledge of Himself. Happy man, happy woman, who is thus spiritually acquainted with the Son of God!

From Matthew we learn that, at the moment of Jairus' appeal, the Saviour was setting forth in His teaching the impossibility of putting new cloth to an old garment, and new wine into old skins (Matthew 9:14-18). In this parabolic way He would show His hearers that His mission of grace had nothing to do with the legal system of religious ordinances in which they had been brought up. The old order of things, requiring so much from man, had utterly failed to do anything for ruined creatures. Everything now depended upon Jesus. The two cases of the suffering woman and the dead girl, occurring when they did, illustrated His point strikingly. Alas, the lesson has never been learned by Christendom From the time of the departure of the apostles downward men have been earnestly endeavouring to put new wine into old bottles. By this we mean that every religious community is more or less constructed upon the principles of Jewish formalism, to the serious hindrance of divine blessing to the souls of men. Nothing avails but Jesus. It is our wisdom to get to Him, leaving all men's ecclesiastical machinery aside. The two cases of the woman and the girl also illustrate the two sides of the Gospel — the human and the divine. The girl was dead. All help must therefore come to her from God. for man is powerless in the presence of the ., last enemy. The woman, on the other hand, played her own part. She came to Jesus, and, in faith, put in her plea for blessing. In like manner, men are “dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1), and need the quickening power of God, and yet men have their responsibility to “come” to the Saviour in response to His call of love (Matthew 11:28). We may find it difficult to reconcile these two aspects of divine truth, but both are assuredly found in the Word of God.

Walking on the Sea

In our childhood days we were taught to sing, “Pity my simplicity." Simplicity of the right kind calls not for pity, but for admiration and imitation, and most assuredly it will receive the Lord's commendation at the last. Men are becoming too wise to be simple; this explains why some find it hard to credit the story of Peter walking on the sea. To all such we are disposed to say in the words of Paul; “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you?” (Acts 26:8). Take God into account, and every difficulty disappears; leave Him out, and difficulties bristle around us hopelessly.

It was the night after the feeding of the five thousand, and the disciples, by command of their Lord, were crossing the sea of Galilee in a fishing boat. The Lord mercifully sent them away before the multitude pressed upon Him the kingdom (John 6:15). Such were their carnal thoughts that such a temptation would almost certainly have carried the disciples along with it. This temporary separation of the Lord from His own is a picture of our circumstances at the present time. Even as He occupied Himself with prayer upon the mountain top then, so is He engaged in a ministry of intercession on our behalf at this moment on high. The disciples found their situation deeply trying without Him. Comparing John 6:19 with Matthew 14:25, they appear to have covered but little more than three miles after some nine hours' rowing. Their difficult voyage is strikingly suggestive of the stormy and toilsome passage of the Church during the entire period of her Lord's absence in heaven. In the fourth watch, somewhere between 3 and 6 a.m., the Lord came to His disciples, filling them for the moment with alarm as they beheld Him walking on the water. “It is a spirit," cried they in their terror, which was soon allayed by His comforting voice, saying, “Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." Why did He not at once still the raging of the sea, as in Matthew 8:26? Nay, who can interpret all His ways with His people? On the one occasion He stayed the tempest; this time He comforted them in it, and rendered them superior to it by His grace. In like manner, we have

the apostles instantly released from prison in Acts 5:19, while Peter was suffered to remain in the hands of his persecutors until the last hour in Acts 12:6, and Paul and Silas at a later date were delivered only by an earthquake (Acts 16:26). Similar differences may be observed in the dealings of God with His people to-day. What we need is simple faith in His goodness that whatever form His dealings take all must be well. It is not always the best thing to be lifted entirely out of the circumstances which distress us, although frail flesh and blood would fain have it so.

The moment he heard the voice of the Lord Peter said, “Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water." This was scarcely presumption, or his Master would not have said, “Come." It was rather the ardour of affection. For a while Peter walked the sea as securely as the Lord Himself; but presently noticing the roughness of the wind, his heart failed him, and he began to sink. Our safety to-day lies in “looking unto Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2). This keeps the heart serene in the midst of life's stormiest billows. Peter could not have traversed the most placid sea apart from divine aid; but this was amply sufficient to uphold him in safety upon the wildest sea.

In his distress Peter appealed to the Lord alone. “Lord, save me." Let us imitate the devoted apostle in this. Are any in distress concerning their sins, and fearful of the wrath to come? Are others in perplexity and need as to the affairs of daily life? Let us turn to Christ alone, who is indeed the only Mediator between God and men. Neither Mary nor the saints in general have such a heart to care as He; and certainly no created being can furnish us with even a modicum of needed grace. Our souls are absolutely shut up to Christ for blessing of every kind. To know Him is to trust and adore Him. The incident before us closes with the disciples worshipping at His feet, exclaiming “of a truth Thou art the Son of God" (Matthew 14:33). That night at sea yielded to them its blessings for eternity.

Belly and Heart.

The Lord Jesus was in collision with the Pharisees — by no means an unusual occurrence. On this occasion it was because the disciples had not washed their hands before eating. The Pharisees enquired of the Saviour why they thus transgressed the tradition of the elders (Matthew 15:1-39). He who is both the Light and the Truth at once exposed their hypocrisy. So punctilious were they in regard to externals that in their eyes even direct disobedience to the Word of God was a small matter so long as their traditionary requirements were maintained. This He proved by their treatment of the fifth commandment. It was their habit to wink at open neglect of needy parents if the priests benefited thereby. This scandal has been witnessed repeatedly even in Christianity, to our shame.

Turning from His captious critics to the multitude, the Saviour said: “Hear and understand: not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." The disciples then drawing His attention to the fact that the Pharisees were scandalised by His apparent contempt for outward observances, He forthwith described them as plants which His heavenly Father had not planted, and which should therefore be rooted up. “Let them alone," said He, “they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into a ditch."

Such a condemnation applies to others than the Pharisees of the first century. There are not wanting those in Christendom to-day who, in their zeal for externals, are prepared to accept as Christians multitudes who have nothing to show but Baptism, Confirmation, and attendance at the

Lord's Supper. However important the first and third of these may be as ordinances of the Lord (the second - Confirmation — being a human device pure and simple), they are worse than useless apart from a living faith in the Son of God. So absolutely evil is the flesh that nothing avails with God but new birth by the Spirit, and cleansing by the blood of Jesus. He who lacks these things possesses neither fitness nor title for the divine presence. The thought is appalling that thousands are being led into an eternal ditch by leaders as spiritually blind as themselves.

Having thus admonished the multitude, the Saviour retired into the house, and Peter asked Him: "Declare unto us this parable." From Mark we learn that the rest of the disciples joined with him in this inquiry (Mark 7:17).

The fact is that Peter and his companions were as yet far from free in their souls from the religious formalism in which they had been educated. Hence their question, which to us perhaps sounds so simple. But with our gracious Lord no honest inquiry was either rebuked or refused. With great pains He ever sought to lead halting ones into the full light of God, for their blessing. Accordingly He pointed out that all that enters into the mouth goes into the belly, and then becomes purged by nature, so that the man is not defiled. But that which comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart; and the human heart being hopelessly evil all that issues from it is defiling indeed. An awful exposure of the heart follows: “evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." This is what both your heart and mine contains, beloved reader. If the grossest of these evils have not broken forth, it is due to the mercy of God in the environment in which He has been pleased to set us, but the evils are most assuredly within us, only awaiting opportunity to show themselves in all their hideousness. What stronger proof could we have that it is not reformation men need, but a new creation! What proof, too, that mere external observances can never of themselves suffice, because they cannot reach to that which is within! If men but realized their own innate corruption, as thus set forth by the Lord Jesus in answer to Peter's inquiry, surely they would palter no more with priests and their doings, but hasten at once to the Saviour's feet, where alone blessing can be found for eternity.

We Believe and Know.

Such language of holy confidence is proper to the children of God concerning every blessing; though, alas, it is not always heard. A fearful trembling faith, sure of nothing, is as characteristic of the twentieth century as a bold unquestioning faith was characteristic of the first. To such a condition of mind have nineteen centuries of ecclesiasticism reduced even the best of God's saints.

We have quoted in part a fine confession of faith by Simon Peter. It will be found in full in John 6:68-69. It occurred at the close of a discourse which sorely puzzled many of our Lord's hearers. He had been speaking in the synagogue in Capernaum, whither the multitude had come in search of Him after His feeding of the five thousand. In His ministry He sought to lift their thoughts above the bread that perisheth. He spoke of Himself as “the living bread which came down from heaven," telling His audience that “if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever," then adding, “and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51). These words at once provoked discussion, some saying, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?”

The Saviour's evident meaning was that He alone could meet the need of the soul but that such was man's condition before God He must go down into death ere He could be really available for any. A living Christ on earth might give us much wonderful instruction; but men being sinners, altogether ruined and undone, it is not mere instruction that is needed, but life and salvation. Ere these blessings could be divinely granted, the Saviour must die atoningly. Now God asks from men simple appropriation in faith of the Christ who died. This is the meaning of the Saviour's words, “Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life," etc.

Here we are compelled to challenge a very common and popular blunder. It is well-nigh; universally held in Christendom that these words have reference to the Lord's Supper. This may explain the eager haste with which sacramental bread and wine are frequently carried to the sick and dying. Such gross materialism, we are bold to affirm, never entered the Saviour's mind as He stood discoursing in the synagogue in Capernaum. The Lord's Supper had not as yet been instituted; how then could He be making allusion to it? Had He really intended this how could His hearers be expected to understand Him? To apply these words of the Saviour to the Lord's Supper lands us into two monstrous errors; first, everyone who has ever partaken of the Supper necessarily has eternal life; and second, those who have never partaken thereof are lost, however genuine their faith in the Saviour's name. Every right-minded soul will instinctively shrink from both propositions. Many a regular communicant will be found outside at the last, never having really believed in the Saviour; and on the other hand, many who have never communicated at all (as our mistaken “Quaker” friends), will be found inside, having really loved the Son of God.

The famous passage in John 6:1-71 has thus no reference to a Sacrament at all, but to faith's appropriation of the once-slain One as Him who alone can meet the need of the soul. He who says from his heart “I believe He died for me," in this way eats His flesh and drinks His blood, and so receives eternal life as the gift of sovereign grace. In John 6:51-54 the Greek aorist is employed, signifying an act which abides in its effects for ever; in John 6:56-58 the Lord uses the present participle, insisting thus upon an every-day feeding upon Himself for the sustainment of the life within. We eat to get life, and we continue to eat for the maintenance of the life.

Many of those in the synagogue that day, even though professedly His disciples, were so carnally minded that they said: “This is a hard saying; who can hear it?” They were following Him with thoughts of a glorious kingdom; and the mention of death stumbled them. Accordingly many of them turned back, and walked no more with Him. This caused the Lord to challenge the twelve: “Will ye also go away?” Peter promptly replied: “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and know that Thou art the Holy One of God" (see R.V. of John 6:67-69). Happy Peter! His heart found its all in the Saviour before him. In like manner what “Thou hast” and what “Thou art” is sufficient to-day to satisfy every longing of the soul until glory dawns.

N.B. — Would the Saviour be likely to cast men upon Sacraments for eternal life, knowing well that priests of every brand, in their sectarian zeal, would be disposed to repudiate as false the Sacraments of all others? With the conflicting claims of Greeks, Romanists, Anglicans, etc., before him, where is the simple inquirer to find certainty? God be praised, we are not driven to investigate the rival claims of all these in order to obtain eternal life. The Word of God and the Christ of God are both available for us all. In these our souls may safely confide.

"Upon This Rock"

Peter's fervent confession of his Lord in the neighbourhood of Caesarea Philippi has always possessed a special interest for the children of God. As a kind of test for His disciples, the Saviour inquired: “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” They replied that no one seemed to know with certainty; John the Baptist, Elijah and Jeremiah being amongst the various suggestions of the curious. This, of course, revealed the true condition of men's minds in regard to Him. They were in reality utterly indifferent as to Him. Had they desired to know who He was, ample means were at their command whereby they might test His claims. The Saviour then turned to His own followers, and said: “But whom say ye that I am?” Peter, the ever ready one, promptly replied: “Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:13-18). With Peter and his friends there was no uncertainty as to the glorious Person with whom they walked. Taught, not by flesh and blood, but by the Father, they had a divine conviction that He was not only the long-expected Christ, but also the Son of the living God.

The Saviour followed the appreciation of His servant's words thus: “And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell (Hades) shall not prevail against it." It is as if He said: “Now Peter, My Father has told you something about Me, I will tell you something about yourself." Christ was about to build His own assembly, the work being actually commenced on the day of Pentecost, and continuing unto the present hour. His prediction involved the setting aside of Israel at least for a season. Fifteen centuries earlier that nation had been separated from all others to be the people of Jehovah, His special witness upon earth. In Nebuchadnezzar's day, six hundred years before the Saviour came to earth, the “loam” sentence ("not My people") had been passed upon them, although subsequently, in the mercy of God, a remnant of them were suffered to return to their land, and rebuild the temple. But their rejection of the Lord Jesus ended even this partial recovery of divine favour. Accordingly the Saviour says, “I will build My Church." This includes all believing people, without regard to nation, from the Pentecostal descent of the divine Spirit until the Lord Jesus comes again.

Just what place was Peter to have in this new and spiritual structure? He was to be a stone therein, for that is the meaning of “Peter” or “Cephas," as John 1:42 shows conclusively. In the Kingdom of Heaven (with which we will deal later, if God permit) this apostle was to hold a unique position but not in the Church. To confound the Kingdom of Heaven with the Church is one of the most unfortunate blunders conceivable. We have only to turn to 1 Peter 2:4-5 to learn from his own pen how Peter understood the words of our Lord. — To all his believing readers the apostle says: “To Whom coming, as unto a Living Stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house," etc. Peter thus extends the figure of the stone to every Christian, meaning by his words that every Christian is possessed of the imperishable life of the Son of God Himself.

What then is the rock upon which the Church is being built? The Saviour Himself, in the special character in which Peter had just confessed Him — "the Christ, the Son of the living God." This was the first time He had been thus acknowledged. His resurrection-power is thus set forth. The Church is founded on One against whom death is absolutely powerless, and, accordingly it stands guaranteed for ever. “The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it"; the unseen world will never be permitted to swallow it up. When Christ returns He will find His Church still upon the earth, awaiting His coming. The personnel of it has changed repeatedly since Pentecost, but the Church is one and the same throughout in the divine account. At the Lord's return every living believer will

be translated to the Father's house without experiencing the pangs of death; and at the same blissful moment every sleeping saint will be raised from the tomb to share in the triumph of that hour (John 11:25-26). Matthew 16:18 is thus a guarantee of indestructibility, not of infallibility, and this, not for man's ecclesiastical organisations, Western or Eastern, but for the aggregate of His believing blood-washed people of whatever name.

Desperate efforts have been put forth, in the interests of priestly pretension, to prove Peter the Church's rock-foundation; and this in spite of the strong protests of many of the (so-called) “Fathers” of ancient time, and of the entire East, of which, after all, the Western Church is but an off-shoot. Peter's sad defection at Antioch, as recorded in Galatians 2:11-16, may well fill us with gratitude that upon no such frail foundation the Church rests, but upon the living and exalted Christ, who is “the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8).

The Keys.

We have already pointed out that it is a fatal mistake to confound the Church with the Kingdom of Heaven. The Lord Jesus, having spoken to Peter of the one in Matthew 16:18, proceeded in the next verse to speak to him of the other. These are His words: “And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Thus it was not the keys of the Church, still less of Heaven, that were committed to our apostle, but of the Kingdom of Heaven. What is meant by this expression, so frequently found in the Gospel of Matthew, and there only in Holy Scripture? It is first used in Matthew 3:2. The Baptist's proclamation is thus summarised: “Repent ye: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." The preacher meant that the glorious kingdom spoken of so abundantly in the prophets (notably in Daniel 2:44), which was to have Jerusalem for its metropolis, and God's Christ for its ruler, had now come into view, the King having been born into the world. The Kingdom of Heaven is thus the reign of Heaven over the earth, in contrast with all the faulty creature administration with which men have been so long familiar. Following the Baptist, the Lord Jesus preached in the same strain; and latter, the twelve apostles (Matthew 4:17; Matthew 10:7). But the growing contempt of the people soon made it manifest that no such kingdom could be established at that season. Accordingly, in Matthew 13:1-58, in a series of parables, the Lord unfolded “the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven." In other words, He communicated to His disciples the hitherto unrevealed secrets connected with the kingdom. Examining Matthew 13:1-58 with care, we gather from it that the king would be absent from the earth for a period, and that during His absence a sadly mingled condition of things would prevail, through the unfaithfulness and neglect of His responsible servants. Wheat and tares would grow side by side in His field, and both good and bad fish would be gathered into the net. To put it yet more plainly, while the manifested kingdom, which no eye will fail to see in its day, stands over, there would be developed a system of religious profession in the earth containing within itself elements both excellent and evil. It is of this, and of this only, the keys were entrusted to Peter. The prime use of keys is to open doors (Revelation 3:7). Accordingly, in Acts 2:1-47 we have Peter divinely selected to preach the first discourse after the Holy Ghost came down from heaven, and three thousand persons were brought to repentance, being baptised forthwith in the Saviour's name. But these were Jews only. In Acts 10:1-48 we have the same apostle proclaiming Christ for the first time to a Gentile congregation, with the happy

result that all who were assembled in Cornelius' house believed, and were granted the privilege of Christian baptism forthwith. Speaking of this event afterwards, Peter said: “Brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the Word of the Gospel and believe." (Acts 15:7).

Peter has thus used the keys entrusted to him by the Lord, and the door of the kingdom has been thrown open to both Jews and Gentiles. The Church belongs to heaven; the kingdom belongs to earth of the latter only have the keys been committed to human hands. But what of the binding and loosing? This has reference to discipline here below, eternal issues being in Christ's keeping alone. Peter's stern dealing with Ananias and Sapphira, and with Simon Magus, are incidents illustrative of binding. Is there anything successional in this authority committed to the apostle? There is no hint of such a thing in Matthew 16:19. Nothing beyond a personal commission can possibly be deduced from the Saviour's words. But when we pass to Matthew 18:18 we find the very same words in an altogether different connection. Peter is not there in view, but the assembly of God's saints, gathered together in any given locality upon earth, and at any time. Even supposing the number be but “two or three," the authority to “bind” and “loose” is with them, the Lord's own presence in the midst supplying them with the necessary power and grace. To receive into communion from the world outside is to “loose"; to put away a transgressor, such as he of 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, is to “bind"; to welcome once more the repentant one, as in 2 Corinthians 2:6-8, is to “loose” again. But in all this heaven is not in question. To import such an idea unto the Saviour's words is to produce inextricable confusion, to say nothing of the spiritual terrors thus injected into the minds of the unthinking. The apostle is gone but the Church remains; though as far as its external unity and order is concerned it has degenerated into a shapeless wreck. But wherever two or three are gathered together unto the name of the absent Christ, His presence is assured, conveying with it all that is needed in grace and competency to act for Him until He come.

"Get Thee Behind Me Satan"

A more terrible reproof than this could scarcely be administered to a man born of God. What did Peter do to deserve it? Let us see.

The Saviour, after His announcement concerning His Church, charged the disciples to proclaim Him no more as the Christ, and from that point began to speak plainly to them of His impending passion (Matthew 16:21). His kingdom rights were thus to be waived for the time being, while another (and higher) purpose of God took shape — the calling out of the Church. But in order that this might be, He must suffer and die. “Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying:” Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee." The Revised Version goes too far in its marginal rendering of the apostle's first words — "God have mercy upon Thee." Darby gives it literally — "Be favourable unto Thyself, Lord." Unquestionably Peter meant well. He could not bear to think of suffering and shame for his beloved Master and Lord. But Satan frequently makes use of amiable nature in order to turn aside God's witnesses from the path of faithfulness. He would fain do this even with the Saviour Himself. But His divinely opened ear (Isaiah 50:5) caught immediately the hiss of the serpent, even though the speaker was a devoted disciple, and He promptly silenced it. “He turned to Peter and said 'Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men'." There was “no honey” in Jehovah's meal-offering (Leviticus 2:11). Accordingly the Lord no more spared Peter

than the Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:1-39). But what a painful suggestion is here! The same lips can give expression both to the Father's thoughts, and to the guile of Satan (Matthew 16:17 and Matthew 16:23)! Well may we each one of us put up the Psalmist's prayer: “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Psalms 141:3).

Peter's error gave the Lord the opportunity of pointing out the character of the path which all His own must tread. “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it." Thus if the cross must needs be His portion, His followers must accept the cross also. For Him, of course, the cross meant atonement for sin, as well as rejection and shame; we share the rejection and shame only. But nature shrinks from, and even resents, this. Its motto (suggested by Satan? is “Spare thyself "; God's motto is “Deny thyself." It has been truly said that Peter “at the last denied the Lord because he had not denied himself."

Be it observed that the Lord did not say to Peter what He said to his seducer on another occasion. To His misguided disciple He said, “Get thee behind me, Satan; to the adversary himself He said, “Get thee hence, Satan" (Matthew 4:10). A faulty disciple might be dismissed to the rear, as offensive to his Master for the moment; but the adversary himself He absolutely dismissed from His presence.

On The Holy Mount.

Bible readers are sometimes perplexed as to the meaning of our Lord's words in Matthew 16:28 : “Verily, I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom." His reference was undoubtedly to the Transfiguration scene, which follows this utterance immediately in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

The Lord thus furnishes us with the key to that marvellous vision which Peter and the two sons of Zebedee were alone privileged to behold. It was a picture beforehand of the glory which every eye will see when He comes forth presently to claim His kingdom. This will explain why John (the only one of the four Evangelists who witnessed it) omits all mention of it in his Gospel. His theme is not the human kingdom-glory of the Son of man, but His divine glory as the Eternal Son, as displayed in His moral perfection when tabernacling here below.

Writing of the Transfiguration scene later, Peter says with ecstasy, “We were eye witnesses of His majesty." What he saw was to him “the power and coming Of our Lord Jesus Christ, which confirms the interpretation just given (2 Peter 1:16-17). The Saviour's face shone as the sun. As the Sun of righteousness He will yet arise upon this poor earth (Malachi 4:2). The sun is the emblem of supreme authority, which God will ere long put into the hands of the Crucified. His raiment, too, became white as the light, suggestive of the absolute purity of His coming administration. Two men appeared in glory with Him — Moses and Elias. The first was one who had died, the other was translated without seeing death. These are representative characters, speaking to us of the entire company of the glorified saints, many of whom will experience resurrection at the Lord's return, others being changed in a moment, and caught up to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). All these will be displayed in glory with Him when He comes to inaugurate His kingdom. Moses and Elijah were in conversation with the Lord; their theme (Luke tells us) was “His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." This will be the

everlasting theme of the saints above. The scene that was enacted outside the gate of Jerusalem, at the place called Calvary, will live in the memory of both God and His redeemed while eternal ages roll. There was laid in blood the immutable basis of all our blessing.

Poor impulsive Peter made a sad mistake upon the holy mount. So delighted was he to see his Master in such respected company that he forthwith proposed to make three tabernacles, “one for Thee, and one for Moses and one for Elias." This soon after the Saviour's stern rebuke in Matthew 16:22! Peter had actually fallen to the level of the idle multitude who speculated amongst themselves whether Jesus were John the Baptist, Elias Jeremiah, or one of the old prophets risen again (Matthew 16:14); never suspecting, in their blindness, His divine personality. Now Peter would put Him whom he had confessed as “the Christ, the Son of the living God," upon a level with mere prophets, as of course Moses and Elias were. The words had scarce passed his lips when the Shekinah cloud, not seen in Israel since the days of Nebuchadnezzar, appeared, and enveloped both Jesus and His companions. Out of the bright cloud came forth the Father's voice, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased hear ye Him." It was right to listen to both law and prophets in their day, but now the Son had come, with His full revelation of the Father, and everyone must make room for Him. Accordingly, Moses and Elias disappeared, and the disciples saw Jesus only.

Let all who respect Peter the apostle profit by the Father's rebuke to him, and beware how they enshrine saints along with Jesus. Even the most honourable are as nothing in comparison with Him; and to Him alone may men look for salvation, help, and blessing. Our eternal destiny depends, not upon our attitude towards Moses, Peter, Mary, or any other, but upon our attitude towards their Master and Lord. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not (obeyeth not — R.V.) the Son shall not see life: but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).

As they descended from the mount the Saviour bade the disciples say nothing concerning the vision until after His resurrection. In the humour that was prevailing in Israel it would be incongruous to proclaim kingdom glories. Suffering was before Him, with eternal salvation for every believer as the result. The kingdom must stand over until the dawn of another age.

The Tribute Money.

Another unfortunate incident, as far as our apostle was concerned, but an incident which exhibits, in a truly marvellous manner, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ towards all His own. He and the twelve were staying in Capernaum — His own city by adoption after He gave up Nazareth. The collectors of the half-shekel took the opportunity to raise the question with Peter as to whether his Master paid the impost. It was neither tribute for the Roman conquerors, nor atonement money as in Exodus 30:13, but a charge levied upon every male Jew for the support of the temple in Jerusalem (Matthew 17:24-27).

Peter regarded the inquiry as a challenge as to the honour and religious fidelity of his Master, and so promptly replied, “Yes." Had the apostle been mindful of the Father's words on the holy mount, he might have said to the collectors: “My Master pay tribute? Do you know who He is — the Father's beloved Son, greater than Moses and Elias, Lord of heaven and earth?” But Peter said nothing of this sort, his soul being influenced by merely human thoughts at that moment.

As he entered the house, his Master anticipated him by saying: “What thinkest thou, Simon? Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? Of their own sons, or of strangers?” Peter found himself thus face to face with Omniscience. His innermost thoughts were known to the Lord before he could give expression to them with his lips. To his Master's question He could but reply, “Of strangers", and he was immediately told, “Then are the sons free." Thus did the Lord remind His faulty disciple of His personal dignity. He was the Son of the great King whose earthly house was the Jerusalem temple, and from Him nothing could properly be demanded. But, oh, the grace that shines in the plural word “sons." He thus put the humble fisherman alongside Himself, as sharing His relationship with the Ruler of the universe. This is the place into which every believer has been brought by sovereign grace. We are not servants, but sons, and because we are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:5-7). All the sons are being brought to glory — that is their proper home (Hebrews 2:10), and they will yet be manifested in the company of the First-born Son for the deliverance of the burdened creation (Romans 8:19).

But. this is not yet. Meanwhile the Son is unrecognised amongst men, and the “many sons” are likewise unrecognised; often, indeed, regarded as “the offscouring of all things." The Lord takes here the “stranger's” place for Himself and for His people. Accordingly He would submit to the collector's demand, and He would have Peter submit with Him. No thought of resistance, whether “passive" or active, to earth's authorities, could receive His sanction. “Lest we offend (or stumble) them," was the gracious word of Him who came here for men's good, and who was prepared to sacrifice Himself to the last degree for their blessing.

But he had not the money wherewith to pay, even though the sum for both was but a coin! Oh, the poverty of the Lord of all! But this poor and needy One soon gave proof of His sovereignty of the universe by bidding Peter go to the sea, and cast a hook, assuring him that the first fish thus caught would contain in its mouth the coin that was required. It was even as He said. Winds, waves, fishes, demons - all recognised in Him their Lord. It was only man who was utterly blind to His glory.

"Give unto them for Me and Thee." Etiquette would say “thee and me.” But the Son of the living God could never take the second place. He might put Peter and all other believers alongside Himself in His wondrous grace, but it nevertheless became Him to effectually mark the distinction between the objects of His favour and Himself, Firstborn and Leader of the whole heavenly band.

"Seventy Times Seven."

Peter had just been listening to a wonderful exposition of divine grace when he inquired of his Lord: “How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?” (Matthew 18:21).

The whole chapter should be pondered in connection with this deeply important question. Therein we learn the spirit that becomes those who belong to the Kingdom of Heaven. In order to present His thoughts vividly to the minds of His disciples, the Saviour called a little child, and set him in the midst of them as the suited pattern of humility and simplicity. Amongst men it is customary for the most assertive to become the greatest; amongst the heirs of the kingdom it is the lowliest that will ultimately have the principal place. Proceeding, the Lord Jesus showed that those who follow Him

should be careful not to stumble one another (even the most insignificant); and should guard with equal care against putting hindrances in the way of their own steps. Supposing trespasses to arise, all the resources of grace were to be tried before treating an offender as a heathen man and a publican (i.e., a Roman tax-collector).

It was at this point that our apostle came forward with his question. The tone of it suggests that Peter thought he had learned the Lord's lesson thoroughly. “How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?” In Peter's esteem this was a magnificent stretch of grace. Alas, how seldom poor flesh and blood goes so far! How often, instead, does the offended one insist upon his utmost right in the way of abject apology, thus humiliating his brother into the very dust before him! It was not without reason that the wise man said: “A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city" (Proverbs 18:19). It is frequently difficult enough to wring forgiveness even once out of one's fellow.

But what did the gracious Lord reply? “I say not unto thee, 'Until seven times,' but until seventy times seven." Grace without limit is what He meant, and this after the pattern of the infinite grace of God as revealed to us in the Gospel. In order to emphasise this, He added a parable wherein a man is represented as owing his lord two millions of money, and being graciously forgiven in response to his appeal for mercy; then going forth, and falling in with a fellow-servant who owed him about three pounds, he seized him by the throat, and heedless of his piteous appeal, he enforced upon him the utmost rigor of the law (Matthew 18:23-25). What an exposure of the awful possibilities that lurk in the human heart! A man may conceivably have received at the hands of the God against whom he has sinned a full pardon for all his offences in virtue of the atoning sacrifice of Calvary, and then refuse to show mercy to a fellow mortal who has transgressed against him! A beggar with God, and a tyrant with men! Oh, the appalling inconsistency.

Listen to the gentle appeal of the divine Spirit in Ephesians 4:32; Ephesians 5:1 : “Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as also God in Christ hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore imitators of God as beloved children." (See R.V.).

“What Shall WE have?"

It was a painful moment when the rich young ruler, whose eager running and earnest inquiry suggested the deepest desire, turned away from the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us the sad story Mark supplying the beautiful detail — "Jesus beholding him, loved him" (Mark 10:21). The world was too strong for this young man. When he understood that to follow the Master he admired would involve shame and loss he turned back regretfully, “for he had great possessions. This led the Saviour to remark to His disciples that it is exceedingly difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. They in their astonishment asked: “Who then can be saved?” He replied that if aught depended upon man, salvation would be impossible for any, “but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:16-26).

What a treacherous thing is the human heart! The very blessings of God, which should dispose the heart toward Him, are only used to His utter exclusion! The more abundantly God pours His favours into a man's lap, the less inclined he is to acknowledge Him. Hence the words in Luke 7:22, “to the poor the Gospel is preached."

Then Peter stepped forward. “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?” The commercialism of such a question is truly painful. As addressed to One who had left heavenly glory, yea, who had “emptied Himself” for the blessing of men, the question was little short of an outrage. What was the “all” that Peter and his friends had forsaken? Just fishing boats and tackle. and a few family comforts. And what had they gained even in the present life? The knowledge of God as revealed in the Son, and the daily companionship of the Son of the Father's love. As the Saviour pointed out to them in Matthew 13:16-17, they were the most privileged men the world had seen up to that hour. Yet Peter asked: “What shall we have?”

But even if a wrong thought was running in the mind of the apostle. this did not hinder the Lord from showing that a positive reward was in store for them for their attachment to His person in His humiliation. “Verily, I say unto you, that ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit upon the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones) judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28). The “regeneration” here is “the world to come” of Hebrews 2:5, “the restitution of all things” of Acts 3:21 — in other words, the Millennial kingdom. It is called the “regeneration" because in that age evil will be put down and righteousness will be exalted. In that age all the saints will reign (even the faulty Corinthians 1 Corinthians 6:2-3), but places will be allotted according to the fidelity of each in the present life, a special place being reserved for the apostles in connection with the twelve tribes of Israel, as the Saviour informed Peter in the passage before us. The portion of the apostles is indicated in Matthew 19:28; the more general portion of all believers in the verse following, with the significant addition, “but many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first."

Salvation is by grace alone, and it is based upon the Saviour's blood. Consequently in this connection there can be no question of “first” and “last," the precious blood having the same value for all, from the most honoured apostle down to the humblest soul who truly believes. All will therefore be found together in the Father's house, all equally near and dear to both the Father and the Son. But in the kingdom another principle has its place, and the righteous government of God will allot positions to His own according to their fidelity or otherwise now. That day will probably yield many surprises. Many whom men anticipated would be first may stand very low down indeed; and many of whom men thought nothing may then stand very high. With our God it is not outward appearances that count, but the condition of the heart towards Himself. No thrones for the apostles until the day of Christ. In this world they hungered and thirsted, they were naked and buffeted, reviled, persecuted, defamed, treated as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things (1 Corinthians 4:11-13). From whence then comes the thrones on which the boasted "successors" of the apostles now sit?

Watching and Working.

Our apostle was possessed of an inquiring mind. The Lord's replies to his various questions have furnished the people of God with much valuable instruction unto this hour. In Luke 12:41 we hear Peter asking: “Lord, speak Thou this parable unto us, or even unto all?” It will be necessary to glance back at the preceding verses in order to understand what was in the apostle's mind.

Throughout the chapter the Lord is seeking to draw the hearts of His own away from earth to heaven. The events which had taken place (see Luke 11:1-54) had made it perfectly plain that the predicted kingdom could not be established at that season, and that Jesus must go away,

despised and rejected of men. During His absence His own must expect persecution and loss, but whatever comes they must confess Him before men. They are to beware of covetousness, and are to trust in the Father, who knows their every need. The Lord seeks to cheer His own by telling them that it is the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom. The kingdom is thus sure, if delayed, and it is to be committed to the hands of all who believe in the Saviour's name. Meanwhile, our hearts are to be in heaven, seeing that Christ, our Treasure, is there, Our attitude is to be that of expectation, for He may come in the second watch or in the third — He has not said when.

Watching and working are to occupy believers until the Lord returns, the former being by far the most important. One might labour in His service from a great variety of motives; it is only possible to watch if the affections are really centered upon Himself. The reward for watching is loving service on the part of the Lord when He gets us home (Luke 11:37); the recompense for working is a stewardship in His kingdom (Luke 11:44). It was in connection with all this priceless instruction that Peter inquired: “Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?”

In His reply, the Lord dealt with the whole question of responsibility during His absence, and showed distinctly how everyone will be dealt with at His return. He speaks first of those who have accepted the duty of giving His household their portion of meat in due season (Luke 11:42-46). He who, from pulpit or platform, or otherwise does this in faithfulness and wisdom is called "Blessed" — his reward is so great. But if one charged with such service says in his heart, “My Lord delayeth His coming," and forthwith gives himself up to self-indulgence, his Lord will come upon him when he is not aware, and will assign him his eternal portion with unbelievers. Awful possibility for some who in our day stand forth as the public teachers of the flock of God!

Following this up, the Lord differentiates between men who know His will and yet prepare not themselves, and those who in ignorance of His will follow the bent of their evil nature. This is just the difference between Christendom (especially Protestantism with its open Bible) and Heathendom (Luke 11:47-48). It will be “more tolerable” for some in the day of judgement than for others. Not that the place or duration of punishment varies for any of the lost. Eternity in the lake of fire is the portion of all who die in their sins. Yet the Saviour speaks of “few stripes” and “many stripes," showing degrees of severity in the divine inflictions. There are no people on earth more deeply responsible than the dwellers in Great Britain. The Bible, with its plain exposures of sin and guilt, and its wonderful unfoldings of redeeming love as shown in the cross of Jesus, is accessible to all. Let every British reader then ponder the solemn declaration of Luke 11:48 : “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."

A Lesson in faith.

The Saviour did not sleep in Jerusalem during the last sorrowful week, even though His daily ministry was exercised in that city. Glad to escape from its religious hypocrisy, He went out each evening to Bethany for refreshment to His spirit as well as for bodily repose. On one of His morning journeys, being hungry, He paused at a fig tree, “if haply He might find anything thereon." The tree was full of leaves, but though the time for gathering the figs had not come, not a vestige of fruit was there. Accordingly He cursed it in the solemn words: “No man eat fruit of thee henceforward for ever” (Mark 11:12-26).

Next morning, as the Lord and His disciples passed the spot again, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots, whereupon Peter said: “Master, behold the fig tree which Thou cursedst is withered away." But should this have surprised the apostle? Was there not potency in the words of Jesus for even greater marvels still? For the voice which cursed the fruitless fig tree was none other than that which ages before said, “Let there be light," and there was light (Genesis 1:3).

The Lord took occasion by Peter's remark to point out to him and to all the possibilities which always lie in the way of faith. Even a mountain can be cast into the sea. “Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." It is a very real thing to have to do with God. Distrust has been natural to the human heart ever since the serpent injected his poison into the mind of our first mother. A new era begins for the soul when the Gospel of Christ is believed. God, as the One who gave His Son, and who raised Him from the dead, becomes known, loved, and trusted. Then from that day forward it is the easiest thing in the world to refer everything to Him, and to confide in His love and care. The simplicity of the little child is really all that is required.

Mark adds two important verses which are not given by Matthew. “When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any," etc. We may perhaps find in these words a suggestion as to why many believers' prayers go unanswered. If I bear a grudge against any one, clearly I have not a good conscience towards God. The simplicity of which we have spoken is not present m such a case, and it is impossible for me to be happy and unrestrained in the divine presence. It is as necessary to be “without wrath” as “without doubting" if I would receive favours from the good hand of God (1 Timothy 2:8).

The Saviour's words at that time have a dispensational bearing as well as a moral significance. The disappointing fig tree was an emblem of fruitless Israel. For fifteen centuries that nation had been signally favoured by God, but the result was nil. Religious profession was there, as abundant as the leaves of the fig tree; but fruit, in the way of love to God and delight in His will, there was none. Israel was therefore about to fall under the divine curse. The mountain is an emblem, of their polity — "our place and nation," as Caiaphas expressed it in John 11:48. This was soon to be overthrown by the Roman legions under Titus, and the people were to be lost in the sea of the nations.

An important question arises here. Has Christendom, with its even greater favours, been more fruitful for God than Israel? Most assuredly not. Accordingly the solemn sentence of Romans 11:22 must soon take effect: “Thou also shalt be cut off." Add to this the threat of the Lord Jesus in Revelation 3:16 : “Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spue thee out of My mouth." There is this difference, however, between Israel and Christendom. Of the believing remnant of Israel, God will in the last days raise up for Himself a new stock in the earth which shall be for His pleasure; when God deals with Christendom, its judgement will be final and irrevocable. What men call “Christendom” will never be seen on earth again.

The Olivet Question!

Our Lord's great prophetic utterance on Mount Olivet, delivered during His last week, is recorded with more or less fullness by Matthew, Mark and Luke, but we are indebted to Mark for the interesting fact that the prophecy was drawn forth by the questions of Peter and his former

partners in the fishing profession, Andrew, James and John (Mark 13:3). So that we have our apostle once more playing the part of the inquirer. The Saviour had just spoken of the doom of Jerusalem and its temple as the result of Israel's persistent rejection of Himself. Naturally this struck painfully upon the ears of men who were ardently expecting a glorious kingdom to be established in the earth, with Jesus as its Sovereign, and Jerusalem as its metropolis. Accordingly the four disciples named asked Him privately when this calamity should take place, inquiring also as to His coming and the end of the age. For His words suggested to their minds that if there could be no kingdom just then, there must needs be a second coming in order that the ancient prophecies might be fulfilled. (See Matthew 23:39). Matthew was led of the Spirit to concentrate his attention upon what the Lord said in His reply concerning the end of the age (Matthew 24:1-51, Matthew 25:1-46); Mark, according to his wont makes a special feature of the Lord's remarks as to the trials of His servants, in the critical time referred to (Mark 13:1-37); and Luke dwells almost exclusively upon the Lord's reply to the first of Peter's questions, that relating to the impending Roman desolation (Luke 21:1-38). It is impossible to deal adequately with this greatest of all prophecies within our present limits. Only a few suggestions can be attempted. The whole utterance finds its focus, not in Christendom, but in Jerusalem and Judea. Its prime idea is the sufferings that must needs fall upon God's ancient people because of their rejection of the Messiah, come into their midst in grace. Within the lifetime of our Lord's contemporaries Jerusalem was to be compassed with armies and be utterly overthrown. Its people should fall in multitudes, many others should be sold into captivity — "and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." How literally all this had been accomplished every schoolboy knows. Luke, from whom we have just quoted, appends a few words as to further happenings at the end of the age, when the period of Israel's humiliation reaches its termination (Luke 21:20-36).

Matthew says nothing as to the impending desolation. The key-verse of the prophecy, as he records it, is Matthew 24:15 : “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place." This is the image of the Beast of Revelation 13:1 which will be set up in Israel's restored sanctuary in the reign of the Antichrist. Our Lord counsels flight when this takes place, for then will be developed the fiercest persecution of godly ones that the world has ever known. The great tribulation will be immediately followed by His own appearing in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. These predictions bring us down to Matthew 24:31, at which point six parables are introduced parenthetically, the main line of the prophecy being resumed in Matthew 25:31 with the words: “When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations," etc. This is not the judgement of the dead, which will not take place until a thousand years subsequent to His appearing; It is the judgement of the quick (or living) — an article of faith to be found in most of the creeds of Christendom, if but little understood by those who repeat them.

There was never a moment in the world's history when this great prophecy, elicited by Peter and his friends, demanded more careful attention at the hands of the devout than the present. We are manifestly on the eve of great changes. A universal cataclysm is considered more than probable even by many to whom God and His Word are unknown, and who therefore only judge by what they see transpiring around them. It is highly desirable that God's true people should have right

expectations, and these can only be gleaned from Holy Scripture. When we consider things in the light of God, our minds are preserved in a correct balance, our faith is strengthened, and we possess our souls in patience and peace even in the midst of the overturning of all things.

Feet Washing.

It was much more than a lesson in humility that the Lord Jesus sought to impart to His disciples when He arose from the last supper and proceeded to wash all their feet (John 13:1-38). The condescension on His part, as the Father's well-beloved Son into whose hands all things had been given, was amazing, and the lesson in lowliness and loving care was indeed profound; but there was immeasurably more than this in the act. His words to Peter in John 13:7 indicate another meaning than that which was apparent at the moment. “What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

The key to this remarkable incident is found in John 13:3. “Jesus .... knowing that He was come from God and went to God." A heavenly Person has thus been here, and has returned again to His glory on high, but one great object of His coming was to fit a company of sinful men to have part with Himself in His own blest abode for ever. His washing of the disciples' feet has thus a moral connection with the Father's eternal purpose of love concerning them.

Mark the various steps. The Lord and His companions had just taken their seats at the supper table. (John 13:2 reads more intelligently in the Revised Version, and ceases to conflict with John 13:26). In the full consciousness of His personal dignity He arose, and having furnished Himself with a towel and a basin of water He proceeded to wash the disciples' feet, a service usually rendered by slaves in the homes of the wealthy. Peter expressed his astonishment: “Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?” Both pronouns are emphatic. The Son of the living God perform menial service to a Galilean fisherman! Peter could not endure the thought: “Thou shalt never wash my feet." The phrase here rendered “never” is the strongest of which the Greek language is capable, so energetic was our apostle in his protest. To this his Master replied: “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." Then the impulsive Peter said: “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands, and my head." In his eyes part with Christ (whatever it might mean) was a thing most earnestly to be desired. But he was told “he that is washed (or bathed) needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit"; and this was true of every person in the room, with the single exception of Judas, as the Lord solemnly hinted.

This conversation makes it abundantly clear that the foot-washing of that night is significative of a moral cleansing of which every Christian is a partaker through grace. There is a total washing, as shown in John 13:10, which can never be repeated. This is the new birth, which is wrought in the soul not by the ordinance of baptism (as so many erroneously imagine), but by the Spirit's application of the Word of God. This is made abundantly plain in 1 Peter 1:23; James 1:18; while Ephesians 5:26 is a sufficient authority for regarding water as an emblem of the Word. Every soul thus new-born finds himself in moral separation from the whole order of things around him. Holy, heavenly aspirations fill his breast, while sin in its every form becomes his deep abhorrence. But though he has been thus morally purified in the very depths of his being, the Christian still needs the cleansing action of the Word of God from day to day. Christ's company is defined as “His own that are in the world." They are to have part with Him in the Father's house for ever, and it is His will that they should have part with Him in the way of spiritual communion now. But for this there

must be an undefiled walk through this evil world. Since it is practically impossible to handle the things of life, and to have contact with the ungodly without having the spirit soiled, He from His exalted place on high (acting in conjunction with the Holy Spirit below) applies from time to time His precious Word to us all for our blessing. “If I wash thee not thou hast no part with Me." We should indeed wash one another's feet, i.e., we should in watchful love, bring Scripture to bear upon one another's lives; but beyond all that man can do for his fellow there remains the Saviour's own ministry of grace. His vigilant eye cannot fail to perceive soil that would escape all human notice.

Peter's strenuous protests thus elicited for the saints of all times a most valuable unfolding of divine grace. Let us beware of introducing a cleansing by blood into John 13:1-38. No such thought is there. The atoning blood of Christ and its marvellous effects is fully dealt with in Hebrews 9:1-28; Hebrews 10:1-39, but not in John 13:1-38. Every Christian has experienced the total washing of the new birth, and in virtue thereof is “clean every whit” he has also had applied to his soul the efficacy of the blood, and is in consequence “perfected for ever” (Hebrews 10:14); but over and above all this there is the Saviour's gracious daily washing of the feet, or in other words, His continual application of His holy Word for the correction of all that may need correcting in our practical walk and ways.

"Lord, Who is it?"

It was the last evening, and the Saviour was sitting at the supper table with the twelve. The paschal lamb was upon the dish, that ancient type which was to be fulfilled in Himself upon the morrow as the Lamb of God slain for the life of the world. He had just given the disciples a touching proof of His changeless love to them in washing their feet. Then a wave of sorrow passed over His spirit, and He said: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me" (John 13:21). The sting lay in the words “one of you." It was painful enough to be scorned by men generally, but that one of the privileged few whom He had admitted to daily intimacy with Himself should deliver Him up to His enemies was heart-rending indeed. But what evil is the human heart not capable of?

Eleven at least of those at the table were simplicity itself as to the matter. Not doubting the truth of the Saviour's words, and not over-confident as to their own fidelity, they asked Him one by one, “Lord, is it I?” Matthew and Mark both record their question, the latter adding that “they began to be sorrowful," the former telling us “very sorrowful."

Peter, with his usual keenness, was anxious to go further than this. His special friend John was nearest to the Lord at that moment - " in His bosom” indeed. Peter therefore beckoned to him to question the Saviour more directly. The nearer we are to Christ in our souls' consciousness the more likely we are to learn His mind at any time. John then, from his place in His bosom, asked, “Lord, who is it?” The reply was: “He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it." This act was a known mark of special affection. The sop was forthwith dipped, and handed to Judas. Only in the fourth Gospel have we John's inquiry, as suggested by Peter, but Matthew records that Judas himself was shameless enough to ask, “Is it I?” He was answered in the affirmative (Matthew 26:25).

Judas furnishes us with a character study of the most awful kind. Few men who have ever lived have sinned so grievously. One of the privileged twelve, treasurer of the band, his feet washed by the Son of God, granted the morsel from the dish, yet for a few pieces of silver, (the amount of compensation for a slave gored by a bull — Exodus 21:32) he sold his Master to His murderers. Love of money was his ruin. So effectually did it steel his heart that the Saviour's most touching overtures were unable to reach him. Christians are warned in tremendous language against this most subtle of all snares in 1 Timothy 6:10-12. Fools are we if we refuse to heed the admonition.

Judas could, after all, only accomplish the purpose of God, and this the Saviour pointed out, in words preserved for us by Matthew and Mark. “The Son of man goeth as it is written of Him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born." It is an immense stay to the heart of the believer to know that neither the wickedness of man, nor the machinations of Satan can frustrate any divine counsel. Rebels against their Maker, whether human or angelic, are indeed constrained, in spite of themselves, to contribute to the final result as planned by Him. This does not, of course, lessen their wickedness in the smallest degree, God and His purposes having no place whatever in their thoughts.

It is a significant fact that while John and his companions addressed the Saviour as “Lord," the betrayer called Him “Rabbi” only (Matthew 26:25, R.V.). There is no recorded instance of Judas ever giving Him the higher title. To truly acknowledge Jesus as Lord is the fruit of a work of the Holy Spirit within (1 Corinthians 12:3). That is, of course during this period of His rejection. But the day will come when God will constrain every knee to bow to Him, and every tongue — heavenly, earthly, and infernal — will confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Php_2:10-11). But in this there is no salvation. It is simply the compulsory recognition of the rights and title of the Crucified.

"Whither goest Thou?"

The Lord and the eleven were still seated at the supper table. Judas was now away from them, completing his arrangements for his terrible crime. All the results of Calvary rose up before the Saviour's mind. God was to be glorified thereby as otherwise He could not possibly be, and He would respond to the achievement of the holy Sufferer by immediately glorifying Him in Himself above (John 13:31-32). The Saviour thus clearly predicted His own resurrection and ascension. But He added: “Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek Me: and as I said unto the Jews, 'Whither I go, ye cannot come'; so now I say to you." This announcement once more drew forth our apostle. “Lord, whither goest Thou?” To this Peter was told in reply: “Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterwards" (John 13:36-38). His ultimate destination was the Father's house on high, as the next chapter clearly shows; but He was going thither by way of death. Death, not as the saint knows it, which is after all but sleep, but death as the judgement of God against sin. As the sacred ark went down first into the Jordan in Joshua's day, so, in like manner, He of whom the ark was a feeble type, must go down first into death, and rob it of its sting by making atonement for sin and guilt, ere Peter or any other could follow in His steps.

The victory of Christ has altered the whole aspect of death for His believing people. No longer is it to us “the king of terrors" (Job 18:14); on the contrary, death is ours, the exulting apostle tells us in 1 Corinthians 3:21-22; that is to say, it is a servant to serve for our blessing. 01d Testament

believers were “through fear of death all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:15). Who can fail to perceive the difference between the days when Christ's victory was a matter of expectation and hope, and our own privileged time when His glorious triumph is an accomplished fact?

Peter should have been content with the Saviour's reply, for it not only told him of the impossibility of following Him just then, it also gave him the gracious assurance that he should follow afterwards. This was the Saviour's first hint to Peter that the honour of martyrdom was ultimately to be his portion.

But the ardent apostle must needs push his inquiries further. “Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake." Pitiful self-confidence, in which all his companions joined, as reference to the other Gospels proves. His humiliating fall must needs be disclosed now. Accordingly, the Lord answered him: “Wilt thou lay down thy life for My sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow till thou hast denied Me thrice." Poor Peter! Ere he could rightly enter upon his life-work for the Master he sincerely loved, he must learn the bitterest lesson men are called to sit down to in this world. He must learn the utter good for-nothingness of flesh, even in the most favoured. He might indeed have gathered all that was necessary from the Saviour's lips, but heart and conscience not being thoroughly searched thus, he must be put into the sieve of Satan. From his fiendish hand Peter came forth humbled and broken, henceforward a powerful exponent of the wonderful grace which forgives the most unworthy.

Gethsemane.

The Saviour and His disciples sang a hymn before leaving the supper table — so Matthew and Mark inform us. This was probably the great Hallel, consisting of Psalms 115:1-18, Psalms 116:1-19, Psalms 117:1-2, Psalms 118:1-29. Wonderful words to come from His lips at such a moment! "The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner" (Psalms 118:22) - Himself the rejected of earth about to be glorified on high. “Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar" (Psalms 118:27) — Himself as the sacrificial victim about to be slain for the sin of the world.

Presently, like rejected David of old, the Saviour crossed the Kidron, and approached the Mount of Olives (2 Samuel 15:23-30). On the way thither, Peter and his companions renewed their pledge of devotion unto death. So we gather from Matthew (Matthew 26:30-35) and Mark (Mark 4:26-31). Upon the slope of Olivet was the garden of Gethsemane — a spot well-known to the betrayer as one of the Saviour's quiet resorts (John 18:2). We do not propose to deal with all that transpired on that dreadful night, but will confine ourselves to the part played by our apostle.

Eight of the disciples were left near the entrance, while the Saviour, with Peter, James and John, went deeper into the recesses of the garden. For this detail we are again indebted to Matthew and Mark. This was the third occasion on which these men were specially favoured by the Lord Jesus, the other occasions being the raising of Jairus' daughter, and the Transfiguration. But presently He left even these three, saying; “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with Me." Returning after a while from His lonely agony, He found them asleep, so little did their dull hearts realize what was coming upon their Master. His rebuke — unspeakably gentle - was addressed to Peter as the one who boasted the loudest. “What, could ye not watch with Me

one hour? Watch and pray (for themselves, not for Him), that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." This happened three times. That is, three times the Saviour went apart and prayed, and three times He found the disciples asleep when He returned to them. In the presence of such a fact, who among us dare boast of anything? How feeble is the devotion of even the truest-hearted believer!

Judas then approached, with a band of armed men. As he covered his Master with his false kisses, the disciples, perceiving that mischief was intended, asked, “Lord, shall we smite with the sword?” (Luke 22:49). Before the Saviour could reply, fiery Peter struck a blow at Malchus, one of the servants of the high priest, and cut off his right ear (probably intending to cleave his skull). It is John who records the names in this instance (John 18:10). Luke tells us that the Saviour touched the sufferer's ear, and healed him (Luke 22:51), an incident that would be specially interesting to “the beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14). But the carnal courage of Peter and the rest soon failed them, for they all forsook Him and fled. The contrast is complete between the Son of God and every other, even the most distinguished. He, perfectly submissive under the Father's hand: they, hasty and violent. He, divinely strengthened to suffer His will, even unto death; they, cowardly when the danger developed. He, understanding all that would result from His cross and shame; they, foolishly unintelligent as to all that He had told them concerning it. (Luke 24:25-27, Luke 24:44) Truly, in the last dreadful scenes none shone but He. In no one but the Son of His love was the Father glorified.

The Threefold Denial.

Had anyone told Peter on the day of his enthusiastic confession of his Master as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” that the moment would come when he would repudiate Him with oaths and curses, he would have been disposed to reply, in the words of another: “What, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” (2 Kings 8:13). But he did it nevertheless; and all the Evangelists record the humiliating story, even John, Peter's special friend and companion, entering into the details of it as carefully as the rest.

It was first a simple denial, in answer to the challenge of the maid who kept the High-Priest's door (Matthew 26:69-70). In answer to the questions of several in the porch, he added an oath to his second denial. Then, being identified by a relative of the man whose ear he cut off in the garden (John 18:26), he broke out into a regular volley of oaths and curses. “I know not this man of whom ye speak" (Mark 14:71). The first two Evangelists only record the cursing and swearing; Luke and John content themselves with the fact of the denial.

Surely the Spirit of God had His reasons for giving us a fourfold account of Peter's miserable fall. It is an abiding warning against self-sufficiency in any of us. “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12). What Peter did yesterday, both reader and writer may do to-morrow, unless upheld by infinite grace. The absolute unreliability of flesh, i.e., of human nature, stands out vividly in the story of Peter's denial of his Lord. In all that he vowed beforehand his spirit was indeed willing, the Lord Himself acknowledging it (Matthew 26:41). Yet, when the test came, he found himself as weak “as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again" (2 Samuel 14:14). In the presence of armed men in Gethsemane where there seemed to be real danger. Peter was bold enough; but in the presence of servant maids later, where there does not appear to have been any danger at all, Peter was cowardice personified. John was with him when

he was questioned as to his association with Jesus of Nazareth, and was apparently in no peril (John 18:15-16); how then could there have been any real cause for alarm for his friend?

Moses failed in somewhat the same way. First, so eager for the deliverance of Israel from Egypt that he used carnal violence in order to attain his end; then, when God's time really came for the great work, his diffidence was such that “the anger of Jehovah was kindled against him" (Exodus 2:11-12; Exodus 4:14). How few, even of the best, know precisely the time to speak and act, and the time to be silent and passive! There has been but One in this world who has perfectly glorified His Father and God. In every other the failure has been painfully apparent. And so the noble witness of Matthew 16:16 and John 6:68-69 is shown to us cursing and swearing in the High Priest's servants' hall, vehemently affirming that he had no knowledge whatever of Jesus of Nazareth! Well might the apostle James say: “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (James 3:10). But even so, Peter's case was not hopeless. His injured Lord, in the midst of His own distress, thought of His poor servant, thus being driven along by the enemy as a fallen leaf, "and the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter." We are indebted to Luke for this exquisite expression of divine grace (Luke 22:61). The look was enough. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record that the sinning apostle went out and wept; Matthew and Luke adding “bitterly." In this we perceive the fundamental difference between Peter and Judas. The latter was goaded on by Satan to suicide, the former, susceptible to divine influences, ended with tears. Judas was a mere professor from the beginning; Peter was a man “born anew” by the Holy Spirit (John 3:3).

What infinite mercy that salvation is not of works! Else, where would any of us stand? “It is of faith, that it might be by grace" (Romans 4:16). The basis of blessing for sinful men is the Saviour's atoning blood. To this no merit can be added; and from it nothing can detract, not even the failure of one so eminent as Simon Peter.

At the Sepulchre.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a mere spiritual idea, but a physical fact of the highest possible importance. It is indeed the keystone of the arch of Christianity. If the resurrection of Christ could be disproved, then both preaching and faith are vain. Happily, no uncertainty whatever exists as to the mighty fact.

None of the disciples were expecting their Lord to rise from the dead on the third day. Though He repeatedly foretold His passion and resurrection, their dull hearts did not appear to apprehend His meaning. Hence the cross and the empty tomb were equally surprises to them. The fact is they were so deeply imbued with the teaching of the Old Testament prophets that their hope in Christ did not go beyond an earthly kingdom. Of blessing of another order and in another scene they had no real idea. The cross necessarily killed their expectations of the kingdom, as the sorrowful travellers to Emmaus candidly acknowledged in Luke 24:21. They had yet to learn that the kingdom was certain, if deferred, and that meanwhile, on the basis of Christ's atoning death, heavenly blessing was to be the portion of His believing people.

The Lord rose very early on the morning of the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1). When certain devoted women approached with their spices, they found the sepulchre open, with angels in attendance. Their Lord was risen. By His death He had settled the sin question, and had now

come forth from the tomb in resurrection power, the might of Satan being thus overthrown. “Fear not ye" was the word to the terrified women. They were charged with a gracious message to the disciples, to which Mark adds a particularly beautiful detail. “Tell His disciples, and Peter, that He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him" (Mark 16:7). Why “and Peter"? Oh, the grace of it! Had the message been general to the disciples, poor cursing Peter would scarcely have dared to claim a part therein. But the touching addition, “and Peter," assured his heart that, notwithstanding his terrible fall, his Lord acknowledged him still.

Peter forthwith ran to the sepulchre, John accompanying him (John 20:2-10). “The other disciple did outrun Peter and came first to the sepulchre." Why was this? There is nothing like love to quicken the steps, and there is nothing like a heavy heart to clog them. He who lay in the bosom of Jesus would necessarily travel faster than his backsliding friend. But Peter, ever impulsive, went into the sepulchre first. When John and he saw the linen clothes wrapped in an orderly way, but no dead body, they went away to their own home. If their Lord was not there the tomb had no further interest for them.

Mary Magdalene, however, could not take things so. With Jesus missing, the world was an utter blank to her heart. Accordingly she lingered at the spot, and presently was favoured with a sight of the Lord Himself, which brought her to His feet in adoration. If she lacked intelligence in shedding tears on the day of all others in the history of the universe when God's people should have rejoiced, she was not deficient in affection This the Lord ever values above everything else in His people. There is, indeed, no substitute for love.

As the great day wore on, the Lord Jesus showed Himself to various of His own, and amongst others, to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34) What passed between the Lord and His erring servant at this private interview we know not, but it unquestionably marked an important step in his restoration, which was so happily completed by the Sea of Tiberias.

“Lovest Thou Me?”

The time had now come for Peter to be restored not only to communion with the Lord, but also to His service. The spot chosen for this was the Galilean Sea, on the shore of which Peter and others first heard the Saviour's call to leave all and follow Him. John 21:1-25 thus becomes the complement to Luke 5:1-39.

On the last journey to Jerusalem the Saviour charged the disciples to meet Him in Galilee after His resurrection. They were reminded of His words by the angels at the sepulchre (Matthew 26:32; Matthew 28:7). Yet, when they reached the North, instead of quietly waiting for the Lord, seven of them went fishing, Simon Peter being the leader of this departure. Their night's labour yielded nothing, for what blessing can disobedient ones expect from God? At dawn a stranger on the shore challenged them as to their condition; and presently, at His command, they let down their net once more, and this time “they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes." John said to Peter: — "It is the Lord." Instantly the impulsive Peter put on his coat, and flung himself into the sea in order to hasten to His feet.

Very beautiful is this! Even after his shameful denial of his Lord, the apostle felt nowhere so happy as in His presence. If human love had broken down, the offender knew perfectly that divine love was still the same. Let every believer find comfort in the thought!

When the weary fishermen reached the shore that morning they found “a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread." A divinely provided breakfast for disobedient disciples! We are reminded of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:1-21. When the prophet was right with God, ravens sufficed as messengers for his need; when he was downcast and erring an angel was commissioned to minister to him. Well has the poet said, “To those who fall, how kind Thou art!” Not a word of remonstrance did the Saviour address either to Peter or to his companions until He had first refreshed them with His bounty. Oh, the gulf that separates this gracious One from even the best of His people!

“When they had dined," the questioning began. It was a warmed and filled Peter that was interrogated that day. “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?” The Lord thus suitably revived his old natural name, for his conduct of late had been unworthy of his new standing in grace. “More than these?” How the question would strike home, seeing that Peter had so vehemently affirmed, “Although all shall be offended, yet will not I" (Mark 14:29). The apostle could but reply, “Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee." Never again could he say, “More than these"; his self-sufficiency was humbled and broken. There are two words for “love” in the Greek of this passage. The Lord employed the word indicative of general affection; Peter in his reply gave utterance to a stronger term, one of special affection, meaning “I dearly love." Forthwith the Lord said: “Feed My lambs." Presently He challenged the apostle in a milder way — "Lovest thou Me?” dropping the words “more than these." Peter replying as before, He said “Feed My sheep." Then the Lord demanded a third time, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?” this time using Peter's own word of special affection. This completely broke down the apostle, who could now but cast himself upon the Master's omniscience: “Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." It was a frank confession that those who had read his life of late could not have gathered from it that Christ was aught to him; but that, nevertheless, at the bottom of his heart there was a true appreciation of His priceless worth. Once more the Saviour said: “Feed My sheep," adding the assurance that though by His unfaithfulness he had missed the honour of dying with Him, the privilege of martyrdom should be granted him in a later day.

We mark three steps in the Lord's restoration of Peter: His prayer, His look and His word (Luke 22:32-61; Luke 24:34; John 21:15-19). Thus reinstated in His Master's confidence, and once more granted a commission in His service, Peter was ready, when the Holy Spirit came down from heaven, to act his own special part in the great enterprise of grace that we call Christianity. No man is competent to serve our Lord Jesus Christ who has not trodden Peter's path. First, born anew by the quickening agency of God's blessed Spirit, his sins forgiven in virtue of the Saviour's atoning blood, and his self-confidence shattered that henceforward no power may operate within him but that of the divine Spirit.

After the Ascension.

During forty days the disciples had the company of the Lord Jesus after His resurrection, and before He ascended up on high. Then came the day when He led them out from Jerusalem as far as to Bethany (a village on the Eastern declivity of the Mount of Olives), and He was parted from them while in the very act of blessing them (Luke 24:51) . They had just asked Him if the kingdom was now to be restored to Israel, and were told in reply that the Father reserved to Himself all times and seasons. Meanwhile they were to be witnesses for Christ in Jerusalem, and unto the

uttermost parts of the earth.

Then he ascended, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. It was a visible bodily ascension, and the glorified One now sits as Man at the right hand of God. As the disciples strained their eyes upward, two men in white apparel assured them that the same Jesus whom they had seen go into heaven should come again in like manner (Acts 1:9-11). There is thus to be a visible bodily return of the Lord Jesus. Every hour brings the great event nearer. With this wonderful prospect before them, the bereaved disciples returned to Jerusalem filled with rejoicing. The next thing was the coming of the Holy Spirit, as the gift of the ascended Christ, and for this they had to wait ten days. This period they spent in prayer in an upper room in Jerusalem, the mother and brethren of Jesus uniting with them (Acts 1:13-14). This is the last notice of Mary in Holy Scripture. After the inauguration of Christianity on the day of Pentecost we never hear of her. Thus our last acquaintance with her is not as being prayed to, as if she had some special influence with heaven, but as a praying one herself amongst other praying ones. Let this fact be carefully noted. It may save us from superstitious notions concerning this highly favoured woman.

On one of those days of prayer Peter rose up and addressed the brethren concerning the vacancy created by the defection and suicide of Judas (Acts 1:15-26). The Lord before His departure had “opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures." Accordingly Peter quoted two verses from the book of Psalms (Psalms 69:25; Psalms 109:8), both having reference to the betrayer. Since Psalms 109:8 said “his office let another take," our apostle urged that one from amongst those who had companied with them “all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out amongst" them should be formally added to their number as a witness with them of His resurrection. Two persons answering to these qualifications were selected — Joseph Barsabas and Matthias. They then gave themselves to prayer, after which they gave forth their lots, that the departed Lord might in this way signify which of the two He had chosen. "And the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

Perhaps no act has been so seriously misunderstood as this, especially amongst Protestant Nonconformists, It is supposed that scriptural warrant is here found for the election of some to the ministerial office. The fact seems to have been overlooked that the incident occurred before Christianity commenced at all. Christianity dates not from the birth of Christ, but from the coming of the Holy Spirit. Matthias was thus chosen in connection with the Jewish order of things, for of the Church of God neither Peter nor his companions had the most distant idea at that time. The truth concerning the Church remained a mystery (i.e., a secret) hidden in God until Paul was called by the Lord Jesus some years later (Ephesians 3:3-6). The ten days that intervened between the ascension of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit were thus a kind of interregnum in the spiritual history of the disciples. The one divine Person had gone and the Other had not yet come. Nothing that savours of popular election to the ministerial office can be discovered in the Scripture records of the early Church. When the distribution of money was in question, the body of the believers were authorised to choose their almoners (Acts 6:3; 2 Corinthians 8:19); when the ministry of the Word was in view, they had no voice whatever. Why this difference? Because the money was their gift, while the ministry of the Word of God is the gift of the Lord alone. It is undeniable that Paul gloried in the fact that man was neither the source of his commission nor the channel by means of which he received it (Galatians 1:1).

The Pentecostal Sermon.

A wonderful event took place on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection, and ten after the ascension, of the Lord Jesus — the Holy Spirit of God came down from heaven to take up His residence here with the redeemed during the entire period of the Saviour's absence. It was not a mere exertion of divine influence for the good of men, but it was the coming of a divine Person. Christianity is thus a signally favoured period. But what is the Spirit of God here to do? To watch over the interests of the rejected Christ, and to gather out from amongst men, by means of the Gospel, those who are to be Christ's brethren and joint heirs for ever. Further, His presence on earth has created a unity amongst the redeemed which was impossible prior to His coming. All the saved are constituted members of Christ's body, and living stones in God's new and spiritual house.

Our business just now is with Peter's part on that memorable Pentecostal day. One of the immediate results of the Holy Spirit's coming was that all the disciples began to proclaim in other tongues the wonderful works of God. Jerusalem was at that time crowded with Jews from many countries who had gathered up for the great religious festival, and these were astounded to hear simple Galileans beginning to speak in at least sixteen foreign tongues. Some inquired: “What meaneth this?” Others mocking said, “These men are full of new wine" (Acts 2:1-47).

Then Peter arose, the eleven apostles being by his side, and addressed the multitude. He first rebutted the charge of drunkenness by drawing attention to the early hour. It was but 9 a.m. He then cited five verses from Joel 2:1-32 relative to the outpouring of the Spirit in the last days; and, while not affirming that the prophecy was then being fulfilled, he sought to show that it was something of the same nature which had that day taken place in Jerusalem. He next turned to the question of Jesus, and spoke of the wonderful facts of His life on earth, and how the Jewish people had crucified and slain Him by the hands of lawless Romans. But God had intervened by His power, and raised Him up from amongst the dead, and exalted Him to His own right hand. It was from the ascended Jesus the Holy Spirit had come down. The aim of Peter's discourse was to show that God and men were at utter variance concerning Jesus. Men had crucified Him, but God had glorified Him. Earth had rejected Him, but heaven had welcomed Him. A truly awful position for men to find themselves in relation to their God.

This Pentecostal address, being the first Christian sermon, is worthy of our most careful attention. It contained no pretension to great learning, it left untouched all the social and political questions which so fascinate the minds of men, and it dealt exclusively with the hearts and consciences of the hearers as to a Person Jesus. Its forceful language was full of Scripture; not only Joel 2:1-32, but also Psalms 16:1-11, and Psalms 110:1-7 being pressed into service. Why should the time of congregations in our own day ever be wasted with discourses of any other character? This, and this only, is the kind of preaching that is mighty through God for the blessing of the souls of men.

The effect of Peter's words was wonderful. Multitudes were broken under it. Realising how terribly they had compromised themselves with God by their rejection of His Son, they said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles: “Brethren, what shall we do?” The answer was as follows: “Repent, and be baptised everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Baptism before remission! This is not God's usual order, but the very reverse. When Peter proclaimed Jesus to Cornelius and his friends, they first received the

remission of their sins, then the Holy Spirit, and after that baptism was granted them (Acts 10:43-48). The usual order was departed from on the Day of Pentecost for a very important reason. Only seven weeks earlier these people had been guilty of the murder of the Son of God. They were now horrified at their sin. But under the exceptional circumstances they were not permitted to receive, either the remission of their sins or the gift of the Holy Spirit until they had been baptised in the name of the very One they had so violently rejected. Three thousand submitted to these humiliating terms, and thus signified the reality of their repentance. Their baptism put them entirely outside “the untoward generation” upon whom the vengeance of God was about to fall by the hand of the Romans.

What a day's work! Three thousand souls won for the rejected Christ! Yet larger blessing was hinted at in Peter's closing words: “The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). Such words are all-embracing. Gentile sinners such as we have part in them. Happy is the man who has heard the Gospel call, and in faith submitted himself to the once-crucified Saviour and Lord.

Healing the Cripple.

The effects of the Spirit's descent from heaven soon became apparent. Not only was a divine unity formed amongst the people of God, which found expression m steadfast continuance in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, and in the breaking of bread and in prayers (Acts 2:42), but signs and wonders began to be wrought in the name of the Lord Jesus. The first of these was the healing of the cripple at the Beautiful gate of the temple, as recorded in Acts 3:1-26.

Peter and John, yoke-fellows for some years in the Lord's work, as formerly partners in trade, went up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour, i.e., 3 p.m. This was the moment when the evening sacrifice was offered in the temple court, and when the incense was burnt at the golden altar within the house. Both sacrifice and incense when first appointed by God spoke to His heart of the Christ who should come. In the day of Acts 3:1-26 these things had become meaningless, all having been accomplished in Him who had now gone up on high. In our own day (after centuries of Gospel light) sacrifice and incense are worse than meaningless. They are a positive insult to Christ and His cross. The hour of the evening sacrifice was the time of the Saviour's death; it is suggestive indeed that the cripple was blessed just then. Surely this fact whispers to us that all blessing for man is founded upon His atonement. Other instances of divine interposition at the same hour may be found in 1 Kings 18:36; Ezra 9:5; Daniel 9:21; Acts 10:3. When God thus condescends to draw attention to the clock there is instruction intended, if only we have ears to hear.

As Peter and John approached the temple gate that day, a man lame from his birth, who took his station there daily, begged money of them. Instead of pence he obtained healing. In reply to his begging appeal, Peter said: “Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." The next moment the poor fellow was walking, and leaping, and praising God — such was the potency of the name of the rejected Jesus.

Those were blessed days when the Church, possessed of no human patronage or worldly endowments, and when its foremost preacher had to say, “Silver and gold have I none," carried on

all its operations in simple faith in the name of Jesus, and in the realization of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Why was such a condition of things ever allowed to pass away? In those days penniless men “turned the world upside down," their enemies themselves being witnesses (Acts 17:6); in these days ecclesiastical princes with limitless wealth at their command are well nigh impotent in the presence of the enemy. Such a fact should lead to great searching of heart amongst us. Something is terribly wrong in the principles and methods of our time!

The cripple of Acts 3:1-26 was a remarkable picture of his nation. For fifteen centuries Israel had been in closest proximity to God's house, but beyond the gate thereof none had ever gone. Worship within the veil, the precious privilege now of every believer in Jesus, was altogether unknown to them (Hebrews 10:19). Why? Because of the ground on which they stood with God - that of law. At Sinai and after, Israel vowed to keep all God's holy requirements, but their awful failures only proved that spiritually, as the cripple of our chapter physically, man is lame from his mother's womb. It is a great lesson to learn our lameness — our utter inability to do anything for God. Grace alone suits lame ones. He who gives up all pretensions to goodness of his own, and trusts in the name of the Crucified, finds salvation therein, as surely as the cripple of our chapter found healing. Spiritual activity soon follows — " walking, and leaping, and praising God." It is in vain to bid a man walk with God and keep His word until he has proved for himself His matchless grace; equally in vain is it to expect praise from the lips of those who are "doing" for salvation. On which line is both reader and writer, grace or law, our own works or Christ's work finished once for all? “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt .... And if by grace, then it is no longer of works: otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Romans 4:4; Romans 11:6).

In Solomon's Porch.

The healing of so well-known a character as the lame beggar soon drew together a multitude in Solomon's porch. This was a covered walk with pillars, much frequented by visitors to the temple. It was here that the Jews told out their unbelief so painfully in the days of the Lord Jesus, when they said: “How long dost Thou make us to doubt? If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." When He did declare plainly the truth as to His person they forthwith attempted His life (John 10:22-29).

The crowd which gathered round Peter and John furnished the opportunity for the second recorded Christian sermon (Acts 3:12-26). It was remarkable in various ways. First, Peter sought to divert attention from himself and his companions by insisting that it was not by their own power or holiness they had made the man to walk; but that instead the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had wrought for the glory of His servant Jesus, whom the Jewish people had so recently denied and slain. The apostle put their guilty deed in the strongest form when he said: “Ye denied the holy One, and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince (or Author) of life, whom God hath raised from the dead." They had deliberately preferred a taker of life, in the person of Barabbas, to the divine Author of life — the Son of God! Now it was His name, through faith in His name, which had given the poor cripple perfect soundness in the presence of them all. What an awful position for men to find themselves in! God was publicly honouring the name of the One they had murdered! God and man were thus at open variance concerning Jesus. The position has not altered to this hour. The world has not changed its mind as to the Crucified; were it otherwise, it would cease to be “the world." The world ever despises and hates Him whom God loves and magnifies.

Peter added: “And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." Marvellous grace this! To our poor minds it would seem as if the awful sin was committed with open eyes! Peter took the same line as his Master when He said: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Under the law Jehovah drew a distinction between a man-slayer and a murderer. For the latter there was to be no mercy; for the former there was safety in the cities of refuge (Numbers 35:1-34). God is graciously pleased to regard Israel — the slayer of Jesus — as a man-slayer. Accordingly there is still mercy for that blood-stained nation.

A very remarkable overture was made to Israel that day in Solomon's porch. In Acts 2:1-47 Peter's appeal was to individuals and those who responded to it became forthwith detached from “this untoward generation"; in Acts 3:1-26 the same preacher's appeal was to the nation as such. He called upon the people to repent and be converted, promising them that in that case their sins should be blotted out, and that times of refreshing should come from the presence of Jehovah. Moreover God would send back Jesus. The heavens had received Him until the times of the restitution of all things; it now remained for Israel to say whether that time of universal blessing should commence forthwith. Let us note carefully that the world's blessing awaits Israel's repentance. While that nation continues in unbelief Jesus remains in the heavens, and the evil sway of the devil goes on.

Before the people could reply, Peter added a warning based upon Deuteronomy 18:15-19. Moses had predicted the coming of a prophet — man like himself, to whom the nation must hearken on pain of destruction. This prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus; who, though the Eternal Son, condescended to become Man in our midst — as truly human as Moses or any other. No mere expounder of Moses' law was He, but proclaimer of a new and more glorious order of things altogether. This is shown in the words: “Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you." All the prophets from Samuel onward had pointed to This day. Israel had been privileged indeed, to have first the prophets in long succession, and finally the Son of God Himself speaking in their midst. And now, in spite of their slaughter of Him, it was divinely proposed to give Him to them a second time; and thus blessing — full and final — should be brought in, not for Israel only, but for all the nations of the earth. Alas, for the hopeless evil of the human heart! The gracious overture was spurned with the result that the world drags on century by century in its weary way, feeling ever more deeply its need of peace and rest, yet never attaining thereunto. The rejected Jesus is men's only true hope, could they but see it.

"You Builders."

While Peter and John yet reasoned with the people concerning Jesus, the ecclesiastical authorities came down upon them in wrath. From Acts 4:1 we learn that the Sadducees were now in power amongst the Jewish hierarchy. These men — the Higher Critics and the Rationalists of that day — were specially enraged that Peter and John should preach through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. They had made it their sorry business to eliminate from the minds of the people all faith in the miraculous. Accordingly the preachers were lodged in gaol for the night, but not until many of their audience had believed the glad tidings concerning the Saviour.

We continue with Acts 4:1-37. In the morning a goodly number of Israel's religious chiefs assembled together in Jerusalem, and having set Peter and John in the midst, they demanded of them by what power or by what name they had made the lame man whole. Peter, filled with the

Holy Spirit in accordance with the Lord's promise in Matthew 10:19-20, no longer timorous but divinely bold, forthwith indicted his interlocutors most solemnly. To the people he used the language of persuasion, but not to the leaders. It was in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, “whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead," the crippled man had been made whole. The position is here plainly stated. Men crucified Jesus; God raised Him. Men were thus in open conflict with God. Not ignorant men, mark; but the clergy of God's people, the public expositors of His holy Word. Further, Peter said: “This is the Stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." Religious teachers, whether in Judaism or in Christendom, are builders; constructors of that which will either abide or perish, as the Lord may judge by and by (1 Corinthians 3:9-17). God's foundation stone is Jesus; upon Him alone can men safely build. But Israel's leaders had treated Him with contempt. God's answer to them was the exaltation of His Son. God has now made Him the Corner-stone of a new structure; the office of Peter's antagonists was therefore gone, however fiercely they might contend for it. Our apostle made a magnificent finish of his defence: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Every man is thus shut up to Jesus for salvation. He who rejects Him does so to his eternal ruin.

The Jewish ecclesiastics were amazed at being thus addressed by “unlearned and ignorant men" such as Peter and John “Unlearned and ignorant” does not mean "without education"; the point is that they had received no specific training for public work. In modern language, they were not university men, But these humble preachers had what was immeasurably better; they had heart-knowledge of God and His Son, and were withal indwelt by the Holy Spirit. They were put outside the council while their judges conferred together as to the best method of dealing with them.

What shall we do to these men," said they, “for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it." They would have denied it if possible, even as they had shamelessly circulated lies concerning what happened at the Saviour's tomb. They agreed amongst themselves to charge the apostles to speak no more in the name of Jesus. When Peter and John were called in, and admonished thus, they gave the only answer that was possible under the circumstances. “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Solemn words, indicating as they do that God was no longer with these ecclesiastics, but with the humble men whom they despised. These latter were aflame in their souls with divine facts concerning the Lord Jesus, the potency of which for the salvation of men they deeply realized; they were not to be silenced therefore by the threats of their antagonists.

How often has this scene been reproduced in Christendom! God's true servants despised and persecuted by professional shepherds of God's people, themselves destitute of any true knowledge of God, while contending fiercely for the empty shell of the religious system from which they have derived all their importance. Utterly incompetent themselves to convey true blessing to men's souls, they have raged against those whom God has been pleased to use for this purpose. So far as the times have permitted, all the force of the world's governments has been invoked against them for the satisfaction of wounded ecclesiastical pride.

That memorable day in Jerusalem ended with a remarkable prayer meeting (Acts 4:23-31). Being let go, Peter and John went to their own company, and reported all that had passed between themselves and the chief priests and elders. The assembly at once turned to God with one accord; and when they had prayed, God gave open proof of His presence amongst them by shaking the place where they were assembled together. “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spake the word of God with boldness."

Ananias and Sapphira.

A great wave of devotedness was passing over the infant Church in Jerusalem. Under the mighty impulse of divine grace earthly things were being held with a very loose hand. Property was freely surrendered (Barnabas being conspicuous in this,) and the proceeds were being laid at the feet of the apostles that all might share together (Acts 4:32-37). Did the Lord demand this of His people? Most assuredly not, for Christianity is characterised by grace, and God has taken the place of the Giver. But He values what His people voluntarily surrender, because it indicates appreciation of what He has wrought for them through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Such a communistic condition of things as obtained in the early Church was only possible while the Church was confined to one city. But liberal-heartedness is always pleasant in the divine sight. Alas, that it should be one of the rarest of Christian graces!

Amongst those who brought to the apostles the proceeds of property sold were Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). These brought part only of the sum realized. This would have been doubtless acceptable enough both to God and to the apostles had they been open and frank about it. But the evil pair agreed together to represent the amount as the whole, and in so doing they became guilty of a grievous sin. They wished apparently to be regarded by their brethren as devoted and unworldly, like Barnabas and many others. How often has human opinion ensnared men's souls! Ananias, who tendered the money, was promptly challenged by Peter: “Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?” There lay the enormity of the sin. God the Holy Spirit had come from heaven to make the Church His temple (1 Corinthians 3:16). As surely as God filled both the tabernacle and the temple with the Shekinah — the visible token of His presence amongst His people Israel — so now in this more favoured age God has granted His Spirit from on high, first to form the Church, and then to inhabit it during the entire absence of the Lord in heaven. Ananias and his wife ignored this mighty fact, even as multitudes who profess and call themselves Christians do to-day. But just as Jehovah resented the affront of Nadab and Abihu in the opening days of the Israel age (Leviticus 10:1-20), so in like manner He resented the affront of Ananias and Sapphira in the opening days of the Church era, and this for the warning of the people of God unto the end.

As Ananias listened to the apostle he fell dead at his feet. The young men having buried him, his wife, who had not heard of what had transpired, came in. Peter then challenged her also: "Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?" She replying in the affirmative, Peter said: "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out." To “tempt the Spirit of the Lord” is to question His presence in the midst of God's people Israel was guilty of this sin at Meribah (Exodus 17:7). The woman fell down dead immediately, and she was presently buried beside her husband.

Were Ananias and Sapphira converted souls? None can say. Certainly the Lord at a later date felt constrained to lay His disciplinary hand upon some of the ill behaved Corinthian brethren. They were indeed “washed, sanctified, and justified," but such was their conduct that some were weak and sickly amongst them, and many slept. 1 Corinthians 6:11 shows that they were fit for heaven, but 1 Corinthians 11:20-32 makes it sadly plain that they were not fit for Corinth. The lesson of Acts 5:1-42 is that holiness becomes God's house for ever. (Psalms 93:5).

“Great fear came upon all the Church and upon as many as heard these things." Moreover, we read: “Of the rest durst no man join himself to them." Men were not eager in those days to “join the Church." The presence and power of God therein was so manifest that it was felt that a new life and a holy one was necessary for such a place. Days of powerlessness and unreality, when a profession of Christianity costs nothing, and may even yield earthly advantages, draw into the outward fellowship of the Church persons who know nothing of God and His saving grace. But the hindrance to real spiritual progress of such a dead weight of flesh is incalculable.

If men were filled with awe as they observed the power of the Holy Spirit thus operating within the Church, and so forbore to associate themselves therewith, the true work of God's sovereign grace proceeded apace. “Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:14). This is only the kind of “adding” that is worth anything.

A great following is easily procured, but if it is all hollowness and unreality, of what value is it? To be “added to the Lord” is to be brought into living touch with a Person. We thus come back to the question of all questions: “What think ye of Christ?

Prison Again.

The power of the Spirit wrought both within and without the Church. Within, Ananias and Sapphira fell dead at Peter's feet; without, even the shadow of the apostle sufficed for the healing of the sick. The whole twelve were miraculously endowed; hence we read, “by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people" (Acts 5:12-16). Miracles have an important place at the beginning of a new era. Many were wrought when the Son of God came to earth, and thus His glorious person was accredited (Acts 2:22); more were granted during the period of the Acts when the Holy Spirit came down; and a new series will be witnessed when Christianity is done and the Antichrist shows himself (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). The Antichrist's miracles, it need hardly be said, will be wrought by the power of Satan.

The ecclesiastical authorities in Jerusalem were envious and angry at beholding such exhibitions of supernatural power in humble fishermen. Accordingly they laid violent hands upon them, and put the whole twelve in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord intervened at night (the first of many gracious interventions in the days of the apostles) and brought them out, with the charge: “Go, stand and speak to the people all the words of this life" (Acts 5:17, etc.). At the earliest possible moment in the morning the apostles did as they were commanded. What a commission "all the words of this life!" A new life for man has been revealed in Jesus, and now, on the foundation of His death and resurrection, is being conferred upon all who believe in His name. "This life" eternal life carries with it a full discharge, the forgiveness of all trespasses (Colossians 2:13). “All the words of this life" were to be declared; nothing was to be withheld; the result being heaven begun below for those who welcomed to their hearts the gracious testimony. It is

refreshing to consider the themes which engaged the preachers in the early days of Christianity. The great design with them was to bring men into spiritual touch with divine persons, the Father and the Son, that so their hearts might be clean delivered from the present evil world. Why are not such themes alone presented to men to-day? Who authorised the entire change in tone and character of ministry that is everywhere so observable now?

The whole Jewish Sanhedrim assembled together in the morning with all gravity to deal with their prisoners. Those who were sent to fetch them reported that the prison doors were found securely fastened, and the keepers were standing in their appointed stations, but the birds had flown. Presently one came and told them that the men were standing in the temple, preaching to the people, Officers were then sent to bring them, but no violence was attempted, for they feared the multitude. The High Priest challenged them thus: "Did we not straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." The last part of the charge was unreasonable enough when we remember their words to Pilate: “His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). It is noticeable that the High Priest, in his address to the apostles, carefully avoided using the hated name of Jesus. “This name"; "your doctrine"; “this man's blood"; but not the name of Jesus. Yet to that name every knee must yet bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Php_2:9-11).

Peter and the other apostles boldly replied: “We ought to obey God rather than men." This was a distinct repudiation of the special place which the Jewish leaders had once held for God. It was gone, as the fruit of unbelief; they were now but “men," and that in open conflict with God. The apostles proceeded: “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey Him." This language suggests that God had not yet given up His ancient people. “Our fathers” and “Israel” show this. The turning point was reached when Stephen's testimony was rejected, and himself murdered.

The Sanhedrim being disposed to slay their faithful reprovers, Gamaliel, one of their most respected members, commanded to put the apostles outside for a space while he reasoned with his companions. He reminded them of various impostors who had arisen, and who had perished miserably with all their followers. His suggestion, therefore, in regard to the twelve, was: “Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." This was sheer worldly wisdom, and wholly false in principle. Neither prosperity nor adversity in this world is proof whether a man or a cause be of God or not. The wicked often prosper. Job's friends erred in this most sadly. Habakkuk was sorely perplexed because of it; and Asaph, the writer of Psalms 73:1-28, had to follow the wicked in his thoughts beyond the grave in order to understand. But Gamaliel's advice served God's present purpose, and His servants were released, after a flogging, and a charge that they should not again speak in the name of Jesus, which charge they were no more disposed to heed now than when it was addressed to them some time previously. They departed “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for His name." Such men were neither fools nor fanatics; they knew a person — the glorious Son of the living God — and to be associated with Him, even in suffering and shame, was to them an unspeakable

honour. They preached Jesus more vigorously than ever.

In Samaria.

Satan frequently outwits himself; and no wonder, for whatever his power, he is but a creature, and so is quite unable to see the end from the beginning. When he brought about the murder of Stephen, with a general persecution of Christians to follow, he doubtless imagined he had scored a great triumph. But an all-wise God ordered it otherwise. Among those who fled from Jerusalem at that crisis was Philip, one of the seven who had been set apart by the assembly to look after its poor. Going down to Samaria, he at once preached Christ to the people. The sovereignty of the Spirit of God is very marked here. The Church had deputed its money matters to Philip and his companions, and lo, Philip is found preaching! For spiritual work no human appointment is necessary; only superstition and ignorance of Scripture dare say otherwise.

A great work resulted in Samaria; (Acts 8:1-13). This place, so long the religious rival of Jerusalem, was now subdued by the power of that grace which Jerusalem was driving away. “There was great joy in the city." Those who “believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, were baptised, both men and women." But at this point the gracious work of God paused for a while.

The good news ere long reached Jerusalem, where apparently the apostles were still able to maintain themselves spite of the opposition of the authorities. Whether they were right in continuing there, seeing that the Lord had charged them to preach remission of sins in His name “among all nations" is a question (Luke 24:47). But they rejoiced to hear of the grace of God in Samaria, and forthwith dispatched Peter and John to visit the place (Acts 8:14-25). These found that the new converts had not yet received the crowning blessing of Christianity, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly they prayed for them, then laid their hands on them, and forthwith they received the Holy Spirit.

This simple action has been most grievously misunderstood and misrepresented in the interests of ecclesiastical officialism, and many souls have been injured thereby. The rite of Confirmation is indeed built upon it. But what is the significance of the laying on of hands? The general idea may be gathered from such a Scripture as Leviticus 1:4. It is expressive of identification.

He who laid hands on another declared thereby his oneness and sympathy with him. Hence the warning to Timothy: “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure" (1 Timothy 5:22). The bearing of the action of Peter and John in Samaria was this: on behalf of the Christians in Jerusalem they expressed their oneness with the new group of believers which had sprung up in the city they had ever hated and despised. Instead of the Spirit falling immediately upon them, as upon the company in Caesarea in Acts 10:44, the Samaritans were kept waiting for this blessing until Jerusalem expressed itself through the instrumentality of Peter and John. God thus openly signified that the Church, whether planted in this city or in that, is one. Had the Samaritans been treated precisely as the Jews on the day of Pentecost the old rivalry between the two religious centres, of which the woman spoke to the Saviour at the well in John 4:20, might easily have been carried into Christianity. This was effectually prevented by the Samaritans being made to share the Jerusalem outpouring instead of receiving an independent outpouring of their own. The choice of instruments, too, was remarkable: Peter, the strictly

conservative Jew, who had ever judged it an unlawful thing to come unto or keep company with a man of another nation (Acts 10:28): and John, the son of thunder, who once asked his Lord if he should command fire to come down from heaven and consume the Samaritans as Elijah did (Luke 9:51-56). But the most sectarian hearts are capable of learning lessons of grace in the school of God. So enlarged were the hearts of Peter and John by what they witnessed in Samaria, that on the homeward journey they evangelised many villages of the same once obnoxious people. They were beginning to understand that God is no respecter of persons.

Simon the Sorcerer

The visit of Peter and John to Samaria brought to light an appalling case of hypocrisy (Acts 8:9-24). For a long time a sorcerer, Simon by name, had deceived the people by his Satanic wonders, Self-exaltation and personal gain were his objects, as with every other misleader ancient and modern. The people had come to call him “that power of God which is called Great” (R,V.). This man's spell was broken by the coming of Philip with the Gospel of Christ. There is indeed nothing else that can deliver men from the thraldom of Satan, whatever form that thraldom may take.

Remarkably, amongst those who came forward for baptism, professing faith in the Lord Jesus, was Simon himself. What was it that attracted such a character? “The miracles and signs which were done." He was astonished to find introduced into Samaria a power more marvellous than his own. There is no need to accuse him of making a profession of faith for the sake of gain; he was doubtless sincerely attracted by Philip's miracles, although his heart was never reached. Faith that is founded upon miracles is worthless, for it is of the essence of faith to believe in that which is unseen. In our Lord's time, many in Jerusalem believed in His name when they saw the miracles which He did, but to such persons He did not trust Himself (John 2:23-25). In the case of Nicodemus, conviction wrought by miracles happily led on to something better (John 3:1-36). In Acts 13:6-12 we read of one who witnessed a miracle great indeed, but it was "the Word of God” he desired to hear, and in conclusion we are told that he “believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."

The coming of Peter and John was used by God to reveal Simon's true condition. Observing that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, all his natural love of self-importance and gain burst forth. Offering them money, he said: “Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit. Why should not the new religion be as profitable to him as the old? The unhappy man has provided us with a new word; but alas, how many of those who use the word "Simony" of others have been glaringly guilty of the same sin themselves!

Peter indignantly denounced the man: “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." Money, like everything else connected with this world, is a perishable commodity; the man should also perish along with that which he loved so well. Even so, Peter invited him to repentance, for God desireth not the death of any sinner. “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." But no sign of repentance appeared; only fear of the consequences of his sin. “Pray ye to the Lord for

me," said he to Peter, “that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me." He was in no humour to pray for himself, but he would be prayed for. Such a position is untenable for any man. Knowing nothing of the Lord for himself, Simon would hang upon Peter's intercession. But this could avail nothing for him, nor can it avail for us. Each soul must have to do with God for itself. The intervention of even an apostle is absolutely without value as a substitute for this.

Behold then Simon the sorcerer, duly baptised, but lost. Surely his story is recorded for the warning of many. If the apostle came amongst us to-day, would he not have to say to not a few Christian professors: “thy heart is not right in the sight of God!” The power of the Spirit in Peter detected unreality within the Church in Ananias and Sapphira, and outside it in Simon of Samaria. Thus was the infant Church mercifully preserved from persons whose kind has flooded it since to its sore damage and the Lord's dishonour.

Paul's Visit.

The next event of note in the history of the Church was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. This remarkable man, distinguished amongst his fellows both for high morality and scrupulous religiousness, outdistanced everybody in hatred to the name of Jesus, and in contempt for His followers. Going beyond proper Jewish limits in his zeal against Christianity, he was stricken down outside the gates of Damascus by the light of the glory of Christ. In that moment of moments he learned that Jesus of Nazareth is Lord of all, and that His people, whom Saul was persecuting, were regarded by Him as part and parcel of Himself. “Why persecutest thou Me?” was the Lord's demand of His stricken foe. Blinded by the glory which thus shone round about him, Saul was led by the hand into the Syrian capital, and was three days sightless, and could neither eat nor drink This painful season was brought to a close by the visit of Ananias, a certain disciple who dwelt in Damascus. He addressed him as “brother Saul" (a gracious recognition of the new relationship into which divine favour had brought him), and forthwith admitted him to the profession of Christianity by granting him baptism (Acts 9:1-19). From that day Saul (who soon became known as Paul) threw overboard as worse than worthless all his previous attainments in morality and religiousness, and henceforward made his boast in Christ alone The blood of His cross was the basis of all his blessings, and the Saviour Himself was his joy and delight.

Some three years after his conversion he visited Jerusalem in order to make the acquaintance of Peter. He lodged with him fifteen days (Galatians 1:18-19). The only other person of note that he met at that time was James, the Lord's brother. The assembly in Jerusalem was at first afraid of him, having only known Saul as a devourer of the flock of God. But Barnabas, described later as “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith," introduced him to the apostles, telling them how the Lord had dealt with him, and “how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." The last remark is important as showing that this new witness did not go to Jerusalem to receive ordination at the hands of his predecessors in the apostolate. He had already done good work for Christ before he met Peter or any of his companions. In Galatians 1:1 he calls himself “an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead." In the same chapter, in the course of a few autobiographical remarks, he says, “When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by His grace to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me." It was a cardinal

point with him who became pre-eminently the apostle of the Church that all ministry flows directly from the Head in heaven. The notion of human intervention in such a matter was exceedingly abhorrent to him.

But Paul desired to make the acquaintance of Peter; hence his fifteen days' visit to Jerusalem, as recorded in Galatians 1:18-19. It would be interesting to know what these men of God discussed together at that time, but the Spirit of God has not been pleased to lift the veil. We may be assured that many of the precious details of our Lord's earthly pathway, of which Peter had been a personal witness, came into their everyday talk, and Saul would doubtless tell his new friend and brother something of what he had learned in the school of God both in Damascus and in Arabia. But Peter soon had to bid farewell to Saul. His bold preaching in Jerusalem so aroused some that plots were laid for his life. He was therefore got away to Caesarea by the brethren, and thence to Tarsus, the city of his birth (Acts 9:28-30). What a world is this! It has murdered the Son of God, and has followed up with relentless hostility every true witness to his name, whether Saul, Peter, or any other.

Eneas and Tabitha.

Saul of Tarsus had now come upon the scene, and, as Paul the apostle, was about to be granted the unique place of honour in the Church, with which no other could possibly compare. But Peter was not therefore to be put aside, for the Spirit of God has room for every variety of worker. At a somewhat later date these servants of Christ made a bargain together, the one to labour amongst the Jews and the other to evangelise the Gentile world. Let it be carefully noted that it was Peter who agreed to restrict himself to service amongst the Jews. This understanding, with the names of the other contracting parties, is given in Galatians 2:7-10. It is of interest because of the improper use that has been made of Peter's name amongst Gentile Christians for so long.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus being recorded with its results, the Spirit once more brings Peter into the inspired narrative (Acts 9:32-43). In the course of a preaching tour “he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda." In Acts 9:1-43 we have the title “saints” for the first time applied to believers of this dispensation. The Old Testament worthies are frequently so described in the earlier Scriptures, and the dead also in Matthew 27:52. Now in Acts 9:13, Acts 9:41 we have the title given as a general one to Christians In the epistles it is employed commonly. Superstition accords this title to a few special persons, as Matthew, Peter, etc., and then only after death; Scripture gives it here and now to every blood-washed believer in the Lord Jesus. Let this fact be carefully noted.

Our apostle found at Lydda a palsied man named Eneas, eight years bedridden. In response to Peter's word, “Jesus Christ maketh thee whole," he arose immediately. What a testimony to unbelieving Israel that God was prepared to honour to the uttermost the name of Him whom they had crucified! Whether Eneas was himself a believer is not recorded. It was more usual for such works of power to be wrought upon others, as an appeal to heart and conscience, not only in the beneficiary, but also in all observers. The result in this case was unique. “All that dwelt in Lydda and Saron (the plain of Sharon referred to in Son_2:1) saw him, and turned to the Lord." This is the only instance in Scripture history of a whole population being simultaneously converted.

From Lydda Peter was summoned to the port of Joppa. An excellent Christian woman in the assembly there, by name in Hebrew Tabitha and in Greek Dorcas, famous for good works and alms-deeds, fell sick and died. Instead of burying her promptly, the disciples sent two of their number to Peter desiring him to come without delay, the body being meanwhile washed and laid in an upper room. Clearly they expected resurrection for her, and yet nothing of the kind had up to that moment been witnessed since the day of Pentecost. Many of God's poor saints, like Stephen, had been done to death, but in no single instance had any been raised again. But there is potency in the name of Jesus even in the presence of the last dread enemy, as Peter's visit to Joppa soon proved. The many widows whom Dorcas had befriended showed the apostle with weeping the coats and garments she had made for them. Hers was practical Christianity indeed, such as James 1:27 inculcates for us all.

Peter, however, put all these aside and kneeled down and prayed. He had no power of his own. Only his Master and Lord could speak of Himself as “the Resurrection and the Life." Rising from prayer, Peter said to the body, “Tabitha, arise." Her eyes opened, she sat up, took Peter's hand, and presently was shown to her rejoicing fellow saints, as alive again from the dead Some have found difficulty in the fact that the apostle did not on this occasion bring in the name of Lord Jesus, as in Acts 3:6; Acts 9:34, and some ancient manuscripts have positively intruded into them the words “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." But the difficulty is imaginary, not real. Peter's prayer is sufficient indication as to whom he depended upon for the performance of so mighty a deed. Remarkably, the spiritual results of this, Peter's greatest miracle, were not nearly so considerable as in the case of Eneas. Then “all” turned to the Lord; at Joppa “many” believed in the Lord! In this we see divine sovereignty “The wind bloweth where it listeth” (John 3:8). We note the varied operations of the Spirit of God, but we are not always able to comprehend them. Peter “tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon, a tanner." How would such lodgings suit his professed successors?

In Cornelius' House.

The time had now come for the door of the Kingdom to be opened to the Gentiles, and Peter was the vessel honoured to this end, in accordance with the Lord's promise in Matthew 16:19. It was a tremendous shock to Jewish conservatism to find Gentiles received and blessed on precisely the same terms as themselves. Even Peter himself had to be rebuked by the Lord in a vision ere he was willing to take his part in such service (Acts 10:15, Acts 10:28). Yet at Pentecost he said: “The promise is . . . all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39).

The first Gentile to receive the call was Cornelius, an officer in the Roman garrison at Caesarea. He was in every way an attractive character. Godward, he was devout and a man of prayer; manward, he was benevolent and gracious, and this to a conquered people. It marked divine consideration for Jewish feeling that such an one should be selected rather than a character like the Philippian jailer. Remarkably, Caesarea had already been visited by both Philip and Saul, yet neither appear to have preached the Gospel there (Acts 8:40; Acts 9:30).

In this we see the sovereignty of God. He has His own time and His own instruments for the execution of His work in every quarter.

Cornelius comes before us in Acts 10:1-48 as one altogether faithful to the light which God had given him. He was not yet a believer in Jesus, for the simple reason that although he was conversant with the facts of the Saviour's life and death, He had never been proclaimed to him as One in whom he, as a Gentile, might (and indeed must) claim a personal interest. One day, as he was in prayer at 3 p.m., an angel appeared to him, and bade him send to Joppa for a man called Simon Peter, who would tell him words whereby himself and his household should be saved (Acts 11:14) Why this method? Why did not the angel tell him forthwith of the dead and risen Saviour? The answer is very simple. The privilege of preaching Christ belongs only to those who have themselves tasted redeeming grace. In like manner an angel directed Philip towards the eunuch in Acts 8:26. Cornelius obeyed promptly, despatching three messengers to fetch up the man who had been named to him.

Meanwhile, the Lord wrought in Peter's heart also, thus preparing him for the new work that lay before him. On the day following the angel's visit to Cornelius, Peter went up to the housetop to pray about noon. A trance falling upon him, he saw what appeared to be a great sheet descending from heaven filled with all kinds of beasts, birds and creeping things. A Voice bade him arise, kill, and eat. He at once objected: “Not so, Lord: for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." The heavenly Voice spoke again: “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." The whole thing was thrice repeated, and then the vessel with its contents was received up into heaven. While the apostle was yet wondering in his mind what lesson the Lord had for him in this vision, it was reported to him that Cornelius' messengers were at the gate. He was now to preach Christ to Gentiles as freely as he had proclaimed Him to the Jews. Peter must learn that the cross had ended Israel's special dispensational privileges, all fleshly distinctions being annulled thereby; all men now stand upon one common level before God, and the Gospel message is addressed to “whosoever." A hard lesson indeed for one to learn whose nation had held a unique place in the divine plan for fifteen centuries.

Arrived at Caesarea, Peter refused the proffered homage of the centurion, and forthwith delivered his message. It was a remarkable meeting — a company of Roman patricians gathered together to hear a Galilean fisherman speak of a crucified Jew. Peter's address was brief, and its theme was Christ alone. Why should preachers ever discourse upon any other theme? The apostle spoke of the Saviour's wonderful pathway below, ever doing good, and despoiling the kingdom of Satan, "for God was with Him." But men slew Him, and hanged Him upon a tree. In opposition to men's hatred, God signified His good pleasure in Him by raising Him from the dead on the third day. In order that His people might have the fullest assurance that His resurrection was indeed a fact He showed Him openly to many, who even ate and drank with Him. Then Peter proclaimed Him as the divinely ordained Judge of quick and dead, adding, “To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." Jesus is thus both Judge and Saviour; and every man must have to do with Him in one or other of these characters.

Whatever Peter intended to say more was never uttered for the Holy Spirit forthwith fell on all them which heard the word (Acts 10:34-38). Blessed interruption! Would that we knew more of it in connection with our preaching to-day. The truth is, Peter's audience drank in his testimony word by word as he rendered it, and so received divine forgiveness on the spot. Hence the gift of the Spirit, whom God bestows upon all forgiven ones, and upon them only. There was no laying on of hands here as in Samaria, for the reason that the special circumstances connected with Samaria had no

place in Caesarea. Baptism followed forthwith, as a privilege granted in the name of the Lord. This is God's order for Christianity until the end; first, the forgiveness of sins; second, the gift of the Holy Ghost; and third, the rite of baptism.

Back in Jerusalem.

Men may call Peter “the prince of the apostles," and in the superstition of their minds put him upon a pedestal exceeding high; but he was clearly not so regarded in his own time. Accordingly, on his return to Jerusalem from Caesarea, he was called to account by his brethren for his conduct there. Peter did not question their right thus to challenge him. It never occurred to him that his words and deeds were above all criticism. At a somewhat later date he was constrained to accept a public rebuke from Paul for shifty behaviour at Antioch (Galatians 2:11-16).

At his next appearance then in Jerusalem, his brethren of the circumcision contended with Peter, saying, “Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them” (Acts 11:1-30). The tidings of the “eating” apparently impressed them more than the tidings of the grace of God. What hearts are ours! The whole assembly in Jerusalem should have rejoiced that a large company of Gentiles had heard the word of the Gospel from the lips of Peter, and believed it to their eternal blessing. A praise meeting might well have been called in acknowledgment of God's wonderful grace to men so long regarded as outside of every good thing. But instead of this, the honoured instrument was called to account for his conduct in detail in “eating” with men of another nation.

Peter dealt frankly with his critics. Not a trace of irritation can be discovered in his defence. His heart was full of the wonderful grace of God to the Gentiles, and so he “rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them." He related his trance in the city of Joppa, and the vision of the great sheet, and what the Lord said to him concerning its contents. He told how at that juncture three men called at the house, summoning him to Caesarea to tell Cornelius and his friends words whereby they might be saved. The Spirit, moreover, bade him go with the men, nothing doubting. In order to guard against every possible misunderstanding, he took six brethren from Joppa with him, who were eyewitnesses of all that transpired in Caesarea, and who were with him now in Jerusalem prepared to add their corroborative testimony. Peter proceeded to tell his critics how, as he began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon his audience, as upon the Jewish believers at the beginning. God thus put no difference what ever between the Gentile and the Jew. In conclusion our apostle demanded: “Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God?”

God be thanked for the answer. As the Jerusalem brethren listened to Peter's narrative, their objections were silenced, and they glorified God, saying, “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Would that every dispute amongst Christians could end so happily! Satan's attempt to bring in disunion amongst God's saints was thus foiled by the grace of God triumphing in all hearts. Yet much was involved for those who thus found fault with Peter. For them as Jews, it meant the complete renunciation of all the special privileges which their nation had enjoyed for fifteen hundred years. If God was indeed dealing with Gentiles on exactly the same terms as with Jews, then clearly Israel's unique place was gone. This was indeed true, the nation's rejection of the Lord Jesus having forfeited everything. Haughty chief priests and elders might refuse to acknowledge this, and so contend earnestly against the new activity of the Spirit of God by means of the apostles; but those who challenged Peter in Acts 11:1-30 were men in whose

hearts the grace of God wrought, accordingly at all cost to their national feelings and prejudices they acknowledged His grace to the “other sheep," who were not of their fold (John 10:16).

Well may we bless God that He has “to the Gentiles also granted repentance unto life." “His blessed whosoever takes every lost one in." Gentile dwellers in Great Britain and elsewhere might well be filled with despair were it otherwise.

Herod's Persecution.

The saints in Jerusalem were not left long in peace. Herod — type of the wilful king of the last days (Daniel 11:36) — "stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church” (Acts 12:1-25). His first victim was James, the brother of John. According to the Saviour's promise in Matthew 20:23, he thus drank of His cup, and was baptised with His baptism. So ended in blood, so far as earth was concerned, a companionship of many years' standing. Prior to their first meeting with Jesus, the two brothers had wrought with Simon Peter as fishermen. Called by sovereign grace, they had been co-workers in testimony for their Lord. The work of James was now finished. Herod, perceiving that it pleased the Jews, next laid hands upon Peter, intending to sacrifice him when the Passover festival was over. The Holy Spirit significantly remarks — "then were the days of unleavened bread." Leaven is everywhere in Scripture the emblem of corruption. During their religious festivals the Jewish people were responsible to purge it out of their houses. Yet, at such a season, when they were more than usually zealous in the matter of externals, they could delight in blood! In like manner, our Lord's accusers were scrupulous about crossing a Gentile threshold at Passover time; while altogether without conscience about the murder of an innocent Man! (John 18:28) Oh, religion, what bloody deeds and what consummate hypocrisy have been perpetrated in thy name!

On the previous occasion Peter was released from prison by angelic hands on the very night of his arrest (Acts 5:19). This time the Lord suffered the enemy to detain him until a few hours before his intended execution. This was doubtless for the exercise of faith, both in the apostle himself and in his friends who prayed for him. For the assembly in Jerusalem made ceaseless supplication concerning the prisoner.

Peter was indeed to have the honour of a martyr's death — his Lord told him so in John 21:18, but not yet. Our times are in His hand — what comfort! Confiding in the Lord, Peter was able to sleep peacefully in prison although bound to two soldiers with chains. Other soldiers were posted at the door of his cell, so determined was Herod not to lose his prey. But all men's precautions are useless when God asserts Himself. He who disposed of Pilate's stone and seal made short work of Herod's doors and guards. Accordingly on that memorable night, an angel awoke Peter, and bade him arise, gird himself, and follow him. The chains fell off, door after door opened before them, the soldiers sleeping on, and presently Peter found himself in the street, the angel then bidding him farewell. The apostle, only by this time fairly awake, then exclaimed: “Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectations of the people of the Jews."

He went to the house of the mother of John Mark, and there a stranger thing happened. Many Christians were at that moment gathered together for prayer concerning him. The maid who answered his knock, in her pleasure at hearing the well known voice, ran back into the meeting to

report, leaving Peter still standing at the gate. A whole roomful of praying ones refused to believe her, and when the girl insisted that she had really heard Peter's voice they decided that it was an apparition! How unbelieving are the hearts of even true believers in the Lord Jesus! In this case the Lord was good beyond all the expectations of His people. When the apostle at last gained admittance, he related how the Lord had delivered him, and then went his way, bidding them tell James (the Lord's brother), and the rest of the brethren.

After his release in Acts 5:19 he was instructed to go into the temple, and there preach the words of eternal life. But he had no such commission now; Jerusalem's day was done. Nothing remained to the rejected witness but to act upon the word in Matthew 10:23, and flee to another place.

Herod's end is recorded in Acts 12:1-25 as a kind of appendix. There came a day when he accepted divine honour from the people, and was forthwith smitten by the angel of the Lord. His body was eaten of worms, and his spirit went to torment. Expressive but awful type of Israel's last king, the Antichrist. Claiming and receiving that homage which is due to God alone, he will be promptly dispatched to the lake of fire at the Lord's appearing (Revelation 19:20).

It is pointedly added in Acts 12:24 : “But the word of God grew and multiplied." So it must be ever, for God can never accept defeat at the hands of His creatures. All who seek to frustrate His purposes of grace but dash themselves to pieces in the vain attempt.

The Jerusalem Council

It was in no sense “a general council” (as men speak), but it was a very important gathering nevertheless, and its decisions are authoritative to this hour. It was a gathering of the apostles and elders, with the assembly in Jerusalem, to discuss the question whether or not Gentiles should be subjected to the law of Moses (Acts 15:1-41).

It happened on this wise. After the return of Paul and Barnabas from their first missionary tour, they spent a considerable time amongst the brethren in Antioch, by whom they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled. At that juncture certain Jewish brethren came along, who taught the Antioch Christians that unless they were circumcised and kept the law of Moses they could not be saved. It will be observed that in the early Church there was liberty for any to minister who felt themselves able to do so, the hearers being responsible to judge their utterances as to whether they were of God or not (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The notion of a “clergyman” had not yet occurred to the minds of any.

Paul and Barnabas resisted these law teachers earnestly, perceiving the deep dishonour of putting human works alongside the perfect work of the Lord Jesus. His Calvary sacrifice is of such infinite value that nothing more can ever be required as a ground of standing before God. But God, in His perfect wisdom, did not permit the law dispute to be settled at Antioch. It suited His ways better that Jerusalem — the centre and hotbed of legalism — should pronounce upon it. Accordingly the brethren at Antioch desired Paul and Barnabas, with certain others, to go “up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question." Another view of this journey is presented to us in Galatians 2:1-21. “I went up by revelation," says Paul. We have thus the outward circumstances in Acts 15:1-41, and the inward guide of his steps in Galatians 2:1-21.

It was a sort of triumphal progress. On their way down from the North, as they passed through Phenice and Samaria, Paul and Barnabas related the wonderful work of God's grace amongst the Gentiles, occasioning thus great joy to all the brethren they met. Titus, a young Greek convert, accompanied them, whom some desired to circumcise; but this Paul resisted to the uttermost, the principle involved being of the deepest importance. They appear to have had a private interview with the apostles before any public meetings were held. Paul laid before them the Gospel he was everywhere proclaiming forgiveness of sins and justification from all things through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Not only were they unable to find fault with such a testimony, but they saw nothing that should be added thereto. James, Peter and John, recognising that Paul and Barnabas had received a special commission from God, gave them the right hand of fellowship, and agreed that the whole Gentile field should be left to them, whilst they would confine themselves to the Jewish people (Galatians 2:1-10). Let those who imagine that Peter ever laboured in Rome note this fact carefully.

In the public council there was much disputing. Even true believers, who had been brought up as Pharisees, insisted that faith in Christ was not of itself sufficient for salvation; the law of Moses must be adopted also. Then Peter arose. He reminded the company of the divine action at Caesarea, where a number of Gentiles heard the word of the Gospel from his lips and believed, and were forthwith granted the gift of the Holy Spirit, even as the Jewish believers had been favoured at the beginning. God had thus signified that He put no difference between the Gentile and the Jew. Why then should they seek to Judaize the Christians at Antioch and elsewhere? Our apostle concluded his brief speech with the striking passage — "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus we shall be saved, even as they." Not “they even as we," but “we even as they." Peter thus formally abandoned all special pretensions for himself and others of his nation. He was henceforth content to be numbered with others of alien race as together sinners saved by grace. Barnabas and Paul followed with some account of the work of God amongst the Gentiles by their means. James then summed up. Peter was evidently not regarded as president of the gathering. Nor did James thus pronounce sentence because he was “the first bishop of Jerusalem," as some affirm. A single bishop in a city was a person unknown in those days. Where bishops existed at all there was a plurality in every place (Php_1:1; Titus 1:5). In the presence of all the apostles surely no mere bishop would claim pre-eminence. The truth is, God the Holy Spirit was present in that gathering, and He saw divine suitability in using James, the most intensely Jewish person in the company, to give utterance to the emancipating decree. James' sentence was that since Moses' law was everywhere preached in the Jewish synagogues, the law had better remain there, and not be imported into the Christian assembly. He proposed that letters should be sent to the Gentile brethren enjoining three things only — avoidance of pollutions of idols, fornication, things strangled, and blood. These were ancient requirements of the Creator before Moses' voice was heard.

Two brethren from Jerusalem, Judas and Silas, were sent to Antioch with Barnabas and Paul, as bearers of the apostles' letter and as witnesses who could confirm everything by word of mouth. The council of Jerusalem might as well never have been held, for all the notice that is taken of its decrees today. For it is undeniable that throughout Gentile Christendom Moses' law is sounded forth in men's ears to this hour, with all its attendant curses, to the obscuring of the infinite grace of God revealed in the Gospel. Thus are believers deprived of the light and liberty which Christ died

to procure for them, and darkness and bondage possess their souls instead. To put Gentile Christians under law in any shape or form is to “trouble" them, and “pervert the Gospel of Christ” (Galatians 1:7).

Rebuked at Antioch.

What interval of time elapsed between the Jerusalem conference and Peter's visit to Antioch is not recorded, but it is probable his visit followed the conference very soon. When Peter saw the wonderful work of God's grace in this Syrian city — a multitude of Gentiles saved and brought into the assembly of God, his heart rejoiced, and he made himself perfectly free amongst them (Galatians 2:11-16). He remembered the Lord's words at Joppa — "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" — and he thankfully recognized these uncircumcised ones as brethren in Christ. He not only had open communion with them in the assembly, but socially also “he did eat with the Gentiles."

But presently certain of James's friends from Jerusalem came down, and at once Peter's conduct changed. “When they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision." Spite of the recent conference, the Jerusalem Christians were still honeycombed with Judaism, and evidently Peter feared loss of prestige on his return if he was seen making himself free with Gentiles abroad.

Alas, the evil spread. “The other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation."

The matter thus became very serious. The whole truth of Christianity was at stake, whether Peter, Barnabas, and the rest perceived it or not. All mere fleshly distinctions have been ended in the death of Christ; salvation is of grace and free to all alike; and of all saved ones a new thing has been formed in the earth — the body of Christ. All this was challenged by Peter's conduct at Antioch. What is man — even at his best! Peter, the man who opened the door of faith to the Gentiles in Acts 10:1-48, would now thrust them from him as unworthy of his association! Barnabas, the man who, in conjunction with Paul, had led many of these Gentiles to Christ, and who had united with Paul in his contention with Judaizing teachers, now joins with Peter in his avoidance of his uncircumcised brethren! “Dissimulation," i.e., hypocrisy, Paul calls it, because they were acting in the teeth of their own conscientious convictions. Truly, “the fear of man bringeth a snare," even upon apostles of Christ!

The man for the emergency was Paul. He rebuked Peter to his face before the whole assembly. Did this begin a life-long enmity? Far from it. At a later date. Peter called his reprover “our beloved brother Paul" (2 Peter 3:15). He recognized the justness of the rebuke that was administered to him, and profited by it. This is what Paul said: “If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews (and Peter had certainly been doing this before James's friends came upon the scene), why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." This means that though Peter and Paul had both been brought up under the law of Moses they had learned the futility of attempting to be justified thereby. Accordingly they were

both believers in Jesus Christ, in order that they might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law. How then could Peter consistently impose the law-system upon Gentile Christians at Antioch?

The fallen apostle may possibly have feebly objected that he intended nothing so serious. But Paul did not understand how a man could conform to law requirements at all, even in so simple a matter as not eating with Gentiles, without thereby involving himself in the whole system. This is the point of his protest on that occasion. Would that men in Christendom understood it to-day! For it is undeniable that masses of professing Christians boast of their acceptance of the law, and consent to have its enactments read out in their hearing in their public services, and yet never dream of carrying out its demands. For example, when was it last gravely suggested to put any man to death for breaking the Sabbath? Who really accepts the place of the “cursed” one, and yet Scripture says: “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them?” (Galatians 3:10). And again: “Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10).

The ground of the law is hopeless for man, so deep is his guilt and ruin. But the Gospel proclaims that God has found a way whereby He can justify even sinful men apart from law at all. That way is the blood of Christ (Romans 3:21-31). Happy is the man who abandons all pretension before God, and accepts His sovereign grace.

Later Years.

So far as Scripture history is concerned, we hear no more of Peter after the regrettable incident at Antioch. His epistles, written some years after, suggest a widespread ministry amongst Jews “scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1), and they contain also anticipations of a violent death for Christ's sake (2 Peter 1:12-15; John 21:18-19). But no details of our apostle's later activities has been preserved for us by the Spirit of God. The fiction of a long residence in Rome is amply disproved by such passages as Galatians 2:9; 1 Peter 1:1. Nor does 1 Peter 5:13 help this extraordinary notion, as some mistakenly imagine. The italicised words “the Church” in the Authorised Version have no authority whatever. The Revised Version is unquestionably right in its rendering, “She that is in Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you." The apostle is simply sending a Christian greeting from his wife, who was with him at the moment of writing in the erstwhile capital of Nebuchadnezzar (1 Corinthians 9:5). “Elect," is never connected in Scripture with the Church as such, but with the saints viewed individually (2 Peter 1:10; 1 Peter 1:2).

That Babylon in Peter's first epistle does not mean Rome is sufficiently proved by the fact that the symbolical name was not given until the Apocalypse was written at a much later period; and even if Peter had known it beforehand, it is unlikely that he would have used it in an ordinary epistle and in connection with common-place salutations. Let those who insist that Babylon means Rome consider that by so doing they accept for the system they love the responsibility for all the enormities attributed to the scarlet-clothed woman whom John saw, and also the awful doom so graphically described in Revelation 17:18! Surely it is not without significance that the last notice of the mother of our Lord in Holy Scripture is as praying amongst other praying ones, not as being prayed to: and the last notice of Peter is, not as the presiding head of the Church on earth, but as being publicly rebuked for the gravest inconsistency by the apostle Paul (Acts 1:9; Galatians 2:2).

The all wise Spirit of God foresaw how superstitious minds, deceived by Satan, would some day regard these honoured saints. and so furnished guards and warnings accordingly. Our only true confidence and hope is in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

“Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power, before all time, and now, and for evermore. Amen." (Jude 1:24-25).

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S. A Lost Tomb.

A Lost Tomb.

The old Abbey Church at Waltham, Essex (twelve miles from London) was founded by the sons of Earl Godwin in the eleventh century. The last Saxon King, Harold II, lies buried there. After the disastrous defeat at Hastings in 1066, two Waltham monks asked permission of Duke William to recover the King's body for burial. Being unable to identify it amongst so many mangled corpses, they called in the help of the notorious Edith, surnamed the Swan-necked. She found it, and it was duly interred in Waltham Abbey.

But the tomb is lost! No one to-day can say with any certainty just where it was placed.

We are reminded of another tomb, the whereabouts of which no one can speak positively — the tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was in a garden, quite near the walls of Jerusalem and its owner at the time was a member of the Jewish Council named Joseph. (John 19:38; John 19:42). Nothing more can well be said about it. But while the tomb of the Saxon King is only of historical interest, and even that to but a limited number, the tomb of the Lord Jesus is of vital interest to every soul on earth.

Let us suppose that both tombs could be identified with certainty. What should we find? The one would contain the dust of him who was placed there; the other would be absolutely empty. The Saxon King awaits his resurrection at the last day; the Lord Jesus had His resurrection nineteen hundred years ago. There is no greater fact in the history of the world than this, and, in mercy to the children of men, God took careful pains to put it beyond all controversy. The risen Lord did not ascend up on high the day He left the tomb. He remained on earth nearly six weeks (Acts 1:3); and during that time He showed Himself many times to His friends, some of whom were sceptical at first, not expecting such a marvelous work of God, but all ended in worshipping at His feet (John 20:25; Matthew 28:17). On one occasion more than five hundred brethren saw Him together. (1 Corinthians 15:6).

The Son of God is thus risen! The tomb has been rifled of its precious charge, to know it no more for ever. But here arises a question of the utmost importance. How came the Son of God to enter the tomb? What caused Him to die? Let God Himself answer the question for us. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8). Listen also to John the Apostle. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but, that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins . . . And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (1 John 4:10; 1 John 4:14).

Thus it was our sins that involved the Son of God in the anguish of the tree and the disgrace of the tomb! Was there no other way whereby sinners might be saved from the consequences of their sins? Could not righteousness be satisfied otherwise? Clearly not, or God would not have gone to the extreme length of sacrificing His Son — His well beloved.

How offensive then is sin in the sight of God! How direful its consequences? Has the reader ever faced the sin question? Contemplate it, we beseech you, in the light of the cross and the tomb! you might well exclaim, with another:

"Oh, how vile my lost estate

Since my ransom was so great!"

It is delightful to the conscience-stricken sinner to meditate upon the love that shines out in the great sacrifice of Calvary. But how can we be sure that the sacrifice was sufficient — that the claims of divine righteousness have been truly met by it? The resurrection of Christ is the proof this. The stone was not rolled away in order that He might go forth, it was rolled away for our sake that we might know that death has been constrained to yield its prey. On the resurrection morning, the Angel said to the women, “He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." (Matthew 28:6)

Faith can now see even more than this. The risen Chris is now on high, accepted in all the value of His great atoning work. So that we may add to the Angel's words, "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour." (Hebrews 2:9).

Reader, is your soul burdened with the guilt of sin? Learn then that it was for just such an one the Saviour died. His resurrection is the great discharge, not only for the Holy One Himself, but for every sinner who believes in His name. The vacant cross and the empty tomb are the joint proof that all the claims of the throne of God have been met once and for ever. Righteousness shall be imputed to us, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 4:24-25, Romans 5:1)

S. A Rock Sermon.

A Rock Sermon.

Early in the last century, the first European steamship, the "Comet," was launched on the River Clyde. Its inventor was Henry Bell, to whose memory a monument may be seen standing on the banks of the Clyde, a little to the east of Dumbarton Castle. At the base of the monument is inscribed upon the rocks the following sentences: —

"God is Love."

"Eternity — Where?"

"Flee from the wrath to come."

When we consider the large number of pleasure steamers which pass the spot in the summer season, and the many ocean liners which go by all the year round, it seems certain that thousands of eyes have read this abiding rock sermon. What will the harvest be? The great day will tell.

The person who designed so public a testimony evidently judged there was something worth thinking about in the words thus inscribed, and we quite agree with him. "God is love," weightiest of all weighty truths, and yet how little is it understood! How many regard God as a severe Being, exacting hard things from His creatures, and taking pleasure in condemning those who fail to render His demands! But "God is love" (1 John 4:8). The cross of Calvary has declared His love in all its vast extent. God's Son, His only and Well-Beloved, sacrificed for the salvation of rebellious sinners; was ever love like this? Is anything like it known among men? Reader, have you considered the application of it to your own case? Have you ever thanked God for His love to yourself, a sinner only worthy of eternal flames? "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8).

Well might the rock-preacher add: "Eternity-where?" A mere breath separates every one of us from it. All is well for him who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ: but what of the man (or woman) to whom this glorious Person is only a name? Eternity means destruction for all such; not extinction of being as some who love their sins fondly hope but desolation and ruin for ever and ever. Everlasting banishment from the presence of God where all is light and song — reader, can you bear to think of this? With all our powers we urge every unsaved one into whose hands this paper may fall to "Flee from the wrath to come." Before the storm of Divine judgment bursts, "Whosoever will" may find shelter in the Saviour: when the storm begins (and the dark clouds are gathering on every hand) His Saviour character will come to an end, and His enemies must meet Him as Judge. In their terror men will say to the mountains and rocks: "Fall on us, hide us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" (Revelation 6:16-17). Beloved reader, in what character do you wish to know the Son of God?

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that obeyeth not (R.V.) the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him " (John 3:16).

W. W. Fereday.

S. What is a man profited…

"What is a man profited…"

In the terrible retreat from the city of Mexico on the night of July 1st, 1520, Cortes urged his followers to carry as little as possible with them. He told them that those would fare best who travelled lightest. Many of the soldiers however preferred to take with them as much as possible of the gold they had looted; but the weight of it dragged them down to death as they endeavoured to swim the lake. For the sake of the treasure they risked and lost their lives, and that in spite of the warning of their Commander.

Men are just as foolish today. As the Lord Jesus expressed it in Luke 8:14 they "are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life." The last of the three is the most deadly of all at the present. The pleasures of this life are abundant. Never was there such variety, and multitudes are simply intoxicated with them. Long queues standing outside picture houses, and massed thousands gaping and cheering at football matches, are sufficient of themselves to prove how deeply pleasure has eaten into the hearts of the people. They think of little else; by these things they live. That they have souls that must live for ever is a thought that never gives them a moments concern. That which is of vital importance, is as nothing in their esteem, while that which is worthless is, in their eyes, of the highest account.

Oh, fools, to throw away your souls thus! Well did our Lord ask, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26) What indeed! The rich man of Luke 16:19, when he found himself in torments, would have given all he ever possessed for an opportunity to retrieve his wasted past. When on earth his one thought was to "have a good time." He was "clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day." In selfish enjoyment he spent his days, ignoring even the poor diseased mendicant who lay at his own gate. He was too absorbed in his own pleasures to have room in his mind for others. So he lived, and so he died, and perished forever.

Reader, this brief span that we call "time" is not everything. For each one of us there is a boundless beyond. Are you indeed willing to so load yourself with business, pleasure, or anything else of an earthly character that you must needs be lost for ever? Hear the voice of your Maker and God. Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? And your labour for that which satisfyeth not? hearken diligently unto Me... incline your ear and come unto Me; hear, and your soul shall live. (Isaiah 55:2-3) In His most Holy Word, He tells you plainly of your sin and guilt, and of the peril in which you stand. Moreover in His Word, He tells you of the wondrous mission of His Beloved Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. From heaven He came in search of sinners lost and undone, and upon Calvary's cross, He suffered once for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. (1 Peter 3:18)

Reader, what have you to say to this? Is the eternal future worthy of your consideration or not? Is it wise to throw away eternal bliss in order to enjoy the corrupt pleasures of this present short life? A

gracious God waits to bless you, are you willing to be blessed?

S. Apron Factories

Apron Factories

It was remarked one day by a servant of Christ that "many places of worship in these times are just apron factories, and nothing more."

The speaker had in mind of course, what is written in Genesis 3:7. Genesis 3:1-24 is God's account of the most terrible catastrophe that ever befell the human family. The story is related in the very simplest terms, in order that everyone may understand. It is the story of the fall of man — of his revolt against his Maker, and how God met the sinners need. No sooner had Adam and his wife sinned, than they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. Yet, in spite of their device, so conscious were they of their nakedness, that at the first sound of the voice of God they hid themselves as unfit to stand in His Holy presence.

There we have the beginning of what has long since developed into an enormous evil - sinners endeavouring to work out a righteousness of their own. But however industrious and sincere the workers may be, it is all to no avail, for, "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight." Romans 3:20. All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. Isaiah 64:6.

Note what happened when God entered Eden. Having convicted the man and his wife of their sin, He spoke to the Suffering Seed, The Lord Jesus, and forthwith made coats of skin and clothed them. Here we have grace indeed. If man has no covering suitable for God, God is able to furnish all that the guilty one needs. So, in Romans 3:1-31 (already quoted) we go on to read that the righteousness of God has now been manifested unto them that believe; that righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ, and which is founded upon His atoning blood.

Death furnished the coats of skin; the death of Christ has made it possible for God to be just, and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

Is this what is being universally preached to-day? Or are not the people being diverted to sacraments and other pious works, rather than to Christ, and the work He accomplished? Are not the multitudes being told that it is "character" that counts with God? This is just to repeat the egregious blunder of our first parents who "sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons." And it is ruinous to the soul. What a contrast there was between there aprons and the coats which God supplied! Not a divine stitch was in the one, not a human stitch was in the other. In like manner, in mans efforts after righteousness, there is nothing of God, and in the righteousness divine which grace confers, there is nothing of man.

Now reader, on what ground do you stand with God? Are you spending precious time sewing fig leaves together? That is to say, are you doing your best to make yourself presentable to God? If so, you are on a false line altogether, and we entreat you to renounce your own efforts as worse than worthless, and put your whole trust in the Lord Jesus, and in the great work which He has done. This is what God says to those who believe. "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that

not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9) This is what believers say in response: Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us. (Titus 3:5) Beware of "apron making." Beware of "apron factories."

Chapter 112

S. A Well Balanced Budget, and something still better

A Well Balanced Budget, and something still better

The Budget of 1932 caused more anxiety to all classes in Britain than any that had ever preceded it. The warning sounded by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in February, 1931, that matters were going wrong, and that drastic steps should be taken, passed unheeded. Then came the great wake-up in August when the nation realized that it stood upon the verge of bankruptcy. Stringent measures were immediately taken in order that Britain might maintain its standing in the world. "The Budget must be balanced," was said by both rulers and people. During those anxious months every right-minded person wished well to the men in the seat of authority, and those who knew God and had access to His throne of grace, did not fail to make intercession for them there.

It is a serious matter for a nation to default. Everyone is thereby plunged into disaster from the King down to the meanest subject. In a moment all that men have set their hearts upon, and all that their industry has accumulated, disappears in overwhelming ruin. But God sometimes uses the disappointments of life for the blessing of men's souls. Some, as they behold everything slipping away from them, feel so keenly the transitoriness of everything earthly that they turn to God, and thus get into touch with the things that really matter, and that abide evermore.

In Psalms 4:6, David says:

"There be many that say, who will show us any good?"

This is the cry of disappointed hearts. They have tried so many things that have yielded no satisfaction that they are at their wits end what next to try, or in what direction to turn. But David was able to answer the pitiful cry for himself:

"Lord lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us. Thou has put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased."

He knew God, and that was enough. In his day he was the mightiest king on earth, but he was not always mighty. Commencing life as the youngest son of a farmer, and sent into the fields to tend sheep, he was, while yet a youth, privately anointed king by Samuel in substitution for the miserable failure who then ruled. Then followed years of persecution while his relentless foe sought his life, before he actually sat upon the throne of Israel. During those years he sometimes knew neither where to lay his head, nor where to turn for bread to eat, but those were his best years spiritually.

Reader, can you say anything at all like it? Have you proved the blessed reality of having to do with God? It is most certain that whatever measure of relief may be granted to us by a balanced Budget, everything is shaking beneath our feet. A glance at world-conditions generally makes this plain. Awful indeed for those who have nothing outside this world!

If you are seriously seeking what this world cannot give, you must first have to do with God about your sins. The sin-question is fundamental, and a holy God cannot pass it by. If there were no sin in the world, there would be no trouble, financial or otherwise. God looks to both you and me for a frank acknowledgment of this.

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalms 51:5).

Terrible is it not?

"The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they are born." (Psalms 58:3).

This is true of everyone of us, like silly sheep we have all turned our backs upon the God who made us — our best friend really.

On what ground can God receive the sinner? Romans 5:8, will tell us:

"God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

This is truly amazing. God's own Son, has suffered for my sins! All the judgment that I deserved was poured out upon Him, and, believing in Him, I am free!

W. W. Fereday.

Chapter 113

S. The High Priest's Garments of Glory and Beauty.

The High Priest's Garments of Glory and Beauty.

W W Fereday. The people of Israel were possessed of a magnificent ritual, every detail of which was ordained by God Himself. This has led some to argue for ritualistic forms in Christianity. If God was pleased with such things in Judaism, surely He will be pleased with them in Christianity. So it is urged. But this is to lose sight of the typical character of the ancient ritual. “ The example and shadow of heavenly things,” is God's account of it all in Hebrews 8:5. Christ having come, and redemption having been accomplished, the reality is ours; the shadows therefore pass away. Christianity being an essentially heavenly and spiritual system, everything connected with divine worship therein is of the simplest possible character. The contrast is complete between the imposing ritual described in Exodus and Leviticus and the simple order of things found in the Acts and the Epistles. Ritualistic symbols are now a positive insult both to Christ and to the people of God. To Christ, because they practically ignore what He is and what He has accomplished; and to the people of God, because they reduce them to a condition of tutelage. Surely one could not insult a grown person more than to engage him with a picture-book of horses, dogs, etc., as though he knew nothing of the animals portrayed therein.

Because Israel's ritual pointed to Christ, the smallest details are given. Nothing is too small for notice that in any way speaks of God's beloved Son. Our present study is Exodus 28:1-43. This chapter describes the priests' robes, as the chapter following describes the ceremonies connected with the consecration of Aaron and his sons for the priestly office. The types of Exodus 28:1-43 have reference to the needs of the people; those in Exodus 29:1-46 to the claims of God.

Let us clearly understand where priesthood comes in in the ways of God. When Israel was in Egypt, groaning under the yoke of Pharaoh, God did not provide a priest but a saviour. But when the people were delivered, having come under the blood of the Lamb, and having passed through the Red Sea, then — and not till then — did God say anything about a priest. In like manner today, the Saviour is God's provision for the burdened sinner, and the Priest is God's provision for the delivered saint. It is the “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling,” who are exhorted to consider the Apostle and High Priest of their confession (Hebrews 3:1). Priesthood is not designed to bring men into relationship with God, but rather to help those who are already in relationship with God.

Let us next observe the point at which the priesthood is introduced in the book of Exodus. Exodus 25:1-40, Exodus 26:1-17, Exodus 27:1-2, Exodus 28:1-43, Exodus 29:1-46, Exodus 30:1-38 are occupied with the Tabernacle, but there is an evident break in these instructions at Exodus 27:19. Down to this verse we have God's manifestation of Himself to man; in that which follows we have man's approach to God. Accordingly, the first part begins with the ark, and ends with the court; the second part begins with the priesthood, and includes the incense altar and the laver, these articles of furniture having to do with man's approach to God, rather than with God's manifestation of Himself to man.

Now observe another thing. The instructions concerning the priesthood are prefaced by the oil for the light (Exodus 27:20-21). This looks irrelevant at first sight, but is it so in reality? Is it not to remind us that the God with whom we have to do, dwells in the light? The time had not come in Moses' day for the blessed revelation that “God is light” and “God is love.” Christ alone could bring this to us (1 John 1:5; 1 John 4:8). But the type teaches us what is suitable for the divine presence. All works of darkness must be put off by those who would be before Him in the joy of His presence. “Always” means that the lamps were to burn with regularity. There is no thought of their being alight in the daytime. It was reserved for men in Christendom to invent so childish a practice. “From evening to morning” is God's word.

Aaron and his sons typify Christ and Christians. The priesthood of Aaron's sons depended upon the priesthood of their father as ours depends upon that of the Lord Jesus. They were priests by divine call (Hebrews 5:4). Christ's call is found in Psalms 110:4; ours in 1 Peter 2:5. Aaron's sons are divided into two pairs, the shadow beforehand of the great separation so soon to come (Leviticus 10:1-20). Nadab and Abihu typify all false worshippers, as Eleazer and Ithamar the true. For the making of their garments “the Spirit of wisdom” from God was necessary. Similarly “men full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom” were required to attend to the money matters of the early Christians (Acts 6:1-15). Nothing, either great or small, can be efficiently wrought for God by unspiritual hands. The Ephod. The garments are not named in Exodus 28:4 in the order in which they were put on. Compare Leviticus 8:7-9 for this order. The ephod is described first, as being the principal priestly vestment. David's use of the ephod suggests that to him the ephod stood for all that the priesthood represented (1 Samuel 23:6-9; 1 Samuel 31:7). The ephod resembled the veil of the sanctuary, but with important differences. There were cherubim in the veil but not in the ephod. The veil speaks of Christ's holy humanity (Hebrews 10:20); the cherubim of government and judgement; we thus learn that these high functions are destined for the hands of the man Christ Jesus. But the cherubim would have been out of place in the ephod, every detail of which speaks of priestly grace. But gold — typical of what is divine, while unsuitable for the veil, necessarily comes into the ephod, for our great High Priest is “Jesus the Son of God” (Hebrews 4:14).

"They shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen, with cunning work.” The gold speaks of the divine in our adorable Lord, Exodus 39:3 shows how it was used. “They did beat the gold into thin plates and cut it into wires, to work it in the blue, and in the purple, etc.” The gold being thus interwoven with the blue and other colours, none could have separated it without destroying the whole beautiful fabric. And who can separate the human from the divine in our Lord Jesus Christ? The union of the human and the divine in His person is one of the holiest mysteries of our faith. In all His ways and words, as recorded in the Gospels, this marvellous union shines forth. For example, in John 4 we see Him as a tired and hungry man on the one hand, and as the Discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart on the other. In John 11:1-57 we behold Him, first; as a weeper (how intensely human), then as the divine Quickener of the dead. In Matthew 14:1-36 we observe His giving thanks in the most human manner in the presence of the multitude, and then wielding divine power for the supply of their need. Again, we find Him in Mark 4 at one moment asleep in human weariness, and the next moment with divine authority bidding the winds and waves be still.

Blue is the heavenly colour. “The Second man is from heaven” (1 Corinthians 15:47). “He that cometh from heaven is above all” (John 3:31). Unbelief in Israel stumbled at this. “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph: whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He saith, 'I came down from heaven'?” (John 6:42) His spotless humanity was indeed born of the virgin, and had no existence before, but He who thus condescended to become human had subsisted from eternity in His own proper uncreated glory above.

Purple is the royal colour. The Son of God has kingly rights. He who is Priest in the heavenly sanctuary to-day will be King in Zion to-morrow. “The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall he no end” (Luke 1:32-33). He inherits Joseph's rights as his legal Heir (Matthew 1:1-25).

Scarlet — a dye obtained from the coccus — speaks of both suffering and glory. So Peter refers to “the suffering of Christ and the glories that should follow” (1 Peter 1:11) Was there ever such a sufferer as the Son of God? Is there a being in the universe, therefore, so competent as He to take up all the burden of His people, and to enter into all the sorrows and trials which beset the path of faith? He learned obedience through suffering, and is able in consequence to succour those that are tried (Hebrews 5:8; Hebrews 2:18). Scarlet speaks also of earthly glory (Revelation 17:3-4; 2 Samuel 1:24). It is not enough that Christ should be glorified on high; God will see to it that He is also glorified below in His own time. When Satan offered Him “all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them” (Matthew 4:8), He refused them, preferring to receive them from the hand of God when the due season arrives for Him to possess them (Revelation 11:15). The fine twined linen testifies to His perfect spotlessness. Though born of a human mother the reverse of immaculate, He inherited from her no moral taint; He was emphatically “that holy Thing” (Luke 1:35). All His ways, too, were stainless. He only of all who have ever walked the earth could say to His critics: “Which of you convinceth Me of sin?” (John 8:46). In all this we have typified such a High Priest as Israel never knew. He is both divine and human, and He combines in His own person the offices of priest and king. When one of Israel's kings dared to exercise priestly functions he was smitten with leprosy for his presumption (2 Chronicles 26:17-18). But the Lord Jesus will, in the coming age, “be a priest upon His throne” (Zechariah 6:13). Melchizedek is needful as a supplement to Aaron in order to present this to us in the types of Scripture (Hebrews 7:1-28). The Girdle of the Ephod.

Exodus 28:1-43 contains the divine instructions concerning the High Priest's robes; Exodus 39:1-43 shows how the instructions were carried out. In comparing these portions one is impressed with this thought — the carefulness of the people to carry out the will of God to the very letter. “As Jehovah commanded Moses,” occurs seven times in connection with the robes alone, and many more times in connection with the Tabernacle in general. The principle of human choice and opinion in divine things had no place in the minds of Israel's workers; God had spoken, and it was their desire to be obedient to His word in every particular. Let us note this fact well as an example for ourselves today.

Following the ephod, we read of the curious girdle of the ephod, which was made of the same materials as the ephod itself (Exodus 28:8). The girdle is the emblem of service; compare Luke 12:37; Luke 17:8. When we consider what the gold, purple, etc., mean as typifying the Deity, royalty etc., of our Lord Jesus, the thought is overwhelming that such an One could possibly

constitute Himself the servant of His people. But it is true, nevertheless, so wonderful is His grace. The form of a bond-servant, taken by Him in incarnation, will never be laid aside. He was not only the unwearied servant of all in the days of His humiliation but, like the Hebrew servant of Exodus 21:1-36, He had purposed to be servant for ever. Accordingly He ministers on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary during our earthly pilgrimage; and Luke 12:37 lets us know that when He gets His waiting ones home it will be His joy to gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat and come forth and serve them. Do we appreciate as we should the matchless grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? The Shoulder-Pieces.

We have next the shoulder-pieces (Exodus 28:9-13). On these were two onyx-stones, with the names of Israel's tribes engraved upon them, six on each stone. The shoulder is the place of power. Hence the good Shepherd lays His once-lost sheep on His shoulder, and brings it home rejoicing (Luke 15:5). In Psalms 28:9 we read: “Save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance; feed them also, and bear them up for ever” (R.V.). Every saint is thus remembered by the Great High Priest, and is sustained by His power, victorious as it is over all the might of Satan and of death. Merit has nothing to do with this; it is all of grace alone. The names of Israel's tribes were engraved “according to their birth” (Exodus 28:10). Thus Reuben stood first, and Joseph and Benjamin came last. Reuben's appalling failure was not suffered to affect God's thoughts of grace, though it necessarily brought him under His holy hand in discipline (Genesis 49:3-4). If Christ only interested Himself in those who are worthy of His interest, where would even the best of us stand? The names were cut into the stones “with the work of an engraver in stone, like the engraving of a signet.” The names must neither be written nor painted, but cut deeply and indelibly. The stones were then “set in ouches of gold." The names upon the stones were thus ineffaceable, and the stones themselves could never fall out of their place. The realization of this type is exceedingly blessed. Paul in all his weakness and need in the Roman prison was so consciously upheld by the power of Christ that he was enabled to pen those marvellous words: “I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me” (R.V.). The fact that he had a living Saviour in the glory of God gave the word “impossible” no place in his vocabulary. Hear him again in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. Smarting under the infliction of the thorn in the flesh, he thrice besought the Lord that it might depart from him. This could not be, but he was given this sweet assurance: “My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” The thought of this was so delightful to his heart that he immediately responded: “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distressed, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong." The Breastplate. The people's names were not only on the shoulder pieces; they were on the breast-plate also. Why this repetition? There are two reasons for it. First, God would show us that in Christ power and love combine for the blessing of His people. We read in Exodus 28:29 : “Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breast-plate of judgement upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually.” Note the words “upon his heart,” twice repeated in the verse following. The changeless love of Christ is our solace and joy. John 13:1 is as true for us as for the disciples of long ago: “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” Neither the doubting of Thomas, the denial of Peter, nor the defection of all together could alter the sentiments of His heart towards them. We dare not speak of our love to Him; it is too variable a quantity to be worthy of mention; but we delight to dwell upon His wonderful love to us. The breast-plate was connected with the shoulder-pieces by

gold chains (Exodus 28:25), showing the union of power and love in the Lord Jesus for the good of His people. Each individual saint is entitled to say:

"Out of myself for help I go, Thy power alone resolved to know, Thy love's the plea I make." The breast-plate was also connected with the ephod itself by blue lace attachments, the reason being “that the breast-plate be not loosened from the ephod” (Exodus 28:26-28). There must be no possibility of the breast-plate getting out of its place for a single moment. The eye of God must never rest upon the priest without being reminded of all His people. The second reason why the names were inscribed upon the breast-plate as well as upon the shoulder-pieces is that God would show us His tender interest in each individual believer. In the shoulder-pieces six names were engraved on each stone; in the breast-plate each name had a stone to itself. What a vast family is the family of God, in its millions, spread over all the earth! Yet each individual saint, however poor and lowly, has his own place in the divine affections. The book of Job is very interesting in this connection. It is one of the largest books in the Bible, but it is altogether occupied with the story of God's dealings with one man's soul. So minute is the divine care that not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father, and we have it from the Son of God Himself that not only is the individual saint remembered as the individual sparrow, but the very hairs of our head are all numbered (Luke 12:6).

Turn now for a moment to Joshua 4:7, where we read of twelve memorial stones of a very different character. When Israel passed through Jordan into the promised land, they took up by divine command twelve stones from the bed of the river, and set them upon the Canaan shore. “These stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever.” The twelve precious stones in the priest's breast-plate were a memorial for God; the twelve rough stones on the bank of Jordan were a memorial for man. The human heart is so forgetful and fickle that there is need of some abiding memorial of God's goodness. The Lord's Supper has this character in Christianity.

What a lovely picture is suggested by the high-priest of Israel bearing the names of the people of God upon his shoulder and heart in the divine presence continually! Yet how soon everything failed in the hands of man! The garments of glory and beauty appear never to have been worn in the presence of God after the calamitous circumstances of the day of consecration (Leviticus 10:1-20). From that point the holiest was closed to the priesthood, save on the annual Day of Atonement, and on that day Aaron was to draw near in white linen garments (Leviticus 16:1-4). His beautiful robes were thus worn everywhere but in the immediate presence of God, where, according to the typical teaching, they were most needed. What immense comfort it is for our hearts to know that there can be no such failure in our Lord Jesus Christ! The Urim and Thummim. In the breast-plate, amongst the names of the children of Israel, was placed the Urim and the Thummim. The words mean “the lights and the perfections.” What it was, none can now say with certainty. It is mentioned altogether seven times in the Scripture; in two of the passages the Urim only is named, and in one (Deuteronomy 33:8) the order is reversed, and given as “Thy Thummim and Thy Urim.” It was probably a precious stone, which by means of its various scintillations gave the answer of Jehovah concerning matters that were referred to Him by the priest. That this was its use is undoubted. Thus Eleazar was to ask counsel for Joshua “after the judgement of Urim before Jehovah"; Saul in his last extremity appealed to God by means of the Urim (though he obtained no response); and the governor of the returned remnant was obliged to defer the claims of some unregistered priests because the Urim and the Thummim was not available (Numbers 27:21; 1

Samuel 28:6; Ezra 2:63). It is because the breast-plate contained this instrument by which divine decisions were given that it is called “the breast-plate of judgement."

It is thus God's delight to make known Himself and His will to those who desire this blessed knowledge. The Urim and the Thummim in the breast-plate of the high priest was the pledge that Israel never need be in darkness about any matter. And is the Christian less favoured to-day? With the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, the completed word of God in our hands, and a glorified Christ interesting Himself in us, there need be no obscurity in our minds concerning the smallest detail of our pathway. It is, alas! not an uncommon thing to find the children of God blundering along from day to day, making a multitude of mistakes, to the grief of their own souls, and the dishonour of the worthy Name by which they are called. To hear them speak one would imagine that God has given His people up to this kind of thing. In the midst of their blunders they ask in perfect bewilderment how others manage to ascertain the mind of the Lord, and so walk consciously in the light. Self-will is the true explanation of this disastrous condition of things. Where the eye is single, and the heart is true, the path becomes as clear as the noon-day sun. The Robe of the Ephod.

After the Urim and the Thummim comes “the robe of the ephod,” which was made wholly of blue (Exodus 28:31). The fact is thus emphasised that ours is a heavenly Priest. “Such a High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (Hebrews 7:26). This is a truly marvellous statement. Who and what are we that no less a priest than this will suffice for our need? The answer is: — we are the brethren of Christ, His sanctified company, and partakers of the heavenly calling. Heavenly people need a heavenly priest. If Aaron were on earth today, and were to come amongst us in full canonicals offering us his gracious services, our reply could only be that a priest of his order is of no manner of use to us. His priesthood was earthly in its character, and was exercised in an earthly sanctuary on behalf of an earthly people. The feeblest Christian stands on higher ground than Israel ever knew. A priestly caste in Christianity, whatever form it may assume, is a base cheat of the enemy, designed for the degradation of the children of God, and to hide from their souls the wonderfulness of the grace of God towards them.

Around the hem of the blue robe were golden bells and pomegranates alternating (Exodus 28:33-34). “It shall be upon Aaron to minister; and his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the Lord, and when he cometh out, that he die not.” The bells and pomegranates speak of testimony and fruit. “His sound shall be heard when he goeth in.” We know what happened when Jesus went in to God. The Holy Spirit came forth, and set the golden bells of Gospel testimony ringing in this dark world. We hear their joyful sound in Acts 2:1-47. The fruit quickly appeared, three thousand souls being blessed on the first day. God be praised, the bells are still ringing, and the fruit is still being gathered. The sweet story of the Gospel has reached our ears, and we are some of the fruit thus produced for God. The bells also sounded when Aaron came out from the divine presence. In like manner a fresh sound will be heard when the Lord Jesus comes again. A new testimony will be commenced in the earth, and abundance of fruit — a new crop — will be gathered by means of it. Israel, not the Church, will be God's witness in that day: “out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3). It will be the time of the world's blessing. Israel being restored to divine favour, all the ends of the earth shall fear Jehovah (Psalms 67:1-7). “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). In connection with this new testimony there will be a

second outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29). It is often said by pious people who feel the present low and unspiritual condition of things that the Church needs a fresh outpouring of the Spirit of God. This is incorrect. The power and blessing vouchsafed at Pentecost is with us still, spite of all our failure and sin. The great need of the hour is an awakening amongst the children of God as to what the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit means. There will be no second outpouring of the Spirit until the High Priest comes out of the heavenly sanctuary to inaugurate the new era.

It may be a question with some as to whether the new testimony of which we have spoken involves a further opportunity of salvation for those who are now rejecting the Gospel. By no means. All who in this day are privileged to hear the proclamation of the grace of God, yet do not bow to the Lord Jesus, will, after the present testimony is ended, be given up to the lie of the Antichrist to their eternal ruin. As to this, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 is perfectly clear. But the world's unevangelised millions (what a reproach to the Church that there should be such!) will hear the new message of God; and abundant will be the harvest. The Holy Crown.

We come now to the plate of pure gold, with its striking inscription: “Holiness to the Lord” (Exodus 28:36). This was fastened to the forefront of Aaron's mitre by a blue lace. It is twice called “the holy crown” (Exodus 39:30; Leviticus 8:9). We are thus reminded that ours is a crowned Priest. He whose blessed brow was once encircled with the crown of thorns is now crowned with glory and honour” (Hebrews 2:9). Whatever God saw in the people of Israel, He always saw holiness in the priest. Typically, of course, for, personally, Aaron was no better than his fellows. The golden plate was put upon his forehead,“that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord” (Exodus 28:38). The high priest was thus responsible for the people in divine things, i.e., in all matters concerning their worship and sacrifices. Surely there are no occasions on which we so much need the gracious intervention of the Lord Jesus as when we assemble for worship. Such is our infirmity that, with the purest of motives and with the best of intentions, we are utterly unable to render spiritual sacrifices to God in perfection. More serious still, in all that transpires there seldom lacks sin. Our comfort lies in the fact that all our offerings come before God through the hands of the perfectly Holy One in His presence. God looks at Him — at His perfections, and so accepts His people and what they bring. Faith says: Look away from me” (Psalms 39:13, R.V.); “Look upon the face of Thine Anointed” (Psalms 84:9).

Unworthy is thanksgiving,

A service stained with sin;

Except as Thou art living,

Our Priest to bear it in.

There is a day coming for Israel when, not the high priest's mitre only, but even the commonest of their possessions will bear the inscription, “Holiness to the Lord” (Zechariah 14:20). This will be in the day of glory — earthly glory, according to their hope. In our case, heavenly glory will yield this blessed result, for which every pious soul yearns. We shall be absolutely and wholly for God throughout the ages of eternity. There remains to be noticed Aaron's embroidered coat, of fine linen, with its accompanying girdle of needlework (Exodus 28:39). This coat was worn as an inner vest (Leviticus 8:1-36), and it typifies the personal purity of the Son of God.

Aaron's Son's Robes.

Aaron's sons' robes, though of linen, are said to be “for glory and for beauty” (Exodus 28:40-43; Exodus 39:27-29). Aaron's sons typify Christians, viewed, not as members of Christ's body, but as belonging to the priestly family of which Christ is the Leader and Head. Every detail of the sons' robes as well as of the robes of their father, speaks of Christ. What have we then in this picture but every Christian so completely covered with the perfections of Christ that the holy eye of God sees upon us nothing but Christ when we draw near in faith before Him!

A.00 Meditations on Ephesians

Meditations on Ephesians

W W Fereday

From the Bible Treasury Vol. 20, page 198.

Ephesians 1:1-14.

("EphesiansWWF.html" \l "a1")Ephesians 1:15-22.

("EphesiansWWF.html" \l "a2")Ephesians 2:1-22.

("EphesiansWWF.html" \l "a3")Ephesians 3:1-21.

("EphesiansWWF.html" \l "a4")Ephesians 4:1-16.

("EphesiansWWF.html" \l "a5")Ephesians 4:12-32.

("EphesiansWWF.html" \l "a6")Ephesians 5:1-21.

("EphesiansWWF.html" \l "a7")Ephesians 5:22-33.

("EphesiansWWF.html" \l "a8")Ephesians 6:1-9.

("EphesiansWWF.html" \l "a9")Ephesians 6:10-24.

A.01 Eph_1:1-14.

Ephesians 1:1-14.

There is an immense difference between the Epistle to the Ephesians and that which precedes (to the Galatians). There the apostle has to descend to the lowest scale of grace, and repeat foundation truths, because of the condition of souls. Here he writes freely of the most exalted themes the counsels of God concerning Christ and the church. The Galatians were being drawn from the ground of faith after circumcision, worldly elements, and works of law; consequently the apostle had to recall them to the true ground of justification before God, faith in Christ's work. In Ephesians he was able to speak "wisdom among the perfect" (1 Corinthians 2:6).

It is interesting, yet solemn, to note the difference between this Epistle and that to the Colossians, which most nearly approximates to it in doctrine. In Colossians he brings forward association with Christ dead and risen, but does not carry us into heavenly places. Our hearts, our mind, should be there, but we are viewed as here. He dwells upon the personal glories of the Head and the fulness that resides in Him, rather than the privileges and blessings that are ours in virtue of our union with Him. Why? Again because of the need of souls. Meat in due season is requisite, and the condition of souls must be consulted. The Colossians were being attracted by philosophy and the tradition of men, etc., and needed to be reminded of the headship of Christ, in Whom they were complete. In the case of the Ephesians, however, there was apparently nothing in particular to rebuke or to warn against; they were exhorted to walk worthy of their calling. Consequently the apostle's heart was free, and he could write freely and fully of the wondrous blessings and privileges which pertain to us in Christ.*

*The difference is the more striking, as the two Epistles seem to have been written at the same time, and sent by the same messenger. Compare Ephesians 6:21, with Colossians 4:7.

Note how he introduces his apostleship: "Paul apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." Quite different is this from the opening of Galatians: "Paul apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, Who raised Him from the dead." Both forms of speech are in keeping with the character of the Epistles in which they are found. Paul was careful to establish for the Galatians that his ministry did not flow from Jerusalem as a centre, nor had he derived his authority through a human channel; but all was of God, having Christ risen as centre. Now in Ephesians, he purposes to show that all blessings for the saints in heavenly places flow from God's will (see in Ephesians 1:5, Ephesians 1:9, Ephesians 1:11), he therefore tells us that his apostleship had the same spring.

Paul begins with praise, as also Peter (1 Peter 1:3). How could he write such divine realities without thus bursting forth? The inspired writers were channels — the Holy Ghost being responsible for every word written by them (1 Corinthians 2:13); but they were not mere pens. Their affections were engaged, drawn forth doubtless by the Holy Ghost; and the truth therefore was inscribed by Paul with a worshipping heart. He speaks of God as "the God and Father of our

Lord Jesus Christ." Farther on, in Ephesians 1:17, he speaks of "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ"; and, in Ephesians 3:14, of "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." These are the two titles under which God has been made known to us. Recall the Lord's words on the resurrection day, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God" (John 20:17). The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ.

This is in direct contrast with the Jewish portion of old. Jehovah called the Jew to enjoy temporal blessings in earthly places, with Canaan as their seat, basket and store, good crops and vintage, etc. — their promised enjoyment, if obedient. But we are not called thus. The Spirit here expounds a deeper purpose formed in God's heart before the foundation of the world, that we should be before Him in heavenly glory with His Son. If there, we must have a suited nature. Could the natural man be at home with God, and find pleasure where all is holy? Impossible, it is opposed to his very being. Moreover, supposing it were possible to be before Him with a conscience not at rest, where would be the joy? How blessed, therefore, that we are to be "holy and without blame before Him in love!" "Holy," because having His nature, a nature that finds its only portion in God — "Without blame," in virtue of Christ's work; for who shall lay anything to our charge? — "In love," His love flowing ever into our hearts, and back again to Him its source.

But if the God of our Lord Jesus Christ has done this in the character of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He has "predestinated us unto the adoption of children (sons) by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will," etc. This is a further step: not only nature but relationship. What grace! What part had we to perform? Man is not found here; all is "according to the good pleasure of His will." He willed, and that is all. He has sought His own glory in doing all this for us: hence we read "to the praise of the glory of His grace." Our blessing is never the prime thought with God, but His own glory and the glory of Christ. How precious the change of expression in ver. 6, not "in Christ" but rather "in the Beloved!" "Accepted" is hardly the idea here, but rather "taken into favour"; and this "in the Beloved!" Recall the Lord's words in John 17:23 : "that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me." How wonderful! Objects of the same Divine affection standing in the same relationship with the Father.

This leads to a passing notice of our former condition (Ephesians 1:7), but it is not developed here, for the Spirit would engage us with God, His counsels and His will. And in Ephesians 2:1-22 it is gone into fully, where we are reminded solemnly of what we were. Here it is briefly said that we have redemption, the forgiveness of offences through His blood. We were formerly Satan's slaves, needing redemption; we were offenders, needing forgiveness.

Further, God has "made known to us the mystery of His will." He has revealed to us His great purpose to unite all earthly and heavenly things under Christ in headship, and has shown us our place of union with Him in the great scheme. What a position of confidence! (See John 15:15.)

We must not confound "the fulness of times" here with "the fulness of time" in Galatians 4:1-31. The latter expression is in connection with the coming of Christ. God has tested man in a variety of ways during different dispensations; and when the creature was proved to be helplessly bad and corrupt, he sent forth His Son. This was "the fulness of time." But the phrase in Ephesians 1:10 refers to the scheme when all the threads of God's purposes will have spun themselves out, and

Christ shall take His place as Head over all above and below, the church sharing all with Him.

But not only do we see Christ's portion as Head of all things in heaven and earth, but our own portion is brought forward: "In Whom also we have obtained an inheritance." Marvellous thought! we are to share with Him all that the Father has given Him. We have been predestinated to it "according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." This leads the apostle to say that we should be to the praise of His glory who first trusted in Christ." The apostle speaks of himself and his Jewish fellow-saints, who believed in Christ while hidden at the right hand of God before His public manifestation to the world. The nation will not believe in Him until the day of display and will not be blessed till then, and then in an inferior way. This the Lord hinted to Thomas, who is a striking type of His people: "Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed, blessed are they that have not seen and (yet) have believed" (John 20:29). This is the church's peculiar place, called to believe in Him unseen, and to have the more exalted place of blessing before Him and with Him. But in Christianity the Jew is not blessed apart from the Gentile. Thus we read, "in Whom ye also (trusted) after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." Jew and Gentile are united, both are reconciled to God in one body by the cross, and both blessed together.

The gospel is here called "the gospel of your salvation." The gospel is spoken of in a variety of ways in the New Testament. It is called "the gospel of God" (Romans 1:1), because it comes out from God and finds its spring in His own heart. It is the "gospel of His Son" (Romans 1:9), because Christ is the object; it is God's testimony to men concerning His Son. It is "the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4); for it bears witness to the present exaltation of Christ as Man at the right hand of God in glory. It is also called "the gospel of peace" and "the gospel of the grace of God." But in Ephesians 1:1-23 the Spirit says "the gospel of your salvation;" for it is the glad tidings, not only that all trespasses are forgiven in virtue of Christ's blood, and that sin is condemned in His death, but that the believer in Him is brought into complete salvation a totally new place of heavenly blessing before God.

Following faith in the gospel is the Spirit's seal: "ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." It is important to see the difference between the Spirit's early work in the soul in convincing it of sin and producing faith in Christ, and sealing. The Spirit of promise is God's gift to all who have accepted Christ's work: the blood first, then the oil (Leviticus 8:1-36). But He is not only the "seal," He is also the "earnest of the inheritance." The inheritance is not yet possessed by us (indeed the Heir has not yet received His rights), but all is blessedly sure, and the Divine Spirit is the pledge. "The redemption of the purchased possession" looks forward to the time when Christ will take possession of everything He purchased. Then creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, the changing of our bodies into His image at His coming being the first stage.

A.02 Eph_1:15-22.

Ephesians 1:15-22.

This closes the introduction of the epistle, and the apostle pauses to pray for the saints. The prayer here is addressed to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ ("Father of glory," because Author of it), and that in Ephesians 3:1-21, to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, corresponding with the twofold title in Ephesians 1:3. Paul had heard of their "faith" and their love — "love to all the saints" being the outcome of faith in our Lord. Narrowness of heart misses His mind, whatever the day may be, though love does not display itself in the same way toward all. In the companion epistle (Colossians) the Spirit commends the saints for the same precious fruit. There are three parts in this prayer. The apostle desired them to know the hope of His calling; the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints; and the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe. The "calling" we have seen in ver. 35; we are to be holy and blameless before Him in love, having sonship according to the good pleasure of His will. The "inheritance" we get in Ephesians 1:9-11; we are to share all things with Christ, the Heir. Note, it is God's inheritance (as also His calling); but He inherits it in the saints. It is not at all meant that the saints form the inheritance, as some have thought, such a notion having no ground but refutation in the N. T. We see it often written of Israel. Yet also God reserved to Himself the land of Canaan; it was His land, but He inherited it in His people, while they were His inheritance.

The apostle wished the saints to grasp the vastness of all three — the calling, the inheritance and the power that wrought in Christ in raising Him from among the dead, and placing Him at God's right hand in heavenly places, with all things under His feet. It is God's display of power not in creation, however wonderful, but in raising from the dead His Son, Who went down into death (where we were) bearing our sins, and Who now is in righteousness at His own right hand above, as the accepted Man, the second Adam, Head of the new creation. The same power will presently place us in the same glory; and meanwhile it gives us to enter into the precious meaning of union with Him there, whereby we walk upon our high places. "He hath put all things under His feet" is a quotation from Psalms 8:1-9. It will be seen in its day; He is Head of the body of the church meanwhile. Wondrous thought! the church is His fulness. His mighty grace has so ordered all; that He (the Head) is not complete without His members — all those who have been joined to Him on high by the Holy Spirit.

A.03 Eph_2:1-22

Ephesians 2:1-22

Ephesians 1:1-23 ends by speaking of the church as Christ's body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all; Ephesians 2:1-22 shows us the materials of which the church is composed. Ephesians 2:1-22 differs greatly from Ephesians 1:1-23 in its general bearing; for Ephesians 1:1-23 brings God forward, and shows us what He counselled before the world was, scarcely touching upon the condition in which He found His elect; while Ephesians 2:1-22 gives prominence to what we were, and details our low estate. Here we are bidden to look down; in the preceding chapter we are called to look up.

In speaking of our former condition the Spirit impresses a line of truth different from that in Romans. There the sinner is viewed as living in his sins — here as dead, "dead in trespasses and in sins." In Romans, I needed to be put to death, and I am shown my death with Christ; in Ephesians I am viewed as dead, and now quickened together with Him. What more striking picture could the Spirit draw of our former state of corruption and helplessness? What can come forth from the dead but corruption? and where can the dead find help but in God Himself? Yet was it an active kind of death; for we "walked according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." The devil rules all in the world; his influence is all-pervading, and we were once under his power as all others. Another Spirit works in us now through grace. The enemy is called "the prince of the power of the air" here only; and this is quite in accord with the general character of this Epistle, which is occupied with the heavenlies. In 1 Peter he is spoken of as "a roaring lion," and characteristically; for saints are there viewed as strangers and pilgrims passing through the wilderness, and it is in the wilderness we find the lion.

Up to this point the apostle had said "ye," meaning the Gentiles to whom he was writing; but were the Jews better as to their former state? "Among whom also we* all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath even as others" (Ephesians 2:3). The Jew, with all his privileges and favours, was not one whit better than the outside Gentile. There may be outward differences, but before God the ruin is complete. The desires of the flesh may be distinct from those of the mind; but both spring from the one evil source. The former would comprehend all that is base and foul; the latter, man's search after wisdom, which invariably leads him from God, and lands him in self-complacency, vanity, and infidelity. Solemn thought! we ever should have delighted in and performed the will of God; but we loved not His way, preferring our own and indulging our "desires" (or "wills") to the full. The opposite should be true now; His will, not our own, should be our unceasing delight. Christ as Man below never did His own will, but the will of His Father, and we are called to follow His steps. All this was our state by nature; we were then "children of wrath even as others."

*In chap. Ephesians 1:12-13, there is a corresponding contrast of "ye" (Gentiles) and "we" (Jews), and of much interest too.

Where is hope to be found for the ruined? In God alone, and He is instantly brought in. His counsels were formed long before, irrespective of our nature and actings; but the Spirit is careful to tell us what we were when grace wrought in us to give us a part in and with the Christ of God. Note the largeness of the expressions: "rich in mercy" — "great love" — "the exceeding riches of His grace." Is the language too strong? Not for the magnificent portion which is ours, through grace, in Christ above. He loved us too "when we were dead in sins" — the first movement came from above and not from below — "and hath quickened us together with Christ." Christ came down in grace to where we were; He found us in a state of death with sins upon us; He Himself went down into death bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. What else would have availed? But, having accomplished all, God has raised Him from among the dead, and He has gone up in the power of resurrection-life into the presence of His Father and God as the risen Man, Head of the new creation, where all is of God. And we have been quickened with the Christ — not merely quickened, but with Him. Quickening has always been true from the beginning for man — irrespective of dispensational differences — needs to be born again to enter into the kingdom of God; but association in life with Christ was not thus developed until He died and rose. Is not this what He alluded to in John 10:1-42? "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." For we are not only "born anew," which is true of saints in all dispensations, but are associated in life with the risen Christ. He is the accepted and beloved One in the presence of God; we are the same through grace. He lives evermore; and because He lives, we live also. We are brought right into the heavenlies — already across Jordan — and made to sit together in Him: not with Him yet, but in Him. To this wondrous display of grace, in bringing us into such an exalted position, God will point in the ages to come; the exceeding riches of His grace will be everlastingly told out in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

It is noticeable that we are reminded here again and again that all is of grace, "faith" being the means, and this not of ourselves: it is the gift of God. Can God sanction boasting in His presence? Nay; he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. And so will it be for ever.

Salvation is looked upon in Ephesians as an accomplished and present thing. In Php_2:12-13, and Romans 8:22-25, the believer is regarded as a pilgrim here below (as also in 1 Peter), beset with difficulties and dangers, and looking for salvation at the coming of the Lord Jesus. But this would not suit Ephesians, where we are viewed as blessed in the heavenlies. We have been and are saved. All is of God; it is His work alone. We were created in Christ Jesus for special good works (which God before prepared that we should walk in them).

The apostle has said that salvation is not of works but of grace, that none should boast; but in Ephesians 2:10 he shows that works hold an important place in Christianity. "Dead works" are as valueless, if not as outwardly offensive, as "wicked works"; but believers are "created in Christ Jesus, unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." It answers to justification before men, as James speaks, which is in no way a contradiction of the doctrine of Paul in Romans but its supplement.* How else is reality proved? Believers may speak of faith in Christ's name, and of association with Him on high; yet the "good works" convince of truth more than mere words. But how are such works produced? Not by following the law as a rule of life (the Galatians, who followed it, fell to biting and devouring each other), but by learning Christ in the power of the Holy Ghost. Believers have been created anew; and in the new creation law has no place.

*Many, not seeing this, have greatly slighted James' epistle. Luther described it as "a downright epistle of straw, with nothing evangelical about it." And a later countryman of his considers it a direct answer of Jewish Christianity to the Epistle to the Hebrews! The truth is, James furnishes us with the side of life, rather than Paul's doctrine of Christ's work, and nowhere writes anything contradictory to it.

How striking that the apostle should bid the saints to look down in Ephesians 2:11! We are carried very high in Ephesians 2:7, and shown our place as sitting in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus; we are now told to remember what we were. It is important to distinguish between self-occupation, and the remembrance of our ruined state. The former leads to doubt and fear; the latter to humility and deeper appreciation of grace.

The Ephesians, in their Gentile state, were called uncircumcision — a term of great reproach. (1 Samuel 14:6, 1 Samuel 31:4) . Circumcision was the sign of relationship with God (and more also): to be uncircumcised was to be altogether outside the circle of relationship and privilege. Consequently, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, they were apart from the Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world. All this is true of the Gentile: the Jew was outwardly nigh, had the promises, hoped in Christ Who should come, and had God's sanctuary and oracles. In the earlier part of the chapter the apostle lays down what is true of Jew and Gentile alike, here he emphasises what was particularly true of the Gentiles.

But where has Christ's work brought the believer? Into the Jew's old place of nearness to God? Nay, but into a place incomparably nearer than the Jew ever conceived. Moreover, He has brought the believing Jew into the same place, having abolished all distinctions after the flesh. This is an immense advance on all Old Testament teaching. The prophets spoke much of blessing for Gentiles, but always in a subordinate way to the Jew (all of which will be realised in the millennial reign). But meanwhile God has brought out His better thing, and Jew and Gentile, believing in Christ, are brought into the same blessed place of nearness to God: humbling to Jewish prejudice doubtless, but none the less the will of God. There are thus in this period three classes in the world: the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church of God (1 Corinthians 10:32). The Jew, believing in Jesus, is brought out of his old Jewish standing; and the Gentile from his place of distance: both are reconciled unto God in one body, and both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

It is to be observed that God has "broken down" the wall which He Himself reared (it would have been sin for anyone else to have done so) of old. Jehovah said to His people, "I Jehovah am holy, and have severed you from other people that ye should be mine" (Leviticus 20:26). The godly gloried in this, and could say, "He showeth His word unto Jacob, His statutes and His judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for His judgments, they have not known them" (Psalms 147:19-20). So that Peter was warranted in telling Cornelius that it was an unlawful thing for a Jew to come unto, or keep company with, one of another nation. But such distinctions belong to the past. God's present work is the formation of the one body. Christ has abolished in His flesh the enmity (Ephesians 2:15). Peace is now proclaimed to the distant and to the nigh: and both draw near to the Father.

Therefore are we Gentiles no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,

Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. Here we have a new thought; not merely one body, but a building. Formerly God sanctioned a material house, and dwelt in it in the midst of the people whom He had redeemed; but here we read of a temple of a very different order. The building on Moriah was disowned and empty ("your house is left unto you desolate" Matthew 23:38), and God was framing "a spiritual house" composed of living stones. Mark here it is God's building, not the work of man. We have to distinguish between the house as built by God, and as committed to human workmen. The first thought is to be found here, as well as in Matthew 16:1-28, and 1 Peter 2:1-25.

Viewed from this standpoint, all is perfect, as God's work ever is, and must be. The church against which the gates of hell cannot prevail is composed of living members, called and built by Christ Himself: no rubbish enters there. But how different when man's part is contemplated! In 1 Corinthians 3:1-23 Paul and His associates are viewed as builders in the house. Paul had laid a foundation at Corinth: others had followed, and built upon it. There the warning is found; for some may build wood, hay, and stubble (instead of gold, silver, and precious stones), and lose their reward in the coming day — all their work being consumed, while yet others may defile the temple of God, and be destroyed. The latter class are not Christians at all. God deals with men according to their profession; and all who take the ground of being His servants, whether possessing life or not, will be dealt with on that ground. (Compare Matthew 24:8-11; Matthew 25:30). Men build with doctrines: the faithful servant teaches the truth as revealed, and gathers true souls; the careless labourer, whose teaching is indifferent, gathers those who too often prove to be unreal, while the false servant corrupts the spring, and poisons and ruins all who fall under his baneful influence

In Ephesians 2:21 the temple is viewed as progressing; "it groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord." This would include every saint of this dispensation; and in this sense the temple is not completed until the Lord comes. "All the building" is the correct idea, not "each several building" as in R.V.* The latter rendering militates against the whole teaching of the epistle, which is the unity of the blessed in Christ.

*I notice that in Acts 2:36 — margin, the Revisers read "every house of Israel." This is at least consistent with their rendering of Ephesians 2:21; but the absurdity is very apparent.

In Ephesians 2:22, we get a further thought: "in whom also ye are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit." Here we have, not the progressive thing, but the local thing — the gathered saints at Ephesus were God's habitation. Very similarly does the apostle speak to the Corinthians, "Know ye not that ye are God's temple, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you" (1 Corinthians 3:16)? Note the difference in the language in (1 Corinthians 6:19), where the saints are viewed individually. Precious, yet solemn, truth for saints to remember, that, as gathered, the Spirit of God is present making them His habitation. How widely and long this has been overlooked in Christendom, one scarcely need say, but it remains on the page of Scripture as the truth of God. Where believed, what room for human officers in worship, to say nothing of priests for us? Ministry or rule is another question.

A.04 Eph_3:1-21.

Ephesians 3:1-21.

Paul now begins to exhort, and touchingly speaks of himself as a "prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles." He regarded no second cause, but accepted his imprisonment from the Lord Himself. Precious principle for our hearts at all times! But it was for Gentiles' sake he was suffering. Most of his afflictions were the fruit of Jewish hatred; so repugnant to them was the indiscriminate grace proclaimed by Paul, which levelled fleshly pretensions and distinctions to the dust.

But though the apostle commences to exhort, he goes off into a long parenthesis (not unusual in his epistles), extending from Ephesians 3:2-21, in which he explains his knowledge of the mystery of Christ; and he prays for the saints. Doubtless they had heard of the dispensation (or, administration) of the grace of God, which had been given him toward the Gentiles. It was by revelation that the Lord made known to him the mystery, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. Paul had had many visions and revelations of the Lord. The Lord's supper was directly revealed to him by the Lord, the manner of the rapture of the saints also; here he speaks of the mystery, Christ and the church. This had not been unfolded in other ages, but "hid in God." The writings of the Old Testament prophets would be searched in vain for a hint of anything of the kind. Yet it was a purpose formed before the foundation of the world, but God had a time for its unfolding. Jewish apostasy and wickedness must reach their height; Christ must be presented to them and be rejected; redemption must he accomplished, the Son must be exalted as man by the right hand of God; and the Spirit must descend, ere God would open out the eternal purpose formed in His heart for Christ's glory. All is now revealed: whence it is announced that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel.

If the time of revealing the mystery was divinely chosen, so also was the instrument. He felt deeply the grace of the choice; he "became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God." "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given." Elsewhere he expresses himself as "not meet to be called an apostle." Called by the exalted Lord, when engaged in pursuing His saints to the death, he became His chosen vessel to bear His name before kings, and the Gentiles and the children of Israel; to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to enlighten all as to the economy of the mystery of Christ and the church. The result is that the heavenly beings now learn in the church — gathered into union with Christ its exalted Head — the manifold wisdom of God. They had seen His mighty work in creation, and had shouted for joy; they are now privileged to see something more wondrous far in character — the rich fruit of redemption, and the eternal counsels of God — the church formed on earth in time, by the Spirit, to have part in Christ's heavenly glory. What is God's purpose concerning the earth and the kingdom, as compared with this?

In Ephesians 2:18 the apostle has said, "Through Him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father" here, "in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him."

Therefore he would not have the saints discouraged by his sufferings; himself gloried in them: they were their glory. Devoted labourer! He had drunk deeply into the affections of the Head for His body the church; and it was his highest joy to serve Him by serving it and suffering for it.

He proceeds to pray for the saints, who were much upon his heart; he bows his knees unto "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." We have noticed that his prayer in Ephesians 1:1-23 is addressed to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here he thinks of their state: he desired it to he good; he longed that they might walk at the height of God's thoughts as revealed.

Ephesians 3:15 is better thus — "of whom every family in heaven and earth is named." There will be several quite distinct circles above and below, enjoying their measure of nearness in blessing. In heaven the church's place is distinct; so is also that of the spirits of just men made perfect (Hebrews 12:1-29); and angels have their assigned portion; while on earth the Jews and the Gentiles have their respective places of blessing before God.

Having touched upon this passingly the apostle prays for the saints, that the Father would grant them, according to the riches of His glory, to be "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." How forcibly this reminds us of man's inability to find out the things of God! Man not only needs a new nature, and the Spirit to instruct, but needs divine strengthening to receive divine thoughts in detail. This Daniel felt in his day (Daniel 10:1-21).

This was not all Paul prayed for, but "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." This is quite a different thought from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is always true, in virtue of redemption, whatever the spiritual state may be; but here we have the conscious enjoyment of Christ within — Himself and His love the stay and delight of the soul. What do we know of it? We become thus "rooted and grounded in love," and able to look out calmly, yet with wonder, upon the boundless sphere of glory opened, in the counsels of God, to our view.

But we comprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height (that is, of the mystery) "with all saints." But there is more. The rich enjoyment of Christ's love, and the understanding of the varied counsels of God enlarge the affections: our hearts share with all the objects of the same wondrous grace — with all who are to have a part in the same glory with Christ. In Ephesians 1:1-23 the apostle speaks approvingly of their "love unto all the saints", and in Ephesians 6:18, he exhorts to prayer "with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." This is Gods way, though love does not necessarily show itself in the same way toward all. "We know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments" (1 John 5:2).

In Ephesians 3:19 we reach the limit; farther we cannot go. He desires our hearts to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge that we may be filled with (into) all the fulness of God. It is not that the vessel can contain all; but it is placed in the fountain, as it were, and is thus filled to its utmost capacity. Are there not heights always to be reached, and depths still to be sounded? But we are enabled for all this by "the power that worketh in us"; which places this prayer in striking contrast with that in Ephesians 1:1-23. There he speaks of the power which has wrought for us, displayed in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ; here it is power working in us by the Holy Spirit. Consequently here we have experience. Fittingly does the apostle close with an ascription of praise; his heart, overwhelmed, could not do otherwise. The church's unique place stands for ever. In the church, by Christ Jesus, he desires glory to God unto all generations of the age of

ages.

A.05 Eph_4:1-16.

Ephesians 4:1-16.

We here enter upon the practical part of the epistle. Ephesians 4:1 refers back to the end of Ephesians 2:1-22. In Ephesians 3:1 the apostle commenced with, "For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles," and then went off into a lengthy parenthesis (not an unusual thing in his epistles) which reaches to the end of the chapter. Here he takes up the thread: "I, therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you etc." How touching the manner of the exhortation! In all his epistles there is marked rarity of commanding (though of course he had authority as an apostle). He loved to say "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy" (2 Corinthians 1:24).

Three times in Paul's epistles we are exhorted to "walk worthy." In 1 Thessalonians 2:12 we are to "walk worthy of God," the living and true God Whom, in contrast with idols, the Thessalonians had been called to serve. In Colossians 1:10 it is "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing," Christ's authority and headship being much dwelt upon in that epistle. Here it is "worthy of the vocation (calling) wherewith ye are called" (Ephesians 4:1). The calling has been unfolded in Ephesians 1:1-23, and Ephesians 2:1-22; it involves new nature and relationship, access to the Father, and God's habitation in the Spirit union with the exalted Christ in one body.

Lowliness and meekness are to characterise us: how else can we walk together? We have the same thing in Php_2:1-30, "lowliness of mind, each esteeming other better than themselves." Fellowship with each other is an impossibility, if self is allowed: heart-burnings and strife must surely follow. But suppose, in displaying lowliness and meekness, we find our brethren otherwise? Then comes the opportunity of exercising longsuffering and forbearance in love; and our earnest endeavour must be to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In view of the many millions of saints in Christendom, it becomes an important question, what is the unity of the Spirit? The Spirit gathers to Christ as centre, and His unity embraces all the saints, every evil being excluded. Nothing narrower or broader than this is His formation, and in this we are called to walk, watching our hearts sedulously, lest Satan get an advantage to Christ's dishonour and our sorrow. We need zeal to observe it practically.

The apostle proceeds to mention some of the bonds of unity. There are seven: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. We must not confound the unity of the Spirit with the unity of the body though the two things are intimately connected. A recent writer, one worthy of esteem in love for his work's sake, has said, "Is it not clear that, during this age, the Church of Christ was never meant to be a visible corporate body, but to be a great spiritual reality, consisting of all faithful and loyal spirits, in all communions, who, holding the Head, are necessarily one with each other?" It is clear undoubtedly, that the church was meant to be "a great spiritual reality," and this it is. But it is also clear from scripture, that it should have been "a visible corporate body," i.e. all the saints on earth walking together in one

communion, keeping the unity of the Spirit. It were better far to own our deep failure and sin, and seek fresh grace from the ever faithful Lord, than to excuse our failure by denying the truth and our responsibility.

Though all that is here stated be true of every saint, it is plain that there are different circles in Ephesians 4:4-6, and that they widen. None can have part in the one body and one Spirit and one hope, but those that are really Christ's; but the one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, are connected with the sphere of profession; while the one God and Father of all Who is above all, and through all, and in us (or you) all, speaks of a wider circle still (save in the last clause, "in us all"); for all the families in heaven and earth range themselves under Him, as in Ephesians 3:15. For God's aim in perfecting the saints, Christ's work of ministry and our building up here below as members of His body, the Head has given gifts. There are two truths in Ephesians 4:7-16; first, "unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." This is the general statement. Every saint has received something from Christ for the edification of the body, which is "compacted by that which every joint supplieth." No member is irresponsible; each has his place and functions. Secondly, there are special gifts, which we may call ministerial. All flow from a victorious and ascended Christ. He came once in grace where we were. We were dead, and under the power of Satan: He went down into death, meeting the strong man, but proved Himself to be the stronger, and, having taken from him all his armour wherein he trusted, He divides the spoils. The lowest place was once His — "He descended into the lower parts of the earth;" He now is seen far above all heavens, filling all things. Captivity has been led captive, the Victor has received gifts for men* (strictly "in man;" i.e. in His human character).

*The Psalm which the apostle here quotes, looks beyond the present dealings of God, and goes on to say: "Yea, for the rebellious also that the Lord God might dwell among them" (Psalms 68:18). Thus there is a reserve of blessing for the people of Israel, at the end, still rebellious alas!

How precious to view ministry thus! It is not regarded in scripture as a mere office, imparting external importance to the holder, but as fruit of the victory of Jesus, of which all His members share the blessedness. There are various gifts named; apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Note, it is not said that He gave apostolic or evangelistic gifts to certain men, though this is true (1 Peter 4:10), but He gave apostles, etc. That is, the men themselves are gifts to the body for its edification and blessing. Apostles and prophets did foundation work; and these, having laid the foundation, have ceased. Their writings abide for the permanent profit of the saints; and in this sense, they may abide; but, as a fact, they are gone. Successors they have none; nor was any promise given of a restored apostleship at the end, whatever some may vainly think.

The remaining gifts for the blessed objects are continued, and are vouchsafed to the end by the faithful Head in heaven. Of these, the evangelist is mentioned first, for so his work is in the order of the soul's experience. He is the special gift to bring the soul to God, the Holy Spirit acting through him. The work of the pastor and teacher then begins. The pastor acts the father's part, watching over the divine life which has been imparted, seeking to train in God's ways, and guide and guard from ill; while the teacher (here a connected class) opens the treasury of truth, and expounds what he knows of the precious things of God that the soul may be instructed. How are these men known? Not by garments or titles, but by spiritual power. The man who yearns over the perishing, and who is able to bring home to them the gospel of Christ, is beyond doubt an evangelist. Where

this is the fact (and it is easily known), he is recognised as such, and accepted as a gift from Christ. So, also those who act a fatherly part or unfold the vast field of revealed truth, showing by their ways that the saints are a burden on their hearts, are to be honoured by their brethren in that still more delicate and difficult work.

It is due to Christ to thankfully accept all that He gives; not setting off one gift against another, but giving all the place assigned by the Lord. "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them that labour among and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in the Lord for their work's sake; and be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

It is to be observed that on the one hand miraculous gifts are not mentioned here, nor on the other hand, elders and deacons. They have each their own place in scripture; the first being signs to the unbelieving: the second, local responsibilities. Here we have the direct and gracious and unfailing position of the Lord for the edification of the body here below.

A.06 Eph_4:12-32.

Ephesians 4:12-32.

The first and principal object of all ministry is "the perfecting of the saints." It is not the will of God that His saints shall remain in an infantine condition, not knowing their privileges and blessings and His thoughts concerning them, but that they should make progress and grow in the knowledge of Himself and of His grace. It is not enough that all is ours in Christ Jesus, and that what grace has given can never be forfeited because the fruit of divine counsel and founded upon Christ's work; but God would have His saints know and enjoy all that has been granted. This thought is immensely higher than the general notion of even good men in Christendom today. With many the principal object is the salvation of souls, at best the blessing of the creature rather than the glory of Christ. This is to serve on low ground, however little intended, the aim being distinctly beneath the declared aim of our God. The unhappy result is that numbers of souls stop short at the knowledge of forgiveness, or of security from judgment, with feeble thoughts of divine righteousness, and little or no knowledge of union by the Spirit with a risen and exalted Christ on high. It is, of course, freely admitted that souls must be won for Christ by the gospel before they can be perfected; but forgiveness of sins is but an initial blessing. The soul is by Him introduced into a large place, where unbounded grace may be learned and enjoyed. And let it not be supposed that the evangelist's work has nothing to do with this. His work is included in the statement, "for the perfecting of the saints." He declares the gospel, and thus performs the first great office, the pastor and teacher follow up the work, the labours of each and all tending in the one great direction. An understanding of this will preserve the evangelist from labour of an independent character. His work, of course, lies not within the assembly, but in the world of the ungodly; yet he goes forth from the bosom of the assembly, and into that circle he gathers souls, that Christ the centre may be glorified in them. Thus are the further objects of the giving of the gifts secured; the work of the ministry is accomplished in all its branches; and the body of Christ, which the Spirit of God came here to form, is edified.

Before passing from this important subject, it is of moment to press the direct responsibility of every servant to Christ. Let us note well the principles of this chapter. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers, are gifts from Christ ascended, as truly as apostles and prophets: the church has no place but as a receiver. The notion of officials or the church appointing ministry is not found here, nor elsewhere in scripture. I am aware that elders (or bishops) and deacons were appointed by an apostle or apostolic man so commissioned like Titus; but such were ordained for rule not for the ministry of the word. The first class (always in the plural) were set to watch over the spiritual affairs of the saints in the towns where they dwelt, their authority not extending beyond those limits; deacons were appointed to serve tables or analogous work. In some instances, persons of both classes possessed ministerial gifts also, Stephen and Philip among deacons being cases in point, but this was altogether distinct from their local responsibilities. They were appointed to local office: as evangelists, etc., they were the gifts of Christ. Therefore, evangelists, pastors, and teachers being Christ's gifts, to Him they are responsible in the exercise of their service, and to no one else.

When the Corinthians were disposed to judge Paul, they only drew forth from him a sound rebuke; and were told that to him it was a small thing to be judged by them, or by man's day — his judge was the Lord (1 Corinthians 4:3-5). Had the apostle been speaking of discipline in the assembly, he would have spoken differently; a minister, if convicted of immoral ways, or unsound doctrine, being as much amenable to discipline as any other professors of Christ's name. But in the ordinary exercise of their gifts all such are responsible to the Lord alone, at Whose judgment-seat they and all will shortly stand.

We now come to the duration of the gifts; "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The perfection spoken of here seems to be not in glory, where all will doubtless be according to Christ, but a state of full growth on earth in contrast with infancy and weakness as in verse 14.

Even in Paul's early day, corrupt men bearing the Lord's name were active in seeking to ensnare the unwary and the simple, and lead them astray from the faith. God would have His saints firmly established in His grace and truth, and in the knowledge of His Son, that they may be proof against the ever-changing wiles of the enemy. It is deplorable to observe saints tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, apparently at the mercy of the foe. Is this God's will? Nay, but their establishment and blessing. And inasmuch as the church of God will never be without souls needing to be helped on to full growth, the ever faithful Head will continue the gifts of His grace until the end: "till we all come." Note, gifts are not given to make the saints helplessly dependent on them, but the reverse; by means of the gifts the saints become firmly rooted and grow up into Him Who is the Head — Christ.

Ephesians 4:15 is rather "being truthful in love"; the truth not only influencing our speech, as the Authorised Version would indicate, but all our ways, having its true place in our inward parts.

Ephesians 4:16 completes the circle of the provision of the Head for the edification of His body. Here we get not only that which is general, the body compacted and fitly joined together by that which every joint supplieth. It is an important principle surely: no member of the body is irresponsible — "unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" — and all must be in exercise that all may be blessed and edified, and the Lord glorified.

In Ephesians 4:17 the practical exhortations take a different shape. In Ephesians 4:1-16 the instruction affects more particularly our collective walk as one body; here we have that which is individual. A becoming and separate walk is pressed. The apostle puts it solemnly: "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord." He knows the dangers to which the saints were everywhere exposed, and that the Lord's honour was bound up with them; therefore the peculiarly impressive tone.

He exhorts them not to walk "as other Gentiles walk" They used so to do, as Ephesians 2:13 shows; and at that time they were children of wrath even as others. But grace makes a difference, and would have the difference to be seen by men among whom we walk; not indeed that we may be praised, but that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ. The exhortation is similar to 1 Peter 4:3 — "The time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles" — only there the apostle of the circumcision was writing to believing Jews, who had in

their former days sunk to the level of the Gentiles around.

Paul depicts in dark colours the condition of the Gentiles who know not God; minds vain, understandings darkened, hearts hardened, alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them. This is true of all, whether philosophical or unlearned. Man's mind cannot find a true centre or object, if it knows not God, nor can his understanding find the enlightenment. See the solemn confirmation of this in Romans 1:21-22, and recall the apostle amongst the "wise" at Athens. In the latter place he could only speak of the most elementary things; the creatorship of God, the unity of man, the folly of idolatry, etc.; for what does man's mind become when he shuts God out? True, all may not sink to the level of verse 19, "being past feeling" etc.; but the unregenerate heart, wherever found, is capable even of that. But we have not so learned. How sweetly the apostle expresses our present path here! Not set as those in Judaism to obey a code of laws, but to learn and hearken to a Person — Christ. Would the law, if kept, make a man heavenly? No, it suits men in the flesh, acting as a curb and as a plummet; but it could never make a man what a Christian ought to be. The Christian's standard is immeasurably higher. "But we know that the law is good if a man use it lawfully, knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man" (1 Timothy 1:9), and this the believer is, in virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, for we have been made the righteousness of God in Him.

The truth is, that a new nature, a new life (from which the Gentiles, as such, are alienated) has been imparted, and the new life has an object presented to it — Christ; and it is the believer's delight to study Him. "I have heard Him and learned Him." In measure as our hearts are occupied with Him, we become changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit. And when we look at His blessed ways here, when manifested, we see how we should shape our steps, for in Him the life of God was displayed in perfection among men below. This, I conceive to be the force of "as the truth is in Jesus" — all was to be seen perfectly exemplified there. Moreover, we have put off (past tense, not as A. V. or R. V.) concerning the former conversation (behaviour) the old man; and have put on the new. Both are described: the old man is "corrupt according to the lusts of deceit." (The meaning of the word "corrupt " here is "ruined " (we get a different word in Ephesians 4:29, "putrid," "rotten"): the old man is past all repair. God has disowned him, we have put him off — "our old man is crucified with Him." But the new man is according to God created in righteousness and holiness of truth. Note the word "created"; God has caused to exist in me what was not there once. See Colossians 3:10, the new man is "renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him." The word eminently suits Ephesians; for here man is viewed as dead. But we have been quickened — quickened together with Christ: there is therefore a new creation, "we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works " etc. I have said the new man is described: he is created "according to God." The new man loves righteousness and holiness of truth, never loving to wallow in the mire, and the practical display of these characteristics is the proof of life.

The apostle proceeds to details: falsehood (meaning more than lying actions as well as words) is to be put off; truth is to be spoken, for we are members one of another. The motive stated is an exalted one: I am not merely to scorn falsehood from a sense of honour, which an upright man of the world may do, but I am a member of the same body with my brother; if I act or speak falsely to him, I do so to myself, and more solemn still, to Christ. Anger is to be watched, that sin may not result, and that the devil may have no place. Anger in the sense of indignation against

unrighteousness and iniquity, is all well and of God — we find God often angry in the Old Testament and Christ moved with anger in the New — but our hearts are treacherous, and we have to watch it.

The thief is to become a labourer and even a giver, for grace transforms. The law required the thief to make restitution but grace makes him positively benevolent.

And if the hands are regulated in Ephesians 4:28, the tongue finds a place in Ephesians 4:29. What do we emit from our lips? The Spirit in James devotes a whole chapter to the unruly member; instruction always needed and wholesome. Is our conversation "corrupt," or is it "good to the use of edifying, ministering grace unto the hearers. Of Christ we read; "Grace is poured into Thy lips" (Psalms 45:1-17).

The Holy Spirit of God dwells within; the temple should he kept pure, that He may be ungrieved. There are two great principles in these verses, a new nature, a positive life imparted, and the indwelling of the Spirit. By Him we are sealed unto the day of redemption. "Grieve not" is here said to the individual, "quench not" in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-28 to the assembly.

God's ways are to be seen in us, and all bitterness, wrath, etc., put far away. The kindness and tenderheartedness of God to us are to form our ways. He in Christ has forgiven us, the spirit of forgiveness is to reign amongst the saints. "Until seven times?" Nay, but "until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:1-35).

A.07 Eph_5:1-21.

Ephesians 5:1-21.

The apostle continues by the Spirit his practical exhortations. The whole Christian pathway is summed up in one pregnant sentence, "Be ye therefore followers (imitators) of God, as dear children." How much higher is this than law! In giving the latter God set forth His requirement from man, and it consisted in "Do this and live," but Christianity is a higher and more blessed thing. God has revealed Himself fully too in the Son of His love. This henceforth is the believer's pattern. We do not aim at godliness with a view to gaining the favour of God, or of making out a righteousness: but we walk thus because we are children, partakers of the divine nature, objects of His unbounded affection. It is sweet thus to be reminded of His love! Paul could address the Roman saints as "beloved of God," (Romans 1:1-32), the Thessalonians similarly (1 Thessalonians 1:4); and the Lord in His prayer to the Father lets us know that we are loved by the Father as He Himself was loved (John 17:23, see also John 16:27). The knowledge of this is to shape our steps.

We are to "walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour." How such a word searches the heart! Is this how we love? Who will not own to shortcoming? Yet the standard may not be lowered, nothing short of this is the mind of God for His saints. Christ gave Himself — His love led Him even to death for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 4:1-21). The sacrifice of Christ is here brought before us in its burnt offering aspect — it was a sweet smelling savour; and, blessed be His name, "for us." In 1 Peter 2:24, where we get the trespass offering side of His cross, "a sweet savour" could not be said: He bore our sins, and drank the cup of divine wrath which was their due.

Warnings follow. "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be named among you, as becometh saints." How humbling that such exhortations should be found in close connection with the unfolding of the heavenly calling! But what is the human heart not capable of? No warning is given in vain; and the condition of the Corinthian assembly, when the apostle wrote his first Epistle there, shows the need of the word. The Thessalonians were written to similarly (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8); the Colossians also (Colossians 3:5-6). The tongue is to be guarded no less than the other members of the body: filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting ill become the saints. Scripture is positive as well as negative; if folly is not to flow from our lips, giving of thanks should. Happy occupation! the heart so satisfied with divine grace, and so engrossed with Christ, that out of its abundance thanksgiving wells out to Him. May we know more of it!

Does God think lightly of sin and folly? Nay; to pursue such ways is exceedingly grave. Such persons have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. The Ephesians must not be deceived, "for because of these things the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience." What can be said when one professing the Lord's name steadily pursues an evil course? "By their fruits ye shall know them." It is no question of the believer failing as he passes through the world — for such there is restoring grace through the advocacy of Christ on high, and

the gracious operation of the Spirit in heart and conscience below; it is an evil course which is supposed, though under cover of the Lord's name. The Ephesians were to hold themselves aloof from such, and not to be partakers with them. Such ways had been attractive to them, for they were once darkness, but now, being light in the Lord, they were to walk as children of light. Our former condition is here very solemnly stated — "Our former darkness." "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all:" we were thus wholly opposed to God, our very nature antagonistic. But we are no longer darkness, nor in darkness, but are children of light: the fruit of the light* — i.e. the practical result of knowing God fully revealed — should be manifested in all "goodness and righteousness and truth." We thus prove experimentally what is acceptable (well-pleasing) to the Lord.

*Ephesians 5:9 should read "the fruit of the light." The fruit of the Spirit is found in Galatians 5:1-26; but here the thought is different.

The Christian should thus, (not only abstain from ungodly ways, but) abjure all fellowship with those who practise them. Rather should he expose them; not necessarily directly attacking the world's practices, but by consistent godliness reproving iniquity. Men's secret sins, which have as large a place now as in Paul's days, are too shameful even to name; but they are exposed, and their true character declared by the light, for light manifests all things. Such exposing will not bring love, but rather hatred, to the witness, as our Lord Jesus said, "Me it (the world) hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil" (John 7:7). In His case the darkness hated the light: it was too much for them.

Therefore is the believer to awake if sleeping, and arise from among the dead. Sorrowful condition for a saint to slip into! Of what value as a witness to God and the truth is a sleeper? Thanks be to God, such are not dead: the spark of divine life is there, and can never be extinguished; but they have sunk into a state of spiritual torpor, having thus lost their enjoyment of heavenly grace, and their usefulness in testimony. The Spirit also arouses in Romans 13:1-14, but there reminds us of the nearness of our salvation, the night being far spent, and the day at hand. Here such sleepers among the dead are exhorted to arise; and, as the apostle adds, "Christ shall shine upon thee." Only thus can the believer reflect anything of God to a hostile world.

Such exhortations remind us of where we are — in an enemy's land. We shall not need in heaven to be told to walk carefully, to redeem the time, and to lay aside folly, and understand what the will of the Lord is. The days are evil: hence the need of the Spirit's admonitions.

The use of wine is to be guarded — in it is excess, profligacy: the rather are we to be filled with the Spirit. This is a different thought from being sealed with the Spirit. The latter is God's work entirely, the Spirit being His gift to the believer, founded on redemption; but to be "filled" rests with ourselves in self-judgment and looking to Christ. How far do we hinder His operation within?

Being thus filled, the heart expresses itself in melody and thanksgiving to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The psalms, etc., spoken of in this chapter are christian compositions not those of David, which relate to the Jew rather than to the Christian. Of course, there are many precious sentiments contained in that wonderful and inspired collection that are true for believers at all times. Still the book is not characterised by those blessings which we are called particularly to enjoy; as accomplished redemption, union with an exalted Christ, the

knowledge of the Father, and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. The spiritual tone is distinctly lowered when souls persist in using the Psalms of David as the proper and habitual vehicle of their worship.

A.08 Eph_5:22-33.

Ephesians 5:22-33.

The Spirit now turns to the various relationships of life and exhorts to a becoming and heavenly walk in them. So complete is the word of God as the believer's directory that nothing is left untouched that is needed for life and godliness. The home and the business find a place as truly as the assembly of God.

*It is just the same principle in Galatians 3:1-29 "They that be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse" No man is justified by the law; not merely that he is not justified by his own keeping the law, but not in virtue of law at all. To be justified, to live, is by faith. "And the law is not of faith:" they are opposite principles. If otherwise, what an admirable opening to have told us that Christ kept the law for us, and that His doing it is our life and title to eternal blessedness in heaven! For His legal observance is, according to some, the way, the truth, and the life, the ground necessary to imputing righteousness. But not so: scripture excludes the idea, insisting that no man is justified by law, and that the law is not of faith; whereas the system says that, though it be nothing for pardon, it is all for righteousness. Had we been Jews, Christ has bought us out of the curse of the law [not a word about fulfilling it for us], that we might receive the promise by faith. Hence the apostle proves that the promise was independent of the law, and hundreds of years before. The blessing of Abraham, the inheritance, is not by law, but by promise. It is a question therefore of the immutability of the promise, not of the law, whatever cavillers may say. The law was a wholly distinct institution, added because of transgressions (in express contrast with our righteousness), till the Seed should come to Whom the promise was made. Is there inconsistency then between the law and the promises of God? There would be, if either life or righteousness were by law. But not so; the scripture has shut up all (ta panta) under sin [not transgression merely], that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. Dead silence as to His keeping the law for us! What we are told is, that, before faith came, we [the Jewish believers, not the "ye"] were guarded under law, shut up unto the faith about to be revealed. So that the law was our schoolmaster unto Christ [not a hint of being kept by Him for us], that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus, and heirs according to the promise, not the law. In Ephesians 4:4 we do hear that God sent forth His Son, made of woman, made under law. Surely here, if anywhere, one might expect to learn, if it were true, that, where so come, He was keeping the law for us representatively. Not the most distant hint of it! On the contrary, He was sent to redeem, or buy off those under law [the Jews], that we might receive sonship. Nor this only: "But because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So thou art no longer a bondman, but a son." It is an elaborate argument to exclude law on every side — law as a principle — from life, promises, righteousness, and special relationship. When Christ is introduced in this connection, it is solely as redeeming those under the law from its curse, and never as obeying it for their justification.

The order of the exhortations here should be noted: wives are addressed before husbands, children before fathers, and servants before masters; each word arising out of Ephesians 5:21, "submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." This important principle the apostle now proceeds to develop in its application to the different circumstances in which we find ourselves on earth. A very beautiful style is to be observed in the exhortations to wives and husbands: each are set to study Christ and the church as their patterns respectively of obedience and affection. How different the principle of legal obedience! Here the Spirit fills our hearts with heavenly realities, and then sets us to reproduce them, as it were, in our walk below. This way reminds of God's dealing with Moses with regard to the tabernacle; "see that thou make all things according to the pattern showed thee in the mount." Thus, as Paul speaks, the tabernacle and its vessels were "patterns of things in the heavens." On a similar principle should our walk as saints be regulated.

It is blessed to notice how the heart of the apostle, even in giving commonplace exhortations to the saints, turns naturally to that which was his peculiar stewardship — the relationship of grace existing between Christ and the church according to the eternal counsels of God. Wives are therefore told to submit themselves unto their own husbands, as unto the Lord, the husband being the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the church. "Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." The apostle speaks of the place in which the church has been set, that of subjection to her Head, not of her actual practice. Alas, for that! How much selfwill and losing sight of the Headship of Christ has marred her practice! But the truth abides, "the church is subject unto Christ" — He is her glorified Head: the christian wife is to learn the great principle, and act upon it.

Husbands are not exhorted to rule, that not being a point where they are so likely to fail*, but to love. The wives are not addressed in this way: love with them is not so likely to be weak as submission. And what is set before the husband? "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it." This, when understood, lifts us above merely natural ground: divine love is our heavenly pattern. It is profitable to notice the different ways in which divine love is spoken of in the scriptures. In John's Gospel (John 3:1-36) we get God's love to the world, in John's epistle (1 John 3:1-24) the Father's love to the family. Here it is neither, but Christ's love to the church. It was that on which He set His heart when in the depths as the costly pearl: He would have her for His own, to share His throne and glory, to be the object of His affection for ever. To acquire her, He must give Himself (for the question of sin was there): could even divine love do more? He held not back even from the cross, for the joy that was set before Him; a part, at least, of which was to have the church as His own — His body and His bride.

*In cases where there is failure in this respect, the husband might do well to read King Ahasuerus' decree (Esther 1:22).

In Ephesians 5:25 we get the past — what He has done: in Ephesians 5:28 we get the present, what He is doing, sanctifying and cleansing it with the washing of water by the word. He will have her to be according to His mind, and therefore uses His word upon her that she may be kept apart by it from all that is contrary to Himself, and cleansed whenever she contracts defilement in the world. What individual saint does not know the power and blessedness of this? He died for the saints, for the church: He lives for us and serves us, as the girded One in the glory.

And even that is not all, for there is a future as truly as a past and present; "that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." What a contrast between present conditions and future glory! Spots are too plainly to be seen now, for the church has not kept herself from the world (James 1:27): wrinkles, signs of decay were to be seen even before the apostle of the church went to his rest. But all such marks of failure and sin will be removed by the holy loving hand of her faithful Lord, and she shall be what His heart would have her; "neither spot nor wrinkle, nor any such thing," as the Spirit emphatically declares, shall be seen in that day.

Meanwhile He loves the church as Himself, with a love that never wearies nor grows cold; and the husband is to learn the precious lesson: Christ nourishes and cherishes the church. "for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." As a type, Eve's case is then brought forward; the fruit, as it were, of the deep sleep of Adam, his helpmeet, and the sharer of his dominion and blessing. Such is the church's place in relationship with Christ; one with Him now by the Spirit, presently to share all which His grace will bestow. Our hearts do well to cultivate a deeper entrance into His mind concerning the church, seeking His glory in it, and the edification and perfection of all His own. For this, Paul counted it a privilege to labour, pray, and suffer (Colossians 1:24-28). In closing the subject, the apostle draws the conclusion that the husband is to love his wife even as himself, and the wife is to see that she reverence her husband.

A.09 Eph_6:1-9.

Ephesians 6:1-9.

It is noticeable that the Spirit of God gives similar instructions as to the relationships of life in Colossians as here; though not with the same fulness, nor quite upon the same lines. The latter is especially to be seen in the word to children: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right" (just). So reads Ephesians: but in Colossians the apostle merely states, "for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord." Was the variation because of the legal tendencies of the latter? From the forms etc., which had such attraction for their brethren at Colosse, the Ephesians were apparently quite clear, through grace; therefore the apostle was free to say "this is just," without fear of the word being misapplied by them.

Everywhere in scripture is filial obedience pressed, and the Lord Himself in the home at Nazareth has left an example which should be studied (Luke 2:51). Disobedience to parents is one of the unhappy moral signs of the last days (2 Timothy 3:2), as also absence of natural affection; elements painfully and increasingly apparent on every hand. But the obedience must be "in the Lord"; all obedience having this important qualification. A heathen parent might bid his child sacrifice to idols: must he obey? Where the express will of God is crossed, such can only answer as Peter and John to the priests who bade them preach no more in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:19; Acts 5:29) Nothing and no one must be allowed to come in between the conscience and God.

Some have found difficulty in the Spirit's use of the fifth commandment in this place, as apparently sanctioning the placing of Christians under the law. This is not so, for the word of God never contradicts itself. Christians have been delivered from the law by the body of Christ, having died to that wherein they were held, and have a new and higher standard set before them for walk below, even a heavenly Christ. To turn back to law is to build again the things we have destroyed, to place ourselves under the curse, to be removed from Him Who called us in the grace of Christ unto another gospel. But what the apostle shows here is that God has always insisted on due honour and obedience being rendered to parents, under the law as truly as under Christianity; so important, indeed, is it with Him, that Jehovah added a promise to the commandment (the first with such an attachment) "that it may be well with thee and that thou mayest live long on the earth." This is stated to show what the promise was; strictly, of course, in keeping with the calling of Israel. The Christian is called to heavenly blessing, he expects trial and difficulty, and perhaps persecution in this world; though it is not denied that there is present blessing in the government of God for those who do His will.

Fathers are next addressed. "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Discipline is necessary, and cannot safely be dispensed with (does our Father train us without it?) but it must be wise to be good. It is unhappy to alienate the affections of the children by unnecessary rigour; parental influence is thus lost, and not easily regained. Faith regards the family as a precious charge from the Lord, and delights to lay hold of the word, "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it"

(Proverbs 22:6). Is not Timothy a bright example, and encouragement to faith (2 Timothy 3:15)?

Some have found fault with the exhortations of Ephesians 6:5-8, saying that they sanction or encourage slavery. The objection is groundless. God does not sanction such a principle; but it has come in among men, as many other things, as a result of sin; and while not interfering at all with the framework of society (which awaits its rectification till Christ comes), He legislates for His own saints, who may find themselves in these relationships.

What can be wiser or more comforting to the christian slave than the word in 1 Corinthians 7:20-24? If such yearned for their liberty, that they might serve the Lord more fully, they are told not to make a care of it, and are assured that "he that is called in the Lord being a servant (slave) is the Lord's freedman," while on the other hand, "he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant" (or slave). Here (Ephesians 6:1-24) such are told to be "obedient to their masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart as unto Christ." Did they serve unreasonable and tyrannical men? How elevating and sustaining then to look beyond the man to the Lord, "knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." If the reward fails here, it will assuredly be seen at the judgment-seat of Christ. Christians are not called to reform the world while passing through it; but to acquit themselves becomingly as heavenly men, in the midst of it all. The principles here laid down though addressed to slaves, apply with equal force to employed servants. Eye-service, men-pleasing, is abominable to the Lord, the rather is it His will that service be rendered heartily, and all done in the name of the Lord Jesus. What a view of our hearts we get, that we should need such a word!

In 1 Timothy 6:2 the apostle adds on this subject another word of particular importance. "And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren, etc." The Spirit of God knows how prone the human heart is to take advantage of such circumstances: it is natural to the heart to be radical. But the believer is to eschew the ways and habits of men, and walk according to God. In the assembly of God, at the Lord's table, the believing master and servant are brethren, and members of one body, outside relationships having no place there; but in the shop or on the farm it is otherwise, and we do well not to forget it.

Masters are then exhorted, and reminded that their Master is in heaven; "neither is there respect of persons with Him." He notes threatening and oppression: the cry of the poor and needy comes up in His ears, and He will requite it in the coming day. This verse should read, I believe, "their Master and yours is in [the] heavens;" which gives an added point of importance: both master and servant are responsible to the one Lord, and will stand together at the same judgment-seat.

A.10 Eph_6:10-24.

Ephesians 6:10-24.

The mind of the Lord has been declared concerning the relationships in which we may find ourselves on earth. Another subject is now dealt with by the apostle — our conflict in the heavenlies. This flows out of the teaching in Ephesians 1:1-23; Ephesians 2:1-22. There our place is shewn as risen together with Christ, and sitting in Him in the heavenly places, blessed with all spiritual blessings in Him. There we learn that, to enjoy our heavenly portion, conflict is necessary with those who seek to hinder.* The allusion (though the contrast is complete) is to the wars of the Israelites in Canaan for the enjoyment of what God had promised. In Joshua 1:1-18; Joshua 2:1-24; Joshua 3:1-17; Joshua 4:1-24 we have God bringing them through Jordan (type of death and resurrection with Christ into the land of promise. In the plains of Jericho, Joshua circumcises them (our circumcision is found in Colossians 3:1-25); they keep the passover, and eat of the old corn of the land. Thus did they take their place as His people in Canaan, in accordance with the purpose of God. But the Amorites were there, determined and prepared to contest every inch of the ground with them. Israel must meet them in the power of God. They were to enjoy every place that the sole of their foot touched; a sign of taking possession (Joshua 1:3; Revelation 10:2).

*The conflict here is totally different in principle from that which we find in Galatians 5:1-26. There principalities and powers are not in view, but the Spirit and the flesh. Both are in the Christian: hence the conflict.

But God was with them, and nothing failed of His good word; wherever they went in dependence upon Him, victory was sure, the enemy was expelled, and they took possession. These things, as others written aforetime, are for our learning. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." We are a poor match for Satan and his hosts apart from the power of God. If like Israel at Ai, who forgot God and measured the enemy by themselves, defeat is certain. But the weapons of our warfare are mighty through God, when His Spirit acts in His people, who can withstand? Carnal weapons are in vain, "for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Our enemies are thus of a different character from those of Israel; they are "spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies" (as in Ephesians 6:12, better rendered). Scripture does not tell us much about the powers in the heavenlies, but we have many allusions to such, good and bad. Thus in this Epistle Christ is set far above all principality and power (Ephesians 1:21); through the church is now made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10). Daniel 10:1-21 draws aside the veil, as it were, and tells us something of the conflicts above, showing how earthly events are affected by movements there; while Revelation 12:1-17 shows us the final expulsion of evil powers from heaven by Michael and his hosts. This occurs in the midst of the last of Daniel's seventy weeks. But such hosts are not ejected from heaven yet (though they be not in the presence of God): our conflict is with them. It is the unceasing aim of the powers of darkness to prevent our

hearts from rising to the height of our heavenly relations; nothing pleases the enemy better than to see saints grovelling below.

Armour is provided, the whole armour of God; which we must take to us to be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Many can bear his roar, who are overcome by his wiles. Israel could calmly contemplate the high walls of Jericho, knowing God was with them, but were utterly worsted by the wily Gibeonites. How treacherous are our poor hearts! How unfit to be trusted! We are only exhorted to "stand"; the bruising under our feet is not yet, though shortly (Romans 16:20). One shudders sometimes at the light and vain talk so prevalent today, concerning the power of the enemy, and our power over him and his works. We need to remember the word not to speak evil of dignities, and Michael's reply to Satan, "the Lord rebuke thee." "He durst not bring against him a railing accusation" (2 Peter 2:10-11; Jude 1:9-10). The utmost we can hope to do in "the evil day" (God's way of describing the whole of the present period) is to "stand": happy the saint who is able to do so.

The armour is detailed; and it is all practical. Our loins are to be girt about with truth, every habit is to be controlled by it, the truth is to govern our lives in each particular. Thus alone can we keep our garments unspotted from the world. The breastplate of righteousness follows; for how can we show front to the enemy if our practical ways are not good? Where righteousness before God is spoken of, the figure is rather a robe, but before the foe armour, as here and in 2 Corinthians 6:7. The feet are to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, i.e., peace is to characterise our whole walk below. Is it in vain that the Spirit constantly says, "Grace unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"? If peace with God has been made by the blood of Jesus, and the God of peace has brought Him again from among the dead, the peace of God is to keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. The apostle prayed that the Lord of peace would give the Thessalonians peace always by all means. It is happy to be a "son of peace:" precious portion in a world of turmoil and upheaval!

But the shield of faith is equally necessary, that we may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. This is that calm confidence in God which it is ours to know in every circumstance; for we walk by faith, not by sight. Faith never dreads foes, however numerous and strong; it measures them by God and goes forward with holy boldness. With the shield in position, the heart is safe.

The headgear is the helmet of salvation. Salvation is ours now as regards the soul; as regards the body we shall know it shortly at the Lord's return; and it is sure. What confidence this gives! All the malice of the enemy can never wrest from us our portion: it is founded upon the sacrifice of Christ, and secured to us by His life on high. Thus are we enabled to hold our heads high, and say, Whom shall we fear?

All these parts of the armour are defensive; but there is one offensive weapon, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." This was what the Lord used in conflict with Satan. "It is written" was sufficient for victory. Satan is for faith a vanquished foe. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." He meets Christ in the saint, and Christ is enough. One word of scripture, used in the power of the Spirit, is of all value when pressed by the enemy. But this must be coupled with prayer. The word of God and prayer are the two great springs of the Christian's life (Luke 10:1-42; Luke 11:1-54); without them we become a prey. Compare 1 John 2:9. It is "the evil day," and our hearts are treacherous and readily beguiled: dependence on God and a right use of His word alone can

preserve us.

But our hearts must not be occupied solely with our own needs: "all saints" are to have a place. This is the Epistle which unfolds the truth of the one body: has it entered our hearts? It is fitting, surely, in such a letter that the apostle should enjoin prayer and supplication for all. And there are those who have a special claim upon our prayers, because placed in the front of the battle, exposed therefore to the peculiar rage of the enemy. Paul was pre-eminently such an one, and valued the prayers of the saints, that his mouth might be boldly opened to make known the mystery of the gospel. He was an ambassador in bonds: he felt the difficulty of his position, though his heart was sustained. Tychicus carried this Epistle, as also that to the Colossians; he would make known to the saints the affairs of Paul, and comfort their hearts by the recital of the Lord's faithful love and grace to him.

Salutations close all, and they too in perfect keeping with the aim and character of the Epistle. W. W. F.

A.00 Questions of the Hour

Questions of the Hour

by

W W Fereday.

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A.00i To the reader.

To the reader.

We ask your earnest attention to the following pages. Never was the atmosphere so full of unholy scepticism as at the present hour. The vaunted learning of our time is making men mad. Long ago the divine warning was issued — "Avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith" (1 Timothy 6:20-21). Blessed is the man who heeds the admonition.

In this small book we have endeavoured to set forth, as plainly and as concisely as possible, what we believe to be the truth of Holy Scripture concerning the great matters referred to. May God by His blessed Spirit mercifully preserve both reader and writer from the apostate tendencies of these last days.

A.01 THE VIRGIN-BIRTH OF OUR LORD.

THE VIRGIN-BIRTH OF OUR LORD.

It is surely one of the strongest proofs of the incorrigible evil of fallen humanity, and its inveterate hostility to everything that is of God that so sacred a mystery as the miraculous conception of our Lord should, after so long a time, be seriously challenged. If this unbelief manifested itself in the non-professing world, it would evoke no surprise (what else indeed could be expected there?); but when we find it breaking out within the compass of the professing Church, and that not in obscure individuals, but in those "who seem to be somewhat"; and when, moreover, we find this particular form of unbelief welcomed, it becomes a painful proof that the predicted apostasy is now very near.

This subtle attack upon our Lord's humanity is at the same time an attack upon His Deity. If He really had a human father, then plainly He is man only. All the Scripture passages which speak of His Deity (and their number is legion in both Old and New Testaments) are thus swept overboard at one blow. Never again can we entertain them. Along with the truth of our Lord's Deity goes all hope of salvation for any of us. What creatures however holy, however gifted, could possess the competency to lay down his life in atonement for the sins of others, yea, for the sins of myriads upon myriads of transgressors against God? Further, if our Lord be only a man, He must needs have inherited from His parents the same moral taint as ourselves; in a word, He must have been a sinner even as we. May the God of grace pardon the awful thought!

When Christendom becomes prepared, upon any considerable scale, to throw over the Virgin-birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, union with Judaism and Mohammedanism will be more than possible. A significant change has passed over the minds of Jewish leaders in recent years in regard to our Lord. They have stated repeatedly that they are now prepared to acknowledge Him as a prophet. Mohammedanism has always done this; when Christendom reaches the same point, the apostasy will be complete. But what saith Scripture? "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ come in flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God; and this is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" (1 John 4:2-3). It is necessary to omit (as we have here done) a few of the superfluous words in the Authorised Version of this passage in order to perceive its true force. It is not a bare acknowledgment of the historical fact of His erstwhile presence on earth that is in question (none could well deny that); it is really a confession of both His Deity and humanity. Who but a divine person could be said to "come in flesh"? No angel has the power so to come, and no mere man could enter the world in any other condition. Accordingly, the true test as to whether a man is speaking by the Spirit of God or by the spirit of Antichrist is his confession of our blessed Lord as a divine person come to earth in human flesh.

In such a matter it is useless to appeal to mere reason, and it will not be attempted here. Yet it should not be unreasonable in our eyes that God is able to do as He pleases, even to become Himself incarnate amongst us, if so His heart disposes Him. But we shall simply draw attention to

a few Scripture statements concerning this mystery of mysteries, counting upon the Spirit of God to use them for the strengthening of faith where it already exists, and for the awakening of faith where at present faith is not.

The very first announcement concerning the Saviour is to the point here. To the serpent in Eden the Lord God said: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15) . Three things are here predicted of our Lord: His incarnation; His sufferings, and His victory. But mark the total omission of all reference to the man in this prophecy. The woman, the enemy, and the Deliverer are the only parties mentioned therein. As Revelation unfolded itself, so did the mind of God concerning the coming One. Thus of all Adam's sons Seth was to be His progenitor; later, of Noah's sons, Shem; of Terah's sons, Abram; of Jacob's, Judah; and of Jesse's, David. In due course, the very village was named in which He should be born; and the time of His coming (Micah 5:2; Daniel 9:25). Then inIsa. 7:14 we read: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel." How this passage is applied by the Spirit of God in Matthew 1:23 is known to every Bible reader.

It is interesting to observe the difference between the manner of our Lord's annunciation in Matthew and in Luke. In Luke's Gospel we have the angel coming to Mary, informing her that she was the vessel chosen of God for the accomplishment of Isaiah 7:14 in answer to the simple inquiry of her piety how this could be, seeing that she was not in relationship with a man, she was told: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:3-5). There are three things here: conception by the power of the divine Spirit; protection of the human vessel and her sacred burden; and the actual birth. Mary's babe was thus not only Son of God as eternally co-existent with the Father, but also by reason of the miraculous circumstances of His coming into the world. Comparing this with Matthew, we have the angel appearing to Joseph — at a somewhat later date. This was for the removal of his righteous scruples when he found his betrothed with child. To him the angel said: "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 1:20), and to him was committed the responsibility of naming the child. In these two accounts of our Lord's birth is manifest the perfect wisdom of God. Seeing that Joseph was in the direct line of succession to David's throne (Mary being descended from a junior branch of the same stock) it was necessary that Jesus should be Joseph's legal heir. This was secured by Joseph's reverent acceptance of the situation as explained to him by the angel. Matthew's Gospel brings this out clearly, while Luke occupies himself simply with the story of the birth without special reference to Joseph and the Davidic title .

Wonder of wonders! Born of a sinful mother (for Mary herself humbly acknowledged her need of a Saviour — Luke 1:47), yet inheriting no moral taint from her. "A body hast Thou prepared Me; Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10:5-7). In Adam as originally created we see humanity innocent; in ourselves, fallen; in the Son of God; holy. Stainless in nature and in ways, death had no possible demand upon Him. But in His ineffable grace He submitted to the pangs of death that He might thereby make effectual atonement for human sin and guilt. Mere reason may well stagger in the presence of such a mystery as this; but herein is food for faith. "God was manifested in flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). Shame on us that so infinite an expression of divine grace should be made a matter of mere idle cavil. Be it the part of every one of us to bow adoringly at His feet, like

Thomas of old, exclaiming; "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

A.02 OUR LORD'S RESURRECTION.

OUR LORD'S RESURRECTION.

It is no marvel that Satan should rage against the truth of our Lord's resurrection, and seek to discredit it in every way; for that mighty fact proclaims his greatest defeat, and it is also the earnest and the assurance of his coming final overthrow.

Christianity is built upon the twofold basis of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The apostle makes this abundantly clear in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 in his rebuke to certain speculative brethren in Achaia. The death and resurrection of our Lord are not mere "spiritual ideas," but sober historical facts. So well authenticated are these facts that if they may really be doubted we cannot reasonably believe anything outside the range of our immediate observation.

The resurrection and ascension of our Lord were predicted in plain language as early as the days of David, at least a thousand years before the events took place (Psalms 16:11; Psalms 68:18). The Lord Himself spoke distinctly of these things while yet He was engaged with His ministry (John 2:19-21; John 6:62; Matthew 16:21; Matthew 17:9, etc.). His enemies well understood His words, and in view of them besought Pilate after His death to secure the sepulchre until the third day was past (Matthew 27:62-66). But their precautions only served to contribute to the absolute certainty of the fact of His resurrection when it was accomplished.

If the resurrection of Christ must really be relegated to the realm of fancies, then faith is at an end and Christianity stands convicted of the greatest fraud that was ever imposed upon the credulity of men. It is the essence and heart of Christianity that the Saviour is alive again from amongst the dead, and enthroned on high, victorious over all the power of death and Satan, with the sin-question settled once for all to the entire satisfaction of the claims of God. If He who entered the portals of death nearly two thousand years ago has indeed never since been seen, upon what has faith to rest?

If the whole story of the resurrection, as given in the Gospels, be read without prejudice it will be perceived that everything connected with that glorious event served to authenticate it to the full. The presence of a Roman guard at the door of the tomb; the unbelief of the disciples at the first news that He had risen (and this recorded by themselves with the utmost simplicity); the lengthy period — forty days — of His sojourn upon earth before He ascended; and the number of persons who saw Him during that period, on one occasion as many as five hundred — all these facts combine to prove that no mistake has been made, and no fraud perpetrated.

Christ, then, is risen. His claims, made when on earth, thus stand divinely vindicated. In contrast with John, He claimed to be the Christ, and was charged before Pilate accordingly (John 1:20; John 10:24; Luke 23:2). He claimed also to be the Son of God; and was accused of blasphemy in consequence (John 19:7; Luke 22:70-71). Resurrection demonstrated Him to be Lord and Christ; and Son of God (Acts 2:36; Romans 1:7).

His character, too, stands vindicated. Was ever servant of God so maligned as He? Crucified as malefactor, He committed Himself in faith to Jehovah as "Thy Holy One" (Acts 2:27) . The divine answer to this was resurrection on the third day.

More than this. Not only is the resurrection divine testimony to Christ Himself; by raising Him from amongst the dead God has publicly sealed His atoning work. Having brought again from amongst the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, God is able to declare Himself "the God of peace" (Hebrews 13:20). Peace with God; the full assurance that every righteous claim has been settled, is the present happy portion of all who believe the Gospel.

The Lord is risen, and now sits on high as the Church's exalted Head. In His hands are the keys of death and Hades, and at His summons the occupant of every tomb will yet be constrained to respond: first, the redeemed at His coming again; then His foes at that dread moment when heaven and earth shall flee away.

A.03 ON MIRACLES.

ON MIRACLES.

On miracles in general it will not be necessary to say much. He who, in humble faith, accredits the marvelous facts of our Lord's incarnation and resurrection will have no difficulty in accrediting other wonders recorded in Holy Scripture. He who declines to believe the great basic facts which lie at the very foundation of Christianity should not ask to be accepted as a Christian at all.

In this matter-of-fact age men are apt to become scornful at the bare suggestion of a miracle. What man cannot do cannot be done. The folly of this attitude should be apparent to the most superficial observer. Upon this principle the charioteer of ancient Rome would have been justified in ridiculing the notion of horseless carriages ever driving through the streets of the Imperial city, and Queen Elizabeth's hardy seamen would have done well to regard as insane anyone who suggested that men would some day navigate the air. Yet now we know that these things, absurdities as they might have appeared in their eyes, are perfectly practicable.

It is sometimes objected that miracles are opposed to natural laws. It would be more correct to say that they have nothing to do with them. Whether performed by God Himself, or by others by His permission, they are sovereign interpositions outside and apart from natural laws altogether. "Laws" suppose a Law-giver. Is it seemly on our part to limit Him, and to affirm what He is able, or ought to do?

The miracles of Scripture have a twofold character. They were, first of all, tokens of God's power.

By means of them it was sought to bring home to the consciences of rebellious men the fact that GOD IS. For this reason many marvelous works were shown in idolatrous Egypt; and for the same reason, in the days of Israel, many mighty deeds were performed in the Kingdom of the ten tribes, and but few in the Kingdom of the two tribes. The latter continued to acknowledge God after Jeroboam led the bulk of their brethren astray in the matter of the golden calves. Scripture miracles were also the expression of God's mercy. The two greatest miracle-workers were Elisha in the Old Testament and the Lord Jesus Christ in the New. The deeds of the son of Shaphat were all of a kindly nature, with one solemn exception; while the works of the Saviour were all, without a single exception,* gracious and merciful in their character. By means of these extraordinary interpositions God was seeking to reach the hearts and consciences of men.

{*The cursing of the fig tree Matthew 21:19), not being a miracle wrought upon men, does not invalidate this statement.}

Even miracles must not be accepted as irrefutable proofs of a divine mission on the part of those who perform them. A warning as to this may be found in Deuteronomy 13:1-5. The possibility is there supposed of one giving a sign or wonder which really came to pass, and which had for its object to divert men from their allegiance to the true God. " Jehovah your God proveth you, to know whether ye love Jehovah your God with all your heart and with all your soul." The magicians

of Pharaoh performed marvels in Moses' presence; Rome claims her miracles to-day, and the Antichrist of the future will outstrip all previous pretenders in this direction. But the aim in each of these cases is to draw men away to that which is apostate and evil. Miracles have therefore to be tested as to their tendencies ere they are accepted as tokens from God. And what is the true safeguard of the soul? We have it in Paul's charge to the Ephesians in Acts 20:32 : "I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace; which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." The Word of God abides with us to the end; and it speaks with no uncertain sound to those who have ears to hear and hearts to obey.

A.04 THE ORIGIN OF MAN.

THE ORIGIN OF MAN.

It is somewhat late in the day for man to raise questions as to whence he sprang, and yet nothing should surprise us in this period of the world's dotage. Is man a being distinct in nature and character from every other, or is he simply an improvement upon something else? Is he a being divinely created, or is he instead an animal who has struggled through various forms up to his present status; in fulfillment of a mysterious law which no one pretends to completely understand? Such are the questions which are being gravely discussed in the twentieth century. Even in religious circles these questions are considered legitimately debatable.

For those who fear God there is but one way in which to get light upon these matters. So important is it that man should understand what he is and whence he came, that it is only reasonable to suppose that God Himself has somewhere spoken upon the subject. This proposition can only appear unreasonable in the eyes of those who doubt or deny that there is a God at all. Now we hold in our hands a book called "the Bible" which comes to us with the highest possible claims. It demands our attention and obedience as a revelation from our Maker and Judge, and it warns us with the utmost gravity of the consequences of turning a deaf ear to its voice. The first book in the Bible goes by the name of Genesis, which means "beginning." It is thus God's account of the beginning of things — heaven, earth, beasts, man, etc. Seeing the exceeding value and importance of such a book, and seeing too that apart from it we have absolutely no light at all as to the origin of things, it is not surprising that the enemy should labour to discredit Genesis in every possible way. But foolish indeed are they who yield to the fell destroyer in so momentous a particular.

We turn to the book of Genesis therefore in order to learn the truth as to the origin of our race, being fully persuaded that we can learn it in no other way. The conflicting theories of philosophers, ancient and modern, and the egregious folly frequently expressed by them (one generation of philosophers holding up to ridicule the theories of other generations of the same breed) serve to prove that outside of Genesis everything is shifting sand.

Man was created on the sixth day — last of all the works of God. The work of the sixth day (as that of the third) was in two parts, first cattle etc., then man (Genesis 1:24-31). In connection with the latter there was divine consultation. "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." When lower creatures were required it sufficed to say: "Let the waters bring forth . . . let fowl fly," etc., and the creatures required were forthwith alive upon the scene. The grave consultation recorded in Genesis 1:26 should of itself suggest to the most cursory reader that now a being of a different order from all others was to be brought into the world. Man is thus a distinct and independent creation, having no link whatever with beast, fish, or fowl. "Created" is repeated three times in Genesis 1:27, as if the Spirit of God would be beforehand with his rebuke of evolutionist absurdity. Moreover, Adam was the FIRST man. The whole structure of Holy Scripture falls to the ground if there were really men before, or independent of, Adam; for the entire volume of inspiration

revolves around two men — the fallen first man Adam, and the peerless Second Man, the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:45-47). One man and one stock is God's account of our race and its head. "He hath made of one blood all nations of men ....we are the offspring of God" (Acts 17:26-29). Such was the elementary lesson administered by Paul to the learned heathen in Athens.

The truth of Creation and the theory of Evolution cannot subsist together. There is nothing in common between them. He who holds to the one must needs despise the other. The Evolutionist would do well to ask himself, did the Son of God leave His glory to die for an improved ape? The question has only to be stated to be rejected with holy abhorrence. The Scripture truths of Creation and Redemption both forbid the Evolutionist's foolish dream. Whatever its pretension to superior learning, Evolution is a degrading lie of Satan, designed to hide from man his true relationship to his Maker, and to destroy in him all sense of responsibility, thus ensnaring him into excess of sin to his eternal ruin.

A.05 THE SOUL: MORTAL, OR WHAT?

THE SOUL: MORTAL, OR WHAT?

A great question, assuredly, with immense issues (some of us believe eternal issues) dependent upon it. If man is altogether mortal; if his every constituent part is capable of coming to an absolute end then farewell to all responsibility; for judgment is impossible. Man is just an animal, and no more. Accordingly, "let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die" (1 Corinthians 15:32).

Where may we find certainty concerning a matter so important? Not in the reasonings and speculations of men, but in the Word of the living God. Does it, or does it not, teach that there is something in man which does not perish with the body? The question is virtually answered in God's account of the beginning of things. We learn from Genesis 2:7 that the body of the man was first formed of the dust of the ground, and then, as a separate act, God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. The true life of man is thus not inherent in the outer frame; it is something distinct from mere bodily vitality. Add to this our Lord's words to His disciples in Matthew 10:28, "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." Supplement this with the Saviour's reference to the long-departed patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in Luke 20:38, "He is not a God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto Him." These passages prove conclusively that when earthly conditions are ended there is another sphere, in which the released spirit lives and moves, where no persecuting hand can ever come. And need we remind the reader of the rich man and Lazarus, who are vividly presented to us in Luke 16:1-31 in their respective conditions of anguish and bliss when this world had by both been left behind for ever?

Man differs from other created beings in that he is made up of "spirit, and soul, and body" (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Angels are spirits only (Hebrews 1:7); animals, etc., consist of soul and body (Genesis 1:20, see margin). The spirit is the seat of the will and of the intelligence — the mental and moral faculties (1 Corinthians 2:11); the soul is the seat of the affections and desires (1 Samuel 18:1;Luke 2:35); the body is the vessel by means of which these express themselves. The word "mortal" is only applied in Scripture to the body; never to either soul or spirit. It is sometimes objected that the term "immortal soul" is not found in Scripture. This is admitted; but what is the force of the objection if that which the orthodox mean by the expression is found there? Moreover, it should be remembered that "immortal" is a negative term; and could only properly be applied to that in man which at some time was "mortal." Since the soul never was mortal; there was no need for the Spirit of God to specifically describe it as immortal.

The Annihilationist will say, in reply to all this, that he believes in "life only in Christ." This is at first sound satisfactory enough, seeing that scripture emphatically declares that "he that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12). But the argument of the Annihilationist is fallacious nevertheless; for it confounds what God has given to all men in the way of nature with what He has given to believers only on the ground of Christ's redemption. "Eternal life" is not mere being, but life in association with the Son of God in His own sphere of blessedness above. This, while open to all, and proclaimed to all in the Gospel, is not entered into by all, being

contingent upon faith in the Saviour's name.

The contrasted terms "death" and "life" are used in various senses in Holy Scripture, and it is well to note this carefully. Thus a man may be morally dead — "dead in trespasses and sins" — while full of bodily and mental vitality (Ephesians 2:1); he may be physically dead, and yet be alive unto God (Luke 20:38); and he may experience the horrors of the second death, the lake of fire, and yet continue in being for ever (Revelation 20:10-14) Happy is the man who, instead of contending with his Maker, humbles himself contritely at His feet; and then, as a confessedly guilty sinner, casts himself upon His sovereign mercy revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A.06 WHAT'S WRONG WITH MAN?

WHAT'S WRONG WITH MAN?

Certainly there is something radically wrong with man, and that universally. In the political world, the nations are filled with mutual distrust, each suspecting the other of the most evil designs; party leaders, too, abhor and denounce each other as wreckers of the public good. In the commercial sphere, every man considers he must sharpen his wits, or someone will take an unfair advantage of him. In the social circle it is notorious that envy, jealousy, and hypocrisy abound on every side. And if we take the merest glance at the religious realm it is manifest there is much there in doctrine and practice, in both leaders and followers, that is not as it should be.

No doubt there are those who endeavour to persuade themselves that things are not as bad as we have represented them. So obsessed are they with the notion that the world is improving, and that man is all the time struggling upward that they are tempted to close their eyes to ugly facts, or at least to minimise their importance. But the facts are there, spite of theorists and faddists of every kind. The world is a great open sore, let dreamers speak as they may.

It used to be suggested that if men's temporal circumstances were bettered the moral condition of things would improve. The idea was foolish from the first, and carried its refutation upon its face. If education and comfort can do so much for man, then surely the higher classes should always have been the very mirror of virtue. Yet, as everyone knows, these classes have generally been the most corrupt of all God's creatures. Now there has been a tremendous betterment of the circumstances of all ranks and conditions during the past century, but with what result? Are men really more truthful more obedient, and more generally disposed to be holy than formerly? Instead of this being so is it not the fact that the world was never more full of refined devilry than at the present hour?

What is wrong with man? Surely God did not make him as we see him? Scripture says, God made man upright (Ecclesiastes 7:2; Ecclesiastes 7:9). An infinitely holy Creator could not have made him otherwise. It was an absolutely perfect being that came forth from the divine workshop at the beginning. Some thing then has happened which has resulted in the moral ruin of our race. What is it? Let the humiliating story of Genesis 3:1-24 supply the answer. In that chapter we have no mere allegory or fairy tale, but God's soberly indicted account of the entrance of sin into man's world. The tempter has been heeded, the leadership of Satan has been accepted, and this accounts for all the evil of which the universe is full. The following Word of God is clear and emphatic, and withal sweeping in its charge: "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12). Man is thus a fallen being, in open rebellion against his Maker, with the death-sentence lying upon him in consequence.

This is what is wrong with man, and it is clearly a state of things beyond all creature aid. Philanthropists and legislators may alleviate some of the details of man's condition, but the root is

beyond them. The need is two fold. First, an absolutely new kind of life and nature. The Saviour said to one of the best of men, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). This is imperative for all who would dwell with God, flesh being irremediable. Then, in view of sins committed, there must be an atoning sacrifice. The one perfect offering of the Lord Jesus upon the cross of Calvary has met this deep need for all who believe in His name. "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). Christ is the only resource both for God and the sinner. He who examines the problem of the world's condition, while ignoring the fall, is on the wrong scent altogether; and he who would benefit his fellows, while leaving out of his scheme the new birth and the precious atoning blood, is pursuing a chimera hopelessly.

A.07 ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

If modern theology may be credited, there is no longer a Hell to be feared, nor is there in man that which must necessarily abide for ever. Satan, Hell, and the soul (as we have always understood these terms) have been practically eliminated from the text books of Christendom. To all this no objection could be offered, if there was any divine authority for such a revolution of thought and idea. Since the voice of God can only be heard in Holy Scripture, we must submit all human propositions, whether ancient or modern, to its arbitrament. He who is willing to take eternal risks on the dubious authority of the word of man should be an object of deep compassion to us all.

To Scripture then we turn. First, as to the word "eternal" (or "everlasting"); what does it mean?2 Corinthians 4:18 will suffice to answer the question. "The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." The eternal is here contrasted with the temporal. The temporal has an end; the eternal has no end. Now precisely the same word is used in Scripture to denote the divine Being (1 Timothy 1:17); the blessedness of believers (John 3:16); and the punishment of unbelievers (Matthew 25:46). God is eternal; the portion of believers is eternal; and the doom of unbelievers is eternal. All are alike without end.

To this it is sometimes objected that the wicked are to be "destroyed" or "perish," and that these terms indicate the absolute end of their being. But this is false, as a very little examination of the Scripture usage of these terms will show. "Destroyed" and "perish," it should be noted, are but different translations of one Greek word concerning which the lexicographers tell us that "its fundamental thought is not annihilation, but ruin, loss." Take a few examples. In

Luke 5:37 our Lord says if new wine is put into old bottles (or skins) the wine will burst the bottles, and the bottles will "perish." He did not mean that they would hence forward cease to exist in any form, the point is that as wineskins they would be marred and ruined. So in 1 Corinthians 8:12, where the apostle asks, "Shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died?" there is no suggestion that the weak one might pass out of being; but simply that, if not considerately treated, such an one might make shipwreck of his Christian testimony.

Even in our daily talk we never think of attaching the thought of annihilation to the words "destroy" or "perish." If I destroy a letter, or an article of furniture, I do not thereby annul their existence in any shape or form, but I so far annul them that they can never again be what they were formerly. The Saviour in Matthew 10:28 and John 10:10 expressly distinguishes between "kill" and "destroy." To "kill" is to take life, and in consequence the word is never used in Scripture of the soul. The reader is earnestly recommended to examine these two important passages carefully.

Scripture is explicit — terribly explicit — concerning the impenitent that "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever, and they have no rest day nor night" (Revelation 14:11). It insists, moreover, that "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:46). It declares, too, as one of the principles of God's moral governments that He will render "unto them that are

contentious; and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness — indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil" (Romans 2:8-9). The word "punishment," so often used in Scripture in this connection, "requires (as another has said) a conscious subject to endure it." It could have no possible meaning as applied to persons who have ceased to be.

No hope of change of condition, nor of extinction of being, was held out to the rich man by "father Abraham" (Luke 16:24) . The doctrines of universal salvation and of annihilation (so popular in our day) were quite unknown both to the one and the other. The man who had lived wholly for this world was solemnly told that he had received his good things, and that now a great gulf was fixed between himself and the blessed. His humble prayer for even a drop of water could not be granted.

We may well marvel at the madness of those who defy the Almighty to His face. In infinite love He sacrificed His beloved Son in order that men might not perish, but have everlasting life. Now, in the Gospel, He "commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Further than this even God could not well go, and those who reject or neglect the preached Saviour can expect nothing else than to reap the eternal consequences of their guilt and folly. In their case, grace being refused, the government of God must take its solemn course. To every man who may be disposed to argue and cavil instead of repent and believe, our counsel would be, "Escape for thy life, look not behind thee . . . lest thou be consumed" (Genesis 19:17) .

A.08 THE DEATH-SLEEP: WHAT IS IT?

THE DEATH-SLEEP: WHAT IS IT?

Among the many strange doctrines industriously spread abroad in our day is the unconsciousness of the soul after death. In support of this theory every Scripture passage which speaks of men falling asleep is pressed into service. When Scripture is freely quoted, the unreflecting are apt to be carried off their feet, in forgetfulness of the fact that Satan is as capable of using the sacred writings upon them as upon our Lord Himself in the wilderness (Matthew 4:6). Even the appeal to Scripture has therefore to be tested, in order to ascertain whether it is just and reasonable.

To our subject. Let us glance at the Saviour's case first. In John 20:17 we hear Him saying: "I am not yet ascended unto My Father." This was after His resurrection, and yet on the day of His death He entered into Paradise, taking with Him the repentant thief according to His gracious promise (Luke 23:43). How are these things to be reconciled? Simply by recognising the distinction between soul and body. In the disembodied condition both the Saviour and His saved one passed into Paradise at the moment of death; while in body the Saviour did not reach heaven's glory until six weeks later, when He ascended from Olivet in view of His disciples. In Psalms 16:9-10 so also, where the Lord Jesus speaks prophetically, the distinction between "My flesh" and "My soul" is clearly indicated.

Take the case of Stephen next. After his martyrdom, devout men carried him to his burial, and made great lamentation over him, yet a little before we hear him saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59; Acts 8:2). Obviously it was his body that men buried, but while men wept over it below his spirit was already in the blessedness of his Master's presence above.

If the Scriptures be read without prejudice it will be perceived that the term "sleep" is always used in connection with the body, never in connection with the soul. Thus after our Lord's resurrection "many BODIES of the saints which SLEPT arose" (Matthew 27:52). The expressions so frequently used in the Old Testament that such and such a person "slept with his fathers" and "was buried with his fathers" have reference to the body only; and follow each other in natural sequence. The SLEEPING body was BURIED. The expression "gathered to his people" may possibly have a larger meaning, perhaps indicating that the departed one had joined his forefathers in the unseen world.

What had Paul in view when he said; "to depart and to be with Christ is far better," and "to die is gain"? (Php_1:21-23). Surely he was not yearning for two thousand years of senselessness? How could this be "far better" than the enjoyment of the love of Christ in the midst of labour here? But he himself tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:8 that to be "absent from the body" is to be "present (or, at home) with the Lord." This should suffice to put Paul's blissful experience at this hour beyond all dispute.

Naturally the story of the rich man and Lazarus is hotly assailed by those who insist upon the sleep of the soul (Luke 16:19-31). It is regarded as the citadel of the position against which they revolt,

and therefore it must be reduced by any means possible. But the waves of unbelief may lash themselves against it ever so furiously; it stands nevertheless. Call the story a parable if you please (though the Saviour does not), there you have men in the world of spirits the reverse of unconscious — fully alive to the sensations of bliss and woe. Moreover, this is not the only Scripture passage which represents men in conversation in the spirit world; Isaiah 14:9-11; Ezekiel 32:21 are as explicit, if not as graphic, as Luke 16:19-31. The rich man "died and was buried"; that is, his body. Next we are told: "In hell (Hades) he lifted up his eyes, being in torments"; that is, his soul. The body was in the tomb; but his soul was in Hades. Let us not seek to evade the plain force of this; it is wiser far to take home to our souls the lesson divinely intended. The conclusion of the matter is this, that when the border-line is crossed, the disembodied soul passes forthwith into conscious bliss or woe; though it is admitted that neither saved nor lost reach their final consummation until the resurrection day is over. Let us not fail to remember that that which marks the line of demarcation between saved and lost is faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and in His precious atoning blood.

A.09 THE MILLENNIUM: MAN'S WORK, OR GOD'S?

THE MILLENNIUM: MAN'S WORK, OR GOD'S?

The idea of a Millennium is more or less familiar to the minds of people throughout Christendom. It crops up repeatedly in literature and in politics; sometimes even in trade advertisements. The general conception is a golden age of prosperity, wherein all perplexing problems, whether religious, social, or political, will find their complete solution. Some, it is true, regard the idea of a Millennium as dreamy and Utopian; others, again, consider that education, legislation, etc., are steadily leading up to the longed-for consummation.

It cannot be denied that Holy Scripture predicts a golden age for this poor tempest-tossed world. In the inspired pages we read that in that era "there shall be abundance of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains," and "the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock" (Psalms 72:16; Isaiah 65:25). What prosperity! What peace! And such passages could be multiplied indefinitely.

The question before us in this article is, whose hand will bring in this ideal condition of things? Is the Millennium man's work, or God's? Man's hand has certainly caused the ruin that we all deplore, but is man's hand able to repair it? Can the philanthropist with his humanitarian schemes, the scientist with his discoveries, the legislator with his remedial measures, or the diplomatist with his international treaties, even contribute to the final blessed result? Can any or all of these bring us one real step towards the desired haven? Unhesitatingly we answer, NO. God is our only hope. His plans are already formed, and they are clearly quoted in His Word. At His right hand on high sits a Man, who was despised and rejected of men at His first coming to earth, and who is to this hour still emphatically refused by men at large. Under His feet God has pledged Himself to place everything in full subjection (Hebrews 2:8). He has said; moreover "that He shall put down all rule, and all authority and power" (1 Corinthians 15:24). Even before His incarnation, the voice of prophecy addressed Him thus: "Jehovah shall send the rod of Thy strength out of Zion; rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies" (Psalms 110:2). Towards the accomplishment of these predictions no divine step has yet been taken. The Son of Man still sits in patience at God's right hand, and heaven is quiescent as regards the public affairs of earth. The moment will come when Jehovah will say to His Anointed; "Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession," but He has not said this yet (Psalms 2:8).

To put it plainly, what will happen is as follows. At a moment when men least expect it, the heavens will be rent asunder, and the Son of Man will appear as with lightning flash (Luke 17:24). He will be accompanied by all His believing people (previously caught up to Him in the air), and attended by myriad hosts of angels (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10). All opposition however considerable from the creature point of view, will melt before Him, and Jehovah will establish Him upon His destined throne in Zion (Psalms 2:6). Every knee will be constrained to bow to Him, and every tongue will confess His title.

The Millennium is thus the age when the Christ of God will at last receive His rights. This is "man's day," as the margin of 1 Corinthians 4:3 so expressively, tells us; THAT is "the day of the Lord." Now the will of man runs riot in the earth; THEN the will of the Lord will alone be done. "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day" (Isaiah 2:17).

There can thus be no Millennium without Christ. Every scheme which leaves Him out of the account must necessarily be futile. Men's devices can only serve to hasten on the last great smash. Were it possible for man to bind up his own wounds, he would only become more proud and independent of God than ever. It is God's purpose to put the reins into the hands of His Son. Then will the nations get perfect administration; every created thing upon the earth; man and beast alike, will be set free from the thraldom of corruption; and even nature's barren spots will be rejuvenated. But the great King's first steps will be the staining of all human glory, and the dethronement and imprisonment of the usurper Satan. A solemn beginning, which will yield the most happy results while the blissful age rolls on.

A.10 THE PERSONALITY OF SATAN.

THE PERSONALITY OF SATAN.

No Bible student would dream of defending all the grotesque representations of Satan, in poetry, prose and picture, with which Christendom has so long been afflicted. Our inquiry just now is as to the personality of the great adversary, for it is being gravely asserted in some quarters that he is not a living being at all, and that the whole mass of Scripture teaching concerning him must be read allegorically, as applying to a mere principle of evil. Certainly, if Satan is indeed a personality, he must be credited with a masterpiece of ingenuity in so far as he has succeeded in persuading his victims that he has no existence at all! A good preparation, surely, for a great victory!

In this short article we shall deal principally with our Lord's relations with Satan during His sojourn upon earth. First, let us consider the forty days' experience which followed the Saviour's baptism. Both Matthew and Luke state with the gravest details that He was tempted in the wilderness by the devil; Mark also alludes to the fact, but passingly. The very words of the adversary are given, including his quotation of Scripture; and his actions are described in setting our Lord upon the pinnacle of the temple, and in showing Him from a mountain-top all the Kingdoms of the world and the glory of them in a moment of time. If these are not the motions of a PERSON, then we know not how to read a single passage in the book of God.

If the story of the temptation in the wilderness is not sober fact, then surely nothing can be safely credited in the entire Bible. Another thing: if the temptations came not from a person distinct from our Lord Himself, then they must have proceeded, like many of our own sinful promptings, from some evil principle in His own heart! Such an alternative is too horrible for words, for it deprives us at one stroke of our Saviour! The tempted One was in that case only a man like ourselves plagued with a sinful nature, and consequently quite incompetent to make atonement for others. Let us not deceive ourselves. The query as to the personality of Satan is a blow at the Son of God, as indeed is every mischievous doctrine that was ever presented to the minds of men.

To proceed. The Pharisees once wickedly suggested that in the performance of His miracles, the Saviour was operating in collusion with Satan. This He rebutted by showing the absurdity of Satan casting out Satan, and to this He added a parable wherein He likened the foe to a strong man, and Himself to a stronger vanquishing him (Matthew 12:22-30). Moreover, before He entered the garden of Gethsemane on that last night, He said to His disciples: "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me" (John 14:30). Surely such words can have no other meaning than that the Saviour was meeting a personal foe!

The future of Satan is so graphically described in the Apocalypse that it should suffice of itself to satisfy every honest mind that a person is intended. In Revelation 12:1-17 we behold him cast out of the heavens into the earth (in the midst of the Antichristian period); and in Revelation 20:1-15 we see him, first shut up in the bottomless pit for 1,000 years; then, the reign of the Son of Man nearing its end, he is released for a little season; next, provoking a revolt against earth's

rightful King, he is deprived of his liberty for ever by being cast into the lake of fire. If any reader can see nothing more in such detailed statements than the extirpation of an evil principle; it is to be feared he is beyond the reach of both Scripture and reason. Could an evil principle be "tormented day and night for ever and ever"? (Revelation 20:10).

It will thus be perceived that the denial of the personality of Satan is no light matter. By it the Son of God stands dishonoured in reference to the period of His temptation; and moreover, by it the Bible is discredited throughout. For none can dispute that from Genesis to Revelation the ways and words of the great adversary are recorded, the opening chapters of the book of Job going the length of reporting verbatim two conversations between him and the Creator. It would be necessary to tear the whole Bible to pieces in order to get rid of the doctrine of Satan, the great antagonist of both God and man.

A.11 THE STORY OF JONAH: NEED I BELIEVE IT?

THE STORY OF JONAH: NEED I BELIEVE IT?

The question is more serious than appears at first sight, for it involves everything of a miraculous character that is recorded in the Old and New Testaments. If one miracle may be discredited we cannot upon any reasonable principle accept any, especially as all come to us upon exactly the same authority. What then becomes of Christianity, which is founded upon miracles of the profoundest character? What greater marvels can be conceived than the Virgin-birth of our Lord, and His glorious resurrection? If these may be safely believed, we need have no difficulty about lesser wonders; but if the momentous facts just named are indeed no facts at all, then woe unto us, for salvation becomes impossible. There is nothing before us but eternal ruin.

Now in regard to Jonah and his sojourn in the fish's belly, we ask, "From whom have we received the story? Who is the author of it?" In reality, everything turns upon this. I could believe the most extraordinary story if it were related to me by one in whom I had full confidence; while I might be dubious concerning the simplest narrative if brought to me by a person upon whose word I could not rely. Who, then, is the author of the story, of Jonah? The answer is really very simple — the Holy Spirit of God is the author of it (whoever the penman), as of all else in Scripture. This statement may evoke a smile on the part of some in these days of widespread unbelief, but it is true, nevertheless. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). "Men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21). These statements, while perfectly true of the whole canon of Scripture, have special reference to the Old Testament (and, let us remember, Jonah is an Old Testament book). The 39 books which begin with Genesis and end with Malachi were in the hands of the Jewish people in their complete form long before the Son of God entered the world. They never confounded the Apocrypha nor any other writings with the sacred books. The Lord Jesus frequently endorsed the Jewish canon in its threefold division, " the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms" (Luke 24:44), and has thus made Himself personally responsible for it before all the world.

Further, He most emphatically endorsed the story of Jonah. He spoke of the three days and three nights in the fish's belly as prophetic of His own impending descent into death and the grave; He spoke also of the prophet's preaching, and of the humble repentance of the Ninevites, contrasting the latter sadly with the obduracy of His own hearers (Matthew 12:39-41). Clearly to the Lord Jesus these things were not allegories, but facts. Historical facts may on occasion be used allegorically, as the apostle used the story of Hagar and Ishmael in Galatians 4:21-31, but they are nevertheless facts still.

It is sometimes asked: "But does it really matter whether we believe the story of Jonah or not? Is there anything spiritual involved in it?" It is not too much to say that the whole of Christianity is involved, in the truth or otherwise of that story. The same voice which said when on earth, "Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly," also said, "God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have

everlasting life" (John 3:16). If I may not trust the first of these utterances, how may I trust the second? I would go even further. If His word may not be taken about a simple matter of fact, how can I rely upon it when eternal issues are in the balance? He who doubted the word of his neighbour about a comparatively small matter, and yet trusted it in a matter of vital importance would be accounted a fool.

Let us not deceive ourselves. The real question is not as to Jonah, but as to Christ, and this the arch deceiver knows right well. He who rejects the Jonah story will, unless grace intervene, ultimately reject everything else that is contained within the covers of his Bible. The infidel sneers now to be heard on every hand concerning Jonah are an insult both to the Holy Spirit who indited the story, and to the Son of God who publicly endorsed it. If these are not sins to be confessed in dust and ashes then I know not any.

A.12 THE BIBLE: FROM HEAVEN OR OF MEN?

THE BIBLE: FROM HEAVEN OR OF MEN?

A great question was agitating the minds of men in Israel when the Son of God came to earth. John the Baptist was in the land, thundering at the consciences of all, and claiming to have a divine mission. The people at large regarded him as a true prophet, and many bowed humbly at his words; but their leaders treated him very differently. They did not openly reject him, denouncing him in terms as not of God, yet they were not at all disposed to acknowledge him. The Saviour's challenge to Israel's spiritual guides was therefore very pertinent: "The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?" (Luke 20:4). Their reply exposed at once their wickedness and their incompetency.

A similar question is before men's minds to-day. It is not now as to John, but as to the Bible. A book is in our hands, with the highest pretensions to a divine mission. The challenge therefore comes to us: "If it be from heaven, or of men?" If it be from heaven, the enquiry very naturally follows: "Why do ye not then believe it?" (Matthew 21:25). But if the Bible be of men, let us relegate it to the museum as a curious relic of an ignorant past.

Some will say, "But the Bible states such impossibilities! An ass speaking, walls falling down flat," etc. Pray, from what standpoint do we reason when we pronounce things impossibilities? Is it simply from the standpoint of our present-day experiences? If so, we are manifestly very foolish. Suppose the Bible had spoken of men navigating the air in Noah's day; only fifty years ago one might on this principle, have said it could never have been. But how is it in the year 1910? Because I have never met angels walking the earth, am I wise in saying they never walked here? One has only to bring GOD in, and the greatest marvel becomes simplicity itself. "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

One of the greatest of Scripture miracles is prophecy. I do not refer to that which is still unfulfilled (a most edifying study), but to that which has already been accomplished. Whatever date captious critics may choose to assign to the books of the Old Testament, it is undeniable that they were all in the hands of the Jewish people before the Saviour's birth. Yet the prophets testified beforehand so many things concerning Him that a life of Christ could be constructed from their writings. They predicted His birth of a virgin, they named the village in which He should be born, they described His ministry and His miracles, foretold His residence in Galilee, His rejection by both Israel and the Gentiles, His betrayal, death, resurrection, and ascension. Is not all this previous testimony [a] miracle? If not, what is it?

The great effort of today is to exclude God from everything. We may not even regard Him as our Creator now (save in mere terms). We are but developed apes, the fruit of a law which no one understands, and which manifestly has no continuity, for no Scientist pretends that man is still developing towards some higher form of being. God excluded from both His Word and His works! Where are we getting to?

If the Old Testament writers were indeed the ignoramuses they are now proclaimed to be, so childishly simple as to pass on to us gravely as facts what after all are only legends, how comes it that their work still holds its unique place in Christendom? Is it not an insult to twentieth-century enlightenment? If the Bible is of men written with some measure of divine aid (its critics would probably admit this much), why does not the concentrated wisdom of to-day produce for us something distinctly in advance of it? Some measure of divine aid would as surely be granted to sincere writers now as of old. Why should "the old-fashioned and almost exploded truths of the Bible" (to quote a recent speech by a Bishop, as reported in the daily press) be still taken to the heathen if something better and higher can be provided? We have a right to demand a new work that shall once for all supersede the Bible in our homes and churches — a work in which our hearts may more safely rest than in the old Book. The critics have been destructive long enough; is it not time they became constructive?

The Bible in all its parts undeniably makes tremendous claims for itself. Moses felt so deeply the divine importance of his writings that he delivered them with all solemnity to the care of the priests, with instructions to read them periodically to the people, men, women and children alike (Deuteronomy 31:9-13) . Moreover, when the time should come for Israel to possess a King, he was "to write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear Jehovah his God," etc. (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). The sweet psalmist of Israel claimed divine inspiration when he said: "The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, and His word was in my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2). The prophets also with one consent spoke with the loftiest authority. Take the first of them: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for Jehovah hath spoken" (Isaiah 1:2). The minor prophets begin with "the word of Jehovah that came unto Hosea." Joel, Jonah, Micah, and Zephaniah open with almost identical words. Amos says five times over in his first chapter, "Thus saith Jehovah." Peter says of the whole of them, "Men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21, R.V.). Paul (in a passage upon the unfair handling of which in the Revised Version I would say much, if space permitted) says: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," i.e., "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). Concerning his own writings in particular, he tells us "We speak not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth. . . . If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 14:37).

Such are a few of the claims put forth in the Bible. If they are false claims, then let us reject the Book with the same indignation with which we reject the Koran and the Book of Mormon. No more dangerous book can be conceived than that which comes to us with exalted divine demands which have no real foundation. Any excellent things that may be found in such a book only render it the more to be feared.

We leave the matter at this point. "The Bible is it from heaven, or of men?" If the former as we reverently believe, woe to any man who would persuade us otherwise. He not only jeopardises his own soul, but ours also. Never was there a time when it was more important to turn away from the clamour of men to God Himself. As the apostasy draws on, our only safeguard is the Word of the living God. Men and their opinions and criticisms are as unstable as the shifting sand, but "the Word of the Lord endureth for ever" (1 Peter 1:25). To this, and to this alone, Paul commended the brethren when his public work was done (Acts 20:32).

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit

W W Fereday.

HIS DIVINE PERSONALITY.

HIS INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

HIS QUICKENING WORK.

A WELL OF WATER.

RIVERS OF LIVING WATER.

ADVOCATE AND TEACHER.

"RECEIVE YE THE HOLY GHOST."

THE DAY OF PENTECOST.

IN THE FLESH AND IN THE SPIRIT.

THE ANOINTING, SEAL AND EARNEST.

THE ONE BODY.

HIS WORK IN THE ASSEMBLY.

p Preface.

Preface.

These papers were written nearly 30 years ago as articles for a Magazine, now extinct, and they were afterwards reproduced in booklet form. Their simplicity and brevity made them acceptable and helpful to many, and the desire has frequently been expressed for a new Edition.

It is earnestly hoped that this re-issue will he blessed to the present generation of readers. No one will question the importance of the subject to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ.

Oxford,

August, 1923.

HIS DIVINE PERSONALITY.

HIS DIVINE PERSONALITY.

Man by all his searching cannot find out God; but what God has revealed in His word concerning Himself is for our adoring contemplation and study. But we do well to engage in such studies with reverence and godly fear. If there be a right attitude of soul toward God, and due subjection of spirit, our souls will be nourished, and our worship deepened; but if the mind be allowed to stray in any measure, or if we go in any wise beyond what is written, we are in jeopardy, as many have proved to their sorrow.

Scripture is most plain, whatever unbelief may say, that there are three distinct persons in the Godhead, equal in power, majesty, and glory, each taking His own part in all that is done, whether in creation or redemption, yet ever acting in perfect unity and communion.

It is interesting to observe that the Trinity was first clearly revealed at the baptism of the Lord Jesus. When coming up from Jordan, after having fulfilled all righteousness, the Father opened the heavens to Him, and expressed the delight of His heart in Him, and the Spirit descended in bodily form as a dove upon Him (Matthew 3:16-17)

What can be clearer to a simple mind than this! The Father speaks, the Son receives His testimony, and the Holy Spirit descends to seal and anoint Him. Three persons, yet but one God.

It is proposed to deal somewhat, if the Lord will, with the person and work of the Holy Spirit, particularly with His gracious operations during this period of privilege while the Lord Jesus is hidden in heaven at God's right hand. The personality of the Holy Spirit has been called in question by not a few, some speaking of Him as though He were a mere influence; others alas! sinking in their ideas lower still. Many also who truly love the Lord Jesus, and desire to have right thoughts, are often very vague as to the person and work of the Spirit of God.

On this occasion, I shall do little more than bring together some of the Scriptures which distinctly assert His personality and deity. We will let scripture speak for itself to our souls. Could the following be said of aught but a person! "I will send Him unto you." "When He is come." (John 16:7-8) "He shall testify of me" (John 15:6). "God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6). He is represented too, as striving with man (Genesis 6:3), revealing things to the saints (1 Corinthians 2:10; Luke 2:26), and He it was who sent forth Barnabas and Saul from Antioch to evangelise the Gentile world (Acts 13:2). Can any of these things be said of a mere influence! Moreover, He can be resisted (Acts 7:51), vexed (Isaiah 63:10), grieved (Ephesians 4:30) lied to (Acts 5:3), and, solemn to say, blasphemed (Matthew 12:31)

Further; Scripture declares He took a part in the birth, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The angel said to Mary, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). The Spirit of God was thus the antitype of the oil which formed one of the

ingredients of the meal offering, as it is said, "mingled with oil" (Leviticus 2:4).

Concerning the cross, we read that Christ "through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God" (Hebrews 9:14). Then, after having been put to death in the flesh," on the third day He was "quickened by the Spirit," "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead" (1 Peter 3:18; Romans 1:4). The last passage, I may say in passing, includes doubtless the resurrection of others as well as the Lord Jesus, as Lazarus, etc. But all these Scriptures speak to us of a person, beyond all dispute; and a divine person too, as I shall now proceed to show. The word of God declares His creatorship, His omniscience, His omnipresence, His sovereignty, and His equality with Father and Son.

(1) His creatorship. He had a part with the Father and the Son in all that was done; else what is the force of the passage, "By his Spirit he garnished the heavens"? (Job 26:13) As to the inferior [orders of] creation we read, "Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created" (Psalms 104:30). And to go back to the earliest record, the very first mention of divine activity in the six days' work is, "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" Genesis 1:2). What can be plainer!

(2) His omniscience. We read that "he searcheth all things, even, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10). We cannot do this. The Apostle shows that we should never have known God's depths had not the Holy Spirit come from heaven to be our Instructor.

(3) His omnipresence. David said, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" (Psalms 139:7). He felt that wherever he went, below or above, whether in darkness or light, the Spirit of God knew all his movements, and discerned the thoughts and intents of the heart. And in the present period of grace, does not one Spirit dwell and act in all the saints of God the world over?

(4) His sovereignty. 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 speaks of His manifestations in the saints for their mutual profit and the Lord's glory, and there we read, "dividing to every man severally as he will." This is a plain assertion of His sovereign action, and they are the losers who fail to understand and act upon it in faith.

(5) His equality. Though a distinct person, in no sense is the Holy Spirit inferior to the Father and the Son. All are co-equal and co-eternal. In concluding his second epistle to the Corinthians the Apostle links the Holy Spirit with God and the Lord Jesus Christ, in his salutation. And the departing Lord, in giving instructions to His disciples, bade them "teach all nations, baptising them in [unto] the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19).

Are not these divinely formed links? Who would venture to join with the Father and the Son one who was not divine? Faith may therefore rest assured that the Holy Spirit, whereof we speak, is a person, and properly and essentially divine.

Chapter 142

HIS INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

HIS INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

We have seen that the Spirit of God is a person, and that He is divine in the fullest sense of the term; we will now look at His gracious operations with regard to the Scriptures.

It is an unspeakable mercy in such a scene as this, with the Babel of human opinions on every hand, that our God has given us a perfect revelation of His mind and will in His own precious word. Where else could we turn for divine certainty? Where besides is there a solid rock for our feet? And whither, if not to scripture, could we turn for a sure and settled resting place? Possessing the word of God, we are thoroughly furnished; we have food for our souls, and light for our path.

Scripture is the work of the Holy Spirit. He it was Who guided each writer, whether in the Old Testament or the New, filling and taking possession of the vessel, holding in check all that would be of man, that we might have the mind of God in its perfection and purity without adulteration or alloy. Let us hold this firmly. Lack of decision is serious in such a matter. This is a day of loose thoughts as to Inspiration. Never was Satan more determined to wrest the Scriptures from souls than at the present time. Ritualism on the one hand places a priest between the word of God and the soul; Rationalism on the other, throws doubt on all that is revealed. Both systems, though in different ways, would rob us of the priceless treasure God has given.

1 Corinthians 2:10-14 furnishes valuable instruction concerning the connected subjects of Revelation and Inspiration. The Apostle reminds us of the word of Isaiah that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him;" adding, "but God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit." Here he asserts divine revelation is the source of the vital truths he taught. See also Ephesians 3:3-5 : By revelation he made known unto me the mystery (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy Apostles and prophets by the Spirit." The Apostle was the administrator of blessings not made known by God until his day. Such a truth as the union of the saints with the glorified Head in one body was hid in God until the Lord Jesus went on high and the Holy Ghost came down. Paul was the honoured vessel used for its communication — he had "visions and revelations of the Lord." It was his to fill up the word of God, i.e., to complete the subjects of which it treats (Colossians 1:25-26). Now no one can reveal the things of God but the Spirit of God. The Apostle asks, "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no one but the Spirit of God." As no one knows my things (or thoughts) but my own spirit, until I utter them or reveal them, so no one knows God's things but God's Spirit.

Nothing can be more degrading than the notion that God cannot reveal His mind to man. This is to lower God painfully. If the creature can communicate his thoughts to another, is it to be supposed that the Creator cannot do so?

Some men speak much of reason in connection with the word of God, but where is their reason to suppose such a thing of our God? The truth is that the Spirit has revealed the mind of God, and we have it in the Scriptures. Thus the apostolic writings are the standard whereby truth and error may be tested. As John says, "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (1 John 4:6).

But, as is often remarked, revelation does not go beyond the person receiving it; to pass the truth on in its perfection, to others requires divine Inspiration. Such is man, that even the favoured recipients of divine revelations could not be trusted to communicate them to others without marring them.

Here, therefore, the Spirit of God comes in again. Hence Paul tells us, "which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, communicating spiritual things by spiritual means" (1 Corinthians 2:13; compare J. N. Darby's translation). This is inspiration.

Here, too, we may see how far inspiration extends; concerning which many have vague thoughts. Some have taught that the doctrines of Scripture are inspired of God, but that the writers were allowed to express them in their own language; others, as Burnet, that the reasoning so often found, particularly in the epistles, was left to the writer; and yet others, as Paley, think them to have used their own illustrations, and to have selected their own O.T. references to confirm their words.

All such thoughts are below the truth, and the Scriptures are injured thus by those who sincerely desire to be its friends. The fact is, nothing was left to the vessel — the words, not merely the truths or doctrines, were given by the Holy Ghost. Were it otherwise, we could have no divine certainty. Where should we draw the line between the human and divine? And is it likely that all would agree as to the line to be drawn? Not that a human element is altogether denied. Paul has his style, and Peter his; for the Spirit took up the men as He found them; nevertheless, every word thus written was from Himself.

No one would be so foolish as to contend for the inspiration of a translation, unless it were the Trent fathers. In such efforts there may be (and are) blemishes, for God does not work perpetual miracles; and here the study of languages comes in as an important and valuable work. All that is asserted is, that the original writings, as sent forth by Matthew, etc., were inspired every word by the Spirit of God.

Just a few scripture proofs. As to the Old Testament, Peter says, "Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Also, he tells us that the Spirit of Christ was in them, testifying beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow (2 Peter 1:21; 1 Peter 1:11). Paul says in Acts 28:25, "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers," etc. Joel is quoted in Acts 2:17, as follows, "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith God. In Acts 3:18, we are told that God showed by the mouth of all His prophets that Christ should suffer. As to the Psalms, we find, "Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said" (Acts 4:25). And the Psalmist said of himself, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2). The Books of Moses are declared to be divinely inspired in such passages as Matthew 15:4, "For God commanded, saying," etc.

The New Testament, as well as the Old, is vouched for in the general statement of 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." The word "Scripture" I admit, merely means "writing," but it is the technical term for the sacred books, and understood as such. We are quite understood when we say "the Bible," which, after all, simply means "the Book." Consequently whatever comes under the heading of "Scripture" is inspired of God. Thus Paul's writings are vouched for, including (and I suppose specially referring to) the epistle to the Hebrews, in 2 Peter 3:16. Paul calls his epistles "Scripture" himself in Romans 16:25-26, where read "prophetic Scriptures," not "the Scriptures of the prophets." And in Timothy 1 Timothy 5:18, he quotes from Luke 10:1-42, and says "The scripture saith."

The book of Revelation is a singular one among the New Testament writings, but its character is clearly indicated in Revelation 1:2 : John "bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ — all things that he saw." Omitting the "and" before "all things," we learn that the visions vouchsafed to John were the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Let none, therefore, despise the book because of its symbolism.

These are but a small part of the proofs. Let the diligent soul search it out, and the more deeply the subject is investigated, the deeper will be the soul's confidence in God that He has given us by His blessed Spirit His unerring word in all its fullness and beauty.

In conclusion, one more thought remains to be noted in 1 Corinthians 2. We have seen that the chapter speaks of Revelation and Inspiration; it also lays down that the help of the Holy Ghost is needful in order to receive and understand the things that have been given.

This is why enemies stumble. Man's wit fails here. His learning is at fault, his powers are unavailing, apart from the Holy Ghost. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The soul must be born of God, and the Spirit must be the teacher; then all is simple and plain. He has come down from above to guide the saints into all the truth, and He never disappoints or fails the humble waiting soul.

Chapter 143

HIS QUICKENING WORK

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We have had before us the personality of the Holy Ghost and we have also considered His gracious work with regard to the Word of God. Now we will enquire into His work in the soul in producing new life towards God, where once sin and death reigned.

This is unfolded very simply in John 3:1-36. Nicodemus came to the Lord by night. He had been outwardly convinced by the miracles which the Lord was performing, as were many others in Jerusalem at that time (John 2:33). He came "by night," feeling instinctively that the world and Jesus were opposed, and that to be seen going to Him would bring down persecution, or at least reproach upon himself. He opened by saying, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him." The Lord met him instantly with the solemn statement, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee except a man he born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

How deeply humbling! What a check upon the thoughts of the ruler of the Jews! We learn here the solemn fact, that man in his natural condition, cannot perceive or understand the things of God. Privileges or advantages make no real difference. Nicodemus had many. He was not a profane or immoral man, nor was he even a Gentile. He was a Jew of high position as a teacher among his fellows, acquainted with the letter of Scripture, and, we have no reason to doubt, moral and religious. What fairer specimen of humanity can be supposed?

Saul of Tarsus was just such another. Read his account of himself in Philippians 3. Possessed of every natural, dispensational and religious advantage.

Some, perhaps, would have understood the matter better if the Lord had spoken of the new birth in John 4:1-54 instead of John 3:1-36. In John 4:1-54 He is seen dealing with an openly wicked woman at the well of Sychar. Not there, but here, does the Lord say, "Ye must be born again."

All must learn sooner or later that man's nature is altogether antagonistic to God, — altogether bad and corrupt before Him. It is not only that men have done bad things, but the very nature is bad beyond repair. Few accept this. We hear much in these days of improvement of man, of the raising of the masses, etc., but all this only shows that men have not accepted the verdict of God about themselves. If they did but bow to it, they would be thankful to be objects of God's sovereign grace and love.

But it remains true, in flesh dwells no good thing. Its mind is enmity against God, and they that are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 7:18; Romans 8:7-8). This admits of no appeal and no modification. A man must be born again, or he can never see or enter the kingdom of God.

But how is this brought about? Nicodemus could not tell, nor can many in this day, but the Lord Jesus explains. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit," etc. Here we have it in a few words. It is the direct work of the Spirit of God, acting by means of the

word of God upon the soul. Perhaps I need hardly say that "water" here is the figure of the word of God. Some have imported the idea of baptism into this chapter and the Lord's Supper into John 6:1-71. But Christian baptism was not instituted until after the Lord's resurrection, and the Lord's Supper not until the night of His betrayal. Consequently neither can possibly be found in the early chapters of John's Gospel.

The water is a symbol of the word of God, which the Jewish teacher should have understood from such Old Testament passages as Ezekiel 36:25, and Psalms 119:9. Christians have the thought confirmed in Ephesians 5:26 and John 15:3. The Spirit of God brings the word to bear upon the soul, convincing it of sin and revealing the Saviour dead and risen. To this the soul believingly bows, and thus a positive new life and nature is imparted. As we read in 1 Peter 1:1-25. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever." This is not an improvement of the old nature. By no means. That remains as evil as ever, to be kept under by the soul that has learnt deliverance through the death and resurrection of Christ. It is a life imparted that had no existence in the person before, enabling him now to sorrow for sin according to God, to believe the gospel, to love the Saviour, to pray and worship, and to love the ways of holiness and truth. It partakes of the nature of Him Who is its source — "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

This is not peculiar to Christianity. Ever since sin came into the world, men have been thus graciously wrought upon by the Holy Spirit. What is peculiar to this period is the Spirit's indwelling, of which we shall speak in another chapter; but His quickening operation in the soul is true at all times, irrespective of dispensational differences.

Still, the Lord says more in John 3:1-36 than could have been made known in Old Testament times; He speaks of eternal life. He had come from heaven to make God known and to show what suits Him and His presence, and He was the manifestation of eternal life. Eternal life was in Himself; yea, He was it, a life heavenly in its source and character, of which heaven is proper and suited sphere, but which is the enjoyed portion now of all who believe in the Son. The Son has been uplifted that life might be bestowed upon all who trust His name. It is not hereby denied that saints of old time had eternal life. But the life was not made known in its full and heavenly character until the only begotten Son came forth from the Father into the world.

Chapter 144

A WELL OF WATER.

A WELL OF WATER.

In John 4:1-54, the Spirit of God is presented under a figure. The Lord Jesus speaks of Him as a well of water within the believer, springing up into everlasting life.

It is to be observed that this instruction was given by Him, not in Jerusalem to a Pharisee, but to a woman of Samaria, by the well of Sychar. To the Pharisee, He said the solemn word, "Ye must be born again," and then proceeded to unfold the meaning of the new birth and the Divine Person by Whom it is brought about.

Here the circumstances are altogether different. The Lord is seen outside the circle of Judaism for the moment, and among the despised Samaritans. Why? Because of the enmity of the Jewish heart. He knew they were aware that His disciples were making and baptising many on His behalf; and knowing this would draw forth hostility, He withdrew from their midst. He went towards Galilee, and must needs go through Samaria. There He met the woman and ministered blessing to her soul, which resulted in blessing for many others also. If some reject His grace, their unbelief does not dry up, but diverts, the channel: others get it.

It is a picture in some sort, of the Lord's position at the present time. He is away from Israel because they have rejected Him and He is showing grace to the stranger. Here we come in. It is a lovely scene: a weary man by a well, yet withal, God manifest in the flesh, asking drink of a woman of Samaria. Why? Merely to satisfy His own need? Oh, no: He saw her need and meant to satisfy it out of the bounty of His grace. She had tried the world, but had found no rest for her heart. She had drunk deeper than most, but had proved it all to be vanity and vexation of spirit. She had found death in the pot at every turn.

The Lord meets her; He begins gently and graciously — "Give me to drink," — words as marvellous as "Let there be light." The Eternal Son asking drink of an outcast like her! She was surprised. To her He was a Jew; she a Samaritan. The two races had no dealings. The Jews hated the Samaritans as imitators of their worship and aliens in their land. He answered, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him and he would have given thee living water"(John 4:10). "The gift of God!" What glad tidings for a sinner! Not the law of God, which exacts, and curses all who fail to render its requirements; but God revealed as a giver. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." This is one of the first and greatest principles of Christianity. Do you know Him thus, dear reader? Or do you regard Him as an austere Person, reaping where He has not sown, and gathering where He has not strawed? (Matthew 25:24) If so, you are a stranger to our God. He delights to give, He has given His Son, He gives eternal life to all who believe, and all things besides (John 3:16; Romans 6:23; Romans 8:32)

And do you know the Son? The Lord said, "and Who it is." She did not know. She thought Him a mere Jew, until He proved Himself to be the Searcher of her heart. These are two essential

principles of Christianity — God known as a giver, and the knowledge of the Only Begotten Son.

Well, the Lord speaks of the gift of the living water. The woman did not understand. Her mind was so full of earthly things that she could not get above them. She spoke of the well, its depth, and His lack of a pitcher. How true it is that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God! (1 Corinthians 2:14) He referred to the gift of the Holy Ghost, soon to be the enjoyed portion of all who believe in His name. This is quite a distinct thing from quickening. The Spirit first acts on the man, implanting a new life, as John 3 shows; then after faith in the gospel, He takes up His abode within, and that for ever. This is peculiar to Christianity. The Spirit was not thus bestowed until Jesus was glorified, however He may have wrought in men from the first. This is a day of wondrous privilege. Would that all our hearts grasped it! Redemption being accomplished, the Son is in heaven, glorified as man at the right hand of God, and the Spirit is here, God's priceless gift to all who really believe in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Let us look further. "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." A thirsty Christian is an anomaly. The Spirit is the seal to us of fullness of blessing. Having come from the glory into which Christ has gone, He assures us of sins put away, of righteousness completed, of acceptance, of sonship to the Father, and of liberty of access to the presence of God on high. All that was merely promised of old, as righteousness, salvation, etc., is ours now. The work is done, the Holy Ghost has come, all is made good to the souls of those who believe. How can we then thirst? I find a good deal of thirsting in the Psalms and in the Prophets; but I do not turn there for proper Christian experience. It is the language of souls under law, before redemption, and before the accomplishment of God's promises of grace. Those who are sealed with the Spirit of God have nothing left to desire, save to enjoy simply and fully what has been given.

But more — the Lord speaks of a well of water springing up into everlasting life. It is the Spirit acting as a living power in the Christian. As water always rises to its own level, so does the new man, led by the Spirit, ever rise up to God. What holy exercise should we be capable of apart from the Holy Ghost? He is the power of worship. He leads the soul beyond such systems as Jerusalem or Gerizim, up to the Father (where He is), in worship in spirit and in truth. The Father seeketh worshippers. Wondrous thought! Once He sought us as sinners. Having found us as such, He now seeks us in a new way. Do we respond?

The Spirit is the power of prayer. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought"; hence we read of "praying in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 8:26; Jude 1:20). He identifies Himself with us in all our circumstances, forming our thoughts, and drawing us forth suitably in prayer and intercessions.

How could we bring forth fruit without Him? (Galatians 5:22-23.) Or how could we serve effectually apart from His power? (Romans 15:19). In every way He acts within us on earth to form us after the pattern of Christ, that we may be to His honour in this scene.

Chapter 145

RIVERS OF LIVING WATER.

RIVERS OF LIVING WATER.

In John 7:1-53 the Spirit of God is brought before us again under the figure of Living Water, but the circumstances and instruction for our souls are different.

The feast of Tabernacles had come round, and all were going up to Jerusalem to keep it. It is noticeable in John's gospel that the feasts are always called "the feasts of the Jews" (John 2:13; John 6:4; John 7:2; John 11:55), whereas in Leviticus 23:1-44 they are declared to be "the feasts of Jehovah." This altered way of speaking of them is not without meaning; they had become mere forms; they were no longer occasions when loyal hearts gathered up to God's centre, because moved by a sense of His goodness. This had faded completely, and the feasts had degenerated into merely ritualistic observances. There was no longer anything in them for God.

The Lord's brethren urged Him to go up to the feast, to avail Himself of the opportunity of making Himself known to the world (John 7:1-5) They had no faith in His person. They saw not in Him the sent one of the Father, here for the accomplishment of the Father's will and glory. Their counsel was purely carnal; what else could be expected from them? The Lord did not go up when others did, but in the midst of the feast He went up, as it were in a private way. He went up, not to join in the hollow rejoicings of the season, but to meet the longing of any individual seeker who might happen to be among that religious crowd.

The feast of Tabernacles was a memorial of Israel's passage through the wilderness, and typifies the coming kingdom of Messiah when all Israel shall be restored, and be found in the land of their fathers, filled with the goodness of Jehovah. How solemn therefore, that the Lord Jesus should have to take His place entirely outside of its celebrations!

God hates mere forms. He cannot bear men who honour Him with their lips, while all the time their hearts are far from Him. Thus it was at Jerusalem. The feast was running its course; ritual was in full swing; all were filled with rejoicing; but the Son of God held Himself entirely aloof.

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink" (John 7:37). It is possible there were some thirsty souls in the throng. Hearts in whom divine craving has been created by the Holy Spirit cannot be satisfied with the mere forms of religion. These satisfy flesh. Too often they serve as a veil to hide from the soul its true condition in the sight of a holy God. Flesh loves religion, and the more pompous it is the more it is loved. But true hearts want something more; whether they know it or not, Christ alone can satisfy them. Here we see the rejected Jesus outside all the display and religiousness of the hour, inviting any thirsty souls to come to Him and drink. What these could not find in mere religion, they would find in Him. And is it not so to-day? Can all the carnal forms and display of Christendom slake the thirst of a soul who is feeling after God? Nay, they keep the soul at a distance; they cast a cloud over it, and plunge it into distress and doubt. But Jesus can satisfy every longing. He is still outside. Those who really seek Him must go forth to Him without the camp, as Hebrews 13:13

speaks. Having found Him the heart is divinely satisfied. It never thirsts again. How can one thirst, knowing deliverance and acceptance, being assured of the Father's love, enjoying liberty of access to God through the rent veil, filled with the Holy Ghost, and taken up with Christ?

The Lord adds more. "He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:38-39). Here we have more than satisfaction for our souls, the gift of the Holy Spirit as an overflowing power. Observe, there could be no such thing until Jesus was glorified. He had received the Spirit personally at Jordan, as an expression of the infinite delight of the Father in Him; but He must go into death and accomplish redemption ere He could receive the Spirit in a new way for those who believe in His name (Luke 3:22; Acts 2:33).

Having thus the Spirit of God, we are responsible to be channels of blessing while passing through this arid scene. But I must be satisfied myself, yea, more than satisfied, ere I can impart to others. I cannot give away if I have not enough myself. What a test for all our hearts! Have we enough? Have we found in Christ risen and glorified sufficient to satisfy every desire of our souls? He was enough for Paul, everything else in comparison was as loss and dung (Php_3:1-8). "Freely ye have received, freely give." All around are needy souls. The world cannot meet their need, religion cannot meet it; those who have the truth can, by presenting Christ in all the glory of His person and the efficacy of His work. But it must flow from the inward parts, or but little blessing will result. That which comes from the head, while it may please the ear and charm the intellect, leaves the poor famished soul where it was before, unsatisfied, unfed. May the Spirit of God work so uninterruptedly in us all, ministering Christ to our souls, that we may overflow in happy, holy service, to the Lord's glory, and the blessing of man.

Chapter 146

ADVOCATE AND TEACHER.

ADVOCATE AND TEACHER.

In John 14:1-31 we are in a sensibly different atmosphere. The Lord uses figures no longer, but speaks directly of the Spirit of God as a divine person, Whom He would send from the Father after His own ascension on high. The communications of John 13:1-38, John 14:1-31, John 15:1-27, John 16:1-33 are always precious to the believer's heart. The Lord was just about to leave His own. The hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father. Before doing so (and His pathway lay through death), He gathered His disciples around Him in Jerusalem, and put the facts of their new position before them, or as far as it was possible to do so at that time. He promised to return and introduce them into the Father's house. He promised to manifest Himself to them in a spiritual way, as a result of their keeping His word, and (what is particularly before us now) spoke to them of the other Comforter, Whom He would pray the Father to send.

John 14:16-17. The Spirit could not come until Jesus was gone. He was not given to all Old Testament believers, as now to all who are Christ's. Redemption must be accomplished, and Christ must be glorified as man at the right hand of God, ere such a gift could be granted to the saints. The work is done, Jesus has gone, and the Comforter is present. The word rendered "Comforter" here (Paraclete) is the same as that rendered "Advocate" in 1 John 2:1. It means one who takes up the cause of another, and who pledges himself to see us through all our difficulties. What a provision for our souls in such a world as this? The Spirit has come to abide for ever, in contrast with the Lord Jesus, Who was only with His disciples for a short time and then returned to the glory. The world cannot share in this. Some have taught otherwise, but the scripture is very plain to a simple mind. The Spirit has not become incarnate, like the Son, therefore the world cannot see Him, neither does it know Him. "But ye know him," the Lord says, "for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." This is true Christian knowledge and experience. But how many fall short of it! How much real unbelief there is abroad as to the personal presence of the Divine Spirit! Many in this day pray for His outpouring, or for a fresh baptism, while others dread lest He should leave them because of their shortcomings and failures. But He is to be with us for ever; the righteous basis being the sacrifice of Christ.

John 14:26. The Lord promised the disciples also that He should be their Teacher, and bring all things to remembrance that He had said to them. Much that the Lord told them they could not understand then, but when the Spirit came, what a flood of light was thrown back upon all the gracious communications of the Lord Jesus!

John 15:26-27. Coming from the glory, He would bear witness to Christ. He would bear testimony to the glory into which He has entered for us, that our souls might be formed by it. What could we know of this but for Him? What could Rebekah have known of Isaac and his father's house, had not Eliezer told her, who came from thence? The Spirit loves to bring before us the blessedness which is now His, and to assure our hearts that all is ours because we are in Him before God. He would use the disciples also. They knew all the facts of the Lord's life and should bear testimony to

all the things they had seen and heard. We know how this enraged the Jewish rulers, in the Acts of the Apostles.

John 16:7-15. Now the Lord goes a step further. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is expedient for you that I go away." Filled as they were with Jewish thoughts, this was inexplicable to them. His going away seemed rather incalculable loss. They looked for a kingdom of glory on earth, for the restoration of Israel's scattered tribes, and for all that the Old Testament prophets had spoken of to the fathers. They knew not yet that His death and resurrection would inaugurate a new order of blessing, heavenly in character, of which the indwelling Spirit is the Divine Seal. God has brought in an altogether better thing than the kingdom, though He will not disappoint faith as to that in its day. Souls who believe in the Son while He is thus hidden in heaven, are privileged to know the blessedness of accomplished redemption, of sonship with the Father, and of union with the exalted Lord as members of one Body. All this could not be known until Jesus went away and the Spirit of God came down. His presence here is solemn as regards the world. He convicts it of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement. The world's greatest sin is its rejection of Christ; and this the Spirit presses. Righteousness is only to be seen in Christ at God's right hand — there is none here. Judgement has been pronounced, because the prince of the world is judged, and the world and its chosen prince are to share it together. Judgement is not yet executed, but will fall when God's present purpose of grace is completed.

As regards the saints, the Spirit is the guide into all truth. He is the Spirit of truth. The Lord had many things to say but the disciples could not bear them then. They were not in a position to enter into the circle of truths which we call Christianity, until the Spirit came. But now we are fully furnished. We have the complete word of God, Paul being used to complete its subjects, and we have the Holy Spirit to unfold it to our hearts. Why is it, that in very many cases the souls of the Lord's people are so lean? Why do such a number fail to apprehend the mind of God as unfolded in the Scriptures? Because man is so generally looked to, to the overlooking of the Spirit of God. He may use means to lead on our souls; indeed this is His usual method. Gifts have been given, teachers among others, that we may grow up into Christ in all things; but such must ever be regarded as but vessels of the Spirit. The Spirit is the true Guide; our dependence must ever be upon Him.

Chapter 147

"RECEIVE YE THE HOLY GHOST."

"RECEIVE YE THE HOLY GHOST."

The Lord was now risen. His mighty work was accomplished. He was now alive from the dead to die no more. He had laid down His life for God's glory and for our redemption, and had taken it again in resurrection. God had shown Him the path of life, and He was soon going into His presence, where there is fullness of joy; to His right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore.

But first, the Lord shows Himself to His own. Mary Magdalene has the joy of hearing His blessed voice once more, causing her to dry up all her tears, and changing her lamentations into divine rejoicing (John 16:20-22).

It was the first day of the week. The Sabbath (an high day just then with the Jews) He had spent in the grave. Now He comes forth to inaugurate a new order of things on the ground of His precious and perfect sacrifice. The old order was now judicially done with; God no longer owned it. Judaism was an empty house. The Lord finds His own gathered together (John 20:19-23). They feared the Jews, and so assembled, as it were, in secret. Contrast with this their boldness in the presence of the enemy after the descent of the Holy Ghost. But the Spirit had not yet come, hence we observe only the weakness and timidity of poor human nature. The doors were shut. The Lord came and "stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." Precious words from the lips of the risen Jesus! Glorious proof that all the work was done! "He Came and preached peace." He had drunk the cup of wrath for them (and for us), little though they understood it at the time. He had stood in the breach, and met and endured in His most holy person all that was due from a righteous God against sin. All this being past, every question having been righteously settled, He is able to speak "peace" to His own.

And not only so, but He showed them His hands and His side. The memorials of Calvary were not effaced, nor will they ever be. The adoring disciples could see with their very eyes something of what the Blessed One had passed through in deepest love to their souls. His incarnation was not sufficient to make peace. Death must be endured, His blood must be shed. He has made peace by the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20).

"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." This is not needless repetition; He was giving them a commission now. His Father had sent Him into the world for His glory, and to bear witness to the truth. His work was done, and He was about to resume His place at the Father's right hand. But He never leaves Himself without a witness; therefore the disciples must take His place in this scene. Mark carefully their place and ours. Taken out of the world, heavenly persons because associated with Christ, sent into the world to bear witness for Him. Such is our place and business here: would that all our hearts realised it more! In connection with the commission, then, the Lord says, "Peace be unto you." Amid all the disturbances and trials of this hostile scene, we are privileged to enjoy, not only peace with God as to our sins, but the peace of Christ filling our hearts (John 14:27; Colossians 3:15)

"And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." What is this! Clearly not yet the gift of the Spirit as a divine person to abide with them: for He said to the same disciples some days later, "Ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence," "ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you"; and He told them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to "wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:1-26). The Spirit came from heaven in fulfilment of this on the day of Pentecost; not before. To understand these words of the Lord in John 20:1-31 it is necessary to refer to Genesis 2:7. There we have the Lord God first forming the man's body of the dust of the ground, then breathing into his nostrils the breath of life. Here then, we have the Lord breathing His own risen life by the Holy Ghost into His disciples. They were converted men before, beyond all question; now they partake of the great blessing peculiar to Christianity, the risen life of the victorious Son of God. Let it be distinctly understood that all the saved from the very beginning of time have had divine life in their souls communicated to them by the Holy Spirit, but it could not be said of saints before the cross that they were partakers with a risen Christ. This is "life more abundantly," as the Lord speaks in John 10:10. The possession of this places us in Him beyond death and judgement. It is a life that Satan cannot touch, and that we cannot forfeit. It is heavenly in its character, and eternal in its nature. Heaven is its proper and suited sphere.

The difference between the Spirit as life and His personal indwelling may be seen in Romans 8:1-11 we have Him presented as characterising our life and relationship to God, instilling Himself into all our thoughts and feelings; in Romans 8:12-27 He is spoken of as a distinct person dwelling within us, bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, groaning within us, and leading us out in prayer according to God.

The words of the Lord in John 20:23 should be carefully weighed. "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." This is supposed by some to mean priestly absolution. Need I say that there is no such thing in Christianity? A priestly class now is a denial of the work of Christ. All believers are equally priests unto God (1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 1:6). The Lord's words refer to reception and discipline in the assembly, and should be compared with Matthew 16:18-19; Matthew 18:18; Matthew 18:20.

When the assembled saints receive a person, whether out of the world, or for restoration after exclusion, they "remit" his sins; and when one is put away, as the wicked Corinthian, they "retain" his sins. But this is administrative for the earth, and must be distinguished from the eternal forgiveness of the soul.

Chapter 148

THE DAY OF PENTECOST.

THE DAY OF PENTECOST.

This was a wonderful day in the history of the ways of God. Redemption was now accomplished. Christ was glorified as Man at His right hand. The moment had come for God to give effect to His counsels formed before the world was. Accordingly the Spirit of God descended according to the promise of the Lord Jesus. The disciples are shown as a waiting company. They had been bidden to tarry in Jerusalem until endued with power from on high. The day of Pentecost had come, and they were gathered together with one accord in one place. It was the first day of the week, the formal meeting day of those who believe in Jesus, being the day of His glorious resurrection from among the dead.

While the disciples were assembled, "suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them" (Acts 2:2-3) Such was the manner of the descent of the Holy Ghost. Never had He come from heaven to dwell in and with the saints before. He had wrought in them, of course, producing in the first instance a sense of sin, then faith in the living God; but He had never been given of God as His seal upon any. He had come upon certain persons (as prophets, etc.) at times for special purposes, but the time had now come for something beyond all this. During the present period He dwells within every believer, making his body His temple. The blood having been shed and sprinkled, the oil has followed, to use the language of the type (Leviticus 8:1-36)

"But," it may be asked, "why should He come upon the disciples in the form of tongues of fire, when He descended upon the Lord Jesus as a dove?" The answer is to be found in the character of the recipients and the testimony they were called to bear. The Lord was here as the expression of God's grace and love. He came not to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Personally He was the meek and lowly One: what more apt emblem of this than a dove? As for the disciples, their testimony was of a very solemn, as well as blessed, character. The word of God through them, while it brought peace and blessing to all who received it, nevertheless judged all before it, and gave no quarter to anything of the first man. Their testimony was to branch out to both Jews and Gentiles, hence "cloven tongues."

The first effect of the Spirit's presence was that they "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Thus did God surmount the confusion brought in at Babel (Genesis 11:1-32), though the time had not come to do away with it altogether. He intended the gospel for every creature. The law was given in one language, and to but one people; but the gospel of God's grace, God's precious testimony concerning His Son, could not be thus limited. Gentiles and Jews were equally needy, and all should have the offer of the Saviour. This, however, the early Christians were slow to learn. They were ready enough to preach Christ to the children of Israel; but God had to specially intervene to make Peter open the door to the Gentiles, even though the commission was clear and plain (Acts 10; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). So slow are the hearts, even of

the Apostles, to take in the extent of God's thoughts of grace.

The tongues, I need hardly say, were miraculous. Peter and the others had not learned these languages, yet they were suddenly able to speak them. Who but God could have wrought this? It astonished the multitude. Being the feast of Pentecost, Jerusalem was full of Jews from all parts of the Roman empire, and they heard these men, who were manifestly all Galileans, declare in their own tongues the wonderful works of God. Some were honest, and enquired concerning the marvel. Cavillers were not wanting, as always, who attributed it to wine. The early hour of the day (the third) should have preserved them from such an insinuation, as Peter soon pointed out.

It was not fleshly excitement; it was divine power. A Divine Person had come down from the glory into which Christ had so recently entered; and was here to bear testimony to Him and His finished work. Thus it was that day. Peter was the chosen vessel. He had but recently denied his Lord with oaths and curses, but grace had fully restored him; and he was bold as a lion. He could even charge the Jewish people with the very sin of which he himself had been guilty (Acts 3:14). So reassuring is the grace of the Lord. Peter reminded the multitude of the prophecy of Joel. God had spoken of an out pouring of the Spirit, before the great and notable day of the Lord: need they wonder therefore at what had occurred. Then he brought home to their consciences their dreadful sin with regard to Jesus. They had rejected and slain Him, but God had raised Him up, and exalted Him. This he proves conclusively from their own Scriptures; for Peter could see the bearing of all these passages now that the Holy Ghost had come.

The result we know. Three thousand persons were saved and added to the little band. Thus was the church of God commenced, though the truth concerning it was not unfolded until Paul was called, some time later.

Chapter 149

IN THE FLESH AND IN THE SPIRIT.

IN THE FLESH AND IN THE SPIRIT.

Romans 8:1-39 is the climax of a very important body of instruction. Most readers have doubtless observed that the Epistle is divided into three parts. Part 1. consists of chapters 1-8, and brings out the fullness and the completeness of God's salvation. Part 2 embraces Romans 9-11 and is dispensational, explaining God's present dealings through the gospel, in view of the special promises made to Israel. The remaining chapters (Romans 12-16.) are practical, pressing upon the recipients of God's mercies a becoming walk below.

Part 1. is however subdivided. In Romans 1:1-32, Romans 2:1-29, Romans 3:1-31, Romans 4:1-25, Romans 5:1-11 the Apostle takes up the question of sins, and shows our complete justification from them all through the death and resurrection of Christ; from Romans 5:12-21, Romans 6:1-23, Romans 7:1-25, Romans 8:1-39 it is more a question of sin; and our complete deliverance from both our old standing and former bondage is shown in the risen Christ. We were once in Adam (Romans 5:1-21), and were then lying under death and condemnation; we were once under the bondage of sin (Romans 6:1-23) as truly as Israel of old were under the hand of Pharaoh in Egypt; we (or at least Jewish believers) were once under the law, with all its solemn consequences for our souls (Romans 7:1-25).

But from all this we have been delivered. We have passed out of our old position by death, and we are now before God in the risen Christ. This Romans 8:1-39 brings before us fully. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). The added clause mars the beauty of the Spirit's words. Our standing is not dependent on our walk in any way, though our enjoyment of it is. "In Christ" describes our new position before God, through grace. We have in Him a life which death cannot touch, and which is beyond all condemnation. We have all the advantages of His risen position. All that is His in virtue of His accomplished work is ours also. The same divine favour and love which rests upon Him, rests upon us also who are in Him. Marvellous place to be brought into! Mighty change from our former place in the first man, where all consequences brought in by Adam's fall were ours, because of our connection with him as our head. Adam became head of a race after the fall, and all therefore have his position, with everything that attaches to it; Christ became head of a new race after His resurrection, and all who are in Him share the blessedness that is His, our sins having been put away for ever, sin having been condemned in His death and righteousness established.

But if "in Christ" expresses our new standing before God, "in the Spirit" characterises us now as men walking below. Romans does not regard us as in heavenly places, as Ephesians, but as those who are set free to walk to the glory of God on earth. "In the flesh" characterised our former state. The flesh was the source of all our thoughts and actions. Flesh is antagonistic to God and they that are in it cannot please Him. The mind of the flesh is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be. The sure result of following its course is death, as the Apostle speaks, "For to be carnally minded (or the mind of the flesh) is death...if ye live after the flesh ye shall die" (Romans

8:6, Romans 8:13).

We are not in the flesh now (Romans 7:5; Romans 8:9), although the flesh is still in us. It is no longer a controlling power; it does not characterise our lives as once. Faith treats it as a condemned thing, and allows it no place. If it acts, it leads us from the Lord into some by-path of sin and sorrow. We are not now debtors to it, to live according to it. "Ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9). The Holy Spirit is God's great gift to every believer; and it is He, in contrast to the flesh, who now gives character to all our walk and ways. He gives us the happy knowledge that Christ is in us — as He Himself said, "In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father and ye in me, and I in you" (John 14:20). He forms all our thoughts and desires, teaches us how to pray, enables us to bring forth fruit for God, strengthens us for all our conflicts with the enemy, and sustains our hearts along the road by His gracious ministry of Christ to us. He is our Leader, and by His power we are enabled to mortify the deeds of the body.

Every soul will do well to enquire of itself before the Lord how far this is practically realised. It is one thing to know and accept it as doctrine, quite another to walk in the power of it. Every Christian lives in the Spirit or he would not be a Christian, but every Christian does not necessarily walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:25) And we should not forget, too, that it is perfectly possible for a true believer to sow to the flesh and not to the Spirit. Lot is a painful instance of this in the Old Testament. This brings us under God's governmental dealings. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap"; and this is as true for the Christian as for others; although it is not possible, through God's grace, to lose the eternal life, which he possesses in the Son (Galatians 6:8).

"The mind of the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). The secret, therefore, of a peaceful walk is to follow the gracious leading of the Divine Indweller. If flesh is habitually judged and mortified, and the Spirit of God allowed His true place, our souls thrive and grow. Things that would disturb and cause bitter sorrow, do not intrude themselves then. The Spirit has not to be occupying us with ourselves and our state, but is free to lead us on to a fuller knowledge of Christ, which is His delight.

The Apostle, in Romans 8:1-39, traces the Spirit's gracious work in us and for us, onward to the resurrection. "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:11). Our bodies being the temples of the Holy Spirit, the God Who raised up Jesus will not suffer them to remain in the grasp of death. "Because of his Spirit" (for so the sentence should read), He will raise them up at the appointed hour, and conform us to the image of His Son.

THE ONE BODY.

THE ONE BODY.

We have had before us the work of the Spirit of God in the individual believer; we will now consider His gracious operations with regard to the church of God. There are not only blessings and responsibilities of an individual character, which every believer should know; there are corporate ones also. The reception of the Holy Spirit introduces the believer into the wonderful unity spoken of in scripture as "the body of Christ.' Of the truth concerning this, the Apostle Paul was the honoured administrator. Neither John nor Peter tell us anything in their Epistles about the church. The conversion of Paul — then known as Saul of Tarsus — was of a very remarkable character. He was not brought to the knowledge of Christ through the preaching of the gospel (God's usual way of working), but was arrested by the Lord Jesus on the Damascus road when actively engaged in the persecution of His saints. On that memorable occasion Paul learned among other things, the following weighty truths; (1) that Jesus of Nazareth, Whose name he so cordially despised, was a glorified Man in heaven; (2) that He owned His saints on earth as part and parcel of Himself. The Lord did not speak of them as His disciples, nor even as His brethren, but as "Me" (Acts 9:4).

This then was the vessel chosen of the Lord to unfold to the saints the great purpose formed in the divine heart concerning Christ and the church, before the foundation of the world. It was not made known in Old Testament times, as we read, "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy Apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Ephesians 3:5). It was "hid in God," not even in the Scriptures, as some have affirmed; although, now that the truth is revealed, faith can turn back to the Old Testament writings, and observe many striking pictures of it.

The body of Christ is dealt with especially in Ephesians and in 1 Corinthians. In the former we get the heavenly order; in the latter, the earthly. In Ephesians we have the divine counsels, and our many blessings in association with the risen Head in heaven; in 1 Corinthians we have rather our responsibilities as members of Christ and of each other, called to walk together below.

Notice carefully that Christ became Head of the body, the church, in resurrection (Ephesians 1:20-23). Union in incarnation is never taught in scripture, but the very opposite. It was impossible that the holy Jesus should unite Himself to sinful and fallen humanity. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die, or for ever abide alone John 12:24). God be praised, He has died, putting away all our sins by His one sacrifice, and is now in glory as Man, against Whom no charge can be laid. Hence, in virtue of the presence of the Holy Ghost on earth, every believer is one with Him on high. In this wondrous circle of blessing the distinction between Jew and Gentile has no place. The former was outwardly nigh to God, having the sanctuary, the law, etc.; the latter was afar off from God, having no part in the promises, and no hope (Ephesians 2:12). Now the wall of partition is broken down. The God Who raised it has demolished it, the enmity between Jew and Gentile is slain through Christ's work, and every believer in Him is brought into a wholly new place of

blessing. We have been made nigh through the blood, we have access by the Spirit to the Father, and share with the exalted One all that has come to Him as result of His toil. What a position for the Christian! Blessed as Christ is blessed, loved as He is loved! Accepted too in His acceptance. Would that every saint entered into it in simple faith. We should not then see true souls going mourning all their days, as so frequently is the case.

Now turn to 1 Corinthians 12:1-31. Here we have the side of responsibility. This epistle presents to us the church of God, not as blessed in the heavenly places in Christ, but in its practical working on earth. The Apostle uses the expression, "the Christ," to describe the Lord and His saints (1 Corinthians 12:12). How wonderful! It helps us to understand the "Me" of Acts 9:4. This unity he shows to be due to the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Faith does not unite us to Christ; the Spirit is the bond. It is important to see this clearly. This helps too as to the limits of the body of Christ. It began when the Holy Ghost descended at Pentecost; it will be completed when the Spirit of God leaves this scene at the Lord's coming. Believers neither of preceding nor succeeding dispensations come into it. They will have their own portion of blessing of course; but they have no part in the church of God.

Then we get practical exhortations (1 Corinthians 12:1-31) The Apostle lays down that every member has his place assigned to him by God, and there is to be no discontent (1 Corinthians 12:14-18). The ear, the eye and the foot have their own proper functions. All are necessary. There are no irresponsible members in Christ's body. Not only is there to be no discontent, but contempt is forbidden (1 Corinthians 12:29-25). The more gifted must not slight others, as though they are of no value. None can be dispensed with. The feeble furnish occasions for the exercise of love and patience (Romans 14:1-6) and the "uncomely" are to be cared for also, the blemishes being graciously covered, not exposed. All round there is to be godly care and affection, and a holy recognition in every way of the profound and divine fact that we are all members one of another, as of the risen Head above.

The Apostle concludes the section with, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Corinthians 12:27). In the early days of the church, all this was understood, at least in measure, and acted upon in faith; but what can we say now? For many dreary centuries the great truth was completely lost, and to-day how few enter into its meaning in power! We hear much of "bodies" that men have formed, and of persons being members of them; but how feebly is it grasped that there is still "one body and one Spirit" on earth! Where this is learned from God, separation from all that is of man must ensue. Not that the church of God can now be reconstructed as at the first; but the few who are content to be together in simplicity as members of Christ's body, in dependence on the Holy Ghost, will never fail of blessing. The Lord knows how to minister to, and sustain His own.

The one body finds its great expression in the breaking of bread. "We being many are one loaf, one body; for we are all partakers of that one loaf" (1 Corinthians 10:17). Anything like sectarianism has no place here. As members of one body it is our privilege to meet, and in that simple character to remember the Lord until He come.

Chapter 151

HIS WORK IN THE ASSEMBLY.

HIS WORK IN THE ASSEMBLY.

There are two main branches of the Spirit's work amongst Christians; (1) in the individual believer, and (2) in the assembly of God. The latter is not so commonly apprehended as the former. Very many believers understand His blessed operation in the individual, but few comparatively enter into the meaning and blessedness of His action in the church of God. We find the two things clearly marked in 1 Corinthians 6:19, we read, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" The connection shows that believers are here addressed individually, for the Apostle is exhorting to personal holiness. Then in 1 Corinthians 3:16, we read, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" Here he addresses "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1:2) hence the instruction is of a very different character.

It is a vital truth of Christianity, that the church is "an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 1:22). Of old, God dwelt in the tabernacle in the midst of His redeemed people, and later in the temple which Solomon built for His name. But there was always distance between God and the people. The veil shut God in, and the people out. There was no drawing near to God within the sanctuary (Hebrews 9:8). But mighty changes have been wrought through the accomplished work of Christ. Not only is sin put away, so that a purged conscience is the birthright portion of every believer, but the Spirit of God has come down from heaven to form the church and to dwell in it. As we read "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them" (2 Corinthians 6:16). God the Holy Ghost dwells in the church, to guard the lordship of Christ, and to lead out the saints in all their exercises towards God. This is very little understood. It was thoroughly believed in the first days of the church of God. The shaken building (Acts 4:31) and the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) were striking proofs that a divine Person was really among them. And though we have no such outward signs now, His presence is as real and true; faith has but to act upon it.

He is the assembly's all-sufficient Leader and Guide. When together for worship or prayer, what further need is there for anyone to regulate or superintend? Such human provisions were only made when the truth of the Spirit's presence became weakened in men's minds. In 1 Corinthians 12:10-11, it is laid down that the Spirit distributes to all the saints severally as He will. There is great variety, and all is needed for general edification and blessing. The modern idea is concentration, not distribution, as if it were possible for one member of Christ's body to have everything requisite for the help and advancement of all. Those who act on such principles most assuredly suffer deeply in their souls in consequence.

1 Corinthians 14:1-40 is of great value concerning the maintainance of order in the assembly of God. Everything is to be done for edification, this being the golden rule that is laid down. For this reason those in Corinth who possessed the gift of tongues were not to exercise them unless an interpreter was near by. We read of prayer, singing and prophecy. 1 Corinthians 14:26 would

seem to show that there was considerable eagerness in the Corinthian assembly to take a part in the public gatherings of the saints. But the saints are not bidden to keep silence and to fall back upon an official leader; they are simply told, "Let all things be done unto edifying." Liberty is allowed as of God, but apostolic counsel is given in order that liberty may not degenerate into license. The only persons who are to keep silence in the church are the women, and this on natural as well as on other grounds. When the Spirit of God is really looked to and trusted, the saints will not come together in vain. However few and feeble they may be, the Divine Indweller will not fail to give them through one vessel or another what their souls desire and need.

What real unbelief has long existed in Christendom as to all this! By some, the Spirit of God is prayed for, as though He had not yet come; by others His presence is recognised as doctrine, but that is all. All this is serious dishonour to God, however little intended. Let it be our earnest and unceasing prayer that God may graciously arouse the whole church to a deeper sense of the reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and to more simple reliance on Him for all the need of our souls until the Lord Jesus come.

Chapter 152

THE ANOINTING, SEAL AND EARNEST.

THE ANOINTING, SEAL AND EARNEST.

In 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, the Spirit of God is brought before us under three striking figures. "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." The Apostle is setting forth the settled place of blessing into which God has introduced every believer in Jesus. We are no longer in Adam, exposed to death and condemnation, but in Christ, and in Him we find every purposed blessing made everlastingly good. But so abounding is the grace of our God, that over and above all this, He has given us the Holy Spirit as the anointing, the seal, and the earnest. He dwells within us.

(1) The anointing. The Lord Jesus received the Spirit in this way when walking as a man on earth as we read, "Thy holy child (servant) Jesus, whom thou hast anointed"; "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power" (Acts 4:27; Acts 10:38). This was an expression of divine delight and complacency in Him personally. The Father saw in Him perfect dependence and faultless obedience; the Spirit was sent down upon Him in token of His full approval and complete satisfaction. He was the true meal offering "Anointed with oil" (Leviticus 2:4). Believers are anointed with the Holy Ghost on an entirely different principle. It is not because of what God sees in us, but because of what His eye sees, and what His heart has found, in the risen and exalted Christ. One grand result of the anointing is, that we have fellowship with the mind of God. The Holy Spirit introduces us into the circle of the thoughts of God, as revealed in His word. It is not enough that we should be born again, the Spirit must be possessed ere any advance can be made in the things of God." Hence when the beloved Apostle warned the babes against the many antichrists that were even then abroad in the world, he refers them to two things as safeguards. (1) Apostolic teaching: "Let that therefore abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning" (1 John 2:24) (2) The anointing: "The unction which ye have received of him abideth in you," etc. (1 John 2:27). Souls who avail themselves thus, and abide in the circle of the Spirit's instruction, are preserved from all the many efforts of the enemy. Our hearts are then in the enjoyment of what the Spirit imparts; and thus are in a position to reject the devil's counterfeit. There may not be ability to expose the error that is presented, but it is known to be not the truth, and that is sufficient for the simple soul (compare John 10:5). In considering the anointing, we are reminded of our kingly and priestly place. Both kings and priests were inducted into their office in this way. Both dignities are ours through divine grace. Believers are "a holy priesthood" now, with title to draw near to God through the rent veil; and in the approaching day we are to reign with Christ, when all things are given into His hand by God. Suffering is our appointed lot meanwhile.

(2) The seal. "Who hath also sealed us." The Lord Jesus could say of Himself, "Him hath God the Father sealed" (John 6:27). The same is true of all who believe, through His death and resurrection. Sealing follows faith. This is quite plain in Ephesians 1:13. "In whom after that ye believed ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." Thus we note two distinct operations of the Spirit of God: first He works in us to produce faith in God and in His Son; then He is given as

God's seal. Believers are thus marked off as belonging to God. Our connection with the world has been broken, the fetters which once Satan bound upon us have been severed, and we are now the possession of our God (1 Peter 2:9). Do all our hearts respond loyally to this? Are we yielded up, body and soul and spirit, to Him, for His service and glory? Alas, there is not a little keeping back of part of the price. How much self-will works, how strongly the world is clung to by not a few of those who really belong to the Lord Jesus! Let each one of us own more thoroughly His gracious claims, and surrender ourselves entirely to Him.

What immense comfort that this Divine Seal will never be removed from any, even the feeblest believer. Many are defective as to this point. Many fear that the Holy Spirit will really be withdrawn, because of their faulty ways and walk. Not so. God gave me His Holy Spirit well knowing what I should turn out to be, and gave Him not because of what He saw in me, but because of what He saw in Christ. This will never change. But a careful holy walk is nevertheless due from us. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30)

(3) The earnest. "The earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." This is in view of the future inheritance. God intends to give everything in heaven and in earth to His beloved Son. The usurper may hold at present part of His dominions, but divine power will shortly wrest them from him and give them over to the Lord Jesus. He will share this universal inheritance with us; such is the purpose of His heart. But it cannot be given to us yet. There are purposes yet to be accomplished, and enemies to be put down. The Spirit of God dwells therefore within us as the earnest (or pledge) of all that is to come. He is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession (Ephesians 1:14; 2 Corinthians 5:5). Thus we wait in confidence for God to make good all His word. As the seal, the Spirit is the token of God's claim on me; as the earnest, He is the token of the claim which divine grace has given me on God.

He is not the earnest of divine love, nor of relationship. We know and enjoy both now. We are already in a circle of boundless unchanging love, for all the affections of the Father's heart rest upon us in Christ Jesus; and we are already children of God. But the inheritance is not yet ours, for it has not yet come into the hands of Christ, hence the earnest of the Spirit. He waits at the right hand of the Father; we wait in this scene for the same appointed hour. The Holy Ghost is the present blessed link between us the Him.

The Lord will come.

The Lord will come.

W W Fereday.

Papers on Prophecy

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Preface.

The volume now placed before the reader includes Nos. 1 to 6 of the "Papers on Prophecy" which have been appearing monthly. It was suggested that they should be published in this collected form, as being more convenient for readers in general. Nos. 7 to 12 will be published at intervals, if the Lord will, and afterwards be issued as a second volume.

May the Spirit of Truth abundantly bless these simple papers to all who read them. May they be used of Him to stir up affection for our absent Lord, and to deepen in many hearts an earnest desire for His coming again. Our object in writing them will then have been attained. W. W. F. May, 1898.

Chapter 156

The Church's Heavenly Hope.

The Church's Heavenly Hope.

Every Christian looks to spend a glad eternity in heaven with the Lord Jesus. It is unquestionable that it is His desire and intention to have us there. In His wonderful prayer to the Father just before He suffered He thus expressed Himself, "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). Having said this, He went into death for us. The dread consequences of our sins fell on Him. He took up the cup of Divine wrath on our behalf that our souls might be delivered. All the work being done, every question having been settled, the Father raised Him up from among the dead, and glorified Him at His own right hand in heaven. He has gone up as Man into the glory; and thus, having previously accomplished redemption, has made out a title for all who believe in His Name to be there also. Glorious thought! All who trust in Him are "to live together with Him" in the Father's house for ever (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10).

As to all this no believer has any real doubt. But it is undeniable that serious uncertainty prevails in many minds as to how we shall be introduced into all this glory. Not a few think by death, fully expecting that all will close their earthly pilgrimage in this way, and thus pass one by one into the enjoyment of our everlasting portion. But however ancient the idea, it is a profound mistake. Scripture states most emphatically "we shall not all sleep" (1 Corinthians 15:51). Indeed, nowhere in the New Testament is the believer told to look for death as the due end of his pathway here. If the cases of Peter and Paul be adduced as seeming to teach the contrary, the answer is that they were exceptional, and had Divine revelations that their labours would close by a violent death for Christ's sake (2 Peter 1:14; 2 Timothy 4:6-8). They do not touch the general principle.

For what, then, should the Christian prepare himself? For the return of the Son of God from Heaven. No unbiased reader can read through the Acts and the Epistles and deny that all the early converts to Christianity looked for the coming of the Lord Jesus. It animated their hearts, separated them from the world, enabled them to patiently suffer, and quickened them to marvellous zeal in the Lord's service. The Thessalonians are happy instances of this (1 Thessalonians 1:1-10).

But let it be distinctly understood what we mean by the coming of the Lord. Scripture speaks of two events, quite distinct in time and character, which it is of the utmost importance never to mix together. It is a wise word that the Apostle wrote to Timothy, "Rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). While this is always necessary, in no department of Scripture study is the neglect of it more serious than in the matter now before us. The Word of God speaks of two quite distinct things: (1) The return of the Lord Jesus for His heavenly saints; and (2) His appearing in public glory for the deliverance of His earthly people, and to reign in righteousness, subjugating all foes. If these are confounded very little headway will be made in the study of the prophetic word. The one is a descent into the air only for the removal of His own; the other is a descent to the earth, as we read, "His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on

the east" (Zechariah 14:4). The one is characterised by deepest affection for the objects of His Divine favour; the other by terrible desolating judgments, upon His enemies (Revelation 1:7).

Perhaps the reader will compare the last chapter of the New Testament with the last chapter of the Old. In Revelation 22:16 we read, "I am the root and the offspring of David, and the Bright and Morning Star." But in Malachi 4:2 we have, "Unto you that fear My Name shall the Son of righteousness arise with healing in His wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith Jehovah of Hosts." Such are the different characters of hope set before the heavenly and the earthly people respectively. Who can fail to see that these Scriptures speak of two entirely different events? The morning star is visible (to those who watch) before the sun, as every one knows.

The public appearing of the Lord to judge and to reign has been the subject of prophecy almost since the world began. It has been used by the Holy Spirit for the comfort of the godly, and for the warning of the ungodly. Enoch, the seventh from Adam, told of it, as Jude shows: "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all," etc. (Jude 1:14). But the heavenly hope of the Church of God, the coming of the Lord Jesus into the air to receive His own, was not revealed, as many other truths, till New Testament times.

The reason is not far to seek. The Old Testament is occupied with God's government of the earth, with Israel as His centre. Consequently the earthly aspect of the matter alone is brought out. But we find something very different when we come to the New Testament. There we see Israel tested, not by the Law, but by the presentation of the Messiah, and rejecting Him with scorn and hatred. He Whom they have abhorred and refused the heavens have received. They are now fugitives and vagabonds in the earth on account of their sins (though yet to be restored); and God is giving effect to another purpose — a purpose of a heavenly character. Souls are now being called out of the world by grace, both Jews and Gentiles, to be the heavenly joint heirs of Jesus. Such have no portion in the earth, but are united to the risen Head by the Holy Ghost (1 Corinthians 12:13). Our calling and portion being above, the heavenly hope of which we speak is set before us by the Holy Spirit. He has come out from the glory into which Christ has entered, and one of His gracious offices is to show us "things to come." (John 16:13).

The Lord Jesus, before His departure from this scene, spoke of the hope to His beloved disciples. (Read John 14:1-4.) Their hearts were filled with sorrow at the thought of His leaving them. He was everything to their hearts. They had left their nets at His call, they had followed Him in His patient service throughout the land; and now to be told that He was going away! But how did He comfort them? He promised to return and fetch them to be for ever with Himself in the Father's house. If they seemed to be losing the glory of the Messianic kingdom by His going away they should have a better portion, yea, a heavenly one. Henceforth they must believe in Him as unseen. This was hard for a Jew, with the Old Testament prophecies of a glorious kingdom before him. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me." Those who believe while He is hidden have the better portion (John 20:29; 1 Peter 1:8). But He went on to add, "In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." He had not made them His companions on earth to cast them aside now that He was returning to the Father. This were unlike Jesus. They should be His companions for ever; therefore

He assures them that there was not only a place on high for Himself, the First Begotten, but for His beloved ones also, in the riches of His grace.

But how were they to enter that glory? "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). The Lord added no more as to His coming; it was not a fitting moment; their hearts were surcharged with sorrow. For all details they must wait until the coming of the Comforter, Who would instruct their souls as they were able to bear it.

Strange that any should think that the Lord meant their death when He spoke thus! Yet it has been the general thought of the pious for centuries. If John 21:22-23 be pondered it will be seen that, however the disciples blundered in some things, they never imagined death and the coming of the Lord equivalent terms. If death (or sleep, as the Holy Spirit prefers to call it) meets the Christian he departs to be with Christ. This is quite a different thing from Christ coming for him. The saints who have gone to the Lord are in a disembodied state (though consciously enjoying His blessed presence), and are waiting as truly as we are, though in a different waiting-room, as it were, for the moment of the Lord's coming. They will be glorified at the same instant as those who are alive and remain. It is a hymn, not Scripture, that speaks of "glorified spirits in heaven."

Now for the details of this blessed event. They are furnished in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18. The Thessalonians were but young believers — a few months old in the faith at most — when the epistles of Paul were addressed to them. A grave rebuke surely for those who say that such matters as the Lord's coming should not be brought before young or simple souls. In many respects the youthful Thessalonians set us all an example. They were characterised from the first by considerable fervour towards the Lord, by earnest service for Him, and above all by ardent expectation of His return. They are described thus: "Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, Whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). The Lord prizes more than everything this affectionate waiting for Himself. It is very precious in His sight, however lightly esteemed among men.

But the Thessalonians soon fell into a difficulty. They were but partially instructed souls, the faithful Apostles having been hunted out of their town by the malicious Jews (Acts 17:1-10). Presently some of their number fell asleep. This was a great surprise and Satan's opportunity. The adversary is always ready to disturb the peace and joy of the saints of God. What had become of the sleepers? Would they not lose considerably by not being here to welcome the Lord? Such were the questions which agitated their minds.

The Spirit of God soon made all plain by means of the Apostle. "I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." Do not misunderstand these words. Saints are not forbidden to sorrow. By no means. God would not have His children stoical. He would have us feel the circumstances of the way, but would not have us swallowed up by them, as others. "The Hope" comes into the Christian's sorrow. It sweetens the most bitter cup and brightens the darkest hour. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep through Jesus will God bring with Him." This is wonderful! The sleeping saint, instead of being a loser, is only the more like his Lord. And what God did for Christ He will do for all who are His. He raised Him out of the cold tomb and

placed Him in glory; He will do the very same at the appointed hour for all His beloved sleeping ones. "Through Jesus" is more correct in 1 Thessalonians 4:14. "In Jesus" has no real meaning, not being a Scriptural phrase at all. "In Christ" expresses our standing before God in Him risen, as Romans 8 shows; "in Jesus" is nowhere found that I am aware of. "Through Jesus" is very sweet here, and stills every rising murmur. When a loved one is called hence it is no mere accident or circumstance; it is the act of Jesus. "He doeth all things well."

The Apostle says, "them which sleep through Jesus will God bring with Him." This must be carefully noted. The Thessalonians had only heard in a general way of the Lord's coming. They knew He was coming back to reign, and they were assured of being associated with Him in His glory; but they knew not yet the distinction between His coming for and with His saints. Their perplexity gave the Spirit of God an opportunity of bringing this forward clearly. Obviously, if the saints are to come with Christ when He comes to set up His kingdom they must have been previously caught up to Him where He is. This is fully explained in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, which verses are better read as a parenthesis.

The Apostle's statement has the authority of Divine revelation. Let our souls ever have the fullest confidence that all that is contained in the Scriptures has come to us from God. "For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (go before) them which are asleep." This was the word that was so sorely needed. They feared the sleepers would be inferior in some way or another. Notice the order. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." What can be simpler or more blessed! "The Lord Himself shall descend." It is the Heavenly Bridegroom coming for His blood purchased Bride. He will not send mere messengers, however glorious, but will come Himself.

"He comes — for, oh! His yearning heart

No more can bear delay —

To scenes of full unmingled joy

To call His bride away."

It is the moment when the Divine Eliezer delivers up the true Rebekah to be the everlasting and beloved companion of the Son (Genesis 24:1-67). It has often been remarked that the word rendered "shout" in this place implies a call, not of a promiscuous character, but to persons in relationship. His shout concerns not the world — at any rate, not just then; it is for His own. "The sheep hear His voice." "They know His voice" (John 10:3-4).

The sleeping saints will hear His call and come forth in incorruption and glory. All other dead persons will be left in their graves, as will be shown, if God permit, on another occasion. The living, wherever found, whether in England or China, Greenland or Cape Horn, will respond also, and will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and go up to meet the Lord. Mighty display of Divine power! It is the fruit of Divine love, the crown of His grace, the necessary result of Divine righteousness. Supreme moment! How one's heart longs for it as the words flow from the pen!

It will be observed that the Spirit of God speaks of two classes of saints — two only. "The dead in Christ" — "we which are alive and remain." All who come under these heads will be removed to glory. It is of moment to notice this, because of the notion, now painfully prevalent, that many of the Lord's own will be left behind at the rapture to pass through the great tribulation because of their faulty walk. Scripture lends no countenance to such an idea. Hebrews 9:27-28 is generally pressed into service for this, but if the verses be read with care it will be seen that the contrast is not between watchful and unwatchful believers, but between believers and the ungodly world. The prospect before the latter is death and judgment; before the former the coming of Christ apart from sin unto salvation. The idea springs from the principle of legalism, so deeply rooted in most minds, that our blessings depend upon our walk and behaviour. This is undoubtedly true as to rewards, but our removal to glory is not reward but the consummation of God's grace. Our title to share in it is not a becoming walk, but the precious blood of Christ. I have known some of the most devoted of God's saints completely under a cloud, and filled with uncertainty, through having imbibed such teaching.

Here another question may arise in some minds. "Scripture," it is said, "seems to speak of many things to be accomplished before the coming of the Lord." True, but not before His removal of His heavenly saints. Instead of a multitude of prophecies having to be fulfilled before the Church of God goes, no prophecy can be fulfilled until it has gone. Prophecy is connected with the earth and the people of Israel; our heavenly hope does not come into the scheme of prophecy at all. The whole Church period is a kind of parenthesis in the ways of God. While He is gathering out the heavenly people, Israel is scattered, and prophecy stands still; when His present purpose is completed, and the Church is all gathered home, Israel will again come into view, and prophecy will flow on from the point where it was broken off by the rejection of Christ. Many things must be accomplished ere Christ will be revealed from heaven to take to Himself His great power and reign; but the Spirit of God has placed nothing between us and His descent into the air to call us up.

Oh that all the Lord's own were looking for Him in simplicity of faith, yearning to see His face, and to be with Him in the Father's house! When in the early days of the Church of God the hope was held fast, there was thorough separation from the world, and real devotedness to Christ. The well known parable of the ten virgins shows the original position as regards the coming of Christ. (See Matthew 25:1-46) "The kingdom of heaven" during this period, while the King is rejected, is the sphere of Christian profession. The Lord likens it to "ten virgins which took their lamps and went forth to meet the Bridegroom." They were "virgins." Such was the ground taken, and such was the character to be maintained. They took their place outside the world — they "went forth." Christianity does not leave a soul in the world, but detaches it, and sets it with its back upon the world and the face towards the glory. This was unquestionably the universal attitude of believers in the early days of the faith. None looked for death, as many now; all looked to see the Lord, and to be caught up to Him according to His promise. The Romans waited patiently for the glory, groaning meanwhile with the suffering creation (Romans 8:17-25); the Corinthians came behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:1-31, 1 Corinthians 2:1-16, 1 Corinthians 3:1-23, 1 Corinthians 4:1-21, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, 1 Corinthians 6:1-20, 1 Corinthians 7:1-40); to the Galatians the Apostle could say, "we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (Galatians 5:5); the Philippians looked for the Saviour to come from the

heavens to change the body of humiliation and fashion it like unto His own body of glory (Php_3:20-21); the Colossians expected to be displayed in glory with Christ at His manifestation (Colossians 3:4); and the Thessalonians, as we have already seen, were waiting with singular affection and earnestness for the Son of God from heaven.

In every way, at every turn, the Spirit of God brings forward the coming of the Lord in one or other of its aspects. It is the constant theme of the New Testament Scriptures, whatever some may say to the contrary. The hope sustained the early Christians in sorrow (1 Thessalonians 4:13); it enabled them to be patient under oppression (James 5:7-8); it encouraged them to suffer loss and reproach for Christ (Hebrews 10:36-38), and led to thorough purification of the life and walk (1 John 3:3); it cheered the Apostle in the course of his service for Christ, and enabled him to go patiently onward through evil report and good report (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; 2 Corinthians 4:14).

Need we wonder at all the evil that came in when the hope faded from men's minds? Alas! it happened as the Lord warned — "while the Lord tarried they all slumbered and slept." Not only the foolish, but the wise virgins also. All were together in this sad departure from the Lord. It is a well-known fact that scarcely a trace of the heavenly hope of the Church of God can be found in writings for hundreds of years after the first century. It had leaked away. Not that the Lord's coming was never referred to in any way. It has always been held that He will come some day to deal with the world in judgment. But the proper hope of the Christian, the portion which His grace has set before us, of removal to heaven to be with Him before the judgments fall, was completely lost.

The result for the mass of Christian profession was worldliness. The word of the Lord to the Church has long been, "I know... where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is" (Revelation 2:13). Satan's throne is in the world. He is its prince and god. Sad that the Church should ever have got into such a place. Her true path is that of a heavenly stranger passing through this scene, as Rebekah through the desert with Eliezer to meet her Lord at the appointed moment. It is her holy and solemn responsibility to bear testimony on the way, but not to settle here, nor to mingle in the affairs of this alien scene. Nothing can deliver the saints of God from the position of compromise in which so many are found but the laying hold in simple faith, in the power of the Holy Ghost, of the mighty yet simple truth that the Lord is at hand.

If the loss of the hope has been so serious for the general company of the saints, what shall we say of those who have assumed to be their leaders? Let Scripture speak: "If that evil servant shall say in his heart, my lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to eat and drink with the drunken: the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 24:48-51). Sadly faithful picture of priestly domination and tyranny. But what is the root of it all? The saying in the heart, "My lord delayeth his coming." The surrender of the hope led on — by gradual stages, of course — to all the evils and enormities of which the pages of ecclesiastical historians are so full.

But a change has come. The Lord is waking up His own to their long-lost blessings. The Holy Spirit is actively at work in every direction in the hearts of believers. It has happened as the Lord said: "At midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom... go ye out to meet him" (Matthew 25:6). The Lord would recall His own to their true attitude before the consummation. His word to

each individual saint is, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from among the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (or "shine upon thee") (Ephesians 5:14). The Christian is not dead (blessed be God!) being in possession of eternal life in His Son; but it is very possible to be found sleeping among the dead. Of what use is the believer in such a case? Where is his testimony? "Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand" (Romans 13:11-12). Do you know the time, beloved reader? Are you saying within yourself, "Time enough yet; my Lord delayeth His coming;" or does your heart leap within you at the prospect of soon seeing His face? We read of some of old that they had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do (1 Chronicles 12:33). Would that this were true of all Christians in this day!

Do not allow the truth of the Lord's return to become a mere doctrine for the head. Let it be a vital reality in the heart. If really looking for Him, purge yourself from all your idols. Expel everything from you that is an offence to His Spirit. Cast off every bit of Egypt, which is even a greater reproach for the Christian than for Israel of old (Joshua 5:9). Get on your watch-tower and cry from the depths of your soul, "Come, Lord Jesus!" He values this more than anything else. Service for Christ is good, and cannot be too abundant, and the Lord values it; but He prizes yet more watching for His return. We get the two things in Luke 12:1-59. In Luke 12:43-44 we read, "Blessed is that servant whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you that he will make him ruler over all that he hath." Not a cup of cold water will be forgotten in the coming day; all is written in heaven. But He puts watching before service. See Luke 12:35-38. The true attitude is first described. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh they may open unto him immediately." Observe the striking illustration the Lord uses. It is that of a man-servant in expectation of his master's return from a wedding feast. In order not to keep him waiting he is standing in the entrance hall, with his hand upon the handle of the door, that when he hears the well-known knock he may open unto him without a moment's delay. Are we thus waiting for Christ? Now, observe what the Lord goes on to say. See how deeply He values simple-hearted watching for Himself. "Blessed are those servants whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants." Heavenly honours await those who long for the Lord's return.

Well, the wondrous moment is near! Soon will the whole Church of God hear the trumpet call and quit this vale of tears for ever. Of Enoch it is written, "He was not found, because God had translated him" (Hebrews 11:15). The same will presently be true of all the millions who compose the Church of God. What an awful moment for the world! Those whom it has ever despised and persecuted for Christ's sake caught away from its midst never more to return! Never again will men be faithfully warned by them of coming danger, nor be lovingly appealed to to believe in the Saviour — in the day of His long-suffering grace. An awful blank will be made! The salt removed, the light transferred to shine in other and more congenial spheres!

That moment will be peculiarly solemn for those who have professed the Lord's Name. "The Lord knoweth them that are His;" and He will make no mistakes (2 Timothy 2:19). He will take to Himself His own, rejecting all others, however loud their claim. To many He has to say, "I know thy

works, that thou hast a Name that thou livest, and art dead" (Revelation 3:1). Better far never to have heard His Name than to go on with an empty profession of it. He will not remove souls to glory because they have maintained a profession of religion. By no means. But all who in simple faith have learned and owned their sinful state, and been washed from their sins by His blood, and sealed by His Spirit, however poor and feeble, will be claimed as His, and caught up into His heavenly presence.

Inexpressibly solemn to hear Him say, as He will to many, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not." The great separation is coming. The wise virgins will go in with Him to the marriage; all others will be left outside, to their eternal ruin. In which company will the reader be found?

"The night is far spent and the day is at hand;

No sign to be looked for; the star's in the sky.

Rejoice, then, ye saints, 'tis your Lord's own command

Rejoice, for the coming of Jesus draws nigh."

Chapter 157

The Resurrection of Life and the Resurrection of Judgment.

The Resurrection of Life and the Resurrection of Judgment.

We have seen what the Lord has set before believers as the goal of their hopes — His own personal coming to receive them to Himself. It is now proposed to deal with the momentous connected theme of Resurrection. It is believed on all hands, save by men very far advanced in infidelity, that "There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:15). But all are by no means clear as to the matter. It has long been thought that all, both saved and unsaved, will rise together in a general resurrection at the last day. This idea, however ancient, is a serious mistake. Scripture lends it no countenance whatever, but speaks in unmistakable terms of two resurrections, separated from each other by at least a thousand years.

Let us turn to Revelation 20:1-15. There we have the preparations for the millennial kingdom. The previous chapter gives the public appearing of the Lord Jesus, accompanied by His heavenly saints, and the overthrow and destruction of those who oppose His progress. Then we get Satan bound and consigned to the bottomless pit for a thousand years. What remains? Simply to point out those who are to share with Christ in the glory of that wonderful period. Hence we have "the first resurrection." The various classes of the heavenly saints are shown in their risen condition; and we read, "They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4-6). Nothing can be plainer than this to a simple mind. It is not a resurrection of good principles, as some have strangely said, but of persons; and that prior to the millennium, and long before the last great judgment. There is no meaning in the term "the first resurrection" if there be but one; and what can be made of the words "the rest of the dead?"

When the Lord Jesus comes for His own every sleeping believer will be raised up in glory. We read, "Christ the firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ's at His coming" (1 Corinthians 15:23). At the same moment that the living are changed the sleepers will be raised. They will hear the shout of their Lord and the trumpet call, and will come forth to be re-united with all their brethren in His presence. The bodies of the saints sown in corruption will be raised in incorruption; sown in dishonour, will be raised in glory; sown in weakness, will be raised in power; sown as natural bodies, will be raised as spiritual bodies, conformed to Christ Himself (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). No others will be raised at that time. "The Lord knoweth them that are His." All who have despised Him, what ever their morality and religiousness in life, will be left in their graves for the judgment at the great day.

This mighty act will include all those who have died in faith from the earliest ages. The Old Testament believers, though forming no part of the Church, and therefore not coming into the heavenly Bride, will unquestionably be raised at the same moment as the Church of God. The expressions, "They that are Christ's," in 1 Corinthians 15:1-58, and "The dead in Christ," in 1

Thessalonians 4:1-18, take them in beyond just controversy. Abel was the first believer to die; all from his day up to the moment of the rapture will be raised simultaneously to go with Christ into the Father's house.

The sleeping saints are as truly waiting for the coming of Christ as we who are alive and remain. They have not yet received all that they have looked for. They are at rest in heaven with Christ, which is far better than toiling and suffering here. They are enjoying His love in a fuller measure than we do, who have so much to hinder us. But they are in a disembodied state; their precious dust is still in the hand of the grave. This cannot satisfy either them or the Lord. The redemption price includes the body as well as the soul, and the Lord will raise up the bodies of all His own at the fitting time. The whole of 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 should be carefully pondered as to this. The subject there is the resurrection of the body, which some at Corinth were disposed to deny. The apostle commences from the resurrection of Christ; and goes on, as regards the saints, until we bear the image of the heavenly at the coming of the Lord from heaven. The resurrection of the lost is not mentioned in the chapter at all; it was quite a different subject to the mind of the apostle, never to be confounded with it.

Ours will be a resurrection from among "the dead." This expression, so frequently used in the New Testament, escapes the notice of Bible readers too often. Look at Mark 9:9-10. As the Lord and His disciples came down from the Mount of Transfiguration "He charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen till the Son of Man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean." Wherein do you suppose lay their difficulty? Not in the general fact of the resurrection, for they were orthodox Jews, not Sadducees, and believed thoroughly in it. But the Lord spoke of a resurrection, "from," or, more properly, "from among, the dead;" and of this they had never heard before. The Old Testament says nothing of a special resurrection for saints, not coming at all within its scope; and the disciples, at the moment, had no clearer light than it afforded. Christ's resurrection was "from among the dead." God came in on the third day and raised Him up. "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades: neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption" (Psalms 16:10). It was not a general resurrection. The great mass of graves were left untouched. True, some saints arose, as an earnest of what is to come (Matthew 27:52-53). Christ's resurrection was an act of Divine favour and love. He had glorified God; God could do no less than glorify Him at His own right hand in heaven. This gives us a title. He rose as the "firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:20). What God did for Him He will presently do for those that are His. He will make a marked distinction between such and the ungodly, not merging all in one, as so many suppose vaguely.

Some passages in Luke's Gospel may be profitably looked at in this connection. In Luke 14:14 we read, "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." What does this mean if all rise together? Is it not something special, something blessed, that the Lord holds out in this place? Look also at Luke 20:35-36. In the course of His reply to the cavil of the Sadducees the Lord said, "They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world (age), and the resurrection from (from among) the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." Clearly this is not the mere general fact of resurrection. That cannot be a matter of attainment, for no one can shirk it. The most ungodly man must rise again and stand before the throne. Obviously

the verse treats of the special portion of the saved when the Lord claims His own. Such will then be raised from among the great mass of the dead and made equal in condition unto the angels. Our calling is superior, for we are children and sons, while angels are but servants; our condition until the Lord's coming is inferior, but this He will change then by His mighty power.

This is what Paul longed for so ardently in Php_3:11. The Revised Version of the passage is to be preferred to the Authorised, which is quite a mistake: "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from among the dead." This does not imply doubt in any way. What he means is that the prospect to be attained at that blessed moment was so wonderful, so overwhelming, that he cared not how trying the path might be that lay between. The thought of the end sustained him on the road. It lifted him above all his sufferings, and energised him for service and conflict. Does it act thus with us?

Some of our readers may say at this point, "These passages seem to indicate very plainly that believers will have a special resurrection of their own at the Lord's return; but there are other passages that seem to teach with equal plainness a general resurrection;" and John 5:28-29, Daniel 12:2, and John 6:39-40, are the Scriptures usually brought forward as objections.

Let every Christian reader be assured that there are not, nor can be, contradictions in the inspired word of God. It is of the highest importance, in this day of renegade thoughts and principles, to be very firm and decided as to this. If we meet with portions of Scripture at any time that seem to be contradictory the defect is with us, not with the Holy Spirit of God. Never let us surrender what is sure for that which may be doubtful. Rather let us hold fast what we have learnt from God, and wait patiently on Him for clearer light as to the difficulties, even if we have to wait for years.

Let us examine briefly John 5:28-29. The principal difficulty lies in the expression "the hour." "The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation (judgment)." Some think this shows all to take place simultaneously. Not so. The expression "the hour" is often used in Scripture in an extended way. Of course the context must always decide when we are to take it so. Here nothing can be more plain or simple. In this very context it is used in this way. In John 5:25 the Lord says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." These are unquestionably the spiritually dead — those who are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). Such heard the voice of the life-giving Son of God when He was present on earth and passed from death unto life; but is this work all over? Blessed be God, no! Sinners are still hearing His voice; "the hour" runs on still. This removes the difficulty with regard to John 5:29. If "the hour" of John 5:25 spreads itself over nearly two thousand years it is not hard to believe that the same expression may cover one thousand years. Moreover, the Lord speaks plainly of "the resurrection of life" and "the resurrection of judgment." He distinguishes them expressly. Surely He would not have spoken thus if all rise together. Consequently the passage, over which so many stumbled instead of being an insuperable difficulty, is really one of the simplest proofs of a special portion for those who have eternal life in the Son of God.

We will now turn to Daniel 12:2. "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." This, I am fully convinced, has no reference to the resurrection of the body at all. The words "them that sleep in the dust of

the earth" are not usual as applied to the dead. The whole context must be carefully looked into to get the mind of God in this place. Daniel 11:36-45 speaks of the Antichrist and his doings in the glorious land. Daniel 12:1 shows it to be the epoch of Israel's terrible tribulation followed by their final deliverance. Then we have the words I have quoted. I believe them to refer to the ten tribes of Israel. The two tribes only will suffer in the land in the latter-day crisis, and are alluded to in the first verse. There will then be a movement among the ten tribes — a rising up from their long national humiliation — with a view to taking possession once more of the land of their fathers. But only some will enter into blessing. The rebels among them will be purged out, utterly rejected by God. This is what is before us in Daniel 12:2. This national waking up is spoken of as a resurrection in several other places in Scripture. The following passages among others may be consulted: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Isaiah 26:19; Romans 11:15.

If the passage teaches a general resurrection at the end really, how can the words "many of them" be explained? Will not all rise again? Moreover, the epoch is a serious obstacle. It is the Lord's coming to put down the man of sin and deliver Israel in order to the setting up of the millennial kingdom. Consequently, if the resurrection of the dead, saved and lost, is shown here, then all will rise before the millennium — at least a thousand years — before the Great White Throne. This conclusion will not suit any school of interpretation so far as I know. If the verse be read as setting forth, in a figurative way, the national reviving of the tribes of Israel, all is simple and clear.

Now a word or two as to John 6:39-40, "And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." This is often triumphantly urged as disproving any special portion for the saints of God. Let us look at it carefully. The Jews had in their minds two "ages," or dispensations — (1) that of the Law; (2) that of the Messiah's kingdom. They believed one would give place to the other in due time. This was what was in the Lord's mind in Matthew 12:32 when in speaking of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, He said, "It shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in that to come." That is to say, neither in the age of the Law nor in that of the Messiah. This helps considerably to an understanding of John 6:1-71. The term "the last day" means not the last day in an absolute sense, when time will give place to eternity, but "the last day" of the period preceding the kingdom of the Messiah. Christianity is a kind of parenthesis in the age of the Law.

Now we must consider other matters. It is plain that at the Lord's descent into the air all sleeping believers will be raised in glory, and all living saints will be changed by His power. This is the first resurrection, but not the whole of it. The first resurrection is in three parts — (1) the resurrection of Christ; (2) of all sleeping saints at His coming; and (3) of those who will lose their lives during the great tribulation. Such are included in the first resurrection, and will be raised in time to share the blessings of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. We get these classes carefully distinguished in Revelation 20:4, already referred to. "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them." Daniel saw the thrones, but no occupants (Daniel 7:9). Who are meant by "they"? Those who are manifested with the Lord Jesus at His appearing. Such come forth as His armies, following Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean (Revelation 19:14). These are the heavenly saints who are caught up, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18. God brings them now with Christ, that the world may know that the Father sent the Son, and that He loves us as He loves Him (1 Thessalonians

4:14; John 17:23). Christ will in that day be glorified in His saints and wondered at in all that have believed (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

All these will reign with Him, and will have judgment given unto them. Their places in the kingdom will be ordered according to their faithfulness on earth. Solemn consideration for all our hearts! Let us ponder it well, and look carefully to our walk and ways.

Then we have the two classes of saints who will be added to them. "I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and those [This word has unfortunately been omitted in our Authorised Version. See Revised Version. It is necessary to make the two classes clear.] which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4). These are evidently raised just at the commencement of the millennial kingdom, for John describes them as "souls," and adds "they lived." They are added to those already raised, and thus complete the first resurrection.

A few words as to these saints may be helpful. They are not, as some have taught, unwatchful Christians who are left behind at the Lord's coming, and who have to suffer in consequence, and wait a while for their heavenly portion. The Word of God knows of no such thing. Our places in the kingdom depend, as I have said, on our walk and service now; but not our translation to heaven to be for ever with the Lord. That is the fruit of Divine grace alone. Who, then, are these two classes of saints? You will find the one in Revelation 6:1-17, the other in Revelation 15:1-8. In Revelation 6:9 John saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God and for their testimony. This corresponds exactly with the first class of Revelation 20:4. He heard them cry with a loud voice, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" These are evidently not Christians. Christians, as Stephen in Acts 7:1-60, the rather pray for their murderers and bless their persecutors; at least, we are taught to do so by our Lord Jesus. But the souls in Revelation 6:1-17 call for vengeance. Are they wrong in uttering such a cry? Impossible, especially when we consider that the seer saw them in a disembodied state in heaven! There, surely, all improper feelings have no place. These are Jewish sufferers, the early witnesses of the gospel of the kingdom after the removal of the Church of God to heaven. Their testimony has not been received, for they are seen as slain. They take their stand on the ground of earthly judicial righteousness — quite right for a Jew, but quite wrong for a Christian, who is always expected to manifest the spirit of grace. Their cry reminds us of the Psalms. They live in a different dispensation to Christianity. In answer to their cry "white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled," or completed (Revelation 6:11). Here we have a reference to a further class of martyrs. Later in the same book we find them (see Revelation 15:2-4). "I saw, as it were, a sea of glass, mingled with fire; and them that had gotten the victory over the beast and over his image, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sang the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb," &c. Here are the fellow servants of the martyrs of Revelation 6:1-17, the second class of raised saints, as in Revelation 20:4. These are not necessarily preachers of the gospel of the kingdom. They are perhaps more passive. They lose their lives because they decline to receive the mark of the beast or to worship his image. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego of old, they stand true in an evil day, confiding in the living

God. At all cost to themselves they refuse to take part in so great wickedness and sin against God. There will be no middle ground in the day of Antichrist. All must declare plainly whom they serve. If the true God, then all the power of hell will be let loose upon them. Such will find comfort in the Lord's words, "Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Matthew 5:12). If they lose the earthly kingdom, through faithfulness, just when it is about to be set up, the Lord will give them a better portion in the heavens, though they are too late to form part of the Church. None are really the losers who suffer for His sake. His heart will take a great delight in dealing out to all such a full reward.

The raising up of these bands of latter-day martyrs completes the first resurrection — the resurrection of life. They will all reign with Christ. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6). Happy souls! Wondrous the grace that will introduce us into such a place!

But what of the rest of the dead — the ungodly? Their tombs will be left untouched until the judgment of the Great White Throne. During the blessed period of Christ's beneficent reign over the earth they will remain in their graves, to be judged at the end. "'The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." How awful to be found among them!

When the term of universal peace and blessing has run its course, we read, "I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from Whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works" (Revelation 20:11-12). This is the final resurrection — the resurrection of judgment. There is no trace of saved persons in this throng. They are the lost, called up by the quickening voice of the Son of God to hear their righteous doom. They are "clothed," i.e., they resume their bodies, to be found, alas! "naked" before Him (2 Corinthians 5:3).

Man has a hereafter, either of bliss or woe. He does not and cannot perish like the beasts, though he may degrade himself morally to become like the beasts that perish (Psalms 49:12; Psalms 49:20). Man has a life that is endless. He derived it by the direct inbreathing of God. The beasts have not this. They lived when made, but of the man two things are recorded. First, "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7). This refers to the body, which became mortal through the entrance of sin. Mortality is never spoken of in Scripture in connection with the soul.

"Dust thou art, to dust returnest

Was not spoken of the soul."

Secondly, we read — "and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Such is the simple yet majestic language of Scripture. Having received such a life, man lives on, either in happiness or in woe. Many confound this with eternal life, which is very unintelligent. The latter is God's gift in Christ to believers only. It is life in association with the Son of God in His own sphere of blessedness above. Immortality is by no means synonymous with eternal life. The former, man had from the very beginning, before the fall; the latter is the gift of God, through grace. It cannot be earned by works of law or by fleshly effort of any kind; it is alone to be had

through faith in the Son (l John 5:11-12).

Has my reader received the gift of eternal life? If so, very soon God will apply the power of it to your poor body, and "mortality shall be swallowed up of life" (2 Corinthians 5:4). Let the words of the Lord Jesus remain in the heart, "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). Thus He sets forth the power that resides in Himself. He will presently put it forth on behalf of all His own.

In view of our blessed portion and prospect, may all our steps be quickened; in view of the awful future awaiting the ungodly, may our zeal be deepened to win souls for Christ while we may.

Chapter 158

The Coming Judgments.

The Coming Judgments.

It is a wonderful thing to be able to contemplate the judgments of God, and be altogether free from alarm; But such is the happy portion of the believer in Jesus. The accomplished work of Christ has turned judgment aside for all who believe — it will not, and cannot fall upon any of them. We have the sure word of the Lord Jesus for this — "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Here faith rests, and takes up the triumphant challenge, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?" (Romans 8:33-34) Blessed certainty! Precious God-given assurance!

It is quite possible that some of our readers have been taught differently as to this. The confused idea has long prevailed in Christendom, that there is to be a great general judgment at the end of time, into which all, whether saved or lost, must come; and that there can be no real certainty as to one's eternal future until that day. This is a profound mistake, grievous in its results, and in plain defiance of the Lord's precious word in John 5:24. If the believer walks thus uncertainly, what real affection can there be towards God? And how can there be the heavenly tone in the daily walk that God looks for in His own?

The truth is, that every believer is placed by God beyond judgment. We are no longer "in Adam" exposed to death and judgment, but "in Christ" where there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1). Not only so, but we are "clean every whit," "holy and without blame before Him in love," loved by the father with the same love wherewith He loves His Son (John 13:10; Ephesians 1:4; John 17:23; John 17:26). As Christ is, so are we in this world. God can no more bring the believer into judgment for his sins, than Christ Himself. Perfect love casts out all fear (1 John 4:17-19).

It is of the first importance that the Scriptures should be rightly divided as to this solemn theme. For clearness' sake, we will consider the matter in the following order:

1. The Judgment Seat of Christ for Believers.

2. The Judgment of the Quick.

3. The Judgment of the Dead.

1. The Judgment Seat of Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 5:10 we read, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Here the Apostle's language is very general. "We" includes every soul that has ever lived in this world. Believers are not to be exempt; all must be manifested before Christ. Not necessarily on the same day, as some affirm, nor with the same issues. Indeed there are two classes plainly shown in the Scripture: those who have done good, and those who have done evil.

Our bad was dealt with at the cross of Christ, when the blessed One bowed His holy head beneath the righteous judgment of God, and nothing remains to be dealt with but the good which we have wrought by the power of the Holy Ghost. The ungodly, on the contrary, when they stand before Christ at a later day, will have no good to show ("there is none that doeth good, no, not one"), and will be dealt with in righteousness for all their bad. The thought of this filled the heart of the Apostle with holy concern. The terrors of the coming day for those who know not God and have not believed the Gospel, were before him, and made him earnestly labour that souls might be delivered from the wrath to come. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 5:11).

It is a solemn, yet blessed, thought for the believer that everything is to come out before Christ. We need have no fear or alarm. We shall then be in a glorified state, as the earlier verses of 2 Corinthians 5:1-21 show. We shall stand at the judgment seat in bodies fashioned like unto the glorious body of the Lord Jesus; for, prior to this manifestation, He will come for us and gather us out of this scene, and place us in the Father's house. When I read there the whole story of my life, I shall see fully the wonders of His Divine grace. We shall then know the full truth about ourselves, and shall adore and magnify the precious grace that has made us what we are.

But how anxious this should make every saint to walk and serve day by day so as to please the Lord! Our service will all come out there. "After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them" (Matthew 25:19). Those who have built on the foundation gold, silver, and precious stones will receive a reward. "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (1 Corinthians 3:8). Every little bit of faithful and true service for Christ will be fully recognised then. A cup of cold water will not lose its reward. All is written in heaven by the loving, yet holy hand of Him who notes every bit of good in His own, while not ignoring their evil.

How gracious of Him to reward any! Whatever fruit we have borne, whatever good we have done, has been really the action of His own indwelling Spirit. It is, as Augustine has said, "God crowns not our merits, but His own gifts. Because He makes them ours, He rewards them, just as if they were our own virtues." He will take real pleasure in saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant,... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21-23).

But what if the Christian's service is bad? Thank God, it will not endanger his salvation, which depends not on service, but on the accomplished work of Christ. But he will be a loser, as we read, "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire" (1 Corinthians 3:15). Solemn thought! The Lord may have to disown the toil of a lifetime because it has not been according to His revealed mind and will. It is not quantity the Lord looks at, but quality. That which flows from real love to His holy person, He values highly, as we may judge from His gracious words to her who lavished on Him her ointment of spikenard (Matthew 26:6-13).

How true it is that "the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Man would be disposed to bestow the greatest reward where the greatest display has been, and the largest results (outwardly) have been obtained; but it may be found in the coming day that the best prizes will be carried off by those who have made but little stir in Christendom, and whose names have been but little known, but who have nevertheless served Christ loyally and faithfully according to their measure and opportunities.

Not that it must be inferred from these remarks that only service for Christ will be reviewed at the judgment seat. The whole life will come out either for praise or blame. The Apostle brings this forward when exhorting slaves, in Colossians 3:24-25. He comforts them by saying, "Of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for we serve the Lord Christ." They might have unreasonable and unjust masters, but the Lord took notice of all, and will reward duly by-and-by. Then the Apostle throws out the word of warning, "But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no respect of persons."

Let every Christian therefore look well to his ways. In the light of all this, how are we living? How are we serving? Soon we shall stand before Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Soon will His holy eye look over all our record, and His holy lips will pronounce His mind as to it. Will our lives in the home, in business, and everywhere else bear His close inspection? Will our service bear the all-searching test of His holy Word? Is it pursued because we love Him and owe all to Him, or is it carried forward for mere self-exaltation and for the strengthening of party? Let us be real. Better far to have the examination now, while there is time to correct, than to let all go on to the judgment seat, where we may find ourselves eternal losers.

Such is the judgment seat of Christ for those who believe in His Name. It is no question of visiting sins upon them, but of manifestation. Rewards will be dealt out, and places in the millennial kingdom allotted, according to faithful service here below. Not that reward is the motive for service or godliness. That would be legalism. Love to Christ is the spring, the rewards come in as encouragements for our souls by the way.

2. The Judgment of the Quick or Living.

Christ is ordained of God to be the Judge not only of the dead, but of the quick, as Peter declared to Cornelius and his company (Acts 10:42). This is a large theme, and can only be dealt with briefly here. It is but little understood, though confessed as doctrine in all the Creeds of Christendom. It is quite the fashion to merge all into the judgment of the dead. The judgment of the living really covers a wide area. It commences with the judgments that will be poured out from heaven after the heavenly saints are removed, and which will go on until the public appearing of the Lord Jesus to put down all His foes. It will be continued more or less throughout the millennial reign, ending with the overthrow of the gathered hosts at the close (Revelation 20:8-9). Then will come "the time of the dead, that they should be judged" (Revelation 11:18).

But we have space for a little detail. The Book of Revelation furnishes us with an outline. In Revelation 2:1-29 & Revelation 3:1-22, in the epistles to the seven Churches, we have a sketch of the history of the professing Church from beginning to end. It is Church history, viewed from the Divine standpoint. In Revelation 4:1-11 & Revelation 5:1-14, we see heaven preparing itself for judgment — God on His throne and the Lamb receiving the seven-sealed book. Grouped around the throne are the four-and-twenty crowned and enthroned elders representing symbolically the heavenly saints in their kingly and priestly character. These are all seen at home with the Lord before the judgments fall. Instead of being terrified by the judgments proceeding from the throne, they worship and adore. They know God, and they have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. In Revelation 6:1-17 the judgments begin to be poured out. All this is future. It is freely admitted that there may have been some sort of analogy in events that have already taken place; but strictly speaking, all this is to come. These are judgments on the living, not the dead. First we have the

seven seals broken one by one by the Lamb, and judgments falling — mostly of a providential character. Then the trumpets are blown, and further strokes descend. The vials follow, and in them is filled up (or completed) the wrath of God. The manifestation of Christ and the heavenly armies takes place next, and the assembled hosts of His enemies are overthrown, the leaders — the beast and the false prophet — being consigned forthwith to the lake of fire (Revelation 19:1-21). All this is the judgment of the quick; it is Divine dealing with living men on the earth preparatory to Christ taking His throne in Zion.

There is one important incident in the judgment of the quick which must be looked at a little more fully, because it is so generally misunderstood and misapplied. I refer to the separation of the sheep from the goats, in Matthew 25:31-46. This is often regarded as setting forth the final judgment of the dead. The page in the Bible now open before me is headed "Description of the last Judgment." This is a mistake, and by no means a small one. Look carefully at the whole prophecy of which these few verses form part. The Lord was with His disciples on the Mount of Olives, and in answer to their questions, opens out to them the things concerning His coming to establish His kingdom at the end of the age. The first few verses (Matthew 24:1-14) are general, and describe the general circumstances of His servants until the end. In Matthew 24:15 He speaks of the idol (abomination) to be set up in the holy place by the Man of Sin, of the great tribulation to follow, and then of the sufferings of the elect in Judea in that day. This part is closed up (Matthew 24:29-31) with His own appearing in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. This is His manifestation to Israel, and subsequent to His removal of the heavenly saints. Then follows a long parenthesis in the prophecy, in which we observe six parables. Three are for the Jewish people, the fig tree (Matthew 24:32-35), the days of Noah (Matthew 24:36-41), and the thief in the night (Matthew 24:42-44); the remaining three concern the professing Church, the faithful and evil servants (Matthew 24:45-51), the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), and the talents (Matthew 24:14-30). The thread of the prophecy is then resumed. "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory; and before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 24:31-32). The time and circumstances of this session are thus easily determined. It is immediately after the public appearing of the Lord Jesus and before the establishment of the kingdom. But is it the judgment of the dead, as so commonly supposed? By no means. It is at least a thousand years too early. The dead, i.e., the ungodly, will remain in their graves until the reign of Christ is over, and will then be called forth to stand before Him. How then can there be a general judgment before the millennium? But there is a more serious difficulty still in the passage — there is no mention of any dead at all. Nor is there one word about resurrection of either good or bad. Further, three classes are found — the sheep, the goats, and the brethren (the first two being dealt with according to their treatment of the third), which quite unfits the passage for the purpose for which so many seem to desire it.

It is the judgment of the quick. The throne is not "the Great White Throne," but "the throne of His glory." The Son of Man sits there in His character of King, and calls all the Gentiles before Him, and enters into, not the question of their sins in general, as later at the Great White Throne, but their treatment of those whom He graciously styles "My brethren." These are Jews, preachers of the gospel of the kingdom during the brief interval between the removal of the Church to glory and the revelation of Christ to judge and to reign. Some will treat them badly, thus showing out their

deep hatred to God and His Christ. Those who lose their lives at that time are found under the altar, in Revelation 6:9-11, crying for vengeance on their foes. Others will treat them kindly, bowing to their testimony, and receiving it as the Word of God, in blessed proof that the Spirit of God has been working in their hearts.

All this the King inquires into. The sheep He pronounces blessed of His Father, and invites them to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. They shall enjoy all the blessings of His millennial reign. They are not a heavenly company, but an earthly; and their portion is not said to have been ordered before the foundation of the world, as ours (Ephesians 1:4), but from its foundation. This distinction is of great importance.

The sheep seem astonished when the Lord commends them for having fed, clothed, and entertained Himself. They inquire, "Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee?" (Matthew 25:37-39.) They had shown such kindness to poor Jewish preachers of the gospel of the kingdom, but had not thought of their deeds at all as done to the Lord Himself. "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

It is most evident that we are not on Christian ground here. Christians are members of the body of Christ, constituted such by the baptism of the Holy Ghost; consequently, all that is done to them, whether it be kindness or otherwise, is accepted by the Lord as done to Himself (Acts 9:4-5; 1 Corinthians 8:12; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). This may not be quite understood now by all who believe, for many have no due understanding of their proper relationship to Christ, but all such ignorance will be dissipated in the glory. Christians will not then be surprised to hear the Lord speak of gracious acts done to His saints as done to Himself. But the sheep are surprised! They know nothing of such a principle. They form no part of the Church of God, where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but are saved as Gentiles by Jewish preaching at the end (Colossians 3:11). Then the King will reckon with those on His left hand. To them He will say, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in; naked, and ye clothed Me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited Me not. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee? Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me" (Matthew 25:41-45). Thus will He deal with those who have failed to show kindness to His poor Jewish brethren of the last days. It is a solemn thing to lift the hand against the Jew. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper" (Isaiah 54:17).

But this does not complete the judgment of the quick. Many details are to be found in the Prophets, far too numerous to be reproduced here. Suffice it to say that when Israel reappears as a nation, her ancient enemies will reappear also, with hearts as bitter against them as ever in the past. The careful reader has only to examine the "burdens" of Isaiah and the other prophets to be convinced that none of them have been exhausted by the indications of long ago. Assyria will come up again, and be dealt with (Isaiah 10:12); the Philistines (Isaiah 14:29-32), Moab (Isaiah 15:1-9, Isaiah 16:1-14), Damascus (Isaiah 17:1-2), and many others. Israel will be specially used

for the punishment of Edom, Moab, and Ammon (Daniel 11:41). These are all temporal judgments, for their implacable enmity to the chosen seed, and are all included in the judgment of the quick.

It may be urged against this, that most of the peoples named no longer exist. This presents no difficulty to faith. God has spoken in His word, and there faith rests. However apparently impossible to us, every sentence will be made good. Besides, who are we to say that Edom, Moab, etc., no longer exist? We no longer know these people by their old titles, but they are probably near our doors under other names. The same difficulty may be pressed with regard to the ten tribes of Israel. No one knows certainly where they are, nor by what name they are at present called (though many guesses have been made, especially of late years), but God has His eye upon them, and will bring them forward when the suited moment arrives. At the same epoch, their adversaries will show themselves, with the same sentiments as of old, to receive from Jehovah's righteous hand condign punishment for their hostility to the people of His choice. The judgment of the quick will go on more or less, throughout the millennial kingdom. "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment (Isaiah 32:1). Long-suffering will not then be exercised with regard to sin, as now; every offence apparently being summarily dealt with (Isaiah 45:20). We are apt to overlook this aspect of the Lord's glorious reign. We speak much of the blessedness of it, and of the peace and glory that will prevail, but are apt to forget the strict righteousness that will form the foundation of His rule. The true Melchizedec is first King of Righteousness, then King of Peace (Hebrews 7:1).

Another point to be remembered in considering the judgments of God soon to be poured out upon the world is that the heavenly saints are to be associated with the Lord Jesus in this solemn work. Daniel says, "Judgment was given to the saints of the Most High," or high places (Daniel 7:22). This the Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians of. They were so far forgetting their high calling and destiny as to carry their disputes into the courts of the world, before the unjust. Paul indignantly exclaims, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?" (1 Corinthians 6:2-3).

This has been greatly overlooked in Christendom. Far from expecting to be the world's judges — yea, the judges of angels, too — not a few of those who really love the Lord Jesus quite expect to be brought into judgment themselves! This is serious — injurious to both peace and affection. As already shown, every believer is placed beyond judgment in the risen Christ, a standing in Divine righteousness being already his through His accomplished work. Nothing remains but eternal participation with Christ. Consequently in all He does we shall have a part; hence our future position as associated with Him in the judgment of the world and of the angels.

The final act in the judgment of the quick is the overthrow of the vast hosts which will be gathered together by Satan after his release from the bottomless pit. It seems inconceivable that after such a season of blessedness, man will be found ready to revolt against the Lord; but so it will be. The heart of man is so incurably bad that neither grace nor glory displayed before it, touch or alter it in the slightest degree. Nothing avails but a new creation, and this is the work of the Spirit of God.

Hence, when Satan goes out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, he succeeds in gathering them together to battle, in number as the sand of the sea. "And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about,

and the beloved city; and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them" (Revelation 20:7-9). Jerusalem is the object of their attack, for there the saints (i.e., the earthly saints) are congregated. Swift judgment falls upon them from heaven. Their deceiver and betrayer is then consigned to the lake of fire, his eternal place of suffering abode.

3: The Judgment of the Dead.

In pursuing our subject, we have now reached the end of time. Christ is the Judge of the dead, even as of the living. "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son; that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father" (John 5:22-23). How solemn that men should have to stand before Him! The One who died for sinners, and rose again: the One who has waited throughout this period of Divine long-suffering and grace, able and willing to save all who believe, however lost or vile! Then for men to have to stand before Him at the end! What shame and confusion of face! What speechlessness! Will men in Christendom be able to say that they never heard His Name, nor the sound of saving grace? Will they be able to plead that the Word of God, containing the record of His grace and truth, was never placed within their reach? Neither will nor can be urged in extenuation of their position. The sentence of God will be justified by each and all.

"And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from Whose face the earth and the heavens fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God [or 'the throne'], and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hell [Hades] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell [Hades] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:11-15). It is a "great" throne, for the most momentous of all questions is to be settled there; "white" because of the holiness and righteousness of all that is there enacted. All who are not raised in the first resurrection must then rise, the mighty voice of the Son of God calling them from their tombs. The sea comes forward with its contingent, as Hades delivers up the spirits to be reunited with the bodies. The books tell their tale, all is faithfully recorded by a holy God. The Word of God will be there, even as the Lord Jesus said, "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge you in the last day" (John 12:48). Every word heard, every chapter read, only increases responsibility, if not received by faith in the heart. How does the reader stand in view of all this? Has the reader been cleansed from his sins by the blood of Jesus? Is forgiveness yours, and justification and acceptance in the risen Christ?

If not, lose no time, we entreat you. The present period of grace and mercy is fast hastening to its close, and soon the Master of the house will rise up and shut to the door. Then all hope must flee, mercy will be no more. What a contrast! Eternal glory in the Father's house for all who believe in the Son; a long eternity of woe in the lake of fire for all who avail not themselves of His wondrous grace.

"Jesus, the Lord our righteousness!

Our beauty Thou, our glorious dress!

'Midst flaming worlds, in this arrayed,

With joy shall we lift up the head.

"Bold shall we stand in that great day,

For who aught to our charge shall lay,

While by Thy blood absolved we are

From Sin's tremendous curse and fear?"

Chapter 159

The Apostasy of Christendom and the Antichrist.

The Apostasy of Christendom and the Antichrist.

We will now consider the march of events in Christendom after the removal of the saints to glory. The coming of the Lord will by no means, alas! clear the field of Christian profession. To many thousands, it is feared, He will have to say, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (Matthew 25:12). True, they carry the lamps of profession, but they are oil-less; they fear His name, but they have never come into living contact with Him; they sing His praises with their lips, but have never known His love and grace in their hearts. All such will be left behind at the rapture, however loud their plea. What will be their future? This we now propose to consider.

Many have thought the era of the Gospel to be the final one, and that the millennium will be an outcome of it, brought about by diffusion of truth, and the spiritual subjugation of the whole world to Christ. But Scripture speaks very differently. The millennium will be brought in by desolating judgments, not by Gospel labour; and as for the present period of favour and privilege, instead of ending in universal glory, it will terminate in darkness and apostasy.

There is a sad consistency in all the history of man. Every dispensation has ended in gloom. Man has failed in whatever circumstances God has placed him. The period of innocence ended in the fall and the expulsion from the garden; the age of conscience resulted in the flood; the dispensation of the law terminated in the rejection and murder of the Messiah; and more might be added. The Church period will have no different ending, all New Testament Scripture being witness. We will quote a few proofs. In 2 Timothy 3:1-17 we read, "This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come." Then follows a dark description, reminding us of heathen depravity as told out in Romans 1:1-32. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." This is very solemn. Clearly there was no thought in the Apostle's mind of the professing Church and the world becoming better and more suitable for Christ. Look also at verse 13 of the same chapter. "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." Consider, too, the short Epistle of Jude. There the course of evil in the professing Church is traced from its first introduction by the enemy by means of certain men who crept in unawares, until the Lord's appearing in judgment. The evil is not eradicated, but goes on intensifying until the Lord Himself arises to deal with it. Recall also the Lord's parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:24-30. The enemy sowed the tares soon after the wheat was sown, and they grow on together until the harvest, when the great and final separation comes.

With all this may be connected the warning in Romans 11:1-36. There the Apostle shows that Christendom has taken the place of Israel in the earth as regards the outward privileges and responsibility. The Jewish branches of the olive tree were cut off because of unfaithfulness, as every one knows. But what of the Gentiles, who have succeeded them as wild branches grafted in? "Be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be

cut off (Romans 11:20-22). This does not touch the question of individual salvation, which is eternally secured in Christ; it is dispensational responsibility. Who will pretend that Christendom has continued in the goodness of God? Judgment, therefore, must fall, though not until the cup of iniquity is filled up by the apostasy of the last days.

To this we will now turn. Observe the way in which the solemn subject is introduced in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17. The Thessalonians at the time of the writing of the Epistle were in deep distress. They were passing through sore tribulation. Paul alludes to "all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure" (2 Thessalonians 1:4). The enemy had let loose his rage upon them, because of their faith in the Lord Jesus. He had wrought in another way also, which was much more serious. He had succeeded in instilling into their minds the idea that the day of the Lord had set in, and that the great tribulation connected with that solemn epoch was upon them. A letter even had been sent to them, pretending to be from the Apostle Paul, confirming them in the notion. All this wrought very sadly among them. The brightness of their hope, which the Spirit commends so warmly in the First Epistle, became clouded, and deep gloom settled down upon them.

Yet one simple consideration would have materially helped them. The Old Testament Scriptures, in speaking of the day of the Lord, speaks of it as judgment on the ungodly. In that day the tables will be turned. The Lord's friends will then be at rest in His blessed presence, while His foes will be in adversity. This thought would have assured the Thessalonians; but unfortunately our hearts are such, that often in a time of difficulty we forget what would prove real help and comfort to our souls.

Observe carefully the Apostle's words: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Lord is present." This is unquestionably the correct reading of this important verse. The Authorised Version is manifestly wrong here. How could the inspired Apostle write beseeching them not to believe that the day is at hand, when elsewhere he says, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand"? (Romans 13:12.) It would be flat contradiction, which can never be in the Scriptures, where all is of God.

On the contrary, he begs them not to be persuaded that the day of the Lord had come. But on what does he ground his exhortation? On the coming of the Lord Jesus to gather together His own. In no way could he have presented the distinctness of the two events more clearly. The coming of the Lord for His own is one thing; His day (introduced by His appearing in glory) quite another. The saints are to be removed to heaven before the last great crisis; but inasmuch as the whole Church of God was still on earth, how could the Thessalonians suppose that it had arrived? Such is the reasoning of the Apostle, at once simple and reassuring.

Another consideration is then presented. Before the day of the Lord sets in the apostasy must take place, and the man of sin run his course. "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away" (more properly "the apostasy") "first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" (1 Thessalonians 2:3). This must not be confounded with other predictions. It is important to rightly divide the word of truth. In 1 Timothy 4:1 the same Apostle writes, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly that in latter times some shall depart from the

faith." If the verses which follow be examined carefully, it will be seen that Popery is in view, with its Satanic hypocrisy and restrictions. The expression "latter times" therefore simply means times subsequent to the writing of the Epistle. 2 Timothy 3:1 presents a further stage in the development of evil: "in the last days perilous times shall come." We do not here read of some departing from the faith; the evil is much more general. Who can read the Holy Spirit's language in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, and fail to see that it is our own day that is so vividly described? "The last days" are running their course now.

But 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 speaks of a later and more solemn period still. Grave as are the features of the "latter times" and the "last days," the Apostasy is immeasurably more serious. It means nothing less than a universal renunciation of all profession of Christianity. The Lord's true ones — the salt — having been removed, and the Holy Spirit having left the scene, what is to preserve the mass from headlong ruin? Not that the nominal profession of Christianity will necessarily be abandoned immediately the saints are taken away. It will doubtless be maintained for a time. Many a religious building will be opened as usual, many a Christless sermon will be delivered then, as, alas! too often at the present time. But it will not continue very long. Liberal-mindedness (so-called) will prevail. It will no longer be deemed necessary to contend for this truth or that; the union of Christendom (of which one hears so much even now) will then be more than possible, only to be followed, under Satanic leadership, by the throwing up of the very name and form of Christianity.

Many really sincere souls find this hard to believe. They have so long cherished the thought that the Gospel is destined to convert the whole world to God, that it seems inconceivable that Christendom itself will become more corrupt and evil than even the heathen world beyond. But the testimony of Scripture must be honestly faced. Nothing is to be gained, but the contrary, by buoying ourselves up with false hopes and expectations. We really thus give the enemy an advantage, because a measure of blindness must inevitably result as to our present pathway in the midst of growing darkness and evil.

It cannot be denied that things are rapidly moving onward to the apostasy. God forbid that one should present a gloomier picture than is just, but the facts are patent to all. On every hand the inspiration of the Scriptures is called in question or denied; many indulge in the loosest and gravest speculations concerning the person of Christ; the fundamental doctrine of the atonement is set aside by multitudes; the eternal punishment of the ungodly is widely repudiated; and many more sorrowful details might be added. This is a day of compromise and surrender. Truths that our fathers suffered for gladly are lightly yielded now, as if they were the merest trifles; and those who suffered for them in the past are regarded by not a few with a kind of compassion, as over scrupulous and narrow, which a little nineteenth century enlightenment would have helped!

If such is the condition of things while the saints of God are here, what will it be when we are all gone? Scripture answers, Apostasy. Arising out of this is the revelation of the Antichrist, the man of sin. Man is a religious being naturally, and must have an object of worship. If God is thrown off, a Satanic substitute is accepted. This we have long seen in heathendom; presently it will be witnessed in Christendom. Satan will bring forward his man when the suited moment arrives, and present him to his dupes. Let it be distinctly understood that the Antichrist is a person. Some have thought the Apostle's remarks in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 to refer to the Papacy, but this is a great

mistake. It is not a system, nor a succession of men, but an individual. The Popes, however arrogant and evil, have never gone to the lengths described here. The man of sin sets himself up above all that is called God or that is worshipped. He sets aside all objects of worship, true and false, and claims sole Divine honour. His seat will be in Jerusalem. "He sitteth in the temple of God showing himself that he is God." Only on Mount Moriah has God ever owned a temple of a material character. During the Church period the temple of God is a spiritual thing. The saints themselves form His temple and the Spirit of God inhabits it (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 1 Peter 2:5). But when the saints are removed to heaven, this is necessarily at an end. Then the material temple will come into view again. It will happen thus. A goodly number of the Jews will be found in their own land at the end of the age (indeed, many are returning at the present time). They will set about to re-establish their old system of worship, with its sanctuary, priesthood, and sacrifices. At the appointed moment the man of sin will introduce himself to them, claiming to be the long-expected Messiah. It will happen then as the Lord foretold, "I am come in My Father's Name, and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (John 5:43). His pretensions will be admitted by the blinded mass, the godly remnant, on the contrary, saying within themselves, "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords" (Psalms 55:21). The elect are not deceived; a stranger will they not follow, for they know not his voice.

Antichrist will soon display himself in his true colours. At the first, he will form a covenant as the leader of the Jews, with the great power of the West for protection (Daniel 9:27). The godless mass will glory in this, saying, "We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through" (referring to their powerful Northern foe), "it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves" (Isaiah 28:15). But this will not hold good long. In the midst of the week, i.e., the seven years of the covenant, the Antichrist, backed up by the Beast (the Roman head), will turn upon them, suppressing their worship, and will seek to force idolatry upon them. If it be asked, "How can this affect all Christendom?" the answer is, that Christendom's political chief and the evil one in Jerusalem are in league, consequently where the one has influence, the other has also. Christendom and the Jews will be together in apostasy, in the last days, strange as it may sound in some ears now. Has the reader ever weighed up 1 John 2:22? "Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is Antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son." Here we get the two forms of evil distinctly connected; the first part of the verse being Jewish unbelief, the second part Christian, or, more properly, Antichristian apostasy. Solemn thought! Where the light has shone the brightest the darkness will be the most dense very shortly.

There is restraint at the present time, as the Apostle shows: "And now ye know what withholdeth, that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only He Who now letteth will let, until He be taken out of the way" (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7). Evil intruded itself into the sphere of Christian profession very early, but though it is steadily but surely working, there is restraint, that it come not yet to a head. The "what" in verse 6, unnamed by the Apostle, is probably government. It is still true that "the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1); and while this is so there is at least a measure of check on human will. But presently Romans 13:1 will cease to be true, for the supreme power in Christendom will receive his throne and authority direct from the Dragon (Revelation 13:1-4); then the way will be open for evil to show itself in its

most extreme form.

"He" in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 is the Holy Spirit. He dwells in the Church of God and in the individual Christian, and is here to guard the interests of Christ. He will not suffer the fearful impiety of which we are speaking to take place while He is present. But when the Church is removed He will quit the scene, and man will be left to the evil of his own heart, and to the devil.

Those will be days of fearful delusion. To help it on miracles will be performed, and these in great variety. Miracles are not necessarily proofs of Divine authority, whatever Papists may say; the devil can perform them, when God thinks proper to allow it. The coming of the man of sin is "according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Perhaps the most serious is the appearance of fire called down from heaven. This we find in Revelation 13:13. This was Elijah's great sign that Jehovah was the true God, which caused the people to fall on their faces and own "Jehovah, He is the God; Jehovah, He is the God" (1 Kings 18:38-39).

The judicial hand of God will be put forth in that day, as well as the power of Satan. It is righteous retribution from Himself. Men in Christendom have had the truth, but have not loved it; instead of believing it they have had pleasure in unrighteousness. God will remember all this in the day to come. His hand will be upon them. He will send them a strong delusion, that they shall believe the lie of the enemy. The truth not having been received (though known), the lie shall be to their eternal ruin. Some find it hard to believe that the (so-called) enlightened men of this day will soon bow at the feet of the man of sin; but it is solemnly true. Men who affect to despise their ignorant ancestors for bowing down to stocks and stones will presently be found doing what is immeasurably worse. Probably the strictly religious Jews of the Lord's day did not care to be told that the unclean spirit of idolatry will return into their midst with sevenfold virulence (Matthew 12:43-45). The last state of Judaism will be worse than the first, and Christendom will be in the same condition. The two systems, so opposed in principle, will be together in evil in the dark day that is at hand.

We will now turn from 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 to some other portions of Scripture. Refer to Daniel 11:36-45. A person is here very abruptly introduced as "the king." Who is he? If the whole chapter be examined carefully it will be found to be occupied with the contentions of the kings of the North and South (Syria and Egypt) about the glorious land. Down to verse 35 the chapter has been fulfilled. The exploits of the Maccabean times are spoken of, also the intervention of the Romans, under the title of the ships of Chittim, before the first coming into the world of our Lord Jesus. Then we observe a great chasm in the prophecy, so common in the prophetic word. This whole period is passed over in silence, and we are carried forward to the last days. "The king" of Daniel 11:36 is clearly a person reigning in the land, and quite distinct from the kings of the North and South, who both make war upon him (see Daniel 11:40). It is Antichrist, but viewed, not as the leader of Christendom's apostasy, as in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17, but as the profane leader of the Jewish people. The language is too similar to that of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 to be misunderstood. "And the king shall do according to his will, and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished; for that that is determined shall be done. Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall magnify himself

above all" (Daniel 11:36-37). Here we have the sadly familiar features, pride, willfulness, blasphemy, and usurpation of God's place and title. Daniel 11:37 is plain that he will be a Jew. No Gentile could hope to be received by the Jewish people as Messiah, heir to the throne of David. It is strange that all interpreters of prophecy do not see this really simple point.

The man of sin is introduced as "the king" with equal abruptness in Isaiah's prophecy. "For Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king also it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it" (Isaiah 30:33). See also Isaiah 57:9; "Thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase thyself even unto hell." Both passages refer to the same solemn person, the one setting forth his doom, the other the extreme wickedness of the people of Israel in having to do with him.

Now a word or two as to Revelation 13:1-18. In the first half of the chapter we have the Satanic revival of the Roman empire, with the blasphemy of its head and his persecution of the saints of God. In Revelation 13:11 we read, "And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon." This is very plain. The language of this and the following verses clearly identify him with the evil agent we have been considering. He is called here a beast because of his connection with the political power. The first arises "out of the sea," i.e., out of the anarchy of the nations; the second comes up "out of the earth," the condition of things being more settled at the moment of his appearance. The second beast is the deceiver and miracle worker rather than the first. The one is characterised by great political power, the other by Satanic seduction.

How awful the end of both! They have lifted up their hands against the living God, and against His Christ, and they will feel the weight of Divine wrath in a peculiarly awful manner at the Lord's appearing. 2 Thessalonians 2:8 speaks very solemnly of the Antichrist, "Whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming." How full of meaning is his title, "Son of Perdition," as we read these words! "The breath of his mouth" is His word (see Isaiah 11:4; Isaiah 30:33). One word from the Lord, and the career of these messengers of Satan is over for ever. Their power is paralysed by His appearing in glory, however great their stoutness of heart in His absence. Revelation 19:20 completes the solemn account: "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These were both cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone." Pre-eminent in wickedness, they shall be pre-eminent in punishment. All other transgressors will pass through death, and be raised to stand before the Great White Throne, thence to be consigned to the lake of fire; these men are solemn exceptions. Without passing through death at all, they are cast in at least a thousand years before the mass of the ungodly.

In conclusion, a few words to the conscience of the reader. We have been considering an inexpressibly solemn theme. We have seen what will be the end of merely nominal profession of Christianity — apostasy, and the worship of the man of sin. How is it with the reader? Is Christianity with you a real thing, or a name only? If the latter, be warned in time! Do not rest satisfied with an oil-less lamp, which will avail you nothing in the great day, but acquaint yourself with the Christ of God while you may. The greatest sinner He will not refuse, nor the greatest

professor, if the true state is owned before Him. "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12).

"See the Saviour, long expected,

Now in solemn pomp appear!

And His saints, by man rejected,

All His heavenly glory share:

Hallelujah!

See the Son of God appear!

Chapter 160

The Coming Great Tribulation.

The Coming Great Tribulation.

It is commonly understood by those who bear the Name of the Lord Jesus that the Scriptures speak of a period of unparalleled trial for the saints of God before the termination of the present age. Many are not a little exercised as to the matter, not being at all clear in their minds as to who the persons are who will suffer at that time. Some assert that the Church of God will be in the scene of conflict then, and that therefore the heavenly saints will be the sufferers during that terrible period; others affirm that the Church of God will be removed to glory ere that day begins, and that its trials will fall upon a different order of witnesses altogether. The question is manifestly far too grave and fraught with results much too serious, to be allowed to remain a mere matter of speculation or opinion. It cannot be treated as a point of indifference. Time hastens, and the darkness deepens around us; every thoughtful Christian believes that we are drawing near to the fulfilment of all that the prophets have spoken. Hence the importance of knowing certainly the mind of the Lord. If the Church of God is indeed to pass through the terrible ordeal, it is of moment to know it, that we may prepare ourselves for it and not be taken unawares; while, on the other hand, if the Scriptures which speak of the great tribulation really contemplate an entirely different company of saints, it is well to be assured of it, that our hearts may be at rest about the matter.

All this we now propose to inquire into. The only standard of authority is the Word of God. What a mighty contrast there is between the ever-varying opinions of men and the inspired Word of our God! On the one hand there is no certainty, but frequently distress and doubt; on the other hand, there is solid ground for the feet to stand upon, and faith finds perfect rest. All doubts are there removed, all mists are dispelled; divine certainty is known and enjoyed in the soul.

We will first examine Matthew 24:1-51. This is admitted to be the most important passage dealing with the coming great tribulation. To have right thoughts as to this chapter is to get real help as to many other portions of Scripture. The general character of the Gospel of Matthew must be borne in mind. It is not in vain that the Spirit of God has given us four different accounts of the Lord Jesus in His walk and ways below. Each evangelist presents the Lord in a different aspect, as must be evident to every reader. In what character does Matthew present Him to our hearts? Unquestionably as the Messiah of Israel. Matthew 1:1-25 shows Him to be Abraham's true Seed, and David's Heir. The Gospel as a whole is the trial of the question whether or not Israel was prepared to receive Him. The result of the test we know. He was despised and rejected by men, and abhorred of His own nation. Consequently, in Matthew 16:18, the Lord speaks of the Church — "Upon this rock I will build My Church" — a new work of grace to be performed consequent upon the final rejection of Himself by Israel. Warnings abound in Matthew's Gospel. Israel was not left in ignorance as to what would happen if the Messiah was not received. One of the Lord's most solemn statements concerning them is to be found in Matthew 23:37-39, which immediately precedes the chapter now under consideration. Mark the sorrow of His blessed heart expressing itself: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent

unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord." All this the disciples heard and pondered. Their minds were filled with the promised kingdom; they firmly believed that their Master was the long expected Deliverer, and they looked that He would soon set up the kingdom in power and glory. The following, among other passages, show what was in their thoughts: Matthew 20:20-23; Luke 19:11; Luke 24:21; Acts 1:6.

They did not as yet understand the cross, though the Lord frequently spoke to them of it. Deliverance from the Romans and all other oppressors, followed by glory in the land, was alone before their minds. But they might have gathered at least two things from the Lord's lamentation over Jerusalem: first, that there must be a period of desolation for Israel and the temple, because of their unbelief; and secondly, that there will be a future coming of the Blessed One, when He will be gladly welcomed by the very nation that once disowned and rejected Him.

However, in passing hence, they drew the Lord's attention to the beautiful buildings of the temple, and got in reply: "See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2). This was too plain to be misinterpreted. Accordingly they asked the Lord the three questions found in Matthew 24:3. "Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the age?" Just a few words on the expression "Thy coming." Let it be distinctly understood that they in no way referred to the heavenly hope of the Church of God, the coming of the Lord Jesus into the air to gather together His own. Of this they had absolutely no knowledge whatever. It was not yet revealed; indeed, they knew nothing at all about the Church itself beyond the brief word already referred to in Matthew 16:1-28. Could we have spoken to them on that day of accomplished redemption, and a rent veil, of Sonship to the Father, of the Holy Ghost's indwelling, of union with a glorified Man in heaven, or of translation to heaven to spend eternity with the First-begotten in the Father's house, they would not have understood a word. All these are privileges now known and enjoyed, being the inalienable portion of all who in this period believe in the Lord Jesus. But these things were not known by the disciples when with the Lord on the Mount of Olives. It will greatly help to the elucidation of Matthew 24:1-51 if all thoughts of the Church of God are promptly dismissed from the mind.

The questions raised by the disciples were not asked from the standpoint of the Church at all. They were merely Jewish believers who believed in Jesus as the Messiah, and who were desirous of information concerning His earthly kingdom.* They are thus representatives of a similar company of saints who will be found in the land at a later day.

{*I am anxious that the above remarks should not be misunderstood. Though the eleven formed no part of the Church of God at the time of which we speak, they most assuredly did afterwards; indeed, they were its first members. But this was not true until the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost descended from heaven to form the body.}

At this juncture it may be well to compare Luke's account of the Lord's remarkable prophecy. He was led of the Spirit of God to dwell on the first of the three questions, with the Lord's answer. Hence we get there full information concerning the overthrow of Jerusalem by the Romans, with but few remarks concerning the crisis at the end of the age. Matthew, on the other hand, while

naming all the questions, was guided to dwell on the answers to the second and third only. Through not noticing this, many interpreters have imagined that Matthew 24:1-51 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, because the parallel passage in Luke does! But this is a great mistake, and due to want of attention to the Spirit's use of the two writers. We may here observe the importance of inspiration. Merely human arrangements cannot account for such differences; but when we bear in mind that the Holy Ghost had different objects before His mind in taking up his chosen vessels, all is simple and plain.

Now let us glance down the Lord's words in Matthew 24:1-51. In Matthew 24:4-14 the general position during the Lord's absence is briefly described. His servants must expect to meet trial and suffering in their service, but must persevere to the end. These exhortations are of value to those who serve the Lord Jesus now; but will have their full application in the circumstances of the Jewish witnesses at the time of the end.

Then we get something more definite. "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whoso readeth let him understand): then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains" (Matthew 24:15-16). Here we have a very important sign. What is meant by "the abomination of desolation"? "Abomination" is the Scripture title for an idol. Thus we read of "Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites," and "Chemosh the abomination of Moab" (1 Kings 11:5-7). It is, therefore, an idol set up in the holy place at Jerusalem. This has never happened in the past. True, the temple was defiled by Antiochus Epiphanes (Daniel 11:31), but this was long before the Lord's prophecy. The only event of note in connection with the temple since the Lord Jesus spoke was its destruction by the Roman armies under Titus in A.D. 70; consequently the Lord's prediction has yet to be fulfilled.

The explanation is as follows. In the closing crisis the Jews will receive the false Christ, as has been shown in a preceding paper. He will keep his word with them for a time, and will appear to be their guardian and friend. But he will change his tactics after a while, and in league with the power of the West will seek to force idolatry upon them. Not only will he himself sit in the temple of God, claiming to be divine, but he will place there the image of the Roman beast. This I believe to be the "abomination of desolation" to which our Lord Jesus here refers. There will be really three false objects of worship in that day — the dragon, the image of the beast, and the Antichrist (Revelation 12:4-15; 2 Thessalonians 2:4). The mass of the Jewish people will blindly accept all this. The Lord warned that wicked generation that the unclean spirit would return with sevenfold malignity at the end (Matthew 12:43-45). The devil-possessed herd of swine furnish us with a solemn picture of them, rushing headlong to destruction (Matthew 8:28-34).

They have kindled their own fire in accepting the false Messiah, and shall lie down in sorrow; this they shall have at Jehovah's righteous hand, as the prophet declares (Isaiah 1:11).

Those will be terrible times for such as fear God; fearful persecutions will break out more severe in character than anything yet known. The Lord bids them note the signs and take warning. When they behold this daring iniquity in the sanctuary in Jerusalem they are to flee. So urgent is the matter that "Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes" (Matthew 24:17-18). They are to make for the mountains with all possible haste. All this instruction is plainly for persons living in Judea. Readers of Scripture who persist in seeing the Church of God in this chapter must find

themselves beset with difficulties in every detail of the prophecy. Is the Church of God confined to one land that such signs should be of service? Is not the Church rather to be found in every quarter of the earth? When once it is perceived that the godly in Judea are in view, all is simple and clear.

The Lord bids them pray that they may not have to flee in the winter, or on the Sabbath day. How exceedingly gracious! He is ever-mindful of the circumstances of His beloved saints, however apparently trivial or small. He thought of the suffering involved in a winter flight without time to go into the house for an overcoat! And what a dilemma they would find themselves in if the image happened to be set up on the Sabbath day! Therefore He bids them cry to God that it may not so occur. In such a case they would not know what to do. If a journey of any length were undertaken on the Sabbath day (Acts 1:12) it would involve a breach of the law; yet, if they stayed awhile, for conscience sake, they might lose their lives.

The introduction of the Sabbath day is an additional proof that we are on Jewish, rather than Church, ground in this chapter. Nowhere in the epistles of the New Testament is the Sabbath spoken of in connection with the Church of God save in Colossians 2:16-17, where the apostle contends for liberty as to it. The Christian's day is not the seventh day, but the first of the week; which speaks to us of redemption accomplished, of victory won, and of a new creation where all things are of God. It is serious to confound the two days, though commonly done. The principles connected with them are entirely different, and even opposite. The Sabbath day is in abeyance during the present period of grace, but will come into view again when God resumes relations with the people of Israel.

To return. The tribulation will be an unparalleled one. Satan will just then have been cast out of heaven (never more to return), and will be full of fury, knowing that he has but a short time (Revelation 12:7-13). All opposition to his schemes he will endeavour to stamp out by means of his principal tools, the Roman Beast and the man of sin. Still, God holds the reins. The enemy cannot exceed His limits. He has fixed the moment when the sorrow shall cease, and all the rage of Satan cannot prolong it one hour. What comfort this is for the saints of God! "Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:22). For three years and a half the tribulation will rage. The period is variously described in Scripture, leaving no real doubt in the mind. In Revelation 11:3, Revelation 12:6, we read of "one thousand, two hundred and threescore days;" in Revelation 11:2, of "forty-two months;" and in Daniel 7:25, of "a time, and times and the dividing of time." Daniel 9:27 also confirms this.

Before speaking of the deliverance, the Lord gives another warning of a highly important character. "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo! here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore, if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not" (Matthew 24:23-26). This word of counsel will doubtless prove to be of great value at that time. The fugitives might easily be duped. When fleeing for their lives, crying out of their agonised hearts, "Oh Lord, how long;" "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down" (Psalms 79:5; Isaiah 64:1), how easily might they be deceived by

false reports. Suppose someone told them that Christ had come, and had arrived at Bethlehem or elsewhere, it might be believed. There is a vast difference in the hope of the Christian and the hope of the Jew in this respect. Our hope is not the coming of the Lord Jesus to the earth, but into the air. We shall meet Him there, and go with Him into the Father's house. This is our proper expectation; but it will be otherwise with the waiting Jews. He will come to them where they are, His feet first touching the Mount of Olives, the spot from which He went up (Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:9-12). But the point of the Lord's warning is that they will not need to be informed when He appears, for His manifestation will be a public display of glory, comparable to the lightning coming out of the east, and shining unto the west: "Every eye shall see Him" (Revelation 1:7).

His advent will bring the Great Tribulation to a close. The righteous Lord will deal with His adversaries, especially the Beast, and the Man of Sin (as we have already shown), and deliver and comfort His oppressed and suffering saints. Such is the testimony of Matthew 24:1-51.

We will now consider the testimony of the Old Testament prophets. Read Jeremiah 30:4-9. The Prophet evidently speaks of the same time as the Lord Jesus in the chapter we have been examining. "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it." This is plainly the well-known time of unparalleled trouble. But who are the sufferers contemplated? Not the Church, of which Jeremiah knew even less than the disciples who sat with the Lord on the Mount of Olives. "It is even the time of 'Jacob's trouble.'" "These are the words which Jehovah spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah." All this is very simple and intelligible, save to those who are addicted to the habit of "spiritualizing" the prophecies of the Old Testament. Such a mode of interpretation is a grievous mistake, highly injurious in many cases to the soul, which finds itself appropriating as its own merely earthly blessings, when God would have the heart in the enjoyment of the heavenly portion, which He has made ours in the risen Christ. When God says "Israel" and "Judah," we may be assured that He means what He says. Hence, Jeremiah's prediction speaks of trouble for the earthly people, no others being before his mind. But deliverance shall follow, as Matthew 24:1-51 has shown us. Jacob shall be saved out of his tribulation, the yoke of the oppressors shall be broken for ever, and Israel shall serve Jehovah their God and the true David their king.

Turn now to Daniel 12:1 : "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time; and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." This exactly corresponds with what has already passed before us. It is the same epoch, for if the preceding verses be examined (Daniel 11:36-45) it will be seen that the Angel is speaking to the Prophet of the day of Antichrist's supremacy in the glorious land (Israel). With this is connected "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time." This is the familiar period of unparalleled tribulation. But who are the sufferers? "Thy people." Daniel's people are the Jews, as I need not stay to prove. Deliverance follows the trouble, at least for the elect — those written in God's book.

How harmonious is Scripture in all its parts! Though Jeremiah, Daniel, and the Lord Jesus wrote and spoke at different times, and under widely different circumstances, they exactly correspond in every little detail. The reverent mind cannot fail to see in this the guiding hand of the One Spirit. He it was Who inspired all the writers in the book of God, giving unity and harmony to the whole. May our confidence in the Spirit of God be deepened in this evil day, when so much unbelief and doubt

is around us on every hand.

The next passage for consideration may present greater difficulties to some readers of Holy Scripture; I refer to Revelation 7:9-17. There we read unquestionably of Gentiles, which has led many to suppose that the Church of God is intended. But attention to the place accorded to Revelation 7:1-17 will greatly help to solve the difficulty. Look back at the preceding chapters. In Revelation 1:1-20 we see the seven candlesticks, and the Son of Man walking in their midst; this is introductory. In Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22, in the epistles to the seven Churches in Asia, we have a sketch of the outward history of the Church on earth from the days of the Apostles until the end. After this we hear nothing more of Churches except in the postscript (Revelation 22:16). Revelation 4:1-11, Revelation 5:1-14, show heaven preparing itself for the work of judgment, and the heavenly saints, under the figure of twenty-four crowned and enthroned elders, are seen at home with the Lord before the judgments commence. This is followed by the breaking of the seals (Revelation 6:1-17) and the outpouring of divine wrath. Then Revelation 7:1-17 comes in. It is a parenthesis really, coming between the sixth and seventh seals. It speaks of mercy in the midst of judgment. The heart of God loves mercy. Judgment is His strange work. He must execute it, in consistency with the holiness of His nature, and in order to maintain the majesty of His throne, but He does not delight in judgment. It gives Him real delight to bless and save men, as Luke 15:1-32 shows; He never takes delight in judging them.

Revelation 7:1-17, then, is a parenthesis of mercy. The judgments are restrained, while God draws aside the veil, as it were, to mark of His own. First we get 144,000 sealed Israelites. A defined number of all the tribes of Israel are sealed in order to be preserved during the terrors of the times. But is this all? No; there are saved Gentiles also. "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9-14).

Some will say, "Surely these are the Church of God!" All such will do well to examine the verses very closely. Observe, this white-robed palm bearing throng are quite distinct from the elders, who, we have already remarked, represent the Church, though not the Church only. One of the elders raised the question with the Apostle as to this countless throng, and then explained that they had come out of the great tribulation. The definite article should be inserted in verse 14. It helps to a better understanding of the elder's words. They are evidently persons who have heard the gospel of the kingdom from Jewish messengers and believed it. Suffering follows for them, though not necessarily loss of life. It must be remembered that the seductions and troubles of the last days will be very widespread. Though most severe in Judea, as is just, they will extend thence more or less over the whole civilised earth. The Man of Sin in the land, being in league with the Chief of the revived Roman Empire, will spread his poison, with its consequent suffering and sorrow, on every

hand.

But these white-robed ones have by grace stood firm. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego of old, they have refused to join in the universal idolatry. "They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They are now seen victorious, about to enter into blessing. The terms of their blessing speak of earth, rather than heaven, the figures being borrowed principally from Isaiah 49:1-26. "Before the throne" is probably a moral, rather than local, expression, as in Revelation 14:3 (compare also Revelation 12:1). Their place and portion, I have no doubt, will be in the millennial earth under the peaceful reign of the Lord Jesus.

A few words as to Revelation 12:1-17 may be helpful to some of our readers. The great tribulation is not there referred to by name, but the allusion throughout is evidently to that period. The sun-clothed woman is seen persecuted by the Dragon, but preserved by God, and nourished in the wilderness during twelve hundred and sixty days (Revelation 12:6-14). Who is this woman? Verse 5 is sufficient to answer the question. The man child is Christ beyond all just controversy, and Christ came of Israel, as the Apostle reminds us in Romans 9:5. The first verse of our chapter shows us Israel as viewed from God's standpoint, invested with all the symbols of authority over the earth. In the closing days, she is the object of Satan's enmity. He will stir up the powers against her, and do all that is in his power to destroy her. But he will not succeed. Israel is intended by God to have the supreme place in the earth; a remnant will therefore be preserved in mercy through all the horrors of the last scenes for this end. His word to His tried ones will be, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee, hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast" (Isaiah 26:20). He will provide for them a Zoar, even as for Lot in a former day (Genesis 19:1-38).

One more Scripture remains to be noticed — Revelation 3:10 : "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

This word is undoubtedly for the Church of God. It is part of the Lord's address to the Church in Philadelphia. But how different the language of this passage to those we have been considering! We do not find here counsel as to what to do in the time of trial, nor any promise of preserving grace, but simply, "I will keep thee from the hour." There is surely a vast difference between being preserved through the trouble, and being kept from it altogether. Enoch and Noah naturally come to mind here. The one told of judgment to come, but was translated to heaven before it fell; the other likewise warned of coming wrath, but, instead of being removed from the scene of judgment, was preserved through it in a shelter provided for him and his house by God. Enoch is a type of the Church of God, Noah is rather a figure of the godly remnant of Israel.

"The hour of temptation" is a wider term than the "great tribulation." The latter, as we have seen, is of but three and a half years' duration, beginning only in the midst of Daniel's seventieth week, when the false Christ changes his front and demands worship; the "hour of temptation" commences when he first appears, and covers, therefore, the whole of the last prophetic week, and possibly more besides. From it all the Church of God is to be preserved. We look for the Bright and Morning Star. Ere the judgments of God descend, we shall be taken out of this evil scene, and safely housed with Christ Himself in the Father's house on high.

Meanwhile His word is to us the word of His patience. He waits at the Father's right hand above, and we wait in the place of conflict below, for the same wondrous event, for the same blessed moment of joy. May it be increasingly a reality with every one of us, for His Name's sake!

Lamb of God! Thou soon in glory

Wilt to this sad earth return;

All Thy foes shall quake before Thee,

All that now despise Thee mourn.

All Thy saints shall then be with Thee,

With Thee in Thy kingdom reign;

Thine the praise, and Thine the glory,

Lamb of God, for sinners slain!

Chapter 161

The Restoration of Israel.

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The ultimate future of Israel is very different from that of Christendom. The latter will plunge into the darkest kind of apostasy, as has been already shown, with no restoration afterwards; whereas Israel, after the severe purging of the latter-day crisis, will be brought into blessing and earthly glory. Scripture is blessedly full and plain as to this. Any who have difficulties as to the Jewish question will do well to ponder prayerfully, in the first instance, Romans 9:1-33, Romans 10:1-21, Romans 11:1-36. After having unfolded in the previous chapters the indiscriminate grace of God proclaimed in the Gospel, the Apostle takes up the special promises made by God to Israel, and explains His dealings with regard to them. First, he shows that God is sovereign, and acts as He pleases. This really explains Israel's history in the past. God chose Isaac not Ishmael, though both were the sons of Abraham. Later He chose Jacob in preference to Esau. In this case both were children of one mother (which Isaac and Ishmael were not), and born at the same time. Again, He spared Israel in His sovereignty when they had forfeited everything by their worship of the golden calf, saying, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Romans 9:15). Thus Israel's place in the past was due to the sovereignty of God. There was no question of special merit or desert: He willed it, and that is all. On the same principle He has set them aside during the present period because of their sins and rejection of Messiah, and is dealing in sovereign grace with the Gentiles.

But has He done with the seed of Abraham for ever? By no means. The Apostle raises the question, "I say then, Hath God cast away His people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew" (Romans 11:1-2). He then proceeds to show that God has a remnant during the present time, while the spirit of slumber is upon the mass of the nation. These of course are incorporated in the Church of God, the body of Christ. But this is not all. God has not forgotten them as a people, and intends to reinstate them in His divine favour, with the full pardon of all their sins. They have been cut out of the olive tree because of their defection, but they shall be brought in once again. In Romans 11:23 we are shown that this is possible, "God is able to graft them in again;" in Romans 11:24 that it is probable, "How much more shall these... be grafted into their own olive tree?" Then the Apostle rises higher still in his reasoning and shows it to be certain, "Blindness in part is happened unto Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Romans 11:25-26).

There are three reasons why God must restore the people of Israel:

(1) His Word; (2) His Name; and (3) the death of Christ.

(1) HIS WORD. The promises of God to Abraham, confirmed later to Isaac, were unconditional. In sovereign grace He appeared to Abraham and said, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be

blessed... all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever... unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 12:3; Genesis 13:15; Genesis 15:18). These promises have never been really fulfilled. Israel has never inhabited the whole extent of the land, as here described. True, it was all under tribute in the days of Solomon, but that was not a sufficient answer to the promise of God. His intention was that they should inherit the land themselves and enjoy it apart from the presence of the stranger. Further, it is patent to all that they have not yet had any of it for an everlasting possession; for what they did take possession of they lost after a while by reason of sin, and were dispersed among the Gentiles. Let none suppose that because this was the case, there is no future glory for them. Though they have been unfaithful to God, He will not be unfaithful to them, but will make good all His word. This is strikingly reasoned out by the Holy Spirit in Galatians 3:15-18. There we read, "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; though it be a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many: but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise." This is very simple. Their law-breaking has not cancelled God's word. His promises were unconditional and before the law. They remain therefore to be made good at the end; for it is impossible for God to lie.

(2) HIS NAME. When at the first He called Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt, God said, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is My Name for ever, and this is My memorial unto all generations" (Exodus 3:15). More than this, He distinctly connected them with Himself under His Name Jehovah: "I am Jehovah, and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by My Name Jehovah was I not known to them" (Exodus 6:2-3). This Name expresses His unchangeableness, as Malachi 3:6 shows; in it, therefore, is bound up the restoration of the people, however guilty and undeserving. They have changed towards God, but blessed be His Name, He has never changed towards them, though obliged because of their sins and unbelief to hide His face from them, as it were, for a season. Let the following splendid declaration be pondered by all who think that God has done with Israel: "Thus saith Jehovah, if heaven above can be measured and the foundation of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all they have done, saith Jehovah" (Jeremiah 31:37). This is magnificent surely, and worthy of the God who uttered it.

(3) THE DEATH OF CHRIST. This is an additional reason, and a grandly fundamental one, why God will yet show mercy to guilty Israel. Does the reader remember the prophecy of Caiaphas in John 11:49-51? It was that Jesus should die for the nation. No doubt his thoughts about the matter and the thoughts of the Holy Spirit were very different, but his words contain the truth nevertheless. Believers should see more in the cross of Christ than the mere putting away of our sins. Thank God! He has borne our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24); but there is a part in that cross for Israel also. They will be brought to know this by-and-by. During Israel's long dark night of unbelief the memorial of that precious sacrifice is before God (Leviticus 6:9). When the Lord Jesus is manifested in glory, they will mourn for Him, as Zechariah speaks. They will

learn in that day that He whom their fathers pierced was wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their iniquities (Zechariah 12:9-14; Isaiah 53:5). What a discovery for Israel! what a lesson to learn after ages of unbelief! Thus will God place them — and that everlastingly — under the shelter of the precious, once-accomplished work of Christ.

Having considered these reasons for their restoration, let us examine some of the statements of Scripture as to it. Turn to Ezekiel 37:1-28. Here we have the Prophet in the midst of a valley of dry bones. He was told that these bones represented the whole house of Israel. "Behold, they say, our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts" (Ezekiel 37:11). Death is here used to describe their national condition. Death is variously used in the Word of God: (1) It describes the spiritual condition of the unconverted (Ephesians 2:1); (2) The separation of soul and body; (3) The final doom of the ungodly (Revelation 20:14); and (4) national dissolution, as here. The following passages may also be consulted: Isaiah 26:13-14; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2.

Ezekiel's vision in no way speaks of the resurrection of dead men, as such, nor of the conversion of sinners, though the chapter has at times been used for both these purposes. It is the national awakening of the people of Israel to the possession and enjoyment of their long-lost glory. With this corresponds the words of the Apostle in Romans 11:15 : "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? "This is the work of God alone; the time the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not till then will God look upon them with favour, nor put out His hand to restore them.

Any attempt to re-establish them in their land and national position prior to that day, however well-intentioned, will only end in disaster. Let this be well pondered. While on the other hand it is a serious thing to ill-treat or oppress the Jew; on the other hand it is solemn to interfere with the governmental dealings of God by attempting to reinstate them in their possession. They are scattered and broken under the hand of God. He it was Who expelled them for most serious reasons. Who will essay to reverse His sentence? It is no mere accident that has befallen them, but the righteous judgment of God. Ere they can have true restoration Israel must receive at the hands of Jehovah double for their sins (Jeremiah 16:18; Isaiah 40:2). He, and He alone, is entitled to fix the time when their warfare shall be accomplished and the indignation shall cease (Daniel 11:36).

Isaiah 18:1-7 is a highly interesting chapter in connection with Israel. It seems to predict an effort by some maritime power to gather them just before the time of the intervention of Jehovah. The chapter is not a burden, but a call. "Woe to the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia: that sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters, saying, Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled!" (Isaiah 18:1-2). The land is not named, but three marks are given: (1) it is a distant land; (2) it is a maritime power; and (3) friendly to the Jews. There is no need to speculate as to its name; events will show in due course.

But Jehovah is not in the movement, His time not having arrived. However, He draws attention to it: "All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, see ye, when he lifteth up an ensign on the mountain, and when he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye. For so the Lord said unto me, I will take My rest, and I will consider in My dwelling place like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of

dew in the heat of harvest" (Isaiah 18:3-4). The language may be obscure to some of our readers, but it clearly shows that while men are mistakenly active, God is not moving, but from His heavenly dwelling place He notes what they are doing. He considers their action; but He takes His rest, the due moment not having arrived for deliverance.

Will the enterprise succeed? Will the divine sentence of exile and chastisement thus be reversed for Israel? No. "For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches. They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth, and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them" (Isaiah 18:5-6). Man's scheme will thus be blasted. When all seems fair, and success seems certain, disaster will come. The people thus restored will but fall a prey to the powers around. With this Scripture before us we need not be surprised at any attempt to reinstate scattered Israel in the land of their fathers. The closing verse of the chapter shows that when Jehovah intervenes on behalf of His people the results will be glorious and full. The once scattered and peeled people will be presented to Himself to be settled in peace for ever around His long-loved centre, the Mount Zion.

We will now consider the details of this. When they were expelled from the good land long ago it was in two parts. The ten tribes were carried away by the kings of Assyria; the two tribes, forming the kingdom of Judah, by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Scripture is silent as to the home-going of the two tribes. It simply regards them as in the land during the events of the last days. They will return in unbelief, and will acknowledge and suffer under the false Christ. They will either rebuild the temple, or adapt to their use some other existing building. Anyhow, we read of "the temple of God" and "the holy place" (2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 11:1-2; Matthew 24:15).

The mass of them will be very pleased with their leader, though the godly will have their misgivings from the first. He will come to them in his own name, and will be received, as the Lord Jesus warned (John 5:43). As their head he will form a seven years covenant with the Roman beast for protection, &c. This Jehovah describes as a covenant with death and an agreement with hell (Isaiah 28:14-22), denouncing the pride and impiety which leads up to it. The reason of this covenant is apparently their dread of the Northern foe, called "the overflowing scourge." But their agreement will prove worthless, for their dreadful foe will chastise them nevertheless; and what is worse, their chosen leader will himself prove a worse enemy within — a veritable wolf in the fold. Alas, for guilty Judah! When the Christ of God came they knew Him not. They discerned not the things which belonged unto their peace, nor the time of their visitation. Therefore the sorrow and scourging, the darkness and delusion.

The appearing of the Lord Jesus will deliver the godly remnant of Judah from this terrible enemy and persecutor. Matthew 24:29-31 makes this perfectly plain. He will answer their agonised cry for help and deliverance by His appearing in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. He will appear to their joy, and those who hate them shall be ashamed (Isaiah 66:5).

The re-gathering of the ten tribes will follow. The great trumpet shall be blown, and those who are ready to perish shall be brought together to worship Jehovah in the holy mount at Jerusalem (Isaiah 27:13). The trumpet of Matthew 24:31 refers to the same event, I have no doubt. Then will the feast of trumpets be fulfilled (Leviticus 23:23-26). When the silver trumpets were first instituted

in connection with the tabernacle, they were for the calling together of the people (Numbers 10:1-3).

What a home-coming it will be after long centuries of wandering and desolation! What joy to God, and what blessing for the people of His choice! And, also, what a meeting of the tribes after dreary ages of separation and estrangement! Isaiah 49:18-23 graphically describes their meeting. To those already in the land — the two tribes — the Lord says: "Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together and come to thee." They shall clothe themselves with them as a garment, and the land will be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants. It is all most touchingly described by the Spirit. "Then shalt thou say in thine heart, who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?" Well may they ask. For centuries Zion has been bereaved of her children. Long has the land kept her Sabbaths. But when Jehovah's time comes, how marvellous and glorious the change!

He will see to it that His own are brought home in a manner befitting the people of the Lord. The Gentiles shall bring Zion's sons in their arms, and her daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. Kings shall be their nursing fathers, and their queens their nursing mothers; and they, the ransomed of the Lord, shall return with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away (Isaiah 49:22-23; Isaiah 35:10).

Many wonder where these tribes are at the present time, and much time and labour have been spent in the endeavour to settle the question. But why should Christians exercise themselves as to such a matter? Where Scripture is silent, we do not well to be curious. Faith is assured that God knows their whereabouts, and that He will make it manifest in His own time and way. The table of shewbread in the sanctuary of old with its twelve loaves was ever before the Lord, and during the darkness the light of the golden candlestick shed its rays upon them (Leviticus 24:1-9). This is night for Israel beyond all question; but the eye of God is upon them, not one of the tribes is forgotten before Him. He knows where to lay hands upon them when He requires them for restoration and blessing.

It must not be supposed, however, that they are all Israel who are of Israel (Romans 9:6). The two tribes, as we have seen, will be severely sifted in the land under Antichrist, and but a third part will be brought through the fire for blessing (Zechariah 13:8-9). The mass will follow the Deceiver to their everlasting ruin and sorrow. The ten tribes will also be sifted, though not quite in the same way. They were not guilty of the grave sin of the rejection of the Messiah, as their brethren were. Judah will be the greater sufferer, being responsible before God for that fearful crime. Still, the other tribes will be put through the sieve, as Ezekiel 20:34-38 shows. Jehovah will bring them into the wilderness before restoring them to Canaan, and will there plead with them face to face. They must pass under His rod, that the rebels and the transgressors may be purged out. The remnant will then be brought in, to be uprooted no more for ever; for Jehovah will plant them in their own land, with His whole heart, and with His whole soul, as the Prophet assures us.

Then the nation will be one once more. They have been a divided people since the days of Rehoboam. Solomon's serious defection from the Lord caused the rending of the nation after his death. Jeroboam was divinely permitted to lead ten tribes away from their allegiance to the house of David (1 Kings 11:1-43, 1 Kings 12:1-33). They have never been united since that day. They

were often in open conflict with each other, the larger company being invariably in league with the kings of Syria. Then came the yet greater separation, when the ten tribes were deported by the kings of Assyria. These have never since been restored to their own possession.

The prophet Ezekiel was instructed as to their future unification in a very simple way. He was bidden to take two sticks, and to write on the one, "For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions;" and on the other, "For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions;" and was then to join them to each other, making them one stick in his hand (Ezekiel 37:15-17). Thus will Jehovah do for Israel by-and-by. Their divisions will be healed, these always being the fruit of sin and failure, whether in Israel, the world, or the Church of God.

In the coming day of glory, Israel will have one King and one centre. Christ will be their head, the true David, the man after God's own heart (Ezekiel 37:24-25; Zechariah 14:9; Zechariah 14:16-17; Hosea 1:11; Hosea 3:5). Then they will sing in reality, "Hosanna to the King of Israel that cometh in the Name of Jehovah." In the past it was but the excitement of nature, the cry changing in less than a week to "Away with Him. Crucify Him. We have no king but Caesar." In the future it will be a real work of the Spirit of God, producing sentiments in their hearts of a divine and abiding character. What a King Christ will be to them! David and Solomon both typified Him, but in what a faint degree! David sinned, and brought the pestilence among the poor sheep in consequence; Solomon dazzled them with glory and splendour, but the yoke was heavy and the oppression severe; and the bright season of glory ended in gloom and disaster. But the true David will bring peace and blessing to His people; the true Solomon will display before them a brighter glory, but His rule will be in righteousness and equity, with no defection on His part at the end. God has only One whom He can entrust with universal rule — His beloved Son, the Son of Man.

Not only will Israel then have but one King; they will have but one centre also. The ancient rivalry between Jerusalem and Samaria will be heard no more; Zion will be exalted to its rightful place as the chosen resting place of the Lord, the city of the great King. It will be an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations (Psalms 132:13-14; Psalms 48:2; Isaiah 60:15). "Jehovah loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God" (Psalms 87:2-3). From thence will the whole earth be administered, and from it will go forth the law and the word of the Lord. Jerusalem has long been trodden under foot by the Gentiles for the sins of her children, but God will yet favour her dust and take pleasure in her palaces. When the arrogant Gentile has been humbled to the dust, Jehovah's long-loved Zion will be restored to its divinely-appointed place in the earth.

When Zion is restored Israel will possess the sanctuary of God once more. This was a distinguishing mark of old, and it shall be so again, in the day to come. "I will place them, and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore... and the nations shall know that I Jehovah do sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore" (Ezekiel 37:26; Ezekiel 37:28). The plan of the new temple may be seen in Ezekiel 40:1-49, &c. The Shekinah cloud which left so reluctantly in the day of Israel's transgression will return again to their joy. The priesthood will be restored, and the sacrifices, and some of the feasts. The sacrifices of the future will, of course, be commemorative in their character, looking back to the one great sacrifice which is the foundation of all blessing, whether for heaven or earth. Of the feasts, all will be restored but the feast of Pentecost and the Day of Atonement. The first is now having its

accomplishment in the call of the Church of God; the second will be completed in its last part when the great High Priest comes out of the heavenly sanctuary, and shows Himself to His own.

Though Israel will thus have the sanctuary of God once more, they will be, as it were, but its guardians. God intends the Gentiles to have a part in the blessings and privileges of it. "Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar: for Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (Isaiah 56:7). Year by year the spared ones of the nations will go up to Jerusalem to keep the feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16). This will not arouse Jewish enmity or jealousy then. They will no longer be the coldly conservative people that they have been. In the early days of Christianity it drew out all their rage that the Gentiles should even hear the Gospel, though they had no regard for it themselves. What changes grace works! In the Day of their blessing, they will gladly share with others the favours so richly bestowed upon them, and will thus fulfil their high and holy mission in the earth.

The whole nation will be converted. When they are brought under the power of the New Covenant, God will put His laws in their hearts and write them in their minds. They will not need to appeal to each other's consciences as to sin, nor to exhort each other as to the Lord, for all will know Him from the least to the greatest (Jeremiah 31:31-34). A mighty change, surely, when we consider their present alienated state!

A fresh outpouring of the Spirit will also be experienced at that time. The early rain fell on the Day of Pentecost, and marvellous have been the results. The latter rain will fall on Israel in the day of their millennial glory. God will put His Spirit within them, pouring Him out from on high (Ezekiel 37:14; Isaiah 32:15). Joel's prophecy, quoted by Peter in Acts 2:1-47, will then be completely accomplished. No fresh outpouring must be looked for until then. During this period of grace the Holy Spirit is here as the birthright portion of every individual Christian and of the Church of God. It is ours to walk in the Spirit and to be filled with Him. Many are vague as to this. They observe that the spiritual condition of the Church at large is low, and deplore it, but think that the only corrective is another outpouring or baptism of the Spirit. This is not the case, however well-intentioned the souls may be who think so. The real need is more simple faith in the mighty fact that the Holy Spirit is present on earth. Let us use the power we have, and God will honour the effort.

When Israel is thus converted and blessed with the Spirit the link of relationship between them and Jehovah will be fully restored. Israel has been an unfaithful wife to Jehovah, playing with many lovers, so that He has had to divorce her and put her away. But the time of her widowhood is drawing to a close, the Lo Ammi sentence will soon be reversed, and God will once more have pleasure in His people. In the past she did not know, in her blindness, who it was that really loved her, and gave her corn, and wine and oil, and decked her with jewels; but when grace operates in her heart, she will turn to Him in contrition and repentance, that she may be received to His heart once more. "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her (or, speak to her heart).... And it shall be at that day, saith Jehovah, that thou shalt call Me Ishi (my husband); and shalt call Me no more Baali (my lord). I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name" (Hosea 2:14-17). The Book of Psalms and the Song of Solomon open up to us the dealings of God with Israel in that day; the one showing His work in their consciences and the other His work in their

hearts. Israel shall be His in reality in that day of glory.

Those will be days of universal blessing. Not by our means will God fill the earth with His glory, but by means of restored and converted Israel. The following is their language rather than the language of the Church of God: —

"God be merciful unto us and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us, that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise Thee, O God, let all the people praise Thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for Thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise Thee, O God, let all the people praise Thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us: and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him" (Psalms 67:1-7).

Well might the Psalmist say, as he thought of the coming glory: "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be His glorious Name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen and Amen" (Psalms 72:18-19).

Thy sympathies and hopes are ours;

Dear Lord! we wait to see

Creation, all — below, above,

Redeemed and blest by Thee.

The Old Old Story

The Old Old Story

(Gospel Addresses)

W W Fereday.

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To the reader.

This unpretentious little volume contains condensed reports of Gospel addresses delivered on Lord's Day evenings in different places in England, Scotland, and Ireland. The addresses were greatly appreciated by those who listened to them; and it is hoped that they will now yield blessing to those who read them. Our great aim has been to

Make the message clear and plain

That Christ receiveth sinful men.

That the Gracious Spirit of God may speed the book on its happy mission is our earnest prayer.

"FIG-LEAVES."

"FIG-LEAVES."

There are but two religions in the world, and both are found in Genesis 3:1-24, for both commenced in the Garden of Eden. Man's religion is described in Genesis 5:7; God's in Genesis 5:21. Man's religion may assume many forms, as Brahmanism in India, Buddhism in China, Mohammedanism in Turkey, and Romanism in Spain; but one principle is common to them all, and is expressed in the little word "Do." Man is thrown upon his own resources, to work out his own salvation as best he may. God's religion, in contrast with this, is happily expressed in the word "Done." His grace has so perfectly supplied every need, that a finished work is now proclaimed to man; nothing is demanded of him but acceptance of it in simple faith.

The story of Genesis 3:1-24 is no allegory, but sober, historical fact. It is God's own account of the greatest disaster that has ever befallen the human family. The wily foe gained the ear of the woman, and then through her the ear of the man, and so brought about revolt against God. The sceptic scoffs at the notion that all the world's misery is traceable to the eating of an apple; but what lay behind that simple act? Disobedience to God; self-will; treason against the Creator. Herein we have the essence of sin.

The guilty pair became aware of their condition before they were challenged as to it by the Lord God. "They knew that they were naked." In like manner men today feel within themselves, spite of their frequent boastings, that they are sinners against God. Who ever met a man perfectly satisfied with himself, who would not, when pressed, admit that he is not quite all he should be, or would wish to be? What is this but an acknowledgment of sinnership, even though the depth of the heart's evil may be utterly unknown? Conscious of nakedness, Adam and his wife "sewed fig-leaves together and made themselves aprons." They had each a conscience now, and a bad conscience withal; accordingly they laboured to make themselves presentable to the eye of God. But it was self effort entirely; God had absolutely no part or lot in the device. From that day onwards multitudes have followed in their steps. In so far as sacraments, temperance, benevolence, etc. (things excellent enough in themselves) are trusted in as contributing in the smallest degree to the salvation of the soul, they are just aprons of fig-leaves and nothing more.

The sound of the divine voice blasted Adam's whole scheme. Spite of their aprons "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden." They were consciously unfit to stand before Him. Scripture abounds with instances of men who became utterly undone when the light of God streamed upon them. Isaiah cried, "Woe is me"; Job said, "Behold I am vile." Peter exclaimed, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." It is happier far to discover one's moral nakedness now, than when this world is left behind for ever. The apostle hints in 2 Corinthians 5:3 at the awful possibility of some being found "naked" in the resurrection state.

Our hope, as sinful men, is in God alone. When He came upon the scene of the first great sin, He spoke forthwith of Christ, the Seed of the woman, who should bruise the serpent's head. Further, "unto Adam and his wife the Lord God made coats of skins, and clothed them." Aprons of fig-leaves! Coats of skins! What a contrast! Not a trace of divine handiwork in the one; not a trace of human handiwork in the other. Here we have the first notice of death in Adam's world. Man's sin occasioned it, for the guilty ones must now have a covering such as would satisfy the eye of God. Every bullock, lamb, etc., that has ever been sacrificed on account of human guilt, pointed in its way to the cross of Calvary, where in God's due time the Son of His love suffered "once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). On the basis of Christ's redemption, God is able to impute righteousness to the most ungodly rebel who believes in His Son. As Romans 3:1-31 expresses it, He is "just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Away then with all our human devices. Let us no longer go about to establish our own righteousness; let us rather submit ourselves unto the righteousness of God. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Romans 10:3-4). The man who was once more diligent than any in sewing fig-leaves together — Saul of Tarsus — counted all his accomplishments in that direction as "loss" and "offal" when he came to know Christ Jesus the Lord. It was from his pen, as guided by the Holy Ghost, that the fine declaration has come down to us: "to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Romans 4:5). Oh, the blessedness, for time and for eternity, of the man to whom God imputeth righteousness apart from works!

"LAME ON BOTH HIS FEET."

"LAME ON BOTH HIS FEET."

The story of Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9:1-13) is a charming representation of the Gospel of God. It was no mere human kindness which David proposed to bestow upon the man, but kindness after the divine pattern. "Is there yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him?" It is remarkable the prominence given to the name of Saul in this story. It was rather as the representative of Saul than as the heir of Jonathan that Mephibosheth was blessed. Now Saul was David's relentless foe. For years he hunted him, thirsting for his blood. Yet David speaks of showing grace to his seed. How like our God is this! "Beginning at Jerusalem," was the Saviour's word when sending forth His disciples with the gospel of divine forgiveness (Luke 24:47). The city guilty of His blood was not merely to have an opportunity of blessing; it was to be approached first of all with the mercy of God. Deep down in every man's heart there is enmity to God and to His Son. But even so, grace abounds. "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Romans 5:10).

Mephibosheth was a cripple. When he was but five years old, he had a fall as his nurse fled with him after the battle of Gilboa. In consequence of this, he was "lame on both his feet." In like manner, man, in the very childhood of the race, experienced the grave moral fall described in Genesis 3:1-24, and has been a poor lame creature ever since. The doctrine of the fall is distasteful to the pride of the present day. The theory of evolution is more palatable, because it represents man as going forward, instead of backward. But if the record of Genesis 3:1-24 is the truth of God as every pious soul believes, then the theory of evolution is a lie of Satan, ruinous in its effects for all who imbibe it.

Mark, Mephibosheth was lame on "both" his feet. Even so man, since the fall, has been incapable both toward God and toward his fellow. Neither of the tables of the covenant is he competent to keep. As to the first, he can neither walk with God, nor run in the way of His commandments (Genesis 5:24; Psalms 119:32). As to the second, he fails at every step. Every man is ready to object to so humiliating a conclusion in regard to himself, while recognising it carefully enough in his dealings with all others. Who would care to transact serious business without having everything secured in writing, with the signatures properly attested? What is this but a confession that man is a fallen creature, to be watched in all his words and ways? It is wisdom on our part to acknowledge our total moral ruin. It is not sufficient to admit that there may be shortcoming here and there; the bottom is never reached until a man owns that he is absolutely "without strength," dependent alone for salvation upon Christ who died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6).

Mephibosheth's condition, as representative and heir of a great enemy and transgressor, and lame on both his feet, is thus the exact picture of every man's moral condition by nature. Now observe his position. He was resident in "Lo-Debar," which means "no pasture." The world is a veritable Lo-Debar for us all. Absolutely nothing is contained therein that can satisfy our highest needs. He who makes the world his pursuit, whatever his advantages, must sooner or later come round to the

wise man's opinion that it is all "vanity and striving after wind."

"Then King David sent and fetched him." Mephibosheth might well have approached David and pleaded before him the name of Jonathan. The King would certainly have honoured his covenant with the departed, and shown favour to his son. But Mephibosheth did not thus take the initiative. Even so, it is not man that takes the first great step towards the soul's blessing. The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost; and now it is the Holy Spirit who speaks the first word in the soul which leads to reconciliation with God. If God were to wait for man to act voluntarily, so deep is the enmity of the heart toward everything divine, that God and man would remain estranged eternally. Once Mephibosheth found himself in the presence of David, he learned that he was being blessed for another's sake, which put everything upon a sure basis as far as personal merit was concerned. It is the comfort of every believing heart to-day that all blessing depends solely upon what Christ is, and has done. The thought of this delivers the mind from self-contemplation, which engenders despair. Never again could Mephibosheth long after Lo-Debar; his place henceforward was with the King, in happy enjoyment of his grace. Similarly the Christian is lifted by the mighty power of divine goodness right out of the world. He becomes a heavenly man now, with his whole soul aflame with the powerful attractions of the Lord Jesus.

In the following chapter we hear David again proposing to show kindness. The King of Ammon died, and David sent messages of condolence to Hanun, his successor. But this time his kindness was rejected. Evil counselors urged upon the young King that David only meant mischief by his embassy. Accordingly the messengers were maltreated, and their overtures repulsed. Swift judgement resulted, as was meet. Every man who has Christ presented to his attention must needs play the part either of Mephibosheth or of Hanun. The one appreciated "the kindness of God," as shown by David; the other refused it to his ruin. It is a wonderful thing to be told of the Saviour's name, and of the precious blood which alone could reconcile sinners to God, but it is a solemn thing to reject the heavenly message. The man who cannot appreciate the love of the divine heart must yet experience the severity of the divine hand.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

Royal visits are always interesting, and frequently excite considerable enthusiasm amongst the people; but it does not often happen that such visits are instructive, leaving a testimony behind them to men of all succeeding generations. Yet this was the result of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, King of Israel (1 Kings 10:1-29). Her visit was not one of courtesy, such as monarchs sometimes pay one to another; nor was it a political visit, designed for the arrangement of treaties which might be to the advantage of her dominion; still less was her visit one of curiosity in order that she might see and hear the most remarkable man of his time. Her journey to Jerusalem was altogether an affair of the soul; "the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord." Like Nicodemus later, she had a sense of need within, which she felt conversation with God's servant might remove. Accordingly she thought it worth her while to travel a thousand miles in order to lay her difficulties before him. In her case was strikingly answered Solomon's prayer concerning "the stranger" at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:41-43). The Son of God once held up this zealous queen as a rebuke to the indifference of men in His day (Matthew 12:42).

We will divide our subject thus: (1) what she heard; (2) what she saw; and (3) what she received.

What she HEARD. She came to prove Solomon with hard questions. "She communed with him of all that was in her heart; and Solomon told her all her questions." Precisely what her difficulties were is not recorded; it is enough for us to know that they were all removed. The soul in every age has its "hard questions." To whom can men turn to-day with their heart problems but to the Son of God? The Samaritan said concerning the expected One: "When He is come He will tell us all things" (John 4:25). Some of the soul's "hard questions" are distinctly noticed in Scripture. We find one in Job 9:2 : "How should man be just with God?" This is the guilty man's "hard question." Bildad's remarks drew this forth from Job. He had just said: "Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man." To this Job replied: "I know it is so of a truth; but how should man be just with God? If He will contend with him, he cannot answer Him one of a thousand." It was all very well for Bildad to say "God will not cast away a perfect man." No one ever supposed He would, but where is the perfect man to be found? Certainly Job felt that he was not that man. The divine answer to the guilty man's "hard question" is found in Romans 3:21-26. The redemption that is in Christ Jesus enables God to justify freely by His grace every confessedly guilty one who believes in His Son.

Another of the soul's "hard questions" is noticed in Psalms 4:6 : "There may be many that say, "Who will show us any good?" This is the language of disappointment. The world has been searched, as it were, for satisfaction, and in vain. Accordingly the poor votary of pleasure exclaims in despair, "Who will show us any good?" The Son of God, of whom Solomon was a type, can alone answer this "hard question." Hear His apostle in Php_3:8 : "I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all

things, and do count them but offal that I may win Christ." The heart of such a man was evidently at rest; in the knowledge of Christ he had found eternal good. Apart from Him the search for satisfaction is but strivings after the wind. The WORK of Christ is thus God's answer to the guilty man and the PERSON of Christ to the disappointed man.

Let us now consider what the queen SAW. First, she SAW the most glorious monarch of his time — " Solomon in all his glory." But this will not compare with what faith sees to-day. "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews 2:9). What a sight! Then she observed that all Solomon's servants were well fed. The meat of his table" struck her. With what food does Christ nourish those who are His? Hear Him saying in John 6:51 — "the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Do not read the Lord's Supper into this chapter, for it had no existence at the time of speaking. By eating His flesh and drinking His blood the Saviour meant faith's appropriation of Himself as the One who once was slain. I partake of the Lord s Supper on the first day of the week but I am privileged to feed upon Christ every day and every hour of the day. Moreover, if to eat His flesh and drink His blood is to have eternal life, and if these words must be applied to a sacrament, then it follows that whoever has once partaken, however evil, is saved, and all who have not partaken, however pious, are lost. What thoughtful person would contend for anything so manifestly absurd? The Queen of Sheba noticed also the apparel of Solomon's servants; they were all well clothed. Christ's servants are clothed with "the best robe" of divine righteousness (Luke 15:22), conferred by grace alone. Everyone around Solomon seemed satisfied and happy. "Happy are thy men," exclaimed the delighted queen. In like manner all who are Christ's have been made happy for evermore, and outside of their circle happiness is nowhere to be found.

Here we must note some points of contrast between the Queen of Sheba and the believer in Jesus. She said: "I heard . . . but I beheld not until . . . mine eyes had seen." We believe while as yet our eyes do not see. "Whom not having seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). She said moreover: "The half was not told me." Concerning the divinest of all themes, God revealed in human flesh, we read: "Even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:15). No finite mind could entertain even "the half" of what the Holy Spirit could tell concerning the Christ of God.

A few words now as to what she RECEIVED. It is true that she brought large presents to Solomon, but she went home enriched nevertheless. "King Solomon gave unto the Queen of Sheba all her desire . . . beside that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty." In like manner, our God not only meets the actual need of the sinner who comes to Him, but He forthwith enriches him with all the blessing of Christ Himself. Hence Christians are described in Romans 5:17 as "they which receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness." There are two things here. Righteousness is our actual need; without it we must perish; "the abundance of grace" corresponds with the "royal bounty" of Solomon. As we read in Ephesians 1:7. "Forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." As men in Christ, we are endowed with all the blessing of Christ. According to His worthiness and the merits of His atoning work is our wealthy portion for evermore.

Chapter 168

"KISS THE SON."

"KISS THE SON."

Christ is everywhere the theme of the Spirit in Holy Scripture. Not only in the Gospels, which tell of His past humiliation; not only in the Epistles, which speak of His present glory; but throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, Christ is the one theme of the Spirit of God. Happy the man who has eyes to perceive this, and a heart to appreciate it. It is the fruit of the gracious work of God Himself within.

Perhaps no book is better known than the book of Psalms. For centuries it has occupied a peculiar place in the religious services of Christendom. But perhaps there is no book less understood. It is commonly regarded as containing only devotional exercises. Certainly the heart tells itself out in the Psalms as nowhere else in the Book of God. But beyond the devotional aspect lies the prophetic; and unless this is seen, there is much in the Psalms that can never be comprehended. The whole book looks onward to the day of the Lord — that momentous day when God will abandon His present attitude of reserve, and interfere once more in the affairs of men.

The theme of Psalms 2:1-12, is Christ's future appearing. The Spirit asks in the opening verses why men are so enraged against Jehovah and His Anointed, and why they are determined to cast away their cords from them. At man's impotent rage Jehovah laughs, and insists that He will yet set His King upon His holy hill of Zion. When the moment comes for Christ to ask for His inheritance, the work of judgement will begin, and every foe will be swept out of His path.

In view of this, the Spirit in Psalms 2:10-12 offers counsel to men. "Be wise now." "Be instructed." Let us examine carefully Psalms 2:12. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish in the way, for His wrath will soon be kindled. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (R.V.). There are four things here: — An exhortation, a warning, an announcement, and a beatitude.

(1) An EXHORTATION. "Kiss the Son. It is not the kiss of affection that is meant, but the kiss of allegiance It is the reverent acknowledgment of His title and claims. It is the moment when the heart exclaims, "My Lord and my God." Two different words are used for "Son" in this Psalm. In Psalms 2:7 we have "Ben "; in Psalms 2:12 "Bar." According to Gesenius, the one is the term of love, and the other the regal term. In other words, His relation to God as the object of His heart's delight; and His relation to men as the appointed universal Ruler to whom all must bow. Pride blocks men's path when Christ comes into view. We all like to receive homage, but we are not so ready to render it. Man's haughty mind cannot brook the thought of a superior. But God has made Jesus, whom men crucified, both Lord and Christ, and has decreed that to Him every knee must bow, and that every tongue must own Him Lord. The most stubborn heart that ever beat will be constrained to humble itself at the feet of the despised Jesus: those who bow in faith now receive salvation; those who do not bow until compelled to do so in another world will be lost eternally.

(2) We have next a WARNING, "Lest He be angry, and ye perish." Is it possible that the Son of God can ever be angry — He who sat by Sychar's well, and spoke so tenderly to a sinful woman

there; He who suffered a conscience-stricken transgressor to shed tears of repentance upon His feet, and turned her not away; He who comforted even a thief in the hour of death, and took him with Himself into the Paradise of God? Can He indeed be angry? Let us remember that the divine nature is twofold: "God is Light" and "God is Love." He was angry in Noah's day, and the earth was in consequence swept clean of its transgressors; He was angry in Lot's and the guilty cities fell. He will not for ever address His Gospel to the children of men.

(3) There follows an ANNOUNCEMENT. "His wrath will soon be kindled." So the Revised Version correctly reads. Nothing is more certain than judgement, however unwilling men may be to believe it. It is "because He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He hath ordained," that God "commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30-31). The moment will assuredly come when the divine attitude towards men will undergo a total change, and He who now sits enthroned in patience at God's right hand will arise to the execution of His solemn work as Judge of quick and dead.

(4) Our text closes with a BEATITUDE. "Blessed are all they that put their trust (or, take refuge) in Him." Christ is the only refuge for sinners. He alone is our hope. It was He who suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust; and in Him alone may we confide. There will be found no refuge FROM Him when He appears, but refuge may be found IN Him by all who desire to flee from the wrath to come. But if Scripture presents Him thus to us as refuge from divine wrath, is He not necessarily GOD? Who else could shield us from the judgement of God? What mere creature could screen us from His uplifted hand? He who once was slain is indeed our Lord and our God, worthy of our heart's adoring love for evermore.

Chapter 169

FOUR THINGS EXCEEDING WISE.

FOUR THINGS EXCEEDING WISE.

It is natural to us to connect wisdom with greatness, but in Proverbs 30:24-28 we are divinely bidden to learn lessons from little things. The Lord Jesus also bade His disciples learn from lilies, sparrows, and even from the hairs of their head. The four little things of Proverbs 30:1-33 are said to be "exceeding wise." Who amongst us would not desire to be exceeding wise, especially in matters spiritual and eternal?

Four suggestions concerning faith may be gathered from this portion of Holy Scripture. First, faith takes account of the future. This is illustrated in the ants. "The ANTS are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer." These little insects know that summer is not eternal. In like manner men's opportunities are fleeting. In the brief span of life here we determine our everlasting destiny. There are two cases held up for our warning in the Scriptures of men who lived only for the present. Esau for a mess of pottage sold his birthright, and is called a profane person for so doing; the rich farmer of Luke 12:1-59 who surveyed his possessions with such complacency, thinking nothing of the life beyond, is called a fool. Let us note it well; "profane" and "fool" are God's titles for men who live only for the present. Alas, how full the world is of such. Would that they might become "exceeding wise"!

Second, faith seeks a place of refuge. The CONIES illustrate this. They are "but a feeble folk, yet they make their houses in the rocks." The Syrian hyrax is here intended, a timid, cautious creature ever on the alert for danger. Noah by faith recognised that wrath was approaching, and availed himself of the shelter of the ark; the Israelites believingly sprinkled the blood of the lamb upon their houses on that night of judgement in Egypt; Ahab, on the contrary, defiantly slighted divine warning, and perished miserably at Ramoth-Gilead. The wise man has said: "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished" (Proverbs 22:3) Men are living in peril at the present hour. The day of judgement hastens on. Divinely "prudent" are they who have fled to Christ for refuge; distressingly "simple" (however wise in their own conceit) are they who slight Him and His great salvation.

Third, faith values fellowship. "The LOCUSTS have no King, yet go they forth all of them by bands." A child may crush an individual locust; but an army of them is irresistible. Desolation attends their progress. There is no individualism in Christianity. By the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven a divine unity has been created between believers here and Christ in glory. Every saved soul belongs to that great spiritual organisation called in Scripture "the Church of the living God." Abraham, and all other pious ones in the world's earlier ages, were just believing units; one of the reasons for which Christ died was that He might "gather together into one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John 11:52). One of our choicest privileges here is Christian fellowship. When Peter and John were released from prison "they went to their own company." In the assembly of the saints they found their consolation and strength.

Fourth, faith leads to glory. The spider (or more correctly the lizard) suggests this. "Thou takest hold of the LIZARD with thy hands, yet is she in King's palaces." In tropical countries these little creatures are ubiquitous. They may be seen crawling up the walls of both hut and mansion. Every blood-washed soul is marked for heavenly glory. God has called us by the Gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The feeblest and most insignificant believer will not miss this magnificent consummation. Neither the violence nor the craft of the enemy can hinder it.

Oh, to be "little" yet divinely "wise"! The foolish, the weak, the base, and the despised has God chosen. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

Chapter 170

THE GREAT ELECTION.

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Man's entire history upon earth has been, in a manner, an election time. From the beginning until now two persons have been seeking the confidence and allegiance of the children of men. Those persons are God and Satan. God is entitled by every right to the confidence and allegiance of our hearts. To our confidence, because of the absolute truthfulness of His character (for it is "impossible for God to lie " — (Hebrews 6:18), and also because He is the source and spring of all our blessings. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). He is entitled, moreover, to our allegiance, for He is at once our Maker and our Judge. Satan has no rightful claim to service from us, being but a creature like ourselves; a creature, too, in revolt against the God who made him.

Looking back over the past six thousand years of human history, three special occasions may be clearly marked when men were called upon, in the most pointed manner, to choose between God and Satan. On each occasion they made "the wretched choice." Turn first to Genesis 3:1-24. There we have Adam and his wife in the garden, surrounded by everything that was calculated to fill their hearts with joy and gladness. They had every inducement to remain loyal to their God. One simple condition was laid upon them as a test of their obedience — of the fruit of the tree which was in the midst of the garden they were not to eat. The consequence of rebellion was clearly stated: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Presently the tempter came along, and, after a short parley with the woman, he boldly said: "Ye shall not surely die." This language made the position perfectly plain. It was a question of "whom will you believe" — God or Satan? Alas, for the decision! Our first parents decided to credit the tempter rather than the Creator, with all the dire results of which the world is full unto this hour. Ever since that day in Eden infidelity has been inherent in the human heart; man would prefer to believe anyone rather than his God.

Turn next to Matthew 2:1-23. The story of that chapter is familiar to us all. A Babe had been born in Jerusalem, concerning whom wise men from the East came up to make inquiry. At the mention of one born King of the Jews Herod was troubled, which was no wonder, seeing that he was accustomed to bear that title himself. No rival could be welcome. But mark the further statement "he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." "All Jerusalem" is comprehensive enough, surely. The expression would include learned and unlearned, old and young, clergy and laity. All Jerusalem was troubled! Herod acted promptly. "He gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, and demanded of them where the Christ should be born." With the utmost readiness these men of the Bible turned up Micah 5:2, and read out to the King the well-known words: And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule My people Israel." Yet not one step did these men take in the direction of Bethlehem to see if the promised King was there. There is nothing

more heartless than mere Bible knowledge without faith. Strange as it may seem, it is possible to go down to an eternal hell with the mind crammed with Bible truth. The indifference of Jerusalem's priests and people is the more awful when we remember that Micah added concerning the promised One, "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." It was thus God Himself who was coming into the world, and men did not want Him! The question in Eden was, "Whom will you BELIEVE?" At the Incarnation the question evidently was, "Whom will you SERVE?" To this the human heart gave answer, "Herod, Caesar — anyone rather than God and His Christ."

Turn now to John 18:1-40. Once more a choice is submitted to men, and all are called upon to record their vote. Pilate has the Son of God upon his hands, and would fain be quit of the heavy responsibility. Falling back upon the custom of releasing a prisoner at the Passover, he brought forth Barabbas, murderer and robber, and bade the multitude choose between him and Jesus. Urged on by their religious chiefs, the people fiercely clamoured "Not this Man, but Barabbas." The question on this occasion clearly was: "Whom will you RECEIVE?" Alas! anyone but Jesus was welcome. It is not that the multitude had the smallest regard for Barabbas; the point was that they did not want Jesus. Remarkably, on each of the voting days of which we have spoken, men chose a murderer. Satan, Herod, and Barabbas were all murderers (John 8:44; Matthew 2:16; Acts 3:14).

The Christ question is with us still, and every man must give his answer thereto. No neutrality is permitted, and indeed no neutrality is possible. Whatever men may say with their lips, or whatever they may refrain from saying, every one has his opinion of Christ, and in his own heart at least every man has recorded his vote, for or against Him. The Saviour Himself has said: "He that is not with Me is against Me" (Matthew 12:30). Neglecters of Him are in as desperate a position as outspoken rejecters, and will share together for eternity (Revelation 21:8).

God will yet compel obedience to His Son. He has decreed that to Him every knee shall bow. In the day of His power not a tongue will be permitted to move against Him. Even hell itself will be constrained to yield respectful homage to Him. But in this there is no salvation. Blessed is the man who to-day confesses Him as Saviour and Lord, preferring to believe, serve, and receive Him to every other.

Chapter 171

"WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?"

"WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?"

The Christ had long been promised. Ever since the fall God had been speaking of Him to the children of men. Psalmists sang of Him, and prophets foretold His appearing and mission. He had now come, and the great test question for everyone was, "What think ye of Christ?" (Matthew 22:42). His presence in the world caused "the thoughts of many hearts to be revealed" (Luke 2:35). Men of necessity fell into their respective ranks, either for or against Him.

Our Lord's question was uttered in the temple, at the close of a day of questioning. The Herodians with their political query, the Sadducees with their doctrinal quibble, and the Pharisees with their legal inquiry had all been successively silenced by the Saviour. It was the last of their questioning. No man "durst from that day forth ask Him any more questions." His time had now come. While all His objectors were gathered together, He turned upon them saying, "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?"

This is the great question of the age, and every man's eternal future depends upon the answer that his heart gives thereto. The question is not as to religion, whether Christianity is to be preferred to any other belief; nor is it as to preachers, their excellence or otherwise. Concerning these things it is possible to hold correct opinions and yet perish for ever. The great root question is as to a Person — God's beloved Son. Upon the attitude of our hearts toward Him everything turns, whether for blessing or for Woe.

In the Scriptures we have many hearts telling themselves out concerning Him, and it may be to our advantage to look briefly at some of them. Take first Simeon of Jerusalem (Luke 2:1-52). That aged saint had it revealed to him by the Holy Ghost that he should not taste death before he had seen Jehovah's Christ. At a given moment he entered into the temple, where a humble village couple were presenting their offerings in connection with the birth of the Babe under their care. Instantly Simeon took up the Child into his arms, and blessed God, saying, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace . . . for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." To him that wondrous Babe was the salvation of God, and the very sight of Him banished from his spirit all dread of death. Take next the wise men of Matthew 2:1-23. After their long journey from the East they at last found themselves in the presence of the new-born Christ. What was He in their eyes? Manifestly He was to them the mighty God, the everlasting Father of Isaiah 9:6, and the Governor of Micah 5:2, "whose goings forth have been from of old," for they fell down and worshipped Him, pouring their treasures at His feet. Simeon blessed the parents, but not the Babe; the wise men worshipped the Babe, but not the parents. Both in what they did, and in what they refrained from doing, these pious men of old were guided by the blessed Spirit of God, who knew perfectly what was just and meet for the wondrous Child.

Hearken to Peter in Matthew 16:16. Others were speculating as to who the Saviour might be, whether Elijah, Jeremiah, or some other (not really caring in the smallest degree); Peter, having

learned of the Father, exclaimed with rapture, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Listen also to the once-blind man of John 9:1-41, when the Saviour found him in the temple, and said "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" When he learned that it was He who was addressing him, he cried, 'Lord, I believe." And he worshipped Him.

What did Mary of Bethany think of Him as she poured her pound of ointment upon His feet? (John 12:1-50). To her He was the Son of God, the Quickener of the dead. Others, as in John 13:1-38, might need their feet to be washed; His were worthy to be anointed, let the spikenard be never so costly. Her adoring appreciation of Him was most grateful to His heart in an hour of sorrow.

Even at Calvary itself one heart told out its faith in Him. One of the dying thieves, at first as blasphemous as his fellow, afterwards confessed Him as the spotless Lord (Luke 23:42). In his eyes, as taught of God, the Sufferer by his side was the stainless One who had done nothing amiss, and for whom the Kingdom must yet be in a day to come. In the face of all the world, as it were, he thus acknowledged Him, and then followed Him, through infinite grace, into the Paradise of God.

We go further. On the Resurrection morning we behold a weeping woman at the tomb of Jesus (John 20:1-31). She was dull in her spiritual apprehension, and she utterly failed to understand the import of what had happened, but she unfeignedly loved her Lord. In her outburst of grief, she said: "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." So much was He to her heart that the world was a desolate waste without Him. One week passes, and we find unbelieving Thomas in the presence of his Master. He had spoken very sceptically concerning His resurrection; but the sight of Him standing in the midst of His own, with the marks of Calvary in His sacred person, drew forth from Thomas the fervent cry, "My Lord and my God." To this let us add the confession of the man (Paul, I mean) who heard Him speak from heavenly glory. In Galatians 2:20 he calls Him "The Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

"What think ye of Christ?" To Herod the king He was just an intruder, to be swept out of the way, if possible; by murder or otherwise. To the religious leaders around him, who were able to tell the king where the Christ should be born, He did not possess sufficient attraction to draw them to Bethlehem to seek Him (Matthew 2:4). In the eyes of Herod Antipas, at a later date, He was a mere wonder-worker who might perchance entertain him by the performance of a miracle (Luke 23:8). But "What think ye of Christ" is the question for us all, and every individual amongst us will have to face it sooner or later. To the men of His time the Saviour said: "If ye believe not that I am, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). And; to Nicodemus He solemnly declared: "He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the Only-begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). All manner of sin may be forgiven; the vilest offender may be purged from his sins in His precious blood. That which ruins men's souls beyond all recovery is their rejection of the Christ of God.

NEW GARMENTS, ETC.

NEW GARMENTS, ETC.

A fast was in progress in Judea, and both the Pharisees and the disciples of the Baptist were observing zealously. Noticing that those who followed the Saviour bid no heed to it, some challenged Him concerning the matter. After He had shown them in His reply how incongruous it would be for the children of the bride chamber to fast while the Bridegroom was with them, He added a parable, wherein He set forth the new order of things which His coming into the world had introduced for all who believe in His Name. The Son of God had not come forth from His glory in order to patch up those things which man has spoiled by sin.

Accordingly in Luke 5:36-39 He speaks of three "new" things — new garments, new wine, and new bottles. Concerning garments, men are found in three different conditions Godward. First, there are those who have not a rag upon their back, and who don't pretend to have. These are the careless folk, who make no religious profession whatever, and who never trouble themselves as to how they appear in the eyes of God. You may see this kind in multitudes parading the streets, or disporting themselves upon the golf ground, when the Word of God is being preached. Second, there are those who are possessed of a garment of a sort, but it consists only of filthy rags, could they but see it. These are the people who are going about to establish their own righteousness, never having submitted themselves to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3). Third, there are those who stand before God in a righteousness which is divine, unimpeachable before His throne. These are the souls who believe in Jesus the Lord, upon whom divine grace has put "the best robe" of Luke 15:1-32.

"No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old." The old garment of human effort is described in Romans 10:5 as "the righteousness which is of the law"; the new garment — gift of grace — is called in the verse following "the righteousness which is of faith" Paul, who had proved experimentally the value of both, in Php_3:9 calls the old garment "mine own righteousness, which is of the law"; and the new, "that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Ever since our first parents sewed fig-leaves together in Eden men have been busily occupied with their own efforts to hide their nakedness from the eyes of God and of every other. Many would reduce Christ to the level of a mere helper, making up by His perfections for their shortcomings and imperfections. Never will God suffer His Son to be put in any such place. He has not given Him from above to be just a patch for the dilapidated garment of man's righteousness; to everyone to whom the Gospel comes, Christ must be all or nothing. The cross has so perfectly met all the divine claims that God, in absolute consistency with His own righteousness, is able to justify for ever the sinner who believes. Christ risen from amongst the dead, and accepted on high, is the measure and security of our blessing in righteousness before the face of God. With Christ, the best robe, upon me, covered thus with His matchless perfections, my right is unchallengeable to be for ever in the divine presence above.

The Lord Jesus spoke not only of a new garment, but also of "new wine." Wine is the familiar emblem in Scripture of joy. In Psalms 104:15 we read: "Wine that maketh glad the heart of man." Christ has introduced new joys for His people. Everything "under the sun" has been marred by sin. All around us the hiss of the serpent resounds in our ears. Foolish indeed are they who seek to content themselves with things here. Now, Christ has gone up on high, and has entered into that scene where there is fullness of joy, and where there are pleasures for ever more (Psalms 16:10). To that scene of fadeless delight He would lead the hearts of His own to day. Let us not defer the joys of heaven until the present world is no more; let us rather rise upon the wings of faith and live now in the spirit of our minds where we shall find our home throughout eternity. In order that this may be, the exalted Lord has poured out upon us the Holy Spirit from above. He is the living link between our souls here and Christ in His present glory. It is His office to minister His things to us, and to maintain our hearts in perpetual peace and joy. Notice the effect on the day of the Spirit's coming. So full of ecstasy and power were the disciples that some, mocking, said: these men are full of new wine" (Acts 2:13). They were indeed full of new wine, but it was not the vintage of earth. It was the new wine of heaven.

The Christian who is in real enjoyment of his heavenly portion is a standing riddle to the man of the world. He absolutely refuses the world's sports and lies, and yet is happy. He even finds pleasure in a prayer meeting. How can this be? The observer wonders, but understands not. "New wine must be put into new bottles." This explains everything. Until a man becomes born again, and thus gets a new life from God, he is altogether incapable of understanding and appreciating divine joys. It is a world to which his heart is an absolute stranger. The "new man is according to God created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24) . Here we have the new bottle, which alone can contain the new wine of Christianity.

Alas, for the infatuation of the multitude! "No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, 'the old is better.'" That is to say, Christ is presented to the soul, with all the wealth of blessing and joy which is the fruit of His atoning work, and men turn away from Him into the world behind saying, "The old is better." For what the world has to offer to-day men are not unwilling to blast their souls for eternity.

Chapter 173

THE STRONG MAN ARMED.

THE STRONG MAN ARMED.

"When the strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace; but when the stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils" (Luke 11:21-22). This parable was uttered under peculiarly solemn circumstances. The Lord had just cast a demon out of a man; His observers, instead of praising God for the deed of mercy, went so far in their wickedness as to attribute His power to Beelzebub. It was not the ignorant folk who did this, but the religious leaders of the people. The parable was given in order to show the true state of affairs between the Lord Jesus and the great enemy. The strong man is Satan. In all ages he has proved himself too strong for his victims. Take the drunkard. However deeply he may long at times to be free from the awful influence which controls him, he finds within himself no power to shake it off. The opium smoker of the East would tell the same dismal story. Take again the modern Spiritualist. From that diabolical snare some would doubtless extricate themselves, but it is impossible. Satan is far too strong for man.

His palace is this world — "His own palace," as the Revised Version puts it. The world was made for Christ, and it will yet be His; but for the time being, Satan is in possession. The Lord Himself twice spoke of him as the "prince of this world." Many blunder as to this. Even some true Christians imagine that because Christianity has come in, Satan's hold upon the world is not what it was in pagan times. Instead of this being true, the Spirit calls him "the GOD of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4), i.e., of the present Gospel era. God having come to earth in human flesh and been rejected, Satan has usurped His place in the minds of men.

The strong man's palace is thus the world: "his goods" are the men and women therein. Awful thought! Independence of God was the bait offered in Eden. Unlawfully grasping at this, man became the slave of Satan. Yet how little is this realised!

"His goods are in peace." We all love peace, but a false peace is terrible to contemplate. The cemetery is a peaceful place, but it is the peace of death. Religion is largely responsible for the false peace with which many are afflicted. Religious observances and sacramental privileges apart from faith in Christ, are a terrible snare. All who are resting in these things need to be aroused. Some would rebuke those of us who would sound an alarm. We should consider it our bounden duty to arouse, however roughly, a man sleeping in a burning house; how much more serious is the peril of those who are going religiously down to destruction!

Christ is our only hope. He is the stronger than the strong, and has overcome the enemy. In Exodus 3:1-22. we have God coming down to bring temporal deliverance to His people; in Christ He came down to bring eternal salvation. In Isaiah 49:24 we have the inquiry: "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?" And the answer is given: "Thus saith Jehovah, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered." But how has the deliverance been wrought? How has the victory been obtained? By

death. Through death the Saviour annulled him who had the power of death (Hebrews 2:14). Isaiah 53:12 puts it thus: "Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death." By submitting to death for one brief moment He has broken the power of Satan for ever. Like David with Goliath, He has cut off the enemy's head with his own weapon.

Resurrection manifested His victory. The cross was in appearance His defeat. But on the third day He arose triumphantly, death being powerless to retain Him in its grasp. "Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15). He who once descended into the lower parts of the earth has ascended up far above all heavens, that He may fill all things (Ephesians 4:9-10).

None need remain in captivity to the strong man. The Deliverer has come and the victory has been gained. When Israel in Egypt felt the bitterness of being treated by Pharaoh as "his goods," they cried by reason of their bondage, and so deliverance came. In like manner today, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

Chapter 174

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

We have here one of the many moral contrasts which are so strikingly characteristic of the Gospel by Luke. Two men are shown to us as standing in the presence of God, with the ground each took before Him. In their respective ways, these men illustrate the two contrasted righteousnesses of which the apostle speaks in Romans 10:5-6 — "the righteousness which is of the law," and "the righteousness which is of faith." They are the Cain and Abel of the New Testament.

The Pharisee comes before us first. He went up into the temple professedly to pray, yet not a word of true prayer passed his lips. Instead, he paraded his fancied goodness before his Maker, and merely thanked Him that such excellencies were found in him. "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." Thus far he speaks negatively, proclaiming what he was not; next he speaks positively. "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." Surely he was twin-brother to the man who said: "Lo, these many years do I serve Thee, neither transgressed I at any time Thy commandment" (Luke 15:29). But what a spectacle is here! A man in the presence of the Discerner of all hearts, yet conscious of no sins to confess; addressing the Giver of all good, yet sensible of no need to spread out before Him. Neither the holiness nor the goodness of God seem to have crossed his proud mind. Little wonder that he got nothing; for with God the rich are sent empty away (Luke 1:53).

Let us seek to understand this man's case, for the lessons of it are meant for us all. He does not appear to have been insincere. Surely if a man is real anywhere he is so in the presence of his God! The Pharisee may indeed have been all that he claimed to be. But a terrible possibility is suggested by this story — a man's religion may be his ruin! Alas, how often is this the case! Religion and morality are frequently used by men to hide from themselves their true condition as fallen children of the first Adam, and personally guilty withal. "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecclesiastes 7:14). The Pharisee, though standing in God's house, and using His name, had no sense of WHO it was with whom he was having to do; else "Woe is me" would have burst from his terrified lips, as from the lips of Isaiah of old. Self-righteousness bursts like a bubble when once the reality of God's presence lays hold of the soul. Saul of Tarsus experienced the truth of this most solemnly.

The publican (or tax-gatherer) took wholly different ground before God. Whether the Pharisee realised it or not, the publican felt deeply in WHOSE presence he stood. Accordingly he smote upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me the sinner." His act was the confession that the heart is the spring of all iniquity, and his words were an acknowledgment that his only hope lay in God. "THE sinner" is what he said, for his whole attention was concentrated upon his own personal condition, without regard to the Pharisee or any other. To this point every man must come, ere God can meet him in blessing. "Be merciful" means "be propitious." The lamb then being burnt upon the altar in the temple court shows how God can be propitious to the guilty. The altar and the sacrifice speak of Christ and His cross. "The redemption that is in Christ Jesus"

warrants God in granting pardon and justification to every contrite believing soul. We have it from the Lord Himself that the publican went down to his house justified rather than the other. That is to say, the one was justified, and the other was not. It is a clear case of righteousness being imputed apart from works (Romans 4:5-6). In the day of reckoning many a wastrel of earth will be found amongst the saved, while many a religious devotee will be numbered amongst the lost. For the one class feel their need of the Saviour, and bow to Him in faith; while the other class, in the pride of their hearts, pursue their own course of self-justification, in despisal of the Saviour's grace.

THREE MEN OF JERICHO.

THREE MEN OF JERICHO.

The city of Jericho has an unique place in Holy Scripture. And no wonder, for it is a remarkable type of the present world. Men said of it in the days of Elisha: "The situation of this city is pleasant, but the water is bad, and the ground barren" (2 Kings 2:19). In like manner, there is pleasantness all around us in the world in which we live; but there is nothing to satisfy the heart, and there is no fruit for God.

In connection with Jericho, three names are made specially prominent in Scripture — Zaccheus, Bartimeus, and Hiel. These are representative characters. Every man in the world may be classified under one or other of them. These men may be described thus: — Zaccheus the Pharisee, Bartimeus the beggar, and Hiel the infidel. It may be objected concerning the first that he was not a Pharisee but a tax-gatherer (Luke 19:1-10). But a man may easily be a Pharisee in spirit without belonging to that ancient sect. Have we not those amongst us to-day who plume themselves upon their own goodness, and who expect God to accept them accordingly?

It was a fine feature in Zaccheus that he had some interest in the Son of God, for many in that day, as in this also, passed Him by with cold contempt. Hearing that the Saviour was approaching Jericho, Zaccheus determined that he would at least get a look at Him. Hence, at whatever cost to his dignity, as one well-known and wealthy, he climbed a sycamore tree by the roadside. His amazement must be imagined when the Lord paused at that very tree, and addressed him by name. He was soon to learn that the Prophet of Galilee was the Searcher of all hearts — God revealed below. As the Lord entered the man's house, critics murmured "that He was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." But though outsiders might say this of him, this was by no means Zaccheus' opinion of himself. "He stood and said unto the Lord: 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.'" It was intolerable to his soul that one so benevolent and honourable as himself should be dubbed a sinner! One cannot help contrasting him with the centurion of Luke 7:1-50. Others said he was worthy; HE said, when he got into the Lord's presence, "I am not worthy." Here we have what the Parable of the Sower describes as "an honest and good heart."

It is humiliating indeed, but it is nevertheless true, that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Some men owe five hundred pence, and others fifty, but none amongst us have aught wherewith to pay. Godward, we are all bankrupt together. To this point the Saviour sought to reduce Zaccheus. He brushed aside all his self-parade, and at once spoke of salvation. He had not left heaven's glory, and come to earth simply to hear men tell Him how good they were; He had undertaken that mighty journey, which was soon to end at Calvary's tree, in order to bring salvation to the lost. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Thrice happy is the man who is prepared to relinquish all thought of merit, and then take his place as a perishing one at His feet.

Bartimeus was in every way a contrast to Zaccheus. The one was wealthy; the other was a beggar. The one felt he had much to plead; the other was conscious of nothing but the direst need, which he was determined should be met that very day (Luke 18:35-43). A blind beggar! Yet so pitiable an object is a faithful representation of every man's condition by nature, could men but perceive it! "Nothing to pay": such is the Lord's account of us all, and what is this but beggary? "The god of this age hath blinded the minds of them which believe not," is the Apostle's sad description (2 Corinthians 4:4). The fact that men everywhere are found pursuing that which can only be to their hurt, while seeing absolutely nothing desirable in that which would be to their eternal advantage, should be sufficient proof that moral blindness prevails universally. Bartimeus was needy, and he knew it. Unlike Zaccheus, he had no self-righteousness to get rid of; his one business was to submit his need to the Son of God at the first opportunity. Never before had the Saviour visited Jericho; and He never passed that way again. A week later He lay dead in the tomb. Hear the beggar making strenuous use of his one chance, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." In vain did men bid him be still; the Saviour was near, and he would reach Him if possible. Oh, that men everywhere would individualise themselves as this poor fellow did! "Have mercy on ME." It is not sufficient to approach the divine presence with the multitude who vaguely call themselves "miserable sinners"; each must face his own personal condition before God ere salvation is possible. To-day, as of old, we may hear the Saviour saying to every seeking soul: "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" Life, light, pardon, and salvation are blessings within the reach of all who seek them in His name.

Hiel was a Bethelite, but his name stands for ever associated with Jericho as its re-builder in the days of Ahab (1 Kings 16:34). When that vile city was destroyed in the days of Joshua, a divine curse was pronounced against any man who would restore it. "He shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it" (Joshua 6:26). During some five centuries this terrible imprecation had been respected, and Jericho had continued a ruinous heap. Now arises one to whom the fear of God was naught. Jericho shall be rebuilt; why should so pleasant a situation be without human inhabitant? But what of the word of Jehovah? What of the judgement pronounced? At all this the infidel sneered; he believed none of it. But the divine sentence was fulfilled nevertheless. Both his firstborn and his youngest sons were sacrificed upon the altar of his impiety. "He laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the Word of the Lord, which He spake by Joshua the son of Nun." The man whose sons were thus smitten to death is the standing representative of all who set at nought the revealed judgement of God. Never was this more commonly done than in our own day. From both pulpit and pew comes the loud disavowal of all belief in eternal punishment. But men's infidel folly will no more set God's future judgement aside than Hiel's bravado set aside His judgement in the past. "According to the Word of the Lord" it will assuredly be.

Under one or other of these representative characters each one of us must classify himself. Happy is the man who takes the place of Bartimeus, acknowledging his need, and seeking blessing alone at the hands of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

MOSES OR CHRIST?

MOSES OR CHRIST?

The Law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Two principles are stated in this passage, as diverse as possible the one from the other; and two men are named who respectively represent them. The principles are law as contrasted with grace and truth; the men who represent them are Moses and Jesus Christ. Long ago it was affirmed that "Moses hath in every city them that preach him" (Acts 15:21); which means that in every city there are those who insist on the performance of works as the means of blessing. It is also true, blessed be God, that throughout the world Christ is preached as men's only Saviour apart altogether from works of every kind. Every man in Christendom is thus ranged under either Moses or Christ. Said the Pharisees to the man to whom Jesus had given sight: "Thou art His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples" (John 9:28). This was at least a clear enunciation of the ground upon which the speakers stood.

Let us be sure that we understand the significance of the terms employed in our text. The different terms may be defined thus. "Law" is the declaration of what man ought to be; "grace" is the activity of divine love; and "truth" is the revelation of all things as they really are — God, man, etc.

Nothing is so generally misunderstood as the law. We mean of course the law of God as given from Mount Sinai. Many to this hour regard it as the appointed means of blessing for men, and so they pursue it zealously. But what saith the Scripture? The PURPOSE of the law is to convict. "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). As a faithful monitor it brings guilt home to the person who submits himself thereto. Its EFFECT is to provoke. "The motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death" (Romans 7:5). Flesh being abominably evil, the law by its prohibitions only stirs up its devilry. The very thing the law forbids is the very thing flesh longs to do. "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known covetousness, except the law had said, 'Thou shalt not covet' (Romans 7:7). This being its effect on man, the law is called in 1 Corinthians 15:56 "the strength of sin " — a tremendous passage for those who seek either salvation or holiness by means of works. The POWER of the law is to slay. Says Paul in Romans 7:10, "I found it to be unto death," and in 2 Corinthians 3:1-18 he calls it "the ministration of condemnation" and "of death." Since man cannot render its righteous demand, the law can but pass its stern sentence upon him.

The law has thus nothing for me as a sinner. It holds blessing before the eyes of those who can respond to it, but upon all others its inexorable sentence falls. Moses avails me nothing, unless to show me my deep need of Christ.

"Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" — two things, and yet one, for neither could subsist without the other. The Saviour was the very embodiment of grace. His every word and deed expressed it. "Never man spake like this Man," declared the officers who were sent to seize Him (John 7:46). The men of Nazareth "wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His

mouth" (Luke 4:22). Before His coming, the Spirit of prophecy testified: "Grace is poured into Thy lips; therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever" (Psalms 45:2). He was "full of grace and truth," and the moral glory of it was before the disciples from day to day during the wonderful years of their companionship with Him upon the earth. He came neither demanding nor threatening. Not with the majesty of a King, nor with the terror of a judge, did He walk amongst men, but with all the grace of a Saviour. He who spake at Sychar (John 4:1-54) was the same Person who spake amidst flame and smoke at Sinai; yet at Sychar He only sought to attract a sinner's heart. Again in Luke 7:1-50 we have a guilty one at His feet; receiving, not the stern condemnation of the law-giver, but the Saviour's pardoning grace.

The circumstances under which law and grace were introduced amongst men were in keeping with the character of their respective missions. In the midst of the most terrifying circumstances the law was promulgated. Even Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." Is this suggestive of blessing — of man being brought home to God to enjoy Him for ever? Far from it. But mark how grace came. The manger of Bethlehem and the cross of Calvary have nothing in them to terrify the heart; on the contrary, these wondrous facts appeal to the tenderest affections, and assure us of God's good-will even to the vilest of His creatures.

Truth, as we have said, is the revelation of things as they really are. The law, though true, was not "the truth." It did not tell God out to us; its stern bearing hid, rather than revealed, Him. Nor did it show what man is, but rather what man ought to be. But Christ's coming has brought all out into the light. God is fully declared. He no longer dwells "in thick darkness." His love, mercy, holiness, and righteousness, have all been perfectly expressed in Christ and His cross. Man, too, stands fully declared. I need not go the round of the prisons to learn what man is capable of; the cross tells the story more completely and truly. Infinite love received for its return spittle upon the face, the crown of thorns, and the cross of shame. Nothing more remains to be told as to what man is. Satan also stands fully declared. Liar and deceiver from the beginning, Christ's presence here brought out the murderer in him. Seeing his Creator upon earth in human form, he treasonably united all sorts and conditions of men in order to compass His rejection and death.

"The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The law cannot help us; no blessing can it bestow upon the guilty and lost. We need grace; shall we not seek it? The truth has come; shall we, as Pilate, turn contemptuously from it? It is the divine desire that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

Chapter 177

LORD, TO WHOM SHALL WE GO?

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"Peter was the speaker, and the words were spoken at the close of our Lord's discourse in the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:1-71). It was a time of deep disappointment to many in Israel. The Messiah had indeed come, but in a form altogether unexpected. They had looked for a King, and lo, a carpenter's Son! Moreover, he hinted from time to time of His impending death. In the synagogue discourse He had spoken of giving His flesh for the life of the world. What this might mean the many utterly failed to understand, but the words made it sufficiently plain that their cherished visions of earthly glory were not to be realised. And so they were stumbled. "They stumbled at that stumbling-stone," said the Apostle later (Romans 9:32). Those who followed the Lord Jesus in a merely carnal way forthwith threw it up. If death really lay before Him, there was nothing in Him to interest them. "There are some of you that believe not," said He. "From that time forth many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him."

Defections test us all. The unreal have frequently insinuated themselves amongst the people of God, only to turn away in due season. Such sifting times make manifest where all hearts really are. At this juncture Jesus said to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Peter, ever the ready spokesman of the band, instantly responded, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and know that Thou art the Holy One of God" (John 6:67-69, R.V.). It is not that Peter understood the Lord's position much better than the seceders. There was much in His teaching which perplexed him, and which disappointed his own expectations, but he at least recognised the good Shepherd's voice, and so clave to Him through all. He felt that there was no other in the universe of God to whom his heart could rightly turn.

The question has its significance for our souls to-day. "To whom shall we go?" To Moses? Certainly "Moses hath in every city them that preach him" (Acts 15:21). That is, there are in every quarter those who would put men under the law as the means of their justification before God. But for undone sinners this is of no avail. Corrupt human nature can never render the righteous requirements of the law; upon this principle can no flesh living be justified. For sinners Moses has nothing but curse and condemnation.

"To whom shall we go?" To Mary? Scripture does not so instruct us. We may well imitate her faith, and as lost ones take shelter in God our Saviour (Luke 1:47). This lesson we may learn with advantage from the mother of our Lord. Nowhere does Scripture speak of mediation and intercession on her part for sinful men. Remarkably, in the sacred records we have Mary but twice seeking favours from the Lord, and in each case He rebuffed her as stepping out of her appointed place. See John 2:4; Matthew 12:46-50. Our last view of her is in Acts 1:14 as one of the praying band in Jerusalem who waited for the Holy Spirit after the Lord Jesus went on high. Not praying FOR, but WITH, her fellow-believers in the Saviour.

"To whom shall we go?" Everyone who has ever known Him has been filled and satisfied. David, when he saw His day in anticipative faith, burst forth in the language of holy rapture: "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into Thy lips: therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever" (Psalms 45:2), Solomon, so despondent when surveying things "under the sun" in the book of Ecclesiastes, expressed himself ecstatically in The Canticles when the promised Christ rose up before his eyes. Paul, whose Christian career began with the sight of the Lord in glory, counted all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus (Php_3:8). For us to-day, as for these men of old, it must be Christ or nothing. Apart from Him all is a dreary waste.

Peter, in his reply to the Saviour's challenge, speaks of what He has (John 6:68), and of what He is (John 6:69) The one meets our need as sinners, and the other for ever satisfies our hearts as saints. "Thou hast the words of eternal life." This is what the Lord had been setting forth in the synagogue in Capernaum. It will suffice to quote John 6:53-54 : "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." Let us beware of carnalising our Lord's words by importing a Sacrament into them. The Lord's Supper, so dear to every believing heart, was not instituted when these words were uttered. What then did the Saviour mean? Just this: that such was man's guilty and alienated condition in the sight of God that nothing could avail for his blessing but His death. Himself as the slain One must be appropriated in individual faith. In this way His flesh is eaten and His blood drunk, and the believing soul receives eternal life. The writer of the familiar words, "the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20), was eating His flesh and drinking His blood as he adoringly penned the words.

"To whom shall we go?" What is the Christ of God to our hearts? To some of those who followed Him in the days of His flesh He said: "There are some of you that believe not." They wanted Christ and the world. Their hearts were not ready to renounce all for Him. What would He say if he were to come into our midst at this hour? And what would we say to Him? Oh, that with divinely-taught Peter, we could each one exclaim: "Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Chapter 178

"THIS SAME JESUS."

"THIS SAME JESUS."

In the present world everything and everyone is liable to change. Everything that we touch has a tendency to decay; nothing really abides the same. TIMES change, and we shake our heads regretfully. PLACES change. We revisit the scene of our birth after an absence of many years, and lo, the whole district has undergone a complete transformation. The old familiar landmarks have disappeared, to be seen no more. FRIENDS change. Those who delighted in our company once pass us in the street now with averted head, and we feel the smart of it within. We OURSELVES change. The child becomes a youth, the youth develops into a man, and then the gray hairs appear. "Change and decay in all around I see."

Our text speaks of One who is ever the same. As touching His deity, He remains when heaven and earth have passed away (Psalms 102:25-27); and as touching His humanity, He is the same Jesus to-day as when He trod this earth below. He is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). This comes home to us the more sweetly when we consider the circumstances under which the words of our text were spoken. The Son of God had just disappeared from the view of His disciples into the glory on high. Their eyes followed Him anxiously until the words of the two men in white apparel reached their ears. The disciples had known the Saviour in circumstances of poverty and shame. Together they had endured reproach and scorn. Now He had left all these humiliations behind Him, and had ascended up to the highest seat in the universe of God. But the angels assured them that He was the same Jesus! What comfort is here! How often among men he who has outstripped his fellows in wealth and honours coldly drops the companions of his humbler days. So common is this that we appreciatively speak of the exception as "not having a bit of pride.

Since the Saviour abides the same, we may learn what He is to-day from what He was when present amongst us on earth. Mark His grace as He permitted the city sinner of Luke 7:1-50 to rain her tears of contrition and love upon His blessed feet. His religious host would have dismissed such a person with disgust, but not He! He was the "Friend of publicans and sinners." See Him again in conversation by the well of Sychar (John 4:1-54) with one whose whole life He knew to be evil, but whom nevertheless He did not repel. The divinely appointed Judge of quick and dead setting Himself to win the heart of a gross offender against His laws is a spectacle that should move the most indifferent heart. He is the same Jesus to-day. His attitude towards sinners is still that of grace, and "Whosoever will may come."

Mark, too, His tenderness when confronted with the condition of men as the fruit of sin. At the graveside of Lazarus He wept — tender tears of sympathy with those whose spirits were wounded and torn (John 11:35). And when He looked down upon proud, scornful Jerusalem which was bent upon refusing His grace, He wept for the people's hardness and impenitence of heart (Luke 19:41). He is the same Jesus still; the same in His tender sympathy with distressed saints, and in His yearning over perishing sinners. His invitation is still, "Come unto Me"; the solemn words of

dismissal, "Depart from Me" have not yet come upon His lips (Matthew 11:28; Matthew 7:23).

But the angels predicted His return. "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." A tremendous fact lies before us in these words. The world has not seen the last of the Son of God. A day is approaching when the heavens will be rent asunder, and He will be seen coming forth in majesty and power. Each one of us should challenge our hearts as to this. Would joy or horror possess us if confronted forthwith with the once-crucified Jesus? It is as certain as the sun in the heavens that every created being must yet look upon Him, and every knee must bow to Him, and every tongue own Him Lord. To him who has been cleansed from his sins by His atoning blood the prospect of beholding the Saviour face to face is "joy unspeakable." And when we thus gaze upon Him it will be the same Jesus of whom we have so often read in the Sacred Scriptures, and to whom our hearts have been drawn by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

Chapter 179

"THE GOSPEL."

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On this occasion I propose to give a rambling talk concerning the Gospel, showing its source and character, and endeavouring to elucidate the meaning of the various titles under which it is presented to us in Holy Scripture. Our English word "Gospel" is simply a contraction of the Anglo-Saxon "God's Spell," which means "God's Story." The Greek word represented by it means "good tidings," and it is sometimes so translated. Luke 2:10 is an example. How wonderful is "God's Story," and how "good" are the "tidings" contained therein will become manifest as we proceed.

It would be a mistake to suppose that every time the word "Gospel" appears in our English Bible the present divine proclamation is intended. For example, in Galatians 3:8 we read that "the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham." This does not mean that Abraham was told of the forgiveness of sins through a dead and risen Saviour; his good tidings were to the effect that through his Seed the predicted blessing should come. Again, when Hebrews 4:2 tells us that the Gospel was preached unto Israel, it is not meant that the present proclamation of grace sounded in their ears. The good tidings announced to them had reference to the rest in Canaan at the close of their desert journey.

It would also be a mistake to confound the Gospel with which we are familiar in Christianity with the messages of God to men in other ages. John the Baptist and our Lord and His apostles preached "the Gospel of the Kingdom," announcing the Kingdom of heaven as at hand (Matthew 3:2, etc.). This has reference to the earthly blessing predicted by the Old Testament prophets, and which is now being held over as the result of the rejection of the Lord Jesus. When Christianity is finished, this testimony will be revived, and the glory of the Kingdom will be established (Matthew 24:14). "The everlasting Gospel" is also a distinct divine message. It will be proclaimed in the midst of the Antichrist's reign, and its burden is "Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgement is come" (Revelation 14:7). Manifestly no such solemn pronouncement is being made at the present time.

Coming to the Gospel as we now know it, it is called first of all, "the Gospel of God" (Romans 1:1). Here we have the source and the spring of the heavenly message which has brought peace and gladness to myriad hearts. No creature mind could have formulated so wondrous a scheme; neither could fallen man have dared to suggest so audacious a plan as that the Eternal Son should be sacrificed in atonement for human sin and guilt. From the divine heart of mercy the thought flowed forth. There is no room for man in the scheme, save as the humble recipient of the blessing. What God purposed, He has Himself carried out, apart from creature aid of any kind whatsoever. In consequence, the glory of it redounds to Him alone, and that for ever. The Gospel is the full revelation of all that God is; therein is told out all His love, righteousness, holiness, truth and mercy.

In Romans 1:9 it is called "the Gospel of His Son," and elsewhere "the Gospel of Christ." This means that if God is the source of the heavenly message, His Son is the theme of it. The Gospel is the proclamation of divine facts — the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Here we have something substantial upon which both conscience and heart can safely rest. He whose utterances are not charged with these great facts should never speak of "preaching the Gospel." Mere ethical teaching is not the Gospel, still less is a political harangue, even though delivered from a pulpit. Let the discourse be ever so erudite, let it be the greatest possible "intellectual treat," if Christ is not its burning theme it is a travesty to call it "the Gospel." The deep need of the human heart is not to be met by the wit of men.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4 we read of "the Gospel of the glory of Christ" (R.V.). God's proclamation tells us not only of Christ crucified, but also of Christ glorified. He who bore our sins in His own body on the tree is now sitting as Man on the right hand of the throne above. This is the public proof that the sin question has been eternally settled for all who believe in the Saviour's name. If even one of my sins remained unatoned for, since the Son of God made Himself answerable for them all, He could not be accepted in His present glory. In connection with this, the apostle speaks in 1 Timothy 1:11 (R.V.) of "the Gospel of the glory of the blessed God." This aspect of things was so characteristic of Paul's ministry that he calls it in 2 Timothy 2:8 "my gospel." He was converted by the revelation of Christ's glory; and he delighted to proclaim the mighty fact, with all its blessed consequences, that the glory of God now shines in the face of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is also called "the Gospel of peace" (Romans 10:15). The first grand result of believing the testimony of God concerning His Son is "peace with God" (Romans 5:1). This means, not merely a happy frame of mind, but the blessed knowledge that every question between God and the soul has been settled by the death of Christ, and that every cloud has been thereby dispelled from the horizon for ever. Our joy may fluctuate continually, for this depends very much upon ourselves — our conduct, and the measure of our daily trust in God; but peace knows no fluctuation, for it depends, not upon anything within us, but upon divine facts outside of us, the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. There have been two proclamations of peace on the part of Christ; first, during His life here (Acts 10:36); and second, after His resurrection (Ephesians 2:17). The first was the announcement of God's attitude towards men, even though rebellious; the second is the declaration of the assured result of Christ's atoning sacrifice for all who believe God.

The Gospel is also "the Gospel of our salvation" (Ephesians 1:13). It not only proclaims to us the forgiveness of past offences — it tells us also how God has lifted us entirely out of the position in which we once stood as children of Adam, and put us into a new position "in Christ" before Him. The deliverance of the Christian is as complete as the deliverance of Israel from the land of Egypt.

But by far the most comprehensive title of all is that found in Acts 20:24 — "the Gospel of the Grace of God." In God's precious message to men concerning His Son, all His heart is declared. Grace beyond the utmost bounds of human imagination is therein proclaimed — grace which picks up the vilest of earth, and fits them for the eternal companionship of the First-born Son in glory. In the coming ages God will display "the exceeding riches of His grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

Chapter 180

"ANATHEMA-MARANATHA."

"ANATHEMA-MARANATHA."

"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema-Maranatha." A truly extraordinary passage to find in such a common-place chapter as 1 Corinthians 16:1-24. It was manifestly the outburst of a flaming soul. Upon the subject in question the writer felt strongly, and accordingly he expressed himself strongly. Christ was everything to him. He was his Saviour, Lord, Object, and Hope — the Centre indeed of his whole spiritual system.

It was not always thus with Paul. He told King Agrippa "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did," etc. (Acts 26:9-10). No man ever despised the name of Jesus more intensely than he; no one ever devoted himself so earnestly to the extermination of all who loved His name. But the transaction outside the gate of Damascus changed everything for Paul. From that moment the Son of God became his all-in-all.

"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ." Knowledge must precede love. I cannot love a person whom I do not know. A man may know all the facts about Christ, and yet not know Him. Historical faith cannot save. I know WHOM I have believed (2 Timothy 1:12). To know the Lord Jesus is to trust Him; and to trust Him is to love Him. 'Faith worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6). But why should I love Him? What claim has He upon my affections? Has He accomplished anything on my behalf? Oh, let us heed the apostle's glowing words: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). Is there anything in this that should appeal to the heart? Hear the apostle again: "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Callous indeed must the heart be that can remain unmelted in the presence of such grace as is herein expressed.

Our text is very sweeping in its denunciation. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema.' "If any man." He spares no one. Yet the apostle had met all sorts of people. Persons religious and persons irreligious; persons moral and persons immoral; persons honest and persons dishonest. He makes every thing turn upon Christ. A man may be both moral and religious, yet be lost for ever. John Newton's lines are true enough —

What think you of Christ? is the test

To try both your state and your scheme;

You cannot be right in the rest

Unless you think rightly of Him.

He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the Only-Begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

"Anathema" means "accursed." The devoted apostle waxed indignant at the thought that anyone could hear of the Lord Jesus Christ and yet not love Him. Contrast with this his meekness under personal injury. Everything of that kind he could bear without one word of angry retort; but let Christ come into the question, let His name be involved, and his whole soul was immediately in a flame.

Let us not misunderstand the apostle's anathema. It is not that he desired the destruction of any. Indeed, he had drunk too deeply into the Spirit of Christ to entertain any such sentiment. Concerning his own rebellious fellow-countrymen his heart's desire and prayer to God for them was that they might be saved. He had even on one occasion wished himself accursed from Christ for them (Romans 10:1; Romans 9:1). He yearned over the souls of men everywhere. The point in 1 Corinthians 16:22 is his holy indignation against men upon whom full Gospel light had shone, and who found no place in their hearts for Christ. How far would this apply to the dwellers in Great Britain?

One cannot but connect his solemn curse here with another in Galatians 1:8. "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." He had proclaimed the Gospel to the Galatians in its entirety; every pretended development of it on the part of others could be error only. What would this strong-speaking apostle say could he walk up and down in the midst of Christendom at this hour?

"Maranatha" is a compound of two Aramaic words, meaning "the Lord cometh." He thus brings to bear upon men's consciences that great day when everything will be brought to an issue for eternity. The Lord's descent into the air will remove to glory every believing soul; His public manifestation in the clouds of heaven will seal the doom of every foe. The door may soon be shut; the Gospel day may soon be over; happy the man who has found shelter in Christ the Lord. The long-neglected truth of the Lord's coming may well thrill every believing heart, while calculated to strike terror into the bosom of every rejecter of His grace.

"HE BECAME POOR."

"HE BECAME POOR."

Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich. — 2 Corinthians 8:9.

There are three things in this remarkable passage concerning which no creature mind can give us any really adequate account: first, the original riches of our Lord Jesus Christ; second, the depth of poverty to which He condescended; and, third, the wealth of blessing which is now the portion of every believer in His name

"He was rich." There are various ways in which riches may be measured. Many would estimate them by material possessions. Take an illustration. You and I are out walking together, and presently we notice a mansion standing in the midst of its grounds, and you tell me that such an one is the owner of it. I reply, "He must be a rich man." "Oh, but," you say, "that is not all he possesses. He has other estates dotted about in England, Scotland, etc." I remark, "He must be rich indeed!" But what are any man's material possessions compared with all that belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ? Colossians 1:16 tells us, "by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him." Who can tell us all that such a verse means? Men are finding out that they do not yet know all that may be known of the "visible"; what then of the "invisible"? As the Creator and Sustainer of all, everything belongs to Christ. Not every man, however, would estimate riches by material possessions; with some, moral surroundings would count far more. A millionaire in a loveless, selfish home might conceivably feel poor indeed if he were to look into the cottage of a labourer, and see love and happiness reigning there, and his heart would tell him that the poor man has the better portion. But what was the moral atmosphere in which the Son of God moved ere this world knew Him? Who can describe the brightness and blessedness of that heavenly scene where love eternal reigns? And that scene was His everlasting home.

But, "though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." Here we need to tread very cautiously. Of what did He impoverish Himself when He came into this world? Certainly not of His deity. During His sojourn here, "all the fullness in Him was pleased to dwell" (Colossians 1:19). Not a single divine attribute did He abdicate in becoming human. Omnipotence displayed itself in His command of winds and waves, and also in His supremacy over death. Omniscience was manifested in His perfect ability to read the thoughts and hearts of men. Neither, in becoming poor, did He leave "the bosom of the Father," as some have said. This is not a geographical, but a moral, expression (John 1:18), and it shows the unique place which He had in the Father's love. This He never for one moment left, neither did He forfeit it. Yet "He became poor." Let us content ourselves with noticing the actual circumstances of His pathway here. He was born in a stable, and cradled in a manger. The condescension would have been amazing had He consented to be born in the palace of the Caesars, but what shall we say of Bethlehem and the manger? Who

amongst us has known such circumstances as these? Observe Him also in Matthew 17:1-27 in the matter of the tribute money. Though but a coin was required to cover both Peter and Himself, the fish of the sea had to furnish the sum. He had it not. During His progress through the land there was no demand for Him in the mansions of the rich and noble. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head" (Luke 9:58). But what were all the painful experiences of His pathway when compared with the cross of Calvary?

Friendless and robeless in the hour of His supreme grief! And when all was over, He had but a tomb that was lent by another. God would not suffer His beloved Son to be buried with the thieves. Isaiah 53:9, rightly rendered, beautifully expresses this: "His grave was appointed with the wicked, but He was with the rich in His death, because He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth." Accordingly, Joseph of Arimathea came along, and craved the honour of burying the body of Jesus in his own new tomb. One thing that impressed me greatly in America was the sumptuous tombs of certain millionaires. They would be more suitably called temples. Their own wealth supplied these; but the Son of God was laid in the lent tomb of another. "For your sakes" was all this. Have we, one and all, been at His feet in humble acknowledgment of His matchless grace? Can each individual amongst us say, "the Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20)?

"He became poor," says the apostle, "that ye through His poverty might be rich." Who is there, throughout the length and breadth of the Church of God, who can adequately declare the wealth of blessing which Christ has secured for all who believe in His name? The first of blessings is the forgiveness of sins. How do we regard that? When the four men of Luke 5:1-39 brought the palsied man to the Saviour their hope was that He would heal his body. Yet His first word was, "man, thy sins are forgiven thee." A sound body is much to be preferred to a fortune; but even a sound body will not compare with the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness is, however, only the initial blessing of Christianity. It is the first expression of a grace which knows no limit. Hence the apostle speaks of forgiveness "according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7). In the same chapter we get the magnificent statement, "He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Moreover, "in the ages to come He will show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). What a spectacle will the bloodwashed host present to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places! An innumerable multitude of the base and despised of earth brought into eternal association with the Son of God, accepted in His acceptance, and loved as He is loved.

Beyond all the blessings which He bestows, there is the knowledge of Himself. Well may we sing: —

Were the vast world our own

With all its varied store,

And Thou, Lord Jesus, wert unknown

We still were poor.

Happy are the people to whom it may be truly said: "YE KNOW the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

THE VICTORY OF CHRIST.

THE VICTORY OF CHRIST.

There is something exhilarating in the thought of victory. Take a lesson from the battle-field. Two armies have met in conflict, and both are now going their several ways. The one host is dispirited and panic-stricken, cursing perhaps, the commander who has led them to defeat and shame; the other host is exultant in triumph and filled with cheer. The troops acclaim their leader, and are proud of their association with him. It makes all the difference to men's feelings whether they are on the side of victory or on the side of defeat.

Now on which side are we — we who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Without hesitation we reply, on the side of victory. Let us now, in a brief way, go over what Christ has wrought.

First, observe the point from which He started forth. That point was God-head glory. The opening verse of John's Gospel in three terse sentences proclaims the eternity of His being, the distinctness of His personality, and His true divine nature. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." When present on earth He could say to the Father in the hearing of His disciples, "Glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:5). Every Christian loves to seize every opportunity to confess the true deity of the Lord Jesus.

Next, observe the point to which He went down. Our text tells us "He descended into the lower parts of the earth." That means the grave. But what were the steps which led Him into such depths? Go with me to the manger of Bethlehem, and whom have we there? It is the Son of God, Maker of heaven and earth, Judge of quick and dead. What brought Him down from the glory that was proper to Deity to such circumstances of humiliation and shame? It was our salvation. Follow Him another step — to the cross of Calvary. We see His lifeless body taken down from the tree and laid away in Joseph's tomb. What is the meaning of such a spectacle, which might well fill the angelic host with amazement? The meaning is this: if He would deliver poor sinful man, lying under the doom of death and the power of Satan, He must enter and break the very citadel of the foe. What apparent triumph for Satan when he had his Maker and Lord sealed up in a tomb! But "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh." Of what avail were all the devices of the creature? When the third day came the Saviour arose; and the stone rolled away, with the angel sitting as if in contempt upon it, testified to the reality of His glorious victory.

Now observe the point to which He has gone up. "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things." He has gone up as Man to the highest seat, and the whole universe is destined to be flooded with His glory. Such is the purpose of God concerning the Son of His love. What a magnificent sweep we have here! From the degradation of death and the grave to the right hand of God, far above all heavens. What delight for all who believe; but what confusion for the foe! This is the Christ in whom we have put our trust. Can we not therefore sing with exultation, "the victory is ours"? In His triumph we read our own.

Let us consider some of the results of Christ's great victory. First, our sins have been completely put away. In this connection Hebrews 10:1-39 attaches the deepest significance to the present seat of the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God. The very fact that He is there is the public proof that the sin-question, as far as His believing people are concerned, has been settled for ever. Seeing that He made Himself answerable for all our sins and iniquities at the cross of Calvary, He could not now be in heaven's glory had not every one of them been perfectly expiated. But not only have our sins been put away, but the power of death has for us been broken. Christ's empty tomb attests this. To John in Patmos He could reveal Himself as the living One, dead once, but alive for evermore, and having the keys of death and of Hades (Revelation 1:18, RV.). Prior to the consummation of Christ's great victory even pious souls dreaded death. Job called it "the King of terrors"; and Hezekiah, when told to put his house in order because he was to die, and not live, turned his face to the wall and wept sore. But the language of Job and the conduct of Hezekiah would be alike unsuitable for the believer to-day. Hebrews 2:14 tells us the Saviour took part in flesh and blood "that through death He might destroy (or annul) him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." He has acquired the right to take His own into heaven's glory without passing through death at all, and this right he will exercise in the moment of His coming again (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). As the Resurrection He will raise every sleeping believer; and as the Life He will transform every living one (John 11:25-26). If meanwhile He suffers any of His own to fall asleep, death is but the caretaker of the body until He wants it; and the happy spirit, freed from all earthly care, is at rest in the peace and delight of His heavenly presence. Truly "the victory is ours!" Whatever the circumstances of the moment, however painful the experiences through which we may be called to pass, however suggestive of defeat these may be, we are yet on the side of triumph, and this the exalted Lord will make manifest in His day.

Chapter 183

ONE GOD AND ONE MEDIATOR.

ONE GOD AND ONE MEDIATOR.

The great truth stamped upon the opening verses of 1 Timothy 2:1-15 is that God is every man's sincere well-wisher. He desires all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth. It is a lie of Satan that some persons come into the world marked out beforehand for eternal ruin. If this were true, every Gospel overture in Holy Scripture would be but a mockery and a sham. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Christians are responsible to take their character from God Himself. This is why the apostle urges that prayer be made for all men, and for rulers in particular. If God wishes well to all, Christians must seek the blessing of all in like manner. In this connection, two weighty truths are affirmed. "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, a man, Christ Jesus." It is humiliating indeed that God should need to insist upon the reality and the uniqueness of His being with the creatures of His own hand. But ever since the deluge men have been guilty of devising gods of their own, to their folly and ruin. The nation of Israel was called out into a position of separation from all others to bear testimony to the unity of the God-head. In Deuteronomy 6:4 we have Moses saying to them: "Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah." But Israel miserably failed as a witness for God, copying the ways of the Gentiles, and becoming as idolatrous as they. This has resulted in the severest discipline for that unfaithful people.

The unity of the God-head was thus the distinguishing testimony of the Mosaic age; to this is added, now that Christ has come, the unity of the Mediator. It is not enough for sinful men to know that there is one God; the heart yearns to understand how that God may be reached and known. Job in his distress said: "He is not a man, as I am, that I should answer Him, and we should come together in judgement. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9:32-33). Realising that man cannot bridge the gulf that sin has made between himself and God, Job felt the need of a mediator. Christ alone meets this need. From God-head glory He stooped to manhood in His ineffable grace. This enables Him to "lay His hand upon us both." But His incarnation could not of itself remove one single sin. "The extension of the benefits of Christ's incarnation," of which men of the Ritualistic sort speak so sagely, is nothing but meaningless jargon. Remission is impossible apart from blood. Accordingly the apostle adds: "Who gave Himself a ransom for all." The manger was a necessary step to the cross, where the foundation of all blessing for the guilty children of men was by Him well and securely laid. He is now risen and exalted. "Christ Jesus" is His resurrection title. His resurrection is the public proof before all the universe that every claim of the throne of God has been met by His atoning sacrifice. When Moses, the mediator of the old covenant, went up to God after the affair of the golden calf, he said to the people: "You have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto Jehovah; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin" (Exodus 32:30). No such language of uncertainty could rest for one moment upon the lips of the Lord Jesus. The cross of Calvary admits of no "peradventure."

In this world He made atonement, full, ample and perfect; and then, in the power of it, He went up to God on behalf of all His people.

The Mediator is one. No other dare we profanely put alongside Him, be it Mary, saints, or apostles. This would be to His public dishonour, and to the injury of our own souls. Christendom has been as grossly unfaithful in relation to the truth of the unity of the Mediator as ever Israel was in relation to the truth of the unity of the God-head. This sin God will not fail to judge when His present long-suffering is exhausted. Meanwhile, Christ may be universally proclaimed. He is Mediator, not between God and Israel, as Moses in the past, but between God and men. He gave Himself a ransom, not for a single nation, but for all. For this reason, Paul the apostle, once the most conservative of Jews, loved to describe himself "a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth."

Thoughts on Philippians.

Thoughts on Philippians.

A Brief Exposition of the Epistle to the Philippians.

W W Fereday

To the reader.

The following brief exposition of the Epistle to the Philippians was written in 1894, and appeared at that time in the form of articles in a magazine which has long ceased to exist. Perhaps a new circle of readers will find help and profit from this re-issue. This precious Epistle has been happily divided thus:-

Chapter 1 — Christ our Life.

Chapter 2 — Christ our Pattern.

Chapter 3 — Christ our Object.

Chapter 4 — Christ our Strength.

Chapter 185

Philippians 1.

(Php_1:1-30)

The Epistle to the Philippians is experimental rather than doctrinal in its character; we get the inner life of the saints and of the Apostle unfolded in a very precious way. The first epistle to the Thessalonians also brings before us Christian experience: but with this difference; the saints in the latter place were but young converts, consequently we see in them divine life manifesting itself in all its first freshness and vigour; whereas the Philippians when Paul wrote to them were tried saints; they had run the race for many years, and had proved God faithful throughout. The Thessalonians were characterised by their work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ; they had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven: the Philippians had weathered the storm, and had patiently continued their support of, and fellowship with, the Apostle in all his labours and necessities.

In Php_1:1-30, we get the blessed motives of the Apostle's heart; in Php_2:1-30, what has been appropriately termed the graciousness of the Christian life; in Php_3:1-21, its energy, steadily pursuing its heavenly Object; and in Php_4:1-23, its superiority over all circumstances.

"Bishops and deacons" are found in the address (in the plural, note). These were local officers, the one to care for the spiritual, the other, the secular, affairs of the saints; and must not be confounded with the gifts for the edifying of the body, as in Ephesians 4:1-32.

Paul thanked God for his "whole remembrance" of these saints; to no other company does he speak quite in the same way. In some quarters he was able to thank God for some things, while groaning over others; here there was nothing to cause him pain. We get thus a striking illustration of Hebrews 13:17. He gave account of the Philippians with joy, and not with grief: to their profit undoubtedly. What particularly refreshed his heart was their fellowship in the Gospel: they had borne him as a labourer on their hearts before God, had sent once and again unto his necessity, and, more than all, had shared with him its trials and reproach. This he recognised as God's work in them, and his heart was assured that, having begun a good work in them, God would perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ. This remark of the Apostle's is to be noted; for he regards the saints in this epistle as counting on God for themselves, he, the Apostle of the Church, being no longer active, but in prison. This letter prepares the way, as it were, for the Church being left entirely without apostolic care. Apostolic succession is unknown to it: God working in the saints, to will and to do of His good pleasure, is prominent.

It was only just that the Apostle should be assured concerning them all; he knew he had a place in their hearts;* they had been partakers of the afflictions of the Gospel according to the power of God, they were also partakers of the grace wherewith Paul had been supplied. Further, God knew how greatly he longed after them all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. The same tenderness of affection is seen in 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13. He greatly desired to see them, as they to see him, night and day praying exceedingly that he might see their face, and perfect that which was lacking

in their faith. His dear Philippians he also describes as "dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown." Precious outflow, and acknowledgment, of affection!

{*v.7 must be read, "because ye have me in your hearts}

He prayed for them: desiring that their "love might abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgement." Love must not be unwisely displayed — it must learn in God's school. At times, love speaks tenderly, at other times sharply; to act and speak aright in love, knowledge and discernment are needed. Love must be evenly balanced by other divine qualities. He desired, too, that they might approve excellent things — the new man exercising himself by the Spirit in God's presence as to good and evil; that they might be sincere and without offence until the day [of] Christ. Note, "the day" is always introduced when it is a question of responsibility. (Compare Romans 13:12; 1 Corinthians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:13). "The fruit of righteousness" (1 John 3:7; Romans 4:18-19) is before the mind of the Spirit here; "the fruit of the light" in Ephesians 5:1-33, "the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:1-26. "To the glory and praise of God," the Apostle adds: ever, surely, the object of the believer's life and ways.

Php_1:1-11 are a sort of introduction: in Php_1:12 he commences upon the subject matter of his epistle. His unselfish heart rejoiced that God had so over-ruled his bonds that the things which had happened unto him had fallen out rather to the furtherance, than to the hindrance, of the Gospel: he would have his brethren know it, that they might rejoice together. Instead of his being regarded as a malefactor, as Satan desired, God had made it plain that his bonds were for Christ's sake, and it had turned to a testimony. How wise is our God; and how blessed to simply trust in Him! To the human eye the imprisonment of such a labourer as Paul (and at such a time, when decay was beginning to set in all around) was disastrous, but the Lord knew best. Paul's chain enabled him to reach persons in Caesar's court, and elsewhere in Rome, whom he probably could not have reached under ordinary circumstances. It is striking that the only note Scripture gives of an apostle being at Rome is as a prisoner; and that many years after the planting of Christianity there.

His bonds had operated also in another way. Many brethren in the Lord, who at first were discouraged by his imprisonment, were now waxing confident as to it, trusting the Lord, and were much more bold to speak the word without fear. What a cheer to the heart of the true-hearted prisoner! If he was bound, the Word of God was not: it was running its course. Though this joy was not without alloy; for some persons were preaching Christ of envy and strife, supposing to add affliction to his bonds. How unworthy! Yet his unselfish heart could rejoice, because Christ was being preached, so assured was he that that Name could not be set forth in vain, whatever motives might operate in the speaker. Besides, he felt that all was contributing to the final victory over Satan — all was leading up to the Apostle's final salvation. "Salvation" in Php_1:19 is not, I judge, his deliverance from prison — that is alluded to in Php_1:26 — but deliverance at the end, which is quite in accord with the use of the word throughout Philippians. Salvation is at the end of the warfare, i.e., at the coming of the Lord Jesus (the salvation of the soul being enjoyed meanwhile). He counted on their prayers too, and the supply of the Spirit of Christ Jesus. The vessel needs to be kept constantly filled with the pure oil from above, that the light may shine out.

Php_1:20-30. The Apostle too had confidence in the Lord — it was his earnest expectation and hope — that the grace which had sustained him hitherto would sustain him to the end; that in nothing he might be ashamed; but that, as always, Christ might be magnified in his body, whether

by life or by death. "For," says he, "to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." So thoroughly was Christ before him, and so thoroughly was he yielded up, body and soul, to Him, that he was content to live or die, as might best suit the Lord, and conduce to His glory. In such language we observe self completely displaced, and the Lord — His service and His glory — filling the vision and heart. Christ was his one object: to live longer here was to labour further for the honour of His Name, and to become more deeply acquainted with Himself. To die would be undoubtedly gain to the suffering Apostle, for then he would be with Christ — he would be at home with the Lord. To one so true of heart, how painful to have to write in Php_2:21 : "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Few walked as himself and Timotheus; the many, even in his early day, mixed self with the service of the Lord.

It was happy to remain, it was happy to depart: he felt in a strait betwixt the two. "If I live in the flesh, it is worth while"; for so the verse should read. But he thought of the Church: he was its minister in an especial manner; he bore it on his heart, sharing the affections and feelings of the Head for His members; and it was this which made the difficulty. For him it would be far better to depart, and leave all the suffering and affliction behind; but "to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." We must remember that decline was setting in on every hand, though the days were early: evil men were already at work, seeking to corrupt the testimony of the Lord, and lead astray the saints. Paul knew that the evil would spread — he told the Ephesian elders so (Acts 20:1-38) some time before the writing of this letter to the Philippians — he desired therefore to stay, and guide the Church's barque a little longer over the troubled sea. And having this desire, and this confidence that his abiding in the flesh was needful, he knew that he should abide, and continue with the saints, for their furtherance and joy of faith. Observe the calm elevation of the man! Viewed from a human standpoint, it rested with the Emperor whether he stayed or not; but he looked not at man, whether in power or otherwise; but calmly settles his own case in the presence of the Lord. It was needful for the saints that he should remain for a season: neither Jewish hatred nor Imperial caprice therefore could interfere. He was persuaded he should see his beloved Philippians again; and he reckoned on their love, that, when they saw him, their rejoicing would be abundant in Christ Jesus.

Mark, he desired to stay for their "furtherance and joy of faith." Sweet and simple language from an Apostle, one armed by the Lord with authority. As far as possible he always avoided any display of authority, being very far removed, in spirit, from those who would lord it over God's heritage; he preferred to say: "Not for that we have dominion over your faith; but are helpers of your joy; for by faith ye stand" (2 Corinthians 1:24). But, whether he came or not, he desired that the walk of the saints should be good: "only let your conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ." This was his joy; as he said to the Thessalonians: "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 3:8). And as John: "I have no greater joy, than to hear that my children walk in the truth" (3 John 1:4). Precious identification with the glory of Christ!

He desired two things for the Philippians: (1) that they might "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel," and (2) that they should not be terrified by their adversaries.

Practical unity is a precious thing, and of the first importance, as the Apostle earnestly shows in Php_2:1-4. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity"

(Psalms 133:1-3). The Spirit of God is the bond of unity, as also its power. He, working in the hearts of the saints, fixes them upon one Object, and binds (or knits) them together in one purpose and aim. Outward uniformity must not be mistaken for this. The latter may be brought about by a general subscription to a creed, or submission to a code of laws, or to a person, as in Popery: but the oneness of mind which the Spirit produces and sustains is a transcendently higher and more blessed thing.

"Striving for the faith of the Gospel," is, I conceive, a different thing from "contending earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3); the latter is in view of internal corrupters, the former is in view of a hostile, and in the case of the Philippians, a pagan, world. They were not to be terrified by their adversaries, knowing that He Who was in them was greater than he who is in the world. They were to present a courageous front to the persecutor. This calm courage which grace supplies operates in two opposite ways: — to the enemy it is an evident token of perdition; to the suffering saints, it is an assurance of salvation, and that of God. The enemy on the one hand is made to feel that the Christian is invincible, that the worst only deepens his bliss; and he cannot resist the conviction in his conscience that he is fighting against God, which can only result in perdition, "seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you." But the saint, on the other hand, feels that the grace which is preserving him through the furnace, will keep him to the end; and, having for an helmet the hope of salvation, he goes forward undaunted and with holy calm. To suffer is a privilege, the Apostle tells us. Compare Mark 10:35-40. There is a difference between suffering with Christ and for Him. The first is the necessary fruit of having His nature, and is the portion of every Christian in a greater or less degree; the latter is the result of identification with Him and His cause in the world. It is for Christ here. Paul had suffered at Philippi, and was suffering at Rome; the Philippians were now tasting the same cup. But it was "for His sake," and that sweetened all; even as when Israel were at Marah, and could not drink of the waters because they were bitter, and God showed Moses a tree, which, when cast into the waters, made them sweet to the taste.

Philippians 2.

(Php_2:1-30).

The Apostle had in Php_1:27, expressed his heart's desire that the Philippian saints might walk together in unity; this he now follows up in a touching way. "If there be therefore any consolation [or encouragement] in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." All this his heart was deeply enjoying, their gifts and loving messages to him in prison being the immediate cause. To be thus thought of, when so many were forgetting him, and ashamed of his chains, was indeed encouragement, their love had comforted his heart, it was a true display of fellowship in the Spirit, and of bowels and mercies, i.e., the tender compassions of Christ. Would they fill up his cup of joy? One thing would do it — to hear that they were "of one accord, of one mind." He desired them to show the same love among themselves that they had so sweetly shown to him. His heart was not content to see them merely outwardly one (i.e., not outwardly dividing): he wished their hearts to be "knit together in love." Their state was far better than that of the saints at Corinth, where party-making, in the most carnal way, was going on in the assembly. Still the Apostle's heart was not satisfied. He always wished the saints to be what they should be for Christ. He would not have them rest short of a full answer to the mind of God. To rest satisfied with our spiritual state, even if comparatively good, is a snare. Paul could commend the Thessalonians for loving one another and all the brethren in all Macedonia, but would not have them stop there; and adds, "but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more" (1 Thessalonians 4:10). To walk together thus in unity lowliness of mind is requisite, and affectionate consideration for each other. The apostle warns against strife and vainglory (compare Php_1:15; Galatians 5:26); and another apostle tells us that "where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (James 3:16). The opposite spirit should prevail: each in lowliness of mind esteeming other better than themselves. Only grace can enable us to do this: but where grace is enjoyed, and the Spirit is working unhindered, it is a joy to see Christ in my brother, while I see failure and shortcoming in myself. An affectionate interest is enjoined in each other; saints are not to be exclusively occupied with their own interests, but, as Paul puts it elsewhere, by "love to serve one another" (Galatians 5:6; Galatians 5:13). Love delights to serve; it cannot be self-occupied.

The pattern is given in Christ Jesus, who humbled Himself in love that He might serve us. Marvellous grace! Wonderful and exalted pattern for our souls! He was in the form of God; to Him it was no robbery to be equal with God, but He emptied Himself, and took upon Him the form of a servant. The contrast with the first Adam is very marked. Adam was made in servant's form, and was created to obey, but aspired to be "as God." This was robbery, and brought its judgement. How different was it with the second Man! As the eternal Word, He was in the beginning with God, and was God: without Him nothing was made that was made. But He emptied Himself, choosing to serve. The form of God was laid aside for a while, though never His divine prerogatives. When here in flesh, He could raise the dead, cleanse the leper, command the winds and the waves, and read the hearts and thoughts of men.

He came to serve, saying, "A body hast Thou prepared me . . . Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10:7). To His disciples He could say, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Mark 10:45). And again,"I am among you as He that serveth" (Luke 22:27). And He has not laid the servant's form aside: He is the girded One still, though in glory. He is the true Antitype of the Hebrew servant, who said, "I love my master, my wife, and my children, and I will not go out free" (Exodus 21:1-36) And even in the future, He will love to serve His own. "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when He cometh shall find watching; verily, I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them" (Luke 12:37).

But the Lord, in His downward course in grace, did not stop at the assumption of servant's form: "being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." What a stoop! What a wondrous pathway! But it has ended for Him in glory. He Himself laid down that "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." God has seen to this. He hath highly exalted Him, and given Him the name that is above every name, and has decreed that every knee, whether heavenly, earthly or infernal, shall bow to Him, and own His lordship, to His glory. It is important to observe the point of view from which the Lord's humiliation is spoken of in this chapter. It is not that He came to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, though that, blessed be His Name, is true; but that He humbled Himself in love, to serve. This is our pattern: "let this mind be in you."

The Apostle continues to exhort the saints. They had always obeyed; not merely when he was present with them, but much more in his absence. To the Galatians he had to speak differently. "It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you" (Galatians 4:18). And now that the Apostle was absent, the Philippians must work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. They no longer had him to encourage them, and lead them in their conflict with the foe: they must count on God for themselves. If Paul was unable to help them, God was there still, working in them to will and to do of His good pleasure. This is the only resource for the saints now. The Apostle, in bidding farewell to the Ephesian elders commended them to God and the Word of His grace (Acts 20:1-38). Apostles have ceased, but God remains: to Him we turn.

He desired them to do all things without murmurings and disputings, and to be blameless and harmless, children of God without rebuke in the midst of a perverse generation. Verses 15-16 are very striking: every sentence reminds of Christ. Was He not blameless and harmless, Son of God without rebuke in the midst of perverse Israel? Was He not the Light of the World, and the Word of life? Saints are thus to have Him before them, and follow His blessed steps. And if the saints so walked, Paul would rejoice in the day of Christ: so evident would it be that he had not run in vain, nor laboured in vain. No labourer boasts of work that turns out badly, even though the fault may not lie at his door. Apostolic exhortations are frequent as to this. See 2 Corinthians 6:3; "Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed." Also 1 John 2:28; "little children, abide in Him, that when He shall appear, We may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." And many other passages.

So dear was the service of Christ to him, that Paul was quite willing to be poured out as a drink-offering; to him it would be a matter of rejoicing. In Php_2:17, he regards the Philippians as a

sacrifice, himself merely (so lowly were his thoughts) as the hin of wine poured on the sacrifice. (See Numbers 15:1-10). If this would glorify Christ, he was willing to be martyred and even desirous; and called upon the saints to rejoice with him. Unselfish servant; and unselfish saints, upon whom he could count to rejoice even at losing him whom they so dearly loved that Christ might be magnified. But though he was thus quite willing to be poured out, and expected sooner or later to be so dealt with, he believed he should abide for the present, as we have seen in Php_1:1-30. Therefore he hoped to send Timotheus to them shortly, that he might be comforted by having the latest information as to their state. He knew not who else to send. Timothy trod in his footsteps, and loved to care for the saints, but he could not say this of all. The majority sought their own things, not those of Christ Jesus. Painful and early departure from the simplicity and singleness of heart of Acts 2:1-47, Acts 3:1-26, Acts 4:1-37! What is man! Need we wonder at the worldliness and apathy of our own days? Let us examine our hearts: has Christ the first place there? Are His interests ours? Timothy had proved himself: as a son with a father, he had laboured faithfully and well in the Gospel; unlike John Mark, who commenced well, but departed from them at Perga, and went not with them to the work. (Acts 15:38). Him, therefore, Paul hoped to send presently, trusting in the Lord that he also himself would soon be able to follow.

Meanwhile, however, he would send to them Epaphroditus, who had come to him with gifts from them: "my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow-soldier," as Paul affectionately describes him, "but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants." Php_2:26-28 furnish us with a fine picture of delicacy of affection and tender consideration for others. Epaphroditus had been sick, "for the work of Christ he had been nigh unto death;" the Philippians had heard of it, and this distressed the heart of the devoted sufferer. That he should have caused them a moment's anxiety was a deep trial to him, and caused him to long to see them again, that their hearts might be set at rest. Paul thoroughly shared this feeling, and much as he desired to keep him, he urged him to return, that when the saints saw him again, they might rejoice. Wonderful! What does the selfish heart of man, as man, know of such feelings? This is the Spirit's fruit — He forms the new man after Christ. God had mercifully spared Epaphroditus to Paul and the saints: the Apostle would have him held in reputation. Like Paul, he regarded not his life that he might serve Christ. (Acts 20:24). Such characters shine the more brightly in the day of declension: we have seen that the Apostle had to groan over the majority of the labourers; here was one who gave his heart (and the heart of God) deep joy.

Philippians 3.

(Php_3:1-21).

The Apostle now exhorts the saints to rejoice in the Lord; a word, to his mind, so important, that he repeats it emphatically in Php_4:4. He has already spoken of different kinds of joy: (1) In making request for the saints, (2) That Christ was abundantly preached, (3) In seeing the saints walking together in unity, (4) In being poured out as a drink offering. Here he leaves the streams, as it were, and traces all up to the source, directing their hearts to the Lord Himself. To write such things could not be grievous (irksome) to him, and it was safe for the saints. How much we need to be reminded of the true source of all our joy! We undoubtedly find joy in the fellowship of the saints, and in the service of Christ; but it is unsafe for our hearts to rest there. The saints may cause pain and disappointment, and the service may discourage; where then the joy? But if the heart is set upon the Lord, whatever the days or circumstances, all is well.

But there are things that cloud our joy, and intrude themselves between the soul and Christ. The Apostle proceeds to speak gravely of one in particular. Judaising teachers were everywhere at work; active enough when he was moving about, they were probably much more so now that he was a prisoner. He describes them unsparingly as "dogs," for they had no sense of conscience or of shame; as "evil workers," because they were corrupting the work and truth of God; and then contemptuously calls them "the concision." The saints were to "beware": to be led by these teachers after the law and ordinances would ruin their joy, and separate them in heart from Christ. Any merely outward rite * is of no value in the eyes of God (circumcision now is only "concision," i.e., maiming): "we are the circumcision," finding our death and separation to God in the death of Christ, "who worship God in the Spirit and have no confidence in the flesh."** It is to be observed that it is not the grossness of the flesh that is spoken of in this chapter, but its religiousness: it is worthless, and they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

{*I do not include the Lord's Supper here. That is connected with the new creation and stands on wholly different ground.}

{**It is worthy of remark, as confirming the character of this epistle, that sin is not once named in it, and the flesh here only just to say we have no confidence in it. The believer is regarded throughout as walking in the power of the Spirit.}

If any one thought he had whereof he might trust in the flesh, Paul had more. He was a circumcised man, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Benjamite, a Pharisee, zealous against all who appeared to slight the law, and as touching the righteousness which was by the law, he was blameless. Who could show a fairer picture? But whatever Saul of Tarsus might have gloried in, Paul the saint and Apostle gloried in Christ alone. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." The ardent legalist and persecutor was arrested by a glorified Christ at the height of his course; he saw, on that memorable day, the despised Nazarene, whose followers he was pursuing to death, in the glory of God. His conscience was touched, his heart attracted. He saw a

righteousness revealed in Christ, which put all human doings in the shade, so that what he had regarded as gain, he now counted but loss; he would no longer stand in his own righteousness, even if it were possible. Henceforward his heart was occupied, not with himself and works, but with Christ. And after many years of suffering and loss for His Name (a path surely of unparalleled trial, except as we remember the path of his Lord) he was of the same mind, Christ was all. Every thing to him was but loss and dung, as compared with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord. Unlike the foolish Galatians, he continued to run well, allowing none to hinder. He regards Christ here as a prize to be won at the end, and divine righteousness as that in which he will stand in that day, which is quite in accord with the character of the Epistle. In another aspect, Christ was his when he wrote, and divine righteousness too; but throughout Philippians the believer is regarded as passing through the wilderness to the heavenly goal. The Apostle kept the goal before him — Christ; allowing nothing to divert the attention of his heart, and thus he was energised for, and sustained in, the path of peculiar trial, reproach, and labour to which the Lord had, from the first, called him. To him the end was so blessed, to have Christ for his own, and to be found in Him, not having his own righteousness, which was of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith, that he cared not how bitter and rugged the path might be which led him to it. He desired a yet deeper experimental knowledge of Christ, and the power of His resurrection (and who knew it better than he?) and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death. To him it was no small privilege to drink of His cup, and to be baptised with His baptism: indeed the deeper his sufferings, the more he would be like Christ, and that was enough for him. In Php_3:11 we must read — "The resurrection from among the dead." What possible meaning can be attached to "of the dead"? The general fact of resurrection can scarcely be an object of desire, for no man can evade it, all must rise again; but Paul had before him the glorious day when Christ will return and call His own from their tombs to bear His heavenly image, the rest of the dead being left in their graves until the judgement of the great day. The resurrection of the believer is of the same character as that of the Lord Jesus; "from among the dead," for blessedness, for glory in the Father's house.

Clearly to this the Apostle had not yet attained, nor was already perfect; but he followed after, if that he might apprehend that for which he was apprehended of Christ Jesus. Christ had laid hold of him for glory; he desired to lay hold of it that the glory might have its full power over his soul. He would forget all the things behind, and do but one thing, pressing toward the mark for the prize of the calling of God on high in Christ Jesus. He would not forget grace, and what it had done for him (1 Timothy 1:12-16), but would forget, i.e., not rest in — all attainments by the way. If I had a twenty-mile walk before me, I might be thankful when the fifteenth mile stone is passed; but it would not do to rest there, but I must leave the fifteenth and sixteenth behind as all others, and press on towards the end. So pressed Paul: the glory, yea Christ was before him; he would not stop short of that. He exhorts the saints to do the same: "let us, as many as be perfect,* be thus minded "; and if any had not properly learned their heavenly calling, God would reveal even this unto them. But all are responsible to walk up to attainment, whether great or small. The Apostle then calls upon the saints to imitate him (in 1 Corinthians 11:1 he qualifies it, "even as I also Christ") in running this race towards the heavenly goal, and bids them mark any amongst them who walked in the same way.

{*"Perfect" here is in the sense of full growth, in Php_3:12, it is likeness to Christ in glory.}

There is another class of men we are to "mark" according to Romans 16:17 — those who cause divisions and offences (stumbling blocks) contrary to the doctrine which we have learned. Such are to be avoided, but all who walked as Paul walked, and were thus ensamples to the believers in word, in behaviour, etc. (1 Timothy 4:12), were to be studied and imitated. The mention of this brought to the Apostle's heart a painful thought; there were those of whom he had often spoken, and of whom he now spoke weeping, who were enemies of the cross of Christ. They were not necessarily persons who had abandoned the profession of Christ, though they never had life; they were enemies of the cross. Having found the path one of reproach and loss, they had renounced it, loving earthly things, and preferring a path of self-indulgence and ease. Their end was destruction; but the Apostle felt keenly the open dishonour to the Name of the Lord Jesus.

The Christian's citizenship is in heaven, not here; his home, his portion, his all, is where Christ is. From heaven we look for Him, as Saviour, to complete His work in us by changing our poor bodies. The salvation of the soul we have now; for the salvation of the body we wait till that day. He will then change our body of humiliation (a better reading than "our vile body"), and fashion it like unto His own body of glory. Wondrous thought! The same power which He will display in the millennial kingdom in subduing all things to Himself, He will presently put forth upon the bodies of all who are His. He is thus the Hope of our hearts in the close of this chapter, as He is the Object of our hearts in the centre of it.

Philippians 4

(Php_4:1-23)

Php_4:1 is a fitting close to the precious subject treated in Php_3:1-21. "Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved." He had placed them, as it were, in Php_3:1-21, outside the world, with their citizenship in heaven, Christ in glory the Object and Hope of their hearts: in this position and experience he would have them stand fast, and not be moved by the wiles of the enemy.

The Apostle then appeals to two women who were evidently at variance, "that they be of the same mind in the Lord." Theirs was not strife of the gross and loose character as at Corinth; still it was a defect among the godly which the Apostle could not sanction. 'Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines"; (Son_2:15). He entreated the mediation of his true yokefellow (probably Epaphroditus). These women had laboured with him in the Gospel, and he had a regard and concern for them: he would have his yokefellow act the blessed part of the peacemaker, as our Lord Jesus Himself enjoined. Again he exhorts the saints as in Php_3:1, to rejoice in the Lord. Precious testimony to the faithfulness of the risen Lord to His poor tried servant; for his own heart was most assuredly enjoying what he here presses on his brethren.

In this chapter we see how the Christian, walking in the power of the Spirit, is enabled to walk above all circumstances. Therefore are we exhorted to moderation (or yieldingness), for the Lord is at hand. It is not the part of the saint to resent wrong, or to contend for rights: doing well and suffering for it is rather our path while the Lord is hidden in heaven. When He is manifested, all will be changed, for His saints will share with Him. Meanwhile it is our privilege to be without care, making known all our requests to God. Not merely large matters, but small also; everything we are invited to pour out before Him. In Matthew 6. the Lord Jesus instructed His disciples in faith as to food and clothing; here the word is wider, "Be careful for nothing." What repose this gives in such a world — and, may we not add, such a church — as this! We are not told that we shall get all our requests (that might not be well) but that the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Paul requested, yea besought, the Lord thrice to remove the thorn from his flesh; but was simply told that the Lord's grace was sufficient for him, and that His strength was made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:1-21) The same apostle requested to be allowed to go to Rome, but for many years was denied his request (Romans 15:23). He desired also "a prosperous journey"; but the Lord saw fit to send him as a prisoner, and to wreck the ship (Romans 1:10). We are in the Lord's hand, He orders all in perfect wisdom for His beloved saints; and who can be His counselor?

The peace of God is a somewhat different thought from the peace of Christ; as both differ, though flowing from, peace with God. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you" John 14:1-31.) This is the peace which ever filled the heart of Jesus as a perfect Man of faith below. He committed everything to the Father; we are called into the same path. The peace of God is that which pervades God's own heart above, which nothing disturbs. The heavens have been

corrupted, the earth ruined, Israel has failed, the Church likewise; yet nothing disturbs the peace of the Divine heart. His counsels stand, in spite of all creature failure; there God rests and there we rest also.

Food is furnished for our thoughts, for the loins of our mind are to be girded up: the lovely things, the things of good report, etc., are to engage us. Blessed portion! The true heart does not wink at evil, the rather abhorring and shunning it; but it does not dwell upon it. We cannot touch the unclean in any way without contracting defilement. We see this strikingly in Numbers 19:1-22. The priest who sprinkled the heifer's blood, the man who laid up the ashes in a clean place, indeed all who had to do with the matter were unclean until even, though they had only acted in putting sin away. We particularly need this injunction as to our thoughts in the present day, when there is so much of a painful character to fill the mind. If our minds dwell on evil, we get defiled, our communion is marred, our spiritual tone is altogether lowered.

If the Philippians practiced what they had learned, received, and heard, and seen in Paul, the God of peace would be with them.

The Apostle proceeds to commend them for their care of him, proved by the coming of Epaphroditus. There had apparently been a long interval without any tokens of love; but the man of God loved to regard it, not as carelessness on their part, but lack of opportunity. In those days saints could not remit by post to the Lord's labourers; the gifts must be carried, perhaps afoot many hundreds of miles. But though thanking them and the Lord for their care the Apostle does not speak in respect of want. "I have learned," says he, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Blessed superiority over all circumstances — Christ engaging the heart, the Spirit operating powerfully in the soul! It is easier to some to be abased than to abound. David, when hunted as a partridge upon the mountains, trusted God; when dwelling at ease in Zion, Satan allured him into the foulest sins. Jehoshaphat, when weak, counted on God, saying, "We know not what to do"; when strong and rich, he joined affinity with Ahab and helped the ungodly.

Paul had been well disciplined. The Lord said when He called him, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my Name's sake" (Acts 9:1-43). Whether full or hungry, Christ was all. What can the enemy do to such? The believer has a life, which, wrought upon by the Spirit of God, rises quite above the difficulties of the way, and is unquenchable.

Still, the Philippians did well in their expressions of practical fellowship. If the Apostle had learned how to suffer need, it ill became the saints to permit him so to suffer. In this respect the Philippians had always ranked well, even sending long distances to minister to the need of the Lord's servant. Paul calls it fruit which would abound to their account; and "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing unto God." Marvellous! The Spirit uses language similar to that used of the sacrifice of Christ in Ephesians 5:2; it partook of that character with God. Would the Philippians be the losers by their liberality? Nay, Paul's God would supply all their need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. The beauty and fullness of this expression is to be found in the Epistle to the Ephesians.

Note, he does not say "our," but "my God"; for he is speaking of experience, not doctrine. He had proved God; he knew Him to be faithful; he could vouch for Him to those to whom he wrote. When it is a question of relationship, he says "our God and Father," as in Php_4:20; every believer, experienced or not, being a child through grace.

He concludes with salutations from all the brethren with him, mentioning particularly some who were of Caesar's household, proving Christ had a people there, fruit possibly of his labours as a prisoner. Precious simplicity of affection, which our hearts will do well to cultivate more and more.

Chapter 189

S. The True Vine.

The True Vine.

Chapters 13 to 16 form a very distinct section in the Gospel of John, and present to us the Lord's precious communication to His disciples in the upper chamber at Jerusalem on the night of His betrayal. They are sub-divided, however, into two parts. John 13:1-38 and John 14:1-31 are characterised by grace: — He promises to return, to send the Comforter, to manifest Himself to His own; and gives them His peace. John 15:1-27 and John 16:1-33 the rather press responsibility. This is very strikingly seen in the parable of the vine and the branches. Christ declares Himself to be the true vine, His Father the Husbandman. Of old Israel had been called the vine of God. Jehovah had brought a vine out of Egypt, and had cast out the heathen and planted it (Psalms 80:1-19). He had bestowed much patient care upon it and had granted many privileges; but where was the fruit? "Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" (Isaiah 5:4). Israel — man in the flesh — failed; privileges and favours developed no good where all was evil and corrupt. How often had Jehovah sent! how patiently had He borne! but all was vain, Israel was a fruitless unprofitable plant. When Christ came to His own, He did not find idolatry as in the evil days of the kings; He found religion and plenty of it. We nowhere read of the restored remnant lapsing into the old idolatrous ways of their fathers; but when Messiah came, He found them sunk into cold dead formalism. Feast-days were kept, sacrifices were offered; but fruit, where was it? Alas for Israel!

Therefore He takes Israel's place, so to speak (brought out of Egypt by God, as truly as they, Matthew 2:15; Hosea 11:1), and commences Israel's history afresh, saying, "I am the true vine." The same principle is seen in Isaiah 49:1-26. Jehovah there addresses (not the nation, but) Christ, "Thou art My servant, O Israel, in Whom I will he glorified." Though Israel had failed, He would not; but would bring forth abundance of precious fruit in the scene where hitherto the Divine Husbandman had looked for it in vain.

But the vine has branches; these are the disciples, and indeed all who attach themselves to Christ, and profess His name. There is an immense difference between salvation and fruit-bearing, between being a branch of the vine and a member of Christ's body. To fail in seeing this difference is to lose the instruction of John 15:1-27 :, and, more serious still, to imperil the peace of conscience which those are entitled to enjoy who rest upon Christ and His work. When I think of salvation, I think of grace; but when fruit-bearing is before my mind, I think of responsibility. Every branch in Him should produce fruit: only thus are they manifestly His disciples; and fruit can only be borne as the result of abiding in Him. Where are we without Him? "Apart from Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). Thus are we taught the ever-needed lesson of dependence. It is ours to count on Him and draw upon His fulness of grace that the new man may develop himself in the power of the Holy Ghost. "Much fruit" is His desire, not merely a little here and there: anticipating thus the perpetual fruit-bearing in the glory of His presence (Revelation 22:2).

The Father is glorified in us thus, and we walk in the enjoyment of His love, keeping the commandments of Christ. The Father's hand is upon His own — ever in love — to increase their fruitfulness: "every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." Purging is oftentimes painful and grievous, and we are prone to miss the divine mind as to it when experiencing it; but love orders all for the divine glory and the soul's welfare. Things spring up in us, and quietly develop and grow, of which perhaps we are but little conscious, but which, nevertheless, would seriously retard our progress in moral conformity to Christ's image, if permitted to go on. We are under the care of the Husbandman. The saints are God's husbandry (1 Corinthians 3:9), and the pruning knife is graciously and in love applied. Precious dealings! needed because of the deceitfulness of the heart while passing through this present scene.

But all the branches are not true men, for profession, not life, is the subject here; and the reality of profession is shown by fruit. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Therefore the Lord proceeds to say, "If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." Note, the language is general, "If a man." The Lord does not say to the eleven, "ye," as in vers. 4 and 5; of their reality there was no doubt, the Lord Himself having just pronounced them clean through His word. He had spoken differently in chap. 13:, when washing their feet, — Ye are not all clean — for Judas Iscariot was then present; but the traitor had gone out, and all who remained were true, however failing. Judas Iscariot was a sample of the class of whom the Lord now speaks; he had not abode in Him; to his own eternal loss and ruin. More of such are found in John 6:1-71. His sayings were "hard" to them. They went back, and walked no more with Him, even though He, and He only, had the words of eternal life.

Wholesome indeed are the "ifs" of scripture; not indeed to distress the believer, such being by no means the object of the Spirit, but to sift and test those who profess the Lord's name. Where divine counsels are expounded, as in Ephesians, "ifs" are not found, for there all is of God. But where human responsibility comes in, as in Colossians and Hebrews, they are brought forward solemnly again and again by the Holy Ghost. There is a right use of such warnings, and there is a grave misuse. W. W. Fereday.

S. Keeping Christ's Word

Keeping Christ's Word

Revelation 3:8

"Thou hast kept my word" is the first matter of distinct commendation as to Philadelphia which we can lay hold of as showing what is in the Lord's mind as to them; and I do not ignore in this that the people thus commended are, first of all, Philadelphians. All the more striking on this account is what He commends in them. It is of great import and worthy of fullest emphasis that, while it is to a company of people who are characterised by "love of brethren" He is speaking, His praise is not that "thou hast loved the brethren." This does not even form part of it. His thoughts seem elsewhere: the commendation is, "Thou hast kept my Word, and not denied my Name." Again, "thou hast kept the word of my patience." Yet in the promise to the overcomer He does not omit what has reference to the name they bear: for on the "pillar," which he who has here but "a little strength" finally becomes, is inscribed not only "the name of my God," and "my new name," but also "the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem." This is the home of the "brethren," and has, I believe, distinct reference to "Philadelphian" character. Yet, I repeat, in His commendation of them, He says nothing of this. Is it not right to ask ourselves the reason of what is at first sight so strange?

Now the title under which the Lord addresses them fully accounts for it. They are Philadelphians whom he is addressing: it is thus plain that if people have not this character He has nothing here to say to them. It is to those He is speaking whose hearts would seek, if it were possible, the recovery of this "church," which should have been like "a city set on a hill," or "a light upon a candlestick," but has dropped, alas, into the invisibility which men ascribe to it, as if it were the necessary and normal state. Yes, it is to these that the Lord is speaking; and the first words He utters remind these, the seekers of church visibility, of His own essential holiness and truth: "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true." How much need will they have to remember this!

Think of the church that is scattered, and which we would so desire to see restored: what are we to do for its restoration? Shall we proclaim to themall, that it is the will of God that His people should be together? Shall we spread the Lord's table, free from all sectarian names and terms of communion, and fling wide open our doors, and invite all that truly love the Lord to come together? For in fact the "one loaf" upon the table does bear witness that we are "one bread, one body"; and there is no other body that faith can own, but the "body of Christ." Why should we not then do this?

I answer: Tell them by all means that the Lord has welcome for all His own: that is right but tell them it is the Holy and True who welcomes, and that He cannot give up His nature." How has the true church become the invisible church? Has it been without sin on her part? is it her misfortune, and not her fault? Take the guidance of these seven epistles in the book of Revelation, and trace the descent from the loss of first love in Ephesus to the sufferance of the woman Jezebel in

Thyatira, and on through dead Sardis to the present time: can we just ignore the past, and simply, as if nothing had happened, begin again? What would it be but mere hardness of heart to say so?

Suppose your invitation of "all Christians" accepted, and that in the place in which you give out your notice, you are able really to assemble all the members of Christ at the table of the Lord — bring them together with their jarring views, their various states of soul, their entanglements with the world, their evil associations how far do you suppose, would the Lord's table answer to the character implied in its being the table of the Lord? How far would He be indeed owned and honoured in your thus coming together? With the causes of all the scattering not searched out and judged, what would your gathering be but a defiance of the holy discipline by which the church was scattered? what would it be but another Babel?

Can you think that visible unity is so dear to Christ, so that He should desire it apart from true cleansing and fellowship in the truth?

1909 223 Surely this address to Philadelphia is completely in opposition — in designed opposition — to all such thoughts. Why should it be that here we have not the Lord presenting Himself as One who "has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars" — plenitude of spiritual power, and His people in His keeping — but as "the Holy and True"? Strange indeed it may seem that dead Sardis should be thus reminded, and not Philadelphia! But to Philadelphia such an utterance would seem as if it meant no less than the recovery of the church by their means. To Sardis it is manifestly exhortation instead of assurance. Philadelphia, even as Philadelphia, needs rather the warning that they must not mistake, in any sanguine interpretation of present blessing, what the days are in which they live, and that they must guard against such a conception of practical unity as would set aside all the value of unity. How perfect in its place is every word of God!

Let us notice then, again, what the Lord commends. "Thou hast a little power hast kept my word and not denied my name — hast kept the word of my patience." Every one must remark these "My"'s, which continue to the end of the address. They show that the true Philadelphian clings to Christ Himself, to His word, His person, His strangership in the present, His certainty of the future. His work is to obey Christ, hold fast the truth as to Him, be waiting for Him. The work of gathering may, so to speak, look after itself, if this be done. We are to be united by the Centre, and not merely or mainly by the circumference. And thus alone can there be anything that shall have fruit for God or commendation from Him who here speaks to His people.

It is easy to be seen then how the Philadelphian character may be lost by a false conception of it. "Brotherly love" is a precious thing when it is really what it purports to be; but see where the apostle, in his exhortation, puts it. "Add to your faith," he says, "virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godli ness brotherly love." If this be the order (and as order he gives it), how many things are needed to precede its proper development! No doubt all these things are in the Christian in some sense at the beginning, just as petals, stamens, and other parts of the flower, are wrapped up in the bud before it opens. But there is a relation of these to one another shown in the order of appearance; and that is what is important here. No "love of brethren" — no Philadelphia — is true, save as these things are found in it. For it all, Christ must be both sap and sun; and this is what the word in Revelation emphasises.

Philadelphian gathering is to Christ, then; and it is Christ who gathers. A common faith, a common joy, a common occupation, find their issue in that which is the outward sign of the spiritual bond that unites us. Who that knows what gathering at the Lord's table means would suppose that communion there could be other than hindered by the presence of what was not communion, any more than harmony could be increased by discord? Of want of intelligence I am not speaking: there is no discord in the presence of a babe; but an unexercised conscience, a heart unreceptive of divine things — which means receptive of how much else! — how must the power of the Spirit be hindered by them! The Scripture rule for times of declension is — "with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22); and the way to find these is not to advertise for them, but to "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace"; walking on the road in which they are walking.

It results, I am confident, that if we really seek the blessing of souls, we shall guard with more carefulness, not with less, the entrance into fellowship. We shall see that it be "holy and true," as He is with whom all fellowship is first of all to be. Careless reception is the cause of abundant trouble and may be of general decline. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." When trial comes, those that have never been firm of purpose, never, perhaps, convinced of the divine warrant for the position they have taken, scatter and flee from it with reckless haste, carrying with them, wherever they go, an evil report of what they have turned their backs upon. Such persons are, generally speaking, outside of any hope of recovery, and often develop into the bitter enemies of the truth.

We are incurring a great responsibility if we press or encourage people to take a position for which they are not ready; in which, therefore, they act without faith. It is just in principle what the apostle warns us of, the danger of leading others without an exercised conscience, to imitate a faith that is not their own. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." No wonder there are wrecks all along the track of a movement for which this is so constantly required, and in which so many are endeavouring to walk without it. Ought we not to remember that it is the Holy and the True that is seeking fellowship with us? and that nothing but what answers to this character, can abide the test that will surely come? F. W. Grant.

Chapter 191

S. An Address to my Brethren and Fellow-Members of the Church which is Christ's Body, ...

An Address to my Brethren and Fellow-Members of the Church which is Christ's Body, known by whatever name.

Brethren, — The test of even an apostle's message was the truth that he brought. Even the signs of an apostle, wrought before men's eyes "in signs and wonders and mighty deeds," were never sufficient of themselves to accredit to his hearers the word he carried. The truth was its own commendation, and needed no other. Our Lord's own appeal was, "If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" And our Lord's own assertion is, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers."

This is my comfort in addressing you, who personally have no claim or title to be heard. If the voice be Christ's, you will recognise it. If your will is to "do Christ's will," you will "know of the doctrine whether it be of God." Neither claiming nor desiring anything upon my own account, if I bring you God's word, your responsibility is to Him as to how you hear it.

Nearly eighteen hundred years ago an apostle wrote that it was "the last time," and gave this sign of it, that there were "many antichrists." (1 John 2:18.) "Many antichrists" were then, for the apostle, a sign of the last time, and more, that the "last time" had already come.

In men's thoughts these are the fresh first days of the church's history. The vigour of youth was still upon her. In the memory of him who wrote the words before us, Pentecost yet lived. And on every side around him, as he wrote, the word of God was growing and multiplying. More than two centuries of struggles and of triumphs were yet to precede its conquest of the whole Roman world. Yet here, before the very earliest "antiquity" to which men so fondly now look back, before the canon of scripture yet was closed, or the last apostle had passed away, the words of that surviving apostle himself (inspired words, scripture which "cannot be broken") assure us that even then the end, morally, had already come for the professing church; not triumph (alas!) nor a millennium — "the last time" and "many antichrists."

Already had the apostle Peter uttered a warning as to the same thing. That there should be false teachers among Christians, privily bringing in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and that many should follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth should be evil spoken of. (2 Peter 2:1-22 :)

To which Jude could add, when he wrote, that these men were already there; so that it was needful for him to write, exhorting earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. "For," he says, "there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ." There was no remedy for all this; the Lord was coming

to execute judgment upon them. "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment upon all."

Quick work of ruin, brethren, in what had been once so fair. Apostles even yet in the church and the canon of scripture not completed. Yet there, in that church, were the objects of judgment, and the Lord coming to execute it!

But we may go back farther still, and put the testimony of another inspired writer side by side with Peter, Jude and John. In Paul's address to the Ephesian elders, mingled with the sorrow of his own departure from them, was the sadder foreboding of evil which should quickly follow to the church of God. "For I know this, that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock; also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." And this so soon began, so rapidly developed, that in his Second Epistle to Timothy he writes as of a notorious fact: "This thou knowest, that all they which be in Asia are turned away from me."

Asia, the scene of so many labours! Was Europe better? From Rome he writes to the Philippians, and he says, "All seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ." "Many walk, of whom I have told you before, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ."

Thus East and West were together departing from the Lord. And how does the apostle — no man of gloomy views or narrow mind he at least — how does he look at the future of that church declined, and yet declining, from its primitive faith and love? "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." "Preach the word . . . . for the time will come that they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned unto fables." "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves . . . . lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness and denying the power thereof."

This is the apostolic picture with no room for a millennium in it, no prospect of general revival or recovery, but the reverse. "The mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way; and then shall that wicked one be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit (or breath) of his mouth, and destroy with the brightness of his coming." Thus there is not a break in the darkness up to the coming of the Lord. The last days are the perilous ones. The last time is known by the "many antichrists." And that time, however, God's long-suffering has protracted it unto the present, had morally already come when John the apostle wrote.

Brethren, if this be so, where are we? As surely as the word of God is true and reliable, the general church is far gone on the path of decline towards the full apostasy that yet shall be. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 :) A form of godliness there may be, and yet "perilous times." Dangerous work to be floating with the tide, accepting things because our fathers did; dreaming, after eighteen centuries of sad and miserable failure, that even now we are to undo these centuries of wrong-doing, and do, after all, what yet was never done! Was there not energy and faith and love of old? Were not apostles equal to you in every natural and supernatural qualification for the work they gave their lives to? Does it nowise daunt you that the apostle Paul should have to say of

places where all the signs of an apostle, no whit behind the chiefest, had been done among them — "All that are in Asia have departed from me?" — or will you convince him of his error in predicting only an increase in evil, and the last days worst?

But you say you have God's promise and assurance that you shall convert the world. For He has said "that righteousness shall even fill the earth as the waters cover the sea." True, He has said this. But He has not said you are the ones to do it, but the reverse. "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the earth with fruit." Is that the christian church? Indeed there is nothing plainer in the word than that it is not. If you will listen to one who says he speaks to the Gentiles as the apostle of the Gentiles, he tells you plainly that just as the casting away of the Jews was the reconciling of the world, so the receiving of them back shall be life from the dead. (Romans 11:15.) Moreover, he bids you as Gentiles "be not high-minded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee." "Behold, there are," says he, "the goodness and severity of God; on them which fell (the Jews) severity; but toward thee (the Gentile church) goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise THOU ALSO SHALT BE CUT OFF."

Brethren, have we continued in God's goodness? Why, then, talk of revival, if there has been no decline? But there has been, as even the scriptures themselves show; which show, too, there will be no general recovery. What is the alternative, then? Cutting off. Yet God's purposes shall be accomplished. "For I would not, brethren, that ye should he ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened unto Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so ALL Israel (the nation, not merely individuals) shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."

Mark the definiteness of all this. Israel nationally blinded, till God has His complete number of Gentiles gathered in, then all Israel saved; and how? By the gospel? No; but by the Deliverer coming out of Zion. And it is distinctly added, "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes," treated as such; their own distinctive promises held in abeyance, that God may gather the Gentiles into the church; "but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sake; for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." 'Words how often quoted, but how seldom applied as the Spirit of God applies them here, to the calling and promises of the nation of Israel!

Thus, if the receiving of Israel be life from the dead for the nations of the world, the "gospel" is not the means of their reception; but as long as it goes on, they are enemies for your sake. When the fulness of the Gentiles is brought into the church, the dispensation will change, the Lord come, and Israel received as a nation be life to the nations of the world. Till the Lord come, then, there is no millennium, no conversion of the world by the church. On the contrary, the expectation of it is the denial of the shame and failure of eighteen centuries, the proud self-assertion of Laodicea, "rich and increased with goods, and needing nothing," not knowing that she is "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," and that the Lord is saying, "I will spue thee out of my mouth."

Beloved brethren, for this fatal and disappointing dream of the world's conversion by your means, you have given up the practical hope of the Lord's coming. Persuading yourselves things are going in the main right, you are accepting, with little scrutiny, the ways and means and associations by which you imagine the end you have in view is promoted. Yet the Lord is just ready to judge the whole scene, and your own individual part in it. Yes, judgment is to close the scene which just now may seem so full of promise — Judgment at the coming of the Lord. For that coming we are taught

to watch, because we know not when the time is. This is the answer at once to the mistakes of those who set times, near or remote, for His coming; and, on the other hand, to those who would put it off to the end of the millennium. You know not when the time is; therefore the Lord says, Watch. You cannot watch for what you know will not come for a hundred years; how much less a thousand?

Nor can you say that the coming of the Lord bids us watch for is not a real and personal one, except by such a mode of interpretation as would throw all scripture into confusion, and all ordinary language too. For the Lord tells us it is a coming in the clouds of heaven with the angels, when all the tribes of the earth shall mourn to see, because it shall be in judgment like the flood; a day when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of His glory, and all the nations be gathered before Him; and He shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats. (Matthew 24:1-51 :, Matthew 25:1-46 :) Yourselves apply these last words to the time of His real advent, and it is quite evident it is the same coming throughout both these chapters. Thus for this coming it is you have to watch, because you know not when the time is.

Yet, brethren, how many of you give ear to the exhortation? You have suffered Satan to rob you both of the comfort and the admonition of your Lord and Saviour's words. And hence a multitude of errors, and of what He will judge as evil and dishonouring ways.

1. You lower the authority of scripture by attributing to it human exaggeration, and therefore falsehood. How could a man, not led of your interpreters, suppose that that coming spoken of in the terms of Matthew 24:1-51 :, was either death, or high-flown language for the simple destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans long ago? If it be so, why should there be any real coming of the Lord at all? Why should not all the passages about it mean something else than they so plainly say? No wonder it should be thought that prophecy can only be clearly interpreted by its fulfilment, if these are really its interpretations! But our inheritance, brethren, our "exceeding great and precious promises" — what about them? Are they not fulfilled prophecy? What if in result all these should dwindle down proportionately; just as the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven has dwindled down into the sacking of a Jewish city?

Alas infidelity thanks you for the lesson which it has not been slow to learn; but the simple and ignorant man, whom you have delivered blindfold into the hands of your interpreters, will scarcely thank you for the proof, that the grand and blessed word of his God is but as to much of it a more than half deception — and how much he cannot know.

From hence a wide uncertainty results. The wise and learned differ, it is found; how then shall the unlearned be sure? And "charity" is invoked to cover all mistakes, by asserting — save as to some fundamental points (that is, some points believed to be essential to men's salvation) — the humility of universal doubt. Indeed the Lord has said that "whosoever will do God's will shall know of the doctrine;" but then you must not say you do "know." You have your opinion; I have mine. Between the two the authority of the word is gone. The Bible is God's word, no doubt; but it is scarcely, "what saith the scripture" any longer. It is "What say your doctors?" And in despite of His own word, His sheep cannot know Christ's voice from the voice of strangers.

2. But another thing. The scripture says, "The whole world lieth in wickedness." That applies, you think, only fully to the past; Christianity is rapidly changing that. As we progress towards the

millennium the world must certainly be growing better. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution," says the apostle. But that has ceased to be. Doubtless it was of such a change already begun at Corinth that he wrote: "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us; we are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised." It is very true we get on better with the world in these days. And times so changed make it difficult to understand how we "are not of the world." All its harmless pleasures we partake of; all its honours we aspire to and obtain; we find it our positive duty to "get on" in it, and do good to ourselves, that men may speak well of us; we do not believe that Satan is the "prince of this world," for we are its soldiers, its magistrates, its politicians.

Brethren, where are we? Is this progress, or is it deterioration? Is the "offence of the cross ceased," or have we ceased to bear it? And are these words "hard sayings," which we cannot bear even from the lips of our Lord and Master? "But woe unto you that are rich, for we have received your consolation. Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you, for so did their fathers of the false prophets."

3. But the church, too — the church it is that all the nations are to flow to yet. Kings are to be its nursing fathers, and queens its nursing mothers. It is the heir of all Jewish promises, the divinely appointed successor to Israel's place and portion. Nay, it is but one and the same church all through, that Jewish and this Gentile. Its law is ours: its union of church and state, its earthly head, its priestly order, its ceremonial services, and its worldly sanctuary; its earthly blessings and dignities, contended for and maintained by carnal weapons: all, all, are ours. Points of detail may be changed without disturbing the essential unity. The church, Jewish or Christian, is all one. So you maintain; with what result it is not difficult to see.

1881 221 Brethren, the Jewish nation, or church — for the nation was the church — was no pilgrim or stranger upon earth assuredly. "Days long in the land;" "blessings in casket and in store;" "to be the head only, and not the tail" among the nations, and their enemies smitten before their faces; these were the things plainly, though conditionally, promised them. If you are successors to all these, who are the successors to the apostles and the primitive witnesses for Christ? — "fools," and" weak," and "despised;" and "hungry," and "thirsty," and "naked," and "buffeted," and "having no certain dwelling-place;" blessing when reviled; persecuted and suffering it?

The law is your rule of life, and holy, and just, and good it is, though as many as are of its works — upon that principle — are under the curse; as the apostle says. But whose is the "rule" of being a "new creature in Christ Jesus," crucified to the world by His cross, and glorying in it? (Galatians 6:14-16.) You find no pilgrim or strangership in your rule, and that may suit you; but you find no glories of the new creation in it either; nor does it speak to you as a heavenly people, sanctified, and sent into the world as the Father sent His Son. All this is nowhere; the Christian's place no higher than the Jews; the standard of walk no different; for, of course, if the law is your rule, and was the Jews', there cannot, and ought not, to he any difference between your walk and his; your place in Christ and its responsibility are gone, for of this the Jew knew nothing.

But "if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." Brethren, what does this mean: "a new creature;" a new sort of creature, as the word implies? Do you go back to Adam, the pure and innocent man in the garden which God set him in to dress and keep? Nay, that would be no creature new in kind. Adam, even pure and good

before his fall, was yet "of the earth, earthy." Is Christ but the first man set up afresh? Nay, verily, he "is the second man, the Lord from heaven." Let men cavil as they please, He is a heavenly man; a second, another sort; a "last Adam," head of a new race, beginning of a new creation. And you and I, who believe, are "in Him," seen and accepted before God, "in the Beloved." "As is the earthly, such are they also that are earthly; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." The image of it we have not yet, true. That will be ours in the day of His coming. The thing we are.

"Heavenly" and "in Christ:" oh, brethren, think you we realise our place and portion? "Old things passed away, and all things become new?" Do you and 1 know what it is to look up into those heavens, where the Son of God sits in glory all His own, and see and recognise in Him what we are before God: "as He is," even "in this world"? Can we say quite confidently, each for himself, "Yes, we are identified with Him who represents us there before the eye of God; as He is, in whom no spot was ever found, nor can be, but perfectness, after God's own heart wholly"? That it is to be in Christ, a new creature. Our rule is to "walk in Him," as being what we really are: heavenly, citizens of heaven, pilgrims and strangers upon earth.

All the rest the cross has ended for us. We have died with Christ out of our old Adam condition; our old man is crucified with Christ. The flesh is in us still, indeed, but in us a foreign thing; and we are not in it before God, nor identified with it in anywise, but with Him in whom it was never found. We are in Him, as He is.

Brethren, can we own this, and seek to get on in a world that crucified the Lord; whose prince and God is Satan; and friendship with which is enmity against God? Can we claim rights where we are dead? Can we take up carnal weapons, where He has bidden not to resist evil? Can we take the law with others, where God has shown us grace ourselves? Can we be magistrates end politicians, where Satan is really prince? Can we find ease and enjoyment, where every step of His way led Him on to a death by wicked hands, even the death of the cross?

"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven, but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword . . . . He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me. . . . And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

"Sell that ye hath, and give alms: provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not . . . . for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and shall come forth and serve them."

4. The effects of not watching have been in every way disastrous. You are waiting for death and judgment rather than for Him who has conquered death and borne judgment for you. These are indeed the common portion of men as such. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this

the judgment." And you have forgotten so the distinctness of your own portion, that you account it enthusiasm for a man to say with the apostle, "We shall not all die," and almost heresy to affirm, as the Lord does, that "whosoever heareth his words, and believeth in him that sent him, shall not come into judgment."* Yet both are simple scripture statements, which the holding fast the Lord's coming gives to the soul in full and unclouded reality. For those who are watching for Him, what more simple than the apostle's language, "we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord"? Is death to these a necessity, a thing "appointed"? And as for judgment — though we shall all give account of ourselves to God — when "the Lord cometh to execute judgment upon all," even Enoch tells us, "He cometh with ten thousands of his saints" (Jude 1:14), or, as Paul says (Colossians 3:4), "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory."

[*In the common version of John 5:21 "condemnation." but the word is almost everywhere else translated "judgment," which is the ordinary word of it. The Bible Union Version and Alford's Revision both give "judgment."

At verse 29 the word rendered "damnation" is the same, and should be similarly corrected; also in 1 Corinthians 11:29 "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself" — here not eternal judgment, but chastening.]

"For this we say unto you by the word of God, that we which are ALIVE AND REMAIN unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to MEET THE Lord IN THE AIR, and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.) That is our portion who are His, living or dead, when He comes: "Every man in his own order; Christ, the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." Mark that! Not everybody at His coming; but "they that are Christ's at his coming." This is the divine "order." "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we (the living) shall be changed." Thus shall we go up to meet the Lord. It is the fulfilment of His own promise: "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

Blessed, blessed words! Are they a call to judgment, think you, reader? Do you expect a sentry and a challenge at the door of the Father's house? or to be put on trial, and judged according to your works, to see if you have title to enter there?

Does He not, then, "know them that are his"? May there be in the company of those "raised in glory," or "changed," and having "put on the image of the heavenly," one who perchance may yet have no title to he there? And the "dead in Christ," who have been many of them more than a millennium "absent from the body, and present with the Lord" — will you put them on trial too, to see if they were indeed rightly there?

No, it is all forgetfulness of the place we have with Him — of His love, and of the value of His work. We have forgotten, that if it be true — as it is — that "God shall judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained;" it is written no less, that we "are not of the world, even as he

is not of the world," and that "as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment, so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and" — blessed alternative of man's natural portion — "to them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation."

This is our hope, beloved brethren, to be with Himself before He comes to execute judgment, and when He does appear for that, we know that we also shall appear with Him.

The common doctrine is a cloud upon this precious hope, and no indirect question of the very certainty of salvation itself. If the day of judgment is to decide who are the saved ones, it is no wonder if many think they cannot be sure even as to themselves before. And if we are to be judged then according to our works,* who but must shrink from the thought of it! The result is, on the one side, legality seeking to rest on its own performances in view of the day of judgment; and, on the other, the lack of comfort and assurance because on this very ground. How different the believer's position as stated in Romans 5:1-21, where, being "justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God!" How different a thing it is to be seeking to make oneself fit to pass the judgment, and recognising the grace which has already given me a place in Christ in the day of grace and of salvation! "Herein is love made perfect with us (see margin), that we should have boldness in the day of judgment, because as HE is" — as Christ in glory is — "so are we in this world." (1 John 4:17.) The day of judgment will not upset the confidence of the day of grace, for we shall be with Him and like Him, the Judge, before that day comes. We are now as He is. When He shall appear, we shall appear with Him in glory.

[*Those who will be so judged are the wicked dead, who are not raised with the saints at the Lord's coming; "the rest of the dead" who "lived not again till the thousand years were finished." They are judged, therefore, at the end of the millennium, when the heavens and the earth flee away from before the face of Him who sits upon the great white throne. (See Revelation 20:4-13.)]

Bear with me a little yet, beloved brethren; and suffer a further question. We have spoken of that church, so dear to Christ, for which He gave Himself. If I turn to the picture of it which I have, in its first bright days, it is impossible not to ask of that church which is the body of Christ, united together and to Him by that Spirit by which we are all baptized into that one body (1 Corinthians 12:1-31 :) — where is that church now? It still remains, you say, scattered throughout the various bodies of Christendom. Well, this is true, no doubt. But then, what scattered it? And, more, what keeps it scattered? Was it an evil for it to be scattered? And is it not as great an evil for it to continue scattered?

You may say, "We neither scattered, nor can bring it together again." That is true too: neither you nor I can undo what has been done. But we can surely own the evil, and ourselves cease from it. And this we are called and bound to do.

And then, what about these various bodies of Christendom, among which you say the true church is scattered? Plainly they are not the true church themselves, for the very reason, that the true church is scattered amongst them. If, then, they are not the true church, what are they? Do they even represent the true church, as far as an outward visible body may?

They do not, for they are not one body, even professedly, but many; and, by the very fact of what they are, to be a member of any one of them is to be not a member of the rest. Thus these bodies

do not even represent the church of God. They are societies of people who are associated together upon the ground, not of membership in the body of Christ, but of holding certain views which distinguish them from other Christians. And that (suffer me to say it, brethren — the appeal is to scripture in the matter), that is true sectarianism, "schism" in the Bible sense, "schism in the body" (of Christ).

Mark it, then, brethren; it is no schism to be outside these bodies. It is a duty; for by the very fact of being united to them, I separate myself so far from all those who, though true and devoted Christians, cannot give in their adhesion to the creed or to the regulations of the sect.

The moment I get the true thought of the church of God, I see it to be a body into which Christ, the Head, admits, and He alone, for He alone baptizes with the Holy Ghost, and by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body. Scripture owns no other membership than this — the being members of Christ — of His body. If you and I are such, we belong already to the church, and have to receive one another, as Christ received us, "to the glory of God." He who imposes conditions is guilty of dividing the body of Christ, not he who cannot in conscience come under the conditions. That discipline is to be maintained is, of course, true, but this is not in question here. Aside from this, the gathering together of Christians as such, apart from all denominational distinctions, is the only "assembling of ourselves together" that the scripture knows.

Do you say, "Well, but that assembly of Christians, as such, must be subject to the order which Christ has instituted for His church"? I answer, Surely so; but this is too small a loophole to admit all or any of the ecclesiastical systems of the day. Tested by the word of God, these all founder upon this, that they put into men's hands the power which alone belongs to Christ, give Him nominal headship but not actual, and subject the conscience thus to men and not to God.

All human regulations, however wise and expedient in their design, yet as regulations necessarily do this. Who has power to regulate in the church of Christ but Christ? Not the whole church together, much less any class or section in it. Are not the scriptures able to furnish thoroughly to every good work? What want we more? Are all your creeds, confessions, canons, and what not, clearer and more forcible than the word itself? Are your liturgies the supply of a deficiency which the Head of the church has not provided for? Alas! is it not all sheer dishonour done to Him, and in reality a subtle form of unbelief in His only authoritative word?

But again, I read that Christ has given gifts to His church: some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. The apostles and prophets remain as the foundation (Ephesians 2:20); the others carry on the building to this day. Evangelists labour in the world outside; pastors and teachers in the church inside. The possession of the gift entailed the responsibility of using it (1 Peter 4:10); for He who gave it could not have made a mistake in giving it. Now, once more, suffer me to ask — and if it be folly, bear with me in my folly — whence did men get the control they exercise over the gifts of Christ? Who gave them power to ordain, or appoint, or choose, or send out, or locate and settle the servants of another master? Is it no interference, think you, with Himself, that He has given the gift to use, but you are to give the authority to use it!

I ask for scripture to show that men were ever ordained to teach or preach at all. It is too scanty a foundation for it to adduce that Paul and Barnabas were separated to a special work among the

heathen, by the imposition of the hands of prophets and teachers. (Acts 13:1-52 :) In the first place, Paul certainly was not ordained then, for to some of the very people to whom he was then sent, he declares that he was "an apostle, not of men, nor by man." (Galatians 1:1.) Secondly, the work they were set apart to was simply a definite mission among the Gentiles, which Acts 14:26 tells us was "fulfilled;" but Paul's apostleship did not end with that. Thirdly, they were prophets as well as teachers who acted in the matter. And, lastly, "the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul," not, See if Barnabas and Saul are proper persons to be separated. In other words, He pointed out to them directly those whom He would have sent, not gave them authority to choose and send.

Then Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every city. And afterwards Timothy and Titus, as apostolic delegates, did the same. But though an elder should be "apt to teach," his vocation as an elder was not to teach but to "oversee." It is well known that the word "bishop," the elder's official title, means "overseer," and is so translated. (Acts 20:28.) They were elderly grave men, fathers of families, who could show, by the careful training of their own families, that they knew how to take care of the church of God. They tended — were shepherds to, as the word translated "feed" means (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2) — the church of God. If they had gift, they laboured in the word and doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17), but they might rule well without that. Not that they were separate classes of elders, for which there is no scripture at all; but if they had gift, they used it, yet it was not confined to them.

These elders never ordained. Apostles did and could depute others. In Timothy's case, who was no elder, when a spiritual gift was given to him by prophecy, it was accompanied with the imposition of the elders' hands. That is the whole scripture on the subject. As for the successors of apostles, or of Timothy and Titus, they exist in the fables of tradition — nowhere else. Scripture speaks only of a widespread ruin of the church, beginning in the apostles' days, and these commend us to the word of God in their own absence, not to successors. (Acts 20:32; 2 Peter 1:15.)

Why do I speak of this? I would gladly be spared having to do so, and have been thus brief, as desiring to call attention to the subject, rather than pretending to make all plain. But the evils resulting from the common view and practice are great and many, and would justify a much longer notice. When I turn from the blessed word of God and its teachings — from its free and simple ministry, in love, to all and anywhere, of whatsoever any one might have for the common good of all — when, I say, I turn from this to the narrow systems of men, where hired preachers have each their little circle in which their voice is alone entitled to be heard; when I see the sheep of Christ oft-times clinging to those who cannot feed them (even if they teach no positive heresy, and are themselves christian men), just because they have the commission of men, and refuse other teachers who have not, or are not their ministers, as they would say; what can I think, beloved brethren? And this is one grand evil of the system, that by maintaining the need of an external commission from those who are supposed to have authority to give it, the commission is as the result made the test of the truth. The truth ceases to have entire authority. Christ is made to commission men who do not preach it, nay, often men who are not His at all. And yet they say there would be confusion from allowing Christians to act simply upon their own conscience to God, and that men would not know whom in that case to listen to or believe. Is not this as much as saying that Christ's sheep do not hear His voice, and that they will hear the voice of strangers?

Brethren, there is still, thank God, a living acting Head to the church, His body — One who cares for His own as tenderly as ever, yea, as when He laid down His life for His sheep — One who, Himself at God's right hand, has sent down in His own absence "another comforter," to abide with us for ever. The Holy Spirit is really present with us in that place of infallible Guide and Director in the church of God, which is falsely and blasphemously claimed by the Roman pope. Alas! are Protestants conscious of His presence, and of what the fact of His presence involves? For if He be here, must He not be Sovereign? Once He did act, and was acknowledged: set apart men to their several spheres of service, as well as gave capacity to serve; sent men hither and thither at His will; and the whole church, in its coming together, could be trusted to His guidance, without prayer-book, priest, or president — each man left to his own conscience before God; all "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." The rule was, as to worship, "in spirit and in truth;" the rule, as to ministry, "all things to edification." In the public assembly, the women were to be silent. (1 Corinthians 14:1-40 :) The one exception shows how large is the liberty for all else.

But I close, though having scantily uttered what was on my mind. But, oh, for a heart rightly to feel all the deep dishonour we have done to Him in the ruin we have brought in everywhere. Repair it we never can; but we can judge ourselves about it, "cease to do evil, learn to do well." Our resource and hope is in the Lord Himself coming to end it all, and in the bliss of His own presence for the feeblest and most failing of His own. May we be waiting for Him! F. W. Grant.

S. Independency

Independency

(an extract)

1909 253 "We shall find that 'independency' is one of the most successful means of evasion of scriptural discipline that could perhaps be imagined one of the most successful snares by which the children of God can be seduced into resistance to the will of God, while to themselves they seem to be standing only for the principles of the word against 'confederacy,' for purity, and unsectarian maintenance of the body of Christ. We must therefore look seriously and with sufficient care into the matter: first, at what independency really is, and then at the fruits which make manifest the tree.

"In its simplest and boldest form independency appears as the denial of any scriptural authority for any 'circle of fellowship' outside of the individual gathering, wherever it may be; and this denial is made in the interests, as they imagine, of unsectarian recognition of the one church only, which is the body of Christ. The formation and maintenance of any such circle is, they maintain, sectarian, and the adoption by such circle of a common discipline is sectarianism full-blown. It constitutes the whole a 'party,' which may take the name of Christ, as some at Corinth did, and only be perhaps on that account to be the more avoided, as making that precious name an instrument of division.

"This charge is not, it may be, that of denying the name of Christ, but it approaches it so nearly as to make it of the most serious consequence. Those who hold to a circle of fellowship and yet refuse the adoption of a sectarian name, with what is implied in this, can neither afford to give up their claim of gathering simply to the name of Christ, nor accept the truth of what is charged against them. Let us examine then what is meant by these assertions, neither shaken from our convictions by their boldness, nor refusing to bring all these to the test of scripture, as often as may be needful. That which is true will only gain in its hold on us by every fresh examination, and the only danger is in this being lightly and not thoroughly carried out."

"Now what is a 'circle of fellowship'? That all such is not forbidden must be believed by the objector himself, if he have but 'two or three' gathered with himself in any local assembly. For this, I suppose, is not the whole 'assembly of God' there, but something indefinitely less than this. Yet, here there must be a within and without, a being, in some sense, of us or not of us — a something which is saved from being a party, not by having no walls or door, but by its having no arbitrary, no merely human, terms of admission. If it have no terms, then it is a mere rabble of lawless men, and as such to be refused by every Christian.

"If you say, 'No, it is scripture to which we are subject,' that brings in at once the implication that it is scripture as you see it, not as your fellow Christians see it; and you take your place as before the Lord, to be judged of Him in regard to this. Your being a separate somewhat, a 'circle of fellowship,' does not constitute you a party: you own Christians everywhere, as members of the body of Christ, and receive them wherever a scriptural hindrance to their reception does not exist,

and you speak of being gathered simply to Christ's name, without an idea that you are making the name of Christ a badge, or sign, or instrument, of division.

"Well, then, in this place, at least, there exists a gathering of Christians that I can recognise — I suppose, ought to recognise — apart from the whole body of Christians in the place. I say 'ought' because I have duties in regard to the assembling of ourselves together; and here alone I find those with whom I can assemble, no unscriptural condition being imposed on me. Were there another assembly in the same place and of the same character, then I should have to ask why they were not together: for the sin of schism is a grave one in scripture, and I should have of necessity to refuse this.

"If, then, in this place, I repeat, there is a gathering that I can own, and must — suppose, now, I went elsewhere and lived — found perhaps there also one that I had equally to own as gathered to Christ's name alone, would it be right for me in the new place to refuse to own as a separate company those in that from which I came, whom, when I was there, I had to own, and whom, if I were now there, I should have to own? Is it possible that my going from A— to B— should make that wrong for me at B— which at A— would be quite right, and if I went back there, would be right again? If so, that is independency in earnest; or else it is the most curious shifting of right and wrong that one can conceive of; morality shifting every few miles of the road, whichever way I travel. And yet, if not, we are connected in principle, to a 'circle of fellowship'!

"The recognition of each other by such gatherings throughout the world is, therefore, right; and everything opposed to it is false and wrong. Nay, it is impossible to maintain practically, if principles are of [no] value to us. For, were I taking the journey spoken of, must I not inquire for those who are of one mind with us in B—? and would those in B— expect anything else of me? To refuse a circle of fellowship may be held as a theory: the facts [however] will always be [found to be] discordant with the theory. The theory itself [if that be all] cannot be truthfully accepted by any one who has given it any sober reflection; except it mean independency of the grossest and narrowest kind; that is, associating where one will, and recognising obligations nowhere but where I will. And this would be indeed the most perfect sectarianism that could well exist.

"But we are to recognise the whole body of Christ! Surely, but not their unscriptural associations. In the interests of the body of Christ I refuse denominations; but in the same interests I am bound to accept the circle of unsectarian fellowship. The gracious words which, providing for a day of failure and confusion, sanction the two or three gathered to the Lord's blessed name, sanction such gatherings in every place, and therefore a circle of such gatherings. It would be as sectarian to refuse identification with these as to take our place with the various denominations. Nay, it would be more so. Nor would it save us from this, to say we were acting for the good of the whole church of God, when from Scripture itself the disproof is so easy.

"Now, another step. To accept these is to accept their discipline. For the Lord's sanction of the gathering is the express sanction of their discipline. Of course, I do not mean by that that they can add to Scripture, or invent a character of discipline that is not found there; nor yet that He could sanction what might be a mistaken judgment. He is the Holy and the True, the Lord and Master of His people always; and that is quite enough to say as to all this. But authority for discipline these 'two or three' have; and woe to him who resists its rightful exercise: "If he hear not the church, let him be to thee as a heathen man and a publican" is said of just such feeble gatherings as these.

"It is plain that precisely the same thing is to be said for the discipline as for the gathering itself: if it is to be respected at A— where it is exercised, it is just as much to be respected at B— or at C—. If it be the decision of a local matter, then the Lord has plainly put it into the hands of those who are in circumstances to judge of it aright, though protest and appeal are surely to be listened to, and they are bound to satisfy consciences where honestly exercised about it.

"As to a question of truth, as such it affects all consciences; it can be put before all: no local gathering has authority in any such matter; it would be making a creed to be subscribed. The truth as to Christ is a deeper and more vital matter, for we are gathered to His name. Where truth of this kind is subverted the gathering exists no more, except as an instrument in the enemy's hand, and is to be refused, with all who take part with it.

"If on the other hand, the question be of facts, then those who have them are bound (if these affect more than the local gathering) to make them known to their brethren; and here a circular letter may rightly have its place, not to establish a rule or principle of action, but as a witness: which of course is open to question, as all facts are, if there be contrary evidence, or that given be insufficient. No circular has authority in itself: it is purely a question of facts and of the credibility of the testimony.

"With these limitations, which are the results of the frailty and fallibility which are common to us all, we have necessarily to own a circle of fellowship and the discipline connected with it, if we would be free from the charge of real independency.

"And real independency is not of God, but always and everywhere acts against Him. It is to make the members of the same body say to each other, 'we have no need of you,' and to deny the unity of the Spirit which should pervade the body. The more we lament and refuse the sectarianism which exists, the more are we compelled, and shall rejoice, to own the body of Christ wherever possible. And this circle of fellowship, while it is not the 'body,' furnishes us with the means of owning this in a truthful and holy way, so far as the state of ruin in which the church exists permits it to be done. With love to all Christ's own — with an open door for the reception of all according to the conditions of truth and holiness — such a circle is not sectarian, but a protest against it, while the meeting that refuses connection with it is sectarian in fullest reality.

"And this is what is meant by the 'ground' of the one body. It is as different as possible from any claim to be the one body, and does not in the least imply any sectarian conditions of intelligence in order to communion. The maintenance of a common discipline is in no wise sectarian, but

part (and an essential part) of that communion itself: absolutely necessary if the holiness of God be the same thing wherever it is found, and not a thing for the 'two or three' anywhere to trifle with as they list.

"Independency, in setting aside the practical unity of the church of God, sets aside a main guard of holiness itself. It makes this no object of common care; it does not seek common exercise about it. It releases from the sense of responsibility as to the house of God: it is my own house I am to keep clean after my own fashion. And this real laxity as to the people of God at large (but which is so consoling to an unexercised conscience, that it is the great charm undoubtedly to multitudes today) naturally has the effect of lowering one's estimate of holiness altogether, and so prevents my own house being kept really clean.

"Where, however, a circle of fellowship is in fact maintained, along with and spite of the protest against it, or where there is not the maintenance of a common discipline — where perhaps as the natural fruit of independency also, the unholy principle is contended for that an assembly cannot be judged for that which would compel the judgment of an individual, there, as is natural to expect, any local discipline almost can be evaded by a little dexterity. If the gathering at B — will not receive you from A — it will from C—, and C— will receive you from A—. No one is safe anywhere from the violation of a discipline which he himself recognises as a scriptural one. Any particular person, if he be not too prominent, becomes lost to the eye amid the maze of bewildering differences. He who has conscience, and would fain be clear, has soon to resign himself to a general hope that what looks so like confusion will in the end conserve the interests of holiness; or in despair, to wash his hands of what he cannot avoid.

"Yet it is an ensnaring system; for in this way pessimism and optimism both can find apology for it, and go on with it. One gets free of an amazing amount of trouble; and while not seeming to have given up all ecclesiastical ties, as many have, yet be practically free as they for the gospel and for the wearying responsibility of being one's brother's keeper! Why should we be? when we only get our trouble for our pains, find a narrow path instead of the broad, open one, which is so pleasant to all of us, and for this have only to shut our eyes at the proper time, and ignore what it seems we cannot help!

"And in fact the countless small breaches of independency make less show than the terrible rents which we are exposed to otherwise. Why not let this sad-faced Merarite go, with his pins and cords of the tabernacle always getting into entanglement, and be content with Kohath and with Gershom?

"Still if the TABERNACLE OF THE LORD is to be set up in the wilderness, how shall we do without the pins and cords?

"In result it will be found that it is the truth of God which suffers, and tends to pass away and be lost. What wonder when we begin with choosing what we will have of it, and what we will discard! Fellowship becomes a thing of most uncertain quality: and what wonder, if obedience to the word have anything to do with fellowship! Worship is largely displaced in behalf of service: for we have lost the necessary pins and cords. We may go on with the help of what truth we can still borrow and find room for; but the truth tends somehow continually to slip away from us; and in the jangle of many utterances, it is ever getting to be of less account.

"One's voice may be little heard in a day like this; but I would do what I can to press upon the people of the Lord first of all their Master's claim. I press that this independency, little as one may imagine it, little as many may care to entertain it even as a question, means ultimately shipwreck to the truth of Christ, because it means independency of Him. One may find in it plenty of associates, for it makes little demands upon one and gives the kind of liberty which is so coveted today. The authority of Christ is not in it. It may support itself by the help of other names — names in repute as Christians too — and be in honour. It cannot have the commendation which Philadelphia, spite of its 'little power,' finds from her gracious Lord: Thou hast kept my word, and not denied my name,' F. W. Grant.

S. Neglect of the Reading Meeting

Neglect of the Reading Meeting

The reading meeting is a great test of the state of an assembly; for it is there, if things be right, that the knowledge, gathered in whatever way, is tested and made sure by that personal conference and comparison which help so largely in making it the realised possession of the soul. Here we may learn too, if there be the freedom and candour of brotherly love, the needs to which the truth ministers, and the ability to use it for real edification. It is of immense value to test in this way how far we have got the truth, while by this means what has been learned by each is thrown into the common fund, to enrich the whole. Those who know least would be surprised to realise how much the questions suggested by their own need may help in various ways the very people who answer them. And this is only one of the many modes in which the waterer is watered — the minister is ministered to.

The reading meeting is never, therefore, made needless or of little value by whatever multiplicity there may be of more detailed and connected teaching. Nay, all this creates a special need for the reading meeting, in order that the food laid before the whole may be individually digested and assimilated. Here, however, any lack of nearness to, and confidence in, one another will be surely felt as a hindrance, and need of another sort manifested to those who have eyes to see.

"The children of this world are" indeed "wiser in their generation than the children of light," Persons brought into the inheritance together of large worldly possessions would soon realise the necessity of becoming acquainted with what they had so much personal interest in. How few are there who, in the case of spiritual wealth which God has made their own, have boldness and earnestness to lay hold of what is theirs by any means available to them. When, over eighty years ago, the Spirit of God began to move freshly in the hearts of His people to recover them to one another, and to revive the almost lost idea of the assembly of God, the reading meetings were a marked and prominent sign of the awakened interest in His word, and that the people of God as such were awaking to claim for themselves their portion in it. No class of men could be allowed, however gifted, however educated and sanctioned by the mass, to stand between their souls and the possession of what was needed alike by all and designed by God for all. Now, alas, the decay of the reading meeting means nothing else but the subsiding of that eager enthusiasm for the truth that then was, and the lessened consciousness of the Spirit of God being in each and all His own to give each for himself the power to acquire possession. The flood-tide is gone, and the diminished stream begins to confine itself to the old channels.

We need to proclaim again that God never designed "theology" to be for a class of theologians, but all the treasures of His word to be for all His people, not a thing in it to be hidden, save from the eyes of the careless and indifferent, those who are willing to exchange their heavenly birthright for a mess of the world's pottage. We need once more to assert that teachers are only a pledge on God's part of his eagerness to have all to know, — not that He has restricted to these the possession of any kind of spiritual knowledge. Teachers are only to show that there, in the living

fount from which they draw, is the living water for all, as free for others as for themselves. They are only the truth of Gods word made to stand out in blazon before the eyes of those who have not yet found it there where He has put it for them, and with this for a motto of encouragement to those who have faith in a God that cannot lie, "Every one that seeketh, findeth."

The success of teachers is shown by their ability to make others independent of them when men say to them, as the Samaritans to the woman of Sychar, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying"; and in proportion as the church of God by their means is made to realise its ability for self-edification. So the apostle says that Christ has given gifts unto men, — "some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the edification of the body of Christ, until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13). That is, the "work of the ministry" — and this is left open to the largest construction — is what the saints as a whole are to be perfected unto [?]. Every saint is free to "covet earnestly the best gifts" (1 Corinthians 12:31), and responsible to use all the ability he has, of whatever kind, to enrich others with it. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal"; and if there are special evangelists, all are free and:called upon, each in his measure, to evangelise; if there are special teachers, all are free and responsible to communicate to others what God has given them of His truth. Love to each other, love to souls, is to have liberty and to be encouraged. everywhere.

How blessed would be an assembly of saints in this condition, every one realising that the fulness of all spiritual knowledge was open to him to enjoy, the best gifts were his to covet, that he was, by the simple wondrous fact of his endowment with the Spirit, the ordained minister of Christ to the world, the ordained servant and helper of his brethren. How intolerable is the thought of class restrictions to limit and hinder the grace of God in His people, yet, alas, into which., sensibly or insensibly, they so readily sink down! The development of all gift is necessarily hindered by it; and this is largely the reason why so few among us are going forth to labour in the ample fields on every side, and why the gatherings develop so little strength and stability. We need not talk about a "laity" to have one. Let God's people sink down into indolent 'acquiescence in their inability for their spiritual privileges, and little gift of any kind is likely to develop among them. Those that can be fed only with the spoon., are infants or invalids. On the other hand, where spiritual life is strongest we shall be most fully conscious of our need of one another. For spiritual feebleness means always a strong world-element, and occupations, aims, pleasures, in which as children of God, we can have no fellowship — can be no help to one another. Our spiritual links become proportionately theoretical, formal, sentimental. But where life is practical and earnest, its needs will be felt and the grace realised which has united us together. Every one has a place to fill that no other can fill; every one is necessary. Good it is to remember this, as to ourselves and as to every other. If we forget it, we cannot by this escape from the consequences. F.W.G.

Chapter 194

S. The Church in a City.

The Church in a City.

F. W. Grant.

"Words of Faith" Vol. 2, p.298.

The question as to the assembly in a city, is one of much more importance than seems at first sight to attach to it. It is a question of the practical organisation of the church on earth, of whether the church heavenly (as in character she surely is), takes, or not, her place on earth as subject to laws imposed by earthly conditions. In a recent case of discipline, affecting many of us deeply, it is, perhaps, the scripture question most involved, and which involves most our judgment as to it. For these reasons it is that I should be glad to have a little space in "Words of Faith," to look at this matter simply in its relation to scripture, which, in my belief, is clear and simple enough about it.

The ground taken by many may be expressed in the brief way in a question which I borrow from a paper in your present volume. "If the scriptures do not speak of assemblies in a city, can we?" The practical conclusion is (though not that of the paper referred to), that supposing twenty-six assemblies in a city, each of these is but the twenty-sixth part of an assembly, and unable to act in matters of discipline, without the ascertained concurrence of the rest.

The texts may be first cited.

The assembly in Jerusalem is spoken of in Acts 8:1; Acts 11:22; Acts 15:4; Acts 15:22;

the assembly in Antioch, Acts 13:1; Acts 14:27;

in Ephesus, Acts 20:17; Revelation 2:1;

Cenchrea, Romans 16:1;

Corinth, 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1;

the assembly of the Laodiceans, Colossians 4:16; Revelation 3:14; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1;

in Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Revelation 2:8; Revelation 2:12; Revelation 2:18; Revelation 3:1; Revelation 3:7.

On the other hand, we have the assemblies of Syria and Cilicia, Acts 15:41;

of Galatia, 1 Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 1:2;

of Asia, 1 Corinthians 16:19; Revelation 1:11, etc.;

Macedonia, 2. Cor. 8: 1;

Judea, Galatians 1:22;

Laodiceans, Colossians 4:16.

The general style of scripture is evident; assemblies of a country or district; assembly in a city or town. There is one text, however, which seems an exception to the former usage. The editors in general, with the best manuscripts, read Acts 9:31, "the church . . . throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria."* It has been urged, indeed, that this is "throughout," not "in" — an argument, I confess, I can make nothing of. The general usage is, however, plain.

[* The manuscripts are (among others), the Sinaitic, Alexandrian, Vatican, and Ephraemi; of versions, the Vulgate, Peschito, Coptic, Sahidic, Ethiopic, Armenian, etc. The opposing manuscripts, E., G., H. (Laudian, Boernerian, and Modena), are considered to be of date 600 A.D., ninth and tenth centuries.]

The question is, Can we, or ought we, to find a doctrine in this manner of speech? Does it seem stated as doctrine? Apart from other considerations, is it safe to build upon what is, at most, an inference? And does not the undoubted doctrine of scripture forbid the inference?

In the first place, cannot the language used admit of being otherwise understood? It is easy to see that in many cities there might be actually but one assembly. In others, according to the need of the saints, the number of assemblies might vary at different times; and even where there were most, their proximity to one another, and free intercourse, with deep mutual interest, would weld the assemblies of a town or city into one practical whole, for all purposes, such as the history, or apostolical epistles in general, have in view. In this way, it seems to me, that an assembly in a city, assemblies in a wider range, would be natural enough, without involving at all the conclusions which have been drawn from this.

Let us inquire a little more precisely what these expressions, "assembly," and "assemblies," in themselves convey.

Plainly, the assembly of God is one, wherever found. There is but "one body," in which all baptised with the Holy Ghost are members; one house of God also; although it does not need now to consider this. "Assemblies" are simply the practical gatherings of this one assembly, unable, by reason of number and distance of location, actually to assemble in one place. They represent, therefore, in the various places in which they gather, the body itself, in which alone the individuals composing them are members. They are not separate organisations — the body is the only one. It is in every place, but the one body in fact, to which, therefore, attach the powers and responsibilities of this. The gatherings are only the local expression of the body, and have no privileges, functions, or responsibilities beside.

Now, in the view I am examining, the moment there are more gatherings than one in a city, these become no longer representatives of the body at large, nor even of that which is the representation. The practical representation of the church at large has ceased to be. Nominally it is the assembly of the assemblies — in fact it never assembles. And what, then, as to the power to bind or loose, which is the result of Christ's presence with two or three gathered to His name? Those who actually gather, in spite of His presence, can decide nothing—cannot bind or loose, or bind only themselves. The real decision which binds is that of an assembly which never assembles! or, by the concurrence of judgments, each by itself, powerless and inoperative!

What, then, makes void Christ's promise to His own, so that, although two or three gathered to His name shall have His presence, they shall not have the fruits of His presence? It is, we are told, the fact of their being gathered in a city! Two or three, gathered outside its limits, might do what two or three hundred within might not. What, then, is city or village in the church of God? What have the artificial terms of human government to do with defining for a kingdom not of this world?

If it be said, No; it is for the securing of unity; I ask, Does it secure, or even tend to secure? And I answer undoubtingly, It does the very reverse. Let us take as an example any ordinary case of discipline. All the elements necessary for the decision of it are in the gathering where it belongs. It is not a question of scripture which can be judged aright by any one, anywhere, who is before God; but one of facts and conduct, requiring investigation upon the spot, where the witnesses can be heard, and their trustworthiness tested. To carry it elsewhere — to try it again and again in different places — is only to throw suspicion upon the first judgment, and to occupy saints unnecessarily with evil not amongst them. This is not, and cannot be, of God. It does not make for holiness; it cannot for unity. What really does this, is, to accept the judgment once given by those who have been in the place for it; or, if question is rightly to be raised, to raise it there. That the need of ten or twenty decisions, instead of one, makes either for unity, or peace, or holiness, I believe it simply impossible to maintain.

If it be said again, that, in a case of this kind, there would be acceptance, doubtless, of the first decision, this is to give up the whole matter. It would be accepted, because of the realised competence of those first deciding, and the felt incompetency of others, or, at least, the uselessness of another trial ; and the same answer might equally be given in every case. It is not felt necessary, in the case of a gathering in a country village, to check or verify its decisions in the name of unity; nay, it would be rightly thought the very opposite of this to do so. And this settles it conclusively as to gatherings in a town.

I repeat, that the local assemblies are but the expression locally of the assembly at large, which cannot actually assemble. The one assembly in a city, which is contended for, cannot be this expression, for it cannot assemble; nor can the gatherings of which it is composed, if the functions of an assembly proper be denied them.

City or village is nothing in the church of God, nor can it avail to modify the processes of its discipline.

The thought of the one assembly in a city denies the guaranteed authority to bind or loose to two or three gathered to the Lord's name.

Its practical effect is not for holiness, peace, or unity, as the interests in which it has been so greatly pressed of late should convince us all. F. W. Grant.

S. The Ground of the Church of God

The Ground of the Church of God

and what it involves.

I am writing for those who have learnt at least that the church of God is one, and that the sects and denominations of Christendom are, as such, necessarily wrong and to be refused. This is a great truth, however simple a one. If the church be God's — if Christ be its Head, and it His body — if by one Spirit we are baptised into that body — if the word of God be Christ's complete authoritative instruction for His own, then of necessity the formation of divers bodies, the union of Christians by what distinguishes them from one another, the adoption of human creeds and confessions (as if the word of God were not full enough or plain enough for the guidance of His people), all this must be judged as so much real confusion. There remains for us only the one church of God, to which every one baptised by the Spirit belongs, a body which it is not ours to make, admit into, or legislate for, but simply to recognise as that to which we have relationship, and a sphere of duty founded upon this, which scripture can alone authoritatively define for us. My conscience, delivered from the usurpation of traditional authority, is set free only to learn humbly in God's presence what is my path with Him, and to follow it in subjection to His word and Spirit.

I do not dwell further upon this then, however important. Two questions that are pressing upon many in the present day, and the various answers to which are dividing those who are so far united, I seek briefly to consider:

How far and in what way is scriptural unity attainable in a day like this? and

What is the discipline of the church of God enjoined with regard to evil doctrine and evil practice, so lamentably prevalent?

The latter question it may be simpler in some respects to take up first, and as to both I merely seek to point out and emphasise a few passages from God's word.

1. Separation from evil is everywhere enjoined upon believers, and that in order to the enjoyment of their privileges as such. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, ... come out from among them, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." And if the evil be in professing Christians, and there be such a state of things that all we can say is, "The Lord knoweth them that are his," still the word is (perhaps even more emphatically) "Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity . . . . If a man therefore purge himself from these" [vessels to dishonour] "he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

In these two passages, both the yoke — commercial, matrimonial, and ecclesiastical — is forbidden with unbelievers, and a man is to purge himself not merely from iniquity, but from association with evildoers; and in both cases in order to be (in the full blessedness of it) a child of

the Father, or a sanctified vessel for the Master's use.

In the latter case it is not simply moral evil that is in question, but the apostle has directly in view the case of Hymenaeus and Philetus, "who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some." These are an example of the people to be withdrawn from. And the apostle John, writing to an "elect lady" of "whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ," enjoins, "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house nor bid him God speed ['salute him,' literally]; for he that saluteth him is partaker of his evil deeds." Here again, dissociation from the person is the only way to be morally free from the evil with which he is identified.

These, it may be said, are rules for the individual. They are so, and therefore absolutely binding upon the individual, but upon each and all. If any gathering of Christians then would link me up with moral or doctrinal evil, my separation from them ecclesiastically is as much enjoined upon me as my separation from the evildoers in question, for they would bind me to disobedience to my Lord. Nay, their case is in this respect worse than his who brings the false doctrine, that he is blinded by it, while they, with their eyes open to its evil, practically sanction it by their association with it. Justly therefore does scripture decide, that whosoever salutes him who brings not the doctrine of Christ is partaker of his evil deeds.

This principle is fully recognised in the epistle which treats of the order of the church on earth — the first Epistle to the Corinthians, where they, having continued in association with the evildoer, are exhorted by the apostle to "purge out the old leaven, that they might be a new lump as they were unleavened." It has been indeed contended with singular boldness, that these words intimate that the Corinthians were still "unleavened" as to their practical state. But "as ye are unleavened" applies plainly to what they were in Christ, not in practice. For they had to purge out the old leaven which was among them, in order to be a new lump corresponding to their character in Christ. How plain then that the leaven had leavened them by the very fact of its permitted presence in their midst! They must therefore act, they must clear themselves, by putting away the wicked person from among them. His being taken away would not suffice. They must judge those within, not expecting God to come in and remove one, whom He had made them responsible to deal with and to put away.

He who should come into an assembly thus infected with evil would clearly become part of the leavened lump; and supposing the man in question had left the place, the assembly would not by the mere absence of the evildoer be purged at all. It would be in the same state as ever, because it was not the mere condition of the man which had defiled it, but theirs who could sit down quietly with sin and their Lord's dishonour.

The scripture principle then is, that whether as regards false doctrine (fundamental error) or immoral conduct, those who associate themselves with such are partakers of it, and leavened by it, whether assemblies or individuals, and to be treated as such.

Let us now look at the other question, What is the scriptural unity of the church of God, and how far is it attainable in a time of confusion such as is the present?

For manifestly the church (or as I would rather call it, for it is its proper title, the assembly) of God — that which, as Christ's body, consists of all that are His members, and of none else — is not in

practical visible unity, as it once was. It was once together; it is now broken up into multitudinous divisions, and mingled with a mass of mere untrue profession. Corporate discipline has thus been rendered impossible; corporate testimony to Christ is gone; the church is not together to act as one. Is power for discipline lost then to any two or three, who desire to walk according to the word now? and how are they to do so, who are "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?"

As to the first we have already seen that separation from evil is a matter in which we are individually responsible to the Lord, whether others act or no; so that it would not be possible for one with a good conscience towards Him to remain in connection with any people by whom these rules were violated. The other is answered by that gracious assurance of Him who from the beginning foreknew and provided for the end; "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

People have pointed out to us that these words are connected with the promise of blessing to a simple prayer-meeting. But that, if true, would not take from their own evident and proper meaning. It would rather suppose the prayer meeting itself to be conditioned by the principles which the words can be shown manifestly to contain. But it is not true that the Lord's statement is appended merely to this. It is evidently at least as much so to what immediately precedes it: "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven;" and "Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree," etc., only adds another blessedness flowing from the Lord's presence with His people. He is present to confirm their acts. He is present to give answer to their prayers. But He promises that presence, as the words emphatically show, only where two or three are gathered together unto His name. There is need then to inquire what this means. We may not assume that every gathering of Christians fulfils these conditions. We must test this by the words themselves.

The name of Jesus and His person are distinguished in the Lord's words. Where people are gathered to His name Ho will be personally present. We must not assume we have Himself to gather to. For sight He is not here. And faith must have His word to justify it. The condition of His personal presence in our assemblies is that we are gathered to His name.

His name is the expression of what He Himself is. He was called Jesus, because He should save His people from their sins. Philip preached "concerning the name of Jesus Christ," that is, "preached Christ," or the truth of what He is; and the Samaritans, believing, were "baptised unto the name of the Lord Jesus," identifying themselves with that truth he had declared.

It is "gathered unto*" My name, and not in it. The difference is obvious. To be gathered in His name means necessarily no more than by His authority. To be gathered to His name means that His name constitutes the centre of union. What unites us is the truth of what He is; and where He finds a people for whom this bond suffices, there He promises the blessing of His own personal presence in the midst.

[*So the Greek; and also in Acts 8:16, just cited, as well as wherever baptism is spoken of.]

This presence must be distinguished from the presence of the Holy Ghost in the saints or in the church as the house of God at large. The Holy Ghost is always in the saints and in the church at large, unconditionally as to any principle of gathering whatever; and His presence therefore does

not sanction the gathering as such. This should be as plain as it is important; for it shows how God can work in His grace amid all the confusion of Christendom, without sanctioning the discordant and sectarian principles which prevail, in the least. Christ's presence in the midst, on the other hand, is sanction*; "whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven," is connected with it.

[*Not, of course, of the state of the gathering otherwise.]

If it is asked, how can He who is corporeally in heaven be (other than by His Spirit) now on earth? this is answered by another question, how could He who was corporeally upon earth speak of Himself then as "the Son of man which is in heaven"? A spiritual, not corporeal, presence in the midst it surely is, not the less real on that account; and Himself really, not representatively, by another.

If, then, we are gathered to His name, nothing less is implied than the absence of all sectarian terms of fellowship; what unites is the true confession of a true Christ, and this involves the exercise of effective discipline, for that would be no true confession of His name which allowed His dishonour. With this proviso, such a principle necessitates a door being open for all that are really Christ's; and if only two or three be on it, it is yet the common ground for all, the ground of the church of God, though the immense proportion of the church be elsewhere. And the two or three there, however few, have the assurance of the Lord's presence with them, and of His sanction of the place they are taking. For binding or loosing, the exercise of discipline, or as one near in living power for all they call upon Him for, they have Christ with them, and such is the force of this precious scripture as to the simple prayer-meeting of two or three.

Thus encouraged, we may turn to some other scriptures relating to the church of God, and note what we find as to its practical order.

Let us mark, then, first, that it is the assembly of God which is Christ's body — of course no local thing, and but one body. This body is the organism, the only one — of right the only visible community into which we are baptised,* and in which we are members.

[*By the Spirit, of course, not water.]

Thus, although there are necessarily assemblies, local gatherings, because the members of Christ are scattered over the earth, yet they are never members of any local assembly; the body with which alone they are connected is the body of Christ. The local assembly is not the divine organisation at all. It is (if you take scripture) the mere result of our circumstances. At the Lord's supper we show that we are "one bread, one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread." The one body is not an association of many bodies, but a fellowship of many members.

On the ground of the church of God, then, we cannot be local bodies, whether confederated or independent, nor refuse to own in the fullest and most practical way the two or three on the same ground anywhere, nor to accept their binding and loosing as what has Christ's sanction. Infallibility, whether on our part or theirs, is not pretended to; nay, as of old, so surely still, saints anywhere may decline from God so far, and be so unfaithful to Christ, as to lose claim to be owned as His. But until there be proof of this, we must remember the Lord's words which we have just been considering. The true and living Head of the church is yet faithful, let the weakness and folly of His

people be what they may; what He sanctions we may not disavow.

I shall only add a few practical considerations, which, with the rest, I would affectionately commend to the consideration of beloved brethren. Truth is of God, and he who resists, resists God in it. Any question as to what is truth is, therefore, serious; how serious, then, when the question affects Christ's headship over His church, and the practical order of that church, which He loved, and for which He gave Himself!

1. The principles announced are the very opposite of any requisition of intelligence as to church principles in order to fellowship. The church of God is necessarily composed of those of every stature and of every grade of knowledge, teachers and taught alike. All these, to the veriest babe in Christ, are already within its pale, and it is too late to talk of terms of admission. There are only two things which scripture (and not we) insists on in order to their enjoyment of their privileges as within — that they should be able to show their genealogy, and that they should be free from that which would involve the Lord's dishonour in association with them. Both these questions the word of God must settle.

2. These principles imply no "confederation of assemblies" at all, for any purpose whatever, but the practical unity of the one church everywhere, divided only by the mere accident of locality; the exact opposite of any confederation.

3. Evil doctrine (or practice) coming in at Corinth, would be as much a question (if not rightly settled there) for saints at Philippi or Thessalonica as at Corinth, or else Christ's dishonour there is of less consequence to me as the miles increase that separate me from it. And this nothing but indifference to Christ can argue.

4. If Corinth be leavened by the admission of evil, those coming from there would necessarily be treated as partakers with it by the mere fact of their association with it. Nor could they rightly be received until they had renounced such associations. This is the only practical proof that would avail to show their freedom from the evil itself.

5. One put away at Corinth would be equally put away at Philippi, or elsewhere, for he could not be outside the practical unity of the one body, and in it at the same time.

Some deny any right to put away from the Lord's table at all, but I suppose it is clear that the apostle did enjoin upon the Corinthians in the case of any one called a brother, yet an evildoer, "with such an one, no, not to eat." Does that apply to the Lord's table? or was their communion table perchance not the Lord's table? or has He another to receive such at, or what?

Again, it has been said we have not power to judge, for all is confusion; which would seem to mean that the Lord is more tolerant of evil than He once was. But the command to be separate is individual and imperative, as we have seen.

Others believe we may judge individuals, not assemblies, while almost in the same breath they will accuse us of maintaining the infallibility of assemblies. As to both, I have in fact replied. I would only ask here if evil loses its character when sanctioned by an assembly? and if an assembly would link one with the evil we are commanded to separate from, is it not a duty to separate from it? And then, further, whom are the twos and threes elsewhere to own, the one separated from evil or the assembly leavened with it? or are they to identify themselves with both and so persistently

link the separated one with what he is separated from, in spite of all? Or once again, if his separation be right and called for, is it not as much the duty of every child of God to be separated with him?

And finally, however many may be the links that connect me with evil, if God calls me to be separate, must I not refuse the second or third remove, even as the first?

These questions I leave for the consideration of my readers. I have entered into no discussion of the facts to which these principles apply, nor do I design to do so. The honest-hearted will soon find how they apply. But these are the principles of what they call "exclusivism." If any child of God should come to see that they are scriptural, and should be led to apply them honestly to his ecclesiastical associations, the Lord will not fail him in the endeavour, and he will surely find in the simple consciousness of doing his Master's will, a sufficient compensation for the reproach of being an "exclusive." F. W. Grant.

S. The Women of the Genealogy

The Women of the Genealogy

Matthew 1:3; Matthew 1:5-6.

The introduction of four women's names, and of four only, into the genealogy of our Lord, as given by Matthew, has furnished material for enquiry to many students of the inspired word. That there was a special purpose in it no one who had any right claim to be such could ever doubt. Moreover, a slight glance only at the names so chosen to a place in connection with the human descent of the Lord of glory would show something of the significance of their being found there. They are precisely such names as a chronicler, left to mere human wisdom in the matter, and especially a Jew, however right thinking, would have kept out of sight; and especially so as there was no apparent necessity for bringing them forward. They were not needed at all as establishing the connection of our Lord with David or with Abraham.

No other names of women are thus introduced. Neither Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, nor any other, while yet there was perhaps not another who might not seem to have better title to be remembered. These women were, of all others, though in different ways, just the blots apparently upon the genealogy. And then, so far from any attempt at concealment of what was discreditable in connection with them, circumstances which needed not (one might have thought) to be referred to, are brought in, as if to draw our attention to what otherwise might have been less noticed. Thus, Zarah's twin-birth with Pharez, though himself not in the line of the genealogy, is mentioned as if to recall the circumstances of that sin which brought them into being; while Bathsheba, instead of being mentioned by name, is associated, as it were, with all the horror of the crimes which her name alone one would think sufficient to bring to mind — "her that had been the wife of Urias."

But there is something very beautiful as well as characteristic in this fearlessness of one who, here, as in other places — in a mere record of names, as it might seem, as well as in the most solemn passages of our Lord's life — spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. If there be a blot upon the life of one of His people, the God of truth will never hesitate to bring it out, though it might seem to be furnishing an occasion to those who seek occasion against the truth; and if there be a dark spot that presumptuous man would dare to lay a finger on, on but one of the links (each divinely constituted) of the chain of ancestry of the Man Christ Jesus, the Spirit of God puts His finger upon it first, to invite our attention to it as something worthy of being noted, and calculated only in the mind of faith, to beget reverential thoughts and lowly admiration of a wisdom that never fails, and that is most itself when it confounds all other.

Now to a faith that (as is characteristic of it) "believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly," the introduction of the names of Tamar and of Bathsheba into the inspired record of the Lord's human ancestry, is pregnant with suggestions fitted to awaken the liveliest emotion. Each of these women of dishonoured names and shameful memories had title, then, in a peculiar way, to appropriate

those words which recorded Israel's most real boast: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." The human feeling for there is that in it whatever there may be more — which has given an "immaculate conception" to the mother of our Lord; would have at least provided for the unblemished character of the line of His natural descent; and that feeling would have said, Let Him have connection with the purest and noblest only that can be found; and thus it is that human thought has been shown fully in the wisdom of One who, from the beginning, took the "seed of the woman" — first as she had been in the transgression — to bruise the serpent's head, and heal those that are oppressed of the devil. Fixed, in divine wisdom, in that part of our Saviour's genealogy which no Jew could dispute — for none could dispute that the Christ was to come of David — these names (all perhaps Gentile, and some undoubtedly so) stood there to vindicate the Gentile's part in the "child born." And just so in the face of pretension to human righteousness they stood to vindicate the claims of sinners to Him whose "body was prepared Him" that He might die for sinners.

Thus far, then, the meaning of these names in the connection in which we find them is plain enough, and their place in the genealogy not only needs no vin dication, but is another note of harmony in that song of praise which His word, as well as all other of His works, is perpetually singing — seed to sow music in the hearts of the sorrowful, in the assurance of how the sighing of the prisoners has come up before the Lord.

But what if we are able to go further and to show that not only is this so, but that each of the four names here given furnishes its own peculiar feature to what, taken as a whole, is really a full and blessed declaration of the story of grace and of salvation — each in its order adding what the former had left out, till the whole is told? Would it not be worthy of God to speak so — to make not only types and parables, but the very names of a genealogy repeat a story He is never weary of telling, however slow man may be to hear?

Let us take up, then, the history of these four names, so far as it connects them with this inspired genealogy, and try to read the lesson which is given us by their connection with it.

The history of Tamar you will find in Genesis 38:1-30. It is one of those dark chapters of human depravity which the Word lays open with its accustomed plainness and outspokenness. Infidels would speak of it as a blot upon the book that contains it, and few perhaps care to read it, least of all aloud. And yet it is a story that will one day again find utterance before the most magnificent assembly that the earth or the heavens ever saw or shall see. And how many such like stories shall come out then — mine, reader, and yours, not perhaps, after all, so far removed from Tamar's — and the pure eternal day will not withdraw its beams, and the night not cover it up with its darkness.

What must be told then, may well bear to be told now. The light that shines upon evil deeds is all undefiled by them. If Tamar's history were a mere thing of the past and had no voice for succeeding generations, no doubt it had been vain to bring it up; but now let us rather thank Him for doing it, who has given us a page of human history so dark that we have to shudder, so filthy that we have to blush at it. Reader, I ask again, is there no page of your life that if it were written by the faithful hand of God, you would have to blush at in like manner?

Now in all this history of Tamar's the thing that strikes me in this connection is, that there is no redeeming feature about it. If I take the record attached to the other names which have place with hers in this genealogy, I may find perhaps in each case something that breaks the darkness a little. But I find nothing similar recorded about Tamar. She comes before me in this picture as a sinner and nothing else. The wife successively of two men, each cut off for his wickedness by divine judgment, she dares yet in her own person, by crime equal to theirs, provoke divine judgment. But the wonder above all this is, that it is this very sin that brings her name into the Lord's genealogy — for this sin it was that made her the mother of Pharez, one of the direct line in Christ's ancestry.

Is there no voice in this? And is it the voice of the God of judgment, or is it the voice of the God of grace, the God and Father, indeed, of our Lord Jesus Christ? True, if I look alone at the Old Testament record, it may call up before me, as it has called up, the time of account and manifestation; but the moment I turn to the New Testament and find Tamar first of women's names in the genealogy of the Lord — Tamar, brought in by her sin into that connection — I find what fixes my mind upon a scene of judgment, indeed, and that of the most solemn sort, but where the Holy One of God stands for the unholy,where Barabbas's cross — place of the chief of sinners — bears the burden of One who alone bare all our burdens, and "with whose stripes we are healed."

Oh, blessed lesson, and worthy of God to give! Tamar's sin her connection with the Lord of life and glory? and O beloved, look! was not our sin our connection? Did not He die for sinners? Was it not when we confessed our sins, and, with our mouths stopped, took our places before God, ungodly and without strength, that we found out the wondrous fact that for the ungodly and without strength Christ had died; and that because we were sinners, and Christ had died for such, He was "faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"?

Thus Tamar's name, first in this genealogy, is first also in the simple gospel truth that it reveals; and the fact that Tamar is a sinner, of whom I can read nothing but her sin, and whose sin gives her connection in a peculiar way with the Christ who came for sinners, is light and joy and gladness in my soul.

But we must turn to Rahab.

And here again we are not in very creditable company. Rahab is a Canaanite, one of a cursed race, and Rahab is a harlot, sinner among sinners. We seem destined to move in this track. The one thing recorded to her advantage is her faith. That it had fruit too, none can question. She is one whom the apostle James takes up, to ask us, "Was not Rahab, the harlot, justified by works, when she received the messengers, and sent them out another way"? But even here, you will observe, the thing he appeals to is not what would, in men's eyes, make a saint of her. There was no brilliance of devotedness, no wonderful self-sacrifice, no great goodness, as one might say. Even in the very thing in which she shows her faith she tells a lie; as if to isolate faith from any kind of merit whatever, and to give us expressly the picture of one that "worketh

not," but whose only hope is in a God who "justifieth the ungodly." (Romans 4:5.)

And who can doubt it was Rahab's faith that brought her into the genealogy, as sin had brought Tamar? Without faith, she had died with those shut up in Jericho, a cursed woman of a cursed race. Faith removed that curse from her faith brought her in among the people of God, if it did not

attract to her the heart of Salmon, so as in the most direct way to account for those words being in the genealogy, "Salmon begat Booz of Rachab."

Thus the second of these women's names teaches us a lesson as sweet and as needful as the former. "To him that worketh not, but believeth" is what we instinctively think of when we think of Rahab, faith that, while it has that which demonstrates its reality, leaves one still to be justified as ungodly, nay, believes on One who only does so justify, — faith which looks not at itself, therefore, and pleads not its own performances, but brings the soul to accept the place of ungodliness only, because for the ungodly only there is justification.

This is very sweet and very wonderful. It is wonderful to find how in the mere introduction of a name into a catalogue, the God of grace can speak out the thoughts of His own heart. And it is very sweet to see how constantly before Him is the thought of our need and of His mercy, and how He would by the very wonder, as it were, surprise men's slow, cold hearts into the belief of it.

And now we have got to Ruth: "Booz begat Obed of Ruth."

But what shall we say of Ruth? Here at first sight our text might seem to fail us, and we might seem to have parted company with sinners. Why, you might say, the Spirit of God Himself takes a whole book to tell us about Ruth. And true, indeed though it be that she was a Gentile, as Rahab and as Tamar, you might repeat of her what the Lord Himself says of another Gentile: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." With no sword of judgment hanging over her head as over Rahab's, with no tie to connect her with Israel, but the memory of a dead husband who had himself abandoned it, with the memory of famine in that land which had forced her husband out, and with the company only of an aged woman, with whom bitter providences, as she deems them, have changed the name of Naomi into Mara, Ruth comes into the land and to the God of Israel, in whose fields she is content to be a gleaner. No, do not think, reader, that I would disparage the worth, or blot the fair fame of Ruth the Moabitess. That she was a Gentile only adds to it the more honour, in that among the godless grew her godliness, and that she was faithful where Israel's own children had set her the example of unfaithfulness.

But is there nothing in this very fact that, in company with the names of sinners among sinners, we find one who shines, as it were, saint among saints? What does it mean, this putting down of Ruth in company with such names as Tamar, Rahab, Bathsheba? Is it not a truth of the same kind as when the Word tells us of one who "gave much alms" and "prayed to God alway," that he was to send to Joppa for a man who should tell him words whereby he should be saved? Or, as when Zaccheus, standing forth and saying to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor," meets the significant and gentle word you can scarcely call it reproof "This day is SALVATION come to this house, for as much as he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was LOST."

So that without the smallest word of detraction from Ruth's goodness, but rather allowing in its very fullest all that can be claimed for it, we may fairly draw a lesson from the company in which we find her name, which is itself full of instruction and of beauty; and Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, side by side in the genealogy, give us but the announcement of Isaiah's vision, which the Baptist's mission went to fulfil: "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." Yes, God's salvation as much needed, and in the same way,

by one as another as much of grace to one as to another, to Ruth the Moabitess, as to Rahab or Tamar.

But we have not yet got at that which gives fullest significance to this name in the genealogy. Against this Ruth, with all her loveliness and with all her goodness, there was lying a ban which did not lie in the same way against the others. She was a Moabitess, and against these there had been levelled an express statute of the law. "An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord, even unto their tenth generation they shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord for ever" (Deuteronomy 23:3). Thus Ruth lay under the interdict of the law. It is striking that it was to this devoted, to this lovely woman that the law applied, not to Rahab nor even to Tamar; God having thus proclaimed in an unmistakable way the law's character; not bringing it in to condemn the sinner and the harlot (where men's minds would have done so), but introducing it as that which would have excluded a Ruth, even with her piety. Emphatically was it thus taught that it was man as man that was shut out from God; not in his sins merely, but in his righteousness; and that if we stand on that ground all "our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."

But the law does not keep Ruth out. Moabitess as she is, she does enter into the congregation of the Lord. The law is set aside in her behalf, and instead of her descendants being excluded to the tenth generation, her child of the third generation sits upon Israel's throne, and hears the promise which confirms that throne to his heirs for succeeding generations.

Thus another principle comes out in bright relief. If God takes up the sinner and the harlot on the principle of faith, law is set aside by the very fact. "The law is not of faith." "The righteousness of God without the law is manifested," "even the righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe." This is what Ruth is witness to. The Moabitess comes into the congregation of the Lord, spite of the law expressly levelled against her to keep her out "and in this we find but another utterance of this self-same story of grace which, in so many languages, our God so joys to tell.

One name alone remains; one truth has yet to be uttered. God takes up sinners, then, by faith, and law is set aside. "Faith is reckoned for righteousness." Not as if faith were righteousness, or its equivalent that would be quite another thing: but God, who had been looking (to speak humanly) for righteousness by law, had ceased to do so. The law had returned Him answer, "there is none righteous; no, not one." Thenceforth the principle was changed, "Faith" was "reckoned for righteousness:" faith that did not pretend to righteousness at all, for it was in One who "justifieth the ungodly."

But if God receives sinners, to what does He receive them? Is it a complete salvation they obtain, or are there conditions still to be met before the final goal is reached, and there is complete security? On what, in short, does the ultimate salvation of the believer rest? This is a question which evidently needs answering before the soul can be completely satisfied and at peace. It is one thing to be now in the favour of God, and it is another thing to know that I can never lose it. And the more I look at myself, if it depend upon myself, the more I must be in dread of losing it.

Moreover, there are those who will allow of a free present salvation, who will not allow of one that gives security absolutely for the future. With them the sinner may be saved without works; but the saint may not! The legalism shut out at one entrance gains admittance at another, and the result in

either case is the same. Self-sufficiency is built up; self-distrust taught to despair; the work of Christ is practically displaced from its office of satisfying the soul, and the grace of God effectually denied.

The Scripture speaks as decidedly on this point as on any other. On justification by the blood of Christ it builds the most confident assurance as to the future. It tells us that inasmuch as "when we were yet sinners Christ died for us, MUCH MORE then, being now justified by His blood, WE SHALL BE SAVED from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:8-10).

And when I turn to this last name of the four, and find "her that had been the wife of Urias" taking her place with Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth in the genealogy of the Lord, it seems as if the text just quoted were repeated in my ears. For, the moment I think of Bathsheba, a greater name than hers (linked strangely with hers in the crime which it recalls), comes in to efface her almost from my mind. David it is I think of David, child of God, Israel's sweet psalmist! in whose breathings the souls of saints in every age have poured out their aspirations after "the living God," David fallen, and fallen so low that we cannot marvel if his name be side by side with Tamar's. David, man after God's heart! Oh, how many of the Lord's enemies hast thou made to blaspheme! how many of the Lord's people hast thou made to mourn for thee! Was that thy witness to what God's heart approved? Was that thy soul's panting after Him? What! murder a man in the midst of faithful service to thee zealously rendered, that thou mightest hide thine own adultery? Was that the man who, when flying from the face of his enemy, and when Providence had put that enemy within his power, cut off but his skirt, and his heart smote him for it? Ah! sadder than thy heart could be for Saul, we take up thine own lament over thee, "How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished."

And surely, O Lord our God, in Thy presence shall no flesh glory! If David could not, could we? Alas! if I know myself, what can I do but put my mouth in the dust, and be dumb for ever before the Lord! "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass." And "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." The voice that comes to me from David's sin is infinitely more than David's condemnation. It is my own. Can I pretend to be better? Can I take my hand from his blood-stained one? Ah, no! I accept with him my own condemnation; and not as a sinner merely, but as a saint. From first to last, from beginning to end, the voice of David's fall brings to me the assurance that the justification of the ungodly must be my justification still. It is like that voice of God, strange, and contradictory in its utterance, men may call it, which, having pronounced man's sentence before the flood, and destroyed every living thing because "every imagination of the thought of man's heart was only evil continually," after the flood declares, "I will not again curse the ground for man's sake;

for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living as I have done."

Blessed be His name! He does not trust His salvation to my hand. My "life" depends but upon the life of Him who has taken His place in heaven, after He had by Himself purged my sins; as much "for me" there in the glory as "for me" upon the cross He is the accepted One; I but "in Him." Because He lives, I shall live also.

If David could have taken his salvation out of God's hand, he surely would have done it in the case before us. That he could not I read in this woman's name, partner in his sin, recorded in the genealogy. Once again, as in Tamar's case before, I find sin connecting with the Saviour of sinners. It was not that God did not mark, and in a special way, His abhorrence of the evil. It was only grace, really to do that. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," and no wonder, therefore, if adultery and murder sprung up again and again in David's path. No marvel that the sword never departs from his house, and that his wives are dishonoured in the face of the sun. But in the midst of all this growth of thorn and thistle, sure fruit and consequence of sin, one floweret springs up from this cursed ground, type and witness that, where sin had abounded, grace over-abounds. From this David and this Bathsheba, whom sin has united together, a child springs whose name stands next in the line of the ancestry of the Lord; and who receives, as if to confirm, this, a special name "Jedidiah," "beloved of the Lord."

And is it an imagination or is it more, that there is something in the name — the other name of this child born — which harmonizes with all this? I will not say; but if Solomon, "peaceful," be a strange name in so near connection with so sad a history, it is not an unsuited one to follow in this genealogical list — not an unsuited one to be in company with Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, or Bathsheba. And it is a blessed one with which to end the history of four names, which when God utters them can be made to speak of what He must love well to utter, or He would scarcely take such strange occasion to remind us of it.

And if to any there seems after all in this, something that seems too much like a mere wonder to be God's utterance, I would beseech such an one to remember how once a burning bush was made just such a wonder to attract a passer-by, and how, when he turned aside to see, a voice out of that bush proclaimed that God was really there. Even so may it not be strange that He should attract now by a kind of wonder, to listen to a story which He loves to tell; and for those who turn aside to see, may the same voice, now, as then, be heard. — F.W.G.

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