



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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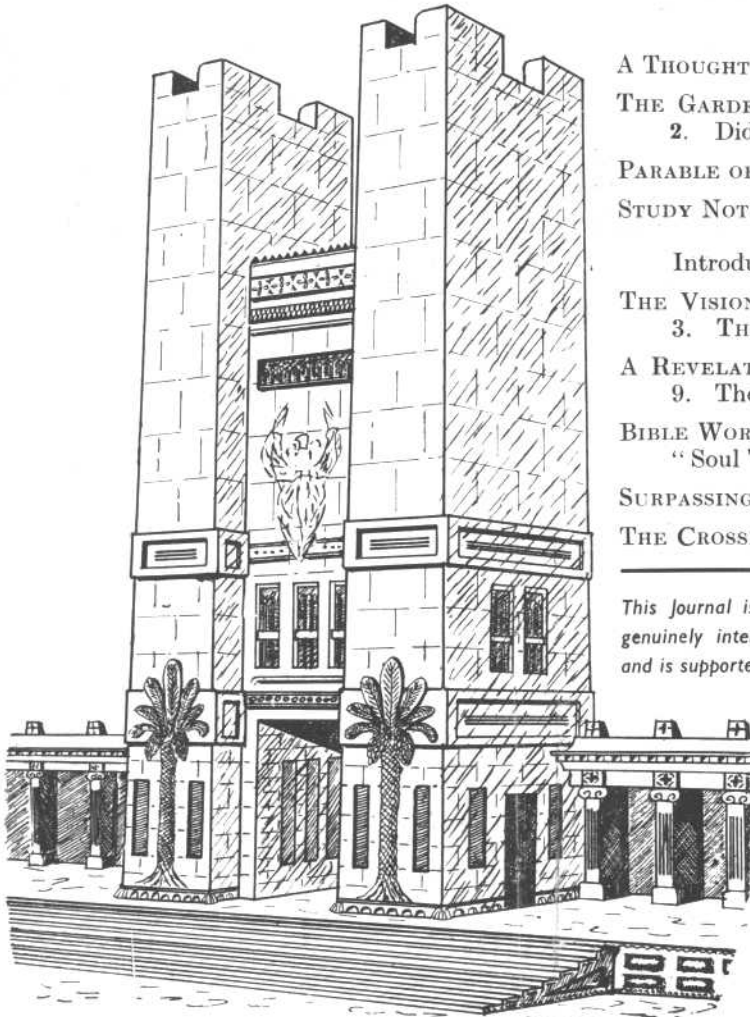
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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A Thought for the Month

"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." (Isa. 9. 2).

As we enter another year it is painfully evident that the people are still walking in darkness and dwelling in the land of the shadow of death. The great light which shined in the world when Christ came to earth with his message of hope has not yet penetrated all the recesses of terrestrial night. The world is a larger place than it was two thousand years ago and there is more darkness to be dispelled. The men and women of earlier centuries made more of the light that was shining because they realised their need more than does humanity to-day. Men are so clever now; so exultant at wresting from Nature her most cherished secrets. They can fly faster than sound, can descend into the depths of the seas; they can transmute the elements and measure the distant stars. Like Lucifer, they aspire to sit upon the sides of the north and be like the Most High. Poor deluded ones, like the antediluvians in the days of Noah, they know not that they walk in darkness and that their ambitions and dreams are valueless without God.

But are all men like this? By no means! Those who proclaim abroad so blatantly the might and power of man, and decry man's need of God, and deny him any place in human life, are in the minority. They represent but a tiny fraction of earth's population. The fact that they enjoy control of the world's means of publicity—the press, the radio, the ear of governments, and so on—gives their pronouncements a semblance of solidity out of all proportion to their true magnitude. The rest of the people are waiting—for what? They know not! They only know that they walk in darkness and in the shadow of death,

and that the light is a long time in coming. It ought not to be so, for although that Light moves visibly among men no more, there are lesser lights, shining by reflection, and they should by now be making some impression, for they have been a long time in the world. Perhaps they do not shine brightly enough—if the reflecting surface is not kept clean and polished it loses its capacity to reflect. Maybe some of the lights have been put under bushes and cannot be seen.

In a book published years ago called *"Efficiency in Hades"*, an American production expert, visiting that mythical place of torment, and being conducted round by Lucifer, observed to his guide "It does seem uneconomic to burn all these sinners just to provide illumination for a few elect in Heaven!" whereupon Lucifer rejoined meditatively "Perhaps the elect wouldn't give a good enough light themselves." That is the world's condemnation, not of the failure of Christianity, but of the failure of Christians. And the question ought to be asked: Is it being said of us, as individuals or as a group? It is so fatally easy to become satisfied with our own position before God, our own acceptance of his plans for human well-being, and the prospect of the promised future "reign with Christ", and forget that the validity of our belief in the future things can only be attested by the degree to which we endeavour to practise them now. The very essential of the faith is service for one's fellows and a constant pointing and leading them to Christ, and the way of life which is Christ's way. We are failing in our bounden duty and privilege if we do not take good heed of those around us who are submerged in darkness and in the shadow of death, and do all that lies within our present power to lift them out of it.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN

An Examination
of the Story of
Adam and Eve

I. Did it really happen

Strange, shadowy scene, when the world was young. So little said about it; so vague the picture which can be visualised, for none of the trappings and interests of present-day living existed then. Nothing had been discovered; nothing had been made. A man and a woman, newly awakened to the consciousness of their surroundings, intelligent, impressionable, capable, but with everything yet to learn and everything yet to do. That is the Bible picture of the coming of human beings to the earth, and the question so often posed to-day is—did it really happen like that? Are all earth's millions really descended from one original pair, endowed with procreative powers for such purpose? And did that first human pair commit some great sin against God, a sin so fundamental that its effects remain with humanity these many thousands of years later and on account of which the misery of man is great upon him?

These are not idle questions; the validity of the doctrine of the Fall in Christian theology is important. It is put before us in the Book of Genesis as the explanation of the presence of sin and evil in the world. Nowhere in later pages of the Bible is that explanation contradicted; in several places it is confirmed. Belief in the literal accuracy of the story is waning fast to-day, even amongst Christians, for two principal reasons; one, that it seems incompatible with current claims of scientific research; two, that it involves accepting the dogma that all men are fallen sinners who cannot redeem themselves but need the redemptive power of a Saviour. The pride of man in his own achievements debars many from rejecting the first and accepting the second.

The alternative to belief in the story is the adoption of the evolutionary hypothesis, that man is steadily making his way onward and upward in every sense, without the help of God. The theory of human evolution has not held sway for very long—not much more than a hundred years out of all the long millenniums of human history—and already it is beginning to be recited less glibly by many of its most ardent supporters. The state of the world at the moment does not tend to bear out the fond expectations of last century's evolutionists. One thing is plain; if the evolution of man is a fact, then the Genesis story of man's

creation is a fable, for that story teaches the direct creation of man, as a new species of creature, by the Most High, and his immediate endowment with qualities which no other creature possessed. It claims that at the time of his creation man was perfect, sinless, and undying, and only afterwards, consequent upon his rebellion against God, did he become sinful, imperfect, and subject to death. The rest of the Bible makes clear that without the introduction of a Saviour sent from God, and man's acceptance of that Saviour, there is no possible release from this hopeless condition. Hence the two theses stand in irrevocable opposition; there can be no reconciliation between the story of Genesis and the theory of evolution.

It is easier now than it was fifty years ago to bring independent supporting testimony to the reasonableness and credibility of the Genesis story—so much more has been discovered concerning the early history of man and so much more is known of the biological aspect of the case that many old-time objections have been robbed of much of their force. Supporters of evolutionism used to point to the then currently accepted belief that polytheism—the worship of many gods—was the original faith of mankind long before monotheism—the worship of one God—had dawned in the world. They claimed then that the idea of one God was in itself an example of evolution of the human mind. Now it is an established fact that the earliest people history reveals were monotheists. Polytheism came into the world as a degeneration of originally purer and loftier forms of worship. This is in accord with the story of man's fall in Genesis but in conflict with the idea of progressive development inherent in Evolution.

Quite apart from the eternal question of the "missing link" which has obstinately remained missing for more than a century of diligent search, it is an obvious fact that the comparative scarcity of human beings in early historical times denotes a fairly recent date for the appearance of the first men. The present two and a quarter thousand millions of earth's population covers most of the land surface of the planet save the Antarctic regions, but less than three centuries ago world population was only five hundred millions, and it is reliably estimated by Prof.

Julian Huxley that in the First Century of this era, at the time of Christ, the number did not exceed one hundred millions. There are some parts of the earth's surface, such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Polynesia, which were only reached by man at various times during the Christian Era; through all the years of Old Testament history they continued virgin territory. There is evidence that China, South-Eastern Asia and parts of India were not settled until between two and three thousand years B.C. More and more, as the gaps in human knowledge are filled in, does the story of man's occupation of the earth take the pattern rather speculatively drawn by H. G. Wells in his "Outline of History" forty years ago, an outward migration in all directions from a common centre in south-western Asia, the lands of the Bible. Wells was an agnostic and no believer in the Bible story, but his shrewd appraisal of the facts toward which the research of his time was tending has been justified by the clearer knowledge of to-day. And the effect of all this is to render it perfectly logical to consider the possibility of a very small beginning of the human race in or about the "Fertile Crescent" of western Asia,—the ancient lands of Sumeria and Canaan—at a time which may not have been more than eight or ten thousand years ago, and perhaps was appreciably less.

The old-time question so beloved of those who would show the Genesis story incredible, "where did Cain get his wife?" with its mock pious horror at the inescapable answer "he married his sister" is not heard so much nowadays. Here again modern knowledge has cast much-needed light upon the problem of consanguinity and shown that a prohibition which exists today in civilised countries, on account of the tremendous degeneration of human physique and the existence of so many undesirable characteristics in the physical and mental constitutions of men and women, would have no validity at a time when the original God-given physical and mental perfection—"in the image and likeness of God"—had hardly begun to be sapped by the destructive effects of sin.

The simple directness of the story is probably its best recommendation. Granted that it was the Divine intention, in creating this planet and making it the scene of teeming vegetable and animal life, that it should eventually be the home of a race of intelligent beings knowing and acknowledging their Creator and Lord, what need was there to start with more than one pair? The Divine

method has ever been to sow seed and let it develop and bring forth fruit a thousandfold. Modern astronomical discovery has shown that, contrary to nineteenth century thought, there are tens of thousands of planets similar in general characteristics to the earth, scattered through the galactic heavens. Is it not possible that all these are destined yet to be the abode of living creatures likewise knowing and praising God, perhaps when the lessons of sin and evil have been well learned on the stage of this earth? May it not be that the same creative power which mysteriously and quite inexplicably produced the first recognisable living animals, the trilobites, in the warm Cambrian seas of the Palæozoic Age, something like five hundred million years ago, and then, æons later, suddenly produced the first reptiles, and later still the first mammals, could just as suddenly in the close of the sixth day of creation, when the Garden was ready, have produced the first man? The history of the differentiation of species into their varieties through geological time is marked at certain points by the emergence of definitely new forms of life which cannot easily be connected with pre-existing forms of life. Even from the scientific point of view, therefore, the sudden appearance of one man, a new kind of creature, on the earthly scene is not without its precedents in earthly history.

From the doctrinal point of view it is essential that humanity began with one man and all are sprung from him. The efficacy of the death of Christ, one just man dying for the many unjust men, (1 Pet. 3. 18) is related to the fact that one man sinned and involved the many in his sin (Rom. 5. 12 and 19). There is no avoiding this issue and the fact that we may not fully understand the philosophy behind it does not mitigate its force. The Apostolic writings insist that the scheme of Atonement is built upon the fact that all men were involved in the sin of their one common ancestor and the effects of that sin have poisoned the world from that day to this.

As a final consideration it must be borne in mind that the story of the Garden of Eden was prepared and preserved under the supervision and care of the Holy Spirit to be a source of instruction to all generations concerning the entry of sin into the world, the effect that entry has had on all men, and an explanation of the fact of sin in us and around us in our own time. That clearly is so that men should be able to appreciate both the necessity of redemption and the nature of the

things from which redemption is necessary. That being so, it follows that a definite understanding of the facts of the story and a true appraisal of its literal or metaphorical content is very necessary to an intelligent grasp of the Christian faith. It is to that end that the chapters which follow are written, that this ancient story which lies at the root of our faith may give its testimony to the verity of

"those things which are surely believed amongst us".

* * *

Next month's instalment will consider the background of the story, the time it was first put down in writing, the validity and meaning of its geographical indications, in preparation for the introduction of its principal character, Adam the first man.

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING GARMENT

Matt. 22.1-14

This is one of the "dispensational parables", drawing a contrast between the two great ages of this "present evil world" during which God is preparing his agencies for the work of world conversion which is the purpose of the third age, the "new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 13. 13). There is personal instruction for the individual Christian, in the fate of the man who rejected the proffered wedding garment; there is also illumination on the outworking of the Divine purposes in this description of an invitation that was rejected by those to whom it was at first offered, so that the honour passed to others who did accept it.

A certain king negotiated the marriage of his son and invited guests to the resultant marriage feast. That is the basis of the story and the outworking of the sequel shows that the son and his marriage form no part of the parable proper; they serve merely to explain the reason of the feast being held. The story really begins when the king's servants went out to call the guests to the feast. They refused to come. Not only so, some of them ill-treated and even slew the servants, wherefore the king sent his army and destroyed those men's city. Determined that his feast should be replete with guests he commissioned his servants to go out again, this time to the open streets and gather in all who would, without discrimination. So the banqueting hall was filled. At this point, conformably to the customs of Jewry in the First Century, each guest was provided with a white festal garment so that the inequalities of social status as evidenced by distinctions of dress would no longer be apparent and all the guests would mingle on a common level. One man, arrogant, refused to don the garment, whereupon he was expelled from the festivity, the warmth and light of the banqueting

hall, and thrust out into the "outer darkness" of the cold Syrian night. That was the story, and its intent and meaning was so obvious to the Pharisees and priests in whose hearing it was spoken that they once again took counsel, how they might limit or destroy Jesus' influence (ch. 22. 15).

Once it is realised that God is working to a plan, and that the successive ages and dispensations of world history are epochs marked out in that plan, the interpretation of this parable is not difficult to find. The first call, to those invited guests who refused to come, was the call of God to his chosen people of old, Israel, selected at Sinai to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19. 6). After Israel's rejection of the call, a rejection made absolute at the First Advent, a second invitation went out, this time to those who by reason of their acceptance of the call became the Christian Church of this present Age. In this framework the first ten verses of the parable fall easily into place.

The king "*sent forth his servants, to call them that were bidden . . . and they would not come . . . he sent forth other servants . . . but they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise.*" (ch. 22. 3-5). In these few words is enshrined the story of Israel's unbelief and hardheartedness. Called to be a covenant people, to declare God's glory to all men, recipients of Divine favour, they rejected all out of hand. The scathing words of the Lord to Isaiah when the youthful prophet received his commission of service were true of Israel all through their history. "The heart of this people has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted" (Isa. 6. 10

LXX). The writer to the Hebrews shows that there is a "rest" awaiting the people of God, but they to whom it was first preached — Israel — entered not in because of unbelief. (Heb. 4. 6). The parable is exact even to the sending forth of the servants twice to call in the originally invited guests; one very plain feature of Old Testament history is the distinction drawn between Israel before the Babylonian Captivity and Israel afterwards. That seventy years in Babylon marked a climax of the first Israelitish Age and a judgment involving the destruction not only of their city and Temple but of their whole national existence. Their restoration in the 6th century B.C. gave them a fresh start and a new succession of prophets, the "other servants" of the parable, but the second set of servants fared no better than the first. The post-exilic prophets were given only the same scanty and half-hearted attention that was the lot of the pre-exilic prophets, and most of them suffered or were put to death in much the same manner. "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" was the scornful accusation of Stephen at his trial before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7. 52). The parable of the vinedressers in the previous chapter (Matt. 21. 33-44) has the same succession of two consecutive sets of servants, in that case followed by the sending of the vineyard owner's son, who was killed by the wicked vinedressers. The application is the same in both cases and it is an obvious one.

So the "king was . . . wroth, and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city" (ch. 22. 7). At this point the history of the parable passes into prophecy; these words came terribly true forty years after Jesus' death, when the Roman emperor Titus besieged, captured and destroyed Jerusalem, and scattered the nation to the four corners of the earth. And simultaneously with the rejection of that people which, though "bidden, were not worthy" (vs. 8) the next section of the parable came into the picture with the going forth of the king's servants into the highways to call in all who would come.

That invitation had its commencement in history when Peter baptised Cornelius, the Roman centurion who is the first recorded Gentile convert to the Divine call in Christ (Acts 10). Not many years afterwards the Apostle Paul, preaching at Athens, gave formal testimony to the fact that God was now calling upon all men everywhere, without distinction of nationality, to repent (Acts

17. 30). "Of a truth I perceive" Peter had said to Cornelius "that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10. 34-35). Now in his own ministry Paul declares the same truth. Writing to the Ephesians, he says that the Gentiles "are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2. 19). So the servants went out, "witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea . . . and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1. 8). For nearly two thousand years those servants have been going forth—and they go forth still.

So the wedding feast was furnished with guests. This is not a feast of the future, beyond the skies. This feast is here, on this earth and in this life. It has been proceeding ever since the first Christians entered into heart communion with their Lord and began to feast at his table. It is the feast which Israel could have enjoyed in their own day, and failed to enter because of unbelief. "It remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief . . . there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God . . . let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (Heb. 4. 6-11). That is the verdict of the writer to the Hebrews on the matter.

Here the dispensational aspect of the parable comes to an end. The remaining picture is an individual one. Of the guests who have been gathered one is unworthy. "When the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment" (ch. 22. 11). This was the greatest insult guest could offer host; the man preferred to display his own finery rather than accept the covering provided by his host. And when taxed with his offence, he had nothing to say. "He was speechless."

What is the wedding garment? Clearly the free gift of justification by faith, consequent upon our acceptance of Christ, by whose righteousness the gift comes. "By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." . . . "Therefore 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" (Rom. 5. 1-2. 18). This is the common covering which renders us all alike acceptable to God despite our own imperfections and shortcomings, and hides the defects

which are impure in God's holy sight. "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" cries Isaiah (64. 6), but "wash you, make you clean; put away the evils of your doings . . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow" (1. 16-18). We come to God in faith, accepting the finished sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, even though we may not with our limited human minds understand just how his death is efficacious for our redemption. But some there are who come, not having accepted Christ in that sense, trusting more in their own endeavours to maintain a standing before God, maintaining that man needs no personal Saviour to reconcile him to God, that a profession of good works and good intentions is all that is necessary. There are "both bad and good" (ch. 22. 10) gathered into the feast, but the king's inspection speedily discerns those who have spurned the wedding garment and trust rather in the "filthy rags" of their own righteousness; and He commands his servants to expel all such from the feast.

"Cast into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (ch. 22. 13). This is the class of text which used to be related to the final destiny and punishment of the wicked and on that account this parable used to be considered a word picture of the separation of righteous and wicked, and the final doom of the latter. There is however no justification for identifying "outer darkness" with the ultimate penalty of sin. The expression occurs only three times in the New Testament, all of them in Matthew's Gospel. In none of these cases is the ultimate fate of incorrigible sinners in question. Jesus in Matt. 8. 11-12 said that many would come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and other men of faith in the kingdom of God, whilst the "children of the kingdom" would be cast into outer darkness where is weeping and gnashing of teeth. In Matt. 25. 30 the unprofitable servant who had wasted his talent suffered the same fate. In all three instances the idea is that of rejection and separation from the purpose of God in this present Age through unworthiness, unfitness. The ultimate fate of the individuals concerned is not in question and is left undecided; what is certain is that they are unfit for inclusion in the band of disciples which God is selecting from both Jew and Gentile during the present and past Ages, that He might use them in his plans for world conversion in the next Age. Separated from the body of believers because of unworthiness now, cast into outer darkness in the sense that they have been excluded from

the light and joy of that spirit-filled society which ultimately becomes the "light of the nations", such will eventually realise what high privilege they have missed—hence the typically Eastern hyperbole "weeping and gnashing of teeth".

For it is very true, as Jesus said in conclusion of his parable "*Many are called, but few are choice*" (not "chosen" as in the A.V.). The Greek here is *eklektos*, which means the valuable or choice part of a thing. Jesus did not say that God would call many and then arbitrarily choose only a few of them; what He did say was that of all to whom the Divine call comes in this Age, in whose hearts the Word finds some lodgment, only a few, after the testings of a lifetime, prove worthy, worth-while, choice. Because God is seeking characters of sterling worth to be his ministers in that day when He sets before mankind the final decision, the choice between good and evil, He is rigorous in excluding the unworthy. They are not necessarily lost; they revert to the mass of unsaved mankind from which they came, to listen afresh in a future day to the appeal of the Gospel, but they have lost for ever the opportunity of sharing with those who live and reign with Christ a thousand years (Rev. 20. 4) and who in the course of that reign will labour with their Lord in the conversion of all nations. That is the lesson of this parable.

The voice of the Spirit is low, and can be heard distinctively only by the New Creature, created anew in the image of its glorious Lord. It is always a "still, small voice," easily lost amid the clamour of the noisy world, but it must be heard, for by it, the first-fruit of the land of glory, we behold the New Creation, and the promise of unspeakable joys and glories yet future, though we still sojourn in a world where Satan's seat is, and where all is old and full of decay and corruption.

* * *

To give praise is very becoming for the believer. It becomes as natural as breathing is to the physical body. Thankfulness and praise are twin sisters and where the one is found the other follows close in its track. Realising the deep need of love and mercy and being the recipient of the same causes the heart to overflow with gratitude to its donor. Like the Psalmist, the language is: "*I will bless the Lord at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth.*"

STUDY NOTES ON THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER

Introduction and 1.1-2

Introduction. The most probable estimate is that this epistle was written in the year 65 from Rome, where Peter was residing with Mark and Silas. Paul, released from his first trial and imprisonment, was in Spain or elsewhere in the West or North. John and Timothy were at Ephesus; most of the Pauline Epistles had been written but not those of John. This Epistle was written in Greek; its grammatical construction is said to preclude the likelihood of an Aramaic original. After thirty years' travelling and teaching in Greek-speaking lands the Apostle must have acquired some mastery of the language and in any case Silas, himself a Greek, was at hand to help him with his task. The exhortations to *Christian fortitude under suffering* might well have been inspired by the Neronian persecution which began in A.D. 64. Eusebius says that the allusion to "Babylon" in ch. 5. 13 is in fact a covert reference to Rome, it being inadvisable to be more explicit; ("*... Peter makes mention of Mark in the first epistle, which he is also said to have composed at the same city of Rome, and that he shows this fact by calling the city by an unusual trope, Babylon, thus 'the church at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you, as also my son Marcus'*". Euseb. Eccl. Hist. 2. 15). The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians cites a number of texts from this Epistle (1. 8, 13. 21; 3. 9; 2. 11, 12, 22, 24; 3. 9; 4. 7); it was therefore familiar to Polycarp who lived between A.D. 81 and 167 and himself had known the Apostle John and perhaps Peter. Papius, who lived at the same time, is said by Eusebius to have quoted the Epistle ("*... Papius made use of testimonies from the first epistle of John, and likewise from that of Peter.*" Euseb. Eccl. Hist. 3. 39). Irenæus, A.D. 150-200, is the first writer known to have stated definitely that it was written by Peter, but since the Apostle's name appears as the writer in the very first verse and the early Church evidently accepted it as such from the start there would appear no need for anyone to take up the cudgels in defence of a matter that was already plainly stated and generally accepted by those best qualified to judge—the generation in which the Apostle lived and to whom the letter was addressed.

Structure. The structure of the Epistle is simple and straightforward, roughly as follows.

Chap. 1. Philosophy of salvation.

1. 1-2 Address and greeting.
- 3-12 Nature of the Christian hope — a heavenly salvation.
- 13-25 Basis of that salvation—the blood of Christ and the living Word of God.

Chaps. 2 - 3 - 4. A series of practical exhortations for daily living.

2. 1-10 Complete dedication of life.
- 11-25 Irreproachability of daily conduct.
3. 1-6 Domestic conduct of wives toward husbands.
- 7 Domestic conduct of husbands toward wives.
- 8-17 Conduct of all Christians in face of persecution.
- 18-22 Digression on conduct of Christ in respect to evil men and angels.
4. 1-6 The moral for Christians in light of that example.
- 7-19 Conduct in view of imminence of Divine judgment on evil.

Chap. 5. Exhortations respecting church fellowship.

5. 1-4 The duty of elders in the church.
- 5-9 The duty of believers in the church.
- 10-14 Final blessing and benediction.

Study Notes on text.

Ch. 1 vs. 1. Peter, "an apostle of Jesus Christ", addresses himself to the "strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia". The introductory phrase is remarkable in that there is no trace of bombast or self-advertisement on the one hand and no undue reticence on the other. The plain statement of identity and mission is given without arrogance or servility. The term "apostle" means "one sent forth"; he limits his claims to that mission.

"Strangers" is a term used to describe Jews of the Dispersion living in Gentile countries. The word means literally "one among the people". It is rendered "pilgrim" in Heb. 11. 13 "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth", and 1 Pet. 2. 11 "as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly desires", so that Peter could have intended a double meaning; the epistle is addressed to faithful Jewish converts living in a pagan society in his own day; it can also be addressed to all dedicated and separated Christians living in an unbelieving world in any generation. The R.S.V. renders the phrase "exiles of the dispersion", giving it a Jewish-Christian

colour. Weymouth has it "God's own people scattered in the earth who are living as foreigners" and 20th Century "people of God who are living abroad" which at least admits the extension of the application to all Christians everywhere.

The five Roman provinces mentioned constituted between them practically the whole of what used to be called "Asia Minor" and is now modern Turkey — the area over which Roman political rule had been superimposed on Hellenic Greek civilisation. The Sinaitic omits "Asia" and the Vatican Mss omits "Bithynia"; it is probable that Peter intended the address to be general and that he sent the letter to the whole of the country over which Christianity had spread.

The missionary work of Paul covered only Galatia and Roman Asia. The other three provinces, lying farther east, received the faith by means not definitely known; traditionally by others of the apostles, in fact probably very largely by individual believers and the missionary ardour of churches like Ephesus, Laodicea, Colosse. Men of Pontus and Cappadocia were present at Jerusalem at Pentecost and must have taken the news home (Acts 2. 9). The Holy Spirit prohibited Paul from working in Bithynia (Acts 16. 7) which lay along the coast of the Black Sea, sending him to Macedonia instead. There must therefore be a thrilling unwritten history of missionary endeavour in these lands during those closing years of the First Century. Aquila, whom Paul found already a believer in Corinth, may have had something to do with this, for he was a native of Pontus (Acts 18. 2). The other references to Aquila in the New Testament both connect him with Asia; Paul refers to him in Rom. 16. 3-4, with Priscilla his wife, as meriting the thanks not only of Paul himself "but also all the churches of the Gentiles" which at that time meant the territory in question with the addition of Greece proper. 1 Cor. 16. 19, bearing greetings to the Corinthians, associates "the churches of Asia" with "Aquila and Priscilla" in sending salutations. There may be more than a hint here that much of Aquila's Christian service was rendered in those countries to which the Apostle addressed this epistle.

Ch. 1. vs. 2 "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." These "strangers" or pilgrims, believers, are thus addressed. Elect is a word meaning the choice or valuable part of a thing; the English word "eclectic" is the transliteration of the Greek word

and refers to the selection from varied sources or materials of a combination of the choicest elements. "Elect" is often used in the New Testament to denote the body of believers, not from the standpoint of an arbitrary Divine selection, as was envisaged in the old-fashioned "doctrine of election", but rather to denote God's choice from among the varied sources of the sons of men those who are fitted and worthy for his purpose. "They that are with him are called, and chosen (choice) and faithful (Rev. 17. 14). It is in this sense that the Apostle Paul says in Col. 3. 12 "Put on, as the elect of God . . . meekness, kindness", etc. These are the things that make a particular believer "elect" in God's sight.

"Foreknowledge" is the Greek "prognosis" which indicates a prior knowledge of a future state or event. In the sphere of human relations it implies a determination of the future position on the basis of the present evidence and that is the use of the English word "prognosis" to-day. The implication here is that the believers are "elect" now on the basis of God's prognosis of their position before him in the future; in other words, the fact that they have dedicated themselves to him and are carrying out that dedication in a life of sanctification renders them part of the "eclectic" which is the choice part taken out from mankind to fulfil a special function in the Divine Plan (the "people for God's name" of Acts 15. 14). Nothing in this foreknowledge limits the individual free will; acceptance of the Christian call is on an entirely free will basis or not at all. Neither does it imply any restriction on individual liberty and capacity to apostasise from or repudiate the faith, thus losing the place held in the elect company. Jesus was delivered to the Jews by the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge (prognosis) of God" (Acts 2. 23) but the Jews were still completely free agents in the matter. It was Divine foreknowledge of the way events would go if his Son was introduced on earth, in Judea, at that particular time, which made the sequel certain in his mind, and in the mind of Jesus (Matt. 16. 21). "Predestinate" in Rom. 8. 29 and 30, and Eph. 1. 5 and 11, has much the same meaning except that this word includes the idea of deliberate planning for a definite end which is in view. The verse stipulates three factors necessary to achieve the election, viz:—

- (a) Foreknowledge of God
 - (b) Sanctification by the Spirit
 - (c) Obedience and sprinkling of the blood.
- Sanctification means literally to holify, make

holy, in the sense of complete separation to Divine things, a separation from the mundane and secular. The sprinkling of the blood of Jesus alludes to the covenant made between God and Israel in the wilderness, when Moses sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice upon altar and people (Exod. 24. 7-8). That indicated that only by the giving of unblemished life — as

evidenced by the blood; "the life of all flesh is the blood thereof" (Lev. 17. 14) — to be the seed of new life can one-time sinful man receive life that shall be everlasting. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (Jno. 12. 24).

(To be continued)

THE VISION OF JOEL

3. The Lords Great Army

An Exposition of the
Book of Joel

"Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain . . . for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand."

(Joel 2. 1).

This is the second stage of the prophecy, and Joel's spiritual vision is becoming keener; he begins to see farther into the future. The language employed in the first part of this chapter is still fitting to the plague of locusts which formed the opening theme of chapter 1, but the words and terms used are so much stronger and more pointed as to leave little room for doubt that under the figure of the locust swarm a great and devastating invasion of Israel's land is depicted. There is no resisting the oncoming hosts; even the sun and moon withdraw their light, and no defence which the people can offer will be of any avail. The day of the Lord, great and very terrible, has come, and who can abide it?

At this crisis (verse 11) the prophet points to a way of escape. Turn ye to the Lord, he cries, and repent, for He is gracious and merciful. Who knoweth but that He will turn and deliver? It is while the people are considering this message that the second alarm comes (verse 15). The enemy is now at the gates and the crisis is now upon them. *"Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly."* The appeal to God for deliverance becomes a reality; priests and people make common cause in supplication and in the spirit of true repentance. Every ordinary occupation and preoccupation is suspended and the entire nation comes together in sincere and heartfelt prayer to God.

And God turns! From that point the danger begins to lessen. *"Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people."* (vs. 18). He goes forth like a man of war and drives away the alien invader, returning then to His own people and beginning to bless them in basket and store. All that they have lost is

restored to them, and they know at last that He is their God and is dwelling in their midst. And at that point the prophecy merges so definitely into the events of this Gospel Age Time of Trouble that there is no mistaking the application, for here is where we have the promise, quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, that God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh, and deliverance, absolute and complete, will be the portion of those who call upon the name of the Lord. Verses 21-32 of this chapter have never yet been fulfilled in the history of Israel; their realisation lies in the future; and this is a guide to us in our interpretation of the entire chapter. At this point Joel saw, in vision, into this time in which we ourselves are now living.

Now the first part of the chapter had its first fulfilment soon after Joel's own day, when the northern armies overran Israel and Judah, and took the people captive, leaving their land desolate. But the thread of prophecy ran its course only as far as verse 14, and there stopped, *because the people did not repent!* The completion of the prophecy was postponed for many long days because of that fact. Came a day when Israel was afforded another opportunity; the Prince of Life Himself was amongst them, the nations again were threatening them, and again the thread of prophecy ran to verse 14, *and stopped again.* They "knew not the time of their visitation" and *they did not repent.* Once more their house was left unto them desolate. Now, to-day, after these many years, the cup of suffering of God's ancient people is filling to the brim. As in the past, their enemies hem them in on every hand; once more the Lord's great army stands ready to execute judgment. But this time the prophecy will run on to its full end, for this time *Israel will repent,* and in faith and confidence look to God for deliverance. We must look at this chapter

therefore as having its beginning in the days of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, and its ending in our own day, the day of Israel's final deliverance.

"Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand." (vs. 1).

What is this "day of the Lord" to which reference is so often made by the prophets? It is nearly always associated with judgment. It is the day of reckoning, of retribution, the time when the evil harvest of this world's sowing has to be reaped. There was a day of the Lord to come to Israel because of her waywardness just as there is a day of the Lord to come to all the world because of its wickedness. Here in Joel the especial application is to Israel; the time of judgment was about to come upon them and nothing could save them from its impact, although repentance and faith would bring them through it, saved "so as by fire". And it is a long day too; this "day of the Lord" began with the taking of the Ten Tribes, and then, a little later, the Two Tribes, into captivity, and it is to last for twenty-seven hundred years, until the time of "Jacob's Trouble", yet future. It endures thus long because it can only end with Israel's repentance, and Israel has not yet repented. So it is that the exhortation in vs. 11-14 "Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart . . ." stands as an impassable barrier to the completion of the prophecy, until Israel's blindness is turned away as described by Paul in Rom. 11. 23-26. Well might Joel cry the urgency of his message and call for a trumpet in Zion, for the day of the Lord whose coming he pronounced as imminent was to commence little less than a century after his preaching.

"A day of darkness and of gloominess" he cries "a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains" (vs. 2). That last phrase is badly translated; the thought behind it is that of a stormy dawn when, instead of the light of the rising sun, there are masses of black thunderclouds banked along the mountain-tops, blotting out the daylight. As said Isaiah "In that day . . . if one looked unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof" (Isa. 5. 30). Zephaniah, also, saw "a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities . . ." (Zeph. 1. 15-16). As Joel himself said later on, the sun

and the moon were darkened, and the stars had withdrawn their shining, and above all men there hung the sable curtain of Divine displeasure.

Against this black background the prophet sees the advancing army. "A great people and a strong" he cries in affright "there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be after it, even to the years of many generations" (vs. 2). In the advance guard Joel saw the Assyrians of his own day, marching relentlessly to the despoiling of Israel's fair land. Close on their heels he could, perhaps, see the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar, coming a hundred and fifty years later to overturn the Kingdom of Judah and bring the royal kingship to an end. Behind them, more dimly, maybe he could see Greeks, and Romans, and Persians, and Arabs, and Turks, all the forces of the Gentiles that were destined to oppress Israel down the ages and despoil their heritage continually. And it might even be that the vision of the prophet, supernaturally sharpened, saw, up against the darkness itself, behind all the others, the shadowy outlines of that greatest oppressor of all, the mysterious King of Daniel 11, and those forces of the north which are described in Ezekiel 38, the last of all these locust waves which are appointed to ravage Israel. All these are legions of the Lord's great army which He has sent to execute his word and all these have played or will play their part in executing the Divine judgments upon that stiff-necked and wayward people that, marvellously, becomes God's own people of faith at the last.

The history of the ages is sufficient to reveal how true it has been of this great army that, to quote the words of vs. 3, "a fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them." The rest of the passage, up to vs. 9, is a vivid description of the havoc wrought by a ruthless invader and although commentators almost invariably apply it to the devastation wrought by locusts and point to the fitness of almost every sentence to that application, it remains true that the passage is even more fitly referred to the capture of a city by a hostile army, and when taken in relation to the following verses describing Divine intervention for the people's salvation, quite certainly to Gentile nations that have harried Israel in the day of her adversity and will be smitten by God in the day of her prosperity.

This section, from vs. 4 to vs. 9, tells of the

invasion, from the first sight of the coming enemy on the far distant hills to that dread moment when the defenders, pressed back into their last stronghold within the city, behold with fear the ruthless soldiers climbing in at their windows and battering down their doors. So has it been, and will be, in Israel's long history; the enemy has continually advanced more and more closely to their total destruction until in their last days it seems as though they are appointed to utter extinction and nothing can save them.

"The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run" (vs. 4). Here the alarmed watchers on the city walls discern the first signs of the attack, the dust clouds raised by the hoofs of the galloping horses and the following war chariots. The movements of those agile steeds may be observed before the outlines of the lumbering chariots behind them can be discerned. But not for long, for *"like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array"* (vs. 5). The chariots are now in view, bumping and rattling over the rocky ground and precipitous slopes. The likening of the advance of this host to a sheet of flame eating up the dry stubble of a field as it advances at rapid pace is very apt.

Now the invaders have reached the city walls. *"They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war: and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks"* (vs. 7). They have stormed the walls and forced their way into the city, and the desperate defenders have retreated to the shelter of their houses; but to no avail. Their relentless enemies follow hard upon their heels. *"They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses: they shall enter in at the windows like a thief"* (vs. 9). This is the supreme crisis; the foe has besieged and taken the city and has appeared at the house doors to satiate his lust for pillage and ravage. Zechariah saw that same picture when he spoke (in Zech. 14) of the city being taken, and the houses rifled, and some going forth into captivity. In Zechariah the statement is made that at that crisis the Lord will go forth and deliver His people, but without indicating just why that deliverance comes about. Here in Joel the reason is stated; it is because the people, at last, repent and turn to the Lord their God in faith, and so He delivers. But let Joel tell the splendid

story in his own unhurried way.

"The earth shall quake before them. The heavens shall tremble; the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army; for his camp is very great; for he is strong that executeth his word; for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" (vs. 10-11).

This is what the prophet sees in his vision, the utter disruption of all the normal course of nature in consequence of this calamity that has come upon the city and the people. This can be nothing else than a symbolic foreview of the Last Days, and so Joel must have understood the vision; no ordinary military invasion could justify the use of such extravagant language. Here, at this point, perhaps, his prophecy passes definitely into the sphere of the times in which we live, the times of the last great trial of faith upon God's earthly people. Later in his prophecy (chap. 3. 16) he sees the issue more clearly and says "the heavens and the earth shall shake; but the Lord will be the hope of his people and the strength of the children of Israel." Isaiah saw something of the same thing when he said "I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger" (Isa. 13. 13) and again, more fiercely, "the earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage . . ." (Isa. 24. 19-20). This is the time that the Lord rises up to judge the earth—but first of all He judges His own people Israel. That is the explanation of the strange word in vs. 11, the word that refers to this savage concourse of barbarian invaders as the "Lord's great army" and their camp as "His camp". The only possible explanation is that He is using them as a means of judgment, His means of testing and purifying Israel. As with Pharaoh of old, He has called them that He might display His glory by them, and when they have served His purpose to that end, pass upon them, in their turn, the judgment they too have richly deserved. So Ezekiel, speaking of much the same thing, says "I will bring thee against my land, that the nations may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog before their eyes" (Ezek. 38. 16).

So will the crisis come upon re-gathered Israel in the latter days. In former times they failed under the test, and they went into captivity. But they will not fail this time!

(To be continued)

A REVELATION AND ITS SEQUEL

9. The Christian to-day amid impending change (part 2)

St. Paul's vision
of the future
2 Cor. 12. 1—9

This instalment is part of and a finale to last month's theme; whereas last month dealt with Israel in this connection, this present section brings into consideration the position of the Christian Church.

* * *

What of the other line of evidence relating to the Christian Church? Can it offer any assistance to our quest? It is the conviction among Church leadership that Christianity is designed to be at once universal and permanent, to embrace all races and peoples everywhere and meet the deepest soul-need of all periods of time. This conviction is accepted without question, indeed, as being true beyond all question. That being so, it is also expected that the Church must change its form and re-adapt its ministry to the inevitable and constant changes of human society, as they occur from age to age, till it has embraced all men in one Society, and linked all nations together as one Fraternity. But, though it may thus need to change its form and ministry, the Church itself, as a divinely conceived Institution will — it is believed — remain intact, and continue to the end of time.

This conception was more easily justified in former days than in modern times. Time was when the Church held such penal measures in her armoury, that she could cow and break all dissident and non-conforming souls by their use. To be put under excommunication and thus outside her pale, was tantamount to being cut off from the world; neighbours and friends were strictly commanded to ostracise and shun the contumacious offender, severing thus all trade and family connections till submission was made, and the Church forgave! Should the offender dare to brave this interdict, then the more terrible weapon of Unending Torment, in scorching flames was employed. Church discipline was thus a much more simple matter to maintain, and few indeed the daring souls which would run the risk of incurring such penalties! "Going to Canossa" has broken Emperors, to say nothing of lesser delinquents!

To keep simple men within her pale, to stand ward over their morality was then a matter of comparative simplicity compared with the situation prevailing to-day. Except for the Roman and Greek Church commun-

ities, these weapons are no longer of any consequence. The spread of education among the more advanced nations of the earth has stripped these thunder-bolts of their effectiveness. Men do not believe the one, nor quail in terror from the other. Does some Church Directorate presume to thrust the delinquent outside her pale? it is the Church which is the poorer for the act! A world outside her border stands a-welcome, invitingly ready to embrace the outcast with open arms! As for consignment to the fiery flames, well, it is not just believed at all to-day! Increasing education has killed that doctrine stone-dead! And with what consequence? The standards of morality have fallen. Vice stalks the City street, and village lanes. Immorality and wedded faithlessness are thematised by film and play. Hooligan and youthful violence increase from year to year. Thefts and robberies are organised with skill. Children have lost respect for parents, and society strains and cracks from top to toe. And the problem of the Church is "How shall we retain our membership?" 'Retain,' not increase is the keyword there!

Under present circumstances our Protestant Churches fight a losing battle all the time. The influx of her converts year by year, are less, by far, than the number of babies born in the land, and with each passing year the disproportion between population and Church membership grows apace, decidedly to the disadvantage of the Church. Where will all this dis-proportion end? Should the same increasing ratio of crime and vice continue for the next one hundred (or even fifty) years what would be the outlook then? Should the birth into the nation, as compared with that into the Church, continue as it is to-day, what will the story be when this present Century ends?

It is no stricture upon the Church's bonafides that is written here. These words are written by a sympathetic pen. This writer knows that the Church has been attempting to perform the impossible — a task, and service altogether beyond her present-age capacity.

The assumption that she should be the custodian of the world's morality was never laid on the shoulders of the Church by her Founder and Lord. Himself, He would not even interfere to adjust the rival claims of a

disputed inheritance. "Who made Me a judge over such matters" asked He. "What have we to do to judge those that are without?" asks Paul.

For three whole centuries the Church refused such custodianship and responsibility — indeed she had to beg and plead for mere existence, apologising with humiliating frequency for living differently from other men! A subtle crafty Emperor, impressed by her internal constancy and discipline, thrust this burden on her neck, and made her henceforth the protector of his throne. From Constantine, not Christ, the Church accepted this responsibility. Charlemagne, in the ninth century, sent the Church's Bishop on circuit, like the Judge of Assize goes today, with the same end in view.

With the awakening of intelligence due to the spread of education, and to the foretold increase of lawlessness in the world, the position of the Church in its former role has been impossible. Indeed she has been severely taxed in maintaining discipline within her own legitimate borders. And to retain her membership the standards have had to be depressed.

One has but to hear the lamentations of the septuagenarians and octogenarians in the most open and evangelical sections of the Church to learn how grievously the standards have been reduced to keep the flock together! Gone, the fervour of the Prayer Meeting, the Camp Meeting, the Revival Crusade, and come, the whist, the sport, the Carnival! Times, they say, have changed, and so must the Church! Yes, times have changed, and times are

changing still! That is just the answer to our quest! Circumstances beyond the Church's control, and beyond her borders too, have forced (and are forcing) the pace, and change, for better or for worse, must come! The great thing is that this change is coinciding with the return of Israel to the Promised Land, and that world forces are in motion which bear both Israel and the Church towards a day of destiny.

Will the Church be able to adapt herself to the passing and impending change ere it comes in at flood tide? Time alone can tell. But it is more than probable she will cling to the idea that she is the custodian of the world's morality to the bitter end, and be called upon to stand judgment therefore, as a consequence.

The task allotted to her care, notwithstanding the mis-direction of her energies, will have been accomplished in her midst, by the Spirit of the Living God. That mission has not failed. God will have accomplished all He purposed in this Age, spite of the Church's growing inadequacy for the task! Can this increasing inadequacy of the Church Militant be accepted as a sign of impending change — as a token that something more appealing and penetrating to men is needed?

Judging by the signs attending Israel's return, and the present Church's growing inadequacy as the world's Conscience-Keeper, the work of "taking out a people for His Name" must be all but accomplished! If that is so, the time for the inevitable impending change must be all but due!

(To be continued)

BIBLE WORD STUDY

"Soul" in
the O.T.

With one exception only (Job. 30. 15) "Soul" in the Old Testament is invariably translated from the Hebrew "*nephesh*" which, beside being rendered *soul* something like 450 times is also rendered *life* about 120 times, and *person* (20) *self* (19) *heart* (15) *mind* (15). The remaining 60 or so occurrences are rendered *creature*, *beast*, *fish*, *man*, *mortal*, *body*, *dead body*, *thing*, *will*, *ghost*, *breath*, *lust*, *appetite*, *desire* and a few other words. In any study of the evolution of the doctrine of the soul, particularly its uses in the New Testament and the meaning the term has assumed in later Christian theology, this variety of meanings in the Old Testament has to be taken as the basis. There may be room for discussion as to the effect of Greek philosophies on popular

Christian thought respecting the soul; there is little basis for disputing that the Hebrew word denoted something definitely physical and full-blooded; the idea of a material living creature, human or animal, lies at the basis of Biblical usage of the word, "soul".

Nephesh normally denotes the breathing creature; it does not define breath or the act of breathing (*neshamah*) nor the spirit or wind of life (*ruach*). Eight times only in its approximately 700 occurrences is the word applied to a body from which life has departed (Lev. 19. 28; 22. 1; 22. 4; Num. 5. 2; 6. 11; 9. 6, 7 and 10), and in all these instances it obviously refers to the fact that the subjects concerned had once been living men. In the Biblical use of *nephesh* there is implicit the

conception of a tangible creature subsisting by reason of the union of the spirit of life with a material or physical body.

The first occurrence of the word as applied to man sets the pattern. God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2. 7). This is the commencement of the existence of the man as such. "Became" is the Hebrew "to be"; one could say "here man began to be". The expression does not mean that God implanted a soul in Adam as though to tenant the body. It was the *neshamah chayah*, the breath of lives, which God implanted in the inanimate body, and the fusion of the two produced the *nephesh chayah*, the living soul.

Following this definition the Bible records that the sons and grandchildren whom Zlipah bore to Jacob numbered "sixteen souls" (Gen. 46. 18) and that "seventy souls" went down with Jacob into Egypt (Exod. 1. 5). The natural descendants of these souls, a few centuries later, who themselves are souls, are found to be eating sacrificed flesh (Lev. 7. 18) blood (Lev. 17. 12) flesh (Deut. 12. 20). Later on, men can satisfy their souls by the act of eating (Prov. 6. 30).

The "living creatures" of Gen. 1. 21; 1. 24; 2. 19, and "moving creature" of Gen. 1. 20 are all *nephesh*, so that the huge reptiles of the Mesozoic Era are souls in the Biblical sense. "Moving creature that hath life" in Gen. 1. 20 is "*nephesh chayah*" just as is "living soul" in Gen. 2. 7, so that there is no difference in this respect between man and the lower creation.

Isa. 19. 10 speaks of those "that make sluices and ponds for *nephesh*" — fish is intended here, as translated in the A.V. In Prov. 12. 10 a righteous man regardeth the life of his *nephesh* — rendered *beast* in the A.V. Likewise Lev. 11. 46-47 distinguishes between clean and unclean souls for human consumption by propounding the law of the beasts (*behemah* — cattle) fowl (*oph* — birds) aquatic living creatures (*nephesh* — fish and molluscs, shell-fish, etc.) and terrestrial creeping things (*nephesh* — reptiles and insects). The word for soul is extended over a wide field of life here. Some of these souls may be eaten and others may not be eaten. Lev. 24. 18 introduces another aspect by instructing "he that killeth a *nephesh* shall make it good; *nephesh* for *nephesh*". Here the A.V. renders the word by "beast" which is obviously proper. The Mosaic Law provided for compensation in the case of slain cattle just as in the preceding verse it demanded the death penalty for the slaying of man.

The king of Sodom asked Abram for the persons (*nephesh*) recovered in the battle (Gen. 14. 21). Esau took all the persons (*nephesh*) of his household with him in his migration (Gen. 36. 6). David occasioned the death of the souls (persons — *nephesh*) of Abiathar's house (1 Sam. 22. 22), and the Tyrians in Ezekiel's day traded the souls (persons — *nephesh*) of men (Ezek. 27. 13). These are among the thirty occasions on which *nephesh* is translated *person* and in none of these instances can the word refer to other than the living man.

Nephesh is rendered *self*, *yourself*, etc., some 21 times, including the expression in Job. 18. 4 "he tearth himself (*nephesh*) in his anger", and the prohibition in Lev. 11. 43-44 against the "making yourselves (*nephesh*) abominable with any creeping thing" (insects and small reptiles in this case). The prohibition evidently refers to physical defilement and the *nephesh* which can be thus defiled is of necessity physical in its nature.

Deut. 19. 11 envisages the possibility of a man lying in wait for his neighbour, "and smite him mortally (*nephesh*) that he die". Here again is there the conception of the soul, *nephesh*, coming to an abrupt end by reason of physical death. It is said of Dr. Adam Clarke, the eighteenth century theologian, that he offered a reward of a thousand pounds to anyone who could find the expression "immortal soul" in the Bible; since the expression does not occur the money was never claimed. The story is probably apocryphal; there is at any rate a clear intimation in this particular text of the inherent mortality of the *nephesh*. A man can lie in wait and cause its death.

The *nephesh*, the soul, comes into being when the physical human organism is vivified by the Divine spirit of life. The *nephesh* comes to an end when that spirit of life "returns unto God who gave it" (Eccl. 12. 7) and the dust returns to earth as it was. God gave the life; God takes it away, and bestows it again in a body of His choosing at the resurrection ("God giveth it a body as it pleaseth him, and to every seed his own body" 1 Cor. 15. 58). In harmony with that principle, the New Testament declares that future life can only come by means of a resurrection from the dead, and that is an essential element of the Christian faith.

"He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that."—John Stuart Mill

SURPASSING WORTH

A Devotional
Study

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffering, being made conformable to his death." (Phil. 3. 10).

Our first parents enjoyed fellowship with their Maker before sin entered the world. When they disobeyed God's law, a barrier came between the Creator and his creation upon earth; and the sublime communion was severed. So through the story of mankind the search for God has continued. The Bible reflects much of that quest for truth.

In Gen. 5. 22 it is recorded that "Enoch walked with God". Later, Abraham was favoured with God's friendship because of his faith (Jas. 2. 23). Of Moses the great leader of Israel it is written ". . . the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." (Exod. 33. 11). The kings and statesmen of Israel who followed the example of their law-giver led God's people to victory and prosperity. The prophets and poets urged their fellow countrymen to seek the Lord and cultivate his friendship above everything else. *"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight saith the Lord."* (Jer. 9. 23-24).

As a nation Israel failed to respond to this great privilege. They treated God in much the same way as their heathen neighbours treated the false gods and worshipped idols. To them he was in a far-distant heaven, unconcerned with the intimate details of daily life. They tried to appease his justice for their wickedness by animal sacrifices and religious ritual instead of the penitent spirit and contrite heart. Thus when Jesus entered the world the majority of Israel knew nothing of true religion nor of the right way to approach God.

Through the example and teaching of their Master, the disciples learned to look upon God as a Father who was interested in all men and women and in the whole of His creation. Speaking of sparrows Jesus said ". . . and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father". (Matt. 10. 29). Jesus preached a God who "so loved that he gave" and of a Father who desired reconciliation with and

the friendship of his children. In life Jesus made this teaching become more real, for they could see him with their own eyes and He shared their human lives. Still clearer did the relationship become when Jesus called them brethren and offered them a share in his life above. During the last few hours in the upper room just before his death, the Master spoke of the most profound truth that was ever presented to human hearts and minds. Illustrating with the familiar picture of a vine He showed how their lives were to become completely united to his and that they would become fully dependent upon him. In the opening words of his prayer recorded in John 17 Jesus states this teaching in its most simple and most complete form, *"This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."* Jesus died to make this possible, and after Pentecost, with the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, it became a wonderful reality. Now they understood Jesus' words "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world", for as they went forth to witness and suffer for his sake they knew their Master was with them. No longer were they acting under the impulse of human selfishness as they had been before Pentecost. Nor were their motives and sentiments controlled by what they could get for themselves. They served a risen Lord, who spoke and acted through them. When they felt weak He made them strong. When they were downcast and sad He comforted and lifted them up. He brought them through persecution and martyrdom; in the moment of death Stephen glimpsed the Lord he knew and loved so dearly.

Saul of Tarsus saw Jesus of Nazareth on the Damascus road and from that day forward he learned to walk with him. He no longer took the road of his own choice. Jesus was his guide and companion. Twice in the Acts it is revealed that the Lord appeared unto him concerning the course of his life. (Acts 22. 17-18 and 23. 11). Along the dusty highways, amid the throngs of the Mediterranean cities, or in the darkness of a Roman prison. Paul had the same fellowship with his Lord. The young converted graduate of the Temple became tempered and mellowed with passing years of friendship with his unseen companion. Yet even when he had reached Rome and was writing to the Philippian Church he

penned these words ". . . that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings . . . Not that I have already obtained this . . ." He had not fully entered into the many aspects of this fellowship but he also wrote "I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus hath made me his own". (Phil. 3. 10-12 R.S.V.).

When, during his trial at Rome, his Christian brethren forsook him, Paul wrote to Timothy that the Lord stood by him and strengthened him. (2 Tim. 4. 17). He was reaching the end of his long pilgrimage and the friendship with Jesus had ripened into maturity, and was able to testify "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day". As he trusted in life, so he was able to trust in death, until the day dawn and he should see his Master face to face.

The secret which Paul learned about our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus is open to every child of God. None who truly seek him are turned away, for "the Father seeketh such." Few are prepared to pay the price of this friendship. To those who yield their whole lives to him, Jesus gives in return an immeasurable love and devotion which has to be experienced to be believed. Only those who have enjoyed his quiet times in the secret place, whether in the lonely room or out on the hillside, can know the joy and peace which his presence can give. The time of personal fellowship each day with the Lord is the key to the victorious life. In the time of quiet prayer and meditation on the Scriptures, He speaks to our hearts and solves the problems of daily living. It is sad that many who claim to follow Jesus never discover this secret place. Others who once enjoyed its comfort and its power no longer find time to "come apart and rest awhile". They are too busy on active service in Christian work to bother with their Master. Perhaps they become too engrossed in an academic study of the Bible so that their personal knowledge of the Saviour has grown dim and hazy. His friendship brings them no thrill of delight as it once did. While speaking to his followers on conditions for discipleship Jesus made it clear that we must love him more than we love anybody or anything else on earth. There can be nothing half hearted about our attachment to him. Every aspect of daily living becomes subordinated to his will. The words of Paul in Phil. 3. 12 bear repeating ". . . because Christ Jesus hath made me

his own". He made us his own at the cost of his flesh and blood. He does not offer us a philosophy for life or a religious dogma to believe. He offers us himself as a bridegroom longs to share his life with his bride. Can we withhold any part of our lives or fritter away our time on anything else?

Home life receives a new atmosphere when Jesus becomes the head of the household. Frayed tempers are sweetened by the reminder that Jesus is near, and cool relationships are reconciled beneath the smile of his love. Irsome duties are willingly done "for him" and He shares the family sorrows. It's easier to bear unpleasantness or insult when we remember that Jesus died for our neighbour as well as for us. As we venture forth each day, we do so with our hand clasped by Jesus. We view our daily task differently knowing that He is watching us. Our contacts in office or factory, school or shop become a means of grace whereby our action if not our words can testify to the life "within". Wrote Paul to the Galatians "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Do our unbelieving relatives, friends and acquaintances ever see Christ living in us? A soul conscious of God's nearness can never act on the assumption that "what the eye doesn't see the heart won't grieve over". His eye sees everything and his heart must be sometimes grieved by our words and actions.

Our homes are not the only places where we need to be reminded that "Christ is the Head of this house, the unseen guest at every meal and the silent listener to every conversation". When the Lord's people assemble for worship and fellowship that same principle applies and should be the guiding thought of every movement and expression.

Some day, as with Paul, our earthly pilgrimage will draw to its close; shall we then have the same conviction as Paul? Will our affection and devotion to the Lord be such that there will be only a very thin veil of flesh separating between us? Is it not worth discarding every earthly interest in order that we might win Christ?

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God." (Eph. 3. 17-19 R.S.V.).

THE CROSSING OF JORDAN

An Instance of
Divine Deliverance

"Within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it".

(Josh. 1. 11).

The great day had dawned, and Israel stood at the banks of Jordan, gazing at the Promised Land half-a-mile away. For full forty years had the promise stood; the fathers who had set out from Egypt to inherit this land were dead, their remains buried in the wilderness, but these their children had lived to see the fulfilment of the promise. This very day they were to pass over and enter upon their inheritance.

The crossing of Jordan is usually bracketed together with the passage of the Red Sea. They are two very similar miracles. But there is a fundamental spiritual difference. The passage of the Red Sea was a going into the wilderness; that of Jordan was a coming out of the wilderness. The one was a prelude to a time of humiliation and suffering, the other to a time of conquest and triumph. The one has been used to picture the Christian's deliverance from the bondage of sin and his entrance upon the Christian life, a life of humiliation and suffering whilst in the flesh. The other pictures his final victory and entrance into the heavenly kingdom, into the light and joy of the presence of God, the full attainment of the promised spiritual inheritance. The passing into the glory of the Divine is often spoken of as a crossing of Jordan; never as a crossing of the Red Sea.

For three days they had waited, watching the turbulent waters rushing past, for it was early summer and the snows of Hermon were melting. *"Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest"* (Josh. 3. 15). The stream, normally only about a hundred feet wide and easily fordable, was a raging torrent half-a-mile from bank to bank and quite impossible of passage even by boats, if they had any, and they had not. The Canaanites on the other side were feeling tolerably secure, at least for the next few weeks until the waters would begin to subside.

Obedient to the command of Joshua, the priests were carrying the Ark of the Covenant, swathed in its blue coverings so that it should not be exposed to the gaze of the people, and at a respectful distance, two thousand cubits — a little over half-a-mile — the leaders of the people followed. How they

were to cross the river no man knew, but, confident in Joshua and in their God, the priests went steadily forward, and down to the water's edge. With, perhaps, only a moment's natural hesitation, they stepped boldly into the water.

As they did so the wet mud appeared under their soles. They stepped forward again, slowly, into the stream, and again the water had hardly laved their ankles before it receded and the mud appeared. So they went on, more confidently now, and the water's edge retreated from before them as fast as they stepped into it. The hosts of Israel, higher up on the slope that led down to the river, could see what was happening, and a shout of exultation arose on the still air, a shout that aroused the attention of the Canaanite guards on the other side of the river, and caused them to disappear in haste to warn their superiors of the strange phenomenon that was occurring down there in the bed of Jordan.

The priests were still advancing, very slowly. Always the waters were shrinking and the priests advancing. The watching hosts on the hillside, limited still to their two thousand cubits distance from the Ark, therefore not as yet able to approach even the river's bank, cried and shouted to each other in awe and wonder at this great thing the Lord was doing in their sight

The stream was down in the deepest part of its channel, gliding along more quietly and only thirty yards or so wide. The wide terraces so lately covered by the rushing waters were baking and steaming in the tropical sun, the soft mud hardening as it dried, ready for the trampling of the thousands of feet that would shortly be crossing its wide expanse. And the priests still advanced, slowly, forward

There was but a brook now in the midst of Jordan. Farther up the valley, as the watchers on the hillside looked into the distance, the river bed was completely dry. There was no more water to come down. The last of the flow would soon have passed them on its way into the Dead Sea. The gateway into Canaan stood open before them.

The priests had stopped, and turned aside a little, standing in a group, with the Ark in their midst clearly visible as they held it hoisted up upon their shoulders. They stood thus; there was a moving and a jostling of

men; and as though animated by one impulse the whole host surged forward, down the slopes to the edge of the bare hard mud, swarming on to the level terraces, dropping by successive steps to the place where the priests were standing, spreading out as they did so until the whole valley as far as eye could reach, in either direction, was filled with the thousands of Israel, walking, running, climbing, to the accompaniment of shouts and cries of triumph and joy, up to the terraces on the Canaanite side, and assembling in the wide meadows beyond which could be seen the walls of the garrison town of Jericho. It was not until the last few stragglers had brought up the rear and made their way up the slopes to the Canaanitish side that the priests reformed their little party, and with the Ark still in their midst, moved up in turn, out of Jordan, into the Promised Land. From behind them, as they did so, came the water. The channel was filling, water was coming down again from the higher reaches, and as the people looked the river began to flow in strength, lapping behind the feet of those slow moving priests until by the time they had gained the topmost level with their burden the swirling flood stretched once more from bank to bank. Moab and Canaan were separated again and no man might go nor come. But the host of Israel was in Canaan.

It was a miracle; of that there can be no doubt. Whatever the natural means by which the flow of the river was interrupted, it was by Divine intervention that it occurred just at the moment when Israel needed such an occurrence to make possible their entrance into the Holy Land.

The account in Joshua 3. 15-16 reads "*as they that bare the ark were come into Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water . . . that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap far away, by the city Adam, which is beside Zaretan; and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people passed over right against Jericho.*"

The waters "stood, and rose up upon an heap". Where was this heaping of the waters? The "city Adam" is the modern El Damieh, twenty miles up stream from Jericho, and Zaretan is Zarthan, opposite El Damieh, on the eastern bank of the river. At this point the Jordan traverses the narrowest part of its valley; it flows between clay banks ranging

from forty to one hundred and fifty feet high. The clay is soft, and landslides into the river occasionally occur. A heavy landslide can dam the river completely and interrupt its flow until the weight of the mounting waters is sufficient to wash away the obstruction and permit the river to resume its normal course.

Such a thing has happened three times at least in recorded history. On the 8th December, A.D. 1267, the west bank at El Damieh collapsed and dammed the river so that no water flowed down the channel for sixteen hours. This record rests on the authority of an Arab historian, Nowairi. It meant that the bed of Jordan from El Damieh to the Dead Sea was dry for all that time and anyone could cross on foot. In the year 1906 the same thing happened in consequence of an earthquake, and again in 1927, according to Prof. Garstang, the celebrated earthquake which shook all Palestine, and cracked the Mount of Olives, caused the west bank at El Damieh to collapse. On this occasion the flow of water was interrupted for no less than twenty-one hours, and a number of people did actually cross and recross the river bed on foot.

It is known nowadays that the fall of the walls of Jericho, a few days after the Israelites crossed Jordan, was caused by an earthquake, occurring at the critical moment. It might well be, as suggested by Garstang, that there was a tolerably long period of earthquake activity at this time and that such an earth tremor, occurring at the right moment, threw down the cliffs and dammed the river, just as in 1927. There is at any rate a remarkably exact correspondence between the story in Joshua and these more modern instances and there seems no reasonable doubt that the crossing of Jordan was due to this precise cause.

"Coincidence" says someone. "If this has happened at other times in history then it was just pure luck that it happened when the Israelites were ready to cross. Perhaps, even, Joshua had received secret information by swift runner of what had already happened twenty miles upstream and knew that within an hour or two the river would be running dry".

Perhaps — if it were not that the Scripture provides its own refutation of the suggestion. Joshua knew precisely what was going to happen at El Damieh several hours at least before it happened!

At some time during the previous day, when Israel was already gathered on the banks of Jordan in anticipation of the cross-

ing, Joshua had said to them "Sanctify yourselves; for *to-morrow* the Lord will do wonders among you" (ch. 3, vs. 5). He, and they, already knew that by some means or other they were to cross Jordan. Joshua now knew that it was to be the very next day; whether at that time he also knew the means by which the crossing was to be effected does not appear. But that night — early in the morning hours — the Lord spoke to Joshua (vs. 7) "*This day,*" He said "will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel . . . and thou shalt command the priests . . ." etc. This was the day of the crossing; it is probable that the word of the Lord came to Joshua during the silent watches of the night, for it is most unlikely that the day itself with all its excitement would give any time to Joshua for quiet communion with God. And there was a full programme of events to be fitted into twelve short hours. First was Joshua's charge and instructions to the children of Israel, then the selection of twelve men from amongst their number to be responsible for bringing out of the river's bed twelve great stones to be a memorial of the crossing. It was whilst giving these instructions that Joshua revealed his knowledge of how the miracle was to be effected. "The waters of Jordan" he said "*shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above, and they shall stand upon an heap*" (vs. 13). This speech must have been delivered not later than eight or nine o'clock in the morning, for it would take the people several hours more before they could be ready for the crossing, and time for, perhaps, two millions of people to cross before sundown had still to be allowed. By eleven o'clock, perhaps, the people would begin to remove from their tents and by midday the priests be venturing into the edge of the rushing flood, and it would be at this time therefore that the first effects of the collapse that had occurred upstream became visible at Jericho in the retreat of the water's edge. Now if this effect became observable at Jericho at midday the disaster at El Damiéh must have occurred not more than four hours before; the high velocity of the water in the Jordan would drain the channel between the two places within that time. It must be concluded then that the collapse occurred not earlier than eight o'clock and yet Joshua knew precisely what was going to happen when he rose that morning, and probably earlier, during the small hours.

Reasonably, it may be expected that God

revealed this coming event to him by means of a dream, as has been done so often in Scriptural story. Joshua saw the high, overhanging cliffs, the rushing river sluicing its way between them; in that incomprehensible manner associated with dreams he knew that he was looking at Jordan, although the place itself he had probably never seen before. As he looked, the ponderous masses moved and slid across the foaming channel, and as the waters behind began to pile themselves up behind the barrier, and those in front quickly drained away and left the river-bed bare, he knew that he was seeing what the Lord was about to do, and awoke, ready for his great task. Thus it was, perhaps that he was able to give Israel so accurate and graphic a description of the marvel that was to happen in a few more hours' time.

The rest of the day's programme fits into this picture very well. By one o'clock the crossing was in full swing. It need not be assumed that the people waited to negotiate the river channel in one long procession—two million would take a long time to cross in that way. More probably Israel was encamped along a wide "front"—perhaps five miles or even more along the course of the river — and when the word was given they began to cross in a body. In such fashion the entire host, with all their flocks and herds, tents and baggage, could be inside the Promised Land in three hours. By four o'clock the transfer could have been accomplished and the priests begin to make their own way up out of the river-bed. Thus the water began to flow again, following their retreating footsteps as they came slowly up the terraces. By six o'clock — sunset—the river was in full flood once more.

The crossing of Jordan was a miracle. The agency used was a natural one; the powers of Nature were enlisted in the service of God. But God knew beforehand what He was going to do and when He was going to do it; He gave Joshua due notice several hours before the event, and when the hour had struck for the barriers to be thrown down and Israel enter his Promised Land, "*the sea saw it, and fled; Jordan was driven back . . . at the presence of the Lord*".

"The difference between theology and revelation is great and must not be confused. The latter is the work of God's spirit in man; the former, the work of man's mind reflecting on God's work."—George Tyrrell



Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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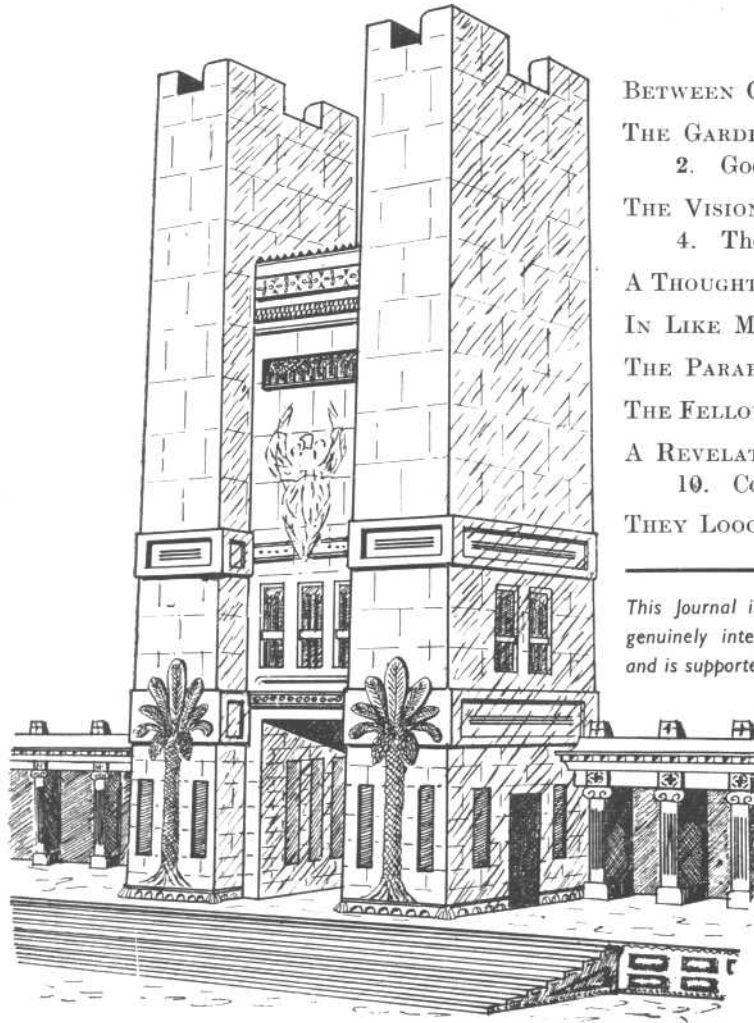
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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Between Ourselves

The usual Annual Convention of Bible study classes in London is planned to be held on August 1, 2 and 3 at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, and a number of speakers from various parts of the country will address the gathering. Programmes and details may be obtained when ready from the Convention Secretary, Bro. W. Neil, 5 Oxford Avenue, Hayes, Middlesex. Proceedings will open at 3.0 p.m. on Saturday and terminate at 4.30 p.m. on Monday. Visitors from the provinces desiring accommodation should write as early as possible to the Accommodation Secretary, Bro. A. Charcharos, 54 West View Drive, Woodford Green, Essex, with full details of requirements, and hotel reservations will be made for them. Those applying to the Secretary for programmes will please expect these at about the beginning of June.

* * *

Readers who have taken advantage of the "Land of the Bible" Information service conducted by Bro. L. H. Bunker have received recently a neat booklet entitled "Nazareth" giving a well-written account of the city and its leading features, illustrated with a number of photographs in colour. Those who do not already participate in this service may have details on application to Mr. L. H. Bunker, 3 Ingram Close, Stanmore, Middlesex.

A new book "They Lived in Israel" by L. H. Bunker, has been published by Chosen Books and is now available. The book is planned on the lines of a survey from pre-history to the modern State, and comprises some 60 pages with about 30 illustrations and maps. The scope includes sections on the land, the language, weights and measures, the Law, women in Israel, home and social life, the countryside, Bible cities, the people and their homeland, and "the way ahead". The book

contains a mass of interesting information expressed in concise language and should be useful to any who are followers of the developments now taking place in the land of Israel. The price is 9/3 post free (\$1.50 in Canada and U.S.A.). Cheques and postal orders should be payable to "Chosen Books" and crossed, and should be sent with orders to "Chosen Books" BCM/CHOSEN, London, W.C.1. (Note; In no case should orders or cash be sent to Lyncroft Gardens; we are not connected in any way with this publication).

* * *

The current instalment of the series "Study Notes in the First Epistle of Peter" is unavoidably omitted this month and will be resumed in our next issue.

Gone from us

Sis. R. Pixton (*Manchester*)

Sis. J. F. Thurman (*Peterborough*)

"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away."

There is something so quietly consistent, so steadfast and sure, about a glow that is maintained. Let us not ask nor seek the sensational. Abraham Lincoln used to tell a story of a boat that plied the Mississippi which had such a big whistle that every time it was blown they had to stop the boat to get up steam. That is typical of a good deal of Christian experience and enterprise. There is the creation of tremendous enthusiasm which manifests itself in one terrific blaze of glory which just burns itself out. For us, please God, the steady, spiritual glow.

GARDEN OF EDEN

2.—God Planted a Garden

*An Examination
of the Story of
Adam and Eve*

The story of man's creation includes a description of the place where it happened. The narrative is tantalisingly brief; it informs us that "*the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed*" (ch. 2. 8) and adds a few geographical indications which have exercised the ingenuity of many commentators of many generations. Endeavours to identify these place names with districts now existing have been made; China, India, and territories westward all the way to Armenia, Mesopotamia and the lost continent of Atlantis have had their advocates, but none really fit the requirements. At the same time it is evident that the unknown writer was at pains to define the location of the Garden for the benefit at least of his contemporaries if not of future readers. And it is hardly conceivable that the Holy Spirit would have preserved such a description if it had no basis in reality or nothing to teach those who read it so many millenniums later. No Scripture narrative is without meaning or preserved without reason. The fact that the majority of students have failed to make much of this narrative is no proof of its unreliability. A great many of the statements of Strabo, the Greek geographer of the time of Christ, were dismissed as fanciful nonsense by educated men of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but when the wilds of Africa and Asia had been explored by Europeans much of that which had been thus dismissed was found to be perfectly accurate. Strabo himself repudiated with scorn certain findings of still more ancient geographers and they too have since been proved right.

It is possible to make something of the narrative. The older students assumed that Genesis was first produced in written form by Moses under inspiration of God and that he described the Garden as it existed in his own day and—more improbably—as it has continued ever since. On this basis the earth was scoured for physical features and place names to fit the description and it has to be admitted that there really are none such. But nowadays it is known that Moses was not the original writer of these chapters; he copied and translated from earlier originals, and the work of recent years in the understanding of ancient Eastern languages has now made it

possible to look at these chapters from a new angle and form a tolerably clear picture of when, where and in what language they were written. That in turn casts an entirely new light on this description of the Garden.

The Eden story was probably written in the Semitic land of Mari on the upper Euphrates somewhere about twenty-five centuries before Christ. It is only within the past thirty years that the remains of this Mari civilisation have been extensively explored by archæologists. The people of Mari wandered down the Euphrates from their ancestral home in North Syria, occupying the Sumerian lands bordering the Euphrates and Tigris, and eventually obtained the ascendancy. These people were the sons of Shem mentioned in Gen. 10. 21-31 and of them was descended Abraham who lived some six hundred years later in Ur of the Chaldees four hundred miles to the south of Mari. The scribe who wrote the story possessed a good knowledge of the geography of the Sumerian lands of his own time, and the relation of those lands to the Garden of Eden of older time; he was well informed in the details of the Creation story and well able to place his knowledge before his immediate readers. If we put ourselves mentally in the position of a God-fearing citizen of Mari reading this account in about the year 2500 B.C., we shall understand the story better.

The place names given in the narrative are mainly those current in Sumeria at that time. There are five districts, Eden, Havilah, Ethiopia, Assyria, and Nod, and four rivers, Pison, Gihon, Hiddekel, and Euphrates. Any reasonably well-educated person having this account before him at the time—or at any time up to the days of Abraham—would be at no loss to determine exactly the places in question; thanks to the research of the last fifty years in Bible lands we need have no greater difficulty to-day.

"*And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden*" (ch. 2. 8). "Eden" is the Hebrew transliteration of the Sumerian word "*Idinu*"—"The Plain"—the proper name which they had given to the low flat country at the head of the Persian Gulf. "Eastward" is the Hebrew "*qedem*" meaning that which is before or in front, either in respect of position or time. When used in respect of position,

since the Hebrews viewed themselves as facing the east, "east" is the natural meaning, and the word is so translated about 25 times in the O.T.; when used in respect of time it denotes that which is past, first or ancient, and is rendered by "ancient" or by equivalent words about 31 times in the O.T. The early translators, thinking of the Garden in terms of position and knowing nothing about Eden anyway, took the word as defining "position" and adopted "east" as the probable meaning. In fact, the unknown scribe intended something quite different. He meant the "ancient Eden" as distinct from the then modern existing "Eden" or "The Plain" known to his readers. In other words, the Garden had been located in a part of Eden or "The Plain" which no longer existed; as the upshot will show, since the days of Adam and Eve it had been submerged by the waters of the Gulf.

On this basis the puzzle of the four rivers which "went out of Eden" to water the Garden begins to make sense, and some confirmation is afforded the persistent Babylonian tradition that the events of man's creation and fall took place in the land known to the Sumerians as Tilmun (now the Bahrein Islands, three hundred miles down the Persian Gulf). We have therefore to read Gen. 2. 8 "And the Lord God planted a garden in the ancient Eden" as contrasted with the modern Eden with which the readers were fully acquainted. Because that ancient land with its rivers had become submerged by the waters of the Gulf during the intervening centuries the historian proceeded to describe it in terms of those rivers as they existed in his own day.

The physical appearance of Mesopotamia is always changing. At the present time the two great rivers, Tigris and Euphrates, join forces a hundred miles from the sea and complete their course as a united stream, the Shatt-el-Arab. Halfway along this united stream the waters of the Kherkhah and Karun come down from the Persian mountains and discharge their joint load into the Shatt-el-Arab through wide marshes; on the other side the Wady al Batin, a deep gorge which once brought a mighty river down from Central Arabia, now contributes a minor flow. The land is flat and marshy, built up by sediment carried down by these rivers, and is constantly encroaching on the sea and pushing the shore line farther south—at the present time at the rate of one mile every seventy years. Ur of the Chaldees is to-day more than a hundred miles from the sea; in Abraham's

day it was on the coast, and the four rivers entered the Gulf through separate outlets. These same four rivers are those whose ancient courses the old-time chronicler sets out to describe.

"A river went out of Eden to water the Garden; and from thence it was parted and became unto four heads" (ch. 2. 10). The word for "Parted" means to be separated or dispersed; that for "heads" is "rosh" meaning the beginning, the first, the originating or controlling power. Four tributary water-courses converged in Eden, the Plain, to form a river which watered and fertilised the Garden. It follows that the Garden was situated somewhere below the confluence of the four streams, between their junction and the sea.

"The name of the first is Pison; that is it which surrounds the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold: and the gold of that land is good; there is bdellium and the onyx stone" (ch. 2. 11-12). Pison as a name has dropped out of history; Havilah lingered in Old Testament times. There were two lands of Havilah, one in Central Arabia settled by Semitic peoples the descendants of Joktan (see Gen. 10. 19 and 25. 18), the other the Sumerian Havilah settled by the sons of Cush (see Gen. 10. 7). The latter is the one intended here; the minerals mentioned make it possible to identify the district. The Sumerians obtained their gold, some from Oman six hundred miles to the south, the greater part from the mountains east of the Tigris in what is now Iran (Persia) only two hundred miles away. In the same mountains they mined the semi-precious blue-green stone (of which many specimens are in museums to-day), which they called *samtu*, the Hebrews *shoham*, translated "onyx stone" in the O.T., and known to-day as lapis lazuli. The Kherkhah river, rising far inside Iran, traversed this region in wide curves; in its lower reaches, and around its outlet to the sea, the Sumerians gathered pearls, (the bdellium of this verse) as pearl divers do in the same area to-day. The pearls, the lapis lazuli and the gold fix the modern Kerkhah as the ancient Pison.

"The name of the second river is Gihon; the same is it that compasseth (surrounds) the whole land of Ethiopia" (Cush) (ch. 2. 13). Ethiopia came to the A.V. from the Greek Septuagint as the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Cush*. The African country of Ethiopia was known as Cush in ancient times and is so referred to in the O.T. from Isaiah's period onward. This was not the Cush of

Genesis; here is the story of a great migration. Cushites were the descendants of Cush the son of Ham (Gen. 10. 6) and were therefore a Sumerian people. They originated on the Euphrates and history finds them being forced down the west side of the Persian Gulf by the pressure of Semitic tribes (sons of Shem) descending the Euphrates from the north. As the Semitic Arabs filled the Arabian peninsula the Cushites moved along its south coast, the Hadramhaut, crossed the Red Sea near Aden and by the time of Israel's Exodus from Egypt were colonising eastern Africa, whence the application of the name Cush (Ethiopia) to the African land still bearing that name. This migration had hardly begun when Genesis 2 was being written and the land of Cush was then confined to the district west of the Euphrates and southward toward Arabia. The Gihon was the modern Wady-al-Batin, watering the whole of Northern Arabia. In ancient times this was a fertile land and the Wady-al-Batin a major river; through the ages that whole part of the earth's surface is being slowly elevated and with the rising land level the river has shrunk to a winter torrent only and the land has become desert.

"The name of the third river is Hiddekel; that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria" (ch. 2. 14). Hiddekel is the river known since ancient times as Tigris. The original Akkadian (Semitic) name was Diglat. According to Prof. A. H. Sayce, the addition of the Akkadian prefix "*Hid*" for river, so forming Hid-Diglat (Hiddekel) betrayed the scribe's unfamiliarity with Akkadian grammar, indicating that he was probably a native Sumerian. The reference to the river going "toward the east of Assyria" is subject to the same consideration as vs. 8, "eastward in Eden", but in this case the close affinity between this statement and those governing the other two rivers, each defining a political division of the Sumerian world, probably justifies taking this to mean "before in place" where the other meant "before in time". From the point of view of a writer living in Mari on the Euphrates, it would be correct to speak of the Tigris as being "before" or "in front of" Assyria which lay almost due east of Mari.

"And the fourth river is Euphrates" (ch. 2. 14). The style in which the fourth river is introduced, with no further description, shows that it was perfectly well known to the intended readers. It was in fact their own national river, running through the centre of their land. It is still known by its original

name—*Purat* in Sumerian, *Ufratu* the Persian equivalent, of which Euphrates is the Greek and therefore the English equivalent. This is the "Great River" of the Bible and perhaps the most famous river of all history.

So the students of that day, reading the story of creation, learned that the rivers of their own land had in the days of Eden joined together to form one main watercourse which traversed the Garden before reaching the sea, thus implying that the area now covered by the Persian Gulf was dry land, a great valley through which the main river made its way to an outlet somewhere in the present Indian Ocean. Geology shows that at some indeterminate time in the past this was in fact the case, that both the Gulf and part of the Indian Ocean were dry land, that the River Indus from India met the Euphrates and they emptied their joint waters into an ocean somewhere in the distant south. That unknown scribe of Mari anticipated the findings of modern geology by more than four thousand years.

An up-to-date illustration might be interesting. It is known to-day that at one time the North Sea was dry land, connecting Britain with the Continent. The Rhine from Germany and the Schelde from Belgium combined to flow together northward through what is now the North Sea, being joined on the way by the Thames and the Humber, eventually falling into the Arctic Ocean. Suppose a writer in mediæval England, knowing of this and wishing to describe an incident of those ancient days, were to write a description of the land as it then existed. He might very fittingly have used almost identical words to those in Genesis. He could have said, (remembering that the present flat country of the Netherlands now borders those lost lands under the North Sea) *"There was a fertile land in the ancient Netherlands, and a river went out of the Netherlands to water that country, and had four tributaries. The name of the first is the Rhine, which traverses the land of Germany, where there are mountains and forests. The name of the second is Schelde which winds through Belgium. The name of the third is Humber, which is northward in the Midlands; and the fourth river is the Thames."* Anyone reading that statement would easily discern where the lost land was supposed to be, and the casual mention of the Thames would make it pretty plain that the writer was himself a Londoner or at least resident in the Thames Valley or Southern England, or writing from the standpoint of

such an one.

The writer of Genesis 2 intended his readers to understand that the lost Garden was situated somewhere under the shallow waters of the Persian Gulf. A more fitting place for man's introduction to the earth could hardly have been selected. This spacious valley, three hundred miles wide at its greatest width by six hundred long, with the great river meandering through its centre, ran roughly north-west to south-east. A glance at a map shows that it was almost entirely surrounded by the mountains of Persia and the high table-land of Central Arabia, a wonderfully sheltered stretch of parkland in a region where summer would be virtually perpetual. The soil, composed of fertile silt brought down by the river, and therefore rich in everything that makes for plant growth,

must have supported a profusion of tree and plant life. Here, if anywhere, is the place where the first few generations of men, sprung from Adam and Eve, could have made progress in knowledge of the earth's resources untrammelled by the necessity of labouring in the sweat of their brows. The great valley, extending from the Indian Ocean to the Armenian mountains, could have supported many millions of human beings before need existed to penetrate the encircling highlands and find living space in the wider world beyond. By then they would have been more prepared for the task of subduing the earth and making it fruitful (Gen. 1. 28) than were those two who entered that wider world prematurely because of their sin.

(To be continued)

THE VISION OF JOEL

4. The Cry of Faith

An Exposition of the
Book of Joel

"Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for He is gracious, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and repenteth him of the evil." (Chap. 2. 12-13).

This is a wonderful invitation—wonderful because God has at this very moment allowed the heathen executors of his judgment to come in amongst the holy people to ravage them. God could have kept them at arm's length, but no, He allowed them to come as it were into the city and right into the people's houses, and it is then, when all hope seems at an end, that He invites the afflicted ones to turn to him in sincerity and faith and He will deliver them. "Who knoweth" cries Joel "if He will turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him?" Evidently Joel himself was one of such who did know that God would so do, for in the preceding verse he has stated his conviction that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness. Jonah, half a century later, used precisely the same words, when remonstrating with God over his leniency with the Ninevites. "I knew," he says, "that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of evil. Wherefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life away from me; for it is better for me to die than to live"

(Jonah 4. 2). Strange that one prophet should exhort his people to repentance because God is merciful, and another should reproach God for his mercy to people who had repented; but we are just as inconsistent in our own profession and our walk before God in many ways. Both prophets really sought the same end; they both wanted to see righteousness exalted and evil destroyed, and to both of them evil and the Assyrians were one and the same thing. And even so late as this present day men have not learned that evil is not banished from the earth by the mere destruction of one nation which has practised evil things.

So Joel's exhortation here was one to repentance in the face of threatened and imminent disaster. As the chapter is followed down to verses 20 and 22 and onward, it is seen that the exhortation must have been heeded, for here, at last, is the evidence of Divine deliverance, full and complete. The northern invaders are driven into the wilderness and destroyed, the land recovers from the ravages that it has suffered and brings forth its harvests once again, there is a great restitution of all that was lost, and, most wonderful of all, Israel is converted and turns to the Lord in sincerity (verse 27). And the question immediately springs to the mind—has this part of the prophecy had its fulfilment?

As the pages of history are scanned, the

answer must be "No!". Never yet has there been a time in Israel's history when by any stretch of the imagination such things as these could be said to have been true. When at any time has it been that "I will no more make you a reproach among the nations" (2. 19)? From Joel's time to our own day they have been a reproach and derision. From Joel's time to our own day they have been the spoil of the nations. And when it was true of any alien power that has ever invaded the Holy Land that God has revealed himself to their destruction, led them into the barren wilderness of the Dead Sea and made them a wonder and an astonishment in their end? When has God ever restored to Israel the years that the great ravaging powers have taken from them, restored to them all that they have lost, and given them to eat in plenty and be satisfied? And when, above all things, has it been true that Israel has known and acknowledged that God is dwelling in her midst, and has put her trust in him, and never again been ashamed (2. 26)? The signs of such a wonderful national conversion have never been manifest; to-day they are more lacking than ever. The only logical interpretation of this passage is that it refers to a time yet to come, and when that fact is realised it is easy to see that these events are the immediate predecessors of the promised pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh spoken of in verses 28-32.

At verse 12, therefore, Joel's mind has passed completely out of touch with his own day and its dangers, and entered into the then far distant day of which his own was merely a picture in miniature. From verse 18 the verbs are properly in the past tense. "Then the Lord *was* jealous for his land, and he *had* pity on His people" etc. Joel was seeing, in vision, the result of the sincere repentance and pleading with God described in verses 15-17, when the priests, the ministers of the Lord, wept between the porch and the altar, calling upon God to deliver. Evidently, therefore, he saw something that represented to him the stirring events of the Time of the End, when the greatest invader of all time would be hammering at the portals of the Holy Land "to take a spoil and to take a prey".

It is significant that in verse 20 the phrase is "I will remove far off from you the *northern* army." Israel's enemies of Joel's own day—Assyrians, Scythians, Babylonians—came from the north, down the great highway that ran from Carchemish on the Euphrates, through the Plain of Esdraelon, the literal

"Armageddon" of the Bible, down into Egypt. But after the Babylonians there were no more invaders from the north, *until the Time of the End!* Greeks and Romans came from the West; Persians and Saracens from the South; Mongols from the East; Arabs from the South; and in more recent days, Britain from the West. It is not until that mysterious King of Daniel 11, the "King of the North", comes upon the scene, that Israel is again afflicted by a "northern army". And that is still future, even though by all present political indications, it may be a very imminent event.

If it is true, then, that by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Joel is now seeing in vision the events of the last great conflict in the end of this Age, we do well to stand by his side and endeavour to see the same things in the same way. There is a striking correspondence between this chapter and those of Ezekiel 38-39 and Daniel 11. In each of these passages the invader comes from the north and enters the Holy Land, attempts to ravage the land and its people, is met by the rising up of God himself, and comes to an ignominious end. The fame of the happening goes out to all the world, and not only Israel, but all men, know that Divine power is manifest and supreme at Jerusalem once more. In all three accounts the place of the invader's defeat and destruction is given as between the two seas, the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean. "I will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east sea (Dead Sea), and his hinder part toward the utmost sea (the Mediterranean)". So says Chapter 2, verse 20. "I will give unto Gog a place there of graves in Israel, the valley of the passengers on the east of the sea" (Ezek. 39. 11). He shall plant the tabernacles of his palace *between the seas*—yet he shall come to his end." (Dan. 11. 45).

What is the significance of this three-fold testimony? What are the associations connected with this district around the Dead Sea that it should be chosen by three prophets, each speaking under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to symbolise the overthrow of the last great power to rear itself against the incoming Kingdom of God?

History records two stirring events of which that district was the scene. One is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Abraham, and the other the miraculous deliverance of Jehoshaphat and his people from the Moabites in consequence of their faith in God. Are these the pointers for us? Is this a hint that the destruction of the hosts of

Gog and Magog will come about, not by the people of God defending themselves with earthly weapons, but in consequence of calm faith in God and his rising up to defend them? That seems to be the consistent testimony of Scripture. "At that time shall Michael stand up" says the revealing Angel to Daniel. This second chapter of Joel becomes eloquent in that case. The last great invasion, the last onslaught of the powers of evil against the re-gathered holy people and the Kingdom of which they are to be the nucleus, will be that in the face of which the people are in the attitude of heart depicted in verses 12-17 of chapter 2, a condition of repentance, of supplication, and of faith that God can, and will, deliver.

If this be so, that is the sign we must look for in the, at present, unhappy so-called "Holy Land". The gathering of the northern host, who is to "enter into the countries" and "overflow and pass over" as Daniel 11 tells us, is obvious enough in these post war years. But the "land of unwalled villages" of Ezek. 38, where the people dwell in prosperity and security, is not yet discerned. Evidently there is more water to flow under the bridges before all is ready for the climax that is described in these prophecies. But time is marching on with great strides toward their fulfilment. We must take the lesson of Joel 2. 12-17 to heart, and wait for its fulfilment in reality.

Just in passing, be it noted that in Joel, as in Ezekiel and Daniel, it is the power of the North that is depicted in the role of the great aggressor. The "king of the South" is mild and insignificant by contrast. In Daniel 11, the King of the South seems to disappear before the climax of the chapter is reached; in Ezekiel, where the same power appears to be depicted by the "merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof" (Ezek. 38. 13) the part they play is a very passive one; it does not seem that they approve the Northern invasion, and equally that they are not in a position to do much about it. And in Joel they do not appear at all. Is this an indication that at the very end the power of the South has weakened to such an extent as to be no longer one of importance? All this still lies in the future, and we cannot be dogmatic, but such questions, viewed in the light of current developments in the earth, are interesting.

But now the prophecy passes on, beyond the great invasion, "Jacob's trouble", and the great deliverance, into those early years of the Kingdom when the Lord will "reign in Zion, and before his ancients, gloriously".

"Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice—the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength" (verses 21-22). These verses are reminiscent of Isaiah's "Millennial" passages, and well they might be, for they refer to the beginning of that same blessed day. The Time of Trouble is over, the Kingdom has been set up, the presence of the King proclaimed to all and sundry, and the law of the Lord is going forth from Zion. Appropriately enough Joel sees all this in terms of the restored and renovated earth, and rightly so, for one of the first evidences of "restitution" will be the greater fruitfulness of the earth itself, providing food for the soon-to-return multitudes of the dead. Hence come verse 23. "Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God; for He hath given you the former rain moderately, and He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month." The Vulgate turns the first phrase "the former rain moderately" into "a teacher of righteousness", and on this basis some have found in this verse a prophecy of the coming of Jesus. In the century prior to the First Advent there was a movement, or "sect", among the Jews which looked for such a "teacher of righteousness" to precede the "Last Day" and the pouring out of the Spirit, and the expectation thus aroused did much to cause men to be "in expectation" as is stated in the Gospels. But it is not likely that Joel did prophesy thus; his picture is one of the fields and crops, and in this verse he is likening God's treatment of Israel at the End Time to the regular succession of the seasons. The first expression really means "rain in just measure," and the three "rains" after that, the three stages into which the agricultural year was divided. First, in October, came the "rain", the heavy downpour which softened the dry ground, and made ploughing and sowing possible. Then, from December to February, the "former rain", or as the Hebrews called it, "sprinkling rain", continuous light rain that encouraged steady growth. Lastly, in April and May, the "latter rain" that refreshed the ripening wheat and crops.

What a vivid picture of this trial and trouble upon Israel, and its outcome! First, the "heavy rain" of intense trouble that ploughed men's hearts and made possible the sowing of Divine seed; next, the "sprinkling rain" of Divine care and deliverance, and the early processes of Kingdom work calculated to bring Israel into conformity with the new

laws and lead them to a condition of harmony with the Kingdom arrangements. Finally, the "latter rain" that finished the ripening work in their hearts and made them full citizens of the Millennial Kingdom. This is a finely-drawn picture of the providences of God descending upon men "like the gentle rain from heaven".

And the result? "*The floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil*" (verse 24). Millennial abundance is to follow immediately, and the cry go out to all the nations "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters—come ye, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa. 55. 1).

"*And I will restore to you*"—precious promise—"the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you" (verse 25). If this "great army" does in fact embrace all Israel's oppressors through the ages, there may be more than a coincidence in this selection of four out of the many species of locusts with which the country was so often afflicted. Moffatt gives the variants in clearest language—he renders "the lopping, the swarming, the leaping, the devouring locusts". The *gazam*, the "loppers", might very well picture the first great world power, Babylon, which "lopped" Israel from their land, and took them into captivity; the *arbeh*, the "swarmers" (cankerworm) could equally well picture the overspreading might of Persia, which, although it did restore Judea

and Jerusalem, did so only as part of its campaign to subdue and cover all the nations of Western Asia. Quite appropriate is the application of *yelek*, the "leapers" (caterpillar) to Greece, the nation that is pictured in Daniel 8 as a tempestuous he-goat coming against the ram (Persia) with such fury as seemingly not even to touch the ground in his mad onward rush; and of course the epithet of "devourer" (the *chasil*, palmerworm) is very fitting to Rome, the fourth, and, in its derived successors, the greatest of Israel's oppressors. And God is going to restore to Israel all that these have devoured. No wonder that Peter at Pentecost associated this prophecy with the Times of Restitution of all things, spoken of by all the prophets from the beginning.

So Israel will be delivered at the last, and "*eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of . . . God . . . and never be ashamed.*" (verse 26-27). Joel in his haste has run a little too far forward; in the next verse he has to come back somewhat and talk of the Spirit that is to be poured out upon all flesh; for the present he is absorbed in his vision of the deliverance of Israel, and for a moment has forgotten the rest of the world. The rest of Joel's prophecy is taken up with what happens to them and Israel's mission of conversion, and in order adequately to deal with that aspect of his message, he has to go back and tell of the same time of trouble from the standpoint of the Gentile nations.

(To be continued)

Voices

There are little sights and sounds with which we are all familiar, that have a healing effect upon the mind that is overstrung with work and worry. The ripple of the silvery stream beneath the shady trees; the hum of the bees and the chirping of the grasshopper in the clover; the golden corn waving in the soft breezes; the flitting butterfly amid the fragrant flowers; the glittering insects in the grass basking in the warmth of the sun; the rustle of the rabbits in the undergrowth; the cheerful singing of the birds; the fleecy clouds floating in the blue skies; the melodious skylark soaring exultingly above all. Such influences are too subtle for human explanation. Little voices they are, proclaiming the grand harmony, the peace universal in nature, and they act as a restorative mentally and physically.

But there are other little sights and sounds of a spiritual kind that tend to heal the heart that is overwrought with failure and sorrow. These are little voices proclaiming a loving God who is watching and caring; a great High Priest who is sympathetic, understanding and ready to help. What sights and sounds are these? The kindly word gently spoken in a tone of cheer; the sudden sparkle of a gracious smile; the unexpected gleam of a sympathetic tear; the little extra pressure of the hand; the secret act of self-sacrifice, unseen, unheard; the silent look that can find no words yet shows it has heard and understood. These are powerful little voices. They require no scholarship, no talent, no skill beyond the scholarship, talent and skill that the spirit of God bequeaths to every loving and earnest heart.

(Forest Gate Bible Monthly)

A Thought for the Month

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (Jas. 1.27).

There is a very manifest tendency in these days of extremes to lay the emphasis upon that aspect of the Christian calling for which one has a preference and to ignore that which does not suit one's own taste. There are, it may be, three types of those who "profess and call themselves Christians", in any sect or group; we might define them the Professional, the Pious and the Practising. They have their distinguishing characteristics which separate them the one from the other, and each a varying degree of usefulness in the Lord's cause, but one of the three is the more likely to learn the lessons of life and to be fitted for the future work of the Church than are the others.

The Professional Christian places his church or sect foremost, upholding it and its institutions and its traditions, right or wrong. He is not usually conspicuous for his knowledge of the Scriptures or his appreciation of the call of discipleship, but he is well-informed on affairs of the day, details of current events, and those things which have to do with church activities, social interests, youth welfare, and so on. The Church is, to him, a convenient background for table tennis parties and whist drives, and the presiding minister a useful contact to give "tone" to whatever is being done. If he ever had studied the Bible to satisfy himself as to the basis of his faith it was a long time ago and he is more concerned now with keeping the church attendance up to normal and its finances in a sound condition. He has never heard—or never heeded—the call to consecration, and the phrase "a covenant by sacrifice" means nothing to him. He knows a lot about this world but very little about the next. That does not worry him, for all his interests and ideas are wrapped up with the things of this world, and the hidden Christ is only a historical figure, the long-since-dead founder of the institution which he himself to-day actively supports. Of the coming of Jesus to establish an earthly Kingdom he may have heard, but if so he has given so fantastic an idea no credence. If such an event did happen he would of course quickly accommodate himself to the new situation and say, importantly, to his new leader, "*Lord, Lord, in thy name I*

have done many wonderful works . . ."

The Pious Christian is of different stamp. His Christianity is to him a very intimate and personal thing, a means by which he may attain his own salvation but not an instrument wherewith to influence his fellows, the "world", outside. He holds tenaciously to the Scriptural truth that God has appointed a day in the which He will deal with the world of men, and is not disturbed therefore if little or none of the light he possesses reaches them now. As often as not he lays considerable emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge and the desirability of Scriptural research for its own sake, and is therefore a keen student of the Scriptures, and an expert in matters of prophetic interpretation. He is intensely—and sincerely—devotional, attaching supreme importance to personal Christian experience, to the inward sense of the indwelling Holy Spirit and the consciousness and confidence of salvation. He has heard the call to consecration and counts himself a footstep follower of the Lord Jesus; but his solicitude for his own spiritual welfare and perhaps that of his immediate fellow-believers excludes in great degree any thought for the interests, spiritual or material, of humanity in general. Scorning and despising "the flesh", and this life and world and all that is in it, he looks only to the next life and next world, waiting with some impatience for the day when he can meet his Lord and say "*Lord, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets . . ."*

Apart from both these is the Practising Christian, the one who has made his faith a personal thing and goes on from that to make his Christianity effective in the world. He is separated from men by his consecration but associated with the world for his service, service to fellow-men which is also service to God. He is a light in the world, showing outwardly an illumination which is all-pervading within. He holds forth the bread of life, bread which he himself has received from the One Who gives living bread from heaven. His service is according to his ability and opportunity, but it is always a service that conveys to other men something of the good that he himself has received, and shows them something of the life that he himself lives in Christ. To him Christianity is a way of life, and every aspect of life has to be shaped and controlled by the faith for which he stands. He has

learned to effect the proper division between outward works and inward piety, between service for this world and preparation for the next, and in so doing he is becoming well fitted for appointment to the exalted position of joint-heir with Christ, a Priest and King, for the world-wide work of the next Age. It was of such that the Saviour declared they were to be in the world but not of the world:

the Professional Christian is *IN* the world and *OF* the world; the Pious Christian is *NOT IN* the world and *NOT OF* the world; neither of these is the injunction left us by our Lord. "*IN* the world but *NOT OF* the world" is his ideal, and the only position that can earn his commendation at the end "*Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy lord*".

"IN LIKE MANNER"

A Bible
Study

"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? 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." (Acts 1. 11).

An important text, this, when the *manner* of our Lord's return is being considered. The authority of the heavenly messengers cannot be questioned; they were certainly commissioned by God to convey this message to the disciples. The words themselves are clear and unambiguous. There is nothing of a symbolic or metaphorical nature about them; they have a definite and positive ring. We do well therefore to give this brief but vital passage some careful thought, for it contains doctrinal teaching of considerable moment.

It is well to recall fundamental principles at the outset. We hold as essential to an orderly understanding of the Divine Plan that our Lord Jesus Christ, since his resurrection from the dead on the third day, is no longer *man*. His humanity He gave on the Cross, as He said, for the life of the world. The Father highly exalted him, giving him a name which is above every name and setting him at his own right hand. In this we perceive the Scriptural teaching that our Lord, who "laid aside" the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, for the suffering of death, at his resurrection took again that glory and entered into the splendour of spirit being. From then He was "the Lord that Spirit", pre-eminent among the spiritual hosts of Heaven, and like them invisible to human sight, except as He might choose to reveal himself in temporary human guise, as He did in the "appearances" during the time between his resurrection and his ascension. But the "gardener", or the "stranger", whom the disciples saw on those occasions, was not the real Christ, Whom they could not look upon

with mortal eyes and still live. What they did see was an outward frame of flesh and clothes adopted for the occasion, as did Daniel and Manoah and Abraham and others who in their own time similarly held converse with messengers from the spiritual world. The Lord Jesus at his Return comes in the full glory of his spiritual being and is not visible to human eyes unless it be in the same way that Gabriel appeared to Daniel (Dan. 8. 15) and to Mary (Luke 1. 26).

Is this what the angels meant when they said He would return "in like manner"? In discussing this question the background of the incident must be considered.

The disciples were still in almost complete ignorance of their Master's plans. They just could not realise that the age-old hope of Messiah's Kingdom, to follow immediately upon his Advent, was not to be fulfilled. After his death those hopes had been dashed but now that they had become convinced of the fact of his resurrection the old expectations revived. They had asked him now if, at this time, He was about to restore again the Kingdom to Israel; for He was talking about their tarrying in Jerusalem to receive the Holy Spirit and that reminded them of his earlier words when He had said that He himself must go away and the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, come in his place. And then He had led them out to the Mount of Olives, giving his parting injunction, blessed them, and before their amazed eyes visibly ascended into the heavens and disappeared from sight. At that moment they surely stood in need not only of enlightenment but also, sorely, of comfort and encouragement. This was a second and final crushing of all their immediate hopes. They knew now that He had gone; all their rosy dreams dissolved into nothingness.

"Ye men of Israel . . . this same Jesus . . .

shall so come . . ." From the time those words fell upon their ears there is no evidence or indication of further doubt or disappointment. They went back to Jerusalem and took up their life's work. No more do we hear of frustrated hopes or uncomprehending minds. The answer to the enigma lay in those words and the disciples were perplexed no longer. What was it the angels really did say?

The earliest extant manuscripts of the Book of Acts are in Greek. It is likely that Luke wrote the book originally in Greek, for he was an educated man of his day. But the words used by the angels would be Aramaic, the common language of the peasantry and the language habitually used by Jesus. If Luke did write in Greek, and since he was not present at the time, he must of necessity have chosen that Greek expression which corresponded most nearly to the form of Aramaic words which the eye-witnesses transmitted to him as those that were used at the time.

The phrase that he selected to convey the sense of the central and most important feature of the verse, determining the meaning of the whole, and which is rendered in the A.V. "in like manner", is one that derives in the first place from the motion of the heavenly bodies across the sky, and their regular return in their allotted paths: of the sun in its course along the ecliptic, and of the planets in their orbits. "*Hon tropon*" has the significance of a thing being done in a manner or fashion already established, and expected to follow in regular sequence. The idea behind it is that of the sun returning along its accustomed path after having gone out of sight at its setting—the same sun, and not another: the same path, and not another. (It is the same Greek root-word *trope* that gives us our English word "tropics", the zone around the Equator above which lies the sun's apparent path throughout the varying seasons of the year). In the New Testament—and in the Greek Old Testament also—the same expression is used to indicate similarity between two related things. Some consideration of a few such texts will show that the assurance "*This same Jesus which is taken into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven*" is indicative of the certainty that as He had gone into heaven, so truly would He come back again, as assuredly as the sun comes back on its accustomed course in the morning after sinking out of sight the previous night. In the following examples "*hon tropon*"—"in like manner"—is shown in italics.

Acts 7. 28. Wilt thou kill me, *as thou diddest*

the Egyptian yesterday?"

Acts 15. 11. "We believe . . . that we shall be saved, *even as they.*"

Acts 27. 25. "I believe God, that it shall be *even as it was told me.*"

2 Tim. 3. 8. "*Now as* Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these resist the truth."

An example from the Apocrypha.

2 Macc. 15. 39. "*As* wine mingled with water is pleasant . . . even so speech finely framed delighteth the ears."

From the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint).

Exod. 4. 13. "For *whereas* ye have seen the Egyptians to-day, ye shall see them no more again for ever."

Psa. 42. 1. "*As* the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."

Obad. 16. "*As* ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall the heathen drink continually."

Surely these examples show very clearly that the angels' meaning was, not necessarily that Jesus is to come in the same outward guise and fashion as He went, i.e., in form and attire like a man, descending visibly out of a cloud upon the Mount of Olives, but, rather, that *even as* He has gone into heaven, so *surely* will He come again. It was this that made all the difference to the disciples when they returned from the Mount on that memorable day. The certainty of his return was as the certainty of his going. They knew He had gone; there was no doubt about that. Just so certainly, they were assured, He would come. His going was the guarantee of his returning. As He has gone, so shall He come. The manner of that coming is defined very fully in other Scriptures; the angels were not concerned to describe that. Their mission was to sustain tottering faith, and it was discharged by this word of encouragement and assurance that they gave to the little group standing there on the top of the mountain, a positive declaration of the certitude of his return. "*As truly as He has gone into heaven, so truly will He come again*".

Importunity is of the essence of prevailing prayer. Never stop praying. At dawn, with David: at noon, with Daniel: at midnight, with Silas: in sorrow, as Hannah: in sickness, as Job: in childhood, like Samuel: in youth, like Timothy: in manhood, like Paul: in hoar hairs, like Simeon: in dying, like Stephen.

THE PARABLE OF THE POUNDS

Luke 19.12-27

Matt. 25.14-30

It was immediately following his visit to the house of Zaccheus that Jesus told the story of the nobleman who travelled to a far country leaving his servants to trade for him during his absence. Luke relates the narrative in his 19th chapter, vss. 12-27. The parable was given for a purpose; it was because Jesus knew that his earthly mission approached its close, the people were looking for an immediate establishment of the Messianic kingdom, and he would prepare them for the realisation that a time of waiting and preparation must interpose between his First Advent and the promised Kingdom which is to be set up at his Second Advent. Those who would sincerely be his servants must discharge with faithfulness and loyalty a commission with which He would entrust them.

There is a considerable degree of similarity between this parable and that related in Matt. 25. 14-30, known as the Parable of the Talents. They both appear at the same time in Jesus' ministry. The one in Luke's account was spoken in the house of Zaccheus not many days before Jesus' death; the setting of the Matthew account is not so easy to determine and the fact that four parables having to do with the Second Coming—those of the faithful and evil servants, the wise and foolish virgins, the talents, and the sheep and goats—all occur together suggests the possibility that Matthew grouped them for that reason without regard to the time of their utterance. In such case the two parables may be versions of the same incident; at any rate the teaching and application is identical.

The purpose of the parable is stated. It was given "*because he was nigh unto Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.*" (19. 11). These men gathered at Zaccheus' house were not unbelievers. They may, most of them, have been a bit dubious as to the Messianic authority of the quiet young man in whose honour the feast was being held, but of one thing they were sure; if indeed he was the promised One that should come, then certainly the kingdom of God predicted by the prophets, a kingdom in which Israel would exercise authority over all nations, was at hand and would appear in their own time. That would be the acid test of his claims. And there seems to be no doubt of a prevalent

impression that this coming Passover was to be decisive; something in the attitude and sayings of Jesus had convinced many apart from his disciples that this time would be the climax of all that He had been doing and saying for the past three and a half years. Jesus alone knew that the long-awaited kingdom was not to appear then, at least not in the way they expected. Hence this parable, to prepare their minds for the fact that another phase of the Divine Plan must be initiated and run its course before their hopes could be fulfilled.

"*A nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return*" (19. 12). It may be true, as scholars have suggested, that Jesus took as the background of his story the journey of certain rulers of his own time to Rome to be formally invested with the dignity of a tributary kingship, and since such occurrences were common in that day the allusion would be clear enough to Jesus' hearers. What was not so clear was the underlying intimation that even Israel's King Messiah must go away to receive his kingdom from higher hands before returning in glory and power to exercise authority. It was all in the 7th chapter of Daniel, had they been sufficiently careful to read aright. "*I saw in the night visions, and one like the Son of Man . . . came to the Ancient of days . . . brought 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*" (Dan. 7. 13-14). The writer to the Hebrews shows that Jesus must first suffer and die as a sacrificing priest after the order of Aaron, ascend on high and enter into the presence of God, then be invested with the authority and power of the kingdom, that he might appear unto men the second time as a kingly priest after the order of Melchisedec, for their salvation (Heb. chaps. 3-4-5, 7-8-9). The Jews of our Lord's day had no idea that the call of the Christian Church was to follow the ending of their own period of Divine dealings and that not until that Church is complete and ready, together with finally purified Israel, for its work of world conversion, can the Second Coming and the Kingdom of God upon earth become reality.

So the nobleman went away, but before

doing so, entrusted his own servants with money with which to trade on his behalf during his absence. There is a difference drawn here between his servants and his citizens. The latter had rejected him as their prospective king and had even sent a message of protest to the distant authority conferring the kingdom. One wonders how many of the Lord's hearers at the feast identified the rebellious citizens with Israel of their own day, and the servants with those who in after years would be the real custodians of their Lord's interests. The parable takes no further notice of the rebellious citizens; it is concerned, not with Israel but the Christian Church between the two Advents. So each servant received a pound wherewith to make profit for his lord.

The "pound" of the parable is the "*mina*" which on the basis of the relative costs of living between the First Advent and to-day was worth the equivalent of one hundred pounds or three hundred dollars. The corresponding parable in Matthew gives the servants five, two and one talents respectively, and on the same basis the talent, if of silver, had a buying power of fifteen hundred pounds in present-day English money. The precise values and minor differences of detail are not important; the principle illustrated is that each of Jesus' disciples in this Age is awarded opportunities of some kind or other whereby he may advance the cause of the Kingdom. Those opportunities or abilities may be of an outwardly spectacular nature such as the flair for public speaking or writing, of a more unobtrusive kind such as talent for organising or administration, or the very worth-while gift of a sympathetic and unselfish nature which leads to all manner of services to others in the direction of consolation, encouragement, incitement to faith, and a constant waiting on God in prayer on behalf of others or in the interests of his work. All these things are given to us in their variety that we might use them to the honour and glory of God and in the advancement of his interests in the outworking of his purposes.

The sequel comes, of course, at the Second Advent, when the King returns in all glory and power to take his rightful place as mankind's king and rule "*with judgment and with justice henceforth even for ever*" (Isa. 9. 7). "*We must all appear before the tribunal of Christ*" says Paul "*that every one may receive the things done in the body*" (2 Cor. 5. 10). It is not always noticed that Paul is not speaking of mankind in general in that verse but

solely of Christian disciples, the Church, who in the whole of the 5th chapter of 2nd Corinthians are shown as in process of preparation for a "ministry of reconciliation" the members of which are ambassadors for Christ to all who do not believe. This tribunal of Christ is the same thing as the cross-examination of the parable when the returned master takes stock of his servants' success in trading.

There was one servant who was slothful and indifferent. He took the money but did nothing with it, and when called upon for his account returned the money unused. That man had, as we would say, "a chip on his shoulder". He resented the idea of making profit for another man, even though that other man be his lawful employer and provide the money wherewith to make the profit. In his surliness he libelled his master, accusing him of being hard and harsh, claiming the benefits of work he had not himself done. "You gave me one pound; I give you back one pound. We are quits, and you have your rights." And in his self-justification he quite failed to see that in hoarding unused the opportunity his lord had given him he had prevented someone else from making use of it. If he had no intention of using his lord's money himself he could at least have deposited it with the money-changers in the Temple, the "Stock Exchange" of the time. They would anyway have turned the money to profitable use for the period of deposit and the lord would eventually have received back his capital plus accrued interest. That points a very vital moral. Our own personal failure to rise up to our privileges and opportunities in our Lord's service may have repercussions outside ourselves; the service or work of others may be hindered or thwarted thereby. In this, as in so many things, it is true that "*none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself*" (Rom. 14. 7).

Those who had traded were commended. In one parable they, having been faithful in few things, were made rulers over many things. In the other they were made rulers over cities commensurate with the degree of profit each one had made. If this teaches anything respecting conditions in the spiritual world to which the Church will eventually attain, it must be that there is variety in that world as there is in this and that there will be "differences of administrations" (1 Cor. 12) according to the spheres of activity for which each one is best qualified. The predominant truth inherent in the parable is that the future life

is not static; it is not just an endless existence in a state of beatitude and contemplation of God. There is work to be done; activities to be undertaken; for all we know heights to be scaled and objects to be achieved. Perhaps creation itself is endless, and long after the work of God through Christ and the Church in the reconciliation of all of mankind who will heed the call to repent is complete, and

every creature on earth is bowing the knee to the Name of Christ, those servants who have faithfully traded with their "talents" or their "pounds" now will be serving just as faithfully and just as zealously, upon an immensely enhanced scale, in spheres that we cannot even begin to visualise, in those "ten cities" and "five cities" to which they will have been appointed by their lord.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS

A Devotional Study

"That I may know him . . . and the fellowship of his sufferings." (Phil. 3. 10). A friendship grows with the passing years. As two people learn more about each other and share each other's experiences their love for each other deepens. Paul discovered this in his fellowship with Jesus, as he followed in his Master's steps.

There was nothing new in "suffering for righteousness sake". Ever since Abel was slain by his brother, those who have loved God have been persecuted by the "children of disobedience", for "*Everyone that doeth evil hateth the light*". (John 3. 20). James calls attention to the example of suffering which the prophets gave us, and in Hebrews 11 we have a long list of Old Testament heroes who suffered for their faith. The prophets declared that the Messiah would suffer shame, pain and death and he is thus spoken of in Isaiah 53. 3 "*He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*"

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his followers that the consequences of a righteous life were that they would be spoken against, ill-used and forsaken. Later many turned away from him because He said "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me*" (Luke 9. 23). All who associate with Jesus in his mission to the world, must share the same conditions of humiliation and sacrifice. This is not just a willingness to deny oneself a few luxuries and be patient with the normal troubles and ailments of life. Suffering for Christ may include those things, but it must ultimately mean much more.

Jesus was born into the hard Roman world and often the peasant folk had a lean time making ends meet. From his earliest years our Lord must have been familiar with the grief of his fellowmen. His ministry of healing would bring him into greater touch with the weaknesses and frailties of humanity,

and the Gospel records reflect his mingling with and sympathy for the sorrowful and out-cast members of society. He was contradicted, ostracised and hunted. The agony of the garden, the hypocrisy and humiliation of the trial, the fatigue and rough handling on the way to Calvary, were all part of a bitter cup which He drank to the dregs. Not only did He suffer physical pain and mental anguish for himself, but his pure and sympathetic heart grieved for the suffering and sin of the whole world.

The witness which the disciples gave after Pentecost rapidly brought persecution from the religious leaders who had been responsible for the death of Jesus. The power of the Gospel message caused many Jews to repent and believe in the Lord. The priests and lawyers soon realised that instead of crushing the new sect by putting its leader to death, it had suddenly obtained new life and influence. Not only were the members of the early Church willing to suffer for their Master but they did it with joy as reflected in Luke's words "*They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name*" (Acts 5. 41). This spirit of joy, derived from sharing their Lord's sufferings, continued with the Christian church as it spread to Gentile lands, as shown by the experience of Paul and Silas in the gaol at Philippi, where they sang praises to God during the night. Paul knew the cost of the witness of the early Church before he became a Christian, but the visions he had received from his crucified Saviour were too strong a call and he followed the path of martyrdom. Eventually he turned his back on the comfort and serenity of his home town of Tarsus and set out along the great high-ways which led to Rome, stopping only to tell the tidings of great joy which must be told to all people.

The joy of the early disciples was a feature

of the Christian life which neither the Jews nor the Gentiles could understand. They cheerfully faced torture and death for Christ's sake, and nothing would make them forsake their trust in him. They knew that their Master was with them during the actual experiences, they knew that He sympathised with their afflictions because He had trodden the same thorny path, and they were able to say with Paul "*our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding weight of glory*" (2 Cor. 4. 17).

Many have asked why it was that Jesus and his followers have had to endure such persecution. What is the purpose of it all? The prophet in Isaiah 53. 5 gives us the foremost reason, because as the Saviour of the world he was "*wounded for our transgression; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed*". He was called "Jesus" because as the angel said, He should save his people from their sin (Matt. 1. 21). He was announced by John the Baptist as "*the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*" (John 1. 29). Jesus spoke of himself as the good shepherd who was to give his life for the sheep (John 10. 11). Soon after Pentecost Peter addressed a large crowd in the Temple area and told them that there was no other name given among men whereby they could be saved (Acts 4. 12). Later Peter wrote "*For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit*" (1 Pet. 3. 13, R.S.V.). In his long discussion of the resurrection Paul wrote to the brethren at Corinth that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures (1 Cor. 15. 3). The writer to the Hebrews speaks of him suffering without the gate in order to sanctify the people with his blood (Heb. 13. 12). The New Testament writers bear united testimony to the purpose of Christ's suffering and death, that it was for the redemption of mankind from death.

The experiences through which our Lord passed as Saviour prepared him for his work as mediator, reconciling men to God. The writer to the Hebrews describes him as "*learning obedience through what he suffered*" and being made "*perfect through suffering*." (Heb. 5. 8; 2. 10, R.S.V.). Jesus was perfect in that He was sinless and obedient before He came to earth, but until He came to live among men He had no personal contact with the conditions in which men lived. He

had not felt the consequences of sin, nor could He fully understand the fear and grief which death had brought. As He moved among people in the world, qualities which hitherto had remained dormant in his heart were now exercised and thereby was his character matured. "*For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning*" (Heb. 4. 15, R.S.V.).

Those who follow Jesus, share his suffering, and by so doing become like him in his compassion and patience for a sinful world. It will mean betrayal, scourging and contradiction, but it will prepare them for a place beside him in his work as earth's future King. Any denial or retreat from this aspect of our fellowship with Christ must necessarily find us unready for his priestly work in healing and rehabilitating a broken and sinful human race (2 Tim. 2. 11, 12).

In the economy of God's purpose, He has used the wrath of man to perfect his workmanship and He restrains that which would cause harm (Psa. 76. 10). So it is that our experiences in the world, although they may seem bitter, are part of our chastisement and are a mark of our sonship to God (Heb. 12. 5, 6 and Prov. 3. 11, 12). The same thought is conveyed in another way by Jesus in the parable of the vine, when He said "*every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit*". The fiery trials cause our faith to strengthen, and we emerge stronger and purified, thereby making us more fitted for his service.

Just before his death, Jesus asked the sons of Zebedee whether they were able to drink of the cup which He was about to drink. That question to James and John is reiterated to every Christian through the words of the Gospel. Our answer to that question gives evidence of our allegiance and love for him. It is in the trial of our faith that we learn to trust him and depend upon his guidance and strength. It is after we have been through the valley of tears and humiliation, when we have felt the biting sting of this world's scorn and rejection, that we draw closer in fellowship to the "lover of our soul". "*If we are his children we share his treasures, and all that Christ claims as his will belong to all of us as well! Yes, if we share in his sufferings we shall certainly share in his glory*". Romans 8. 17 (Phillips).

A REVELATION AND ITS SEQUEL

10. Conclusion

St. Paul's vision
of the future
2 Cor. 12. 1—9

It is to be noted that James spake of a "taking-out" of a people, not a "taking-all". Even though Jesus commissioned his disciples to go out into all the world to preach, the object during the past centuries has not been to convert the world, nor to win converts en-masse. Paul sought to 'save some' (Rom. 11. 14) of his countrymen by provoking them to jealousy. "Saving some" from Jew and Gentile has been the keynote for the Age; two remnants to be made into "one new man" in Christ—that is all!

Of those who have heard the Good-News not all have yielded themselves in such degree of consecration as to be conformed thereby to the image of God's dear Son! Not all have yielded themselves a living Sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God—their reasonable service—refusing to be conformed to this world, but choosing rather to become "transformed by the renewing of their mind". Not all have been baptised into his death, nor have become crucified and dead with him in daily experience. Not all; but only "some" have entered into this deeper privilege—but by this means those who have done so have been "taken out"—separated out by Holy-Spirit leading, as a people to bear his Name.

We do not claim this special privilege as peculiar to any one single group or denomination in the Christian Church. It does not belong exclusively to Dis-establishment any more than to the Established Church, or to any other of the larger long-established bodies in the Universal Church. It has been true of all (and applicable to all) in every section of the Christian Church since Pentecostal days who have counted all things as 'loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord,' and have sought with all their hearts to 'be found in him' not having their own righteousness but that of Christ Jesus alone. All such have longed to know him, and the power of his Resurrection and the fellowship of his Sufferings, being made thereby conformable to his death. To them life has had but this 'one thing' in view, and they have borne down upon it with all their heart and soul! This, and this alone, has been the power that has "taken out" the people who will bear his Name!

It should be obvious that all whose names have been inscribed on the Church Register

have not reached this measure of consecration, nor lived with this 'one thing' in view! How much easier the Pastoral task would have been had that depth of consecration characterised all the Sheep in the Fold! Many, during the course of the Age, have been called to repentance and found entry into the Church Visible, but few will be chosen (found 'select') when those who have been prepared are finally "Taken out". When these have been taken Home to be forever with the Lord, a larger residue of less zealous Christian people will be left over in the earth, and, in the great Change that seems now to be impending will be aligned and subordinated to the Israeli Residue, after the Davidic Throne has been established in its midst. Subject to the drastic changes that loom ahead, the Christian Residue will be transferred and find their place and service side by side with Abraham's natural sons in the great work of inviting the still greater residue of men to seek the Lord and find satisfaction to their souls in Him.

(This is too vast a theme to come under our present heading. Some day we may take up this thread again, and trace it through under another Caption).

There is just one last point to raise.

If the fact concerning the nearing approach of the next great Change in the Divine Dealings are as they have been outlined foregoing, what ought to be our own attitude towards this crucial matter? What ought we to be doing and saying to our friends and acquaintances concerning it? It is not going to be an easy matter for any Christian Watchman to note the drifts and trends of Christendom, and find himself a mere voice crying in the wilderness. The Gentile nations do not understand, or appreciate, the outstanding significance of Israel's return to nation-hood. She is but a small people, with but little influence upon world-affairs, and as such can be written off as just one among several other resurgent nations cast up by two world wars. To tell the nations,—nay, to tell the Christian Church that Israel is destined to be the 'head' among the nations, not the 'tail', will be to talk as those that dream! To tell Israel of this fore-ordained destiny, while this present world set-up remains, will seem like inviting her to grasp the moon! Indeed it is on this very point she is destined to fail and fall at a later

day! When commanded to 'go up and possess the land' she will choose to be led back among the nations, and remain as one of them! To spend time witnessing to Israel—except to call them, *as individuals*, to repentance, and to accept Jesus as a present Saviour, is scarcely using time and labour to best advantage. It is out-pacing God. The Holy Spirit affords no backing for such service! The Work of God is still that of taking out a people for his Name!

What of the apostatising Christian World? Is it possible to rekindle faith, and bring the back-slider again into Church membership by testifying to the impending Change? Unfortunately all such have lost the 'hearing ear', and the 'understanding heart'—the "light" they had has become "darkness"—and . . . they love to have it so! The name stricken from the Church Register appals no longer, while the story of the 'tormenting flames' leaves them stone cold! If there must be a 'Change', well, is it not high time it came! Can the new set-up be worse than this? That is the unbeliever's general mood!

What can be said of the Foreign Missionary Service? Is it of any use to testify there of an impending Change? Alas, No! The submerged millions of darkest Africa, and benighted Asia are already on the change, groping blindly for deliverance from white-man domination. Right now they tell the Christian Missionary to 'go home' and preach to the slums of Christendom. The hope that the Church of Christendom will bring these billions within the fold recedes like a desert mirage on a summer's day!

Would it avail to tell high Church leadership of this impending Change? Here we might meet with rejoinder and rebuff more scathing than in the Mission-field. 'Oh yes' they might reply, we know that there must be a Change, indeed it is our conviction that we are in it right now. We ourselves are changing and becoming more tolerant and charitable to other faiths outside our own! We believe there is good in every religion, and that the trends and leadings of these days will bring in a Confederation of them all. Our Christian Church is changing and adapting itself once more to the circumstances of the hour!

What then can we do and say as servants of our Lord in these crucial times? Whom should we serve, and with what message should we serve? If we are persuaded that we are on the threshold of the great Change in the Divine Dealings with Israel, and that the

era of the Christian Church in its present form is all but at an end, then the situation is greatly simplified and clarified for us. Our first task is to bring ourselves into right adjustment with the Coming Change. Does the idea of the passing of the 'Old', with its 'ancient privilege' and 'Old-time Institution', occasion regrets or disapproval in our heart? Or does it kindle hope and satisfaction in our souls? Are we sad, or glad, as we peer forwards towards that root-and-branch Restitution of all things spoken?

Our first work is to bring ourselves into alignment with that stupendous Reformation. Long have we prayed 'Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be done in earth, as in heaven'—it is that Kingdom that lies just over the borders beyond that Change!

When we have brought ourselves into line with the Will of God in that respect, what can we do for others of like precious faith? The answer here most certainly is "help them to do the same". Here we shall find a class of fellow-pilgrims who will be right glad to hear and learn of that far-reaching Change! Indeed, it is just what they want; just what they long for and pray for every passing day. Here is the only class of people within the four corners of the earth who will hail the nearing prospect of that impending Change. And why? Because for them, it means 'going Home' to be forever with the Lord! The 'taking out of a people' will then be complete, and the work of the Christian Faith at an end! The next scene in the Drama of Redemption will then take the stage with Israel as the Principal of the Cast.

Till strikes the hour-bell bringing in that Scene, it is your privilege—and mine—to be positioned like our Brother Paul! We too have had our glimpse of 'Paradise Restored' and right gladly would we tell the news to earth's remotest bounds! But like him, we find ourselves hedged about with external inhibitions and frustrations through lack of hearing ears. Like him we find ourselves tied down—'staked down'—to a present-day ministry lest we squander our life away by dreaming dreams, or by attempting to interpret them. He could have been the Apocalyptic picture-painter '*in excelsis*', had he been left uncontrolled, but Jesus kept him in check by his 'stake'. Again, like him, we have messengers of Satan to buffet us because our hopes are, as yet, no more tangible than hope; because, while informed of that coming Kingdom day, the realistic world around us groans and moans out its bitterness unceas-

ingly night and day! Aware of so much intended good yet incompetent to translate awareness into actual result!

Are not all God's true people like this? Is it not just the smart from the Satanic taunt of present incapacity to rectify the world's wrongs, that makes us long and yearn for the Advent of One who can, and will? All who are God-taught and God-touched, long for that Day of Rectification to come, if only because no institution or organisation exists to-day can rehabilitate the depraved human soul, and elevate it into a perfect man-soul! And it is because all God's "called-out" sons and daughters are thus handicapped that they need help and comfort in these crucial days. It is for this purpose that our 'stake' pins us down to a present-age ministry on behalf of God's struggling saints alone!

But only by being thus pinned down can grace Sufficient be a satisfying portion for our souls. Only by waiting expectantly with Jesus, the coming of God's due time for other greater things, can our hearts find unison with his! Only by dedicating our little lives to the self-same task—the one and only task He has in hand to-day—can our souls be tuned-up into resonance with his! And only when thus attuned to him, can grace Sufficient flow from his great heart of love unhindered, into yours and mine to-day, as once it flowed into that of Paul long ago!

Since that glorious Ascension Day, when Jesus bade his loved ones adieu, our blessed Lord has been seated at his Father's right hand, waiting there the day when his enemies will be made his footstool. Come that happy day He will ask, and God will give him, the heathen for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. But till that day arrives, our Saviour has been shepherding the little Flock, (from his seat on his Father's Throne,) in keeping with his Promise in his last committal Prayer, "*And for their sakes I sanctify Myself that they also may be sanctified through the Truth*" (John 17. 19).

Our gracious Master dedicated himself—set himself apart—to that one thing on their behalf. Godward, He has been our constant intercessor; usward, He has been as Shepherd and Bishop to our souls. His only activity during the long 'waiting' days, has been that of helping his brethren—God's many sons—to attain the eternal Glory, to which they have been called.

It is still his task to help home the Flock, to whom He promised that assistance at his

departure from this earth. It is for their Home-Gathering He waits with keen anticipation, and to make that Home-gathering sure, He provides his Sufficient grace.

There has, as yet, been no alteration in his ministry. Still, He is engaged on the taking out of a people for his Name. That, and that only, is the purpose of his Shepherd (and Episcopal) care (1 Pet. 2. 25). He is not yet seeking to win the world's affections. Nor is He seeking to win Israel's hearts to love and serve their God! These things will come in their own good time. For his present purposes, even though the portents of impending change begin to abound on every side, He still has one objective in view,—to lead home the Flock—to help along the many Sons to glory.

If we desire to walk with him, to work with him, to live with him, we too must serve 'The Cause' as He is serving it. We too must help to lead home the Flock! We too must leave the unrepentant world to await its coming day of grace; we too must leave heart-hardened Israel to the furnace and the fire (Ezek. 22. 17-22) till its silver has been refined and its dross removed! Not an easy task to leave it to its fate, you may perhaps say! Granted! but that is exactly how it was for our brother Paul long ago, and for which we needed his Master's special grace! That is exactly how it was for the Master himself when the wise and prudent were cast off, and only babes and sucklings blest! (Matt. 11. 25-30).

If therefore, in these eventful days our hearts are deeply touched by Creation's increasing groans (Rom. 8. 19-22) and Israel's worsening plight (Matt. 12. 44-45) and find ourselves unable (or forbidden) to tell them of the impending change to come, let us bow submissive to the Will of God and wait till His Glory-Cloud moves on, desiring not to choose our service of ourselves, but only to participate with him where the Holy Spirit is still working out God's sovereign Will. The temptation to out-pace God can be very strong; our very sympathy for the wayward sufferer could be our undoing, and prompt us to want to steal ahead of him in what we think He ought to do.

We repeat once more that He is still engaged in "taking out a people for his Name"—first by a call to repentance from sin, next, an invitation to present our bodies a living sacrifice, and third, a conformation of character into the image of God's dear Son. This fact cannot be repeated and emphasised too often, or too much. Should any of us be blessed with a Missionary inclination in the

foreign field, that would still be the course to adopt. Or, if we are constrained to minister as the evangelist at home, we still should have that end in view. Or, even if our interest centres in the returned people in Palestine, there is no other course open to us than that. It is still right and proper to call Jew, as well as Gentile, to repentance, to accept Jesus as the Saviour, and to follow him by baptism into death!

Because the Master himself is still engaged on this special Ministry, his veto stands unre-moved against any other work; and it is this very prohibition that is intended to be our 'stake'—our thorn in the flesh—to pin us

down to a 'present-day' service. But if that is so, it is just this 'staking-down' that makes us need—and appreciate—his special grace. And so, what time we feel the chafing and the fret, yet bow submissive to his Will, the words of tenderness and sympathetic care will steal home upon our inner ear, as once they did with Brother Paul, and we too shall hear him say, "My grace is Sufficient for thee" also.

Let us hear the Psalmist's plea and so find rest to our souls;—"O rest in the Lord, wait patiently for him, and He shall give thee thy heart's desire" all in His good time and Way!

THE END

THEY LOOKED FOR A CITY

Extracts from the writings of men who believed in the coming Kingdom of God on earth.

Dr. Thomas Chalmers, one of the greatest of Scottish preachers and theologians, was born in 1780 and died in 1847. He was the founder and first Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland, which came into existence in 1843. Well versed in the scientific thought of his day, he championed the integrity of the Word of God and saw clearly that it promised a restitution of all things. The following extracts are from his writings on 2 Pet. 3. 13.

* * *

"While we attempt not to be wise above that which is written, we should attempt, and that most studiously, to be wise up to that which is written. The disclosures are very few and very partial which are given to us of that bright and beautiful economy (*world system, Ed.*) which is to survive the ruins of our present one, but still somewhat is made known, like every other Scripture, profitable both for doctrine and for instruction in righteousness.

"In the new economy, which is to be reared for the accommodation of the blessed, there will be *materialism*; not merely new heavens, but also a *NEW EARTH*. And, as distinguished from the present, which is an abode of rebellion, it will be an abode of righteousness. It holds out a warmer and more alluring picture of the Elysium that awaits us when told that there will be beauty to delight the eye, and music to regale the ear, and the comfort that springs from all the charities of intercourse between man and man, holding converse as they do on earth, and gladdening each other with the benignant smiles that

play on the human countenance, or the accents of kindness that fall in soft and soothing melody from the human voice. We hail the information of our text, that after the dissolution of this earth's present framework, it will again be varied and decked out anew in all the graces of its unfading verdure and of its unbounded variety. In addition to our own direct and personal view of the Deity, when He comes down to Tabernacle with men, we shall also have the reflection of him in a lovely mirror of his own workmanship.

But though a paradise of *sense*, it will not be a paradise of *sensuality*. Though not so unlike the present world as many apprehend it, there will be one point of total dissimilarity between them. It is not the substitution of spirit for matter that will distinguish the future economy from the present, but the entire substitution of righteousness for sin. It is this which signalises the Christian from the Mohammedan paradise—not that sense, and substance, and splendid imagery, and the glories of a visible creation seen with bodily eyes, are excluded from it, but that all which is vile in principle, or voluptuous in impurity, will be utterly excluded from it. There will be a firm earth, as we have at present, and a heaven stretched over it, as we have at present; and it is not by the absence of these, but by the absence of sin, that the abodes of immortality will be characterised. There will be both heavens and earth in the next great administration, and with this speciality to mark it from the present one, that it will be a heavens and earth 'wherein dwelleth righteousness'."



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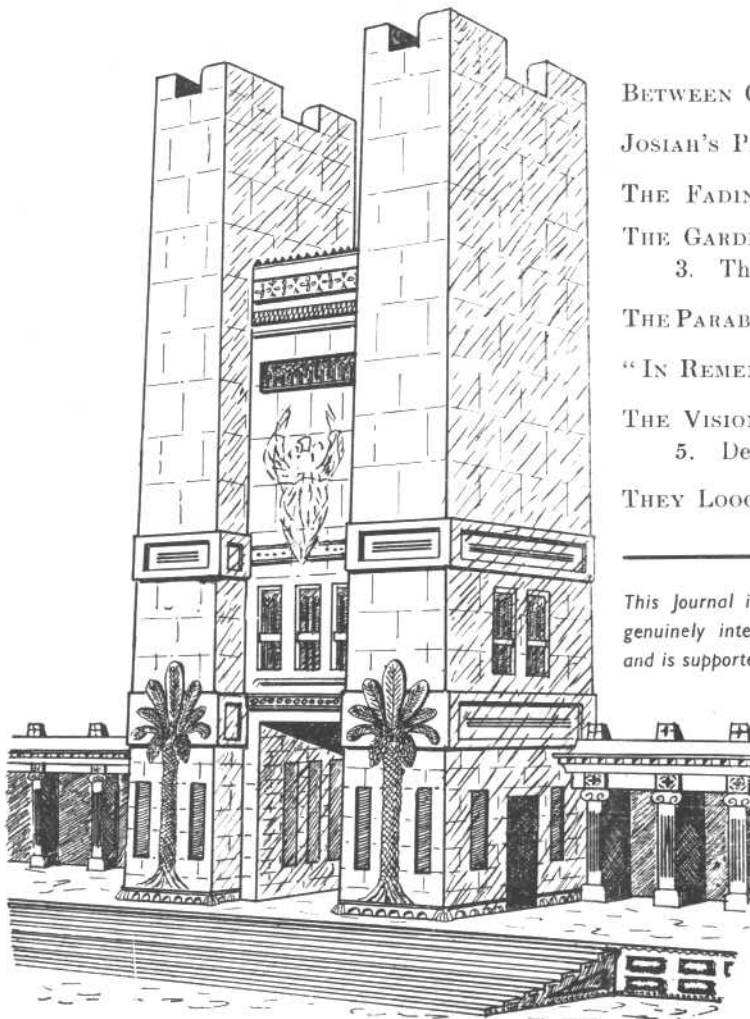
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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Between Ourselves

Referring to the notice in last month's issue respecting the Convention to be held in Conway Hall next August, will intending visitors from the provinces please take note of a change in the name of Accommodation Secretary. Visitors desiring hotel accommodation for the nights of Saturday and Sunday, August 1 and 2 should apply to Bro. H. Charlton, "Rozel," 13 Elizabeth Way, Stoke Poges, Bucks. The General Secretary of the convention is Bro. W. Neil, 5 Oxford Avenue, Hayes, Middlesex, from whom all information apart from accommodation matters should be obtained.

* * *

For the benefit of those participating in the annual memorial service of our Saviour's death the date is announced as Tuesday, 21st April. Those who gather at such services will do so with the intention of confirming their devotion and life-long consecration to the service of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Part of this month's issue has been devoted to several articles particularly bearing upon the keeping of memorial to our Lord's death on our behalf, appropriate at this time of the year; on this account one or two usual features have had to be omitted.

* * *

A magazine which could be of interest to some at least of our readers is the *Mount Zion Reporter*, a 16 page Christian periodical published monthly in Jerusalem, by the Christian body known as the "Church of God", dealing with the latest news of conditions and events in Israel; Israel in Bible prophecy; Archaeological discoveries; progress of the Gospel, etc. The cost is £1 or 3 dollars per year, and requests should be sent to *Mount Zion Reporter, P.O. Box 568, Jerusalem, Israel*. A free sample copy would be sent on request. (Note; all requests must be sent to Jerusalem, not to Lyncroft Gardens).

A notice appeared in our August issue relating to colour slides of Israel scenes for use in still projectors, obtainable through the instrumentality of Bro. L. H. Bunker. We would now state that orders and enquiries for these slides should in future be sent to the newly appointed official agent for Israel Colour Slides, Mrs. C. F. Newton, 7 Great James Street, Holborn, London, W.C.1. A full printed catalogue is available and anyone interested in these slides is invited to write to that address for a copy of the catalogue.

The fishermen disciples of Jesus must have been startled when their Master said to them "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men". They must have suddenly realised that their earlier training had not been in vain. They would be able to make use of their experience as fishers in far different waters. Henceforth they were to catch men. What we are apt to overlook is the fact that before the Master gave them a promise, He laid down a condition. Before they could be fishers of men, they must be prepared to follow Him.

Perhaps this offers an explanation of why we have so often failed in the past. We have been eager to be fishers of men, but we have not paid sufficient attention to the necessity of following Christ, not only wherever He may lead, but in His own life, and in His own methods of work.

Gone from us

Sis. Barnett (*Frinton, late Ealing*)
 Sis. Davey (*Aylesbury, late Ealing*)
 Bro. W. Greatorex (*Bournemouth*)
 Bro. C. Hemming (*London*)
 Bro. W. Pampling (*London*)

"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away."

JOSIAH'S PASSOVER

The story of a
great cleansing

It was in the eighteenth year of the reign of good King Josiah that the great Passover was kept—the most memorable Passover that Israel had known since the day of his entering into the land. “Surely there was not holden such a Passover” wrote the historian “from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah” (2 Kings 23. 22). It was a famous Passover, one to be remembered and preserved in tradition and exhortation throughout their generations. There had been some seven hundred Passovers celebrated since the invading hosts had crossed Jordan and built the stones of Gilgal, but this one was the greatest. What was there about it that made it so noteworthy?

Perhaps it was the freshness and enthusiasm of the whole thing. The story in 2 Chron. 35 reads like that of a revival in nineteenth century England. Faith in Israel had fallen to a very low ebb. The days of Hezekiah had long since passed—he had been dead for about seventy-five years. Judah had suffered under the sway of two idolatrous kings, Manasseh the son of Hezekiah and Amon the son of Manasseh. Under those two men the knowledge and worship of God had languished and died. The idolatrous religion of the surrounding nations had been set up in its place and the people had, in the main, readily accepted the change. Manasseh had erected the symbols of Baal worship all over the land and images even in the Temple itself; he it was that first gave to the Valley of Hinnom its evil reputation, and caused his son to pass through the fire to Moloch. When Josiah came to the throne, as a young lad, the land and the people were steeped in wickedness and the word of the Lord was silent; there was no open vision.

Now it was when King Josiah was twenty-six years of age that he became seized with the desire to rebuild and repair the Temple of the Lord, which had evidently suffered seriously from neglect and consequent decay. Exactly ninety years previously that Temple had been the scene of a mighty deliverance in Israel. Sennacherib the Assyrian had lain encamped with his army, outside the walls of Jerusalem, demanding unconditional surrender. Isaiah the statesman-prophet had gone into the Temple and laid the insulting letter before the Lord, pledging the faith of King

and people that God would deliver . . . and the angel of the Lord had gone forth that night, and slain in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred and eighty-five thousand men: and Sennacherib returned with shame of face to his own land, there to meet death by the assassin's dagger. Thus was Jerusalem delivered. But all that was ninety years ago, and the people who had rejoiced in that great thing were now asleep in the grave, and their sons and their grandsons no longer believed that such things could be, and they bowed down before Baal and Ashtoreth and Moloch and delighted themselves in the abominations of the heathen—until Hilkiah found the Book of the Law among the Temple treasures.

It was finding that book of the Law that brought about the great reformation and the great Passover. Josiah had ordered the restoration of the Temple. It was whilst bringing out of the treasury the silver that was stored up therein, wherewith to meet the cost of the work, that Hilkiah the High Priest discovered a greater treasure still, the Book of the Law of Moses. He gave it to Shaphan the scribe to take it to the king.

Hilkiah was the High Priest but he had not known that this treasure was in his keeping. To what depths must the priesthood and the Temple service have sunk! Quite evidently the old injunction that the Law was to be recited in the ears of the people and taught to the children had not been honoured for a long while past. The consternation that was evoked when the contents of the Book were made known to Josiah a little later reveals that the Law of Moses was in general unknown to Judah at this time. It had been forgotten, and with it the ceremonies and ritual of the Day of Atonement, the Passover, and the feast days must have fallen into disuse. Probably Hilkiah knew that such a book had once existed; maybe he had heard his grandfather and predecessor in the priestly office speak of some such thing; and there may have been a vague tradition that a copy had once reposed somewhere in the Temple archives. But he had never seen it and was probably much more concerned with the “modern” religious thought of his own day. There seems to be something of awe in his tones as he says to Shaphan, surely in hushed words “I have found the Book of the Law in the House of the Lord”. And Shaphan took it to the king.

Shaphan was much more indifferent. He merely remarked to Josiah "Hilkiah the priest hath given me a book". It meant nothing to him; just an old book found in the recesses of the Temple, and probably hopelessly out-of-date. It was perhaps with a feeling of boredom that he began to read it before the king. But the effect upon Josiah was immediate and decisive. He realised at once that his ambitious plans for the rebuilding and rededication of the Temple counted for nothing in God's sight without a deeper and more important thing, the existence of which had not until now even occurred to him. The Temple was but the outer shell; without the worship and service of a consecrated people, conscious of its own weakness and shortcoming, but confident in the saving power of God, the beauty of the restored Temple would be as ashes and its sacrifices an abomination in the sight of God. In the midst of his schemes for the restoration of the Divine Sanctuary in the sight of all Israel, Josiah heard the terms of the Divine Law, and he rent his clothes.

Just so, it may be, do we, in the midst of all our planning and scheming, activity and service for our Master and our brethren, all our preaching and witness to the world, come up suddenly against the essence of the Divine Will for us, and realise that all these outward things are of no account in his pure sight unless we have first made our hearts right with him. The will of God for us is, first of all, our own sanctification, and it is after we have started on that consecrated walk that He leads us to opportunities of outward service for him. It is the consecration that hallows the service, and not the service that vitalises the consecration. "*Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices*" asked Samuel of Saul "*as in obeying the voice of the Lord?*" The question comes down the ages and rings in our ears, with its answer "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice". Happy are we if, like good king Josiah, we can realise the situation directly the word of the Lord falls on our ears, and act, swiftly and decisively.

Josiah did not content himself with rending his clothes. Repentance is a necessary preliminary to justification and no progress can be made until that first step has been taken, but it is not a condition in which to linger. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation" says Paul in 2 Cor. 7. 10, and unless there is that tangible fruit of repentance, and a speedy fruit at that, the repentance is not very genuine. So Josiah called his ministers of state and

his court attendants, and sent them speedily to enquire of the Lord's will for him at the hand of one who could rightfully claim to speak on his behalf. They seemed to know where to go: they made their way to Huldah the prophetess, who, for all that the information we have is very scanty, seems to have been of some repute and held in some respect. Her words leave us in no doubt as to the forthrightness of her own allegiance to the God of Israel. Her reply was framed in terms of the strongest condemnation. Albeit there was a word of approval for the king's own personal condition of heart before God, the old lady made it plain that Israel as a nation must suffer the inevitable consequence of its sinful way. Judgment must needs come upon them before times could be better. "*Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands, therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place and shall not be quenched.*" (2 Chron. 34. 25).

Here is a principle that applies in our own day also. Again have men—the whole world of so-called "civilised men" this time—forsaken God their Creator and Sustainer, and rendered homage to gods of their own creating, to works of their own hands. In the midst of the distress and trouble which that course of action has brought upon them we proclaim the coming of a new and better order, the Millennial Kingdom, in which evil and lawlessness will be put down with firm hand and all men walk in the light of the glory of God and in the peace of his laws. But before this roseate picture can become a reality there must first be judgment upon the world for its wrongdoing. The Lord Jesus is to be "revealed from heaven, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those that know not God and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1. 8) before He comes with clouds, glorious in the retinue of his saints, and all the people of the earth join in that great mourning which is at once the evidence of their realisation of his Advent and the sign of their repentance. God waits to bind up the broken-hearted and give liberty to the captives, but nothing now can avert that Divine judgment under which the last vestiges of the rulership of "this present evil world" will pass away, never to return. And in our witnessing and preaching we should remember that. Not only must we, as Paul on Mars Hill, declare that God commandeth all men everywhere to repent, and like Peter at Jerusalem, speak of the coming

pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh, but we must also, like that faithful old prophetess in the dim long ago, pronounce the inevitability of Divine judgment on this world, to burn out its evil as by fire, to consume the defiling images and symbols and sweep clean the corruption off the land. It is only when God has thus devoured all the earth with the fire of his jealousy that He will be able to turn to the people a pure language that they may all call upon his name to serve him with one consent (Zeph. 3. 9).

The king's decisiveness did not fail him. Unwelcome as the news of the coming desolations of Israel must have been to his ears, he nevertheless took the only course that could be right with God. He summoned the elders and the people, gathered them together, with the priests, in the Temple, and there, in the presence of the God of Israel, he caused to be "read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord". There was to be no further excuse for ignorance. All Israel was to hear the Law read, and the authority of no less a person than the king himself lay behind the injunction to heed the words. And then the king drove home to all the seriousness with which he regarded the position. He "*stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, 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 Chron. 34. 21). That was a mighty thing to do! Josiah stood before his subjects, openly confessing himself to be a breaker of the Mosaic Covenant and worthy only of its curses because of his shortcoming, and then solemnly and formally made a covenant between his God and himself that he would in future keep the words of the Law as a true son of Israel. He publicly repudiated his own past sin, his nation's sin, and espoused afresh the holy calling of the chosen nation. It was a great thing to do, and it was the only thing. Thus was he able to call all Israel to pledge themselves to follow his example; so he "caused all Israel to stand to it" and the people entered once more into the covenant made with their fathers.

It was in that strength that Josiah proceeded to the logical end of his reform. He went straight from the making of the covenant to a great sweeping away of the idols and the images from the land. The thoroughness and speed with which he conducted that campaign

of destruction is shown more clearly in the parallel account in 2 Kings 23. Up and down the land he went, breaking down images, grinding them to pieces and scattering their dust to the winds; defiling the sacred places of the idolatrous religions, turning out their priests, demolishing their buildings, desecrating their sacred symbols and smashing their works of art, until nothing was left of paganism in all the land from Bethel to Beer-Sheba, and the land was cleansed.

And it was only after all that, after the king had shown the sincerity of his repentance by his determination to be clean in God's sight, that he came to the Passover!

The greatest of all Israel's Passovers was that held by King Josiah after his reformation work was done, and it was the greatest, not because it was organised and directed by a king, but because it was inspired by a man who had become clean in the sight of God. Just as the ancient Hebrew women used to take their lamps and sweep out every corner and cranny of their houses, the night before the Passover, that not the slightest trace of leaven might remain in their homes, so did King Josiah with resolution and ruthlessness seek to sweep out every trace of personal and national uncleanness in the sight of God, that his passover might be truly acceptable to the Most High.

There is a challenge for us! We approach another Memorial season, another day of coming together in a ceremony which goes to the very roots of all that we hold most dear. "Till He come!"—we repeat the words and cling to our faith that the time will not be much longer delayed and the angel of deliverance come to us and to all the world. It is in that Memorial ceremony that we gain much of the strength to sustain us for another year of pilgrimage, the resolution that is to support us as we go forth to witness to his Name and his Truth. How can we make it a Memorial such as has not been known in all our past experience? "*So let a man examine himself!*" come the solemn words of Paul to us, "*and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup*". As did Josiah, so let us, approaching this season, stand to our covenant with our God, and renew it in the sight of our brethren, go forth to cleanse out of our hearts all that stands between us and God, all that divides us from our brethren, with ruthlessness and determination rooting out everything that savours of the world, the flesh and the devil. And being thus cleansed, thus zealous for the righteousness of God, thus filled with the

Spirit, we can come with our brethren to partake of the feast and feel its life-giving influence entering into and permeating every fibre of our being. This wine is life, said our Lord to his disciples—*My life, given to you*. This bread is *My flesh, given for you*. Can these things do aught but revivify us to greater works than ever before and a closer following than ever before, *if we are clean*? One there was at the first Memorial who was not clean, and he had no part or lot at the fellowship of that table. But to those who did share in the broken bread and poured out wine, *because they were clean*, there came a union in fellowship which lasted as long as life itself, and

inspired them to go forth as one family to turn the world upside down for Christ and his Kingdom. And they did turn the world upside down!

May we, then, at this season, remember King Josiah and his Passover, and how he prepared himself for that Passover by first becoming clean in the sight of God and removing out of his kingdom those things that did offend and cause iniquity. Let us prepare for our Memorial in like manner, cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.

THE FADING LIGHT OF LAODICEA

*A meditation
in the past*

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

The reading finished and the little company sat silent, almost as if expecting the Master Himself to come into their assembly. Thus had they sat, for more years now than some of them cared to remember, at each Memorial celebration, recollection going back over the years past, hopes rising as they thought of the future. That passage in the Book of Revelation had an especial significance for them and they read it every year at their Memorial service; always did it grip them with its solemn expectation of the Coming One. They were but a small company, meeting in a small house on the outskirts of the city, but they knew that when their Lord did come, He would come to them. The wealthy and fashionable congregation whose magnificent building was one of the sights of Laodicea would have none of him; they had ignored John's message and cast out the faithful few who reproved their increasing worldliness and carelessness in spiritual things, and so there were now two companies in Laodicea that claimed the name of Christ, but in only one of them that his voice was heard.

It had not always been thus. Although none of them were old enough to remember it, they all knew of the time when the Church at Laodicea had its humble beginning in the house of Nymphas, (Col. 4. 15). He had been at Ephesus, eighty miles away, on business, and whilst there had heard the preaching of Paul the Apostle. *Jesus Christ, and Him crucified!*

Repentance, remission of sins, justification by faith, consecration to God and holiness of life! Times of Restitution, life for all by a resurrection from the dead! Nymphas had long sought the meaning of the sin and distress in the world; he was a business man and Laodicea was a business man's city; but he had sometimes gone the six miles across to Hierapolis (Col. 4. 13) the holy city of the Greek Nature gods and goddesses, to seek inspiration and enlightenment, and as often returned home dissatisfied. But here was a message which satisfied his longings as nothing else had ever done. It answered all his questions and fired his imagination; now he was agog to finish his business and get back home to Laodicea to tell his friends of the glorious news he had heard.

So it came about that he found himself on the great Roman road that, running inland from Ephesus across Asia, passed through Laodicea and Colosse on its way. He had companions, too, for at the Ephesus meetings he had met Philemon of Colosse and his son Archippus, and as they travelled back together the long road seemed but an hour's journey, so much there was to discuss, so much of recalling the words of the great Apostle and his no less fervent fellow labourers at Ephesus. Epaphras, already a tower of strength to the Ephesian church, had exhorted them to return to Ephesus and hear more of the words of life, and had promised to come to Laodicea and Colosse to help them with their converts and minister to them the things of Christ. Arrived at Laodicea, Philemon stayed one night at the house of Nymphas and then went

the remaining twenty miles to his own town of Colosse, where his wife Apphia heard the word from his lips, and believed too.

Thus grew up, first in Laodicea, and then in Colosse and Hierapolis, (Col. 4. 13) three little companies of believers who were themselves never to see the great Apostle in the flesh, but nevertheless were to make rapid progress in the knowledge of the Truth as they studied the Hebrew Scriptures and read together the fragments of the sayings of Jesus that began to come their way. Paul's own journeyings took him to many places but never to these three towns. Timothy came sometimes; but Epaphras was their most frequent visitor and he was to them an ever welcome and a faithful minister in Christ. (Col. 1. 7).

There had been one memorable event in those early days. Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave, had returned to Colosse bearing with him two—perhaps three—precious letters, letters written by the great Apostle himself. The one was a personal letter to Philemon, written jointly from Paul and Timothy. "*Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved and fellow labourer, and to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow-soldier, and the church in thy house*" it began (Philem. 1. 2), and in it Paul the aged besought his brother Philemon for the errant slave who had now himself become a brother in Christ, in Whom there is neither slave nor free, but all are brethren. And the other letter was particularly to the church, a letter full of fatherly counsel and doctrinal instruction; for Paul had heard that already in these Greek cities there were some coming among the believers seeking to take away the liberty that was theirs in Christ, and graft upon their simple Christian faith, on the one hand Jewish ordinances born of the Law, and on the other hand Greek mysticism and Eastern philosophies which would reduce the living Christ Who had become the inner power of their lives to a meaningless theological figure, a shadowy emanation that could neither sustain nor save. The trading markets of Laodicea brought many such Eastern doctrines to the ears of the Christians there, and the false worship of Hierapolis added its quota of Greek mythology, and Colosse received the impact of both. So the Epistle to the Colossians, carried to his master by Onesimus, was read, as was Paul's wish, both at Colosse and at Laodicea, and treasured up in the archives of the Church.

Perhaps there was a third, an Epistle of

Paul to the Laodiceans. It seems to be indicated in Col. 4. 16 but it is not in the New Testament and it has never been found. (There is a so-called "*Epistle to the Laodiceans*" but it is known to be a forgery of much later times). So that, if Paul really did write such an epistle, it was not preserved by the Holy Spirit as necessary to the later edification of the Christian Church. The loving brotherliness that so clearly existed between the ecclesias at Colosse and Laodicea and Hierapolis makes it evident that the one epistle to the Colossians was shared by them all, and all were edified.

Then came the news of Paul's death. Far away in Rome, he had suffered under the sword of the executioner, and Philemon and Nymphas were conscious of a new responsibility in their respective pastoral charges. Persecution was breaking out; Ephesus, more in the public eye than the inland cities, bore the brunt of it, and Laodicea and Colosse were left to a greater extent than formerly to their own devices.

And now the first generation of Christian Laodiceans and Colossians was passing away. Epaphras had gone, Nymphas had gone, Philemon had gone, and Archippus, after perhaps a season of service at Ephesus, had been called, if tradition be correct, to become the "presbyter" or "bishop"—the elder, as we would say to-day—of the now flourishing church at Laodicea. It would seem that the sister assemblies at Colosse and Hierapolis were declining, or at most remaining stationary. Laodicea flourished. That was not surprising. Laodicea was an important city, the capital of the province of Phrygia, and a trading centre. It occupied a prominent place on the great road, situated in the midst of beautiful country and splendid scenery, and boasted the finest architecture in all Asia; hence it attracted many visitors. Its citizens were prosperous, well-read and well-educated. Insensibly at first perhaps, but none the less surely, the church at Laodicea, bereft of the personal presence and direct influence of its first fathers in God, subject to the persuasive arguments of newcomers who knew nothing of that early missionary zeal and simple faith which had characterised its first members, began to conform itself more and more to the fashions and ways of the city, and as it did so the Spirit began to depart. They had not repudiated the Truth; they held still to the main doctrines of the Faith, perhaps more closely than had the brethren of Colosse; but there was a lukewarmness about their service,

a formality about their worship, a self-satisfaction with their Church organisation and a smugness in their study and ministry, that caused perplexity and sadness of heart to the few of their number who loved their Lord sincerely and waited still for His appearing. Those faithful ones wanted to preach the Kingdom; they believed that to be the only hope of the world; but now so many of their fellowship, professing the same Lord and the same faith, seemed to be indifferent or sceptical regarding that appearing and that Kingdom. They were so much more interested in business and the social life of the city.

Until, one day, when the Church was assembled in its magnificent building for formal worship, there came a grave, dignified presbyter, his clothes stained with travel-dust, and the congregation sat still as he mounted the rostrum, for ambassadors from the important sister-church at Ephesus were treated with ceremony and honour. His eyes swept the audience, resting sternly upon the self-satisfied, well-dressed men and women seated in the front rows, softening as he surveyed the eager faces of the company at the back. He spoke slowly and sadly. "My brethren, I come with news. Our beloved brother John, the last of the Twelve who followed our Lord in the days of his flesh, has finished his course. Henceforth there is laid up for him a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give him in the day of His appearing". He paused. "He sends you a farewell message, given him in vision in the Isle of Patmos, a message from the all-seeing One, the Master himself. Give heed, my brethren, for the message is for you." He drew a roll of parchment from the recesses of his robe and began to read in a firm voice that resounded through the building.

"Unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: these things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God: I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. As

many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent—" . . .

They never went back to the great building. The scene at that night's meeting was too vivid, too painful, for any of them to wish so to do. They never went back, and when next the emissaries from Ephesus came to Laodicea, they came to a little house on the outskirts, where a few true-hearted believers in the risen Lord met to encourage one another in the faith and to wait for his appearing.

* * *

The simple ceremony was over. The aged elder looked at his brethren affectionately. There were not many left who had been present, with him, at that service when the message to Laodicea had been read in the great Church. It was a long time ago—he was beginning to realise that now—and most of these were of the third generation and knew nothing at first hand of the events that forced him and his out of the church which had left its first love. He looked at them again, and thought to himself "The time is prolonged—surely He must come soon". In quiet assurance of faith he raised his hand in benediction. "Little children" he said "ye are members one of another, brethren beloved in the Lord. 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 . . . The bread that we have broken, is it not the communion of the Body of Christ? The cup we have shared, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? And we are all partakers thereof . . . Let us therefore who are thus minded esteem one another alike, building up one another on our most holy faith, waiting together for the glorious appearing of our Lord from heaven, for He will surely come!"

He made a gesture of dismissal, and they went out, quietly, as always after the Memorial Service. Through the darkened streets of the city they made their way, one and another turning off here and there as the parting of each several way was reached. The last half-dozen of the little company came thus to a building ablaze with light and gay with music. People were coming down the steps; rich, well-dressed men and jewelled, lavishly attired women to slaves awaiting them, carrying litters in which to bear them home, and torchbearers holding flaming torches to guide them on their way. Behind the tall Grecian columns which graced the vestibule the pilgrims caught sight of a brilliantly lighted interior, costly furnishings, and amid an admiring crowd, a proud

dignitary, clad in purple vestments. And the little party moved on, away from the wealth

and the show, out of the circle of light, into the darkness, into the unknown—to God.

GARDEN OF EDEN

3.—The Creation of Man

An Examination
of the Story of
Adam and Eve

A green, sunlit glade, alive with the hum of insects and the song of birds; a grassy bank, across which lay the still form of a man, magnificent in physique and perfect in proportion, a form which a moment ago had not been there—the busy insects ceased their hum, the song of the birds fell away into silence, the earth waited . . .

A light wind, sweeping over the tree-tops and down into the glade, ruffling the tall grass and setting the leaves nodding, bathing that motionless form in a soft caress . . . the body quivering, closed eyelids flickering open to reveal expressionless eyes slowly taking on a look of deepening wonder and enquiry. Limbs quietly stretching and flexing; the man sitting up and looking around him . . .

The creation of Adam must have been something like that. An almost instantaneous gathering together of earthly substances and their constitution into a human body by Divine power is quite easy to understand when in the stories of the Gospels we find that same Divine power doing precisely the same thing by creating wine where before there had been only water and replacing the already decaying flesh of Lazarus four days dead in new and healthy flesh. We in this generation are so accustomed to popular descriptions of the creation of new elements or the transmuting of one element into another by nuclear processes that we have far less excuse than had our fathers for questioning the credibility of this story.

The earth had been in existence a long time when God made man. God had worked through the ages making preparations for this climax to his terrestrial creative activity. Adam opened his eyes to a world of luxuriant life, both animal and vegetable. There were already many living creatures, pursuing their multifarious activities, showing him by force of example what sentient life could mean and could offer. But the earth had not always been thus. In the dim past it had been a place silent and dark, where stark, sterile mountains thrust their savage peaks from a universal sea devoid of any kind of life. That was no home for man. Then the sea and the land divided; in the sea there appeared living

things, lowly things, seaweeds and rock-scum, and corals and sponges neither plant nor animal but partaking of the qualities of both; to the land there came mosses and ferns, scorpions, beetles, grubs and creeping things; this too was no home for man. The slow ages passed and the misty hothouse atmosphere gave place to arid heat and a desert landscape, over which prowled grotesque giant reptiles, and raging seas tenanted by terrifying marine monsters; here again there was no home for man. But now the outworking Plan of God was taking great strides toward fulfilment. The hot, harsh conditions of the Mesozoic Era gave place to the soft rains and pure air of the Cainozoic; the enormous reptiles and sea creatures disappeared and in their place came the animals and birds we know today. Something quite new was seen on earth, a flower. Soon there were myriads of flowers, and with the flowers came bees and butterflies, noble trees like the oak and the beech and the elm, fruit trees like the apple and the pear and the orange, flowering grasses and aromatic herbs, and finally grain, wheat and barley and maize. Then God saw that the earth was ready for man's home and He came down to earth to create man.

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image." (Gen. 1. 26-27).

This is the general description of the appearance of man upon earth. Chapter 2 has the particular, the detailed story associating the actual act of creation with the garden in which it took place. In that chapter stress is laid upon man's bodily frame being of the dust of the ground; in this the emphasis is upon the fact that he is made in the image of God. "Let US make" . . . "in OUR image". To whom was God speaking and in what sense was man made in "OUR" image?

The modern critic is not slow to seize on this use of the plural and to suggest that this indicates the source of the story in polytheistic Babylonian mythology; Moses altered the

plurality of gods all through the account to make the story fit Hebrew belief in one God but accidentally omitted this one! Says one of the critics "*the plural unconsciously escaped the narrator's pen*". What the critics do not notice or at any rate do not mention is that nowhere in Babylonian mythology is man said to have been made in the image of God, so that the foundation of their premise is altogether swept away. The serious student, believing this story to be from God, must look farther below the surface than the critics have ever done to find the meaning of this declaration.

Jewish commentators have usually suggested that God is here depicted talking to the angels. The interest of the angelic world in the Divine creative work is hinted at in Job 38: 7 where, speaking of God fashioning the earth, we are told "*the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy*". Says the Talmud "*The Holy One, blessed be He, does nothing without consulting the family which is above*". Despite all this, however, there is no indication in the Bible that the angels had any share in the work of creating man, whereas Genesis explicitly states "Let US make man". It may be nearer the truth to think of the Father and the Son working together, for one thing upon which the New Testament is definite is the fact that the Son is the executive agent of the Father in things pertaining to man just as He is the way by which the Father is manifested to man. "*All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made*" (John 1: 3). "*By him were all things created . . . in heaven . . . in earth*" (Col. 1: 16). ". . . God, who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1: 9). At the same time it has to be recognized that the Genesis story depicts God as a unity, one who is conducting every step in creation by himself, until He comes to the final act, the creation of man, and then for the first time admits the joint work of another; "Let us . . .". Since the Son admittedly was the active agent in all the preceding creative works as well as in that of man the use of the plural in this verse alone would still seem to provoke enquiry.

Jewish scholars of an older time, such as Maimonides (1131-1201) suggest, in effect, that God took counsel with the earth, the earth supplying the body and God supplying the soul, so that the expression "in our likeness" was to be referred both to God and to the earth. This is worthy of thought before passing over. The angels were made in the

likeness of God but, being spiritual, have nothing of the likeness of earthly or material things. The lower animal creation which preceded Adam had the likeness of earth but nothing in them of the spiritual. Man alone has that which makes him a citizen of both worlds; he is of the earth, earthy, but God has implanted in his nature the capacity for spiritual intercourse with the higher world, the ability to worship and have communion and fellowship with God. It can quite reasonably be imagined that God, in a metaphorical kind of way, could say to the earth "Let us make man".

The expression, "in our image, after our likeness" has to be taken very literally for both words definitely indicate true resemblance. We do not have to confine the meaning to physical likeness; the whole man, moral, mental and physical, is included. So far as the moral aspect of man's nature is concerned, the implication is easy to accept; man is made in the moral likeness of God, having the same power of discernment between right and wrong, the same appreciation of moral values. Of all terrestrial living creatures, man alone possesses this moral sense and alone can be considered accountable for the morality of his actions. From that aspect one passes to the mental powers of man; here again there is a difference from the brute creation, in that men possess powers of reflection and deduction, and can reason of things unknown on the basis of things known. These faculties make possible increase of knowledge, discovery and invention, achievements which lie forever outside the powers of any other sentient creature. In this also, man is in the likeness of God, although his mental powers lie on an immeasurably lower level. Nevertheless they are at least such as to enable God to invite man "Come, and let us reason together, saith the Lord" (Isa. 1: 18). It is in connection with the idea of physical likeness that the difficulty arises; it is so evident that the body of man is devised and constructed to fit him for life on this earth and would be totally out of place in, and unfitted for life on, any other plane of being. Perhaps, after all, the "us" does refer to the co-operation of heaven and earth in the production of man, and the best understanding of this passage be found in thinking of man as possessing the mental and moral image of God enshrined in the likeness of an earthly creature. That there are essential differences between earthly and heavenly bodies is evident from the words of Paul in 1 Cor. 15 when he makes clear that

there is one glory of the terrestrial and another of the celestial, that "*as we have borne the image of the earthly so also we shall bear the image of the heavenly*"; yet James tells us that man is made in the similitude of God (Jas. 3. 9). But James is talking of human emotions, not of physical appearance, and it may well be that the human emotions of love, joy, zeal, loyalty, gratitude and so on are all counterparts of qualities finding far richer expression in the celestial world and in this sense also man is made in the image and likeness of God.

How did God create and vivify the first man? Did He take some pre-existing animal body and adapt it to his purpose, so that what started life as one of the lower creatures found itself exalted to a thinking, reasoning being? Did He allow the various species of anthropoid (man-like) apes to evolve, generation after generation, until one day He looked down and saw one specimen almost man-like in appearance and took that one and in-breathed his Spirit to make it a man? These and other hypotheses have been proposed but none involve any less simple and straightforward an exercise of creative power than that forthshown in the words in Gen. 2. 7 "*And 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*". There is every indication here that God constructed something new from entirely primitive and original material. He took "dust of the ground" where "dust" is *aphar*, the fine ingredients of the soil, and "ground" is *adamah*, the surface of the land in general, and He formed (*yatsar*—moulded or shaped, as a potter does clay) man from the variety of ingredients in the ground itself. How literally exact is that description is demonstrated by the fact that a human body contains at least forty-one of the ninety or so elements found in Nature. A scientist could take from the shelves of his laboratory so much carbon, so much calcium, so much sulphur, and similarly with the remaining elements, and produce some nine or ten stone weight of material which would be an exact replica of the substance which makes up a human body; but he would finish with a heap of greyish powder and in no way could he fashion it into a human being. God caused to be gathered together in one place the right quantities of those forty-one elements, brought them into chemical combination the one with the other so that they formed a complex system of carbo-hydrates, proteins and the like, caused

that combination to develop into a collection of living cells, tiny pinpoints of life too small to be seen with the naked eye but present in such myriad quantities that together in all their variety of shape and purpose they took on the outward appearance of a man, and inwardly became the organs and arteries and muscular system of a man—the man Adam. It may have been—must have been—the work of a moment of time from the gathering together of a hundredweight or so of particles from the surrounding earth to their metamorphosis into a symmetric and perfect human body lying there in the sunlight; and then God inbreathed into that inanimate frame the breath of life and man awoke to consciousness, a living soul.

This expression is not to be understood as implying that God implanted an immortal soul into the body of flesh, as though to tenant it until death, then to fly away as though set free. That idea, born of the rather confused theology of the Middle Ages, is a travesty of the truth. The teaching of Genesis is that the union of the Divine Spirit of life with the material body constitutes a living soul. "*Man became a living soul*". The separation of material body and spirit of life (which returns to God who gave it—Eccl. 12. 7) at death connotes the cessation of that "living soul"; the continuance of life of the individual is only by virtue of Divine power re-implanting that spirit of life in a new body of God's own creating, a "resurrection body". That is why the Christian faith is firmly rooted in the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. There can be no future life without a resurrection from the dead, and because the old body at death has returned to the dust, its component items then to re-appear in a hundred different forms by virtue of the processes of Nature, the resurrection body is not the one that dies but an entirely new body. "*Thou sowest not that body that shall be*" (1 Cor. 15. 37).

Once that point is clearly appreciated, it is easier to understand that man in his perfect state, as was Adam at his creation, is intended by God for everlasting life upon the earth. Leaving aside for the moment any consideration of the Divine Plan as regards those from among mankind who attain to joint heirship and eternal association with Christ in his glory and in the celestial world, it has to be remembered that God, who "*formed not the earth in vain, he formed it to be inhabited*" (Isa. 45. 18) has quite evidently created these material spheres which form his physical creation for the purpose of sustaining life

which shall be to his glory. The mediæval idea that all material things are inherently corrupt and must pass away in a final holocaust of fire is now very generally repudiated. When God looked upon all that He had made, He pronounced it "very good" (Gen. 1. 31). A reasoned view of the Divine purpose therefore must envisage the continuance upon earth to all eternity of sinless, undying human beings living their lives to the glory of God in this environment just as the multitudes of the saints in heaven will live their lives in that environment. The whole tenor of Scripture is to this effect; the inspired writers concur in visualising an ultimate state of felicity on this earth when "*there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor sighing, neither shall there be any more pain*" because "*the dwelling-place of God is with men*". (Rev. 21. 3-4).

Now that implies that Adam, created perfect and sinless, was also capable of living that undying life upon earth had he remained in harmony with the laws of righteousness. Sin,

and sin alone, is the cause of death so far as humanity is concerned. Without sin there can be no death. Hence the Apostle Paul states categorically "*by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*" (Rom. 5. 12). It follows therefore that the creation of Adam was the first movement in a chain of cause and effect which had as its ultimate object the peopling of this planet with an adequate and appropriate population of supremely happy undying creatures fulfilling a defined place in Divine creation and living always to the glory of God. The interposition of sin has delayed but not frustrated that object; sin will be overcome and eliminated and the original purpose achieved.

So Adam, the first human living soul, opened his five senses to the reception of impressions from the external world around him, and the history of mankind on earth had begun.

(To be continued)

AFFLICTION'S GOOD

When a blade of wheat springs up, and all is promising well, sometimes the wheat-fly pierces it, and lays its eggs within. Then the grubs come out, and devour it all. Now we might suppose that with its only stem thus nipped in the bud the wheat would be destroyed. But not so. The seed corn possesses an inherent power of recovery, and what at first seems fatal to its fruitfulness proves to be for its greatest good. The plant, by the death of its first shoot, has time for its new lateral feeders to become more firmly established in the soil; and, in place of the one ear that was destroyed, from its stronger root, now puts forth many.

It is often thus in the life of the Christian. All his plans and purposes are suddenly undermined. God in mercy sends a worm, as he did to Jonah's gourd; then it withers away in a night, and all seems lost. But not so. He who has "the root of the matter" in his heart, finds that root of faith and love now rendered stronger and firmer by the painful process.

Moses was far more fit for his mighty work after forty troubled years of disappointment and humiliation, spent as a humble shepherd in the lonely deserts of Midian, than upon the morning of that day when he first assayed his people's deliverance with all the prestige of Egypt's royalty. David, hunted as a partridge in the mountains, and reduced almost to despair, was nearer the throne of honour than

when he formerly dwelt at ease, the flattered favourite of Israel's king.

Peter indeed thought himself well able to defend his Master on that evening when, moved by love, zeal, and courage, he uttered the eager resolve, "*Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended.*" But the night of failure, shame, and anguish that followed his self-confident cry, and the after-days of darkness, left him a wiser, stronger, braver man. He, who had once quailed in the presence of a maidservant, bore a fearless testimony to his Saviour before that very court which had crucified Jesus, and was openly bent on the destruction of his followers.

The lives of most of God's servants have been alike trying and eventful. The divine rule of promotion is, "*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.*" The reason for this is given by the Apostle Paul, and it serves to solve much of the great mystery of pain. "*Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience hope.*" "*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.*" In God's good time the blighted purpose and disappointed life prove a tenfold increase of true Christian fruitfulness, which could not have been otherwise attained. (Selected.)

THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST JUDGE

Luke 18.1-8

There is a peculiarly modern ring about this story of the man in high office who cared nothing for morality and right dealing. He was there to dispense justice, to defend the innocent and restrain the evil doer. He had a double responsibility; he was accountable both to God and to man. The laws he administered were based on the Divine principles upon which God had made the world and man upon it; they were accepted and professed by men as the true basis of ordered society. It was his duty to put them into effect and enforce them, with all diligence, showing neither fear nor favour, and he had no intention of doing anything of the kind. There is no suggestion that he was dishonest or hypocritical either with himself or with others. He acknowledged his position quite frankly in verse 8. "*I reverence not God, nor regard man*". He administered his office in the way that best suited his own convenience without any regard to the merits of the cases he handled or any thought of responsibility to the mandatory power, of God or of men, from which he derived his authority. Like so many in positions of influence and power to-day, he knew of no reason why his administration should be guided by moral principles or the standards of truth and justice. He enjoyed the benefits and privileges of his position, used his power as he pleased, and governed his actions entirely by expediency. He was not particularly immoral; he was just amoral. And far too many men are like that in this present time of declining religious faith and belief.

A good many have asked why this particularly unpleasant individual should be used by Jesus to illustrate our Father's attitude to the prayers of his disciples. Surely, say some, a better simile could have been found. It might be said in reply that the fact that Jesus did use this picture to point the lesson is sufficient basis to expect some very definite truth, embedded therein, for which we do well to seek, and having found, to consider. It is clear that, as in certain other parables, Jesus is teaching by contrast. If this admittedly unrighteous judge is found rousing himself at last to do his duty in consequence of the appellant's importunity, then *how much more* will God, who is not unrighteous, and unlike this judge, is actively working to give sin-sick

humanity the relief they crave, ready to grant deliverance to those who come to him. There is a supplementary question which follows hard on the heels of this answer; if God is indeed so solicitous to save, why is He so long in doing it? That question, and its answer, is also in this parable, but has to be considered in its right place, at the conclusion of the story.

The unjust judge, then, gave no heed to the poor widow's complaint. She may have had justice on her side and might well have been grievously treated by her adversary at law; the judge neither knew or cared. Her complaints went unheeded; her case was never brought up for trial. The judge, to use a modern expression, "couldn't care less". But after a time he was made to care. This widow would not take no for an answer and she would not go away. She knew that justice was available and she knew that she was entitled to justice, and justice she intended to have. She kept on importuning the judge, and at last, tired of seeing her waiting at his door and irritated at the continual repetition of her plea, he bestirred himself to look into her case, to set the machinery of the law in motion, and awarded her the judgment she sought. Not because he cared one jot for the rights or wrongs of the case; he was completely honest about that. All he wanted was to be rid of the woman and left in peace.

Now the really important factor in this story is the widow's fixed belief that she must eventually obtain her desire, not because the judge was upright, but because her cause was just. A man so candid as this one about his attitude could not but be well-known to his prospective litigants and no one would expect justice or consideration from him, any more than do men in similar cases to-day. The widow pursued the course of action she did on the basis of one fixed principle; the law entitled her to relief and the law must eventually be upheld. It was that fixed inward conviction which sustained her as day after day she renewed her apparently unavailing plea. Eventually her faith was justified and she received her desired judicial award.

"*Continuing instant in prayer*" says the Apostle in Rom. 12. 12. That expression "continuing instant" has the meaning of dogged perseverance, a tenacious grasp of the

thing desired which will not be loosed. Strong, steadfast, immovable. Rotherham translates the first verse of this parable "as to its being needful for men always to pray and not be faint-hearted". The essential nature of prayer is communion with God. We commune with God not because of the things we want of him, but because we want to be one with him; in common-union. We desire oneness with God because we have entered into full heart sympathy with his guiding principles for all creation. We, like God, desire above all things to see righteousness universal and evil eliminated, and our desire is because we have come to realise that condition of things to be the only possible basis of enduring life. Therefore "Thy Kingdom Come" is the most fundamental prayer of all and the essence of all prayer. It is because we believe and are persuaded that this ardently desired consummation to the Divine Plan will surely come to pass that we continue in prayer before God. We know in whom we have believed and are persuaded that he is able. Our constantly reiterated prayers serve to strengthen and crystallise our conviction that these things will surely come to pass, just as with the litigant widow the more she pressed for justice the more sure she became that it would be hers eventually.

This is where the other question has to be answered—Why is God so tardy in replying? We know why the widow had to wait so long, but we cannot give that reason in the case of the reality which the parable illustrates. There is no unrighteousness with God, and he is diligent to oversee the interests of the disciples. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears are open unto their cry" (Psa. 34. 15). Why then the apparent delay? Perhaps Rotherham's comment on verse 7 is enlightening on this aspect of the parable. "Slow to smite his foes, he seems also slow to save his friends". Rotherham's own translation of verse 7 gives a new slant to Jesus' words "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry unto him day and night, though he bear long with them?" where Rotherham has it "though he bear long with regard to them". Here we come up against that longsuffering of God, his patience and forbearance with sinful man so often exemplified in history. He would have spared Sodom if so few as ten righteous men could have been found there (Gen. 18. 32). He gave the Ninevites every opportunity and spared them when they repented at the eleventh hour. Even though it means prolonging the reign of evil, and of human misery and

death, he defers his arising in judgment until in his wisdom He sees that the iniquity of man is come to the full. So he "bears long" with regard to the cry of his faithful servants because He is working in his own inscrutable way for the salvation of "whosoever will" among his rebellious creatures. That is why there is apparent delay. And that is why faith tends to die. Jesus knew that too. Even although God will avenge, and the faith of those who have waited will be abundantly justified, Jesus knew, as He told his disciples later on, "because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24. 12). So here, at the close of the parable, He gave voice to the sad question "Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (vs. 8). We need not deduce from those words that Jesus doubted whether at his Return there would be any at all holding still to the faith; the whole tenor of his teaching implies his knowledge that there would be the faithful watching ones ardently waiting for his appearance, not taken by surprise when the event occurred, and ready in every sense of the word to be "changed" in a moment (1 Cor. 15. 51-52) and so associated with him to all eternity. What Jesus did foresee was that in the Time of the End faith in the world at large would be at a very low ebb precisely because of the apparent victory of evil and impotence of righteousness. In the days of the First Advent everybody believed in God, even though in many cases their lives bore little evidence of any real endeavour to walk in his ways. In the days before the First Advent everybody believed in God; and so did nearly all men subsequently until the approach of relatively modern times. Of all ages in world history the last two or three centuries have been by far the most agnostic and atheistic. Faith in God is to-day rapidly vanishing from the earth and from the human standpoint it would almost seem as if the Christian cause is lost. Materialistic writers already talk of the need of a new religion founded on modern knowledge and devised to suit modern needs, to replace Christianity which in their view is archaic and out-worn. Vast sections of the earth's surface are ruled by political systems which have no use for God and openly say as much; by their actions most of the remaining governing powers, whilst still paying lip service, show that they too have little intention of upholding the principles of Divine rule which God originally instilled in the heart of man. So men conclude that God, if He exists, is either impotent or indifferent.

It is at such a time that God acts. "I tell you" said Jesus "that he will avenge them speedily." When the iniquity of the nations has at length come to the full; when the great Clock of the Ages strikes the hour fore-ordained of God and the time of his Kingdom has come, the prayers of the faithful will be answered, in that revelation of the Son of Man in the glory of his power which will at one and the same time overthrow the powers of evil and introduce all men to the beneficent rule of the Messianic Kingdom. "Every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall

be made straight, and the rough places plain, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (Isa. 40. 4-5). This is the thing that must be, that shall be, because it is the right thing, and because evil is inherently unstable and must one day consume away by its own corruption.

The Christian whose faith holds firm in God because he knows that God is, and knows that God is good, is the one who will endure unshaken through the dark days in full confidence that at the last, God will avenge him of his adversary.

"IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME"

*A meditation on
the first anniversary*

The memorial links us with our brethren in all lands and all times. But in how vastly different circumstances has the sacred feast been observed during the past nineteen hundred years. Consider the first memorial just a year after its inauguration by our Lord on that night in which He was betrayed. Can we picture the disciples gathering in response to love's request? It was no effort for them to remember him. Their memories were crowded with mental pictures of scenes in which He had been the central figure. The four Gospels put together record only the merest fraction of all that Jesus did and taught and with which they were familiar. As if it had only been yesterday they could recall his appearance, his dress, his bearing and gestures, and above all the glory of God in his countenance. Never man spake like this man had been the testimony even of his enemies. What an indelible impression therefore must our Lord's teaching have made upon them. Think of being able to listen in memory to the sermon on the mount spoken in the voice of our Lord himself and at the same time to be able to conjure up the whole scene! How wonderful to be able to visualise our Lord enacting some of those scenes with which the Gospels have made us so familiar, such as the cleansing of the lepers, the restoring of sight to the blind, causing the lame to walk, casting out devils, cleansing the Temple, rebuking the winds and the waves, walking on the sea and even restoring the dead to life. How vivid and tragic must the closing scenes have been to them; the triumphal procession on Palm Sunday followed by the terrible cry of "Crucify Him"; the sad procession from the judgment hall to the place called "Calvary" and the crowning horror when the three crosses were erected

with Jesus in their midst.

As they gathered together for the first memorial each would have specially treasured memories of personal contacts with the Lord. Mary, the Lord's mother, would be able to go furthest back. If every mother's mind is richly stored with precious recollections of her first born, how transcendently more must Mary's have been. Possessing the secret of his birth, with what wonder and awe must she have watched her child's personality unfolding as He grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man. She would recall the wrench when at the age of thirty He left the humble home to take up the work for which He had been born. The parting, however, had been softened by the thought that He had gone to lead the nation. as their Messiah, back to God and to fulfil the angel's words given before his birth. "He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord shall 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." How sorely tried her faith had been by subsequent events. With growing alarm she received the report concerning the hatred which He had been arousing against himself and of the plots of the rulers to destroy him. Then vividly before her mind would pass the final scenes. In helpless agony she had stood before the cross with her sister and the two Marys until she could endure no more and John had led her away. But now she understood the reason for it all and all the wealth of her affection had been transformed into a passion of Divine love as she saw him wounded for her transgressions, bruised for her iniquity and the chastisement of her peace upon him.

It was surely with trembling hands and eyes and heart that overflowed that she partook of those sacred emblems of that broken body and shed blood that had meant all the world to her.

Those amongst the disciples who could look farthest back were John and Andrew. At the first memorial they would be recalling as they had doubtless done innumerable times before that first meeting with the Lord on the banks of the Jordan. As the very first and withal two of the finest of his disciples, the Lord had been no less interested in them than they had been in him. It had been a meeting never to be forgotten; what a wonderful evening they had spent together. First impressions are lasting and probably all would be specially recalling the circumstances in which they had first met the Lord. There was Nathaniel, he would be thinking again of how he had been making it a matter of prayer under the fig tree when the Lord gave him that heart-searching glance, spoke those thought-penetrating words and gave him that splendid commendation which he should never forget as long as he lived. Nicodemus too would be there but no longer timid. How he would recall again the events of that memorable night when the Lord had spoken to him those wonderful words of life. Little had he realised at the time the meaning of the saying addressed to him. "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*" As he thought of his Lord hanging there on the cross for his sins he could now see something of its depths of meaning.

Martha and Mary would also be there with their precious store of personal recollections. How much the Lord had loved them and how frequently had he made their house his home. Never would they forget or cease to be stirred with deepest gratitude for that most wonderful of all the Lord's miracles performed on their behalf. The sisters could still hear the ringing tones of that voice that woke the dead and gave them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. And what about Peter and James and John, the three so often singled out by the Lord for occasions of special intercourse with him. How much they would recall of personal contacts. As they partook of the emblems surely their minds would go back to that wondrous vision on the mount of transfiguration when Moses and Elijah had spoken of the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. Instances could be multiplied of how the early disciples would in

the most natural and spontaneous way remember him. To them it would not be so much the Plan of God as the person of Christ that would be uppermost in their minds; not so much the doctrines of the Truth as the personal love of their Lord.

As we look forward to celebrating another memorial we cannot but recognise a difference between ourselves and our brethren of whom we have been speaking. Unlike them we can have no vivid personal recollection of the Lord as He was in the flesh. Our knowledge of the Man Christ Jesus is second hand, like most of our information on the subject, books forming the principal source of all our knowledge. God caused the New Testament to be written specially for that larger body of his brethren whom our Lord referred to as "those also who shall believe on Me through their word." By its aid we too can remember him in all those incidents portrayed so simply and beautifully in the Gospels, using our sanctified imagination to make the scenes live before us. As compensation for our lack of first hand knowledge of the human life of our Lord, we have a much more complete knowledge than those first disciples of his resurrection life. The epistles written over quite a long period give evidence of how gradual was the growth into the fuller knowledge of the person and work of Christ. Even Peter refers to Paul's writings as containing some things hard to be understood. Following the epistles we have the added knowledge imparted in the Book of Revelation, giving us a history in advance of the whole of the Gospel Age and beyond. The disciples at the first memorial could look back only over the three and a half years of our Lord's earthly ministry; we can look back over nineteen centuries and see the Lord in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, watching over his people with patient tender care.

If our knowledge of our Lord in the flesh is of necessity second hand, not so our knowledge of the risen Christ. There is no child of God but has abundant occasion for remembering the Lord in respect of his own personal contacts. While it is true that "*the sands have been washed in the footprints of the stranger on Galilee's shore, and the voice that subdued the rough billows is heard in Judea no more*" it is also true that "*Warm, sweet living yet, a present help is He, And faith has still her Olivet and love her Galilee.*" We must all have had personal contacts with the Lord else we have no right to a place at the memorial

feast. We have been cleansed from the leprosy of sin; blind and deaf to the things of God and the voice of God, our blind eyes have been opened and our deaf ears unstopped; blind, He has opened our lips that our mouth should show forth His praise; crippled He has given us power to stand erect and walk in his ways; dead in trespasses and sins He has quickened us and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ. These and countless other blessings are common to all God's people, yet each has had experiences in connection with them peculiarly his own. The members of the New Creation are not mass produced. The Lord has an individual plan for every individual life. The memorial is an occasion for remembering him with deepest gratitude for all the peculiarly personal expressions of his love. It is here that we are apt to fail most. Like the babe which though the object of maternal love's unremitting attention and tenderest care, is yet all unconscious of it, so we often take for granted, accept as coincidence, receive as a

matter of course, the mother love of Jesus expressed towards and experienced by every one of his "little children".

Each memorial as it comes and goes shortens the time that yet remains to the Church on earth. In the atomic bomb God seems to have given to the world his ultimatum with a time limit that is very short. The choice is now before them, of chaos or Christ, and the decision cannot be long delayed. If the end of Satan's empire gives evidence of being so near then nearer still is the end of the church on earth. The next memorial for all we know may be the last. It almost certainly will be the last for some. Let us go forward with this solemn thought in mind, not only looking back to the cup which our Lord drank to the bitter dregs at Calvary and in which we are privileged to share, but also forward to the infallible joy, which awaits us, of being permitted to drink the wine new with him in the Kingdom of God.

THE VISION OF JOEL

*An Exposition of the
Book of Joel*

5. Deliverance in Zion.

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit". (Chap. 2. 28-29).

"Afterward"—after what? Plainly this pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh follows the deliverance of Israel and their whole-hearted acceptance of God; it is, therefore, the Millennial outpouring that is referred to. Then why did Peter, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, claim the fulfillment of this prophecy in his own day? "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" he said (Acts 2. 16-21). The answer is that Peter believed the time of the Kingdom to be immediately at hand; and, what is of importance, none could justly say it was *not* at hand at that moment, for if Israel had accepted the message of the High Calling as a nation, and so entered into that for which their two thousand years of training had been preparing them, the work of the Gospel Age would have been ended in one generation and the Millennial Age been ushered in. Even al-

though the foreknowledge of God perceived that Israel would not enter in, that only a remnant would believe, and that the call therefore must go to the Gentiles, with all the long extension of time which that entailed, it must needs be that Israel have the opportunity. And so Peter was right in applying the prophecy to his own day—until Israel had rejected the call. From then on, the prophecy was deferred, and is still, waiting for the full end of this Age to come.

Does any part of this passage refer to the Gospel Age? It would hardly seem so. It used to be thought that the "servants and handmaidens" upon whom the spirit is to be poured "in those days" represented the Church of this Age; but there is a manifest incongruity in referring to the Church as "servants" in the same breath in which others are spoken of as "sons". Peter's quotation from Joel is not word perfect; he says "it shall come to pass in the last days" whereas the Hebrew of Joel has "it shall come to pass afterward" and the Septuagint has *meta tauta* "after the same things". And the promise is two-fold. The Spirit is to be poured out upon "all flesh"; that is a universal outpouring which can only be true in the Millennial

Age; and as an additional glory the "sons and daughters" shall prophesy, the young men shall dream dreams, the old men see visions, and the servants and handmaidens, lower far in status than the free born people of the land, are to share in the out-pouring—even to the extent of prophesying also, according to Peter in Acts 2. 18. The reference is undoubtedly to the regathered "Holy Nation", restored Israel, converted and purified, taking up their place in the Millennial work. It may be that the "sons and daughters" are the lineal children of Jacob in that nation, and the "servants and handmaidens" the Gentile "strangers" who have joined themselves in that day.. Isaiah (44. 5) speaks of these; they are men and women from other nations, who after the completion of the Church have joined themselves to the earthly nation and become by adoption members of the earthly seed of Abraham, their faith and devotion having been thus rewarded with a part in the Millennial work of that earthly seed, under the direction of the then glorified Church. The 56th chapter of Isaiah, and Ezek. 47. 22-23, probably refer to the same thing.

Isaiah 32, that well-known Millennial chapter, is helpful here. Verses 9-14 describe Israel's period of disfavour, cast off from the purposes of God, *until* (vs. 15) "the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and . . . the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever". Zech. 12. 10 also speaks of the spirit of grace and supplication being poured upon the house of David at the Time of the End; there are in fact quite a number of such references all going to show that this universal outpouring takes place at and after the time of Israel's conversion, and not before. The prophecy therefore must find its fulfilment after the Time of Trouble and after the Kingdom has been established.

"Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions."

This is a glowing picture of a nation completely and unreservedly devoted to the service of God, and free at last to take up that service in its fulness. That nation is the newly constituted people in the Holy Land which will have fulfilled all the prophecies concerning the restoration of Israel. Their God has come forth out of his place to defend them; their enemies have been turned back and will never again have power to afflict or distress them; the time for world-wide proclamation of the Truth has come, and the Holy Spirit,

coming down in the form of the ministrations of the glorified Church, is through that regathered nation to be poured out upon all flesh. This association between the work of the Church and the bestowing of the Holy Spirit is shown in the words of Revelation 22. 17 "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come . . . and whosoever will may come . . . and take of the fountain of the water of life freely". In the joy and exultation of this knowledge, and the zeal of this service, the whole of that "holy nation" will respond and manifest all the characteristics of God-given revival and evangelical fervour. The sons and daughters will prophesy of the future; the old men will dream dreams of the future; the young men will see visions of the future, and all those prophesyings and dreams and visions will be related in the ears of all men the world over that they might know what are the laws and standards of the new Kingdom, and what are the glories that await the willing and obedient, both during the Millennial Age and at its end. Prophecies, dreams and visions are all associated, in the Bible, with the emotional stress and the more than usually sharpened spiritual insight that accompanies the close of an Age and the opening of the next; this verse refers without a doubt to the tremendous wave of evangelical fervour that will possess the delivered nation when the Kingdom is established in power and they commence, at long last, to fulfil their historic destiny of being a people to give light to the Gentiles, to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth.

The next two verses (30-31) are retrospective. Joel has gone back a little to look at the signs which will herald this long-awaited day of the Spirit's outpouring. "*I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come.*" These words take on new significance when we find that our Lord used the same symbols to describe the signs of his Second Advent; evidently the same events are referred to and the signs of the imminent Millennial reign are the same as the signs of our Lord's return.

"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call."

This verse touches some important truths. There are at least three momentous words in

it—"whosoever", "deliverance", and "remnant". But to understand their significance we must take them backwards. Before asking the identity of the "whosoever" who are to be delivered it is necessary to know what is the deliverance promised. Before understanding the nature of the deliverance we must enquire into the identity of the "remnant" through whom that deliverance is to come. And so we are brought face to face with one of the most intriguing doctrines of the Old Testament, the doctrine of the "remnant".

It was Joel who first introduced this theme. In later years the Holy Spirit used Isaiah to dwell upon it and show how God would preserve a "remnant" to keep alive his work and carry it on as one world merged into the next; and others of the prophets, notably Micah, caught something of the same idea. But the seed of it all is here in this word of the earlier prophet. "Deliverance" for "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord" is to be in, and come by means of, the "remnant whom the Lord shall call". And this remnant is closely associated with Mount Zion and Jerusalem.

Isaiah and Micah, both living later than Joel, between them can explain this word. "It shall come to pass in that day" says Isaiah "that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, . . . shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return . . . unto the Mighty God . . . the consumption (consummation) decreed shall overflow with righteousness" (Isa. 10. 20-22). This is the first point to observe. The "remnant", those that escape, both from the corrupting influence of the Gentile world and the evil hosts of Gog and Magog, will be a purified people, trusting wholly in the Lord. This is therefore a converted people, dwelling in the land and ready to God's hand as an instrument for his purposes. This is confirmed by Micah, who says (4. 6-7) "In that day, saith the Lord, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out . . . and I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast off a strong nation, and the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion even for ever". The glorious destiny of the purified nation is clearly shown in these words, and their beneficent mission to all the people of the earth is equally clearly shown in the next chapter. "The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass." (Micah 5. 7). It is true that in the next verse the same remnant

is said also to be among the nations as a lion among the beasts of the forest, an evident reference both to the position of leadership assigned to that nation in that day, and also to the fact that it will be a nation that tears down and destroys all opposition to its rule.

It is interesting to notice that quite a number of reputable translators give a personal meaning to the deliverance that is said in this verse to reside in Zion and Jerusalem. Thus Rotherham says "*In Mount Zion and Jerusalem shall be a delivered remnant*" and Leeser, Revised Version and Variorum "*in Mount Zion and Jerusalem there shall be those that escape*". Here again there is clear evidence of a wonderful deliverance of God's ancient people taking place at the time when God is about to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. Isaiah crowns this particular theme by declaring "I will send *those that escape of them* unto the nations . . . and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles" (Isa. 66. 19). This is the great mission of regathered Israel, and this is the work to which they are called when the Millennial Age has begun. In a literal sense they will be Divine missionaries to all the earth, and their rulers, the resurrected "Ancient Worthies", princes in all the earth, requiring and receiving the obedience of all men.

So the vision of Israel's triumph closes, and gives place in Chapter 3 to another and parallel vision of the Time of the End; but this time the prophet is looking, not on his own people and the effect of the Time of Trouble upon them, but upon the Gentile nations and the manner in which the Time of Trouble affects them. Instead of seeing a restored and renovated homeland in which the sons of Jacob praise and serve the God who has delivered them, he sees the marshalling of angry hosts determined to fight God. But the end is the same, and chapter 3 closes, as does chapter 2, in the "afterward of peace" of the Millennial Kingdom.

(To be continued)

You cannot study the New Testament with any prayerful attention without discovering that every single blessing you enjoy as a Christian is yours simply because you are in Him. It is all stored for you in Christ; because you are in Him everything is yours, and until we are in Him nothing is ours. Oh, to reckon upon our union with Christ!

THEY LOOKED FOR A CITY

Extracts from the writings of men
who believed in the coming Kingdom
of God on earth.

Dr. John Cumming was born in 1807 and died in 1881. He was a devout student and writer on prophecy, although his views on the Book of Revelation would be considered sadly out of date to-day. In 1832 he was appointed minister to the National Scottish Church in Covent Garden, London. The following extract from his writings shows how expectation of the coming Millennial Age was based upon the Scriptures, and held, a hundred or more years ago.

* * *

"Some say, is not this an earthly heaven? My dear friends, earth is not essentially corrupt; there is nothing sinful in the clods of the valley—there is nothing sinful in a rose, nor in a tree, nor in a stone. I have seen spots upon the earth so beautiful, that if the clouds of winter would never overtake them, nor the sin of man blast them, I could wish to live amidst them forever. Take sin from the earth—the fever that incessantly disturbs it—the cold freezing shadow that gathers around it—and let my Lord and Saviour have his throne upon earth, its consecration and its glory, and what lovelier spot could man desire to live on? What fairer heaven could man anticipate here after? To me it is heaven where Christ is, whether He be throned upon earth, or reigning amid the splendours of the sky—if I am with him, I must enjoy unsullied and perpetual happiness.

"Great and solemn crisis, I cannot but again exclaim. My dear friends, if you like, reject all my views of Apocalyptic chronology, reject all my historical explanations, if you like; but do not reject this, that Christ, Who died upon the cross, will come, and when ye think not, and reign, wearing his many crowns, and upon His glorious throne. Look for him, and the same Christ will come again, the husband to the widow, the bridegroom to the bride; He has promised that He will come to us, and we shall be 'forever with the Lord'.

"And when I think of the time when He does come, I can scarcely realise that glorious Sabbath which will overspread the earth, that noble song which will be heard when the saints shall sing together '*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Hosts*'. What a flood of beauty magnificence and glory will roll over this now

shattered orb, like the countless waves of an illuminated ocean, illuminated by Christ, the great central Sun, around Whom all systems revolve, and from Whom all beauty comes. And, my dear friends, if there be the least probability in what I have said, is it not our duty to pause—to prepare and search if it be so? When men hear that there was a new star somewhere to be detected in the firmament, there were some thousands of telescopes directed every night to the skies, and countless stargazers searching if, peradventure, they might discover it. My dear friends, a star comes brighter and more beautiful than any other, the 'bright and morning star', too long concealed by clouds which are about to be chased away; why should not our hearts look for him? Why should not the believer who has shared in the bitterness and in the blessings of his cross, pray and pant for him, if, peradventure, he may share in the splendours of his crown? Is not the Lord welcome to us? Crushed and bleeding humanity, amid this thousand wrongs, cries, '*Come, Lord Jesus*'. The earth, weary with its groans, and the sobs of its children, cries, '*Come, Lord Jesus*'. The persecuted saints in Tahiti and Madeira, in the dens, and caves, and solitary places of the earth, cry, '*Come, Lord Jesus*'. And, surely, many a heart that has been warmed by his love—that has been refreshed by his peace, sanctified by his grace, shall raise the same cry, '*Come, Lord Jesus*'; and the sublime response will descend from heaven like a wave from the ocean of love overflowing men's hearts, '*Behold, I come quickly*'.

"My dear friends, I say to many of you, 'Farewell'; and I say that in a sense in which it is not often uttered. I say it not lightly, but solemnly. May you fare well in the First Resurrection. May you fare well at the Judgment Day. May you fare well in time; may you fare well in eternity. And at that day when sighs and farewells shall cease, may we meet before the throne of God and of the Lamb, and so be forever with the Lord. Amen, and Amen."

"The primary characteristic of knowledge is not that it is for ever changing, but that it is for ever growing."—(Sir James Jeans)



Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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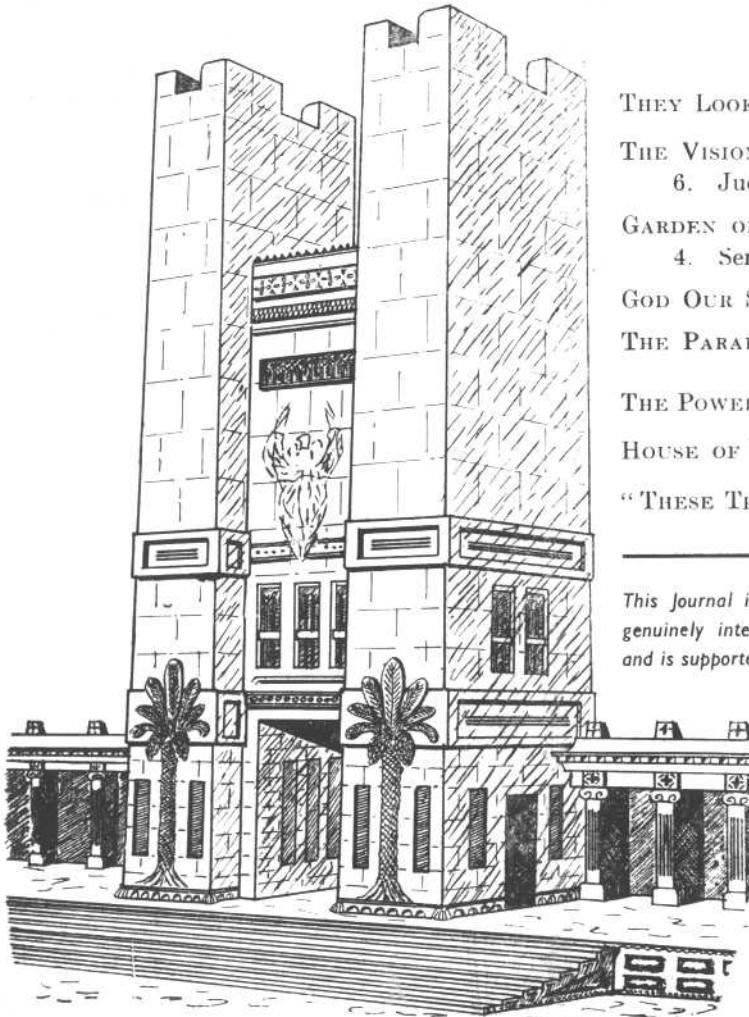
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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"THEY LOOKED FOR A CITY"

Extracts from the writings of
men who believed in the coming
Kingdom of God on earth

C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) was one of the most famous of British preachers. He was a staunch believer in the truth of the Bible. The following extract from one of his sermons shows how fully he accepted its Millennial teaching.

* * *

"We stand on the borders of a new era. The present dispensation is almost finished. In a few more years, if prophecy be not thoroughly misinterpreted, we shall enter upon another condition. This poor earth of ours, which has been swathed in darkness, shall put on her garments of light. She hath toiled a long while in travail and sorrow. Soon shall her groanings end. Her surface, which hath been stained with blood, is soon to be purified by love, and a religion of peace is to be established. The hour is coming when storms shall be hushed, when tempests shall be unknown, when whirlwind and hurricane shall stay their mighty force, and when 'the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ'. But you ask me what sort of kingdom that is to be, and whether I can show you any likeness thereof. I answer 'No'. 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him' in the next, the Millennial dispensation; 'but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit'. Sometimes when we climb upwards, there are moments of contemplation when we can understand that verse 'From whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ' and can imagine that thrice-blessed hour when the King of Kings shall put on his head the crown

of the universe; when He shall gather up sheaves of sceptres, and put them beneath his arm; when He shall take the crowns from the heads of all monarchs, and welding them into one, shall put them on his own head, amidst the shout of ten thousand times ten thousand who shall shout his high praises. But it is little enough that we can guess of its wonders. *O Christians, do you know that your Lord is coming?* In such an hour as ye think not, the Man Who once hung quivering on Calvary will descend in glory; the head that once was crowned with thorns will soon be crowned with a diadem of brilliant jewels. I do look for his pre-millennial advent, and expect He will come here again. Jesus, our Lord, is to be King of all the earth, and rule all nations in a glorious, personal reign."

Appointments. Bro. W. Siekman

Aug. 1-3	London Convention
4	Leicester
5	Nottingham
6	Lincoln
7	Dewsbury
8-9	Glasgow
10	Warrington
11	Wallasey
12	Manchester
13	Coventry
15-21	Reading (Maranatha Conference)
22-23	Cardiff
24	Yeovil
25	London Farewell Meeting

All details please apply Bro. A. J. Lodge,
75 Shelveys' Way, Tadworth, Surrey.

THE VISION OF JOEL

6. Judgment upon the Gentiles

An Exposition of the
Book of Joel

The third chapter of Joel's prophecy is so well known a passage, and so often read and quoted in studies relating to the end of the Age, that it seems almost superfluous to engage upon a detailed exposition of its verses. It is without doubt the "key-chapter" to all that the Scriptures have to say concerning Armageddon. The short, terse, but vivid description of the nations feverishly arming themselves and coming together to the final conflict, only to meet the might of the Lord, rising up out of Zion to destroy them, has no parallel in any other Biblical book. It is a summary of the more detailed explanations given by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and John in the Book of Revelation. It is unhesitant in its assertion of final and conclusive victory for the powers of righteousness and it closes the prophecy on a note of finality. After all the troubles and disasters Joel has seen, he declares triumphantly that, at last, "the Lord dwelleth in Zion".

The chapter has four sections. First of all, in verses 1-2, God asserts his intention of bringing to a head all the smouldering opposition to his ways on the part of the Gentile nations, in that day when He sets his hand the second time (Isa. 11. 11) to recover the remnant of his people from the four corners of the earth. "I will also gather all nations," He says, "and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land" (vs. 2). That word "plead" does not bear the meaning we usually attach to it in these modern days, that of imploring or beseeching. It means literally "to enter into judgment with" and is used to describe the Lord's calling the peoples to account before him. Thus we have Isa. 66. 16 "By fire and by sword will the Lord plead with all flesh", and Jer. 25. 31 "the Lord hath a controversy with the nations; He will plead with all flesh; He will give them that are wicked to the sword", and Ezek. 38. 22, "I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him . . . an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire and brimstone". This latter Scripture is referring to the fate of "Gog's host", another prophetic view of the same event that Joel is now describing, and this is the effect of the "pleading" to which

the Lord refers in Joel 3. It is a judgment which comes upon the peoples whose deeds merit judgment, and according to the inexorable laws of Divine creation, that judgment must surely come.

The scattering of Israel among the nations, and the "parting" (or dividing) of their land, are perfectly well known and understood by students already. The land has been repeatedly divided and re-divided, as one great Gentile empire has succeeded another. The people have been repeatedly driven into captivity and scattered into far countries at the will of every great military conqueror who may have brought them under his dominion. First were the Assyrians, who took the northern kingdom, the "Ten Tribes", captive, and settled aliens in Samaria and Galilee. Then came the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar, driving Judah and Jerusalem away and leaving the land desolate. The partial restoration under the Persians was never a real restoration; the people were in subjection to a Gentile power and the land was politically divided into provinces ruled by rival governors. The Greeks drew fresh lines of demarcation and the Romans altered these in their turn, kings of the north and kings of the south marching and counter-marching across the hills and valleys, bringing distress and disruption continually upon the unhappy people. Even after the great dispersion during the half century following the capture of Jerusalem by Titus in A.D. 70, and the ending of the national existence of the chosen nation, Persians and Arabs and Crusaders and Turks made havoc in the Holy Land, creating and destroying petty provinces and kingdoms, ruling for a space from fortresses and cities until the sword of a stronger compelled the weaker to loose his hold. The twentieth century has seen no interruption of the process; to-day, the land promised to Jacob and to his seed for ever is divided between half-a-dozen Arab states amidst which the tiny portion conceded to the sons of the patriarch maintains a precarious existence. The land has been divided by the enemies of Israel, and to the time of writing remains divided.

It is against this background that the prophet goes on to declare the sins for which the Gentile nations are being called to

account. This is the second section of the chapter, from verse three to verse eight. The whole picture is that of a people taken captive and sold into slavery at the whim of its captors. They have done so carelessly, never dreaming of retribution. But God has not been indifferent. He has taken note of all that has been done, and now through his prophet He says: "Because ye have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried into your temples my goodly pleasant things, . . . BEHOLD, I will . . . return your recompence upon your own head; and I will sell YOUR sons and daughters . . ." (vs. 5-8). This is, of course, a symbolic statement. There could be no literal selling of Gentile slaves to the Sabeans, for that people no longer exists; they passed out of existence many centuries ago. And it would be difficult to find any place in the Divine Plan and its outworking for such an excursion into petty slave-trading on the part of the Most High. The picture is that of retribution, the operation of the Divine law "what a man soweth, that shall he reap". These Gentiles have ruled over the seed of Jacob, spoiled their goods, and occupied their land, for many centuries, unrighteously. But during all that time God has been planning for an earthly Servant Nation that is to rule on earth at the end—just as He has during this present Gospel Age been developing for himself a heavenly Servant Nation, chosen from amongst men, that shall rule them from the heavens at the end. And when the time comes for the law of the Lord to go forth out of Zion, it shall be that all men will find themselves brought under the righteous rule that is to be administered by the once despised slaves who were sold and scattered over the earth. "The sons of strangers shall build up thy walls", said Isaiah, "and their kings shall minister unto thee . . . for the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish . . ." (Isa. 60. 10-11). "In those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold out of all the languages of the nations . . . of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying 'We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you' ". (Zech. 8. 23). It is a familiar story; the Scriptures are full of it from Isaiah onwards; perhaps the Gentiles to whom the message has been witnessed for so many long years have grown so accustomed to it that they do not believe that God will really rise up to judgment and break their power over this long-suffering people. They have been able to spoil them and harry them and destroy them unchecked for so many generations. If God

cared at all He would have done something about it long ago; it is not likely that anything so drastic as these prophetic enthusiasts are talking about will happen now. . . .

"PROCLAIM YE THIS AMONG THE GENTILES! PREPARE WAR, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up. Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning-hooks into spears: let the weak say 'I am strong'. Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye nations . . . come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: FOR THERE WILL I SIT TO JUDGE ALL THE NATIONS ROUND ABOUT". (vs. 9-12).

Like a thunder-clap the prophet's declaration bursts upon the ears of the heedless ones. God is not unmindful; God is not mocked; and now he has suddenly risen up to judgment and the time of retribution is come. The nations are to gather together and it is to be for the last time; when this Day of Assembly has passed there will no longer be any nations, for the kingdoms of this world will have become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever. "At the noise of the taking of Babylon the earth is moved, and the cry is heard among the nations."

This is Joel's final vision, and the most glorious. It seems almost as if it has burst suddenly upon his consciousness, as though at verse 9 all the glimpses and partial views of the coming Day of Trouble, all the pictures of devouring locusts and marching soldiers, ruthless invaders and terror-stricken defenders, weeping husbandmen and praying priests, have suddenly fused together into a clear and vivid picture and Joel sees, resplendent in the light of the glory of God, a regathered and repentant Israel, standing confident in the power of God, waiting the last great conflict of this present evil world, waiting the rising up of God to their defence, anticipating the overthrow and dispersal of their enemies. And as they thus wait, and the evil powers of earth begin to gather for the assault, an assault which according to Ezekiel 38 is expected by them to be one committed upon a helpless people "to take a spoil and to take a prey", the voice of the Lord rings out, loud and clear, commanding the angry hosts to come to the valley of their judgment and the valley of their doom.

The Valley of Jehoshaphat! What is the mystic meaning of those words? Why is it that the mighty hosts of the Gentiles are to be gathered into the Valley of Jehoshaphat and that Valley becomes then the scene of their

defeat and judgment?

The Kidron valley, between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, is sometimes—but not in the Scriptures—called the “Valley of Jehoshaphat”, and both Jewish and Moslem tradition has it that here is to take place the Last Judgment. But Joel was not thinking of the Kidron Valley—he was thinking rather of the Wilderness of Tekoa in Judea down toward the Dead Sea where there had been a memorable deliverance of Israel in the days of King Jehoshaphat fifty years before Joel’s own time. The armies of Moab and Ammon had invaded Israel; it seemed as though all were lost, but under the leadership of their God-fearing king the people placed their trust and faith in God for their defence and went out to meet the invaders, unarmed, with their priests leading the way, and singing the high praises of God. And God delivered them! The story is related in 2 Chron. 20, and it is one of the rare instances in which Israel did rise to the height of faith and reaped the reward of faith.

Verse 13 changes the picture. The hosts have gathered in the fatal valley and to the prophet’s excited mind they appear as masses of grape-laden vines, full to bursting, awaiting the gathering and the vintage. “Put ye in the sickle” he cries “for the harvest is ripe The press is full, the fats (wine-vats) overflow (with the juice of the crushed grapes) for their wickedness is great”. This symbol of the winepress is used elsewhere; in Revelation 14. 19-20 there is the same allusion—“And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city”

It is here that we are enabled rightly to place these happenings in the times and seasons of the Divine Plan. Verses 15-16 tell us that at this juncture, when the nations have gathered together and have been, as it were, “reaped” and “cast into the winepress”. “the sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake; but the Lord will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel”. These are the signs of the Second Advent, and of the establishment of the Kingdom in power; the gathering and the reaping lead up to this culmination. The incitement to war, the turning of all the arts of peace to purposes of conflict, the federating

of weak nations into allegedly strong unions, the framing of treaties and agreements and pacts of mutual aid against real and fancied aggression, all this, carried to the extent to which it has been carried in recent years, constitutes a clear fulfilment of this prophecy and a definite indication of the imminence of that “darkening” of the sun and moon and “shaking” of the heavens which in Matt. 24 is given as the immediate herald of the manifestation of the returned Lord in glory to all mankind. That is a late stage in the succession of events which constitutes his Advent; the gathering of the Church and its union with him “beyond the veil” takes place before this, and may well have occurred before the nations have completed their assembly in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. If, in fact, this “winepress” feature, when the Lord will “roar out of Zion”, is to result in the immediate deliverance of his earthly people in the Holy Land and the almost immediate commencement of Millennial work, as verse 18 seems to indicate, then it must logically follow that the Church will have been gathered some time previously, and therefore before Armageddon is fought out around the land of Israel.

“So shall ye know that I am the Lord your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no stranger pass through her any more”. (vs. 17). That is the outcome; the Gentile hosts have come up for judgment and have been judged; they have undertaken their last assault against the citadel of God’s righteousness and been repulsed, and their power has been broken for ever. Israel has returned wholly and completely to the Lord her God, and the stage is fully set for the Millennial Kingdom.

This is virtually the end of Joel’s prophecy. The remaining few verses carry the story forward into the Millennial Age, but they are set rather by way of contrast to the dark days which have occupied the prophet’s attention for so long. He has seen the time of distress and oppression wax to its zenith, and disappear as in a moment by the power of the Lord, and in the confidence of that hope he is well content.

(To be concluded)

“The authority of emperors, kings and princes is human; the authority of councils, synods, bishops and presbyters is human; the authority of prophets is Divine.”—

Sir Isaac Newton

GARDEN OF EDEN

4.—Servant of the Soil

An Examination
of the Story of
Adam and Eve

"And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." (Gen. 2. 15).

Here is the first record of any kind of human activity in the whole history of mankind. Before his companion had been given to him, while as yet the first man was alone in the earth, he received a commission and a sphere of responsibility, a duty toward God which became an obligation devolving upon him. He was not left to choose his own way of life; not given freedom to please himself as to how he would spend his time. The world had been created by God and was God's world. The man had been created by God and was God's man. The man was placed in the world and found it an environment which suited his needs in every particular. Man and the earth were perfectly attuned and fitted to each other, and man was capable of maintaining this tune and fitness indefinitely provided he observed the laws which had been Divinely framed to assure the everlasting continuance of both man and the earth. In the upshot man violated those laws and in consequence the entire creation fell into disorder. Men have even yet not learned that order will not be restored until once again all mankind willingly and voluntarily maintain inviolate those laws of God and re-establish the three-fold harmony and unity between God, his earth and his men which alone will ensure orderly continuance of that which his hands have made. We do not yet see that happy state; it can only come about in Christ, and *"we see not yet all things put under him"* (Heb. 2. 8). We do see Jesus, in the glory and power of the Father, working toward that desirable end, which will surely come. In the meantime we can only look back to Eden as a model in miniature of the blessed state which is yet to be.

It will not do therefore to think of Adam as called to live his life in a kind of eternal playtime with nothing more vital to do than satisfy the natural feelings of hunger from the wild-growing trees around him. There is no place for idleness in Divine creation. Every living creature has its function and its duty to perform, a place which it must occupy and an obligation it must discharge, if creation is to continue, and man is no exception to that rule. And so the very first injunction laid upon man, the very first purpose to which his

dawning intelligence was directed, is here expressed in the word "service". Man was put into the garden to serve. The very first verbs expressive of human activity to be found in the history of man are the two in this verse, "to dress" and "to keep". The first is "*abad*", meaning to plant and dress, as in vineyards (see Deut. 28. 39) derived from the basic word "*abd*" which signifies to do work, service, labour, especially as in the tilling of the soil, and from which the Hebrew word for servant is derived. The second is "*shamar*", to observe or fulfil an obligation as in the keeping of a covenant or commandment. The whole expression "to dress it and to keep it" therefore combines the two principles; man is a servant of God in the care of the earth and his labour on the soil is an obligation which he is bound to discharge. Right at the outset man was made responsible to God for the proper care and development and use of the earth, his home. Men to-day either do not know that or they do not believe it; they are despoiling and destroying the earth with their foul inventions, their unprincipled wastage of the earth's resources, their senseless warfare on the lower creatures, resulting in upsetting the balance of Nature with their insecticides and pest control and mass breeding and mass production methods, continually making worse what they have already made bad. All the time the Devil looks on and continues to assure them that they shall not surely die and the signs of death are gathering and thickening fast. All this is the result of that first departure from the Divine ordinance and way of life which constituted the first man's refusal to fit into the place for which God had created him.

But there, in Adam's day, there was no sign of that. Adam must have taken up his duties with gratitude and happiness as his developing intelligence and perceptive faculties began to show him just what life could mean. The idea of companionship would almost certainly not have crossed his mind in those early days; there was so much to see and do, so many new objects at which to wonder, so many things of interest to explore. The time must have passed very quickly, and the bare idea of even questioning the things God told him could not have entered his mind. We have to remember that Adam of necessity

started with a mind as blank as that of a newborn baby and must have assimilated ideas and discovered things in the same fashion as does a baby—largely by investigation and experiment—without the advantage of others of his own kind to teach him.

How did the first man commune, or communicate, with God? How did he receive the messages and instructions which according to Gen. 2 and 3 he undoubtedly did receive? Was there an audible voice on the air, sounding in his ears, in which case he must have been created with the gift of language already bestowed in order to understand the words? Was there a visible appearance, a "theophany" to use the theological term, an appearing in fleshly form of the agent of God to convey the message from on high, in much the same way as the Lord appeared to Abraham or to Moses, or the angel Gabriel to Daniel or to Mary? Or was it the impression of the Divine word upon Adam's mind in such fashion that his brain could understand although no sound vibrated the air and no sight appeared against the background of the landscape? We do not know; we only know that in some fashion Adam did receive the word from God and understood its meaning.

So his first activity apparently was to set about tilling the ground. Not in the sweat of his brow as after the Fall, but tilling the ground nevertheless. We may assume that Adam, awaking to consciousness, found food and drink for his immediate needs already awaiting him in his surroundings; it seems however that the continuance of the supply was going to depend upon his own efforts. It was in that early day that the fundamental law was laid down "*If a man will not work neither shall he eat*".

It is a remarkable fact that the most detailed of the Babylonian traditions of the creation of man, known as the Sumerian Epic of Paradise (discovered in 1912 and fully deciphered in 1932) depicts the first man as being a gardener and occupied with the duties of a husbandman. The scene is the land of Tilmun, the Babylonian Eden, where, according to the record, "*the wild beasts were tame and gentle. They lived in peace with the cattle...the sun shone in heaven and rejoiced, the moon in her sanctuary, and from the mouth of the earth came flowing the sweet water of the river abundantly. The ground produced rich crops and Tilmun became the centre of the world upon which the sun shone always.*" Later on the sole man inhabiting the garden is shown tending,

plucking and eating the fruits of various plants and trees. Some recollection of the truth must have descended through the generations in Babylonian tradition, having its origin in the actual happenings of Eden recorded by the Holy Spirit in the second chapter of Genesis, and although such traditions may not be regarded in anything like the light in which we regard Genesis, the corroborative testimony they offer is of some value.

At some time during those early days, whilst as yet Adam was still alone, there came to him the first expression of God's moral law. The question of just what is meant in the story by the two mystic trees, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, is best left for consideration in conjunction with the account of the Temptation and the Fall, later on in the narrative. Suffice at the moment to note that in addition to these two trees there was also "*every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food*" (Gen. 2. 9) and that it was of these latter trees that Adam was told he could freely eat (vs. 16). The tree of knowledge was forbidden and no injunction whatever was given concerning the tree of life.

How would Adam understand the statement "*In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die?*" He himself had but recently been awakened to life; he knew nothing of death so far as human beings were concerned for he had never seen another human being and it might well be at this stage of his development the possibility of there ever being any other human beings like himself had never crossed his mind. The animals he knew, and he might by now have seen death in the lower creation and so been able to understand what it was so far as its outward manifestation was concerned. In any case he could only have visualised death as a cessation of his conscious life given him by God. Death was the withdrawal of that life, and that is how Adam must have understood the pronounced consequence of partaking of the fruit of the forbidden tree. That is rather important in considering the nature of the Biblical doctrine of death as the wages of sin.

The only other incident before the coming of Eve that is recorded is the naming of the animals. Although the remark attributed to God in vs. 18 "*It is not good that the man should be alone*" comes before the naming of the animals, in vs. 19-20 the sense of the passage demands that the naming came first and the writer preceded that account with vs.

18 to heighten the contrast—among the animals there was not one suitable to be his companion. This naming of the animals must have been a lengthy process; as Adam explored his home and observed the wealth of animal and bird life and insect life with which it was furnished, he would note the distinctions of types and species and invent characteristic names for them—in his mind probably, for with no one to speak to it is possible that he had not yet mastered the art of spoken words. Only after he had observed the duality of Nature, the companionship of animals and their production of offspring, would he begin to realise that he himself, perfect and well provided for as he was, lacked one thing which the animals around him enjoyed, the society of one of his own kind. From that moment he must have been conscious of a feeling he had never known before, a feeling of something lacking.

With that realisation the first phase of Adam's experience came to an end. Until then he had been a single unit, living entirely to himself, taking advantage of the earth's resources and, we can have no doubt, becoming more and more accustomed to, and interested in, the tilling of the soil for the production of daily food. But all that he did was for himself; the idea of sharing, of extending his interest to another and putting

forth effort on behalf of another, had never occurred to him. Now that he had seen for himself the male creature going forth to forage food for the benefit of the female, lying in the cave or nest caring for her young, a totally new set of ideas must have begun to work in his mind. In a dim, dark sort of way he began to realise something of the truth behind the much later words of St. Paul "*none of us liveth to himself*". Perhaps then, for the first time, some embryo realisation that he had been brought into existence for a purpose began to enter his mind, that life was not intended merely for eating and sleeping and rejoicing in the sunshine. His eager mind must have often posed the unspoken query "What?" as his eyes fell first upon one new sight and then upon another. Now, perhaps for the first time, his mind registered a different kind of query, "Why?"

And at that moment God moved toward the next stage in his unfolding purpose—the bringing into being a second creation, a companion for man, of the man, to be with the man, and with the man to exercise those powers bestowed by God which would eventually lead to the consummation of all his intentions with regard to his material creation.

(To be continued)

GOD OUR SAVIOUR

An Exposition of
I Tim. 2. 4-6

With the increasing number of churches dependent upon his care, Paul found himself obliged, at times, to depute some of his authority and oversight to other men, in whose integrity and trustworthiness he had every confidence. One of these men, near and dear to the ageing Evangelist, was "Son Timothy".

To prepare and equip this young lieutenant for these responsibilities, Paul sent him the first letter that bears his name. Timothy was but young in years in comparison with many over whom he would be called to preside, and on that account likely to be despised because of his youth. On his young shoulders responsibility was laid to "set things in order" in the Church gatherings, as well as to administer necessary discipline upon obstinate and wayward offenders both in Church affairs and in their outside public demeanour. Though

Timothy may well have known the methods of Paul's own procedure in these things, it was an advantage to him to have, from the Apostle himself, this letter of authority and guidance, for it placed him, during Paul's absence, in a position in the Church second only to Paul's own.

In the Church assemblies were men of many kinds. Some of them were of Jewish birth, with all the touchy sensibilities peculiar to their race. Many were of heathen origin, and before the Gospel attracted them were brutal, rough and uncouth. Some of them were cultured men according to the standards of Greece, then prevailing. Together they would make a motley crowd, with interests almost as varied as their faces varied. It would be no easy task for Timothy (or others taking this oversight) to keep a state of peace

within the assemblies, or to impress upon them the need for a pure and upright life.

Among the items of advice given to Timothy were those found at the beginning of the chapter from which we have taken our text. *"I exhort, therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all that are in high places; that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity."* (V. 1 and 2 R.V.).

This may seem unusual advice to our point of view to-day, but in a day when disregard of the reigning monarch was a dangerous thing, it was expedient that such advice be tendered for the peace and welfare of the community. Most heathen peoples would pay their regards to the Imperial bust; only the Jews, as a rule, would dare to disregard the Emperor's claims. For this disregard they were punished very frequently. The Christian communities could not offer worship before Caesar's effigy, but Imperial resentment could be tempered and softened by causing it to be publicly known that they were praying to their God for the welfare of the Emperor and his government. All legally permitted religious systems were expected to pray to their respective gods for the blessing of their God upon the Empire and its Emperor. Paul's advice to Timothy was that this practice should be encouraged and practised publicly—not because it needed those prayers to persuade God forcefully to interfere in the affairs of the nations, but that they should not incite or aggravate the Imperial petulance unduly. God's control over the affairs of the nations would go on, and influences from the higher sources had gone out at times, in earlier days, and curbed or modified royal and Imperial proclamations, and could do so again.

Proceeding, Paul says *"For this (public prayer) is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who willeth that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, himself man, Christ Jesus . . ."*

In these words, some Christians claim to find warranty for the eternal salvation of all men everywhere, saying "if God wills it so, it will be so—for none can thwart the working of that Will." Is Paul speaking of an eternal salvation in these words, to be accomplished for them in an Age to come, and not in this present Age? Let us see.

Paul says, as the ground and reason of his assertion concerning the salvation which God

wills, that "there is one God, and one mediator between God and men . . ." Was there anyone in Paul's day who said that there was more than one God? Indeed yes! That there was but one God was a belief peculiar only to Christian and Jew. Every other nation, people and tribe, the wide world through had its god or many gods. Greece, Egypt and Rome numbered them by hundreds—each with its own province and attributes. For what purpose did the peoples approach or appease these myriads of gods? To protect them in danger; to give victory in war; to provide food and all necessities, to act, in all cases, as a watchful dispensing Providence—in a brief word, to give them their daily bread, in peace and quietness of life.

Did any claim that there was more than one Mediator between the high gods and men? Yes, assuredly! This was a belief gaining greater currency every day, against which Paul warns Timothy at a later stage of his advice (Chap. 6. 20-21). More particularly Paul combats this thought in his letter to the Colossians. Heathen philosophers had claimed that there were many intermediary ranks of intelligences between the highest authority (whatever its name may be locally) and the level of brutish carnal man. Some initiates into these things claimed inner knowledge (*gnosis*) of these ascending and descending ranks, and by their activities some of these thoughts had invaded the Colossian church (Col. 2. 8-20). Heathen religions had many of these intermediaries, of which the lower interceded for their devotees before the higher, and the higher before the highest, till their prayers eventually reached the pinnacle of all power. For what did they intercede? For food, for raiment, for home, and homeland—for all those things that made up the round of life. The god who was accounted the dispenser of these things was their Preserver and Saviour. The intermediary who interceded on their behalf was their patron deity, and to both of these higher powers their crude reverence was expressed.

Paul had made contact with this pantheon of gods previously, notably at Athens, where among its numerous altars he found one inscribed to "an unknown God" (Acts 17. 22-31). Eliminating the whole hierarchy of these intermediaries, Paul told them "He is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being".

Again at Lystra Paul had contact with a rude people which reacted immediately to his kindly act, (the healing of the impotent man)

by naming the Apostle Jupiter and Mercury, (two among many of these intermediates) before whom they would have done sacrifice. In his amazement and horror at such an unexpected consequence, Paul told them these things had come about because God had suffered the nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless, though they worshipped and invoked their many gods, through their numerous intermediates, it was not these gods but the Living God—the God who made heaven and earth—who had fed them. *“He did good, and gave you from heaven, rain and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness . . .”* (Acts 14. 8-18). God had sent his sun and rain upon both the just and the unjust, and had preserved the nations alive through the centuries. God had been, and still was the Saviour of men—the Preserver and Maintainer of such life as there was in these rude barbaric times of ignorance. It was to dispel some of this ignorance that Paul had been sent among the nations, to teach them that *“though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as there are gods many and lords (intermediates) many . . . to us there is one God, the Father; of whom are all things, and we for him; and one Lord (one intermediate) Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and we (made nigh to God) through him.”* (1 Cor. 8. 5-6).

If God is thus the Provider and Saviour of all men through the bounties of all natural resources, we may easily understand a later reference to these self-same things when Paul says *“we trust in the Living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of them that believe.”* (1 Tim. 4. 10). To the believer there was a ‘plus’ or ‘special’ factor. Something was common to believer and unbeliever alike; but something else was ‘special’ to him that accepted the message of the Living God. The whole creation was his charge, but saints were his peculiar care. The knowledge that the nations needed (whereby they might be saved) was that there was but one God—the Living God—and one Mediator between God and them, himself having been (not a minor god) but Man—Man Who had given himself a Ransom-price for all.

Timothy was being sent by Paul into Macedonia—a province in which the very notions against which he had apprised Timothy had prevailed. Timothy was therefore fore-warned and put on his guard against what to expect when he arrived at his journey’s end, and also what he ought to do to guard against giving unnecessary offence to

the fickle susceptibilities of those exercising authority there.

That the Christian church should pray for power and opportunity to dispel the darkness of superstition in king and peasant alike in this present Age is readily understandable, but that they should pray to-day for the salvation of the unbeliever to be accomplished in the age to come (centuries ahead) is too hard to accept. The salvation open to all who could believe was a salvation from the darkness spread by the god of this world into the light of the Gospel of the Glory of Christ—a privilege open to all who had ears to hear, and to this end, instead of longer permitting the ages of gross darkness to run on unchecked, God had commanded all men everywhere to repent, to-day, for otherwise, if they did not repent, they would surely be judged in the Age to come by that man whom He had ordained and raised from the dead. No salvation other than this is indicated by Paul’s language to Timothy. It is not a salvation that is universal; it is not a salvation that is eternal, apart from individual acceptance and belief.

The key to the right understanding of this reference to God our Saviour, who willeth that all men should be saved, is found in that little word ‘one’, twice repeated, applied by Paul to both the Living God, and to his worthy Son. It implies, by comparison, the many gods of the heathen nations around, which, to the darkened minds of these people, were their protectors and Saviours. The salvation which God willed for them was their deliverance from the superstitious reverence paid to all these varying grades of gods, so that they might know him as the one Universal and Living God—the provider for all men—and approach him through Jesus Christ, his Well-beloved Son.

How apt is the statement of Paul to the Thessalonians (natives of the very country to which Timothy was being sent)—*“ . . . ye turned unto God, from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivereth us from the wrath to come.”* (1 Thess. 1. 9-10 R.V.). In so doing, the Thessalonians had become participants in both the ‘common’ and ‘special’ salvation, a privilege then open to all the nations and peoples everywhere, who would heed and obey the call of God to the Light, as the Thessalonians had done.

The Parables of the Costly Pearl and Buried Treasure

Matt. 13. 44-46

Two of the shortest recorded parables, together occupying only three verses! Their teaching and intent are identical, the one being merely a reiteration of the other, against a different background. One wonders why they are so brief; surely Jesus must have rounded out his stories in much more comprehensive form than is here written down; perhaps their very brevity as recorded is intended to emphasise one plain, clear-cut truth without the distracting effect of side issues.

The Kingdom of Heaven, He said, is like a treasure buried in a field and discovered by a man, who promptly goes away and realises on his assets in order to raise the capital necessary to buy the field. We need not stop to reflect upon the morality of the man's action; Jesus used stories based upon real life to illustrate his teachings, and this is how many men would behave under such circumstances. In any case we are entitled to assume that the then owner of the field was not the man who put the treasure there, and a good argument could be put up for the discoverer's right to the treasure. The whole point is that he saw something in that field which other men, including the owner, did not see, and he was prepared to sacrifice all that he possessed in order to acquire it.

The other story concerns the world of trade. A merchant man, in the market for valuable pearls, found one that was superb and excellent above all that he had seen or heard of before. Such was his professional appreciation of the technical merits of this particular pearl, such his estimate of the commercial possibilities inherent in its possession, that he did not hesitate to invest the whole of his financial resources in this one single pearl, and count himself a happy man to have obtained it.

The very brevity of these two parables creates some small difficulty in being at all dogmatic as to their intended application. The fact that they point to the giving up of all things in order to obtain a much to be desired end is plain; but two very obvious and definite interpretations at once suggest themselves. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave up all in order to "seek and to save that which was lost", and however much one may question the intrinsic value of this sin-sick and dying human race which He came to save, it is not possible to

deny that He saw something in man which He regarded as of value and suffered even the death of the cross in order to obtain it. We also, Christians who have set to our seal that God is true, and on that basis have given ourselves to the Lord Christ, we also have found a treasure which involves the willing and eager selling of all that we have, that we might obtain that treasure.

Perhaps the parables are intended to bear both interpretations. "As He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4. 17). It is quite in accord with the economy of the Scriptures to have one passage serve more than one purpose. The known fact that many of the prophetic passages have two applications, one to the generation to which they were spoken and another to the great climax at the end of human rulership and the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth, is a case in point. The value to us of these two parables is doubled if we see in them, first, a picture of our Lord renouncing his Heavenly glory and coming to earth to save man, and second, a picture of every man who answers the call to surrender and gives up all else that he may win Christ.

The two parables certainly take us deeply into the realms of Christian theology. There were certain heresies in the days of the Early Church, to some extent still persisting to-day, which taught that Christ had no pre-existence before his advent upon earth, that He first knew life in the same way as other men by being born a man of Adamic generation; only after his death was He exalted to the Father's right hand. Had such indeed been the case, then Christ gave up nothing and "sold" nothing in order to redeem man. In fact He had nothing wherewith He could redeem man, for as the Psalmist says of all men and any man "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Psa. 49. 7). The understanding of the Apostle Paul was to the contrary; writing to the Philippians he gives evidence of very clear vision. "*—Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a*

cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that . . . every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. v. 5-11 RSV). The Revised Standard Version is quoted here because it expresses so much more accurately St. Paul's meaning than does the Authorised Version, which, it has for years been admitted, presents a very poor rendering at this place. The definition in human terms of the relationship between the Father and the Son, and the Divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, has always been a difficulty, as witness the theological wrangles on this subject throughout the Christian era; but this passage in Philippians taken side by side with the two parables under discussion do at least demonstrate very clearly that the One who "IN the beginning . . . with God" (John 1. 1) partaker of the Divine glory, divested himself completely of that superlative state, and, again in the simple language of John "was made flesh and dwelt among us". "The Son of Man" He said himself "is come to seek and to save that which was lost" and in his coming He gave evidence that in lost humanity, degraded and sinful and rebellious though they be, there is something worth saving, something that to him is as treasure hid in a field, needing only to be dug up and cleansed; a pearl of great price, needing only to have its lost lustre restored and be set in a frame of beauty suited to its intrinsic merit. One of the great lessons we Christians have to learn—and sometimes it is very difficult to learn—is that God has faith in the possibilities of man and will yet have that faith vindicated in the emergence of a sinless undying world in which all that is of sin and rebellion will have passed away. "Are there few that be saved?" asked the disciples of Jesus. He gave them to understand that those who eventually attain to joint-heirship with himself (Rom. 8. 17) will indeed be a "little flock" because of the stringent conditions of the calling; outside of that there is the greater call the fruits of which yield the picture of multitudes coming to God and all the ends of the earth turning to him, when the ransomed of the Lord will return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isa. 35. 10; Rev. 21. 3-5). The old theology declared that the few, the very few, would pass the Divine scrutiny and be admitted to heaven; the vast majority of God's intelligent creatures would be rejected as wastage and pass into the hopeless eternity

of hell. God is not so inefficient a workman as that! He will work continuously and patiently with each refractory individual until it has become abundantly clear that by no means whatever can that individual be truly and sincerely converted to live for, and give loyalty and allegiance to, the Saviour Christ. Only then will He let go and leave the sinner to the wages of sin—death.

So the purpose of God will be achieved in a triumphant and gloriously successful ending to the mission of One who sold all that He had to win mankind for himself. What of the other application of the parable?

Perhaps the best avenue of approach is through the Apostle Paul's words, again in Philippians, expressing his own attitude of heart to his calling "Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him". (Phil. 3. 7-9 RSV). Here is expressed the utter devotion to God and God's service which is demanded of every believer who would come "into Christ". There is a world of difference between the one who believes in Christ and his message and endeavours to live in conformity with it, and the one who not only thus believes but comes to Christ in full surrender and dedication of life, possessions, abilities, all, to his service as He shall direct. Only these latter will at the end "reign with Christ" (Rev. 20. 4) and be associated with him in the direction of the mighty evangelical work of world conversion which is to characterise the coming era of Christ's reign, when human power and kingdoms have passed away. It is only "if we suffer with him" *now* that "we shall reign with him" *then*. That word *suffering* does not mean wholly nor even primarily the idea of physical pain as so many believe; it means endurance. He that "endures to the end, the same shall be saved" whether the endurance be in the realm of physical ill-health, literal persecution, or the insidious wearing-down processes of the world, the flesh, and the devil battling against of our faith. So the Kingdom of Heaven in this aspect consists of those who have "forsaken all, and followed thee" and in consequence, "in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory", will be associated with him in that glorious reign (Matt. 19. 28). The "regeneration" is the time of giving new life,

the Millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ at his Second Advent. It is not without significance that Jesus' words above quoted were spoken at the time the rich young ruler "went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions". Here was one who came in sight of the buried treasure, the costly pearl, but he was not prepared to sell all that he had to obtain the coveted possession. And he went away a disappointed and unhappy man.

In that lies the lesson. We have the opportunity of giving ourselves in full surrender to God, without reserve or condition, to be used

in his service as He may direct. Home service, foreign service, prominence, obscurity; it may be any of these, or a combination of them as life goes on. We do not know. We only know that God calls us, again in the language of the great Apostle (Rom. 12. 1) to "*present your bodies a living sacrifice, acceptable unto God, your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind*". In so doing we shall be following the example of One who himself sold all that he had, and bought that field".

THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION

"But 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 by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8. 11). The resurrection of Jesus brought strength and unity to the Early Church. Following the crucifixion, the disciples were as dead men. All that they had toiled and hoped for had suddenly vanished and they were plunged into gloom and despair. He whom they had trusted to restore the glories of Israel, lay dead in the tomb, crucified as a criminal.

When Christ rose from the dead, He gave to his followers new life which they had never known before. From being frightened, ignorant and powerless, they became happy, full of spiritual vitality and imbued with a faith which weathered many a storm of persecution. They were, in the words of Peter in Acts 1. 22, witnesses of his resurrection. The change which took place in the early disciples is perhaps the strongest historical evidence for the resurrection. The power which had wrought so great a miracle as the raising from the dead of the Son of God became available for the spread of the Gospel by his followers. As we trace the story of the Church, as recorded by Luke in Acts of the Apostles, the effect of the power upon individual disciples and the Christian communion as a whole is often quite striking. There had not been nor ever could be a "religious faith" anything like that which surrounded the Gospel of Christ. It was quite different from the philosophies of men and religions of the east. They were based upon intellectual knowledge, argument and ethics. Even the members of Jewish religion never enjoyed the personal relationship with God which

they should have done. In the church of Jesus Christ, however, there was a faith based on revelation and power from God. Whence came these things and why? What was it that was so different in these men and women that the eternal Creator of the Universe should confer so great a privilege?

God was able to work in and through the early Christians because they had learned from Jesus the doctrine of self-denial and complete dependance upon God. The teachings of men, whether scientific, philosophical or religious, have always advanced the doctrine of "self". Self-culture, self esteem and self-expression are the modern counterpart of the same idea. Jesus had taught his disciples to be meek and contrite in heart, trusting God for everything, whether it was their daily bodily needs or the virtues to be developed by their characters.

Such a condition of mind is the result of a new relationship to God, based on redemption through Jesus, and maintained by constant prayer with God. By these things the resurrection power of Jesus Christ was given to his first followers, and to every true disciple from then until now. Prayer played a very big part in the Master's life, and He frequently resorted to communion with his Father in order that He might know God's will. When faced with a crisis, He resorted to fellowship with his Father and therein lay the success of his ministry. (Luke 6. 12; 9. 29; Mark 9. 29).

The history of the activities of the Early Church reveals a group of people who had learned to apply the lessons of prayer taught by Jesus. From the first chapter we learn that they "*all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication . . .*" (v. 14). After Pentecost the same attitude is reflected in chapter two,

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (v. 42). In chapter three we catch a glimpse of Peter and John going up to worship at the Temple at "the hour of prayer". In chapter four we are given considerable information about a prayer meeting in the Early Church, and so great was their intercession that the very building where they met was shaken. The passage concludes with these words "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all." (Acts 4. 32, 33). Later, deacons were chosen in order that the apostles might give themselves "to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Still further, Luke relates how Peter was released from prison as the result of a prayer meeting in John Mark's home.

All of these examples of the early Christians at prayer, after the Holy Spirit was outpoured at Pentecost, were accompanied by a display of Divine power operating through God's people. On some occasions it was the power of the Gospel unto salvation and at others, the ministry of healing. It was not the educated, wealthy and influential in Israel through whom God worked, although He did not despise their gifts. Thus when men of learning like Paul and Luke gave themselves to his service, God used their abilities to the furtherance of his Kingdom. Throughout his epistles Paul repeatedly exhorted those to whom he wrote to "pray without ceasing".

Coupled with this power through prayer came a unity of purpose and action hitherto unknown among the disciples. They were men of different upbringing and outlook; some were rugged, others polished, but God had not looked at the outward appearance when selecting the foundation stones of the Church. Rapidly these men and women from all walks of life were welded into a united band by a common purpose and energised by a single source of power. They preached the same gospel of Jesus, crucified and resurrected. This was the "oneness" for which Jesus had so earnestly prayed before his death recorded in John 17. It was an exhibition of the love in action about which he had so often taught them. It was the love which showed that they had passed "from death unto life" (1 John 3. 14).

The unity of the early Christians broke

down sectarian and social cliques; it ignored national and racial barriers. Within the community of the first believers were Jews and Gentiles, rulers and slaves, scholars and peasants. They regarded each other not by their former associations but as fellow disciples, and thereby received strength through their common bond. Repeated exhortations to love each other as brethren in Christ were necessary and even then occasional failure in their unity is reflected by such passages as 1 Corinthians 1. In his second letter to the same church Paul wrote "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view;" 2 Cor. 5. 14-16 (R.S.V.). To-day, that lesson in the Christian Church still needs to be learned. The spirit of Christ, given free course in the lives of his brethren must completely abolish all feelings of hurt pride and retaliation. Personal opinion and ambition must be subordinate to the common good, "in honour preferring one another". Natural interests are crucified in order that Christ might live within us. Such an attitude towards other Christians and our fellow men in the world, is not developed by trying to be virtuous, for that just cannot be done. Human nature breaks down under the strain of inner selfishness and outward circumstances. It is only as Christ is given control of our hearts, to provide us with the guidance and strength for each daily experience, that we can be "more than conquerors" over our weaknesses and desires. So the apostle Paul learned from the Lord "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore was Paul able to say "Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (2 Cor. 12. 9). Our bodily weakness should not hinder us from obeying the Divine will, for we have a reservoir of energy in Heaven which is sufficient for every service for God.

Perhaps there are few more outstanding examples of this than Peter on the day of Pentecost when he stood up as spokesman on behalf of the rest of the disciples. He had been a coward, thrice denying his Master on the day of the Trial. However in the power of the Spirit, he became a new man who many times faced persecution and death for Jesus. The outward manifestation of the Holy Spirit through the first disciples was in their witness

to the world. By their preaching and healing they continued the work which Jesus began. That power has never changed, and "*the God that lived in the apostles' day is still the same to-day.*" The only alteration has been in the faith of the believers. It still requires men and women to venture forth, with implicit trust, so that the Lord will honour his promises "even until the end of the world" (Matt. 28. 20).

"Christian"; the name bespeaks of one who follows the Lord Jesus. Jesus trod a pathway wherein He preached the Gospel. He did not just do it now and again in the convenient phrase "as He had opportunity". His whole life was bound up in the announcement of the Good News of the Kingdom of Heaven. The first Christian community did the same thing. The apostles were hardly eager to go to the Samaritans and Gentiles, but by various means the Lord led them forth from Jerusalem unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Generation after generation through the ages their labours have continued often at the cost of martyrdom. Many have been inspired to leave the comfort and security of their homes in order to blaze the trail overseas. No less have been those remaining in their normal home and work who have sought to let their light shine. We, of this generation, must ask ourselves, what are we doing to maintain the faithful witness of the ages? Are we exempt from this service in this day and age? Can we run for the prize according to a new set of rules?

The power of his resurrection is at present

confined to the immediate associates of Jesus, those who long to know him and share his sufferings. Their resurrection now is pictured for us in the words of the father in the parable of the prodigal son when that son returned to his family, "*this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.*" Such is the love of God for those who repent from their sin and become his children. The same thought was expressed by Jesus as recorded in John 5. 25 "*The hour is coming, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live;*" He went on to speak of an age yet to come when the power which was to bring him from death, and which was to empower his disciples, would bring everyone back from death; for He said "*... the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth;*" It was a wonderful moment to which Jesus looked forward, to the day when all the conditions brought about by sin, through accident, disease and war would be removed for ever, and the mighty power of God would be exerted to give life to all who had ever fallen asleep. So writes the apostle once more, "*But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*" Eph. 2. 4-7 (R.S.V.)

HOUSE OF WISDOM

"Wisdom hath builded her house; she hath hewn out her seven pillars. She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine: she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city—" (Prov. 9. 1-3).

The "Wisdom chapters" of the book of Proverbs—Chapters 1-9 are important to an understanding of the relation between the Father and the Son, and between Christ and his Church. It is in these few chapters that for the first time God began to become manifest to men, although that manifestation could only be said to be completely effected when the Word, made flesh, stood before men in the full sight of men and declared "*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father*" (John 14. 9). Jewish thinkers in the centuries immediately

before Christ identified the Wisdom of God with the Word of God, and began to anticipate in a vague kind of way that which became a reality when, to use John's words "*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory*", (John 1. 14). This identification of Christ the Son with the Wisdom of God is alluded to by St. Paul in 1 Cor. 1. 24 and 30 ("*Christ the Wisdom of God*" and "*Christ Jesus, who is made unto us Wisdom of God*").

The intimacy of the relation between the Son and the Father is eloquently phrased in Heb. 1. 3 "*Who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person*"; but this is evidently based upon the pre-Christian conception of the Wisdom of God. Here is one definition in chapter 7 of the

Wisdom of Solomon (from the Apocrypha) "...the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty...the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness". There is an anticipation here of Col. 1. 15. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation". Reasoning back to the 8th Chapter of Proverbs, in which Wisdom speaks to man in the first person "*The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old*" (Prov. 8. 22) the early Christians began to develop theological views respecting the origin of the Son which led eventually to the great Arian controversy of the Fourth Century, when the fact that the word "possessed" in that verse might equally logically carry the meaning of "created", the rendering adopted by the Septuagint which was the Bible then in use, started a theological schism in Christendom which has never been healed.

The Book of Proverbs knows nothing of these theological distinctions over which so many Christian voices and pens have waxed eloquent down the centuries. Wisdom, in Proverbs, is the means of God revealing Himself to man. Wisdom is the Word of God—the "Logos" of Philo—at first thought of as merely the voice of God coming from behind the veil, but later on assuming the attributes of personality, though still behind the veil. The fact that Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, claimed pre-existence with the Father ("*What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before?*" "*Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was*" (John 6. 62 and 17. 5) shows that the personality of Wisdom prior to the First Advent was real, and that the One who in the flesh manifested God to man for a few years (1. Tim. 3. 16) had also manifested God to man, admittedly in a far less personal manner, in the times before his flesh.

The Wisdom chapters of Proverbs, therefore, are truly descriptive of the Son administering his executive power as the one seated at the right hand of the Father, interpreting the Father to the sons of men and putting into effect the Divine Plan for human redemption and development from the Fall in Eden to the final reconciliation and entry into the everlasting Kingdom. Throughout the whole range of human history Wisdom is calling to the sons of men, extolling the virtues of righteousness and warning against the effects

of sin. There is a definite structure in these chapters which corresponds very well to the great epochs of the Divine Plan. Thus at the very commencement (1—7) man is told "*The fear (reverence) of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools (simpletons) despise wisdom and instruction*". This is basic truth and must have been the first principle spoken by God to the first human pair in the Garden of Eden. On that basis rises the three-fold structure of these chapters, three proclamations made to mankind by Wisdom, picturing three great epochs in the Divine Plan.

The first epoch is introduced in chapter 1. 20 "*Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets*". The proclamation goes on to Chapter 7 and all the time it expresses the message of God to fallen man, urging him to seek the heavenly counsel and eschew evil, but largely to no avail. "*I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded*" (ch. 1. 24). That was at the beginning; but at the end the story is still the same "*With her much fair speech she caused him to yield; with the flattering of her lips she forced him*" (ch. 7. 27). Against the counsel and advice of heavenly Wisdom there is set, time and again in these chapters, the attractive influence of the world, the flesh and the devil, personified here by a seductive woman, whose "*house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death*" (ch. 7. 27). The story of Eden is repeated consistently throughout the ages down to the coming of Christ.

The Garden of Eden story has a place in this. The law of Wisdom—the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge—was certainly imparted to Adam at his creation, and there was a Tree of Life, the partaking of which would ensure continuing life. But there was an alternative and another tree, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and there was at the very least an impression given to our first parents that the partaking of this tree would also impart wisdom, and by a shorter, easier and more pleasurable route. There is an old Sumerian legend that seems to tell of a garden, and a man and woman, and two temples in the garden; the man and woman worshipped in the wrong one and death came in consequence. That legend may enshrine a survival of the truth. Perhaps the two trees of Eden were ritual trees, the eating of the tree of life, and the forbidden fruit, ritual meals, the partaking of a meal which signified a sharing of life with God—or with the devil. Perhaps the sin of which Adam and Eve were guilty was that which formed the

theme of the First Commandment—they worshipped another god!

Be that as it may, the story of Proverbs 1 to 7 is one of continued apostasy in the face of the pleadings of Divine Wisdom. Throughout the whole long period of time which separated the Fall in Eden to the coming of the man Christ Jesus Wisdom had called from behind the veil, beseeching men to turn to God, and live; but men in the main had not given heed. Up to the last moment before the birth of Jesus, the human race was, in the words of the last verse of this first section, going steadily "down to the chamber of death".

The second section, Chapter 8, is heralded by Wisdom's second proclamation. Wisdom "standeth in the top of the high places, by the way in the places of the paths..." It is better to read the Margolis translation here "In the top of high places by the way, where the paths meet, she standeth: beside the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors..." (ch. 8. 2-3). This is a more widespread and universal appeal than the first; there is the same eulogy of the virtues of Divine Wisdom but the appeal is more personal and direct. The frequent references to apostasy and evil-doing so prominent in the first section are entirely absent from this; the impression given is that the hearers now are much more inclined to heed the voice of Wisdom than were those of the previous call. "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death" (8. 34-36). That passage is paralleled by words attested by Jesus "He that believeth on the Son hath life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3. 36). It is noticeable also that whereas in the previous section there is material prosperity promised to the one who heeds Wisdom, ("so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses burst out with new wine" ch. 3. 10) the blessings here promised are of a spiritual nature ("my fruit is better than gold... and my revenue than choice silver" ch. 8. 19). All this leads to the conclusion that just as the first section pictures Wisdom appealing to pre-Christian mankind, when the promise to Israel, at any rate, was of material prosperity by conforming to the Covenant (see Lev. 26. 2-13) so the second section pictures the Wisdom of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, appealing throughout

this present Age of the Gospel to all who will heed his words and cast in their lot with him. It is to such that the message of 8. 22-31 comes with force—the One who speaks to them was with God in the beginning; the Lord constituted him at the beginning to be the agent of his creative power and the means of his revelation of himself to men. That, after all, is what the Apostle John declared at the beginning of his Gospel "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God... all things were made by him... and the word was made flesh". There is a striking correspondence between Prov. 8 and John 1.

If then the first section does picture the mission of Wisdom before the First Advent and the second section the mission during the Christian dispensation, analogy would require that the third section, Chapter 9, must prefigure the mission of Wisdom during the third great epoch of God's dealing with man, the Messianic or Millennial era. Chapter 9 has a note of triumph in its call, as though Wisdom has completed a work of preparation and is now about to execute a purpose long cherished. The house is built; it has been sanctified by monuments and sacrifices. The feast is spread, and now the invitation goes out to all "Come, partake". It is easy to see in this a poetic allusion to the work of the future Age. Wisdom's house, built at last, is quite clearly the Church, the building of which has been going on steadily through this present Age, its completion constituting the signal for the end of this Age and the commencement of the next. We, members of Christ's Church, "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets... all the building... groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2. 20. 21). "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2. 5). Wisdom's slain beasts are the sacrificial offerings which sanctify the house "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God" (Rom. 12. 1). The newly mingled wine is the new wine of the Kingdom, that to which Jesus referred at the Last Supper when He told his disciples "I will not drink henceforth with you of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom" (Matt. 26. 29). And the furnished table is without doubt the feast spread in the sight of all mankind in the day Messiah's Kingdom is established "In this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees... and it shall be said in that day Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him,

and he will save us . . . we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isa. 25. 6-9). The messengers have gone forth to call all to the feast "Come eat of my bread and drink of the wine which I have mingled" (ch. 9. 5) a call that is expressed by John the Revelator in eloquent words when he says "And the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come' . . . and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22. 17). The nature of the call is clearly shown in the next verse of Prov 9. "Forsake the foolish and live; and go in the way of understanding" (verse 6). Here in this chapter

is God's last word to man, spoken in that day, yet future, when all, the dead and the living, will hear the call to this feast and will make their decision, for good or for ill. "If thou be wise" says verse 12 "thou shalt be wise for thyself; but thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it". Wisdom's task—so far as this earth is concerned—is finished when at last every man has made the final choice, when the wilfully obdurate have suffered the inevitable consequences of sin, and the righteous ushered in to the everlasting years of Eternity.

"THESE THINGS"

A Study in
2 Pet. 1

The key note of this study is "these things". The expression occurs no less than five times in eight verses. By "these things" Peter refers to the list of Christian virtues mentioned in verses 5 to 7, where he says "giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love".

Note these five occurrences, and what the Apostle says about "these things" and their importance. The first is in verse 8. "If these things be in you and about them make you that ye shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ". The marginal rendering for "barren" is "idle", and Weymouth's translation brings out the meaning better; "if these things exist in you and continually increase, they prevent you being either idle or unfruitful in advancing towards a full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ". Each part of this verse is important. "If these things be in you" has in the original the idea of existing in you as your permanent property or possession, something that has become a part of yourself. These things are furthermore not only to be in us, but to abound in us. In the original, the word "abound" has in it the thought of "to multiply". They are to exist in us not as expressions of a moral code, but as principles of an inner life. Where life exists there must be activity in the reproduction of itself, continually increasing, as Weymouth renders it, just as the cells of the living organism increase and multiply in the process of growth and development. The permanent possession of living principles like faith, virtue, etc., cannot but be accompanied by a process of multiplication in thoughts, words and acts in conformity with these principles. It would be

impossible for such a life to be idle or unfruitful.

Notice, further, that the thought is not of not being barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ, as the Authorised Version has it, but of being neither barren nor unfruitful in advancing towards a full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. As one writer expresses it, "the knowledge of the Lord is not the region in which their activity is to work, but the goal to which all that activity should be tending". This knowledge, the writer further points out, is the higher personal knowledge, in contrast with the lower general knowledge. We are exhorted to add to our faith, virtue, and to virtue general knowledge and all the other qualities mentioned so that we might be able thereby to reach unto the personal knowledge and love of Christ.

The second thing that Peter says about these things is that where they are wanting it results in spiritual blindness. "But he that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins". A fable is told, how in the centre of a great forest a bird is perched on the topmost branch of a tall tree, singing with all his might. A fox at the bottom of the tree asks what it is making all the song about. The bird replies that it cannot help it, the view is so wonderful. "What do you see?" asks the fox. "I see mountains and meadows, a great dome of blue sky and the sea far away." "I don't believe a word of it", said the fox, "I don't see anything but these trees. There isn't anything else to be seen". Spiritual vision is the ability to see far off, away beyond the things of sense and time, and such vision can only come from the possession of Christian faith and hope. Lacking these things no one

can see beyond the "trees" of the present and the temporal. Only as the Spirit bears witness by *its fruits* that we are the children of God can there be any assurance that we are God's heirs. If we lack this assurance, there is no real ground for faith and hope, and there can therefore be no real spiritual vision.

Advancing years in natural life is often accompanied by failing eyesight. The reverse should be true of spiritual life. As these things abound in us increasingly the spiritual vision becomes clearer and clearer, until, as Bunyan pictures it in *Pilgrim's Progress*, the Delectable mountains are reached, from where it is possible to see the very gate of the Celestial City.

Continuing, Peter says that those lacking these things have forgotten that they were purged from their old sins. This implies not only a losing of sight, but an experience of moral relapse. People who are becoming defective in sight are sometimes apt to become negligent with regard to habits of cleanliness. When we lose the vision of God's holiness it is certain to be attended with negligence regarding holy living.

The third thing Peter says about *these things* is that by enabling us to make our calling and election sure they will secure for us an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Verse 10 says "*Wherefore the rather brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure*". This follows naturally after the previous verse, where he has been showing how that the doing of these things will give clearness of spiritual vision, urging us on to apprehend that for which we have been apprehended. The candidate for parliamentary election makes his *calling* sure when he accepts nomination and subscribes to the rules governing the election. He makes his *election* sure when he gains the approval of the electorate as reflected in their vote. The child of God makes his calling sure when he gives himself in consecration to God and daily seeks to confirm that calling by a life of sanctification. He makes his election sure when he wins the final approval of God. Of Enoch it is said that he was translated for the reason that before his translation he had this testimony, that he "pleased God". As God's approval was expressed in Enoch's translation, so will it be expressed in our "change" in the glory of the First Resurrection, when, called, chosen and faithful, we shall have made our election sure.

Continuing with verse 10, Peter says "for if

ye do *these things*, ye shall never fall, for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ". The word for "fall" in the original means "to stumble". If ye do these things ye shall never stumble. This does not mean that they would never make a mistake, or have a setback. The thought in the Apostle's mind may be gathered from his use of the expression in the previous epistle, where he refers to Jesus as a stone of stumbling to those who stumble at the Word, being disobedient. Jesus had come unto his own, and his own had received him not. Because not right at heart, they had stumbled, and so serious were the consequences that they had to be cut off from the favour of God. Stumbling as used here does not refer to the temporary slips of a man who is right at heart, for none knew better than Peter how easy it was to slip. It means rather the serious occasions of offence experienced by the man who at heart is at cross purposes with God. A man whose blood is pure can get quite a deep wound without causing permanent harm, but the person whose blood is unhealthy can develop blood poisoning from the merest scratch.

There is something grand about Peter's expression "for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you *abundantly*". It reminds again of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and the stirring account of the passing over of Valiant-for-truth. "When the day that he must go hence was come, many accompanied him to the river side into which as he went he said, "death where is thy sting?" So he passed over, and *all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.*" What an abundant entrance the Lord Jesus had; "ten thousand times ten thousand", and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing". The picture which the Bible presents of the Christian life here is that of an *abundant* life, comprehending a peace that passeth all understanding and a joy unspeakable and full of glory. In like manner it pictures a fitting end for such a life in an *abundant entrance* into the everlasting kingdom, when as more than conquerors we shall have a Divinely royal reception.

The opposite of an abundant entrance is that of being saved, yet so as by fire. Lot stands forth as an example. In the destruction of Sodom he lost everything with the exception of his own life and the lives of his two

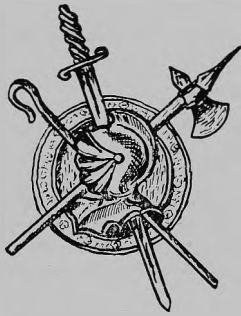
daughters. Our ambition should be to live the full life here that God has designed for us, experiencing the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ, and to win thereafter this abundant entrance. Do not let us be satisfied with anything less. What the glories are that await us there, neither tongue nor pen can show. One thing we know, "when He shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as He is". As the crowning feature of the life to come, Paul, speaking of it, ends by saying "so shall we ever be with the Lord". This will be our greatest joy, and it is manifest that we can be prepared for those delights of his immediate presence only if the spiritual qualities that Peter has been describing, exist and abound in us, here and now.

Going on to verse 12, we have the fourth occurrence of "these things". Peter says "wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them and be established in the present truth". In this section Peter is telling us that the possession of these things is essential to an establishment in the present truth. Present truth is an expression we often use to denote the fuller light enjoyed in these last days. Peter, however, was speaking here of the truth which was present with, and enjoyed by, the believers in his day, and has been present with and enjoyed by believers ever since. That truth was vastly different from the truth belonging to the old dispensation. It was different doctrinally, dispensationally and practically. Doctrinally it embraced all the new teaching associated with the ransom sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, and how the types and shadows of the ceremonial law were fulfilled in him. Dispensationally it comprehended all the new light regarding the ending of the Jewish Age and the opening up of the Gospel Age. Practically it contained all the new teaching regarding the possibility of deliverance from the law of sin and death, because of the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. All these were vital fundamental differences and it is the last feature that Peter has been stressing in his emphasis on *these things*. Having a good understanding of the doctrines, and a good knowledge of the dispensational features of God's plan are not enough. To be established in the present truth one must possess *these things*. As this was true in Peter's day, so it is true to-day.

There is just one other occurrence, the fifth

of the key note "*these things*" in this section. About thirty years before writing this letter, the Lord had given Peter a thrice repeated commission to feed his sheep. On the same occasion He had given him an indication that he was to die the death of a martyr. We find both of these ideas in the verses that follow. He says, "*Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance*"—performing thus to the very last the duties of a faithful shepherd. "*Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me.*" But Peter does not stop there. Like the Lord, whose spirit he has so richly imbibed, he thinks of the need of the sheep after he has been removed from them, and continues: "Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance". As if he would say, "this is the all important matter, as I have endeavoured to show by both my teaching and by my life. And now since I feel that the death by which I must glorify God is drawing nigh, I will do my utmost in the time that yet remains to impress this same truth indelibly on your minds". This is Peter's parting injunction. It was written not only for those who received it in his day, but for us living to-day. May we take it as a personal message from him, and may we each endeavour to have *these things* of such vital importance always in remembrance.

"No cross, no crown" is a famous saying of William Penn, the Quaker founder of Pennsylvania. It is illustrated by the experience of Simon of Cyrene, who was compelled by the Roman soldiers to bear Jesus' cross. Simon had come from North Africa to attend the Passover, and his feelings can be better imagined than described on that day when this fate befell him. He had doubtless made his own plans for the day, but these were upset by this unexpected incident. Believers are always encountering experiences of that type, and they are always finding the abundant blessings into which the Cyrenian Jew stumbled. One was immortality. Wherever the Gospel is preached his name will be honoured to the end of the age. Another appears to have been eternal life, for Mark writes of him as the father of two well-known Christians, Alexander and Rufus.



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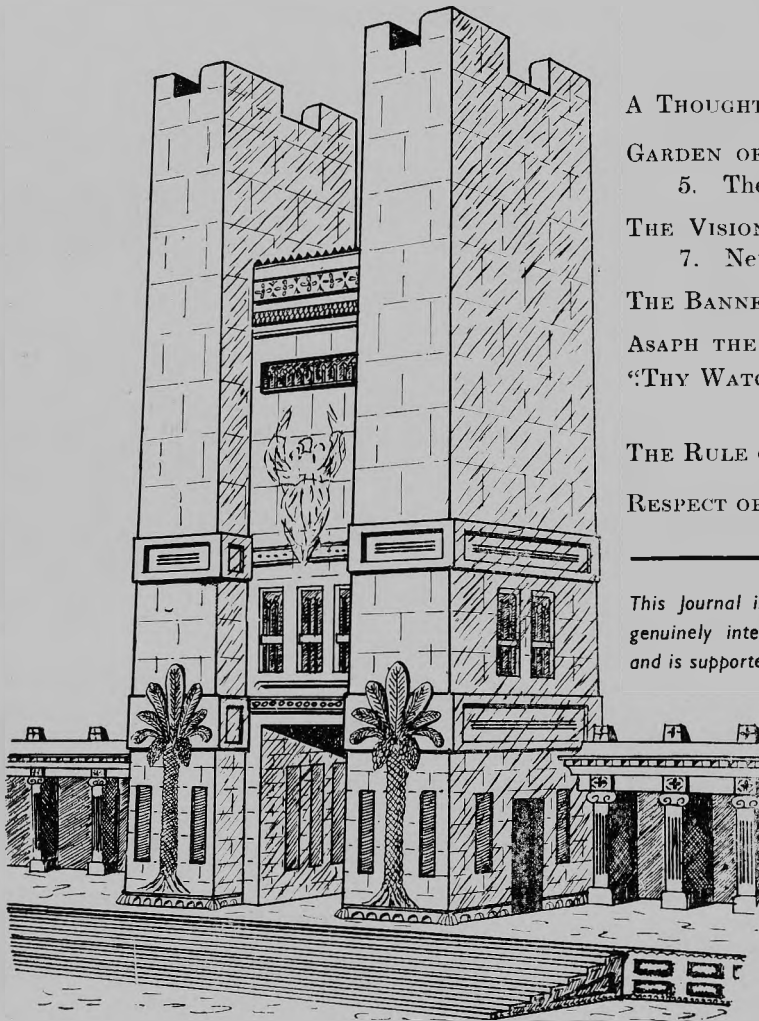
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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A Thought for the Month

We have for some time been familiar with the sensational claims made by the Press for the capabilities and powers of modern calculating machines, robots and automatic computers. These fruits of human inventive genius, it is said, possess memories by means of which they can store information and release it when required; they can perform intricate mathematical calculations in a fraction of the time possible to mere man possessing only a human brain. They can, in fact, writes the reporter enthusiastically, practically think, responding to external stimuli in the same fashion as does a human brain. Of course this is all nonsense; the most intricate of such devices is a pure machine, operating mechanically or electrically in accordance with the laws of mechanics and electro-technology. One blown fuse and the computer is dead until someone comes along and puts in a new fuse. But the whole thing is symptomatic of man's desire to do something that God has already done, but without God's help—and the result is a miserable caricature of the real thing. Much better to be honest and admit that man can build wonderful machines of almost fantastic attributes, but he cannot create life and intelligence.

Now an Australian scientist comes along with the statement that it will soon be possible for medical men to operate on the brains and vocal chords of monkeys and the like so that they may be given the intelligence and the powers of language of man. He looks forward to a day when the menial tasks of life will be undertaken by intelligent talking monkeys, thus setting men free for more leisured pursuits. That such a prospect would imply a slavery every bit as hideous as that from which the black races are only now

slowly being emancipated does not, apparently, trouble him in the least. Truly, the arrogance and selfishness of modern educated man appears to know no bounds.

All the same, here is a splendid opportunity for the modern "science fiction" novelist. Suppose the thinking machines and talking monkeys got together and produced a race of hybrid creatures which decided humans were a nuisance anyway and were best out of the way! An armour-clad monkey thinking and acting a thousand times faster than man might prove a formidable proposition. One could only pray that a fuse might blow at the critical moment. It all leads one to wonder if there is not some factor in human nature which induces deterioration of intellect, feeble-mindedness, in the educated man who deliberately leaves God out of his life. The actions to-day, not only of scientists, but of statesmen, might well justify some such conclusion.

"God hath made man upright" said King Solomon "but they have sought out many inventions". (Eccl. 7. 29). The Hebrew word, strangely enough, denotes mechanical devices, and comes from a root meaning to think or compute, in a mathematical sense, with a secondary meaning "to devise evil". Perhaps the wise king was more farseeing than we give him credit for. At any rate his words are very apt to our own times.

Gone from us

Sis. Tring (West Wickham)

"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away."

GARDEN OF EDEN

5.—The Coming of Eve

*An Examination
of the Story of
Adam and Eve*

The coming into existence of the first woman is more difficult to comprehend than any other part of the Eden story. The first man was made of the dust of the ground; God breathed into him the breath of life, and man became a living being. That is easy to visualise. With Eve it was different. About the only clear and easily understood element in the story is that she was made of Adam's own flesh—"bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" "*she was taken out of man*". Those were Adam's own words, and however the process of Eve's creation be viewed the conclusions reached may not do violence to the principle underlying those words. Adam's body was constructed from the elements of the earth around him and infused with the spirit of life by God; Eve's body came from Adam and it is not said, as it is said of Adam, that God breathed into Eve's inanimate form the breath of life and awakened her to conscious existence in the manner that Adam was awakened.

It was after the animals had been named and Adam began to perceive the processes of Nature at work in the lower creation that God expressed what were probably Adam's own feelings by the declaration "*It is not good that the man should be alone*" (ch. 2. vs. 18). Adam himself was by now probably feeling need of a companion, one with whom he could share his thoughts and his experiences. To what extent he may have visualised the possibility of a society of creatures like himself, living and working together in harmony, engaging together in the pursuit of objects of common interest, it is impossible to say. Probably his mind had gone no farther as yet than to dream of just one other human being corresponding in all material respects to himself. Perhaps he did, perhaps he did not, hear the avowed intention of the Lord, "*I will make him an help meet for him*" but even if he did he could have had no conception of the wonderful thing that was soon to happen to him.

This word "help meet" has suffered from improper confusion with the English word "help-mate" and has been made to appear as if God was proposing a wife for Adam. Although, of course, the one so soon to come into existence was destined to become Adam's wife, this is not the meaning of the word. "Help meet" is the Hebrew "*ezer-ki-neged*"

which means, literally, an opposite counterpart, as in a mirror reflection. "One like himself standing opposite him" is an equivalent rendering. Adam had seen all the animals and found none there like himself, none having properties either of body or mind with which he could find something in common. There was no other living creature like Adam in the whole wide world; he was unique. God proposed to alter that situation by bringing him face to face with another like himself with whom he could hold communion and who could share with him the interests of his life.

The popular idea that Eve was created from one of Adam's ribs which was taken from his body for the purpose while asleep has to be mentioned because it is the popular idea and because it appears like that in the Authorised Version narrative. Obviously there is much more behind the story than this; the account warrants closer examination.

"And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh instead thereof. And the rib which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man." (ch. 2. vs. 21-22).

The word translated "deep sleep" does not refer to ordinary sleep but indicates a trance, being in a senseless or stupified condition, as in the case, in modern days, of a patient being under an anaesthetic preparatory to a surgical operation. How long this trance lasted we do not know, but it was during its course that Adam was subjected to something very analogous to a surgical operation. It was not necessarily the removal of one of his ribs which would incidentally have left him something less than a perfect man, physically. This word "*tsela*" translated "rib" is not primarily a medical word. It is a mechanical term referring to rooms, beams or walls flanking the sides of buildings or other structures. "*Tsela*" denotes the side chambers of Solomon's and Ezekiel's Temples, eleven times, the side walls of the Mosaic Tabernacle seventeen times, constructional details of buildings such as beams, boards, planks, corners, etc., another seven times, and "rib" in the medical sense only in the Genesis story; nowhere else. The word is derived from a root which means to incline to one side. On

this account Jewish traditions pictured Adam as having been created a kind of dual being, Eve being joined to him at his side, the trance like period of insensibility becoming the occasion for the separation. But before considering further just what is intended to be conveyed by the "rib" it may be helpful to examine the succeeding stages of the process. Of that which was taken from Adam, God "made" a woman. This word "made" is not that used of the creation of Adam, "*yatsar*", which means to form, fashion, shape, or construct. It is "*banah*" which means to build, and is used with this meaning everywhere in the Old Testament—over 300 times—when the building of a thing is referred to. The woman's body was not formed in the same manner as that of the man. *His* was fashioned from earthly material by the hand of God; *hers* was built up by a process of growth, and that which eventually blossomed into the perfection of full womanhood had its origin in the body of the man.

This fact is stressed by Adam's words when he set eyes upon his destined companion. "*This now*" he said "*is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.*" In Semitic dialects "bone" is often used as a synonym for "self" and Adam's exclamation might well have inferred "This is self of myself and flesh of my flesh". It is clear that Adam was perfectly well aware that the woman had not been created independently, as he himself had been, and then brought to him; she derived her form and her life from his own self, under the provision of God.

Did Adam originally find Eve a fully-grown mature woman or did he first watch a process of development through childhood into womanhood? There is a certain romance associated with the idyll of the first man coming face to face with his destined bride and taking her to himself in the rapture of such a meeting; but if in fact it was like that, then the part taken from Adam must have been supplemented by a generous allowance of "dust of the ground" in order completely to fashion the physical frame of a fully grown adult. Perhaps, rather, Adam awoke from his short time of unconsciousness to find himself the custodian of a new young life which until that time had been part of his own self. He must have seen the same kind of thing happening among the lower animals and his mind would quickly grasp the situation. Such a supposition would account for the use of the expression "builded he a woman" instead of

"fashioned" as in the creation of the man, and would give full meaning to Adam's exclamation "This is self of myself and flesh of my flesh". In such case it would have been a number of years before his charge could become his wife; he must first guide her through the experiences of early childhood and maidenhood, observing her development until at last she attained relative equality with him both mentally and physically.

Cases have been known in this modern world where male and female characteristics are combined in one individual—hermaphrodite is the medical term—one or the other usually obtaining the ascendancy eventually. Remembering the Scriptural insistence that all men owe their life and their form to Adam, all die "in Adam" and indirectly in consequence of his sin, it is perhaps not unreasonable to think of the first man Adam as created with all the powers and vehicles of life built into his own organism, retaining only the predominantly manlike characteristics when he had passed life and form with all womanly attributes to the one who was of him and one with him, yet separate from him.

In some such manner may be understood how Eve was taken from Adam's side and the flesh closed up to leave him whole and entire, fitted to fulfil his destiny as the father of the human race. That all this had been intended and planned from the beginning, that Adam at his creation already bore within his body the beginnings of the one who was afterwards to attain separate existence as his companion and wife, may be inferred from the parallel accounts in chapters 1 and 5. "*So God created man in his own image . . . male and female created he them.*" (ch. 1. 27). "*In the day that God created man . . . male and female created he them; and blessed them and called their name Adam.*" (ch. 5. 1-2).

Although God gave to man the name of Adam, derived from a root meaning to be red or ruddy, and in Arabic at least implying handsome, it seems that Adam himself invented his own name to describe his species, "*ish*". "Adam" has lingered in the Hebrew language as a general name for mankind—*Beni-adam*, the sons of men; *Ha-adam*, the man—and in the Genesis account the word is used both as a general term, *ha-adam*, the man, and as a proper name, *Adam*. When however Eve was brought before him, Adam exclaimed "she shall be called woman" (*ishshah*) because she was taken out of man (*ish*). *Ish* and *ishshah* are the most common Hebrew words for man and woman, or wife, respectively.

There seems to be almost the beginnings of language making here; students of ancient languages have repeatedly noticed how primitive words are often based upon natural sounds—the Hebrew word for “sneeze”, for example, is “*atishoo*”—and one wonders if Adam coined the word *Ish* from the apparent sound of the drawing in of breath. The most fundamental act of his life was breathing; it is not difficult to detect the sound of “*ish*” in this most common of all processes, and that sound may well have seemed to Adam an appropriate one with which to form a spoken word descriptive of himself. Then when Eve came along, taken out of himself, what more natural than the double sound caused by breathing in and exhaling again; so “*ishshah*” was derived and the first simple grammatical distinction created. Learned men have written voluminous books on the origin and growth of language, endeavouring to demonstrate its development from the inarticulate cries of wild animals; in fact the first words must have been deliberately coined by the first man, establishing a means of intellectual communion with the woman who stood beside him.

The declaration which forms verse 24 “*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh*” is no part of Adam’s speech. The compiler of the story added this as his comment. Adam knew nothing of fathers and mothers and it was Eve who was brought to Adam, not vice versa. The writer of the story, correctly perceiving that the whole basis of the marriage relation was established by God in the union of these two, laid down this basic principle which stands for all time. Some have used this text as support for the claim that the primitive state of human society was matriarchal, i.e., that the woman was the head of the family and the man was received at marriage into the tribe of his wife and remained the subordinate member. This is sometimes the case even to-day among certain primitive peoples but the Bible is consistently emphatic that “the husband is the head of the wife”. (Eph. 5. 23) and the whole setting of the Eden story is clear that God held the man to be the responsible partner of the two. The verse can be very well understood as referring to the clearly implied truth that in the Divine order a man, on taking to himself a wife, forms a new unit in society, leaving the parental roof and establishing a new home over which his wife presides and in the shelter of which his children are born and reared. Although that

ideal is violated in many ways by both primitive and civilised man, in ages past and present, it is never violated without contributing to the further degeneracy of the human race. Only the Divine ideal and the Divine arrangement can endure and produce eventually what God determined when at the beginning “male and female created he them”.

“*And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed*” (vs. 25). This verse is usually completely misunderstood. So far as physical nudity is concerned, the two concerned had never known any other state since their creation and it must therefore have seemed the most natural condition of things to them. No other human beings as yet existed. The imposition of modern standards of taste and propriety upon these two at that time is therefore quite improper, especially since although such standards are those of western civilisation at this present time, they are not universally applicable throughout the world. There are, even now, some tribes in tropical regions where it is considered highly improper for unmarried persons to appear in anything other than a state of nudity; the briefest of coverings is only worn after marriage. We have therefore to look for something more fundamental in this remark that, although naked, they were not ashamed.

The Hebrew word “*erom*” translated “naked” is derived from the idea of being elevated or raised up so as to be plainly in view. There is nothing concealed or hidden. Perhaps the best O.T. text to illustrate the basic meaning of the word is Job 26. 6 “*Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering.*” Adam and Eve were open and uncovered, upright and guileless, in the sight of God, who was the only One who at that time had anything to do with them. They could, to use a modern expression, “look God in the face” without shame or fear; complete frankness and sincerity characterised their communion and relations with God. This was the state of complete innocence, not of physical knowledge in which their intelligent, perceptive minds must already have made considerable progress, but of mind. Physically and mentally perfectly mature, they were as little children, living in the Kingdom of Heaven. No shadow of sin, no thought of disobedience, had as yet entered their minds. In perfect trust and union with their Creator, they stood upright and open before him and were not ashamed.

How long this happy state endured we have no means of determining. The one clue is that

no children were born to Adam and Eve whilst in the Garden. There is no reason why there should not have been. They had received the Divine command to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and in fact any failure on their part to do so would itself have been disobedience to God, and therefore sin. But the first child was born after the Fall and their expulsion from the Garden; perhaps

their time of unalloyed happiness together was relatively short after all. We do not know; we only know that even as they stood there before God, radiant in their happiness and full of promise for the future, the agent of all evil was moving in quickly to sow the seeds of which men have reaped so disastrous a harvest.

(To be continued)

THE VISION OF JOEL

7. New Wine of the Kingdom

An Exposition of the
Book of Joel

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the House of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim." (3. 18).

This verse is full of Millennial imagery, the wine and milk of the Kingdom, and the River of Life. These symbols are found elsewhere in the Scriptures, separated. Here they are found combined. Here is our authority for linking them together in point of dispensational time and proclaiming to all and sundry that in that day, when the River of Life commences to flow again from the sanctuary of God, there will be wine and milk—the deep truths and the elementary truths of the Divine Plan, the things by which men may approach unto God, and enter into communion with him, as well as the things by which men may learn to live their earthly lives acceptably and in conformity with his laws—without money, and without price.

We are indebted to Ezekiel for the clearest view of this Millennial river. Out from the Sanctuary that symbolises the Divine Government on earth during that Age (Ezek. 47) he saw a stream emerge, waters that rapidly widened and deepened as they pursued their onward course, until they became a mighty river, too wide and too deep to pass over. They flowed down into the Dead Sea, and healed its barren waters, so that fish could live; and upon the banks of that life-giving river grew every kind of tree whose fruit was good for food and whose leaves were potent for healing. Fitting symbol, this, of the life-giving influences that will flow out from the administration of the Lord Christ and his glorified Church "in that day". Small wonder that men will cry "Lo, this is our God; we

have waited for him, and He will save us, This is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." (Isa. 25. 9). To Ezekiel, the vision was as a restoration of man's lost Eden home; he saw once again the mystic river that watered the garden, and the Trees of Life in the midst of the garden, lost to mankind for so many weary centuries, now restored before his wondering eyes.

Zechariah, in a later day, saw the same thing. Like Joel, he saw it in connection with, and immediately following, Israel's spectacular deliverance from their enemies. He had stood and watched (Zech. 14) the investment of Jerusalem by the hostile forces, and the Lord go forth as when He fought in the day of battle, and the disruption of those forces by the power of that going forth. And then he had seen the living waters come forth out of Jerusalem—not a perennial winter stream to be dried up by the summer's heat, but a sparkling river bearing fertility and life to every thing and every one within its reach all the year round; "*in summer and in winter shall it be*". So these three prophets joined together in giving testimony to the means by which God will in the coming Age bring life and health to the nations, so that the Revelator, centuries later, was able to revive their vision in his own words. When, in his turn, he came to close the last book of the Bible with his inspired description of what God will do at the end, he saw "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb—on either side of the river, the tree of life—and there shall be no more curse." (Rev. 22. 1-3).

The "*valley of Shittim*", as the translators have it, is the "Valley of Acacias." (*Shittim* is the Hebrew word for acacia). The Valley of Acacias was the name given to the terraces on

either side of the Jordan, for a considerable distance above its entrance into the Dead Sea, which in ancient times (and to some extent in modern times also) were thickly forested with acacias. There is a striking parallel with Zechariah's vision here, for he also sees the river of life issuing forth toward the "east country"—this same district—and thus finding its way by means of the Jordan into the Dead Sea. One cannot help feeling that both prophets saw the same thing in vision, and described it each in his own words, and one wonders, is it possible that they did each enjoy a foresight of a literal stream that is to flow thus, "in that day"—without in any way deprecating the symbolic interpretation of the passage, which to us is in any case the more important?

In the natural picture, the flowing of the great "fountain"—not just a single spring; the Hebrew *ma'an* means a collection of many springs gushing forth a great quantity of water at one place, as in the "fountains of the great deep" in the story of the Flood in Gen. 7:11—and its consequence in the rivers of Judah all flowing with waters (Joel 3:18) would, of course, result in abundant harvests of grapes, and consequent wine, and ample pasturage for flocks, and consequent milk. No wonder then, that Joel says the mountains would "drop down" new wine—so heavily laden with prolific vines would they be—and the hills flow with milk, so rich in flocks and herds would they be in their turn. All this is due in the first place to the River of Life flowing out from the house of the Lord. That then must be why Isaiah cries out so triumphantly (55:1) "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters—come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price". It is in this chapter that the spiritual application of the material illustration is so clearly seen, for Isaiah goes on to say, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me. Hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you—"

That is the call of the Millennial Age. That is the work of the Millennial Age, to offer the symbolic wine and milk to all men, without money and without price, and exhort them to "listen" and "hear", that their souls may live.

The insistence that all this is "without money and without price" may quite reasonably be taken as an indication of the abundance of

wine and milk that the living waters will have brought forth. It will become as common and free as the air we breathe, and the sunshine which warms us. That, at any rate, will be true of the wine and milk of the Millennial Age.

So the prophet turns his eyes away from the fair vision, and looks upon the Divine warfare against evil which has made that vision possible. "*Egypt shall be a desolation*" he cries, "*and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land.*" What kind of Millennial Age is this, that witnesses prosperity and life on the one hand, and desolation and death on the other? Has God his favourites after all, and are Egypt and Edom to be punished eternally for their oft-times misguided and ignorant opposition to the children of Judah?

Certainly this verse cannot be literally fulfilled, for neither Egypt nor Edom now exist. (The Egyptians of our own day are, racially, a different people altogether). Both nations went into oblivion many centuries ago. And there, of course, is the answer. In that day when Israel shines forth resplendent, purified and converted, as God's earthly missionary nation, the Egypt and Edom who persecuted them in the days of their weakness, will not, as nations, be there. The nations that cried "let us cause them to cease from being a people on the face of the earth" have themselves ceased to exist as nations, but Israel, whom they oppressed, is enthroned forever. That is the Divine decree, and who shall say that it is not a just decree? "*Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed. FOR THE LORD DWELLETH IN ZION.*"

THE END

In a remarkable statement, Paul tells us that experience worketh hope. Perhaps only a Christian Apostle could have made such a statement. In the case of the unconverted, it is probably true to suggest that experience, far from working hope, leads to little more than despair. Those who are living without Christ in this world can find little in their experience to stimulate a sense of hope. The wages of sin is death, and a life that is committed to evil can know little of joy, and certainly nothing of eager anticipation of the glories that are yet to be revealed.

THE BANNER OF TRUTH An Essay

"Thou hast given a banner to them that reverence thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth." (Psa. 60. 4).

Truth is the guiding principle of all creation. When God began to bring what we call material things into existence, in readiness for the final glorious outcome, of intelligent, self-responsible, living creatures worshipping Him in sincerity, He ordained Truth as the standard by which all things must be measured. So closely interlocked are all the processes by which the universe is ordered and men live that nothing which will not stand the test of truth can continue in existence. That is why, in the superb scene of the Heavenly City with which the Bible closes, *"there shall nothing enter into it that maketh a lie."*

This fundamental principle which is built into all that God does emerges in the Old Testament as Divine steadfastness. God is One upon whom reliance may be placed. For ever is God's truth established in Heaven. Through all the shifting scenes of sin it stands as a beacon light, showing where God is, in the darkness of this world's night. In a very special sense, God Himself is identified with Truth, so that we can logically say that God is Truth in the same way that we often repeat the well-known expression "God is Love". Moses in Deut. 32. 4 refers to Him as a *"God of Truth, and without iniquity. Just and right is he."* In that brief sentence three important words—important for an understanding of the plan of salvation—are brought together: Truth; Justice; Righteousness. In all the developing story of God's ways as revealed in the Bible, those three words stand together, and God stands in the centre of them. Read the Book of the prophet Isaiah and note how many times he uses the expressions "In the God of truth; By the God of Truth." That golden-tongued man of God knew full well that nothing can stand eternally, except it be founded on truth; perhaps that was why, in the opening chapters of his prophecy, he so bitterly condemned the hypocrisy of Israel's leaders.

But Truth must be revealed, made known, to men, if they are to order their lives by its principles and so fulfil their Creator's intentions for them. On the lower level of human existence, the laws of creation must be known and understood if men are to conduct their

lives in the way that assures continuing life. On the higher level, men must be brought to a knowledge of the Will of God and of their relationship with God if they are ever intelligently and willingly to take the place in His plans for which He created them. So it became necessary for God to reveal Himself, and His Truth, to His creatures in a manner they could understand. The Psalmist knew of that need when he cried *"O send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy dwelling-place"*. (Psa. 43. 3).

"In a manner they could understand!" How can God reveal Himself to men? He dwells "in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see." (1 Tim. 6. 16). *"Canst thou by searching, find out God"* asked the Arabian sage (Job. 11. 7). The ancients used to talk about a high mountain in the far north, away from the haunts of men, which they called variously "the mountain of the world" or "the sides of the north" and there, said they, God dwelt, but no man could ever ascend to see him or converse with him. His messengers might come to man, but man could not go to Him. How then could he reveal Himself to man?

The Apostle John gives us the answer. *"No man hath seen God at any time"* he says *"the only begotten Son, the one existing within the bosom of the Father, he hath interpreted Him"*. (John 1. 18). That brings us to the very vital connection between the Truth of God and the Word of God.

"The Word was made flesh!" That is true doctrine and it became true in history when Jesus the son of Mary appeared among men. But the Word of God had come to men before that. Even in the times of creation, before mankind existed, the Word of God was active in the forming of man's future home. *"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made"* says the Psalmist (Psa. 33. 6). In a very wonderful manner that Word of the Lord is invested with the idea of personality, and identified with Divine Wisdom, in Proverbs 8, and charged with a message to mankind. *"Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men. Hear, for I will speak of excellent things . . . for my mouth shall speak truth . . . the words of my mouth are in righteousness . . . that I may cause those that love*

me to inherit substance, and I will fill their treasures. The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth was . . . Blessed is the man that heareth me . . . for whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord."

In the days of the Old Testament, therefore, God was at work in a totally incomprehensible manner, revealing Himself to mankind by His Word, that mysterious Wisdom who both undertook the mighty works of creation and also became the Divine message to man. We are told that the Lord by Wisdom made the heavens (Psa. 136.5.) and that the Lord by Wisdom founded the earth (Prov. 3.19). We find that "the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the Word of the Lord." (1 Sam. 3.21). Does this mean that the Word appeared in visible form to Samuel and held converse as man does with man? There were certainly other occasions in Old Testament history when such an appearance was manifest to the eyes of certain men and women; in all such cases the subjects of such visits were made aware that they had had to do with a visitant from God. There was nothing very informative about any of these appearances; the message given usually had to do with some situation at the time existing, but the Scripture is plain that these occurrences were direct manifestations of God to men—"theophanies" is the theological term nowadays used to describe them, meaning "appearances of God"—and in some cases the language is quite direct as in Gen. 18 when Abraham is said to have stood before the Lord, spoken to him, received answers, and eventually "*the Lord went his way as soon as he had left communing with Abraham; and Abraham returned unto his place.*" The Word was the manifestation of God to men in Old Testament days and the channel of His instructions to the Patriarchs. It is interesting, though, to notice that instruction in the future long-term purposes of God did not come through the Word, but through the Spirit. "*Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*" (2 Pet. 1.21). The authority of God was revealed by the Word; the purposes of God by the Spirit.

In New Testament times came the deeper revelation; "the Word was made flesh." The Word of God stood before men in visible form; the Word of God laid hold upon human nature and became man, who "spake as never man spake". Here at last was there a witness to the

Truth which could not be gainsaid, and that is exactly what He did say of Himself. "*To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.*" (John 18. 37). So the world at last was able to hear the Truth proclaimed in terms that every man could understand. Christ was the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1. 24) and the message He proclaimed testified alike to the power and the wisdom of that One who is the ultimate source of all Truth.

It is a remarkable fact that in the Gospels the expression "The Word of God", in the sense of a truth-bearing proclamation, is never used during the ministry of Jesus. The latest occasion was six months before Jesus came to Jordan, when, according to Luke 3. 2. "The word of God came unto John (the Baptist) in the wilderness." After that, the active ministry of the Word of God appears to have ceased until after the Ascension; then the word of God again went out in power, and in the Book of Acts there are recorded more than forty instances. During the ministry of Jesus we find that the expression "my words" replaces "the word of God", and this is just as it should be. In His own person, our Lord Jesus Christ was the Truth of God, the Wisdom of God, the Word of God, verily manifested in the flesh, and the words which He uttered and were heard by men, were in deed and in truth "the word of God". "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*" he said; "*I am the Light of the world*".

Here then, in the earthly ministry of our Lord, was the banner of Truth first raised on high and displayed. True, only a small and relatively insignificant section of the earth's multitudes saw it, for the First Advent of Jesus was confined entirely to Judea and Galilee, but the important thing to observe is that here, and in this manner, God caused His Truth to break through into earthly affairs, and be displayed before men. Moreover, once displayed, this Truth is never to leave the earth, for God had provided that after the brief sojourn of the "Word made flesh" had ended, there should be others, men and women of the human race, who themselves had been illumined by this Light that had come into the world, who should become receptacles and dispensers of the Truth. Behind the visible "Word made flesh" there stood the mighty invisible power of the Holy Spirit, which was never to leave the earth, but to continue from generation to generation,

imparting Truth to those who would raise aloft and display the banner in the sight of all men.

So the Word was entrusted to the Church. We talk sometimes about the Church's commission to witness the Gospel "in Jerusalem and Judea, and to the uttermost parts of the earth," but in fact this is something much more fundamental than a preaching mandate laid upon us, which we may discharge or ignore as we choose. The Church is the repository of the Word of God during this Age; it is really no exaggeration to say that God reveals Himself to mankind during the period between the First and Second Advents by means of the Church. It is a solemn thought, and a solemn responsibility. The Church is not only God's witness in the world, it is also a light in the world, and it holds forth the Word of life. In so many ways is the work of Christ when upon earth imitated by His own followers in their collective association together as members of His Body. And the power by which this responsibility is discharged is the power of the Holy Spirit which Jesus promised would be conferred upon his disciples as soon as their work was to begin. Small wonder, then, that the first recorded reaction of those disciples was "*So mightily grew the Word of God, and prevailed.*" The banner of truth had been given to the Church, to be displayed. Even although the principal object and work of that display is the gathering out from among the nations of "a people for God's Name"; even although the world will most certainly not be converted during this Age or before the Second Advent of our Lord in glory and power, still it is true that the Holy Spirit, operating in and through the consecrated members of Christ's Church, is providing a channel through which the Word of God may come to anyone who has an ear to hear.

This is a big step forward from the days of the First Advent. Then, the Word of God came only to a few, a small people gathered in one corner of the earth, and the echoes of its tones hardly reached outside that little nation and country. But in the two thousand years that have elapsed since that time, the word of God has traversed every part of the globe where men live. It has followed the migration of nations as they ventured into lands that had before never known human inhabitant. It is not yet true that all men have heard the word; the Spirit has not yet been poured out upon all flesh; but the banner has been displayed in all lands and with the ful-

filment of the prediction that the Gospel of the Kingdom must be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations before the end of the Age could come, another great step in the onward progress of the Divine plan has been taken.

So the last great Age of human history is introduced, the Age during which the Holy Spirit of God will enter every human heart that can possibly be made receptive, and God be revealed through His Word to all men. "*It shall come to pass that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.*" Even that final outpouring is to be preceded by the intervention of the Lord Jesus in power and glory, for we are given a picture in the book of Revelation of the heavens being opened and a Rider on a White Horse appearing, leading the armies of heaven, and his name, we are told, is the Word of God. That heavenly intervention is not only for the destruction of Heaven's enemies, a theme so vividly pictured in the visions of Revelation; it is also for the purpose of manifesting the truth. Says Isaiah the prophet "*In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the nations seek.*" (Isa. 11. 10). Again we have the banner displayed—the banner and the ensign are one and the same thing—and the nations gather around that banner. At long last the word of God will reach all nations and all mankind, and the Holy Spirit be active in bringing whosoever will into absolute harmony with God.

"*The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come'*" (Rev. 22. 17), Why the Spirit? Would it not be more appropriate to say "the Bridegroom and the Bride say 'Come'"? Perhaps the old credal definition of the Spirit as "proceeding from the Father and the Son" may help us here. There are four powers involved in this question of winning and restoring the human race; the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, the Church. It is the Father, who as Creator and First Cause, calls His erring children back into harmony with Him and His ways. It is the Father in the Son who reigns over the nations and rules them like a shepherd. It is the Father by the Holy Spirit who quickens the minds of men that they may see out of obscurity and out of darkness, and come to walk in the light of the Lord. It is the Father through the Church who shows men how they may renounce sin and turn to serve the living God, and encourage them to come to the point of repentance and conversion, which is the first step on the way that leads them into the everlasting Kingdom. So perhaps the picture

in Revelation is looking at the work going on in men's hearts, where the illumination of the Holy Spirit, coupled with the missionary endeavour of the glorified saints, combines to call the repentant one to "Come"—come where?; to the feet of Jesus, the eternal King, the One in whose name alone they may, at the end, stand before the Throne of God and be adjudged worthy of life everlasting.

So the banner of Truth must, and will, be displayed, until at length its unswerving witness is swallowed up in the universal comprehension of Divine Truth by all men. "*The knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.*" Divine truth must

always continue to come to man from God, for man cannot live without the constant flow of truth from God, any more than plants and trees can continue to live without the constant flow of heat and light from the sun. "*The entrance of Thy words giveth light*" said the Psalmist. Divine truth is life-giving, healing, building-up, to the soul as light is to the body. It is only in complete and utter dependence upon God and the constant reception of His Truth that men will live on in the never-ending years of the Ages of Glory. "*For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.*"

ASAPH THE CHIEF MUSICIAN

A man who made melody to the Lord

"For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God."

(Neh. 12. 46).

Asaph was a great choir-master; so great that his name lingered on for many generations after his death and in all Israel's after history the Temple singers were known as "sons of Asaph". Here was a man whose talents and whole life were consecrated to God and used in one particular direction, in the ministry of sacred song. Who knows how many hearts in Israel were turned more reverently toward the God of Israel, and how many minds to the more sober consideration of the Covenant and their responsibilities as a chosen and separated people to God, in consequence of that ministry? The ascending of praise and thanksgiving to God is a very lovely thing in Divine worship; and it is more than that. The heart's devotion can rise to heaven on the wings of song, and the renewal, the re-affirming, of one's own consecration can be carried to God by the voice of thanksgiving. It is a part of the service in which all can join and express for themselves in their own way the love and gratitude they feel for all his benefits. Sometimes a speaker, anxious to conserve as much of the time allotted to the service as he can for his address, requests that one of the hymns be omitted, or the long ones shortened. He does not well who does so. The Father looks upon the praises and prayers of his people in their gathering together with as much interest and sympathy as He does upon the ministry of the spoken word and, who knows, maybe He gets less weary of listening to the praise and thanksgiving of the congreg-

ation than He does of the sometimes over-long perorations delivered in his name by the minister.

Asaph lived in the days of David. He must have found in that king a very ready sympathiser with his services and a quick readiness to make use of his characteristic talents. David himself in his younger and—who knows—happier days had been a singer and a poet. As a shepherd lad he had whiled away many a pleasant hour on the hillside, while the sun shone warmly down, composing and singing simple songs of praise to God. In later years, when in the service of King Saul, he played the harp and sang the same songs to his own accompaniment. Now, with all the cares of state pressing on his shoulders and the claims of several wives to satisfy he probably had less time for such direct indulgence in his musical tastes; but when he came to organising the worship of God he remembered the charm that music had always had for him, and realising what it could mean in the worship of Israel, he looked around for a suitable man to place in charge of such things and found a twin soul in Asaph.

It was when King David had brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem after its long sojourn in the house of Obed-edom, following its capture by the Philistines in the days of Eli two generations earlier, that Asaph received his appointment. According to 1 Chron. 16. 4, David had "*appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the Ark of the Lord, and to record, and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel: Asaph the chief. . .*" As the account goes on we find that there were players on psalteries and harps, and

priests with trumpets, and Asaph himself, in addition to his duty of leading the choir, "made a sound with cymbals". It seems evident that this Temple music was by no means a subdued affair; more likely is it that it bore some distinct resemblance to the Salvation Army bands of our own day. But the Lord blessed it; that is the important thing; He blessed it! That is a point to remember when we feel disposed to decry and condemn a form of service which some others are conducting to the Lord's glory but a form which does not appeal to ourselves. The Lord's arm is not so short—nor his imagination so limited—that He is compelled to confine himself to just one way of doing his work and although we do tend to flatter ourselves that we are the only ones who understand his Plan and therefore the only ones entitled to work for him or to speak in his name, there is plenty of evidence to the unbiased observer that the Lord does find use for many of the efforts put forth by Christian disciples of many differing theologies despite the shortcomings of some of them as respects a clear vision of his Plan.

Now Asaph was not only a musician, he was also a prophet. He must have been a very self-effacing one, for there is no mention of the fact during the time of his own life. Perhaps the greater glory of his royal patron obliterated any lesser radiance that might have shone from the Chief Musician. But in the days of Hezekiah, several centuries later, there is a casual reference which goes to show that his prophetic office was remembered equally with his musical skill. 2 Chron. 29. 30, tells us, in connection with Hezekiah's restoration of the Temple service after the idolatry of Ahaz, that *Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped*".

So Asaph was a seer—a prophet! In his musical preoccupation he found time to study the Word of the Lord and to become a fit medium through which the Holy Spirit could speak. What would be the subjects of his prophecy? Without much doubt he would prophesy, as did all the prophets, concerning the King and the Kingdom, and the conditions of entrance into that Kingdom. Like all the prophets, he would speak of Judgment and Restitution, and call the people to repentance and dedication of life to God's service—to consecration. How would he speak to them?

Surely through the medium of his sacred office! Not for Asaph the free, unrestricted wandering through the countryside in the manner of Amos the herdsman or Joel the vine-dresser. Not for Asaph the standing in the royal court in the company of princes and politicians of this world, like Isaiah or Daniel. His duties kept him in the place where daily worship was being constantly offered, and it was there, and in the course of that worship and those duties, that his prophecy, if it was to be given at all, must be uttered. And therefore it is that for the prophecies of Asaph we must look into the psalms of Asaph.

They are twelve in number, these psalms which are accredited to David's chief musician. Some have suggested that they might not all actually be from Asaph; that the structure of at least one seems to indicate a composition of a much later date, but there is really little or no evidence to support such hypotheses. These twelve, Psalm 50 and Psalms 73 to 83 inclusive, are entitled "Psalms of Asaph", and there is every reason for concluding that we have here compositions that are the work of this fervent-hearted Levite, set to music and rendered under his direction by the sacred choir in the days of David. And being a prophet, what more natural than that he should incorporate in these songs the understanding that the Holy Spirit had given him?

It would take many pages to exhaust the doctrinal and prophetic teaching left on record in the twelve psalms that enshrine the ministry of Asaph. A few brief allusions must suffice. And no such short survey can start on a more appropriate theme than the one which led Asaph to compose the 73rd Psalm—the Permission of Evil. Not exactly a doctrine, as we understand the term to-day, perhaps, but how vital a foundation for our own orderly and satisfying appreciation of the Divine mysteries. "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" he says (Psa. 73. 3)... "they are not in trouble as other men... they have more than heart could wish... and they say 'how doth God know?'... When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; THEN UNDERSTOOD I THEIR END." Ah, yes, that is where we, too, understand why God has permitted evil, and that He will not allow evil and the evil-doer to continue for ever. It is in this psalm, too, that Asaph coined a word that has been an inestimable source of encouragement to the disciples of Jesus in all the centuries of this

Gospel Age; "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." (Psa. 73. 24).

It must have been this realisation of God's determination to vindicate the righteous in due time that led Asaph to the train of thought revealed in Psa. 77. "I have considered the days of old" he says "the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night; I commune with my own heart; and my spirit made diligent search. Will the Lord cast me off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever . . . hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Then, in a swift revulsion of feeling "I will remember the works of the Lord. I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of all thy doings." In the study and consideration of the Plan of God as revealed in his past actions Asaph found both consolation and instruction to explain the apparent inactivity of God. "Thy way, O God, IS IN THE SANCTUARY" (vs. 13). That was the great lesson and it is so still with us. The teaching of this Psalm is the over-ruling providence of God and his wise direction of events for the ultimate good of all men. He is leading them through many strange and hard experiences that they might learn at last the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and come willingly and voluntarily in harmony with God's righteousness. "Thou leddest thy people like a flock" are the concluding words of the Psalm. To the doctrine of the Permission of Evil therefore we have to add the doctrine of Divine Providence that doeth all things well.

The next theme to which Asaph devoted his talents was that of Divine Judgment, and here two of his Psalms, 82 and 83, share the burden of the song. "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods" is the tremendous opening of Psa. 82. None of all created beings are exempt from God's judgment if so be that sin has entered and found a lodgment. Even though they be called gods, children of the Most High, they will die like men, and fall like one of the princes, should the contaminating effects of sin so demand. If wicked men take counsel against the people of God, and say (Psa. 83. 4) "Come, let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance", He will rise up and cause them to scatter and be no more, as the rolling leaves and dust before the whirlwind, twisting and twirling about in the terrible blast of his anger (vs. 13-15). And Asaph saw clearly—so clearly—that the final

effect of Divine Judgment is "that men may know that thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the most high over all the earth". (vs. 18).

Now Asaph comes prophecy. In Psa. 78, 79 and 80 he sings of God's chosen people Israel, of his goodness to them and their unfaithfulness to him. "Give ear, O my people" he cries "to my law. Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old" (Psa. 78. 1). Then he sings of the great deeds of old, the victories and triumphs of Israel in the wilderness, the continued faithfulness of God in face of the persistent unfaithfulness of Israel. So, at last, "he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel; so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh . . . and delivered strength into captivity". But when God saw the distress into which his people had fallen, and how the enemies of righteousness exulted over the sorry state of those who despite all their faults and all their failures and all their perversities were still the people of God, then "the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine, and he smote his enemies, . . . he put them to a perpetual reproach." What a wonderful commentary upon the Divine Plan it is to say, as Asaph here says "so he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands." (Psa. 78. 72).

The song drops to a lower key. Asaph's prophetic insight showed him that in days yet to come, long after he himself would be sleeping with his fathers, there would be trouble and distress upon Israel because of renewed unfaithfulness. He saw a day in the which fierce Babylonian soldiers would come and despoil the city and the sanctuary, and take all the treasures thereof captive to Babylon. "O God" he cries in agony in the opening stanza of Psa. 74 "why hast thou cast us off for ever? Why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?" In vision he saw the Temple destroyed and lifted his voice in impassioned protest. "A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees. But now they break down the carved work thereof with axes and hammers . . . they have cast fire into thy sanctuary . . . they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land". But it is in this psalm that he rises up to a lofty plea for the fulfilment of God's Plan, a fulfilment which he knows is sadly needed because of the world's sin. "Have respect unto the covenant" he urges "for the dark places of the earth are full of the habit-

ations of cruelty". Psalms 74 and 75 both reveal Asaph's knowledge that such a time of disaster must come upon Israel, and that it would be followed by judgment upon the nations that oppressed them. "In the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red . . . the dregs thereof, the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them" (Psa. 75. 8). So it is that in Psa. 76 he passes on to a brighter view of prophecy and glimpses something of the day of light and gladness that is to follow the overthrow of God's enemies. "When God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth—surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain" (Psa. 76. 10). There is his faith in the coming Millennial Day, in those "Times of Restitution" which Peter, long centuries afterward, was to declare had been spoken of by all God's holy prophets. Asaph was one of those prophets.

It was in the 50th Psalm that the great singer attained his loftiest height of vision. In that wonderful pæon of praise and prophecy he traverses briefly the whole of God's later works, succeeding that earlier phase when Israel after the flesh was the only instrument to God's hand. There in Psalm 50 Asaph has taken a mighty stride forward and sees the development of another Israel, gathered to

God in another covenant, and in the ecstasy of that revelation he calls "gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice" (Psa. 50. 5). Perhaps that last vision of all showed him the majesty and power of God more vividly than anything before. It was at any rate with this train of thought in his mind that he uttered the sublime words that we have used so often ourselves to describe the all-power of our Father and our God: "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills"!

"Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me, and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God." The vibrant words die away into silence: the melody fades away in the distance. Asaph the singer, the musician of David's choir, is no more. He sleeps with his fellows, awaiting the call to enter that new world about which he so constantly spoke and sang; but his words live on after him, and we, nearly three thousand years later, find strength and encouragement and inspiration because an obscure but zealous and earnest man of God, away in those far-off days, used his talent for music and poetry to sing praises to the God of his salvation.

"Thy Watchmen Shall See Eye to Eye"

A well-known
text examined

"Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion." (Isa. 52. 8).

The immediate setting of this text is the promised return from captivity to Babylon. There would be symbolic watchers on the walls of Jerusalem and symbolic heralds hastening over the mountains to announce to the watchers the coming of the returning hosts intent on rebuilding the Temple and city. The long night of captivity is past; the day of Divine favour is come. "I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies. My house shall be built in it, and a line shall be stretched out upon Jerusalem." (Zech. 1. 16). Hence the stirring cry of the watchmen in the seventh verse: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that bringeth good tidings of good, that sayeth unto Zion 'Thy God reigneth'" (Isa. 52. 7).

Then come the words of our text. The re-

joining watchmen sing together because they see, face to face, the heralds of good tidings announcing the Lord returning to his sanctuary in Zion.

That is what this expression "eye to eye" means. "Face to face." It only occurs in one other place in the Old Testament, in Num. 14. 14, where it is rendered "For thou, Lord, art seen 'face to face'," and the thought in Isa. 52 is that the watchmen see clearly, face to face, the heralds of glad tidings announcing the imminent return of their God to his people.

Rotherham's rendering is "Eye to eye shall they look upon Yahweh's return unto Zion", and he further remarks on the meaning as "Probably 'face to face with the event'." Moffatt has it: "They see the Eternal face to face as He returns to Zion". Margolis: "They shall see, eye to eye, the Lord returning to Zion". Ferrar Fenton: "When clearly you see that the Lord comes to Zion". The Septuagint confirms the thought by having "Eyes shall

look to eyes when the Lord shall have mercy upon Zion".

Students know that this wonderful imagery was not intended solely for fulfilment in the days of Israel's return from captivity. Paul uses the seventh verse as applicable to the heralds of the Gospel, in Rom. 10. 15. Realising that the return under Cyrus was but a picture, a type, of the greater release from captivity which should come to spiritual Israel at the close of the Gospel Age, and the joy which the imminent Advent of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus, would inspire in the hearts of the Gospel Age "Watchers", we can discern a greater and more glorious application to these glowing words.

The "Watchers" on the walls of the Holy City of this Gospel Age have waited through a long and dreary time during which the people of God have been held captive by an oppressive system which has crushed the Truth to the ground. Only a few of the "poor" have remained to be "vine-dressers and husbandmen", but these have faithfully manned the walls watching for the promised "return". The night is far spent, the day is at hand, but as yet only the first gleams of dawn are perceptible.

Then come the heralds. Hasting over the mountains, pressing toward the Holy City, so long down-trodden and oppressed, they come with glorious news. The KING is on his way. He is returning to Zion with favour. Enlightenment and prosperity is to come with him. The captive people are loosed—even now they are on their way to commence the great work of rebuilding the Temple of God, and placing within it the golden vessels—the precious truths so long submerged under the defilements of a foreign power.

How eagerly the Watchers fasten their gaze upon the heralds. They haste—therefore the news is good. Did they bring bad news their pace would be slow. They each seek to outvie the others in order to reach the city first. How beautiful the sight, heralds upon the mountains proclaiming the coming King!

So they meet, face to face. No longer any doubt. The news runs round the city. Not all the watchers receive the news at once. Not all hear exactly the same story from the different heralds, all zealous to proclaim the essentials of their message. But one central truth stands out—THE KING IS AT HAND! He may be upon the mountain approach; He may even be within the city, and making himself known to those who have perceived his entrance. There is no lack of love and zeal on the part

of those who have not actually seen him enter the gate, if so be He really is now within the walls. All are united in the one joyous theme—the time has come. "*I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies.*"

That is the story of this closing period of the Gospel Age—a period which is now well advanced. Is the King within the walls? Is He at the gates? Whether the one thing or the other, the important teaching of the text is that we are "face to face with the event". The Watchers and the Heralds have met, and their united testimony has been given to seekers after the Lord for three generations past. The Temple has been built; Divine Truth, things new and old, has been established in its rightful place. The work is not yet finished; the building must go on; the Temple must be adorned with yet purer and nobler vessels of truth and understanding, that the day may at length come when the great outer doors will be flung open to all mankind and the invitation come to all men to enter and walk in its light.

The importance of a right understanding of this Scripture is great. It calls us to recognise the significance of the times in which we live; that the work begun in Christendom during the nineteenth century continues still in active preparation for the day when our Lord Jesus Christ shall be manifested in his glorious *apokalupsis*—His revelation of himself to all men, in association with his glorified Church, for man's blessing and salvation. How beautiful upon the mountains . . . the heralds . . . proclaiming "Thy God reigneth" . . . for the time of his Kingdom is come, and the day is not far hence when He shall "reign in Mount Zion, and before his ancients gloriously".

"Truth gains more even by the errors of one who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself, than by the true opinions of those who only hold them because they do not suffer themselves to think."—*John Stuart Mill*

"Let intellectual and spiritual culture progress, and the human mind expand, as much as it will; beyond the grandeur and the moral elevation of Christianity, as it sparkles and shines in the Gospels, the human mind will not advance."—*Goethe*

"To find the Maker and Father of this universe is a hard task; and when you have found him it is impossible to speak of him before all people."—*Plato*

THE RULE OF THE IRON ROD

A scripture very familiar to the Bible reader who looks for the coming reign of Christ is that one in the Second Psalm "*Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel*" and even the most gentle of disciples has felt a thrill run through his being as he pictures a day in which all opposition to the Kingdom of righteousness is relentlessly crushed. Many have solaced themselves in present distress by anticipation of a coming day in which the tables will be turned on those who set themselves against the Lord's Anointed, and the proud and mighty of this world are compelled to lick the dust at the feet of earth's rightful Sovereign.

A number of Scriptures, mostly in the Books of Psalms and Revelation, are habitually cited to buttress this idea of an all-powerful Dictator ruthlessly crushing all opposition and setting up his rule of absolute righteousness and justice by the exercise of brute force. The end is considered to justify the means, and the Scriptural assurance that as a result of the Millennial reign all humanity will come into heart harmony with the Divine law of selflessness and love is held to stamp the means employed with the hallmark of Divine approval.

But the whole tenor of Christ's teaching discountenances the use of coercion or force. He himself resolutely refused to employ any other agency but love. Even although He faced death, the death for which He had come into the world, He refused to call upon the twelve legions of angels to come to his aid, and trod the winepress alone. When in surprise and mystification Pilate queried "Thou art a King then?" Jesus uttered those memorable words which have resounded down the ages, "My kingdom is not of this world (*kosmos*) ELSE WOULD MY SERVANTS FIGHT". Not for him the standards of kingship by which this world measures kings. And it was in the passive and yet overpowering force of love that the early Church went forth conquering—and conquered.

But if the teaching of Christ at his First Advent definitely repudiated the use of force as a means of accomplishing the work of his Kingdom, how shall statements of so definite a nature as Psalm 2. 9 and Revelation 2. 27 be understood? Certain it is that as students of

the Divine Word we can neither afford to ignore them nor to wrest them to mean the opposite of their plain implication. We can only approach them, armed first with a clear knowledge of the principles upon which Christ will deal with man in the future Age and then look at these Scriptures in the light of their local meaning—the significance they had for the Israelite who lived in the day in which they were uttered—and so deduce that prophetic indication which is there given in the guise of a familiar reference to some everyday incident or custom.

It is generally agreed that the work of the Millennial Age is portrayed in miniature and in principle by the life of Jesus Christ, by his words, actions, miracles, and so on. It is equally definite that he preached the overcoming of hate by love, of greed by selflessness, of force by persuasion, of self-centredness by service for others. This then is the law of the Kingdom, and however the rule of the iron rod is to be understood it must in no sense do violation to the principles which underlie the teaching of Jesus. In a very real sense it must represent fairly and accurately the law of the Kingdom of God on earth.

What then is this rod of iron?

The figure, like so many in the Psalms, is a pastoral one. The shepherds of David's day—as both before and after, in the unchanging East—went about their occupation provided with two implements, the pastoral staff and the iron club. The iron club was the shepherd's weapon of defence, not only for himself, but also for his sheep; for the Palestinian shepherd followed his calling under very different circumstances to those associated in our Western minds with the care of the flock. The pastures were often found in mountainous and desolate places, and whilst roving bands of robbers threatened danger to the shepherd, wild beasts such as hyenas, jackals, bears, leopards and lions were liable to attack the flock, and the safety of the defenceless sheep depended entirely upon the watchfulness and strength of the shepherd.

A number of Scriptures attest the familiarity of Israel with the fact of wild beasts in their midst—as for example, I Sam. 17. 34-36, I Kings 13. 24, Jer. 5. 6; and to realise this aspect of the shepherd's work is to understand more clearly the import of our Lord's own

words in John 10. 11-17 "*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep. He that is a hireling, and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, beholdeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth, and the wolf snatcheth them and scattereth them*".

The rod of iron (Hebrew—"Shebet") was the shepherd's iron club, his weapon of defence and his means of defending the sheep. But since in the ordinary course of events the shepherd's care for his sheep transcended all thought for himself, the iron club became in a very special sense associated with the protection of his flock from every kind of danger. This is borne out by the Scripture in a very remarkable manner. The quotation in Rev. 2. 27 "He shall *rule* them with a rod of iron" employs a Greek word (*poimaino*) which has the significance of "shepherding" in the sense of "feeding"; and the phrase would be more correctly translated "He shall *shepherd* them with the *shepherd's club*". In addition to its use for defence against robbers and wild beasts, the club was used for beating a way through jungle or undergrowth in the search for fresh pastures, and so its association with feeding as well as defence became obvious.

The same word is translated "feed" in John 21. 16 ("*Feed* my sheep") I Pet. 5. 2 ("*Feed* the flock of God") Rev. 7. 17 ("The Lamb which is in the midst of them shall *feed* them") and in several other instances. In the Old Testament the same allusion occurs in Micah 7. 14 "*Feed* thy people with thy *rod*", where "rod" again is translated from "*shebet*".

In the same connection also is the word of the Lord to the Israelites of Ezekiel's day "I will cause you to pass under the rod (*shebet*) and I will bring you unto the bond of the covenant" (Ezek. 20. 37). "He will smite the earth" says Isaiah "with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked." (Isa. 11. 4). This "iron rod" is in very truth a means of sustenance and defence to those who are the "children of the Kingdom" and who stand in need of that which the Kingdom is designed to provide.

But what is the significance of that parallel expression in Psalm 2. 9 "He shall break them in pieces like a potter's vessel" and its companion text in Rev. 2. 27 "As the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers". Another Eastern custom of every day is alluded to here. A common occupation in the East was the making of "*homrah*", broken pottery reduced to a very fine powder by constant grinding with heavy stones, and used

in the manufacture of cement. The common use of earthenware vessels of all kinds rendered an abundant supply of broken pottery continually available, and with painstaking care the makers of "*homrah*" squatted upon the ground with a little pile of potsherds between their feet and rolled the heavy boulder to and fro until the fragments were reduced to the finest of dust. Not until then was the "*homrah*" ready for the next stage in the making of cement for use in lining water cisterns and aqueducts, and for many other purposes.

Here then is afforded an eloquent picture of the disintegrating forces which break down and scatter not only the kingdoms of this world but all that is lifted up in defiance against Christ. The vivid picture drawn by Daniel when he expounded to King Nebuchadnezzar his dream of the great image is on the same line—the image broken to the ground and pulverised to dust by the "Stone" Kingdom—(Dan. 2. 34-35).

This disintegration is not of individuals, but of institutions, governments and organisations of man. "Everything that can be shaken will be shaken" says the writer to the Hebrews (12. 27) and every student is thoroughly familiar with the many lines of Scriptural reasoning which indicate that at the time when the reign of Christ begins it is the institutions of man which crash to destruction that every individual member of the human race may be given the opportunity of walking up the "Highway of Holiness" to perfection of life.

With this destruction of every man-made institution the individuals comprising them are set free to be built into that new and universal organisation which is the New Jerusalem come down from heaven to earth—just as the broken potsherds were ground into dust in order that that same dust might be welded together in a new and indestructible cement that should endure forever. The broken potsherds, having outlived their usefulness and like a "garment, waxing old, ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8. 13) are converted into new and imperishable structure which shall serve the needs of man for all time. Could there be in all the range of Scripture allegory a more perfect picture of that "Stone" Kingdom, which "shall break in pieces and devour all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever".

Thus the entire picture is one of the beneficent reign of Christ under which evil will be restrained and the "flock" defended from

those wild beasts of iniquity and sin which would otherwise still lie in wait and dog their footsteps; and the willing ones led by the "green pastures and still waters" of the Twenty-third Psalm, where they may in perfect confidence and security "obtain joy and salvation" whilst "sorrow and sighing will flee away" (Isa. 35. 10). In the meantime the enlightening influences of this day will have played their part in bringing about that "time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation" (Dan. 12. 1; Matt. 24. 21) in the course of which all the broken potsherds of human government will be reduced to the dust—and upon their ruins will arise the fair edifice of

that "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" for which Abraham looked so many long years ago (Heb. 11. 10). The "iron rod" is a guarantee of Divine protection and sustenance to all mankind. The "breaking as a potter's vessel" predicts the final collapse of the power of man and the reconstruction work of the Millennial Age—founded upon love, peace, persuasion to good things, that the words of Isaiah so many centuries ago may at last come into a rich fulfilment—

"And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."

RESPECT OF PERSONS

*Practical Christian counsel
from James 2. 1-5*

The theme of this article is "Respect of persons". Owing to the unequal distribution of wealth and its advantages this evil has always been very common in the world. The social earth, like the physical, is composed of different layers or "strata". The lower classes have deferred to the higher and the higher have despised the lower. We are living now in a great levelling time when, as the Bible has foretold, the valleys are being exalted and the mountains and hills being made low. This has occasioned great social upheavals, symbolic earthquakes, which we know from Scripture will get yet more intense.

This evil, so prevalent in the world, had found entry into the church in the time of James. It has been present in the professing church of Christ ever since, and was one of the main causes of the great apostasy. When the church began to lose her first love she began to pander to the great and to despise the poor. There followed a lowering of spiritual standards and the wheatfield became overrun with tares.

In verses 2 and 3 James calls the attention of the brethren to what was taking place in their midst. He presents a suppositious case which the context shows may well have been founded on fact. *"If there come unto your assembly" (margin "Synagogue") a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment, and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, sit thou here in a good place, and say to the poor, stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool, are ye not then partial in yourselves and become judges of*

evil thoughts?" It is worthy of note in passing that this is the only place in the New Testament where the word "Synagogue" is applied to a Christian church. James is writing to Jewish Christians who had been accustomed to meeting in the Synagogue and had carried the name with them into their Christian fellowship. The word "Synagogue" means "assembly", while the Christian equivalent, namely, "the church" or "ecclesia", means "called out assembly". The distinction is quite significant, as the synagogue or assembly was associated with the natural Seed, whilst the church or called out assembly is associated with the spiritually called out Seed.

The two different characters which James pictures coming into their assembly were evidently visitors, just as we have "strangers" dropping into our meetings. One is rich and the other poor, and for no other reason than the mere circumstance of outward dress the one is treated with great respect and the other with scant courtesy. What would be the motives behind such conduct? Would it be that the former was at once regarded as an asset to the meeting and the other perhaps a liability? How would we feel in similar circumstances? While none of us would go the length of showing such respect of persons as James pictures here, is it not true that we all have to fight against the almost innate tendency to defer to wealth and worldly position?

In verses 1, 4 and 5 James mentions three considerations which should help to keep us free from the evil of respect of persons. Verse 1. *"My brethren, have not the faith of*

our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons." The New Testament speaks of faith sometimes as a principle like hope and love. It also speaks of faith as the whole system of belief centring in Christ, as when we are exhorted to contend earnestly for the faith. Thus we can have faith in the faith. The brethren to whom James was writing had come out of the Jewish faith, centring in Moses, into the faith of Christ. This faith was wholly incompatible with respect of persons. Had Jesus been born in the palace of kings, consorted with the rich and the great of this world, and died in honour and esteem of all men, then there might be some room for respect of persons. James was the brother of the Lord, there is good reason to believe, and none knew better than he the lowly life of the Son of God. Following the birth in the stable of the overcrowded inn there was the humble peasant's home at Nazareth. Following the long years of patient toil in the carpenter's shop there were the three and a half years of the Lord's ministry. From the very beginning of this ministry, so far as the great and rich and wise were concerned, He was despised and rejected. It was the common people who heard him gladly. Publicans and sinners were drawn to him; even his apostles were ignorant and unlearned men. And yet so far from being disappointed Jesus had prayed "*I thank thee O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes*".

It was not because Jesus was not great that He associated with humble people, but because He was so great. As the Father, the Lord of Heaven and earth, had chosen the humble, so James reminds us in this verse that Jesus, although the friend of publicans and sinners, was nevertheless the Lord of glory.

Against the background of the example of the Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus how ashamed we should feel of any taint in us of this evil of respect of persons.

In Verse 4 we have another helpful consideration. "*Are ye not then partial in yourselves*" if you are guilty of such respect of persons "*and are become judges of evil thoughts*?" Weymouth's translation makes this verse clearer. It reads "Is it not plain that in your hearts you have little faith seeing that you have become judges full of wrong thoughts?" It is a very serious thing to sit in judgment upon anyone, for "with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged", our Lord

declares. If our judgment of others is just and based upon right principles and tempered with mercy it reflects credit on ourselves. If, however, we who are being trained to be the judges of the world are so deficient in discernment that we base our judgment on externals such as differences associated with the possession or otherwise of material things we condemn ourselves as unfit for the position. It indicates that we cannot judge properly because we ourselves do not have the proper sense of true values. As Weymouth says "In our hearts we have little faith". In one of the morning five-minute talks some little time ago the speaker said that we were living in a world of make believe, almost like Alice in Wonderland. The most valueless things fetched the highest prices and the most valuable and precious things were least esteemed and cost the least. Things like worldly fame, power, prestige, riches, learning, were all eagerly sought for and the highest prices paid even to the spending of life itself in their attainment. On the other hand the things that God highly esteems, such as love, peace, kindness, goodness, self control, faithfulness were lightly valued. Surely the representatives of the Heavenly Kingdom should demonstrate what the true values are in this world of make believe.

In Verse 5 James gives us the third consideration why we should beware of respect of persons. "*Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love him?*" James feels this danger of respect of persons to be so great that he asks them to "hearken" or "listen" to him further in the matter. He calls them "his beloved brethren" to assure them that he has a deep concern for their spiritual welfare. In this he reminds us of what we may already have noted in the epistles of Paul, Peter and John. "*Hearken my beloved brethren hath not God chosen the poor of this world?*" It is not a matter of chance or accident that it is the poor who are attracted to your meetings. This is the result of God's choice in the matter. This principle was expressed by Mary even before Jesus was born. "*He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart. He hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away.*" No flesh may glory in God's presence; meekness and humility are essential in those whom He causes to approach unto himself. It is not, however, that not *any* great

or rich or noble are called, but not *many*. There are a few, but only a few, and the reason for this is illustrated in the case of the rich young ruler; he went away sadly for he had great possessions, and when he had gone Jesus said "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." In this as in so many other things we see God's compensating grace. He is no respecter of persons choosing the poor simply because they are poor. But it is amongst the common people that there exists those conditions which are most fitted for the development of the essential qualities of faith, meekness and humility. If we are ever tempted to feel envious of those better off than ourselves let us remember that "God has chosen" the poor of this world to be his heirs and there can be no greater honour than this.

To be poor, however, is not the only requisite, for not *all* the poor are chosen by God. James mentions another qualification. "Hath not God chosen the poor, *rich in faith*?" Luther is said to have called this epistle of James an epistle of straw because of its emphasis on works. It is very evident, however, that James had a proper realisation of the need for and value of faith. In saying that God has chosen the poor, rich in faith, he does not mean that they were rich in faith before being chosen, for a rich faith can only be produced by the operation of the grace of God. There must have been an initial faith making them prepared like Abraham to leave their own people and their father's house. Richness of faith comes afterwards as a result of God's training. Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. As illustrated in Pilgrim's Progress it is sometimes very dim at first. The Evangelist points Christian to the wicket gate and says "Do you see yon wicket gate?" But Christian cannot see it, only the shining light which is beside it and which he takes as his guide to it. After he enters the way his faith becomes rich as a result of his experiences.

Continuing, James says "*Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him*". Paul says the heir, when a child, differs nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all. This is the position with regard to God's heirs. We are waiting for our coming of age, our adoption, as it is put in Romans 8. So great is our inheritance that it embraces *all things*, as Paul

declares "All things are yours, whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Respect of persons arising from existing social inequalities affects us sometimes by inducing in us a feeling of inferiority when in contact with others whose dress, or house, or education or social position is much superior to our own. If we could only realise a fraction of what it means to be heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ how paltry and insignificant these differences would appear to be!

Besides being rich in *faith* the poor must also be rich in *LOVE*. The Kingdom is promised to those that love him and love for God is inseparable from love for our fellows. In the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats the King says "*Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*". The reason given is because of their Love for him as expressed in their love for his brethren. If this is true of those who shall inherit the earthly phase of the kingdom, how much more so with the heirs of the spiritual phase Love is the great leveller. Where it exists there is no room for class distinction or feelings of inferiority and superiority. In the Kingdom of the future in the glory by and by there will be the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all men. Meantime as heirs and representatives of that kingdom we have a responsibility for demonstrating its principles here and now and this we can do only as the *love* of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which He hath given unto us.

"Some small trifle of daily routine; a crossing of personal preference in very little things, accumulation of duties, unexpected interruption, unwelcome distraction. Yesterday these things merely fretted you and, internally at least 'upset' you. To-day, on the contrary, you take them up, stretch your hands out upon them, and let them be occasions of new disgrace and deeper death for that old self-spirit. You carry them to their Calvary in thankful submission. And to-morrow you will do the same."—

Bishop of Durham

"Seeing that we are all ordained to be citizens of the one Everlasting City, let us begin to enter into that way here already by mutual love."—*Old Elizabethan prayer*



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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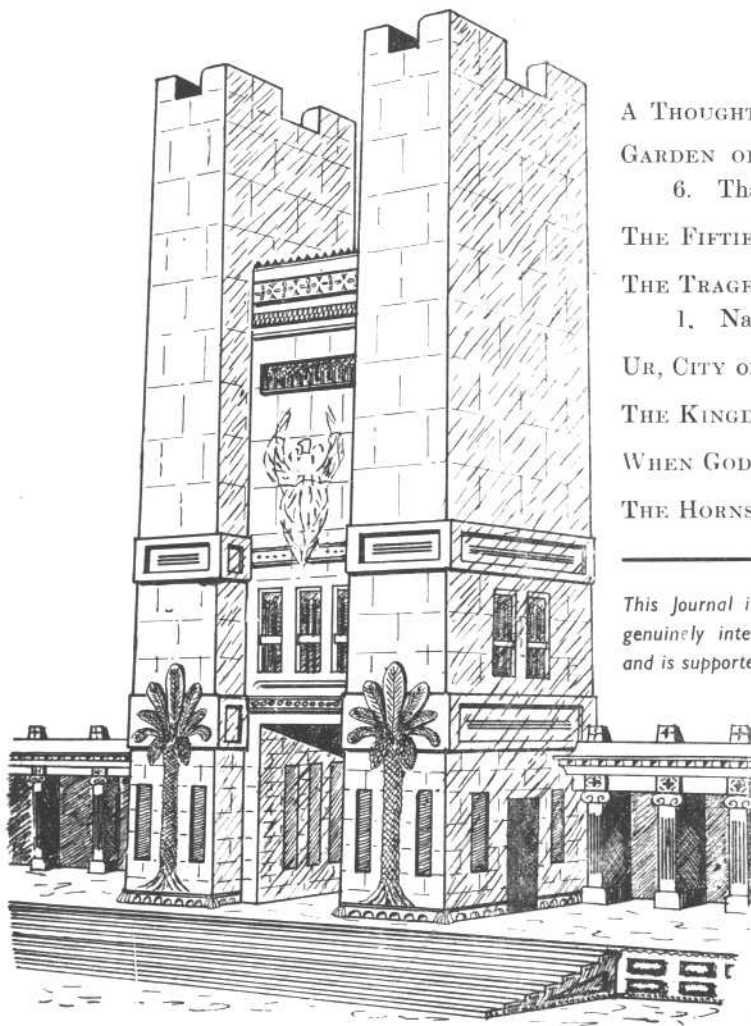
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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A Thought for the Month

"The profit of the earth is for all; the king himself is served from the field." (Eccl. 5. 9).

King Solomon is known to have been something of an expert on horticulture (I Kin. 4. 33) and in this casual remark in Ecclesiastes he showed himself possessed of an insight which seems lacking in the economic world to-day. *"The abundance of the earth is for everyone. The king is dependent on the tilled field"* is the Septuagint rendering; those old scholars who translated the ancient Hebrew into Greek for the benefit of the then known world certainly caught the essence of Solomon's idea. The economics of ancient civilisations were based on the growing of crops and the keeping of flocks and herds. Their arts and crafts, their industries and manufactures, all that made for the refinements of their cities and their trading enterprises, were not allowed to affect the fertility of their soil or the welfare of their pastoral interests. Pagan and sunk in idolatry as were so many of them, they knew that the perpetuation and development of human life upon earth depended upon their own husbandry of the soil and that which Nature causes to spring forth from it. Even in their religious observances "fertility rituals" which had as their object the maintenance of the gods' interest and influence in the productivity of Nature were always the most prominent feature, and in this at least those pagan religions showed something of early man's understanding of the essential need for man to co-operate with Nature and to preserve the balance of Nature which was already established, if man is to continue upon earth.

Modern man ignores all this. Modern man, arrogantly contemptuous of those earlier generations, goes on his way heedless alike of Nature's laws and the needs of the future. He turns fertile land into dust bowl deserts in his greed for immediate quick profits; he despoils the land of trees in his insatiate appetite for raw materials and industrial development, so

depriving the birds of their homes and reducing their numbers. Therefore insect pests increase and so he poisons with insecticides the earth already polluted by industrial "smog" and the exhaust gases of tractors. He defiles the streams and rivers with chemical waste and kills the fish, and now has started dumping radio-active waste in the sea with the bland assurance that there is too much water in the oceans for it really to matter. New and unknown diseases attributable to the vitiated and poisoned food thus produced appear among men and terrifying drugs are invented to counteract the diseases. Here and there a few enlightened voices are raised in protest and warning, but they are at once dubbed cranks and old-fashioned and the mad orgy of destruction goes on. And the thoughtful Christian, who, like his Master, loves humanity and the earth of God's creating wonders where it is all going to end.

It ends, of course, when God intervenes in human affairs and establishes the Messianic Kingdom. This very orgy of destruction is one of the evidences that the time is very near for the close of man's rule on earth and the inauguration of the reign of Christ. Then will be the time that the wilderness and desert places,—largely man-made—will rejoice and blossom as the rose. The cleansing of the rivers and seas and the re-fertilising of the earth will be a long and arduous process but it will be accomplished and the words of the Psalmist be fulfilled *"Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God shall bless us."*

Gone from us

Sis. Caldwell (Arundel)
 Sis. A. James (Brentwood)
 Bro. G. P. James (Bristol)
 Sis. Moyser (late Darlington)
 Sis. P. D. Walton (Coventry)

"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away."

GARDEN OF EDEN

6.—That old serpent, the Devil

*An Examination
of the Story of
Adam and Eve*

With the opening of chapter 3 of Genesis, a new character appears on the stage, and with his coming the idyll merges into tragedy. In chapter 2 there is in all the world nothing but innocence and sincerity, and all creation is at peace and unashamed in the sight of God. Chapter 3 introduces something else, craftiness, deceit, lying and sin, bitter seeds whose harvests have never since ceased from the earth, and will not, until the Divine rule of the Messianic Age shall have undone all that the Tempter wrought in Eden, and raised mankind to the sinless condition which was the Creator's intention from the beginning.

The religious plays of the Middle Ages depicted this archangel of all evil, upon whom is laid the blame for the seduction of our first parents, as a hideous monster having long horns, cloven feet, forked tail, and eyes and mouth breathing out fire and smoke. The idea was to strike healthy terror into the hearts of the beholders, for this was the Prince of Hell, and Hell was preached as a place of grievous torments in which all who did not observe the precepts of true religion, or at least did not obey the mandates of the priests, would spend eternity. Instructed Christians know better than to believe such crudities nowadays, but it is still essential to accept the fact that there does exist a powerful celestial being, in a continuing state of rebellion against God, who first introduced sin and death to humanity and has actively promoted the same ever since. Through the long ages men have pictured that malevolent being in various ways and under different guises but until modern times have not doubted his dread reality. Here in Genesis the writer of the account faithfully reflected the spirit and outlook of his own day when he described him under the figure of a serpent.

Long and protracted, earnest and sometimes acrimonious have been discussions on the manner in which an ordinary snake—any one of the two thousand varieties known to exist—could have been used to tempt Mother Eve in the matter of the forbidden fruit. No one doubted, of course, that the Devil was behind the whole thing, but was it that the Devil "materialised" in the form of a serpent, thus to appear to the woman, or did he merely use a conveniently handy reptile as an instrument? Did the serpent actually talk to Eve in

the words of chapter 3, or was the temptation by force of example, the creature twining its sinuous body round the tree to partake of the fruit with evident relish while Eve looked on? Each hypothesis has its advocates although unfortunately for most of them the naturalist has to point out that snakes have no sense of taste, no ear-openings, are quite deaf, and lack ability to make audible sounds except the well-known hissing which is effected by the rapid expulsion of air from the lungs (exceptions are the rattlesnake which produces its rattle by rubbing its scales together, and the bull snake which bellows like a bull, also by expelling air from the lungs). It is necessary therefore either to conclude that the serpent of Eden was a very special kind of serpent, perhaps deliberately created for the purpose, or else to examine the text much more closely than is usually done.

The Hebrew word for serpent is "*nachash*", a word which has two basic meanings. In the first place it means to hiss or whisper, especially the whisperings or mutterings of soothsayers, from which usage it also denotes the practising of enchantment or sorcery. Examples are the "enchantments" of Balaam in Num. 24, the "divining" of Joseph in Gen. 44, and the sorcery practised by Israel in the days of Ahaz and Manasseh (2 Kings 17. 17 and 21. 6). From this usage of the word the serpent became known as the "*nachash*" because of its characteristic hissing. The other meaning is that of brightly shining from which the word for copper, "*nechushah*", is derived. The fact that two such dissimilar ideas as enchantment and bright shining have their origin in the same word points to something which connected the two in the early days of language making.

A clue to this connection is found in the fact that, as shown earlier in this treatise, when the Genesis account of creation was first written in its present form in Abraham's native land about twenty-five centuries before Christ, the writer used phrases and allusions familiar to his immediate readers. When he said "the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made" he knew what his readers would understand by those words, and he clearly meant them to understand that this serpent was the means by which evil came into the

world. The Babylonians and the Sumerians looked upon the serpent as the symbol of everlasting life and identified it with the sun as a life-giving power and object of worship. In early sculptures the serpent was given a dragon-like form and endowed with wings to denote its heavenly origin; eight such winged serpents stood guard at the gates of the Temple of Bel in Babylon, the centre of the whole system of early Sumerian religion, and those mythological figures were of highly burnished copper. Here is the connection between the two dissimilar meanings of "nachash". In the far-off days when the story of the Garden of Eden was written down for men to read, the serpent was identified in men's minds, theologically or mythologically, with a brilliant supernatural being claiming to be the bringer of life to men and demanding their worship. But, says the chronicler, he was in fact a sorcerer and an enchanter, more cunning than any of the beasts of the field which God had made.

The word "subtil" in Gen. 2. 1 is "*arum*" which means to be crafty or cunning. It is rendered "devices of the crafty" in Job 5. 12, "tongue of the crafty" in Job 15. 5, "taking crafty counsel" in Psa. 83. 3 and "dealeth very subtilly" in I Sam. 23. 22. When St. Paul quotes the Eden story in 2 Cor. 11. 3 "as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty" he uses the equivalent Greek word "*panourgia*" which is rendered "cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive" in Eph. 4. 14, "he (Jesus) perceived their craftiness" in Luke 20. 13, and "not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully" in I Cor. 3. 19, which is a direct quotation from Job 5. 13 where "*craftiness*" is again "*arum*". The subtlety of the serpent, then, is not wisdom in an intellectual sense, but cunning, deceitfulness, in an immoral sense, and this explains the reference to the beasts of the field. The writer of Genesis 2 was fully aware of the cunning displayed by wild beasts—the Hebrew word is one denoting wild beasts as distinct from cattle and domestic animals—as they hunted their prey, but the serpent, he said, was more cunning than any of them. It is apparent therefore that the serpent he is talking about is not one of the literal serpents which may have existed in Eden, for they were "beasts of the field" like other animals. This serpent was a creature apart. It was in fact the serpent whom the Sumerians of his own day worshipped, "*Ha-nachash*", the serpent, just as in the preceding chapter we have *Ha-adam*, the man, the particular man Adam.

When we read in Gen. 2. 1 that "*The serpent was more cunning than any of the wild animals*" we are intended to think of that brightly shining heavenly creature of evil intent whom the Babylonians worshipped as the giver of life—the one whom we now call Satan, the Devil, "who deceiveth the whole world".

Who or what was it, then, talking to Eve as she walked in the garden, in words of human speech which she could hear and understand? Remember that up to this time the only spoken speech she had heard had been from the lips of her husband, apart from the possibility that if in fact God's communications to them both were made by the agency of the Word of God appearing in visible form and speaking in audible words, she might also have listened to speech from that source. Eve knew that the lower animals were all inferior and subservient to Adam and herself, and that none of them had the gift of speech. Is it likely that she would have accepted a talking snake as a reliable guide in preference to those words of authority to which she may have been accustomed from a much more impressive and dignified source? Eve must have known that the snakes were created beings like herself; she must have known they were liable to death like all other animals, perhaps had even seen them die. How could she be deceived by such a creature's claim to know the secrets of godlike wisdom and of eternal life? She would have possessed a reasonable understanding of the facts of her own creation and that of Adam and of the earth on which she lived, and realised something of the difference between this earth and the celestial world in which dwelt their Creator, the One to whom they were indebted for all their knowledge and understanding. It is surely inconceivable that Eve would have listened to, or been persuaded by, any message unless it seemed to come from that same celestial world from which all they already knew had emanated.

If then in fact Eve did find herself confronted by a gloriously radiant heavenly being, majestic and awe-inspiring in his splendour, her acceptance of his deception is much easier to understand. His use of spoken words would excite no astonishment or doubt; his professed knowledge of the ways of God would seem perfectly logical; and his insinuation that he was in a position to reveal knowledge formerly withheld by God would appear a fairly reasonable proposition. He had come from there, and he should know. Somehow such an

interview sounds a much more natural occurrence than a conversation between a gullible woman and a six foot snake standing erect on the tip of its tail.

There is some evidence both outside and inside the Scriptures to support the view that something like this is what actually happened. The worship of the serpent as the life-bringer or life-preserver or source of immortality is very widespread in the world and pervades almost all pagan religions, both now and in the past. In many cases the serpent thus venerated in the plain literal snake, of one species or another, but the farther back we go in history the more that snake takes on the form of the stylised creatures of Babylonian and Assyrian and Sumerian myth. We know what they looked like; hundreds of them are found in wide variety on clay tablets and marble slabs excavated in the lands of the Bible and now displayed in the world's museums or the treasuries of private collectors. All these artistic representations converge on and are centred on the great god Marduk or Bel, the deity of Babylon. Marduk, son of the supreme god, the Saviour, the Redeemer, the firstborn from the dead, creator of the earth and of man upon it—yes, the Devil has arrogated to himself, thousands of years in advance, all the titles which belong of right to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and has drawn to himself the worship of all the world throughout all the ages. And the tablets and sculptures show this Marduk as the ancients conceived him to be—noble of feature, aggressive and terrible of mien, sturdy feet that he might stand on the earth and six-winged that he might fly from the heavens, strong hands grasping the lightnings and thunderbolts whereby he might deal destruction to all enemies. This was the glorious radiant one to whom the Babylonians sang praises, he who deceived the whole world in appearing to them as an angel of light. But from whence did the ancients draw their inspiration for this terrible and glorious appearance? Might it not be a lingering recollection, handed down through the generations, of one who once was seen by the first mother of all, and whose form, because of the tragic consequences, was indelibly impressed upon her memory and described to her children, generation after generation? It might well have been so, for the sculptured form of Marduk, preserved through generations of idolators, bears some resemblance to those angelic beings, the "seraphim", whom Isaiah the prophet saw in vision standing

around the throne of God.

The seraphim of Isaiah 6 also had six wings, and so glorious was the sight of them that the prophet covered his eyes and cried out that he was undone. The word means fiery ones or burning ones, alluding to their dazzling appearance, and is the plural form of the word for "burning". The same word is used for the fiery serpent which Moses made and held aloft on a pole, by looking to which the serpent-bitten Israelites in the desert were healed (Num. 21. 8) and for the "fiery flying serpents" of Isa. 14. 29 and 30. 6. These two latter verses are metaphors describing the scourge of invading Babylonian and Assyrian kings who described themselves in their own records as servants and representatives of their serpent-gods, Marduk and Asshur. The *saraph* or *seraphim* as described by Isaiah is a recollection of the same visible manifestation of a celestial being as preserved in Babylonian idolatry. In the one case Isaiah sees the seraphim as in constant attendance upon the throne of God crying his praises "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory"; in the other they are fiery flying serpents, like their prototype the serpent of Eden, bringing sorrow, destruction and death.

Then in final support of the conclusion that the visible form of the serpent of Eden is the origin of the serpent-god of Babylon and is similar to the seraphim of Isaiah we have a graphic description by the prophet Ezekiel of the heavenly being who was once in Eden the garden of God but because of rebellion was condemned to eternal death. In his 28th chapter the prophet after denouncing the sins of the prince of Tyre, takes up a more intense and obviously metaphorical denunciation of one whom he terms the "king of Tyre" but clearly is not an earthly being at all. The covert reference evidently is to the fallen archangel who rebelled against God. This one is said to have been full of wisdom and perfect in beauty, in appearance as though clad in dazzling jewels, and to have been in Eden the garden of God. Adopting Leeser's rendering, which translates a number of obscure words a little more accurately than does the A.V., "*thou wast a cherub with outspread wings and I had set thee upon the holy mountain of God as thou wast. Thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the bright shining ones*". The likeness of this to the company of the *seraphim*, the "fiery" or "burning" ones of Isaiah 6 is too striking to be ignored. Here, surely, is a vivid description of the happy

state of that celestial being of high rank who once moved among the holy attendants of God, and eventually became a visitor to the garden which God had planted on earth, and there, because of rebellion in his heart, seduced the first human pair from their allegiance to God and from that moment became "that old serpent, the Devil, and Satan". *"Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day thou wast created, till unrighteousness was found in thee . . ."* So the prophet proceeds with his denunciation, culminating in the utter and hopeless doom of this prince of all wickedness.

It is not suggested that these wondrous beings who thus attend in the Heavenly courts do in their normal state bear such strange and perhaps bizarre forms as the Scriptures above describe. We have the authority of St. Paul for knowing that the celestial world is so utterly unlike this terrestrial one that no image conceivable by the human mind can possibly depict the nature and the form, so to speak, of its citizens. It is when such a messenger comes to earth to hold converse with man that a form which is perceptible to the human senses is required. It is logical to expect the instantaneous creation of such a form, as must have been the case repeatedly in Old Testament times when a visitant from above came to man, to Abraham, to Moses, to Daniel, to the father of John the Baptist and Mary the mother of Jesus. His mission

accomplished, the ambassador would return to the celestial realm in the glory of a nature *more greatly excelling that of man than the nature of man excels the humblest form of plant life on this planet, a glory having nothing in common with the shapes and forms of this world.*

So it might well have been that Eve, wandering alone one day in the sunny glades of Eden, pondering over the ever widening vista of experience which life was opening before her, came face to face with a dazzlingly radiant, dignified, commanding figure strangely similar in form to her husband and herself and yet in many respects dissimilar. The burning glory which surrounded him and the voice of authority with which he spoke told her at once that here was a visitor from that unseen world from which God had so often spoken, maybe had before this sent a visible messenger bringing guidance and instruction. But this was a different visitor; perchance he also came with a message, possibly something new which she had never heard before. There could have been no suspicion in her mind, for the very idea of an intelligent creature from heaven being disloyal to God who had made them all could never have crossed her mind. It must have been with the most intense interest and curiosity that Eve gave all her attention to the stranger as he began to speak.

(To be continued)

A flower that stops short at its flowering misses its purpose. We were created for more than our spiritual development: reproduction, not mere development, is the goal of matured being—reproduction in other lives. There is a tendency in some characters running parallel to the high cultivation that spends its whole energy on the production of bloom at the expense of seed. The famed Japanese cherry blossoms at Washington illustrate this, they bring forth a marvellous profusion of blossoms, but they produce no fruit. The flowers that are bent on perfecting themselves by becoming double, end in barrenness, and like barrenness comes to the soul whose interests are all concentrated upon its own spiritual well-being, heedless of the needs of those around. The ideal flower is the one that uses its gifts as means to an end, the brightness and sweetness are not for its own glory, they are but to attract the bees and butterflies that will

fertilize it to make it fruitful. All else may go when that work is done." "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The problem then is, how are we to escape from the self-life that holds us, even after the sin-life has loosed its grasp?

Back to the Cross we must go. Not only from the world of condemnation, and from the world of sinning, does it free us as we accept it, but from the power of outward things, and from the thralldom of self. Not only does death open the door into the world of acquittal, and again into that of holiness, but also into the realm of surrender, and thence into that of sacrifice. For the essential idea of the Cross is a life lost, to be found again in those around. "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it."—Matt. 16. 26.

(The "Herald of Christ's Kingdom.")

THE FIFTIETH PSALM An Exposition

This is a psalm of judgment, a grand yet solemn anthem declaiming God's purpose to execute all his good pleasure among the sons of men and to make an end of sin. Those—and they are many—who see in this noble psalm nothing more than an expression of Divine displeasure upon the formalism of Israel's worship in Old Testament days, and of condemnation upon the irreverent and impious, fail to grasp its essentially prophetic doctrinal teaching. Asaph was a prophet; we know that from 2 Chron. 29. 30, and in his position as chief of the choral services at the Temple in the days of David he must have spoken, as did all the prophets, of the wonders that remained yet unrevealed in the Plan of God.

The key to the interpretation of the psalm lies in verse 5 "*Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice*". The word "saints" really means, literally, "holy ones" in Old Testament times as well as during this Gospel Age; that is undisputed. There were many faithful souls in every generation of Israel from the days of the wilderness wanderings onward. But this fifth verse with its command, following as it does the previous verses which tell of God arising to judgment, does not fit any historical event in Israel except in a poetic sense. Every time that God arose in judgment upon Israel the nation was scattered, and the "holy ones" were not exempt from the troubles that fell upon their more unfaithful fellows. The greatest judgment of all in the time of Christ resulted in a scattering that has not been remedied yet. Nothing of "gathering" here. It is when we look to the work of this Gospel Age that we find a gathering of saints consequent upon an arising of God to judgment. "And he shall send his angels, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24 31). Whatever meaning the psalm may have borne to Israel in the days when its words floated upon the wings of music ascending from the Temple courts, therefore, it is this prophetic interpretation that has the deepest lesson for us now.

"The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof." (vs. 1).

The scene is set at Pentecost, when God is about to commence his great work. For fourteen centuries He has been bearing with the weakness, the idolatry, the hardness of heart, of his chosen earthly people, the nation to which He had confined himself to the exclusion of all others, and now the end of that order of things had come. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" He had said, but now He decrees that the word of salvation is to go to all men everywhere without limit of race or colour. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" Jesus had just commanded his disciples, and here in this opening verse of the psalm, Asaph the prophet has seen the same thing in vision. "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles" another prophet was to declare five hundred years later (Mal. 1. 11) and Asaph had but anticipated that splendid declaration. This first verse, then, pictures the call to repentance and dedication of life to God that went out first of all when Peter stood up with the eleven. In a very real sense it was on that day that God called the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof.

"Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined" (vs. 2).

Mount Zion was the site of the king's palace and, until the Temple was erected, the place where the Ark of the Covenant remained. It early came to symbolise the whole city, and this eloquent verse tells of God being manifested in the visible splendour of his presence in his own city. The effulgent radiance of the *Shekinah* glory has come out from the city to be at once a source of enlightenment and strength to his own people and an agency of terror and judgment to the sinners. God has come down to dwell in his own city and his glory is commencing to be manifest upon the earth. "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great king" (Psa. 48. 2). That tribute is not yet literally completely true, and cannot be until the Millennial Age when evil has been banished and men are walking in the light of the law of the Lord, but it is in process of becoming true inasmuch that we, the consecrated followers of Jesus, have already seen and rejoice in that Divine

light which is shining forth from the spiritual Jerusalem. Men may deride and scorn the idea; like the enemies of Israel in the days of Jeremiah they may "pass by and clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, 'Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?'" (Lam. 2. 15) but the fire of that judgment and the light of that knowledge will yet reach all men and all will be compelled to acknowledge that truly there is a God that judgeth in the earth. This shining forth of God from Zion, from Jerusalem, of verse 2, then, well depicts the gradual manifestation of God to men during this Gospel Age, from Pentecost until now. During all that time He has been manifest to the Church by the medium of his Holy Spirit which illuminates and leads and has been manifest to the world through the medium of his Church, his "witnesses" in the earth. The extent to which God has shined into the hearts of the unsanctified during this Age, both for enlightenment and for judgment, is dependent upon the faithfulness of his own sanctified ones in their privilege and responsibility of ambassadorship for Christ. "Now then" says Paul "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech by us: we pray, in Christ's stead, 'be ye reconciled to God'" (2 Cor. 5. 10).

But although this has been an age of enlightenment, both to Church and world in different ways, and the shining forth out of Zion throughout the age has been one of continuously expanding and brightening day, there is also to be a great blazing forth in judgment at the Age's end. "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thes. 1. 7). This shining out of Zion, proceeding through the Gospel Age, culminates in a fearful revelation of the *Shekinah* glory against all sin and sinful things and sinful men, just as it did in the wilderness when Korah and his companions defied the living God, and the glory of the Lord went out from the Tabernacle and destroyed them. (Num. 16). "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heaven from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people" (vs. 3-4).

This is Armageddon, the rising up of God at the end of the Age to "avenge our blood on

them that dwell on the earth" (Rev. 6. 10), and to vindicate his own Name and the honour of his plan. "Our God shall come"—can there be any more thrilling, inspiring certainty? Israel looked for him to come in person, descending upon the Mount of Olives in visible shape (Zech. 14. 4) striding the two sides of the riven mountain like some gigantic Colossus. "The Lord my God shall come, and all the holy ones with thee" cries Zechariah at the sight, calling to mind the traditional words ascribed to Enoch the patriarch "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince (convict) all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 15). That was Israel's expectation, but then Israel in that day knew nothing of Christ. We know, now, that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who comes as the representative of his Father to reign over the Kingdom in his own right, for "his right it is" (Ezek. 21. 27) and that the light of the glory of his appearing is not one that is seen by the natural eyes or that appeals to the natural senses, but one that is evidenced by the signs of the times, the signs of his presence, a presence that is none the less real because his person is hidden from our sight just as surely as was the glory of the Father hidden behind the literal *Shekinah* that at times of judgment did manifest itself in the sight of men from within the sanctuary.

The expression "judge his people" can be taken in two ways. It can mean that God has come to judge his people for their own misdeeds; on the other hand, that God has come to judge his people's cause, and mete out retribution to their oppressors. The nature of the next two verses appears to indicate the latter as the sense in which the expression is used here. God is calling to the heavens and the earth to witness that He is now about to vindicate his people's faith and to deliver them—here, in these closing years of this Gospel Age. At Pentecost He called the earth; during the intervening centuries He shined forth from Zion; now at the time of judgment in Armageddon He calls to witness what He is going to do. And this is what He declares, this is the commandment that He gives forth.

"Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness; for God is judge himself" (vs. 5-6).

Who are these "saints"? It is not until the ending of the Gospel Age that any of God's holy ones are "gathered". Until then, in all the long centuries of the reign of sin and death, their history has been one of oppression, persecution and scattering. But now comes a time when they are to be "gathered". Is this a gathering in the flesh or must its fulfilment be found only in the general assembly beyond the veil?

The intimate relation of the command to the coming judgment shows that it must relate in the first place to a gathering taking place on earth. The picture is based upon the inauguration of Israel's nationhood with their covenant at Sinai. The devout Israelite, following the words of the Temple service, would turn his thoughts back to Moses and the cry of the people "All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient" as the Levites intoned this verse about holy ones and a covenant by sacrifice. To the Israelites, the Law under which they came at Sinai was a Covenant by sacrifice and they themselves were God's holy ones, a peculiar people, a chosen nation, a royal priesthood. It was as a united people, separated from the nations of earth, that they faced the hardships of the later wilderness experiences in their journey to the Promised Land. That picture points the doctrinal teaching for us in this verse. The "gathering" is the separation of God's consecrated ones from the affairs and interests of earth to serve the provisions of this "covenant by sacrifice". We who are Christ's have entered into a covenant just so surely as did Israel—not a Law Covenant as was theirs; a Covenant of which the criterion is faith rather than works, but nevertheless a covenant demanding sacrifice in even greater degree than did Israel's. Nothing that is worth having in God's great Plan is attainable without sacrifice, renunciation, endurance.

The gathering, then, takes place on earth and it is a visible evidence to men that Divine judgment has commenced. The signs were very evident in Israel's day in the wilderness. From Sinai onwards the Lord marched before them with power and signs and wonders, and the fame thereof travelled far and wide and struck terror into the hearts of heathen nations. So it is to be again; in these last days the gathering of the saints together—to God, not just into one or another sect or fellowship; "Gather my saints together unto me"—has been proceeding. Those of like mind have come together and have found themselves separated from the world. The union between

all such saints may not be readily apparent on earth—differences of policy, of outlook, of doctrine, of service, militate against the attainment of full fellowship between all who are the Lord's saints—but it is completely apparent in heaven. And that unity which is recorded in heaven is reflected back to us on earth so that all who are truly Christ's find themselves in heart oneness with each other even although they may abide in different spheres of normal worship, fellowship or service. There is a "unity of the spirit" which transcends the boundaries of sect or organisation and it is *that* unity which is the fulfilment of this command "Gather my saints together unto me".

So we come to the triumphant climax. The heavens shall declare God's righteousness. Is not that an apt description of the work of the Millennial Age? When this gathering of saints has been completed and consummated in their "change" to spiritual conditions and eternal association with Christ their Lord, the stage is set for the final phase of God's Plan so far as this earth is concerned. Then it will be abundantly demonstrated that God is judge himself. "*Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field; and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever*" (Isa. 32. 16-17). "*Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other; Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven*" (Psa. 85. 10-11). This is the glorious outcome of the coming forth of God to judgment, and the devouring fire that went before him will resolve itself into a benignant radiance in the light of which all nations shall come and worship before God, and coming, find the way of peace.

Here the song ends, with a "*Selah*"—an impressive pause in the choral rendering whilst priests and people alike remained silent for a few moments to contemplate the glory of the things about which they had just been singing. When the strain is again taken up, it is on a different subject. There is much in that homily, from verse 7 to the end of Psalm 50, that could afford scope for reflection and instruction to us; but it is the majestic picture of God's purposes in the first six verses, up to that "*Selah*" that should inspire and enthuse us to be more diligent than ever before, that we might be of those who are "gathered together unto him".

THE TRAGEDY OF SAMSON

The story of
a great failure

I. Nazarite unto God

The valley lay drowsily under the hot summer sun. The fields of Eshtaol stretched out, quietly beautiful, leading the eye to the white houses of the village of Zorah in the distance. The road winding through the valley was no more than a mule track, travellers were few and far between, and the inhabitants went on with their farming and stock rearing unmolested except for periodic raids of Philistine marauders from the south, scouring the quiet valley for plunder.

The Philistines were already there when the tribe of Dan entered the land, many generations ago. At first they had not anticipated trouble, for the Philistines were down in the flat lands bordering the sea, thirty miles or more away, and there was plenty of room in the land for both. But now with both peoples multiplying fast and wanting ever more and more land on which to settle, there was bound to be a collision, and for many years now, ever since the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, the two races were constantly clashing. For thirty or forty years past the children of Dan had been held in subjection to the hated Philistines.

Tall, muscular men, these Philistine soldiers, clad in coats of mail, wearing polished bronze helmets, armed with swords and spears and other weapons such as Israel had never seen before. They had come from the island of Crete in the days of Abraham, dispossessing the Canaanites who dwelt on the sea coast and settling there to grow corn for their native land. Crete was a civilised and progressive country, peculiarly like eighteenth century Britain in a good many respects, and having a lively power of mechanical invention, so that the primitive Israelites stood no chance at all against them. Not until the days of David, still a century or so in the future, was the power of the Philistines finally to be broken by Israel.

So it came about that Manoah and his wife, quiet God-fearing Israelites of the tribe of Dan, pursued their uneventful lives in Zorah in humble faith that God would protect them from all enemies and give them prosperity all the time they honoured him and obeyed his covenant. They had one great sorrow; no son crowned their union, no one to carry on their line and inherit their lot in the land. It seemed hard to understand, almost as though God had

not kept his part of the covenant, for the covenant promised the blessing of children among other gifts. Strange to understand and hard to accept, until the day that Manoah's wife met the angel in the fields.

The matter of fact manner in which visitations of angelic beings to men is related in the Old Testament reads strangely to modern minds, and of course a good many, even among Christians, dismiss the whole thing as incredible—based on nothing more than fanciful embellishments to the story. But there is no doubt that these things did happen, that emissaries from the celestial world did assume forms of flesh and appear to men as men, to carry out some element of the outworking of the purposes of God. The fact that so far as we know such instances do not occur to-day is no argument that they did not occur then; the whole basis of God's dealing with men since Christ is changed. We walk by faith, not by sight. God is selecting out from among the nations a church, a people for his Name; He speaks to them through the medium of his indwelling Holy Spirit and there is no need of external agents appealing through the physical senses. In the next Age, when God turns again to deal with all mankind under the beneficent arrangements of the Messianic Kingdom, it is at least possible that the direct and personal ministry of angels will be restored. At any rate, there is no evidence that Manoah and his wife saw anything unusual in the proceedings. It is true that Manoah's expressed fear was the superstitious one common to that day that, having seen a manifestation of God face to face, they must die, but his wife, more practical, pointed out that if the Lord intended to kill them He would not have accepted a sacrificial offering at their hands, and with that Manoah was content. They were left then with the gist of the angel's message, to wit, that a son was to be born to her who heretofore had been barren, that he was to be devoted to God, a Nazarite, under the ritual that distinguished the Nazarite fraternity, from the day of his birth, and that when grown to manhood's estate he would begin to deliver Israel from the power of the Philistines.

That last promise must have brought joy to the hearts of this pious couple. Deliverance was what every true Israelite desired. It is a

safe deduction that the immediate past had been a time of national apostasy, for the fact that they were now subject to the Philistines instead of vice versa is a direct indication that they had failed to keep the covenant which, if kept, promised them immunity from such things. The barrenness of Manoah's wife is another evidence pointing to the same thing, for this also, on a national scale, was another result of failure to keep the covenant. The promise of a child, therefore, one who would only so much as begin to deliver Israel, was a Divine intimation that in some way Israel had shown signs of repentance, so that God, as ever, was quick to respond with the promised deliverance.

There are four cases of a child being born to a hitherto barren woman in the Scriptures, and in each case the child was destined to fulfil some specific Divine commission. Isaac, Jacob and John the Baptist in addition to this son of Manoah, were thus born, and each birth was heralded by a Divine intimation of future destiny. It almost seems as if God took special measures to indicate a providential interference with the normal course of Nature in order to draw attention to the significance of what He was about to do.

In this case the child was to be a Nazarite. The vow of a Nazarite was a custom ordained in the Mosaic Law to mark the dedication of a man to God's service, either for a stipulated time or for life. The man thus setting himself apart from his brethren was required to fulfil two obligations which made that separation a very real thing. He was to abstain from the fruit of the grape-vine in all its forms, whether as plucked from the vine, or as wine or drink, and he was not to pass any razor over his head—his hair and beard were to be suffered to grow unchecked. In addition he was not to allow himself to become defiled by death or a dead carcass. Such a man was peculiarly "God's Man" in a sense which was not true even of the Levites. They too, were set apart and dedicated to Divine service, but in the things of every-day life and among their fellows. The Nazarite was set completely apart for the performance of such direct duties as might be laid upon him by God. The intimation to Manoah and his wife that their son was to be a Nazarite implied therefore that he was separated from his birth for some very definite purpose of God; they were told too what that purpose was. "*He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines*".

So began a life full of promise. Born of

devoted, God-fearing parents, trained up in the strict self-discipline which strengthened character, sobriety and tenacity of purpose whilst at the same time it built physical strength and stamina of the highest possible order; conscious all the time of a Divine destiny and calling. What better inheritance for a young man on the threshold of life? What brighter hope for the future, as the inhabitants of Zorah watched his growth through boyhood into early manhood, and recalled the promise made at his birth "*He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines*".

So, we are told, the Spirit of the Lord began to move Samson at times at the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol. The camp of Dan was evidently a tribal meeting place, where perhaps the elders of the villages and families gathered in conclave, and the youth of the tribe met to engage in sports and contests of skill. The superior strength and prowess of the youthful Samson would at such times mark him out among his fellows and give rise to much nodding of heads and earnest consultation among the older men. Surely, they would say to one another, God was about to fulfil his promise and raise up for them the deliverer for which their souls longed. Here was the man whose giant strength could prove equal to that of their armour-clad enemies. Surely God was about to deliver his people! Hopes must have run high in the villages and hills of Eshtaol and Zorah, and men begin to lift up their heads a little and talk, perhaps, of those far-off glorious days when Joshua and his hosts had won them this land by his own armed might. Here was another Joshua, to lead them into battle with the high praises of God on their lips and the two-edged sword in their hands, to put to flight the armies of the aliens and bring peace and prosperity to Israel.

And none, in those golden days of hope, suspected the canker which lay in the heart of their hero and robbed him, and them, at the last, of the triumph they sought.

(To be continued)

Friends at West Wickham extend a warm welcome to all interested, to a week-end convention on Sat./Sun., 10/11 October, commencing 2.45 p.m. Sat. and 11.0 a.m. Sun., in Justin Hall, Beckenham Road, West Wickham. Light meals provided between sessions. Details Bro. J. Bignell, 28 Croft Avenue, West Wickham, Kent. (Springpark 5484).

UR, CITY OF ABRAHAM

An
essay

"And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan." (Gen. 11. 31).

That is about all the Scriptures have to say about Abraham's native city. The Biblical story of his life really begins when he became a citizen of Canaan, the promised land of his inheritance. Fourteen out of the fifty chapters of Genesis are devoted to the story of Abraham, from his entrance into Canaan at seventy-five years of age to his death at one hundred and sixty, a period of eighty-five years. Of his earlier life, when he was called Abram, a citizen of the great city of Ur, on the lower Euphrates, nothing is known—for the Rabbinic legends of his experiences there are of no value—and all that the Scriptures have to say about those earlier days is contained in a few stray allusions here and there. But by piecing together what is said, and calling to our aid the discoveries of recent times, there can be drawn a reasonable picture of the setting in which this man who afterwards became known as the "Friend of God", the "Father of the Faithful", was born and brought up; the place in which he received the Divine call "get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee" (Gen. 12. 1). This long since vanished city of Ur is forever sanctified in having been the birthplace of the man in whom, and in whose seed, all families of the earth are to be blessed. When, in one of its houses, the child Abraham drew his first breath, a great event in this world's history took place. God looked down from Heaven and placed the seal of his approval upon a fresh development in the outworking of his plan.

Abram was born in Ur when his father Terah was one hundred and thirty years old. That might seem an incredible thing to us to-day, but there is reasonable evidence—outside the Bible account as well as inside—that there was nothing abnormal in such a thing in Abram's day. The Genesis references to the ages and longevity of men and women in the early stages of world history are so interlocked with each other and with the Bible story as a whole that they cannot be disputed without affecting the integrity of the histories. Terah already had other sons;

Haran, who was sixty years old at Abram's birth, and Nahor, probably not much older than Abram. The story opens to us in Gen. 11. 26-30, and already Nahor and Abram are grown up and married; but Haran, the eldest son, is dead, leaving one son, Lot, and two daughters, whose names according to vs. 29 were Milcah and Iscah. But it is asserted by scholars that the second name, Iscah, should rightly be Sarai, that the construction of the word as it appears in the original gives evidence of an incorrect translation into Hebrew from the Babylonian cuneiform script in which these early chapters of Genesis were first written. If this be correct—and the following verse is more understandable if this is indeed so—Nahor and Abram married daughters of their elder brother, a not unusual custom at that time in world history. Further evidence that this might very well be the case is afforded by Abraham's words to Abimelech, king of Gerar (Gen. 20. 12) to the effect that Sarah was his "sister, the daughter of my father, but not of my mother". In Biblical usage Sarai would properly be called the "daughter" of Terah even though one or two generations removed in descent.

The Scriptures give no indication as to how long the family lived in Haran, after leaving Ur. Abram was seventy-five when he departed from Haran: he was already married to Sarai when the family left Ur, but beyond this there is nothing in the text to guide us. It may be, however, that the family's decision to emigrate was due in part to the political troubles that were gathering about their native land, and that God, having nurtured the chosen line of Shem in this southern city for several generations, led them now to leave it before destruction came upon Ur, as come it did, not many years after their departure.

Ur was, even in Abraham's time, an ancient city. Situated near the sea, almost at the mouth of the Euphrates, it was about as far from Babylon in the north as London is from York or New York from Washington. But Ur was centuries older than Babylon. Long before the sons of Shem "journeyed eastward", found this smiling plain in the land of Shinar, and embarked upon their impious attempt to build a city and a tower whose top should reach unto Heaven (Gen. 11), the sons of Ham had built Ur and enriched it with all the magnificence of that art and architecture

in which they were so skilled. Along with its neighbour cities, Eridu the holy, in which the Tree of Life was reputed to have stood, and Erech the high-walled (mentioned in Genesis 10, 10), it was one of the first cities to be built after the Flood. During many years Ur had wielded rulership over the cities of the land and its kings had established peace and exacted tribute, but in the days of Abram those glories had passed away and the city was contending for its very existence against the rival claims of other powers, not least of which was Babylon, soon to reign supreme over all the land. It might well be that Terah saw in the disturbed state of the country and the growing menace of Babylon a leading from God to depart, away from the pomp and glitter of the city, and to take up his abode in the quieter and cleaner surroundings of the West. One fact that is indisputable is that the God of glory appeared to Abram whilst he was still in Ur and bade him depart and go to the land which God would show him. Stephen tells us that, in his speech to the Sanhedrin, although we have no means of knowing from whence he derived his information, (Acts 7. 2).

Tradition has it that Terah was an idolator. There is no direct statement to that effect in the Scriptures. The words of Joshua to Israel in Josh. 24. 2, "Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood (river—the river Euphrates) in olden time, Terah the father of Abraham and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods" need not demand that Terah in particular did so rather than Israel's ancestors in general, the progenitors of Abraham and Terah, served other gods. The fact that not only Abraham, but also Nahor, and Lot the son of Haran, in short, the entire family, were devout worshippers of God and remained so all their lives is hardly consistent with their father himself being other than a worshipper of God. At the same time, it is true that Laban the grandson of Nahor possessed *teraphim* (household divinities much in use in Ur) at the time of Jacob's flight with Rachel (Gen. 31. 19). This is an evidence that something of idol worship was mingled with the faith and devotions of that part of the family. If Laban's own testimony is to be accepted, Terah was undoubtedly a servant of the true God, for in the covenant Jacob made with Laban, the latter says, "*The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father. judge between us*" (Gen. 31. 53). On the whole it does seem as though this family was one that had kept the true faith alive in the midst of

idolatrous Ur.

As dwellers in Ur, Abram and his relatives enjoyed what we would call a high standard of living. The city was the leading trading centre of its time—Babylon was only just coming into prominence—and the canals connecting Ur with the sea brought ocean-going ships from the coasts of the Persian Gulf, and as far away as India, right up to its quays. The furniture in Terah's house might very well have been made from tropical woods—sandal wood and teak from India and mahogany from Africa. He would possess chairs and tables, strikingly like our modern ones, elaborately carved and ornamented, the work of craftsmen. At night the family took its repose on beds formed of cord networks stretched across wooden frames, covered with cushions and having raised ends decorated with pictures or designs. Specially shaped receptacles of earthenware held clothing and household linen; weaving was a well understood art and was employed for the making of clothes as well as carpets and cushions further to advance the comfort of the home. The majority of household utensils were of pottery or copper; if Terah was a reasonably wealthy man, tableware, such as forks and spoons would be of silver or gold. Knives were made of copper, for the people of Ur, like all the ancients, held the secret, lost for thousands of years afterwards and only rediscovered during this twentieth century, of so tempering copper that it could be used for cutting edges as to-day we use steel. Even razors were made of copper in Abram's day and some of them have been found, in shape something like a tiny curved hatchet, with a miniature metal handle.

It is probable that Terah and his married sons lived together in the same house, that being a common practice in Sumerian cities. The general procedure was to add rooms as the demand arose, and the ruins of some of the dwellings have as many as twenty or thirty rooms. They were not like modern houses. The visitor, passing through the entrance door, found himself in a kind of reception hall, a door on the farther side giving access to an open courtyard, around which was grouped a number of rooms, perhaps eight or ten, in the form of a square. Each one had its own doorway opening from the court, and often, in addition, communicating doors to the adjacent rooms. A gallery, approached by a wooden staircase, ran round the four sides of the court at first floor level and from this gallery the upstairs rooms opened. The roof was made

of sundried clay, made watertight with bitumen, fitted over wooden beams which in a house like Terah's might be made of cedars from Lebanon. The roof projected over the gallery but the centre of the court was open to the sky, so that daylight penetrated all the rooms through this central opening. Doors and windows all faced the courtyard so that the outside walls of the house had no breaks save the main entrance. The residential parts of the city must have presented a rather monotonous appearance of sheer brick walls.

As if to make up for this sameness of brickwork in the streets, the public buildings of Ur were ornate and magnificent, often decorated with brightly coloured tiles and enamelled bricks, and coloured representations of lions, bulls and dragons, or flowers and date-palms, in relief. Statues of gold and copper, representing the gods, or commemorating some great military victory, stood here and there, and in the centre of the city the imposing edifice that was the pride alike of Ur and all Southern Babylonia, the Temple of the Moon-god.

Abram and Sarai, in their walks through the city, or as they went about their business or visited their friends, must often have stopped to gaze upon its magnificence. If, as is probable, they were followers of the true God from infancy, it is not likely that they ever set foot in its precincts. But its worship and its ceremonial must have been very familiar to them, and on the great feast days they would have watched their friends and neighbours setting out to join in the services and climb the great Tower that dominated the Temple area. They might even have stood and watched the people thronging the Sacred Road that led up to the double gateway straddling the outer walls, and passing into the outer court. Through that gateway they might perchance catch glimpses of the two sanctuary buildings, both built to the honour of Sin, the Moon-god, both closed, their inward mysteries concealed from the public gaze. On the feast-days the people were not concerned with the priestly ritual and temple service; they pressed through the portals of *Dublal-makh*, the Great Gate, gaining access to the elevated terrace on which stood the "*Hill of Heaven*", the great brick "tower", two hundred and fifty feet square and seventy feet high, planted on all its terraces with trees and flowers, and at its top, the gleaming gold and silver of the holiest shrine of all. Abram and Sarai, standing well away from the outer wall, would be able to watch the

people ascending the three converging stairways that led to the upper terraces of the building.

It was this same temple—the ruins of which exist to-day, the best preserved specimen of such temples in all Mesopotamia—that Cyrus the Persian repaired and rebuilt after he had captured Babylonia in the days of Daniel. At the time of his issuing his famous decree asserting that God of heaven had charged him to build him an house at Jerusalem, and giving permission to the captive Jews to return to their own land, he also issued another decree asserting that Sin, the Moon-god of Ur, had given him all the lands of the world to rule, and had commanded him to rebuild the Temple at Ur; that decree, engraved on baked clay tablets, has survived to our own day just as has the other decree remained on record at the end of the Second Book of Chronicles and the beginning of the Book of Ezra. It would almost seem as if Cyrus was making sure of being on the right side of all the gods! The sister of Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon, was high priestess of the Temple during the last days of Babylon; Daniel himself must have seen it and perhaps trodden its courts on the official business of King Nebuchadnezzar. He could surely never have set foot in the ancient city of Ur without thinking of his forefather Abraham, and of the promise of God which took Abraham out of this place that he might become the father of a great nation by means of which all the families of the earth were to be blessed. He could not have looked upon that two thousand year old Temple—not so magnificent perhaps as in the days of Abram fourteen centuries previously, but a wonderful structure still—without seeing in vision the whole of its glory reduced to dust and mud, as it is now. Abram, looking upon it in his own day, must have reflected in much the same way, and, esteeming the promise of God greater riches than all the treasures of Ur, left them all behind him without regrets.

So the time came when the busy southern city knew the little family no more. With their faces set northward, they began the long journey that for Abram and Sarai was to end in the Promised Land. They probably travelled a long way by boat, up the winding Euphrates, past Shuruppak, the city which the legends of the day had it was the residence of Noah and the place where he built the Ark; through Babylon, as yet but a small town, much smaller and less important than Ur commercially; not the "mistress of the

nations" as she became in after years, but politically already the leading power in the land. Somewhere in the baggage that the emigrants were taking with them there were packed a few tablets bearing the records of Creation and the early history of Adam's race: among them the story of the Tower of Babel. Now as the boat made its way upstream, Babylon's buildings lining both banks, Abram's gaze must have fallen upon the Tower itself, standing proud and erect by the side of the river, dominating the houses and the palaces, visible evidence of the city's continued rebellion against God.

So, at last, they came to Haran, there to dwell awhile in comparative peace and obscurity until Terah was dead and Abram could undertake the last stage of his journey and see with his own eyes the land which

God had promised to him and his seed.

To-day, that land is a hive of activity, fertile and prosperous. The land of Ur is a desert. The seed of Abraham are pressing into their land in their thousands, making ready the fulfilment of the Divine promise. Ur is a silent desolation, a wilderness of sand and dust. The canals have long since dried up; the trees have withered and died; the buildings are ruined and deserted. The stillness is broken only by an occasional wandering Arab, the silence by the noise of an occasional train rumbling over the railway that runs from Baghdad to Basra and passes near the ruins. The glory of Ur departed when Abram the friend of God set out from its busy markets and crowded streets to find "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God".

KINGDOM OF GOD

"The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14. 17).

In the Kingdom of God, we are told, righteousness will flourish. In this present world it is not so. However right our intentions may be, however we strive to do rightly, Jesus taught us that righteousness was more likely to be persecuted. *"Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."* In an unrighteous world, the righteous man is not over popular, and with the wicked he is hated. They do not want the ways of righteousness and, as Jesus said "Everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light lest his deeds should be reproved". (John 3. 20).

The present order of things gets more chaotic every day. Can we, therefore, expect to live peaceably in a world in which we are not at home. "The whole world lieth in the wicked one" Jesus said, but, praise God, the Lord Jesus has broken into the strong man's house, and is binding him, and, being infinitely stronger, is wresting the kingdoms of the world out of the power of the strong man (Satan) and soon that glorious day will dawn when "every eye shall see him" and all shall know that the world has changed ownership, having passed to its rightful King, Christ Jesus, when *"the Kingdoms of the world have become the kingdoms of our God, and of His Christ"*.

There are some people who think that the

Kingdom of God can come through just demonstrating love, but God's Plan shows that Justice and Righteousness have to come before Peace. The love of God is not a soft, sentimental sort of love that will continually 'wink' at our iniquities, because He loves us enough to chastise us and to make us strong and true and, at last, perfect. To this end He chastens his true children, and St. Paul shows that without this chastening we are not true children of God but, as he terms it, "bastards". (Heb. 12. 8). It is obvious from the present trend of events, when parents are very lax with their children and discipline and high moral standards are not taught, that when we are left to ourselves we cannot bring forth anything of lasting good.

The Proverbs of Solomon state that "a child left to itself bringeth its mother to shame", and so we are finding it to be true. Only by discipline, and strict control can the unruly children of this world be brought to 'rightness' of life.

The Prophecies and, particularly the Psalms, show that, preceding the inauguration of Christ's Kingdom, great and world-shaking events are to take place. David says:—*"Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne."*

"The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God."

He also shows the beneficial effect of the judgments and righteousness of Christ:—

"O let the nations be glad and shout for joy; for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth."

Let all 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."

Great upheavals are to be looked for, therefore, in the time immediately preceding his coming to take his power and reign, for 'iniquity shall stop her mouth' and God's children, who long to serve and worship him unhindered, shall 'flourish as the palm'.

In the epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul again confirms that righteousness is the first office of Christ, saying, of Christ to Whom he is likening King Melchisedec:—

"First, being by interpretation, King of Righteousness, and after that, also, King of Salem, which is, King of Peace." (Heb. 7. 2).

Thus we see that this troubled old world can only have peace, when righteousness has been set up, and enforced.

The Prophet Isaiah prophesied of the setting up of this Kingdom of God and righteousness, saying:—

"Behold a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment."

He then goes on to describe the effects of this establishing of righteousness under the new King:—

"and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."

And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in quiet resting places."

Praise God that "violence shall no more be heard in the land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders".

Only in the establishment of righteousness and justice, therefore, can blessings and peace come to God's people, and only thus can health and happiness ever be attained; for righteous living is our only true well-being.

In this world, therefore, God's little ones must undergo severe discipline and trials and tests, that they may be trained in the way of righteousness. There can be no "settling on

the lees" while the world is still in the hands of the usurper, and he must be "upward on and ever, who would keep abreast of truth". This discipline is hard and rigorous; being weak and even fearful, we shun this disciplinary period, and sometimes feel that we have utterly failed. There seems, at times, no rest from the conflicts of the battles within and of the onslaughts of the world without, but our Captain is strong and has already conquered the evil one, so that we may trust him to keep us from falling. Who alone is able to do so.

If, therefore, our hearts fail us, who are looking for this Kingdom of Righteousness, in the midst of so much wrong-doing, we can take comfort from the words of the Prophet Isaiah:—

"Strengthen ye the weak knees, and confirm the feeble hands."

Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not; behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you."

and all true Bible students know the glorious promises which have been given to us for our comfort, to enable us to stand firm and not give up hope in these days. Though we fall, we cannot be 'utterly cast down' for has he not told us that we may be

"confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ".

Let us, therefore, be strong and of good courage, for "with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth."

"And they shall take them captives whose captives they were, and they shall rule over their oppressors."

"And it shall come to pass in the day, that the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrows, and from thy fear, and from thy hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve....

Therefore, we will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is our strength and our song: he also is become our salvation."

EULOGY ON THE BIBLE

The Bible's horizon is eternity. In its growth it has been the Light of God in the history of Grace, and will continue so to be until the perfect Day. The history of Creation, man's trial and fall by sin, the sentence of death; the promises and covenants of God,

embracing the full scope of the Divine Purpose for the world's salvation, are therein disclosed. THE LAWS—moral, ceremonial and sacrificial, are made known and form the foundation of subsequent purposes revealed in the Book.

GOD'S revelation to the prophets was partial. He has since spoken by His Son—His last mouthpiece, the final Prophet, His only Apostle, the Messenger of the New Covenant that is everlasting. Combining both Testaments we have the Alpha and Omega of God's Word, and in these sixty-six books we have a wonderful unity of spirit. There are many chapters, but one book; many petals, but one flower; all the fruit of one Mind. Their message is chiefly concerning THE CHRIST, and but for HIM the sacred Volume would not have been written. They are joined together by a spiritual bond and none can put them asunder. Their testimony will not have ceased until their pages are known and understood by both the living and the dead (Rev. 20 12). Written by Historians, Lawgivers, Judges, Kings, Poets, Prophets, and Apostles, each moved and inspired by the Spirit of God, their one supreme theme was the MESSIAH, the PROMISED SEED, the SECOND ADAM, the ONE MEDIATOR, the ADVOCATE and REDEEMER of all men. He is the top Stone of the entire PLAN of God, because it was in

the interest of every soul that "HE by the grace of God tasted death for every man". (Heb. 2. 9).

All the most urgent problems that confront men, such as the prevalence of evil, of disease and death, of inequalities and injustices, and the problem of how to change and bring to an end such a condition of things—the problem of death itself, what it is, and what future hope, if any, there is for those who have died; the problem of better things to come—these questions which baffle human wisdom, are answered completely and to the entire satisfaction of heart and mind, in this inspired Word of God. Both the origin and the destiny of man are there disclosed, and we see clearly that while "weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning". (Psa. 30. 5). A comparison of the opening pages of the Bible with the closing pages, will reveal by contrast that in its outworking, God's glorious Plan of Redemption will completely reverse the evil effects of the Fall, and fully emancipate mankind from the thralldom of sin and death.

(*Forest Gate Bible Monthly*).

WHEN GOD SPEAKS TWICE

A Bible Study

The subject is allied to the use in the Scriptures of the figure 2. The Bible uses figures to indicate things; 7, 10, and 12 each give the idea of completeness. 7 days make a complete week, 10 commandments a complete law; 12 tribes a complete nation. So the figure 2 gives the idea firstly of completeness. (Matt. 22. 34-40). They asked for the great commandment and the Lord said, "there are two". If a man keeps these two he will keep the ten; they constitute complete instruction. The law and the prophets—two again—the revelation of God for Jewish instruction is divided into two. In later times Revelation 11 speaks of two witnesses; two olive trees. The Old and New Testaments are the complete revelation of truth to us, they contain complete advice; although they are two they are one harmonious whole—two witnesses but the same story. The two commandments referred to are not exactly the same yet together they form God's one requirement.

We have now come to another phase in the meaning of the figure 2. We see firstly that it teaches completeness, but we now see also the idea of *unity*. The Old and New Testaments differ but together they are unified in one

story. At the beginning of creation God said, "Let us make man in our own image"; two hearts that beat as one. Our Lord said later, "I and my Father are one". Thus we see the thought of unity. Man and Wife is another Scriptural instance of two being one. Evening and morning make one complete day. Two advents of our Lord but they fill one purpose, they are united in the one purpose of God.

The third thought in the use of the figure 2 is a strange one; it is that the second is better than the first. There are, however, limits to this. 1 Cor. 15. 45. Two men, the second superior to the first. Some speak of the Lord as the second Adam, but the Scriptures say the *last* Adam is he who lays down his life for the first Adam; He is the last Adam because there will never be another. The fact that the Bible speaks of a first *man* and a second implies that there will be other, but there are two Adams only. The second is superior to the first because He redeems him.

Heb. 8. 6-8. The word "better" used here pre-supposes that there are only two covenants being discussed. The second is superior to the first because under it the words of God, instead of being written on the tables of stone

will be written on the tables of the heart. (Heb. 10. 8-10). The second, superior, whether it be the covenant or the offering because it does that which God really intended should be done, the second is the enduring or better phase of God's work. If a man die, shall he live again? Yes, and the second time is the enduring time; the second time brings individual responsibility. Our Lord said, "If I go away, I will come again and receive you unto myself." The second is better than the first for at the Second Coming the Lord receives his own to himself.

The fourth idea in the usage of the figure 2 is that of *finality*. The second death is final, the Scriptures do not speak of a third. (Isaiah 11. 11). That will be final. He will gather the outcasts of Israel. The first time He put forth his hand was at the Exodus, but the second time will be final and Israel will be really gathered into their own land. Mankind knows this usage of the figure 2; Paul said his second letter to Timothy was written just before he went before Nero the second time, and he knew it would be his last. He knew he would not be released this second or final time. We see it is difficult to say all that is meant by this figure 2 in a few words, but we realise how important it is, and it is never used haphazardly but always with some definite point in God's mind. So, if anything is spoken twice it is important. When the storm arose on the sea of Galilee while the Lord was asleep, the disciples said, "*Master, Master!* carest Thou not that we perish?" The matter was urgent. We use this repetition in every day life. (Luke 22. 31-32). You see how the point gains by our Lord saying "*Simon, Simon*". He would catch Peter's ears by this. In John 21. 15-17 the Lord went beyond the usual practice, He asked Peter if he loved him more than twice, He asked him the third time, and Peter grieved because He asked him the third time, but by so doing the Lord drove it right home to Peter. On the way to Damascus the voice said "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*"

An instance of God speaking twice occurred at a very important time in the history of Israel, as recounted in 1 Sam. 3. Eli and Samuel had gone to rest and the voice spoke to Samuel. The third time Eli woke to the fact that it was the Spirit of God. The voice told Samuel that Eli's house had been judged, and the end of Israel's priests for the time being had come, it broke up the priesthood. Verse 10, "*Samuel, Samuel*". This repetition of the name was the prelude to a great change in the

history of Israel, and you will find that this is so in every instance; Samuel, Samuel; Simon, Simon; Saul, Saul; each marks a very important phase in the history of God's people. When God speaks twice it is most important, something momentous is to occur. The first use of God speaking twice occurs to Abraham. (Gen. 22 10-17). *Abraham, Abraham*, lay not thy hand upon the lad. Isaac was taken away and the ram sacrificed in his place. Isaac was not really Abraham's only son, he was the second, the superior one, so superior that the other one was not mentioned and Isaac is spoken of as the only son. God said, "In blessing I will bless thee." Repetition again, then two examples are given, as the stars and as the sand. How very important is this instance of God speaking twice! First He repeats Abraham's name, then (verse 15) the angel called the second time and affirms the promise. First the promise is given, then He swears. (Heb. 6. 13-18). God here used a mode of speech to drive the lesson home to his people. He could have said, "I will bless thee," but instead He said, "In blessing I will bless thee". There was no need for God to bind himself by an oath, his promise was enough, but in order to drive it home to Abraham and his seed He speaks twice.

If God will thus speak to his people that they might believe, we ought, when God speaks twice, to believe more whole-heartedly than we do. When God speaks twice the object in view is that our faith may be strengthened, by God, as it were, repeating himself. Remember all we saw in the use of the figure 2; Completeness, unity, finality. The next time God speaks twice by repeating a name is Gen. 45. 25 to chapter 46. 4. The brethren told Jacob that Joseph was alive; then God intervenes, repeats his name and the heart of Jacob is strengthened for the rest of the journey. God speaks twice and the heart is strengthened. The next time God speaks twice was at the burning bush. (Ex. 3. 2-7). This was another important time; Moses was then commissioned to be Israel's deliverer, and God started him on his journey by calling, "*Moses, Moses*". These are all the instances of God speaking twice by repetition of name, but in Ex. 3. 7 we read: "I have surely seen the affliction of my people", etc. Acts 7. 34 in recounting this incident says, "*I have seen, I have seen* the affliction," etc. Exodus says, "I have surely seen"; but the original says, "*I have seen, I have seen*." This also occurs in other texts. "In the day thou eatest thou shalt surely die," or "*dying* thou shalt die."

There are other instances of God speaking twice but not by repetition of name. God gave the tables of the law at Sinai and He gave two tables of stone; on these two stones was the complete final instruction for Israel. Moses broke them, but God is very forgiving and He wrote them a second time. In spite of their idolatry He said, "this law is for you", and He gave it them a second time. (Ex. 34. 1-6). Here is a repetition of God's name. God speaks twice when He gives them the law and repeats his own name. This is an illustration in some respects of the time of the presence of the greater Moses when God will speak anew in the New Covenant. (Hag. 2. 6-9. Heb. 12. 26-28). The first shaking meant the institution of the law, the second shaking means the breakdown of earthly kingdoms and the

establishment of his Kingdom. Not only kingdom promises, but church promises gain by God speaking twice. (Isaiah 26. 3). Although our version is quite correct in saying "perfect peace", other versions give this verse, "Thou wilt keep him in *peace, peace*", and it is so given in the margin. (Heb. 13. 5). This is literally, "Not, not, will I leave thee, not, even not, will I forsake thee." These words are the first given in Josh. 1. 5. God said this to Joshua at the end of the Israelites' wilderness journey just as they were about to enter the promised land. The second time these words are used is in Heb. 13. 5. God has cared for his Church through her journey and the promise comes just as we are about to enter the land:—"Not, Not, will I leave thee, not even, will I forsake thee."

THE HORNS OF THE ALTAR

*A Meditation on
Psa 118.27*

How stirring to the Christian soul are the words of this beautiful Psalm. What searching thoughts they provoke! Composed by one of the sweet singers of Israel in days long gone by, and spoken in such wise that they seem to refer to his own times, how much meaning there is in them, when the Holy Spirit illuminates them, in the mouth of our Lord Jesus. "The stone which the builders refused is become the head-stone of the corner."

If these words were written following the return from Babylon, and just after the rebuilding of the Temple, how beautifully descriptive this may be of one particular stone, seemingly out of place everywhere in the temple walls, and thus refused and rejected by the builders, until the temple is all but finished—and lo, when the topmost row is being laid, the ungainly stone finds a place as the head-stone of one of the corners. Such a state of things might more easily come about when "re-building" a temple, from the piled-up debris of a former structure, than on erecting an original structure. Next in order after the erection of the Temple would come the dedication and the subsequent sacrifices. "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even to the horns of the Altar"—that would be the language of true devotion, as soon as the Temple had become the Sanctuary and Dwelling-place of the Lord their God. But the Holy Spirit has made deeper use of these words than that of a mere eye-witness of the re-dedication services of a rebuilt Temple.

The Word of God shows Jesus to be the Stone which, rejected by the Jewish polity-builders, will eventually become the Head Stone of the Corner when the Lord rebuilds the walls of Zion.

After extorting from their own lips God's judgment upon the unfaithful husbandmen (Matt. 21. 41), He asks them "Did ye never read the Scriptures 'The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes'" (v. 42). The Apostle Peter gives us valuable aid in identifying both the "Stone" and the rejectors thereof, when he writes "To whom coming... a living stone, disallowed of men, but chosen of God and precious" (1 Pet. 2. 4). Jesus was that stone in the primary sense, whom the Jewish builders rejected. In the secondary and larger sense, it was a Spiritual Messiah over which they stumbled and were disobedient. They looked for a Messiah in the flesh. Unlike Paul, they never came to say "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet henceforth know we him no longer" (2 Cor. 5. 16). Paul had once looked for Christ after the flesh—a human Christ—yet henceforth because his eyes had been opened he was now looking for a spiritual Messiah.

Thus Psalm 118 in its deeper sense is a Psalm descriptive of Jesus as the Christ, and incidentally of all those who are baptised into him. That gives us our bearings then for applying the binding of the Sacrifice to the

horns of the Altar. Behind the earthly sacrifices of bulls and goats which were laid on the Altar, there is a picture of the better sacrifices, and of the antitypical altar of sacrifice. Whatsoever was placed on the altar was devoted to God. Either it was to be utterly consumed by fire; or a portion was burnt, and another portion was reserved for the priest; or a third measure, a portion was burnt, and another taken by the priest, and still another taken and consumed by the offerer himself. The fire consumed God's portion in some cases, the fire and the priest (who was God's representative) did so in others, and when the offerer took a portion it was as the guest of God. Now all these means of disposing of the sacrifice shows how exclusive the claims of the Altar were. "*Behold Israel after the flesh, are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the Altar?*" (1 Cor. 10. 18). That which is devoted to God, and placed on the altar, is no longer to be accounted of common use. Whosoever thereafter partakes thereof, is made holy thereby. It would be accounted sacrilege of the grossest kind, and lay the offender open to the severest penalties, to take of such altar-flesh, and use it improperly or when unclean. Everything that was devoted to God, whether of necessity, as in sin-offerings, or of free-will, as in thank-offerings was brought in whole, or in part, to the Altar. In placing such sacrifice on the Altar, it was, as it were, placing it in God's hands, which were accounted open and outstretched to take it and to receive it.

"Given to God" was the all-pervading thought in the mind of everyone who brought his "gift" to the Altar.

This aspect of God's Altar among Israel shows us how serious and solemn a matter it is to approach and present a gift to the Most High God. It was a unique favour indeed to be permitted to do this. To approach the presence of Majesty and offer a gift worthy of a King is accounted a great honour among men. How much greater honour to approach Eternal Majesty and ask him to accept and utilise something which poor, imperfect human flesh may wish to offer Him, to be used in his service. Many men link themselves up with earthly movements, and count it an honour to do so, if royalty bestows its patronage or approval upon the movement. Now think of God's "movement"—that is, His Plan of the Ages, His Plan of Redemption—and who, with love and charity in his heart for his fellow-men in adversity, but would rejoice to

have a part, if only a little part in that great work? Ah, yes! that would be easy if it took place just because of humanitarian impulses—if it were a matter of joining in with God in "doing something spectacular"—of doing something for angels and men to see! But God's way is not just that way. He is most certainly seeking "co-workers", but they are not invited to be "co-directors". God requires the complete surrender of the whole being—heart, mind, soul and strength—to his Sovereign Will—and for this surrender, the Altar is the symbol. The Altar stands for the full consumption and absorption of all placed thereon. Only ash remained when the fire had done its work. In eating the part allotted to him, the priest was only sharing with the Altar. And it is because God interposes the Altar between himself and those who would like to "lend him a hand", that so few ever reach the position of being "co-workers" together with him. Blessings unspeakable and favours innumerable flow to others, through those whom God does accept into "co-works-ship", but He bestows his gifts through none who are afraid of, or who "cheat" the Altar.

God's Altar is the contrast to the world's pedestal, but He that goes by way of the Altar will reach beyond the stars—and the outcome of his choice will be eternal. If there are times when the consequences of our choice seem to fret and irritate us, and when, because our lives are lived in quiet backwaters, we look on and see our fellows racing to the front amongst men, take the cords of devotion again, and bind the sacrifice more firmly to the horns of the Altar. Make your new cords daily, new resolves, new affirmations, new pledges, and say to the Lord that till his due time you will wait, and will be fully submissive to his Way. The words "*Not as I will, but Thy will be done*" make a fine chord. "*Choose Thou my way O Lord; myself I cannot guide*" make another—and so on.

If it makes life a narrower thing, a restricted environment, remember, there is not much room on the top of the Altar—it is a narrow way, but it leads to the greatest achievements because it is God's own way. When therefore the flesh struggles for more liberty; or if you feel at any time that things in God's plans are going slow; that expectations are not turning into realisations quickly enough, bind the sacrifice down again. Tie it up to the power (horns) of him who sanctifies the Altar; and let him help to hold it where the fires can "eat it up", all that God has graciously condescended to accept from your hands.



Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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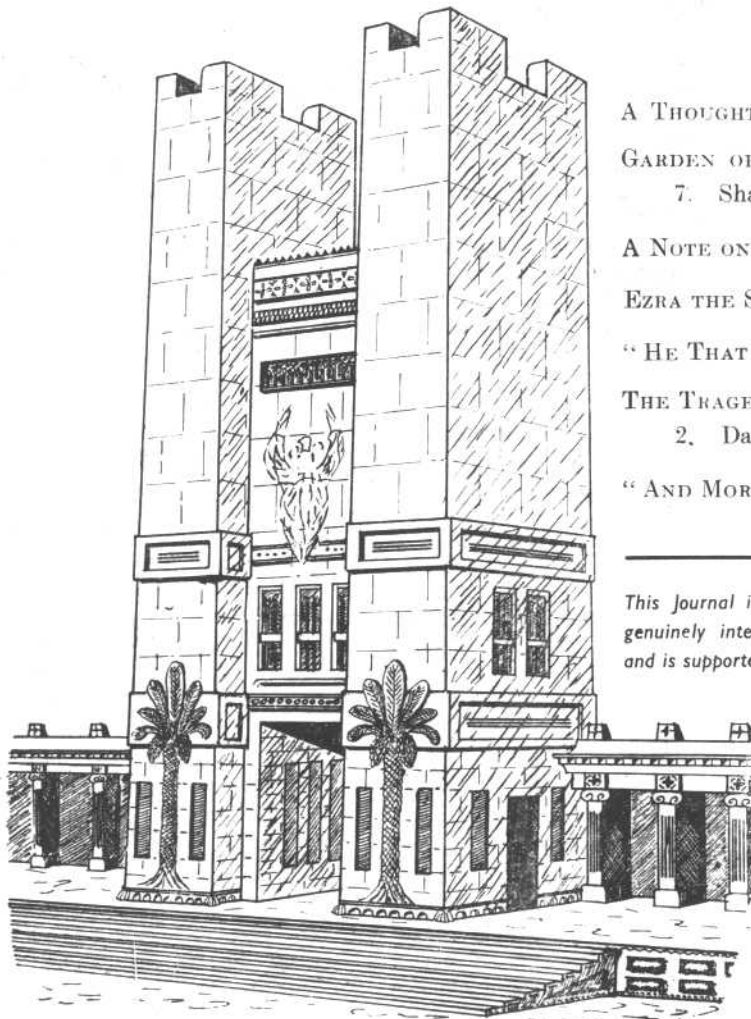
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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This Journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge and the furtherance of the Gospel of the Kingdom, its circulation being largely among independent Bible fellowships and study circles which share in varying degree the viewpoint of the Divine Plan herein set forth.

SPECIAL NOTICE

We regret the late appearance of this issue, with fewer pages and different type face, due to an unfortunate combination of General Election work and a machinery breakdown. Next issue 1st December should be normal.

A Thought for the Month

"Two men went up into the Temple to pray . . ." A story so well known that it needs no repetition. Yet how often do we stop to consider whether we ourselves are become like the man who, fasting twice in the week and giving tithes of all he possessed, found cause for glory, not in his separateness to God, but in his separateness from his fellow-men. "*I thank thee that I am not as other men are.*" What a miserable confession to make. In looking upon his fellows he saw nothing to emulate, no characteristics or virtues which he could desire for himself, but only the sordid evidences of evil. The reign of sin and death was a very real thing to this Pharisee; and with an exquisite nicety he carefully dissociated himself from it all and explained to the Almighty that, living perforce in an evil world and amidst sinful men, he was nevertheless not of them nor with them, and that he at least was one to whom had come the superior inward knowledge which, separating for ever from the plebeian multitude, rendered him a fit companion for the One Who dwelt in the inner sanctuary.

We read the story, we smile pityingly at the vivid picture of this pompous Israelite, and mentally place ourselves with the publican standing afar off, as we continue our reading. But what of the lesson behind the parable? Is it not true that many times in the individual Christian life we find ourselves thanking God that we are not as other men. Does it not often happen that this wonderful separateness to God which we call consecration degenerates into a mere smug and self-satisfied separateness from the world. And worse still, at times the suggestion is made that in this latter day when the purpose of God in calling from the nations a people for his name seems to be on the brink of completion, a still more exclusive and narrow-minded outlook is called for:—to wit, that our age-old mission as witnesses of Jesus and ministers one to the other must be abrogated in favour of an individual contemplation of the

sacred mysteries and a refusal to extend the privilege of fellowship and the Word of Life to all but the favoured few who are accepted as being likewise the "sealed of God". Alas; that the fruit of a one-time zealous response to be "not conformed to this world" should be, not a transforming by the renewing of the mind, with all the marvellous light of spiritual understanding that transformation can bring, but a gravitation to the lowest depths of bigotry, of self-delusion, of utter spiritual blindness which separation from our fellows must mean when we are not separated to God.

No matter how discouraging our experiences with those to whom we bear the Word of Life—no matter how disappointing our efforts to serve and strengthen our brethren—we must not become narrow or bigoted. We are exhorted to be sure of our foundation and to have a reason for the faith that is in us. We are expected to be rooted and grounded in the knowledge which has come our way and we are warned not to compromise our understanding of Divine Truth for the sake of outward harmony. But above all things we are impressed, time and time again, with the necessity for continual progress and advancement in our personal understanding of Truth. There may be many things—there must of necessity be many things—upon which various disciples do not see eye to eye, and because of differences of thought there must upon occasion be a physical separation into groups for orderly worship and service. But that mystic common-union which binds together all who truly name the Name of Christ transcends such temporary divisions and triumphantly demonstrates the fulfilment of the Saviour's prayer "I will . . . that they may be one." Stand then upon this sure foundation, and we shall have cause to rejoice, not in works of righteousness which we have done, but in that common standing in Christ which is our privilege and seal of Divine sonship.

GARDEN OF EDEN

7.—Shadow of Death

*An Examination
of the Story of
Adam and Eve*

"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. 5. 12).

When the Apostle Paul wrote those terrible words, he took his stand definitely and irrevocably for the doctrine of the Fall. His whole argument for the saving grace of God in Christ, set out so lucidly in the fifth chapter of Romans, hinges upon the literal truth of the Genesis story. If there was no one man, back there in the beginning of history, who fell from his sinless state and embraced sin, and suffered death in consequence, then there is no Christ in the latter days by whose righteousness the grace of God operates to the removal of sin and the restoration of all that men lost when Adam sinned. The two facets must stand or fall together. St. Paul is recognised as the predominant authority on Christian belief and doctrine and his insistence upon the inerrancy of the fundamental principles underlying the story of Creation and the Fall must be accepted, by all who "profess and call themselves Christians".

Having received the story as true, it remains to examine the narrative in order to determine as nearly as possible, just what actually did take place. What precisely was the nature of that sin which had such grievous consequences for the entire human race? What temptation was this which proved so overpoweringly strong that it completely submerged all that man knew of God and felt toward God, and led him into an entirely strange and alien path? How was it that the effect of one single action in the life of the first man reacted physically and mentally on all his descendants to such an extent that none since have been able to resist sin and all have been subject to death? The forbidden fruit must surely have been potent fruit indeed to have produced such far-reaching consequences!

The story relates how God introduced man to the trees in the garden of his creating; first, trees that were good for food, in all their variety; second, the tree of life; thirdly, the tree of "knowledge of good and evil". A prohibition was laid upon him; he was not to eat of the fruit of the tree of good and evil, for the eating of that fruit would result in death. After Eve's creation the serpent assured her that no such consequence would ensue, that in fact she would be greatly enlightened and become like the celestial beings. Both Eve and Adam succumbed to the suggestion and partook, finding too late that the serpent had lied and that in disobeying the Divine injunction

they had signed their own death-warrants. There is the story in the simplicity which has made it understandable to men of every level of intelligence and culture in every generation of history and we in this twentieth century have to relate it to our own understanding of God and his ways and ask ourselves if a more detailed picture can be discerned behind this simple outline of one forbidden tree with its tempting fruit.

More than one agnostic has enquired scoffingly why God took so serious a view of a misdemeanour which is perpetrated annually by nearly every small boy when the apples are ripe—not always waiting until they are ripe—and what kind of a God of love can He be to have made this one apparently trivial act the alleged cause of all the fearful horrors which sin and death have inflicted upon the world in all the ages since. Put like that, the critic's query is a reasonable one, and the action of God seems on the surface to be harsh and arbitrary in the extreme. One might make answer that the entire episode is represented as a test of obedience, and that Adam's disobedience in even a minor matter is sufficient to demonstrate the fact that he had disobeyed and therefore stood condemned before God. That argument was fairly conclusive a few generations ago when accepted theology viewed God as a somewhat vengeful Deity intent upon the eternal condemnation of the vast majority of his creatures, most of whom were never in the whole of life's experience to have any opportunity to hear, much less accept, the only Name in which salvation could be attained. It does not ring so convincingly today when it is realised that, so far from seeking the condemnation of men, God made men for life, to fulfil a definite function in the Creation, and that death comes only if man refuses, after full opportunity and knowledge of the issues involved, to fulfil the duty for which he is created. The eating of the forbidden fruit, or whatever was the reality behind that apparently trivial action, was something far more fundamental than an act of petty disobedience; it must have represented a deliberate repudiation and defiance of God. If we can establish a reasonable basis for relating the simple story of the Fall to such a defiance we will go far to appreciating why there were such terrible and far-reaching consequences.

Let the stage be viewed with all its scenery and its characters in position as the drama moves into action. Against the background of the fair garden of God's planting stand the two trees, each laden with fruit, the one giving righteousness and eternal

life, the other evil and eternal death. Behind the Tree of Life, but not seen on the stage, is the invisible presence of God, the Creator and giver of all good. Beside the other Tree stands in dazzling splendour a wonderfully radiant celestial being, known and worshipped in later times as the Serpent, one claiming to be the giver of life and happiness to men but in reality bringing only misery and death. Before the two trees stands Eve the first woman; Adam the first man is as yet off the stage. The woman has learned something of the mysteries and duties of life, perhaps directly from God's messenger, certainly at second hand through her husband. This new friend she has never seen before and with womanly curiosity and natural interest she listens to his rather patronising query

"Yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"

Strange that so exalted a being should seem ignorant of the basic instructions of God. Eve hastens to put him right. *"We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die"*.

The smiling lips curl scornfully and the piercing eyes look upon the woman with barely veiled amusement. *"Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods (elohim—celestial ones) knowing good and evil"*.

And she believes him! The woman believes her new-found friend rather than God who at this moment seems to be far away. She can taste of the forbidden fruit and yet avoid its effects. Her new friend has told her so and she believes him. The fruit is good for food, and it is attractive to the eyes, and now she knows that it will confer wisdom and knowledge—she hesitates no longer but steps forward, and plucks, and eats. Desirous that her husband shall share with her in this new experience, she goes to him bearing the fruit in her arms, and he, when he sees, takes also of the fruit, and eats

They look round now towards the tree, but the Serpent is gone. The sunshine has faded, and a chill wind begins to blow down from the mountains

Was it all as starkly simple as that, or was the sin that drove our first parents out of Eden and planted in their bodies the seeds of every ill and disease which has since afflicted humanity something much more fundamental? Is this part of the story strictly literal or a picturesque metaphor?

It can be strictly literal, and yet the true sin be something much more serious than the touching of a prohibited tree. Many a child's relatively

minor act of disobedience is but the outward symptom of an inward state of defiance or insubordination which itself is far more serious than the precise act that furnishes the occasion for punishment, and that the parent concerned knows perfectly well and acts accordingly. So it could well have been with Adam and Eve. The partaking of the forbidden fruit could have been a ritual act expressive of inward rebellion against God in just the same manner as Christians, partaking of the bread and wine in holy communion, memorialising their Lord's death, perform a ritual act expressive of their inward loyalty to, and communion with, their God. The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge might well have had a real and objective existence as ritual trees, the first human beings expressing their state of heart toward God according to which tree they chose.

This opens up an interesting train of thought. There has always been a close connection, not only in the Bible stories, but in all human history, between trees and worship. Before men built temples—and in places even now where men do not build temples—they set aside groves of trees, or on occasion single trees, as places where they could come to do homage to their gods. The Old Testament makes frequent reference to the "groves" where Baal and Ashtaroth and other pagan deities were worshipped in Israel. To such an extent is this true that the Hebrew word "ets" is used indiscriminately for "tree", "grove", "idol", "image", and several allied words. The idea always is that a god, an idol, an image, is produced from the trunk of a tree. There were obviously no temples, no man-made sanctuaries, in Eden, yet man must have been created with the instinct to worship, a trait which after millenniums of sin still persists. What more natural than that a special grove of trees ("tree of life" and "tree of knowledge" in Genesis might equally accurately be translated "trees" or "grove") should have been set aside by God as the place for his meeting with man and so constitute the first Divine sanctuary on earth ever to exist? Adam and Eve could go into that grove and feel that there in a very special sense they stood, like Jacob later on, at the very gate of God and gate of heaven. They might in ceremonial manner have partaken of the fruit of that grove in symbol of their continued obedience just as we today partake of the bread and wine. That would give a vital meaning to the expression "Tree of Life". It was not merely a fruit that would confer continuing life upon earth; it was a fruit which symbolised the eternal life of God given to those who kept themselves within the sustaining power of God. It has to be realised that so long as Adam and Eve remained in harmony with their Creator and the laws of their being; completely

obedient and loyal to him, they would never have known physical death; they would have lived forever into all eternity, and so under similar conditions would all their posterity. The Tree of Life could be a source of life to Adam and Eve only whilst they remained righteous before God, because all life comes from, and is sustained by, God. Later in the story, because they had eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, they were barred from the Tree of Life. They could not have both.

If then the Tree of Life was in this manner a place of ritual acknowledgment of man's dependence upon, and loyalty to, God, then logically the Tree of Knowledge could well be a similar place of ritual denial of God's claims upon man, and of avowed rebellion and disobedience against God. The expression "knowledge of good and evil" might well indicate man's acquisition of that knowledge on his own initiative and in his own way, rather than by waiting for God's revelation in God's own due time. That, at any rate, is how it has worked out. Man has learned good and evil by bitter experience; God's way would have been less painful.

An interesting light is shed on this aspect of the story from Babylonian tradition. The very ancient "*Epic of Paradise*" to which reference has already been made speaks, not of two trees in the garden, but of two temples in either of which the first man and woman could worship. The name of the one is deciphered as the "temple of the living plant," or possibly "plant of life," and the other, deciphered only with difficulty and uncertainty, appears to be a word meaning to sweep away, cut off, break in pieces, or expel. It might well be that the original form of the tradition pictured them as temples of life and death. The legend proceeds "*In the temple of 'life' he (the man) stood. In the temple of 'death' he stood, and there he sat down, and Ea (the supreme god) saw him. Laying aside his sceptre, Ea waited for the man 'Open, open' he cried at the door of the temple. 'Who art thou?' asked the man. 'I am a gardener rejoicing in the tree. I will give thee the knowledge of a god.' The man joyfully opened the door.*" The legend goes on to enumerate and name seven different plants the fruit of which man was free to eat, and then tells how man took of another fruit not included in the list. "*The man approached the 'amhara' plant; he plucked; he ate. And Aruru (the earth-goddess) pronounced a curse in the name of Ea (the supreme god). 'He shall not see life all his days but shall certainly die.'*" There is enough in this old tradition to show that it had its source in the events which are recorded in the Book of Genesis even though it had afterward become coloured and influenced by Babylonian mythology. And its likening the two trees to two temples whilst still

preserving the eating of forbidden fruit as the occasion of the death sentence is significant.

What then really was the nature of Eve's and Adam's sin? What fundamental transgression did they commit which, culminating in and signalled by, the eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, involved the sentence of death which has since rested upon the entire human race? Can any clue be gathered by considering the sins to which mankind has since been prone? Do the expressed laws of God yield any suggestion? The Ten Commandments given to Israel at Sinai enshrined the Divine standards for that nation at that time. It is interesting to notice that of those ten commandments the last six could not be broken by the first human pair for they treat of man's relationship to his fellows and the first pair had no fellows. The only sins they could commit were those against God, refusing to accord him that which is his due. Likewise if we take Jesus' interpretation of the law, only one half could be applicable to Adam and Eve. They could not love their neighbours as their own selves for there were no neighbours. They could only observe, or break, the injunction to love the Lord their God with all their heart. There remains the commission laid upon them by God at the beginning, a three-fold one. They were, first to be fruitful and multiply, using their powers to bring children into the world and populate the earth; second, till the earth and bring it into subjection, this implying that all the earth was not like the Garden but required the expenditure of labour to bring it under control; third to exercise proper dominion and control over the animals so that all creation followed an orderly and peaceful course. Failure to execute any of these commissions would involve disobedience and disloyalty to God, the violation of that basic law of later time, to love the Lord their God with all their heart. Such a refusal would surely be the most fundamental transgression of all, for it would profoundly affect the entire Divine purpose for this earth at the outset.

Suppose then that the Devil, appearing to Eve, persuaded her that there was no need to be scrupulous about observing the Divine commands, that idleness in the Garden was much to be preferred to work on the untilled lands, that the tending of the trees and crops inside the Garden was quite unnecessary the while Nature, unaided, produced sufficient for their wants, that the exercise of their powers of control over the animals was quite unnecessary since the animals had always managed tolerably well by themselves? Suppose he thus induced Eve to a renunciation of the purpose for which she had been created, and she in turn persuaded her husband to the same, the pair yielding themselves to allegiance and the

guidance of this new friend who had come to them from on high, thus consciously and deliberately disavowing their loyalty to the God they had known before? The alleged benefits for which they were induced thus to deny their Creator must have been of the lowest material kind—the pleasures of idleness and freedom from responsibility, a selfish enjoyment of the good things of the present to utter disregard of the future or the ultimate purpose of God in their creation. After all, that is largely the story of sin through the ages and men in general have shown themselves true sons of Adam in this respect. “Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom; pride, fulness of bread and abundance of idleness was in her, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.” (Ezek. 16.49). So it was with Eve. She saw that the tree was pleasant to the eyes, and good for food, and to be desired to give wisdom. All these things are appeals to the immediate selfish tastes. And the Tempter, following up his advantage, intimated that by accepting his sovereignty and guidance they would enter into the range of experience and knowledge possessed by the celestial ones of heaven—“ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”. He would enrich their lives with things God had with-held.

The terrible decision taken, Adam and Eve could no longer appear before the Tree of Life, there to partake of its fruit in symbol of their dependence upon God for continued life and as an act of worship and token of loyalty. A new master now required another and a distinct symbol of submission. They came now to the Tree of Knowledge, Eve taking the more active part, and there enacted a solemn covenant, partaking of that fruit in sacramental fashion in pledge of their allegiance and obedience to the Archangel of Evil and their rejection of God who had given them life. It was a fearful moment—surely the angels in heaven veiled their faces and God looked down in pity and sorrow. Creatures of free-will, He had made them, and given them every possible good gift along with the responsibilities He must lay upon them. They had taken the gifts and rejected the responsibilities.

With the eating of that fruit, the ritual act which sealed their decision and made them the servants of the Devil, the link of life which connected them with God snapped. The Devil had persuaded them that their life on earth could continue without God—he probably believed that himself—but he was wrong. The acceptance of sin means separation from God and the cutting off of that power flowing from him by which eternal life is possessed. After that the duration of life is measured only by the extent to which the residual vitality can keep the organism going within the general framework of

the processes of Nature. In Adam’s case it was nine hundred and thirty years, but death came eventually. And so it has come to all men since, with accelerated pace in proportion as the physical vitality of men has declined.

It is only as men and women come “into Christ” that the processes of eternal life can commence again. “Ye must be born again” said Jesus to Nicodemus, and on another occasion “He that believeth in me hath everlasting life.” The evil wrought in Eden can be nullified in the believer who comes in sincere acceptance of Christ and pledges his allegiance and loyalty to him. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus . . . for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” (Rom. 5. 1-2). The broken link is re-established: in a manner too wonderful for our human minds to comprehend, the life from God cut short by Adam’s sin commences to flow again, so that it can be truthfully said “He that hath the Son hath life . . . God hath given to us eternal life” (1 Jno. 5. 11-12). True, only a few, a fraction of earth’s millions, do thus enter into life during this present Age; Jesus himself said they would constitute but a “little flock.” That is in the Divine purpose, that a trained and qualified people might be prepared for the much more extensive and spectacular work of the next Age, the Messianic Age. Our Lord Jesus Christ, as king over all the earth, together with all who have been his faithful followers now, will conduct the last and the greatest evangelical work of all time and call all men, without exception, to repudiate sin and the Devil, come to him in repentance and contrition, give themselves in complete dedication and submission, that they too might receive that same gift of life which will make them to all eternity the loyal sons of God. Even though sin’s penalty must, at the last, be exacted from those who will not repent, and who wilfully reject Christ, it will be gloriously true that every one who can possibly be reached by the searching and all-pervading love of God through his Son Jesus Christ will have reached the standard which God has set, and will enter into life. For it must yet be that “in the name of Jesus shall every knee bow in heaven, and in earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2. 10-11.) That declaration cannot be true until all who can be reclaimed from sin have been reclaimed, and all who cannot be reclaimed have passed into that death which is the inevitable consequence of sin, so that throughout the whole of God’s creation there are none who do not live in him and for him, no conscious mind that is not at all times rendering heartfelt praise and adoration to his holy Name. There will be no

Tree of Knowledge then, for there will be neither worshippers at such a Tree nor Devil to accept such worship; the Devil is at the end cast into the lake of fire which is the Second Death (Rev. 20, 10 and 14.) There will be only the Tree of Life, to which all will come for that enduring life which is the eternal link between God and his creatures. So, in John's vision of the New Jerusalem, thrown open to the nations which are saved but into which nothing can enter which defileth or maketh a lie, there is no sign of the Tree of Knowledge and no Tempter; only the Tree of Life and the glory of God, dwelling with men. (Rev. 21, 3-6 and 22-27; Rev. 21, 1-5.)

But away back there in the days of Eden these wonders of the future were still hidden in the

unrevealed counsels of God. The first man and the first woman, standing side by side before the Tree of Knowledge, the taste of its fruit still on their palates, thought of the trust they had betrayed and the God they had disowned. There is no evidence at this moment of remorse or repentance, only of fear and apprehension. They did not seek to find a way back to God; they sought rather to flee from His presence and hide themselves that He might not find them. The story gives no ground for thinking that they were yet ready to repudiate their sin, only that they might escape its consequences. They were afraid, and to escape God they hid themselves among the trees of the garden.

To be continued

A NOTE ON EPHESIANS 4

"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace . . . till we all come in the unity of the faith . . . unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." (Eph. 4, 3-13.)

The picture in Ephesians 4 is that of Christian growth, from the condition of "babes in Christ" to that of full Christian maturity (but, even so, not the perfection of character which is to be ours beyond the Vail. Eph. 4 has to do entirely with this life and not the next.) Right at the outset the immature believers are exhorted to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" and an essential part of this "walking worthy" is the "endeavouring" to "keep the unity of the Spirit." As a help to our efforts in this connection we are reminded that there is "one Body—one Spirit—one hope of our calling—one Lord—one faith—one baptism—one God." In all of these we share equally as brethren, and we all have the same basis upon which to stand. Our abilities may and do differ, and so does our capacity for understanding the deep things of God's Word, and this will in turn affect our understanding of doctrine or modify the viewpoint we take, but "to every one of us is given grace (favour) according to the measure of the gift of Christ." He proportions his gifts according to our capacity for receiving and making use of them and as we are able to make use of more because of our growth in grace so He gives us more. Thus for the instruction and upbuilding of the one-time "babes" He has given, as the Apostle says here, "helps" of all kinds: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers; in order that these same growing Christians, having attained Christian maturity, should come *into* (margin) the unity of the faith and knowledge of Christ and so become what he calls "a complete

man, the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Now this "unity of faith" into which such a mature Christian has entered is not, as so many imagine it to be, merely a unity of assent to various points of doctrine, although an understanding of the great Bible doctrines concerning sin and death, redemption and life, the High Calling and mankind's destiny is a necessary factor in the attainment of that unity. But this "unity of the faith" is really the final fruitage of which the "unity of the spirit" is the original seed. Unity of the Spirit is based upon our fellowship with each other and our belief in Jesus and his words the unity of the faith is built upon our fellowship with God and our knowledge of him and his laws. The first can be entered into comparatively quickly, so soon as we come into Christ and meet with his people; the second is the result of long years spent in "growing up into him in all things." The one clearly is therefore a development from the other, but even when we *have* entered into the unity of the faith, and attained the full stature of a man in Christ, we are still like Paul, knowing only in part, seeing as in a glass, darkly; and the day has yet to come—and it will not come this side of the Vail—when, especially in matters of doctrine, we attain full perfection of understanding. That need not hinder our unity now; in fact, according to Eph. 4, if our unity now *is* hindered by any such consideration, if we allow ourselves to be carried hither and thither by every "wind of doctrine," never attaining, if we do not play our part in the oneness of the Body, then, implies the Apostle, we are still children. And as such we shall not inherit the Kingdom that we seek.

EZRA THE SCRIBE

*A character
Study*

It must have been a wonderful day for the Jews, exiled in the kingdoms of Babylon and Persia, when the Emperor decreed that they were to return to their own land to restore their ancient religion and culture. They were God's chosen people, having the Law and the promises given through Moses. Their restoration to the Land of Promise was a fulfilment of the Holy Scriptures (Deut. 30). In the early chapters of the Book of Ezra we are given records of how a party of exiles under the leadership of Zerubbabel returned to Jerusalem to build the Temple. It was the holy place which symbolised the Jewish faith, and its rebuilding was of paramount importance in a national religious revival. At last the shrine was built, but the city walls and Israel's national heritage remained desolate. The first flush of enthusiasm faded with the passing years until the generation which had pioneered the return of the Jews had passed away. Many of those remaining in exile were content to retain the rank and privilege of state far from their homeland, and they were either indifferent or ignorant of the plight of their countrymen in Jerusalem. It looked as if the Word of the Lord to rebuild the waste places would never come to pass.

God had not forgotten His people, either in Israel or in exile. He was preparing His servants in Babylon and Sushan for the next step forward in His purpose. One of these was Ezra, a member of the priestly family, a son of Zadok the famous High Priest in the days of David and Solomon. Hilkiah, who had been responsible for the Temple discovery of the ancient book of the Law in the days of King Josiah, was another ancestor of Ezra. Unable to fulfil his function as High Priest, Ezra turned his attention to a more careful study of the Word of God. He was evidently filled with the zeal of his forefathers. This is reflected in the early chapters of his book by his account of the return of the first exiles. He makes special mention of the "word of the Lord by the prophet Jeremiah" having been fulfilled. Later he writes of things being done according to the Law of Moses. (Ezra 3. 2; 6. 14, 18)

We have our first glimpse of the man himself, a "ready scribe in the law," in chapter 7. In verse 10 he appears to be much more than a "scribe" for it is quite evident that he was a scholar and a teacher of the Scriptures available up to that time. Through the work of Ezra the Holy Writings were arranged in the canon as we have them today, except of course for the sections which were to follow. He too was responsible for the formulation

of the synagogue worship which has been handed down the centuries. His own people and Christian believers both owe Ezra a great debt for his diligence and example in handling the Word of God. We have reason to thank God for raising up such a man.

The eighth chapter of Ezra reveals him as a man of faith. He gathered together all those who was to return to Jerusalem with him. The undertook to transport the Temple treasures, which were a most responsible task, yet they refused the protection offered by the king. Their route lay through treacherous country and they might easily have been waylaid by robbers or attacked by wild animals. However, they placed their whole trust for the perilous journey in the hands of God, and He protected and cared for them until they reached the Holy City. Here and there in this book we catch a glimpse of the sympathetic nature of a brilliant man who held high office as leader of the people. In verse 21, concerned with the safety of their travelling, he wrote of the "little ones."

When Israel entered the promised land, Moses gave them some important advice concerning the place of the Word of God in family life. We do not know if the exhortation of Deut. 6. 3-9 was heeded by the ordinary people, but it is clear that the majority soon forgot all about it and never in their history through the period of the Judges and Kings, did the Sacred Word take its rightful place in the homes of God's people. Ezra knew that successful family life was based upon the Word of God, by the regular reading and consistent application of it in the home. He also knew that mixed marriages produced divided loyalties, unhappy partnerships and little children reared in the faith and practices of the heathen. History would repeat itself over again as the people of Israel settled comfortably with the strangers of the land.

Thus we find, in chapter 9, Ezra grappling with this problem of the people of Israel not remaining separate from the heathen for the service of the Lord. He did then what we should do when faced with a communal problem: he turned to God in prayer. That is the solution of every trouble and difficulty. His prayer contained language which is strikingly similar to that of Daniel and Nehemiah. He seems to have been brought up in a similar spiritual atmosphere to them. He laid bare his heart before God and made no attempt to excuse either himself or the people. He coupled his own name with his wayward countrymen as with contrite heart he confessed their sins.

Ezra was dealing with a stubborn people and

he knew his duty. His methods may seem heartless, almost cruel. To him the trouble among the people was like a contamination of a disease and it had to be eradicated and destroyed. This rather distasteful task was not the last glimpse of the faithful scribe.

Some years after Ezra had settled in the land of Israel Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem to organise the building of the city walls. When this had been accomplished, Nehemiah as civil governor turned to Ezra, the religious leader, to read publicly from the Book of the Law, and to explain to the people the meaning of the sacred writings. The value of his earlier studies while in a foreign land now became apparent and God's wonderful purpose in his life had worked out to completion.

It is quite remarkable the way in which these two men, Ezra and Nehemiah, worked together, each in his respective office, without rivalry. God had dealt with them in different ways, and prepared their individual personalities for that place in His plan for which their training and abilities suited them. Nehemiah was a courtier of the King's palace; Ezra was an alien priest, almost unnoticed by the foreign authorities. Their reaction to the proffered military escort for the journey to Jerusalem was completely opposite. It is a lesson for our own day. We are not all fitted for the same task, nor does God reveal Himself in precisely the same manner to each of us. This is not a matter of "peaceful co-existence," but the privilege of willing co-operation. We lose much in our character development and service for God if we fail to work together with those whom God has designed to be our colleagues in his work, even though they may appear very different from us from a human viewpoint.

In his day Nehemiah was the great statesman and the man of outstanding leadership who had done so much for the rebuilding of his nation. The great wall of the city was to stand through many years as a monument to his courage and enterprise. But that wall was one day to crumble in the dust. Ezra the scribe would appear less prominent and awesome than the governor of the city. Yet our records of Ezra are much greater. Not only did he prepare our canon of Scripture and set in order the service of Divine worship, but he wrote the hundred and nineteenth Psalm as from his heart there flowed joy and praise of the Word of God. That had been the source of his strength and comfort during the long years of waiting for God's command to move forward. It was the guiding star along the weary miles until he reached the place where he became the great teacher in Israel. He placed God's Book in its rightful place in the nation; the centre of public worship, of family life and of private meditation.

From the scrolls and parchments came light when all seemed darkness. He saw how Moses, the man of God, had brought Israel to birth, borne with their grumbling, led them patiently forward to the Land of Promise. Following the example of the great prophet of Israel, Ezra too was able to witness the successful conclusion of an enterprise in obedience to the Word of God.

However small or however great may be our part in the Divine Purpose, we can learn from the "ready scribe in the law of Moses" in that we are diligent in the Word of God. This is the starting point of any true revival, in the individual heart and the collective fellowship. Ezra is an example of patient waiting, not in idleness or grumbling, but in useful preparation and eager anticipation until it is God's time to move forward. Nor may such progress proceed in the manner or by the means we imagined. Let us be assured that God does advance in his own majestic way, and that those who wait upon him are not disappointed. Thus may we sing with Ezra, "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.*" (Psalm 119. 105).

Word from the Past

"As I was paying heed to what was profitable, some writings came into my hands which were too old for Greek ideas, and too divine for Greek errors. Thus was my soul instructed by God, and I understood how pagan teachings lead to condemnation, whilst these teachings abolish the bondage that prevails throughout the world, and free us from a plurality of rulers and tyrants innumerable. They furnish us not with something which we had not already received, but with something which, thanks to errors, had been lost."

Thus wrote Tatian, an Assyrian, and one of the most brilliant pagans of the second century, speaking of his conversion to Christianity. It is worthy of note that, coming to the Old Testament (the writings to which he refers above) and the teachings of the Christian church, he realised how different were these principles from the Greek philosophy which held premier place in the world of that day, and, too, that acceptance of this new way of life brings freedom from the bondage which is upon men. Said Jesus: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"; and again, "If the Son shall make you free, then shall ye be free indeed." There was not much liberty in the Roman world, and that freedom in Christ which is the portion of all who become His by full surrender to His way of life stood out in sharp contrast to the condition of those who still sat "in darkness and the shadow of death."

“HE THAT HATH NO SWORD” *Short study on a debated text*

“He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one”? (Luke 22. 36).

Could Jesus have intended his disciples to acquire and carry swords for offensive purposes? The answer is clearly “No”. His whole teaching militates against that suggestion. The Christian way is one of peace, and our warfare, as Paul says, is “not with carnal weapons”. When before Pilate a few hours later, Jesus said “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, but now is my kingdom not from hence” (i.e., not based upon the principles or methods of this world).

Was the injunction to the end that He might be successfully defended in the Garden, and rescued from those who were coming to arrest him? Again, no! He went there willingly, knowing that He was going to arrest and death. It was for that purpose He had come into the world. When Peter did use his sword in a vain attempt at rescue, Jesus commanded him “Put up thy sword again into its place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”

Could the swords have been recommended for the disciples’ own defence in later days? There may be more reason to stop and consider this, in the light of the words of Jesus which led up to the exhortation in question. “When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, ‘Nothing’. Then said he unto them ‘But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip; and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one’”. Did this mean that the Divine care that had provided for their wants when they went out two by two to evangelise the villages of Israel was now to be withdrawn and henceforth they must rely upon their own effort for sustenance and safety? If so, this would seem to be a strange reversal of the Divine way, and moreover is not borne out by the disciples’ later lives. So far as their history is recorded they were always dependent upon God for their needs. With respect to personal safety there is no indication anywhere that they ever used the sword for defence against human enemies; on the contrary, they were assured that they must be afflicted, persecuted, imprisoned and even in some cases put to death for his Name’s sake, and all of this they were to endure that they might win the promised crown of life. There is no thought of using physical means of defence here.

But the answer must lie in the comparison made by Jesus “When I sent you . . . But now”. When they went out as evangelists it was to the com-

paratively settled and peaceful villages and towns of Judea and Galilee, where they could go from place to place without encountering wild beasts or other wayside perils. At nightfall they would reasonably expect to find refreshment and lodging from their fellow-Jews and go on their way in the morning. That kind of hospitality was a binding custom on all at that time. But after Jesus’ death they were to travel to distant lands across waste and desolate country, where food would not be easy to obtain, nor hospitality from those of like mind. A scrip to carry reasonable provision, and a purse to carry the small amount necessary for daily expenses, would be requisite. Wild beasts—wolves, jackals, hyenas, lions, all common in Western Asia outside the inhabited districts—would constitute a menace, and in days when there were no such things as guns, the sword was the only defensive weapon against such. Travellers carried them habitually for such purposes.

It might be, then, that the words of Jesus were intended as an intimation of the mission that lay before them, the scrip, the purse and the sword being cited as symbols of the nature of their future experiences. No longer was their life’s work to be a simple pastoral ministry in the homeland of Israel, but a vigorous missionary work, amid unknown peoples and unimagined perils, in strange lands and places, to the uttermost parts of the earth.

“And they said unto him ‘Lord, here are two swords’. And he said unto them ‘It is enough’”. He realised, perhaps, that they had failed to grasp his meaning, and were thinking only in terms of immediate defence from the danger that threatened him at that time. And as far as that was concerned, two swords were enough—enough for him to refuse their aid at the critical moment and drive home for all time the lessons He was trying to teach them. After his death and ascension, perhaps, the disciples realised as they did not realise earlier how woefully they had misunderstood him on that fateful evening.

“Great havoc is said to have been occasioned in Eden when man’s first sinful parents knew that they were naked, but almost greater havoc seems to have been occasioned right through history through the devil drawing the attention of the righteous to the fact that they were clothed with righteousness.—

Rev. Paul Gliddon

THE TRAGEDY OF SAMSON

The story of
a great failure

2. Daughter of the Philistines

"And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up and told his father and his mother, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore get her for me to wife" (Jud. 14. 1-2.)

Easy-going, casual words, but in one moment they destroyed a father's pride and a mother's hopes. That their son, dedicated to the Lord from his birth, marked out for Divine service and Divine honours, pre-ordained to deliver Israel from the Philistines, should deny all the high ideals inculcated in him from childhood, by choosing for his wife a woman of the godless aliens, must have caused heartbreak to his parents and consternation throughout Zorah. Where now were all the golden expectations of freedom from servitude and restoration of racial pride and dignity. Their champion had failed them; their idol had feet of clay. "Is there not a woman of the families of Israel, that thou takest a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" expostulated his father bitterly. Samson only replied indifferently, "Get her for me, for she pleaseth me well." There is all the arrogance and self-confidence of inexperienced youth in that remark.

It need not be thought that Samson was either repudiating his Divine calling nor even consciously violating his obligations as a Nazarite. The trouble ran much deeper than that. All the evidence goes to show that Samson interpreted his commission in terms of his own physical strength bestowed by God, and believed that his personal relationship to God was of no consequence provided he made use of his physical powers to inflict as much damage upon the Philistines as he could. Samson is the perfect example of the natural man who perceives not the things of the Spirit of God even though he pay God lip service and believe himself to be a favoured one of God. The obligations of the Mosaic Law and of the Nazarite's vow meant nothing to Samson the while he could go out and kill Philistines for God. It was only when the natural strength failed him and he was brought low in suffering that his mind became ennobled to better things. But at this time in his life that sequel lay far in the distant future.

Timnath was a village some six or seven miles from Zorah, lying just inside the boundaries of the tribe of Judah and only a mile or so from the Philistine frontier. It evidently had a joint Hebrew-Philistine population and mixed marriages were probably not at all uncommon, despite the pro-

hibitions of the Law Covenant against such unions. Samson must have known the village well and some of his boyhood friends would have been Timnathites. The athletic figure of the Hebrew youth, his flowing locks and keen, clear eyes, would make him attractive in the eyes of all the village maidens and even a Philistine father would not object to a match with a man of such known prowess. So the marriage was arranged. With heavy heart, assuredly, Manahem performed the distasteful task, demanded by the custom of the day, of consulting with the Philistine father of the girl and agreeing upon the details of her dowry, the guarantees and assurances necessary on behalf of his son, and all the arrangements which had to be made before the union could become effective. This to the Hebrews was the real marriage, after which the bride remained at her father's house for a period of months before her husband came to take her to her new home. This part of the arrangement did not conform to Philistine custom and probably that fact was partly responsible for the sequel.

So it came about that within a little while Samson was striding along the narrow track which led from Zorah to Timnath, on the way to finalise the contract with the woman who had taken his fancy. Canaan was a fertile and tree-clad country in those days, and the wilder parts between centres of habitation harboured many wild animals, some of them dangerous to man, so that Samson may not have been altogether surprised at the sudden appearance, on the pathway before him, of a lion. The beast was probably the more frightened. The narrative says, "A young lion roared against him"—the prelude to its crouching for a spring. Samson, confident in his strength and agility, waited for the leap. As it came, he adroitly sidestepped and in a lightning flash got behind and above the animal, his hands round its throat, taking care to keep out of the way of its flailing limbs, bending its neck backward until he had throttled its life out of existence. With, perhaps, a gesture of contempt, he flung the lifeless body by, the wayside and strode on his way, revelling afresh in his strength and probably praising God for his victory. The account says that the Spirit of God came upon him to do this thing; we have to remember that there were no eye-witnesses so the account of the incident had in the first place to come from Samson himself. He must have accredited his power and deliverance to the Spirit of God and this would be in all sincerity. He did believe that God was giving him

this physical strength in every time of need and the chronicler of the story would repeat Samson's assertion in all good faith. And who, reading the entire story and viewing the life of Samson in relation to the onward development of God's purposes, can doubt that the Holy Spirit did indeed give him strength above that of most men that he might work out the destiny planned for him, even though in the end he failed to make of it all that could have been had he been less a slave to his own fleshly passions?

The period of waiting ended, Samson again took the path to Timnath to claim his bride. It seems to have been an unusually casual proceeding for a son of Israel. As a rule this was the festive occasion on which the bride waited with her maidens for the coming of the bridegroom, and that fortunate man set out accompanied by all his men friends, and with every manifestation of rejoicing and merriment, to bring his bride back to her new home. On this occasion it is evident that Samson set out by himself, and that his parents must have preceded him. Perhaps the marriage was not too popular in Zorah and his friends wanted nothing to do with it. When the feast finally was held it was at the bride's house and not the bridegroom's, and the companions of the bridegroom turned out to be Philistine men friends of the bride, facts which are significant. The casual nature of the whole proceeding is heightened by the fact that Samson, on his way to his bride, found time to turn aside to look for the carcass of the lion he had slain some months previously when last he had passed this way. He found the skeleton—the flesh would have been completely consumed by vultures within a very few hours of death—and in the skeleton a colony of bees. Without ado he scooped out the honey with his hands, *"and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave to them, and they did eat; but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion."*

They would not have eaten had he told them. Staunch supporters of the Law, they knew better than to eat that which was defiled by association with the remains of the dead. Samson committed two further breaches of his Nazarite vows in this incident. He defiled himself by touching the dead carcass, and he partook of that which was defiled in the Law as "strong drink," i.e., anything fermented. The ancients used honey as a means of producing fermented liquors. For so paltry an immediate attraction as a mouthful of honey he ignored his obligation to God. There is a strong likeness between Samson and Esau. Esau also insisted on marrying alien women and sold his birthright for the present satisfaction of a mess of pottage.

The wedding feast proceeded, but the outcome was disastrous. Thirty full-blooded Philistine youths drinking Samson's wine almost certainly spelt trouble, and trouble was not long in coming. Samson, probably himself flushed with wine, challenged the thirty to a tussle of wits. He would propound a conundrum, a "riddle" as the Authorised Version has it, the loser paying to the winner thirty mantles ("sheets" in the Authorised Version), and thirty sets of inner garments. The youths accepted the challenge, and Samson, remembering his finding the honey in the lion's carcass, gave them *"out of the eater came forth food" ("meat" in the Authorised Version) and out of the strong came forth sweetness.* It would seem to us a particularly difficult conundrum for anyone completely unfamiliar with the circumstances to solve; probably, however, the solution was arrived at by a series of replies to eliminating questions, after the fashion of some modern party games. This, however, was no party game. These Philistine youths had no intention of being on the losing side, and when after three days they were still as far off the solution as ever they determined on more drastic steps.

This feast was a most elaborate affair. It was apparently designed to continue for seven days. The impropriety of such a period of conviviality with the people he had been commissioned from birth to oppose and fight, and if necessary destroy in order to deliver Israel, apparently had not entered Samson's mind. These men, Philistines or not, had come to celebrate his wedding and he intended to see that it was well and truly celebrated. And so he awaited in genial equanimity the thirty mantles and sets of inner garments, the price of their failure to guess his riddle.

Samson's newly married wife, however, was in a predicament. Her erstwhile friends had threatened her with the burning down of her father's house with her inside it unless she obtained the answer to the riddle and imparted it to them. It does not appear that she had sufficient confidence in Samson's ability to handle the matter to tell him of the threat; rather she used her woman's wiles—accompanied, according to the narrative, by floods of tears—until the hero's patience gave out and he told her the secret. After that, of course, it was all plain sailing. On the seventh day the Philistine youths triumphantly returned answer to Samson, *"What is sweeter than honey, and what is stronger than a lion?"* Samson knew how they had obtained the solution but there was nothing he could do about it. He contented himself with the contemptuous retort, *"If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle."*

There remained the matter of the thirty mantles and sets of inner garments. It is sad to relate of a

man professedly dedicated to God that this presented no problem. Samson went down to the Philistine town of Ashkelon, some thirty miles away on the sea coast and deep in Philistine territory. There, by means not recorded, he surprised and murdered thirty Philistine men, stole their garments and came back to Timnath to pay his debt.

Cold with anger, Samson returned to Zorah with his parents, leaving his Philistine wife in her father's house. At that moment he had finished with her; he never wanted to see her again. This was not the triumphant home-coming he had planned. It is not likely that his feelings were those of a man betrayed by one he loved; more likely they were those of wounded pride. His insulting reference to his newly married wife as "my heifer" shows that he had little genuine respect or love for the girl; more likely her appeal was purely to the animal passions, and now the fever had passed and he was morose and resentful. Accustomed as he was to admiration and hero-worship from the circle in which he had grown up, he now had been slighted in the very quarter from which he least expected it, and he was coldly furious.

What could have been the feelings of the older couple, trudging along wearily behind him? What had become of all the golden dreams which had coloured their up-bringing of this child of promise? How could they now expect this son of theirs to become a saviour in Israel, a champion of the people of God, going out in the power of the Holy Spirit to overthrow the enemies of the chosen people, restore the safety and prosperity of a covenant-keeping nation, and so enable its God-given destiny to be fulfilled. Rioting, gluttony, drunkenness, theft and murder; these were the fruits of Samson's wedding feast; these were embedded into the character of the man of whom it had been predicted before his birth, "*He shall be a Nazarite unto God*"; "*He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines.*" And when the two arrived home and the full story of the week's disastrous happenings had been made known in Zorah, many there must have been who mourned for their fallen idol; many who uttered in their hearts, as long-cherished hopes faded, the oft-repeated plaint, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

Manoah and his wife were not the only saintly couple whose devoted training of a loved child in the things of God seems in later days to have been wholly fruitless, when that child, grown to maturity, has turned aside into lawless or godless ways. So many have asked, in all sincerity, "How can such things be?" What was wrong with the early training that it proved unable to hold the one so instructed throughout life? Many disap-

pointed parents have been plunged into the depths of despair because of some such outcome to their efforts. The fault does not usually lie in any inadequacy of training; the root cause goes much deeper. It lies in the well-nigh overwhelming power of Adamic sin. There is no answer to these problems unless the doctrine of the Fall is accepted with all its implications. "*As by one man sin entered, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*" The accumulated effect of all mankind's sin from the beginning lies inherent in every man born into the world. Every child starts life under this handicap. Our Adversary the Devil remains vigilant and active, ever seeking to maintain and increase the content of the world's sin. Is it to be wondered at that in many cases the earnest endeavours of the best parents just fails entirely to offset that inherited poison and eventually some external chain of circumstances tips the balance sufficiently to set the unhappy individual upon the downward track. In Samson's case it was a pretty face which started him on the road to ruin; in countless other instances it has been one or another of the varied aspects of those three cardinal influences, the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Behind it all has been the dread influence of the god of this world, blinding the minds of those who believe not.

But just as the seed of evil, sown in past generations, comes to its fruitage, so must the seed of righteousness, sown in prayer and faith by godly parents, bear fruit one day. God is not mocked, and God is all-powerful. We do not understand all God's secrets, and our knowledge of his purposes is at the best immature. We do know that God desires not the death of the sinner, but rather that he may turn from his evil ways, and live. There is much in the prophetic Scriptures which speaks of a Day of righteousness in which, under the righteous rule of Christ, returned to earth in power and glory, the Devil will be bound that he might deceive the nations no more, and all men walk in the light of Christ's Kingdom to learn of righteousness and the call to become reconciled to God. Is it too much to expect that in some wonderful manner God, who knows the secrets of all men, will extend to all the Samsons of every age in whose hearts resides the slightest possibility of repentance, the opportunity to turn again from their evil and accept in sincerity the Christ whom once they knew, and from whom in ignorance and under the handicap of Adamic taint they turned away? Let every parent who mourns a son or daughter at present thus lost take comfort from the Scriptural truth that God is not less merciful than our own hearts, that his love for the erring one is not less than is ours, and that He will by

no means loose his hold until in his own infinite wisdom He sees that all hope and possibility of repentance is dead. It was Dr. Paterson Smyth many years ago who suggested that it may take the supreme crisis of physical death eventually to awaken some wayward ones to the evil of sin and the goodness of God, and who can doubt that repentance in such circumstances, as in the story of the prodigal son, would find the Father ready to come out and meet the lost and returning one?

But here in the story, Samson is farther away

from God than ever. Of what use to say that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, when the only result was to nerve and strengthen him to great physical feats but never to reach his heart. Until then he could in no sense of the word be God's man. So he returned to Zorah, a disappointed, frustrated, vengeful man, consumed only with the desire to execute further retaliation upon the authors of his wounded feelings.

To be continued

THREE WORLDS

Here is an interesting extract showing how the Scriptural thesis of the "three worlds" was understood and propounded as far back as the year 1806.

Francis Lambert, a Roman Catholic ecclesiastic of some eminence, was born in France about the beginning of the eighteenth century. He was the author of a work on the prophecies, which was first published in Paris, 1806. On the phrase "end of the world," he writes: "In order that we might rightly understand what the Holy Scriptures announce concerning the destruction of the ungodly, and the punishments which are to fall upon apostate Gentiles, we must distinguish the great judgments of God, which are the consummation of three periods which the Scriptures call worlds. The first of these worlds commenced at the Creation, and was ended by the Deluge, which is the first universal judgment pronounced by the Creator against all flesh. Peter calls this first world 'the world that then was,' or the old world. The second world commenced when Noah left the ark with his family to re-people the earth. It comprehends the time from Noah to Moses, before the Law—from Moses and the giving of the Law to the Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that which shall elapse from thence till the reprobation of the Gentiles, and the return of the Jewish people—that is, the time which shall intervene between the First and Second Advents of our Lord. This second period, or rather the last portion of it, is often called by the sacred writers 'the last times'—the last days. It was in reference to this corrupted world (or age) our Lord said to Pilate: 'My kingdom is not of this world.' In fact, it will not be until the third world, or 'the world to come,' as Paul calls it, that the kingdom of the Messiah, so often spoken of in the Scriptures, will be established. This second world, which still continues, will be ended by a judgment which is called by Malachi 'the great and terrible day of the Lord.' Then the Lord will 'shake the heavens and the earth'—or, as it is immediately explained,

'will overthrow the throne of kingdoms.' (Hag. 2, 21.) In fine, the third world, which is yet future, is that which the Apostle calls 'the world to come'; or (Gr.) 'the habitable earth to come.' (Heb. 2, 5.)" (*Taylor's "Reign of Christ on Earth," p. 284.*)

Thy King Cometh

This comment upon a very well-known text was written by George Gilfillan (born 1813, died 1878) a writer who became minister of School Wynd Church, Dundee. The illustration is one that brings vividly before the mind our own position as "men that wait for their Lord" (Luke 12, 36).

"'This Gospel of the Kingdom' I am told in Matthew, 'shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come'. I never read these words without remembering a spectacle which I, in common with thousands of others, saw, and which none that saw it can ever forget. It was when Her Majesty, the Queen, (*Queen Victoria; Ed.*) visited the Scottish metropolis in 1842. Scarcely had the twilight darkened into night, than from every hill surrounding that most magnificent of cities, there seemed to rise simultaneously a crest of fire. Each mountain lifted up into his hand a torch; and from Berwick to Fife, and Fife to Stirling, the great Firth was at once illuminated. It was a witness, a token to the land that its sovereign was near. It was a token, too, to the approaching vessel, far out at sea, that all was ready for her reception; that loyalty had gushed out into these flaming signals. Thus, when the Gospel beacons, from California to Japan, are fully lit, it will be a witness, a token to earth, that the end is approaching, and a signal to heaven for the preparation of the chariot, the harnessing of the steeds, the furbishing of the thunderbolts, the gathering together of all the elements, the witnesses, and the victims, of that great day of God Almighty. Our part, meanwhile, is surely to go forward, and to light up from land to land the signals for this great and blessed Advent."

"AND MORE THAN THAT"

A study in
Ephesians 3

Careful students of Paul's letter to the Ephesians are prone to remark with wonder the majestic nature of the language employed in the attempt to fit the things of God into the words of men. There is far too much of this lofty thought throughout the whole Epistle to be dealt with in this article—for indeed, a whole series of articles could not scale all the heights or sound all the depths which our beloved brother Paul wrote into it.

Our attention at this time will be given to some three or four of these massive thoughts, though we know that even then the half will not be told.

The first point for our consideration is in Chapter 3, 8, where Paul speaks of the *unsearchable* riches of Christ. "*Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.*" The word that is translated "unsearchable" is a word that has baffled all translators, for no translation has yet set forth the whole thought as expressed by Paul. Moffatt renders the phrase "the fathomless wealth of Christ," while Weymouth has the "exhaustless wealth of Christ." Rotherham translates it "the untraceable riches of Christ," and the Diaglott, "the boundless wealth of Christ." Even the Concordant Version fails to translate this word accurately, for if, as this version says, the wealth of Christ is "untraceable," what purpose could have been served by Paul's ministry? How could he inform the Gentiles of wealth which was untraceable? Does not the fact that he was charged with this mission to the Gentiles require that the subject of his ministry should be apprehensible, and therefore in some degree "traceable"?

The precise meaning of the Greek here is "that which cannot be measured out with the foot." The situation that this phrase brings to mind is that of some young worthy nobleman, newly come into a vast inheritance, despatching his trusty steward to "ride the boundaries," and survey the wealth of the estate. Furlong by furlong, "stade" after "stade," day after day, he goes, and yet the end seems as far away as ever. The time fails him to "measure it out by the foot"—yet with every passing step he is tracing out its dimensions, or estimating something of its buried wealth. He could report back that he had traversed a thousand stadii, but there was "more than that."

And that is precisely Paul's thought here. As the Steward of the Lord he was tracing out the length and breadth of the Lord's inheritance, and surveying its intrinsic wealth, yet there was always "more than that." He had never said the last word about

it, at any time. No matter how he enthused about the Master's inheritance, there was always more to say—always "more than that." And for the saint, who, in thought, traversed with Paul, the wide reaches of the Lord's heavenly estate, there was always some present satisfaction and enjoyment as they pressed along their track, but they never reached its end—there was always more to come. Thus when we "trace it out," the track will have no end, and therefore we will not be able to "measure it out with the foot." We *may* measure it day by day, but we shall not be able to "measure it out"—it is too great for that.

Our next point is in verse 10, where Paul speaks of "the manifold wisdom of God" . . . "*to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the Church the manifold wisdom of God.*" This is a wonderful statement, and merits more attention than can now be accorded to it. The word translated "manifold" or "diversified" has to do with a range of colours—as, for instance, the spectrum effect when light is passed through a crystal prism.

The student of geology also sees this colour range as he views some rock specimen under a beam of polarised light. Among its components may be seen the sparkling green of its olivine, the dark brown of its hornblende, the flashing red of its haematite, the shining silver of its felspar. Occasionally a specimen of more diverse and complex composition may be on the slide, and as he views the richly variegated colouring he is taught to call it "*poikilitic*." This is the very word used by Paul—the "*poikilitic*" wisdom of God; yet that is not all that Paul has to say—to emphasise this variegated wisdom of God he adds another word by way of prefix and calls it "the *poly-poikilitic* wisdom of God"—the "*much variegated* wisdom of God."

We are told that colour-makers, working with the elements now available can produce and distinguish no less than ten thousand shades and hues within the range of the visible bands of the spectroscope. Not every eye would be capable of distinguishing the slight degrees of light or shade in this vast range of colour, but to the experienced eye this range would indeed be a "*poly-poikilitic*" one.

To the angelic hosts watching with intense eagerness the expression of the Wisdom of God as it reveals itself in the experiences of the Church, the wide scope, added to the manifold variety, of

their Providential leadings, day by day, can be well compared to this colossal range of ten thousand hues and shades. God's dealings take each child just as he is, each different child being the subject of a different mode of leading and development; each different child being the object towards which a different facet of Divine Wisdom is directed, so that its full individuality may be developed to its fullest possibility.

Since our "*poly-poikilitic*" range is limited to ten thousand hues and shades all we can say (let the angels say what they will) is that the Wisdom of our God has ten thousand hues and shades—and more than that! Here is a Wisdom equal to every emergency and every experience the long age through, in the lives of every one who will constitute the Church of God.

The next point of our survey is found in verses 18 and 19—"the love that surpasses knowledge." Here is a wonderful galaxy of words indeed. "Breadth," "length," "height," "depth" . . . the love . . . which passes knowledge . . . filled with all the fullness of God." Behind the "*poly-poikilitic*" Wisdom of God lies a love which outstrips all the range of our finite ken—which overleaps the utmost bounds of our present comprehension.

It is related that Nansen, the Arctic explorer, having one day bored through the ice, let down his sounding-line into the waters beneath the ice-cap. Down and down it went, but did not touch bottom. Another line was added, and another, until all the lines in the ship were tied together and let down—but even then they failed to reach the ocean bed. When writing up the records of that day, Nansen wrote, "*3,500 fathoms . . . and deeper than that.*" That is exactly Paul's thought about the Love of God. It is the full measure of man's necessity—and greater than that! How much more none can ever know. Words just break down when contemplating a Love like that! When our sounding-lines have reached their utmost depth in the hearts and lives of men, all we can say is—in Nansen's words—"3,500 fathoms, and more than that"!

Our final point is in verse 20—"above all we can ask or think . . ." Here the Apostle's words seem to fail him completely, as writing in the most highly inflected language of the ancient world, he tries to commit to the parchment the things which his illumined eyes could see. He piles up word on word, idea upon idea in his enthused attempt to utter what he knows. Now his theme is Power—after Wisdom and Love comes Power. It is a power that is "able to DO—able to do above what we ask—abundantly above what we ask—*exceeding* abundantly above what we ask—and then as though realising that the tongue may be less

accomplished than the brain, he adds as a last attempt to state the impossible, "able to do exceeding abundantly above what we can . . . think." And with that our attempts at understanding reach their boundaries, and we can only say "all that we can ask or think—and more than that"! And having reached that point, heart and mind and soul can only bow in reverent silence before the wealth of Grace in Christ Jesus our Lord, before the infinite resources of Manifold wisdom, before the illimitable heights and depths of Love Divine, and before the all-prevailing power of him who is the glorious Author of it all.

To the mind of Paul life's journey was an increasing panorama of wonder—of things to be wondered at. The daily Providences of God in his life; the widening vistas of the great Divine Plan as it unfolded through the centuries, were things that enthused him with wonder upon wonder, and gave to his lips and pen these glowing phrases, these vaulting ideas, and these thrilling powers of holy imagination and understanding in the Way of the Lord.

Paul could rejoice in that Christ Jesus gave himself a Ransom for all, but it revealed the very floods of joy when he could say, "He loved me, and gave himself for me."

Children with "wonder" minds can always see much more in life than those who are coldly calculating in their approach to things. Children of God with "wonder" minds can always see in these glowing words and thoughts of Paul more than those who are coldly statistical in their definitions of truth. These glowing words were a transcript from Paul's own experience. It was both fact and action in his own life and character before it found its way to his manuscript, and because he lived intensely with his Lord, his pen could write with an intense intimacy about those things he received from his Lord, and which he strove so enthusiastically to write for his friends.

"If you become his man," said one old saint to an early British king, "you will come upon wonder upon wonder in his call—and every wonder true."

And that goes for us too.

Each point dealt with foregoing could well have been the subject for a complete article and even then the half not have been told. Let each brother or sister as they read, try to fill out each point for themselves, and then, when the contemplation is complete, say—"and more than that."

"In the past we have suffered from theologians who have lacked the spirit of evangelism, and evangelists who could have done with a little more theology."

Rev. Percy Sowerby in a broadcast talk.



Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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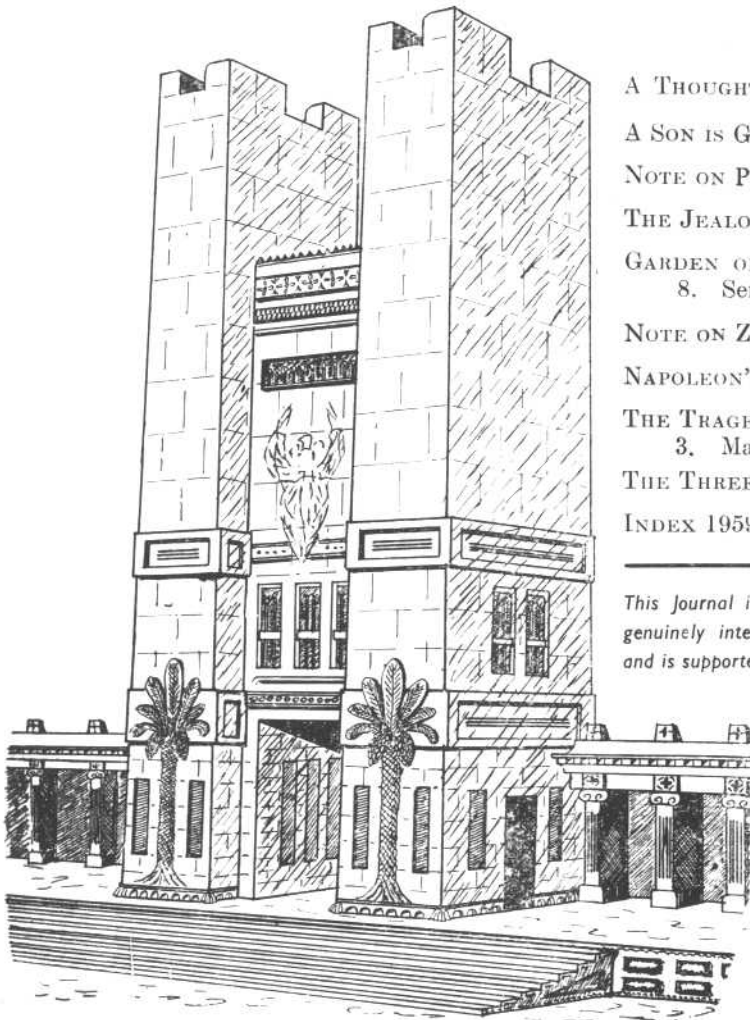
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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A Thought for the Month

"I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for thou, Lord, only, makest me dwell in safety." (Psa. 4. 8).

The latest refinement of this bizarre civilisation of ours is a magnetic tape which, placed on a tape recorder at one's bedside and switched on at bedtime, induces sleep by auto-suggestion. This is hailed as a great advance in the art of living; the insomnia induced by the stress and strain of the day is charmed away by a seductive voice encouraging the relaxation, first, of the limbs and muscles, then the mind, finally telling the subject that he is now completely relaxed and can go to sleep. At two guineas a time the purveyors of this particular attempt to alleviate the ills of suffering humanity are likely to do well. Whether the sleepless ones will do so well is another matter, for here, as in so many modern similar devices, the treatment does not get down to the cause; it aims only at dealing with the effect.

In this increasingly materially minded world, where money, possessions and influence are the well-nigh universal gods at the shrines of which nearly all men worship, and the high purpose for which man was created is almost forgotten, it is well sometimes to look back upon those earlier days when men did consciously recognise the necessity of keeping God in their lives. The serenity and tranquillity of heart and mind which a firm and convinced faith in God produces in the life is something which cannot be imitated or produced by any other means whatever. *"In him we live, and move, and have our being"* said St. Paul on one notable occasion, and it is only as we do live and move in God that we can even begin to approach to the fulness of normal human life. The individual who tries to live without God—and the majority, unhappily, are like that to-day—is less than human. Though he masters the secrets of Nature and wings his way to the distant stars

he will still be sub-human while he is without God, and he will die eventually because none can live forever without God Who is the source of all enduring life. The ills that afflict men's minds to-day, ills on a scale never before known, is evidence of that.

The Psalmist in this Fourth Psalm knew this secret. His appraisal of the relative merits of God's gifts and man's achievements would find scant agreement to-day but it is as true to-day as it was then. *"Thou hast put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and corn abound"*. That is how the R.S.V. renders Psa. 4. 3 and that is why in the following verse the Psalmist talks of the quietude with which he lays himself down to sleep. *"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee"* (Isa. 26. 3). At this Christmas season we do well to remember that there is at the very core of the Christian faith a peace and confidence that is more effective and powerful by far than anything else in all the world. Not for nothing was it proclaimed that the Child in that manger two thousand years ago should be called the "Prince of Peace".

Attention is drawn to the index on the last page of this issue. Should any new readers desire copies of back issues containing any item which specially interests them we will gladly send any such issues on request; it is only necessary to mention the page numbers of the article concerned and the appropriate issues will be sent within a few days.

Gone from us

Sis. L. Woods (*Anerley*)
Bro. H. Crosby (*Bath*)

"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away."

A SON IS GIVEN

A Christmas
Discourse

"For unto a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder." (Isa. 9. 6).

Long centuries before Jesus was born, and Christmas became a Christian festival, the peoples of Bible lands—Assyria, Babylonia, Canaan—made the end of December a time of celebration and rejoicing. It marked the change of shortening days and the turning of the sun to climb higher in the heavens; it gave promise of ripening crops and the joys of harvest. The ancient Babylonians used to drag their Yule logs into their homes on what corresponds to our Christmas Eve and consume them by fire; the following morning they decked with gifts the Tree of Life which they pretended in symbol had grown from the ashes of the dead log—the prototype of our "Christmas tree"—thus, said they, would life come out of death, in due time, by the favour of the gods.

Where did they get that tradition from, tradition so strangely true to fact? Was there some lingering memory of the true faith once held and taught by their common father Noah, their racial ancestors Shem, Ham and Japheth, the patriarchs of their families like Peleg and Heber? It would almost seem so! For it is true that out of the ashes of death will come new life; that after the destruction of the dead wood of this world there will arise a Tree of Life whose fruit shall be for food to mankind and whose leaves shall be for the healing of the nations, rich gifts indeed for the sons of men, in that greatest of all Christmas festivals when the Kingdom of light and life has succeeded upon the ending of this world of darkness and death.

Isaiah had something of this in mind when he saw the vision of the Great Light. Like so many of the prophets' revelations, he viewed this representation of things to come against the background of his own day. There is a temptation to read the thrilling passage "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," as though it were a completely disjointed piece of revelation sandwiched unthinkingly into a passage dealing with the local troubles of Israel in the prophet's own day having nothing to do with the subject of the Kingdom. That is not so; chapters 7 to 12 of Isaiah's prophecy comprise one complete and harmonious presentation of Millennial truth in which the

vision of the Everlasting Father finds its proper place. And in order to understand the full harmony that exists between these wonderful chapters we must endeavour to put ourselves in the prophet's place and look at them through his eyes.

The story starts with Isaiah's seventh chapter. Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, King of Israel the "ten-tribe" kingdom, have joined together to attack Judah, the "two-tribe" kingdom of which Ahaz was the apostate king. They have besieged Jerusalem, but the Lord has not as yet suffered them to take it. The people of Judah are nevertheless greatly afraid, for they have long since abandoned their faith in God and they know not where to turn for help.

This is Isaiah's opportunity. At the bidding of the Lord he goes forth to meet Ahaz and give him an assurance that the Lord is going to defend Jerusalem—for his own name's sake; certainly not on account of any piety or faith on the part of the wicked king. It is in the Lord's plan that very shortly the ten tribes shall be taken into captivity. But Ahaz does not believe; he does not want to believe. "*If ye will not believe,*" says Isaiah, "*surely ye shall not be established*". Therefore a second word came to Ahaz. "*Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God,*" commands Isaiah. But Ahaz said, "*I will not ask, neither will I prove the Lord*". His rebellion is deliberate and calculated; it cannot be excused. Therefore the message of condemnation, already given to the ten-tribe kingdom, is given also to the two-tribe kingdom. A young woman shall bear a son, and call his name Immanuel. That son is the sign; before that child has grown to youthful maturity, Assyria shall have desolated Samaria and ravaged Judah. Ten-tribes, and some from among the two-tribes, shall have gone into captivity for their sins. The seventh and eighth chapters trace the sad history of that terrible time of disaster which culminated in the complete triumph of the invading Assyrian hosts; the people, said Isaiah, would finally look into the earth, "*and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness*".

Now these were not just empty words, spoken by the prophet after the manner of a gramophone record. Isaiah, inspired as he was

by the Holy Spirit, was seeing these things, future though they were, and he described what he saw. His prophetic vision showed him the grim Assyrian warriors marching through the land, and fleeing multitudes pressing on brokenly before them. He saw the deeds of violence, the slaughter of helpless captives, the brutal treatment of women and children, the burning villages, the desolated vineyards and pastures, the clear Judean skies clouded and darkened by drifting smoke. As he gazed upon that dread scene his prophetic vision sharpened, and in the spirit of his mind he was carried over nigh on three thousand years of time, to see the events which this Assyrian invasion in the days of Ahaz and Hezekiah pictured. He saw the last great onslaught of the forces of darkness, the hosts of the north which we call the armies of Gog and Magog, descending upon God's ancient people at the end of this age. Isaiah still beheld Assyrian soldiers, he still identified the people and the villages and the scenery of the land he knew, but with that mysterious certainty that is sometimes our own experience in dreams he knew that he was looking now at a scene representing the end of this Age and the time of the greatest deliverance of all; and as he looked, straining to see into the murky blackness which all but shrouded the vagueness of the moving figures, men, women and children writhing under the terror that had come upon them, he saw something else, something which caused him to look up and break into the tremendous declaration that commences at verse 2 of chapter 9.

"The people that walk in darkness," he cried in exultation, "have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."

Away there on the horizon, beyond the tops of the eastern mountains, above the darkness of the present terror, the glorious radiance of coming day was racing up the sky. The time of light, the time of life, was come, and the darkness would soon be overpast. The Lord was coming as it were from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran, his glory covering the heavens, and his brightness as the light of day, as the sun. Isaiah saw the Assyrian soldiers cower and flee before that terrible radiance, the arrows of Heaven's artillery raining upon them, and all their armies put to flight. The Lord had risen up to the defence and deliverance of his people, and from behind the hills there came into sight the rising of the Sun of righteousness, with healing in his wings. And the people, so lately bound in

darkness and in the shadow of death, rejoiced in this great appearance which had delivered them from the kingdom of darkness and brought them forth into the kingdom of light. That is what Isaiah saw, and for the moment all thought of his countrymen's present troubles and dangers was forgotten, the while his eyes drank in their full of those resplendent glories symbolising earth's Millennial day.

This is the Christmas vision indeed, the turning of the old, darksome, dying year into the new, lightening, living age of light and life for all men. Here is at hand the time of promise and of gifts unto men, the prospect of harvest and all the joys that come with harvest; the toil of ploughing and harrowing but a memory. Here in very truth is the day for which Isaiah so long had looked, and concerning which he was yet to preach and teach persistently and consistently through many dark years. But for the present the vision was leading him onward into a glory of revelation.

"Thou hast multiplied the nation; thou hast increased the joy." So the Margolis version has it, and Rotherham confirms with "Thou hast increased the exultation; thou hast made great the joy." (The "not" in verse 3 of the A.V. is an incorrect rendering). "They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil." Here is a picture of mankind, freed at last from the fear of evil things and evil men, from death and all that death implies, "multiplied" upon the fair Millennial earth, destined to be the home of resurrected hosts. Isaiah sees here the beginning of the Millennial kingdom; perhaps he saw, or thought he saw, the promised multiplication of his own nation, Abraham's seed, "as the sands by the seashore" but it is just as correct to apply his prophetic outburst to the greater increase of all men, the entire human family, in that day. He had just seen the great light burst upon a world of evil and put the darkness to flight; now he sees the consequent increase of men and the increase of their joy. "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God. We have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him. We will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

Why do they thus rejoice? The next verse supplies the answer. "For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian." The rout of the Midianites in the days of Gideon was one of Israel's greatest victories. The brave three hundred, having

nothing but lights concealed in earthen pitchers, by that means and that alone defeated the enemy host. Did the Holy Spirit suggest that defeat of Midian to Isaiah with set intent? Is it not true that this coming greater defeat of the powers of greater evil at the end of this Age is going to be because another "three hundred" will have had their inner light revealed by the breaking of their earthen pitchers? "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father!" (Matt. 13. 43).

"For every boot stamped with fierceness, and every cloak rolled in blood, shall even be for burning, for fuel of fire." Thus runs the Margolis rendering, and other translators agree with the thought, not easily discernible in the Authorised Version, that the rejoicing is on account of the implements of warfare, the armour and clothing of the soldiery, and the grim relics of war, being all consumed in the fire. "He maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the earth." War is no more; the time of peace has come, and the devouring fire has consumed all the institutions of unrighteousness.

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder." Was it that Isaiah heard, eight hundred years before it floated over Judea's quiet fields, the angel's song of Bethlehem? Did the Holy Spirit in some wonderful manner convey to his attentive mind those strains that later fell upon the ears of the shepherds? It reads almost like a song. "Unto us a child is born . . . unto us a son is given . . ." Mysterious, sweet cadences, rising and falling on the calmness that has succeeded the vision of slaughter. "Unto us a child is born . . . a child is born!". That surely must be the fulfilment of Divine promise, the birth of earth's new King, come to rule in righteousness. "Unto us a son is given!" The truest son of Israel that Israel would ever know, a prophet like unto Moses, a king like unto David, a priest like unto—Melchisedek; yes, a priest upon his throne. "A child is born! . . . a son is given!" So the music must have gone on as Isaiah listened "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord . . . Unto us a child is born . . . a son is given . . . and the government shall be upon his shoulder!"

The heavenly song fades away—perhaps the vision passes from his sight also, but the inspiration of the Spirit is strong upon Isaiah and he opens his mouth, only partially comprehending the significance of his words, yet

knowing that they have to do with that coming Day for which he looks.

"His name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor." The comma ought not to be there. The expression is a combined one. The word for "wonderful" possesses the meaning of exceptionally singular or unique, something as it were beyond the understanding of mere man. When Manoah asked his celestial guest his name, and the angel told him it was "secret" the same word is used (Jud. 12. 18). The word "counsellor" is one that is used of royalty's closest confidants and advisers (as King David's counsellor in 2 Sam. 13. 12). Our coming King is, then, in the first place, the Wonderful Counsellor. Of whom is He the confidant? Surely of his Father and our Father, Who will do nothing without revealing his purposes to the beloved Son in Whom his plans are centred and by Whom they are executed. In the visions of Revelation one like unto a slain Lamb takes the sealed book from the hand of the Deity upon the Throne and reveals what is therein written. We do not know, we cannot visualise, the intimacy of fellowship and oneness of understanding that must exist between the Father and the Son, giving such depth of meaning to Jesus' own words, during his earthly life, "I and my Father are one". Surely He indeed is the One who "was by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before him" (Prov. 8. 30). Yea, indeed, his name is "Wonderful Counsellor".

But it is also "the mighty God". Not *El Elyon*—"The Most High". Not "*El Shaddai*"—"The Almighty". Not "*Jehovah*"—"The Eternal One". The Hebrew is "Gibbor El". *Gibbor* is the word for giantlike, powerful, mighty, and the giants and mighty men of the Old Testament are "gibborim" (the plural form of *gibbor*). But *El* itself means "mighty one". The plural form, *elohim*, refers to God himself or to the heathen gods, or to angelic or supernatural beings, or even to mighty men, as in Psa. 82. 7 ("I have said, ye are gods, and all of you children of the Most High) so this name "the mighty God" really means "the mightiest mighty one". Is not that a fitting name for the One to whom is committed all power in heaven and earth? Is not that a fitting name for the One to whom every knee in heaven as well as on earth, is to bow, and every tongue, angelic and earthly, confess? "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore; and have the keys of hell and of death." There is a wonderful passage in the Apocryphal "Gospel of Nico-

demus" in which the risen Lord is pictured as storming the gates of hell and rescuing its hopeless inhabitants. "When the prince of hell heard" (that Jesus was coming) "he said" (to Satan) "I adjure thee by the powers which belong to thee and me that thou bring him not to me. For when I heard of the power of his word, I trembled for fear, and all my impious company were disturbed. . . . And while Satan and the prince of hell were discoursing thus to each other, on a sudden there was a voice as of thunder and the rushing of winds, saying, . . . Lift up your gates, O ye princes: and be ye lifted up, ye gates of hell, and the King of Glory will enter in. . . . And the mighty Lord appeared in the form of a man, and enlightened those places which had ever before been in darkness; and broke asunder the fetters which before could not be broken; and with his invincible power visited those who sat in the deep darkness by iniquity, and the shadow of death by sin." This is assuredly our Mighty One, to Whom has been given all power in heaven and in earth, and will exercise that power to overcome death and all evil and establish the reign of everlasting righteousness.

What then of his third title—the *Everlasting Father*? Does He here usurp the prerogative of the One upon the Throne of Creation, the God and Father of us all? We know at the outset that such a thing can never be. At the close of the Millennial Age, when Christ the King will have subdued evil and vanquished death, when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and all power that opposes his benevolent and life-giving sway (I Cor. 15. 24), when mankind are, at long length, reconciled to God, and in full perfection of life will have entered upon their eternal inheritance, "then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." (I Cor. 15. 28). The thought in this title is that given by Rotherham; the "*Father of Futurity*" or the Father of the Coming Age. It is Jesus who has redeemed and purchased the entire human race by means of his own death on the cross; it is Jesus who receives them back to life in the Millennial Age soon to begin, and becomes their Mediator—the Mediator between God and man during the remaining period of man's insufficiency. It is Jesus who gives them life; who by means of his priestly and kingly work will so influence the hearts and minds of men that all in whom is any possibility of reclamation will eventually repent, and be converted, and come to Jesus, the Lord of life, that

they might have life. He will be the world's great Life-giver, the world's Father, during that age. He is the Father of the Coming Age and the life that men will receive they will receive at his hands. As it is in Adam that men die, so it is in Christ that men will be made alive. (I Cor. 15. 22).

In so many ways He will be a father to redeemed humanity. "*He shall feed his flock like a shepherd*" sings Isaiah "*and gently lead those that are with young.*" There will be such infinite patience and understanding in that day. No longer will there be the hard, unyielding iron of the law, demanding its "pound of flesh", its demands against the sinners. There will be instead the wise, loving, albeit firm discipline of the understanding parent, and a growing up into true maturity, "whosoever will", under that paternal rule. The wilful sinner, if he will not repent, must remain a sinner still, but at the end he finds himself shut out of the Holy City, for he has rejected life, and without life he cannot enter (Rev. 21. 27). But he that overcometh will be presented at the end before the Father Himself and experience the glorious liberty of the Sons of God.

The Prince of Peace! There is no mistaking the meaning of that name! It brings to the mind at once all that is fondest in the dreams of men, in the hopes and beliefs of those who to-day are the Lord's disciples. "Peace on earth; goodwill to men." So many have given up hope that it will come; but we know differently. "*In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.*" (Psa. 72. 7-8). Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven." (Psa. 85. 10-11). "And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." (Isa. 32. 18).

Not only is He the Prince of that peace which is to be man's inward possession, peace of heart, of mind, of soul, that peace with God which is the result of justification in his sight ("Therefore being justified by faith, we have *peace with God*" Rom. 5. 1), that peace which comes with the realisation of human perfection and possession of everlasting life. He is also the Prince of that outward peace which will be characteristic of human society in that blessed day. The same passage in Isa. 32 tells of that. "My people shall dwell in a *peaceable*

habitation, and in *sure* dwellings, and in *quiet* resting-places" (vs. 18). What a contrast to this present day of distress and trouble, strife and tumult! "*They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid.*" (Micah 4. 4). In every picture of the future day that we have, this thought of peace is prominent and predominant. "*I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like a flowing stream.*"

This is our King! This is earth's King, disesteemed as yet by those who will, one day, many of them and most of them, become his devoted and adoring subjects. "*Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice even for ever.*" Daniel in vision saw this same Son of Man come near before the Ancient of Days, and saw him given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages should serve him. His dominion, said Daniel, is to be an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. (Dan. 7.

14). They all saw something of this, all the prophets of old, and they all said something about it, gave some vivid description of its characteristics, some life-like pen-picture for the instruction and encouragement of those who followed them. They were quite sure about it. "*The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this*" cries Isaiah as the glowing words come to an end. He must needs go on to see and to talk of darker themes, but he had seen the vision of the Son that should be given and he knew that the word of God and the power of God stood pledged to bring this thing to pass. "*The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.*" "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud . . . so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

"*For unto us . . . a child is born . . . unto us . . . a son is given . . . and the government shall be upon his shoulder!*"

Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly.

A NOTE ON PHIL, 1, 23

"*Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.*" (Phil. 1. 23).

Paul was in a strait betwixt two things, knowing not which of the two he would choose, if he had the choice. On the one hand it was desirable for the sake of his converts that he remain in the flesh to give them that instruction which they needed; on the other hand he had an earnest desire to be finished with this earthly life with all its trials and persecutions, and to attain his promised resurrection inheritance. But there is nothing in the verse to demand that Paul expected that promised "being with Christ" to follow immediately upon his death. It was the contrasting appeals of life with the needs of his converts and death with its cessation of labour that stood before his mind. The word "depart" in this verse is the key. It is correctly rendered "unloosed" or "set free" and refers to the being released from the thraldom of the flesh without any reference to the time feature of the matter. The word is derived from the loosing of a vessel's mooring ropes from the quayside preparatory to setting out upon a voyage and is applied to the dissolving of an object into separate parts such as the rendering of a piece of cloth into its constituent

threads by unravelling the weaving. From this it has the thought of the dissolution of the earthly frame in death and the return of the spirit to "God who gave it". Paul uses the same word in 2 Cor. 5. 1 "We know if our earthly house be *dissolved* we have a building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens", and Peter, when speaking of the dissolution of "this present evil world" says "Seeing then that all these things shall be *dissolved*, what manner of persons ought ye to be" (2 Pet. 3. 11). The idea of release or freedom is contained in the use of the same word by Jesus when he said (Luke 13. 12) "Woman, thou art *loosed* from thine infirmity."

Wilson's "Emphatic Diaglott" renders the verse "*I have an earnest desire for the returning and the being with Christ, which is far better*" thus making Paul contrast his remaining in life with his desire for a then far future event, the Second Advent of his Lord, the consummation of all his hopes. This is hardly a correct rendering. The word is rendered "returned" in 2 Macc. 8. 25 (*Apocrypha*) when, speaking of the Jews' pursuit of their enemies, it is said "but lacking time they *returned*, for it was the day before the sabbath". In that

instance the word has the idea of the pursuers being "loosed" or "released" from their pursuit, as though we would say they "let go" or "desisted", and that is not the same thing as the return of Christ from the heavens. On the whole therefore it does seem that Paul

was quite definitely speaking of his anticipated release from the flesh, from this present life, because such a "loosing" implied that his next conscious experience, was the "being with Christ", "which is far better".

THE JEALOUSY OF GOD

More than twenty times in the Old Testament is it said that God is a jealous God. The statement is often misunderstood, naturally enough since the word "jealous" in modern English has a very definite and not very pleasant meaning. The Hebrew word translated "jealousy", however, has a wider range of meaning, and a systematic examination of the use of the word in the O.T., and its Greek equivalent in the N.T., soon removes from the Divine character any suspicion of the attitude of heart and mind normally associated with English usage of the word "jealousy".

The "jealousy" of God is his concern and zeal for the preservation of his own holiness in the sight of men, and for the fulfilment of his Word. The word is translated "zeal" about as many times as it is translated "jealousy" and if every text in which the word occurs is examined it will readily be seen that "zeal" is as good a rendering as "jealousy". As an example, take Zech. 1. 14 "I am *jealous* for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great *jealousy*". In this passage God declares his concern at the treatment of Jerusalem by the other nations and his determination to deliver her. So Nahum 1. 2 "God is *jealous*, and the Lord revengeth". Here it is God's coming judgment on the heathen city of Nineveh for its oppression of Israel that is in view. Again Isa. 42. 13 "The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up *jealousy* like a man of war" against the enemies of the chosen people. "All the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my *jealousy*" He says through Zephaniah (Zeph. 3. 8). In a rather different setting we have the jealousy of God for his own good Name and worship, as in Psa. 78. 58 "For they (Israel) provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to *jealousy* with their graven images". In Deut. 32. 16 we have "They provoked him to *jealousy* with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger" and in Ezek. 5. 13 (where the word is rendered "zeal") "I the Lord have spoken in my *zeal*. when I have accomplished my fury in them".

This same jealousy of God is shown as the driving force which accomplishes his pur-

poses. In Isa. 9. 7 we have, speaking of the Messianic kingdom one day to be bestowed upon the Child that should be born "The *zeal* of the Lord of Hosts shall perform this", and in Isa. 37. 32 the same expression is used with reference to the Divine determination to restore Israel to the Holy Land after the time of desolation. One of the Messianic Psalms (Psa. 69. 9) represents the Messiah as saying to the Father "The *zeal* of thine house hath eaten me up", an allusion to the consecrated mission of our Lord Jesus Christ when He came to earth at his First Advent. (St. John quoted this verse and applied it to Jesus on the occasion of his expelling the money-changers from the Temple—see John 2. 17).

It is not surprising, then, to find that the same word is used by the New Testament writers in the same fashion. "I am *jealous* over you with godly *jealousy*" says St. Paul to his converts in 2 Cor. 11. 2. Obviously "zeal" is his meaning there, as also in Rom. 10. 19 "Moses saith, I will provoke you to *jealousy* by them that are no people." God would incite Israel to greater zeal by the spectacle of his dealings with the Gentiles. The elders of the church in Jerusalem, visited by St. Paul, said to him "Thou seest how many thousands of Jews there are which believe, and they are all *zealous* of the Law" (Acts 21. 20). In his epistle to Titus (2. 14) St. Paul speaks of the church of God as being "*zealous* of good works", and in Rev. 3. 19 the Lord Jesus himself bids certain backsliding ones to "be *zealous* therefore, and repent".

When, therefore, God declared to the people of Israel (Exod. 20. 5) "I the Lord thy God am a *jealous* God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me", He was saying in effect that in his zeal for the exaltation and establishment of righteousness and the eventual fulfilment of his purpose, He would allow the evil of evil men to run its course through the generations, as it has done, that it might bring forth its inevitable fruit and so at the end disappear from his creation. Divine jealousy and Divine zeal for righteousness are one and the same thing.

GARDEN OF EDEN

8.—Sentence on the Serpent

*An Examination
of the Story of
Adam and Eve*

"And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons." (ch. 3. 7).

The last act in the drama opens with this verse. Light and darkness, good and evil, truth and falsehood, obedience and rebellion, all have played their part on the stage that is Eden, and now it remains only for sin's penalty, death, to be displayed. There settles over the scene the dark cloud of tragedy, relieved only by the silver gleam of hope that this is not, after all, the end. But it is at the most a gleam, not even sufficient to illumine the bowed figures of the two chief characters as they make their way from the light of Eden into the gloomy obscurity in which all the remaining years of their lives are to be spent. They were never themselves to see that gleam brighten into day; the promise was not to them but to their seed and for a day in the far distant future. For them, there remained only the inevitable consequence of the choice they had deliberately made.

The usual interpretation of this seventh verse is that the eating of the forbidden fruit had the physical effect of rendering Adam and Eve conscious, for the first time, of their own nudity, and they took steps immediately to fabricate a somewhat scanty and impermanent covering from the leaves of the fig tree. It has already been shown that the expression "they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" in chap. 2. 25, did not have reference to sexual nakedness, for which a totally different Hebrew word is used in the Bible, but to the fact that they stood open and fully revealed in the sight of God; there was nothing in them that was hidden from him. At that time, before their sin, they were "not confounded", abashed or ashamed, for they had the consciousness of perfect harmony and union with God, and could, so to speak, "look God in the face". Now the case was different. Although they had been persuaded by the serpent into pledging him their allegiance and repudiating God, this sequel to their action was the swift realisation that God knew all about it. Their eyes were suddenly opened to the fact that they still stood plainly revealed in the sight of God, not now as trusting and obedient children, but as rebellious and disobedient sinners. Their condition at that

moment is well illustrated by words in the Book of Hebrews "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4. 13). When, a little later on, they heard the voice of the Lord God in the garden, the aprons they had made yielded no assurance of the protection they needed. They hid themselves among the trees in the vain hope of escaping God. We need therefore to look beyond the surface meaning of the words and consider what more vital significance they may have had.

The word here rendered "aprons" is "*chagorah*" which denotes an article girded around the body, not an apron in the modern English sense of that word. In 2 Kings 3. 21 it is used for "armour" and in numerous instances refers to the girding the body with sackcloth at times of mourning. In general the word applies to the wearing of ceremonial garments having some religious significance, such as the robes of the Aaronic priesthood (Lev. 8. 7-13 and 16. 4), of Samuel the child prophet to indicate his dedication to God (1 Sam. 2. 18), of the symbolic clothing of the Messiah with righteousness and faithfulness (Isa. 11. 5), and so on. The fig-leaf coverings made by Adam and Eve were probably designed to enshroud their bodies in the same manner and we have to ask for what purpose they were made. The action appears to have been taken consequent upon their eyes being opened to a realisation of their position, sinners completely and fully revealed in the sight of God. "*They knew that they were naked.*" Now there is still no evidence that they were in any sense repentant. All the indications point to the opposite. Had they repented, and returned to God at that moment, it is unthinkable that He would not have done something other than condemn them as He did, even although it might well be that the mere fact of sin had already wrought some harm to their physical bodies which needed a fresh exercise of Divine creative power to rectify. But true repentance and reformation always brings at least reconciliation with God and fellowship with him; these two on the contrary passed under Divine condemnation and were banished from fellowship with God. If then there was consciousness of sin but no repentance, for what purpose was the covering of fig-leaves?

The solution may well lie in the following verse. Having made themselves the apron-coverings, they heard the voice of the Lord in the garden. Instead of going to meet him as had apparently been their custom, they hid themselves for fear among the trees, hoping thus to escape observation. It seems fairly clear that God appeared to them in visible form—the “theophany” of the Word of God—and in their immature state of mind they felt they only had to be physically hidden to escape that searching eye. What more natural thing that in order to facilitate their concealment they should adopt this very obvious and familiar means of disguise? Arrayed in complete coverings of leaves they could remain motionless among the trees of the garden and hope to escape detection. These two had not sinned against each other, they had sinned against God. Husband and wife, they had nothing to conceal from each other, but they both had something to conceal from God. And verse 10 sets the seal upon this understanding of the nakedness and the fig-leaves when Adam says “I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” It was Adam’s nakedness before God that was the subject of his concern and his fear, and for that reason he and his wife clothed themselves with leaves in the vain hope that God would not see them amidst the trees of the garden. He was naked before God in both senses of the word when he was created but there was no fear and no concealment then. He could stand upright before God in perfect confidence. But now sin had entered into his soul and he could not bear the thought of appearing before the visible manifestation of God and meeting that accusing eye. So, with his wife, he went away and hid himself.

But “the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good,” (Prov. 15. 3). “Where art thou” God called to Adam, knowing all the time where he was. Adam could not ignore that commanding voice; he and his wife came forth, trembling, before the Presence, “I heard thy voice in the garden” he said, “and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” Came the stern accusation “Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree...?” How, indeed, did Adam know that he had no covering in the sight of God and no confidence to stand before God, if it were not for sin? Just as, in Isaiah’s day many centuries later, “your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you”

(Isa. 59. 2) so now the man who heretofore had enjoyed fellowship and union with God in perfect confidence found that fellowship broken and that union severed; he shrank within himself and could no longer look God in the face.

This part of the story shows up in sharp relief some important considerations. First, consciousness of sin is not the same thing as repentance. Adam was clearly conscious of his sin as thus he stood before God but the idea of repentance was still not in his mind. He admitted the fact of his sin, but as yet did not seem conscious that he ought to do something about it. He contented himself rather by indicating how it came about. “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” That excuse did not get him very far. He finished up by being condemned on two counts, one for partaking of the fruit and one for listening to the voice of his wife instead of the voice of God. Merely being conscious of sin and deploring it never saved anyone. The Jews at Pentecost were convicted of sin, “pricked in their hearts,” (Acts 2. 37) but when in consequence they asked Peter and the apostles “what shall we do” the answer came, swift and unhesitant “Repent...” Adam did not ask God what he should do; he merely attempted to excuse himself without repudiating his action.

So God turned to the woman. “What is this that thou hast done?” This is an expression of great emphasis in the Hebrew, as though laying supreme stress on the serious nature of the matter concerned. Eve, following her husband’s example, offered a similar reply, perfectly truthful, a clear statement of fact, but again ignoring her own part in the sin. “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.”

It is an interesting conjecture as to whether the scene of verse 14, the condemnation of the serpent, was on earth or in heaven. There is not much doubt that here we have the banishment of Satan from heaven. As “star of the morning” to use Isaiah’s poetic description, this radiantly glorious celestial being must long have moved among the citizens of the heavenly realm; perhaps been held in high honour among them. But nothing that is of sin can exist in the presence of God. “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil.” (Hab. 1. 13) cried the prophet when he thought upon the holiness of God. From the time of the Fall that “star of the morning” must have been forbidden entry to the presence of God; according to every Scripture passage which refers to the subject he was cast out and

limited to the material creation which he had sought to gain for himself. "Brought down to sheol (the death state) to the sides of the pit" (the grave) is how Isaiah (14. 15) defines his doom. Says God through the prophet Ezekiel "I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God, and I will destroy thee, O anointed cherub, from the midst of the shining ones. . . I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth . . . and never shalt thou be any more." (Ezek. 28. 16-19). In the more prosaic language of Genesis, maintaining the setting of the earthly garden, the same fate is described in the words "upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life." The word for "belly" here occurs only twice in the Old Testament and is not the usual anatomical word employed elsewhere. It is derived from a root meaning to bow down or to bend, and taken in conjunction with the second part of the phrase the meaning is that the fallen archangel was sentenced to be bowed down to the dust for the remainder of his life. "To bite the dust" is a familiar expression in modern English and conveys the same idea.

"Thou art cursed above all cattle and above every beast of the field." The key to the meaning of this rather enigmatic expression lies in the fact that every part of God's handiwork is created for a purpose and with a definite function to perform in the orderly progress of what God's hands have made. The cattle and the wild beasts (beasts of the field) all have their appropriate place in Nature and carry out their designed functions in obedience to their instincts. The Devil ceased to fulfil his allotted place in the Divine scheme and became an anarchist, choosing his own course heedless of its effects upon the orderly development of the Divine plans. The brute beasts were fulfilling the will of God; Satan was not. That is why he is said to be "cursed above all cattle."

But God had not finished yet. The process by which the end of Satan and his schemes is to be brought about had to be defined. "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." (vs. 15). History reveals the meaning of this cryptic saying. The seed of the woman is Christ, and by an extension of thought justified by the Apostle's words in Gal. 3. 29, in a secondary sense all who are Christ's. The serpent has his seed also, those in every age who have given themselves to the active opposing of God and all that is associated with God. The serpent was to have a seeming but

not conclusive victory; "thou shalt bruise (break or crush) his heel," but the seed of the woman is to have the ultimate victory in crushing the head of the serpent. The visions of Revelation have the final word. "The Devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. . . this is the second death," (Rev. 20. 10 & 14). "Through death" Christ will "destroy him that hath the power of death, the Devil" (Heb. 2. 14). The bruising of the heel may very well refer to the suffering inflicted upon loyal servants of God in all ages by the active forces of evil; particularly must it point to the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross, and in a lesser sense again to the martyrdom and suffering of Christians throughout this Age until the last of those who are Christ's have been gathered to him in the First Resurrection. There will be no more bruising of the heel after that, for, as Revelation 20 shows so clearly, at the Second Advent the Devil is to be bound and cast into the abyss "that he should deceive the nations no more" throughout the duration of the Messianic Age. Perhaps Satan the rebellious archangel, through all the long ages of human history, has never really believed that this could happen. Perhaps the forbearance and wisdom of God, in deferring the execution upon him of the penalty for sin, death, has led him to think that God could or would not exact that penalty. It is true that sin has a blinding effect which might eventually bring the inveterate sinner to the point where he has destroyed his own capacity for repentance and God can do nothing with him. We do not know; we do know that eternal death awaits the arch enemy of God and man when at the last God gathers together the tangled threads of this world's experiences and makes of them the basis of humanity's everlasting inheritance. In all Scripture doctrine and prophecy the only intelligent being of God's creating who is definitely known to be irreclaimable for righteousness is the Archangel of Evil. For all others there is at least still hope.

So the serpent was banished for ever from the presence of God. This might well be the occasion to which Jesus referred when He said "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." (Luke 10. 18). The word is *astrape*, which denotes, not only lightning, but any dazzling radiance of light, and is so used in various connections in the New Testament. The One who was revealed to men as the Word made flesh in those few words identified himself with the Word of God which was the mani-

festation of God to Adam in the far off days of Eden. What more likely thing than that this same Word of God was the agent who pronounced the Divine sentence against the lawless one? Jesus talking to disciples flushed with excitement because the very demons were subject to them through his Name, might very well have ranged back in memory to a day long past when He on his Father's authority judged the rebellious archangel and watched his departure from the heavenly courts.

And now the scene changes to the earth again. Confession of guilt has already been extracted from the two human parties to the rebellion. The prime instigator has been dealt with. Now God, again manifest in the form of the Word, appears to Adam and Eve to tell them their fate. It would almost seem as if they have been kept waiting whilst the Heavenly Assize was being held; now they stand before him in deepest fear and woe to hear what he has to say.

(To be continued)

A NOTE ON ZECH. 12.10

"And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son..." (Zech. 12. 10).

Who is the pierced one to whom reference is made in this verse? The speaker is God, declaring the great things He will do when He rises up at the End Time to deliver Israel from her oppressors and inaugurate the kingdom of the Messiah upon earth which is to abolish sin and bring in everlasting righteousness. There is a great repentance, for the spirit of grace and of supplication has been poured out upon Judah and Jerusalem, and there is a great mourning, as of those who mourn the death of a first-born. The Apostle John in John 19. 37 refers this text to the crucifixion of Jesus and the fact that the bystanders gazed upon him. Obviously John could not have intended more than an application of the text in an analogous sense, for the passage in Zechariah is clearly descriptive of a time when Israel is to be delivered from the Gentiles and is truly repentant. Israel at the time of the crucifixion was only just about to be delivered into the power of the Gentiles and was certainly far from repentant.

There is something incongruous in the idea of God Most High, Creator and Sustainer of all things, God the Father, the Eternal One, being "pierced" by his creatures. Neither does it ring true in a Jewish book, written by a Jewish prophet, for Jewish readers, to picture men as "looking" upon God. The Jewish belief was always that no man can look upon the face of God, and live; that no man could aspire to behold his Person. The same understanding was carried over into Christian belief, as is witnessed by St. Paul, referring to the Deity *"who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; who no man hath seen, nor can*

see" (1 Tim. 6. 16). This expression in Zech. 12. 10 with its strange inconsistency of person "they shall look upon me... and they shall mourn for him" requires closer examination.

Several translations (RSV, Moffatt, Ferrar Fenton) render "him" instead of "me" and say that there is a certain amount of variation in the old manuscripts at this point. This emendation makes it much easier to apply the expression to our Lord Jesus at his Second Advent, the more especially since the poetic quotation in Rev. 1. 7 *"He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him"* is evidently based in large measure upon this text in Zechariah. On the other hand, if the original was in fact "him" and not "me", the Jews of Zechariah's day, to whom the word was first addressed, would be left wondering who was intended, for they knew nothing of Christ, five hundred years before his birth, and certainly nothing about the two Advents of the Messiah. They expected but one, and that an Advent in triumph and glory. A clue to the prophet's meaning might, though, have been afforded to those of his listeners who were thoughtful, by the next verse, describing the mourning over this spectacle as being like the "mourning of Hadad Rimmon in the valley of Megiddon." This mourning was an annual event among the idolatrous people of the land—and not a few Israelites were idolators. Every year a ceremonial mourning was held on behalf of the youthful god Adonis or Tammuz, who had been cruelly slain by his enemies. In consequence of the lamentation he was held to have been resurrected so that peace and blessing should return to the earth. (Reference to this pagan ritual is made in Ezek. 8. 14 where the prophet goes to the gate of the Temple and there finds "women weep-

ing for Tammuz"). Perhaps that allusion helped to prepare some reflective minds for the truth that the Son of God must one day be pierced through, and die, that He might afterwards return in resurrection glory to bring blessings to all mankind. Perhaps in that way, the Holy Spirit, speaking through Zechariah, began to uncover a little of the mystery which was more fully revealed when St. John explained that the Word, which was with God at the first, was now made flesh and appeared in the sight of men as the Son of God (John 1. 14).

There is an interesting link between Zechariah and John in this connection which may have meaning. The word translated "me" is based upon a primitive demonstrative pronoun having the same meaning as the Greek "hautos"—"this same". John uses the Greek word in John 1. 2, so that the two texts could read quite accurately "They shall look upon *this same* whom they have pierced and shall mourn for him" and "*This same* was in the beginning with God". The Hebrew word is composed of two consonants only, *aleph* and *tay*, (A, T) which are the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In the Book of Revelation, which was written in Greek, God declares of himself "I am *Alpha* and *Omega* (A and O, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet) the beginning and the ending saith the Lord, the Eternal, the Almighty" (Rev. 1. 8). This has its origin in Isaiah, where in several instances God says "I am the first and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (Isa. 44. 6, also 41. 4, 43. 10, 48. 12). Thus the reverent Jewish mind, conning over these words, might have been led, not to thinking of God himself being revealed in the sight of men and seen to be "pierced" at that, but a mystic figure, "*this same*," a revelation of God come from God, one which could be manifested in the sight of men and even be pierced by men without doing violence to the reverential awe and sanctity in which every true Jew held the Person of God Most High.

That is how the New Testament pictures the coming of Jesus. "No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son . . . he hath declared (manifested) him". "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 1. 18 and 14. 9). It is in this fashion that Zech 12. 10 can associate the Father with all that is taking place whilst ensuring that the "seeing" and the "piercing" is manifested in the Son. That is to be a feature of the Second Advent when the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed to men for salvation and for judgment. It is not necessar-

ily a physical seeing. Men will look upon him whom they pierced in exactly the same sense as, to quote Luke's rendering of Isa. 40. 5 in Luke 3. 6 "all flesh shall see the salvation of God".

NAPOLÉON'S TRIBUTE TO CHRIST

This eulogy is said to have been penned by the celebrated Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) and was often quoted in Christian periodicals of several generations ago. It is improbable that he did in fact express these sentiments; the origin of the composition is completely lost: but the words are worth reading and for that reason worth preserving.

* * *

There is something about Jesus which I cannot understand. Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne and myself have founded great empires, but upon what did these erections of our genius rest? Upon force. But Jesus founded his upon love, and to this very day millions would die for him. I have inspired multitudes with an enthusiastic devotion, such that they would have died for me; but to do this it was necessary that I should be visibly present with the electric influence of my looks, of my words, of my voice. When I saw men, and spoke to them, I lighted up the flames of devotion in their hearts. But Jesus by some mysterious influence, reaching down through a lapse of eighteen hundred years, so draws the hearts of men towards him that thousands, at a word, would rush through fire and flood for him, counting not their lives dear unto them. Christ alone has so succeeded in raising the mind of man towards the unseen that it becomes insensible to the barriers of time and space.

Across a chasm of eighteen hundred years Jesus Christ makes a demand which is beyond all others difficult to satisfy. He asks for the human heart; He will have it entirely to himself. He asks it unconditionally, and forthwith this demand is granted. Wonderful! In defiance of time and space, the soul of man, with all its powers and faculties, becomes an annexation to the empire of Christ. All who believe in him experience that remarkable supernatural love toward him. This phenomenon is unaccountable; it is altogether beyond the reach of man's creative powers. Time, the great destroyer, is powerless to extinguish this sacred flame; time can neither exhaust its strength nor put a limit to its range. This is it which proves to me quite convincingly the Divinity of Christ.

THE TRAGEDY OF SAMSON

The story of
a great failure

3. Man of Blood

It was probably not very long after the disastrous sequel to his wedding at Timnath that Samson decided to go to the wife he had abandoned, presumably with the idea of bringing her back with him to Timnath and making her his wife in fact. His anger had abated; his nature was probably not capable of maintaining any deep emotion for very long, and in the casual way which seems to have characterised so many of his actions he apparently assumed that all that had happened would by now be forgiven and forgotten and that he would be received as cordially as when he first came to Timnath, a prospective son-in-law.

His easy-going hopes, however, were soon dashed. His father-in-law was by no means pleased to see him. *"I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her, therefore I gave her to thy companion."* It looks as though the old Philistine quite thought he had seen the last of his turbulent son-in-law and considered the marriage to be at an end; he had in consequence disposed of his daughter to one of the young men who had been the cause of all the trouble at the start. What freedom of choice the girl herself had in all this does not appear. Most likely, very little, but it is quite evident that she was not the sort upon whom much sympathy need be bestowed. The father, however, probably eyeing Samson's menacing bulk a little apprehensively, was ready with a suggestion *"Is not her younger sister fairer than she? Take her, I pray thee, instead of her"*. He misjudged his man. The aggrieved husband was in no mood to discuss the relative merits of the two sisters' physical charms. He had been slighted once again, his vanity wounded even more deeply than before. One can well imagine the swift revulsion of feeling, the transformation of genial placidity to blazing anger as he strode out of the house vowing vengeance for this, the supreme insult of all. *"Now shall I be blameless from the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure"*. To describe the ensuing wholesale and widespread destruction of the Philistines' standing crops as "doing them a displeasure" is such a masterly understatement of the facts that one is justified in concluding that if the word Samson used actually does have the meaning of the English phrase then he could hardly have been fully conscious of the enormity and

significance of what he did. The whole story of Samson yields the picture of a man whose mind had not developed in pace with his body, a giant not aware of the moral significance of his actions. Now he went out possessed of one idea only, revenge; revenge upon the whole Philistine community which he blamed for the miscarriage of his dreams and plans.

One of the commonest of small animals in Canaan at that time and during most ages since is the jackal (mistranslated "foxes" in the Authorised Version). Samson was a country lad born and bred and he would well know how to track them to their holes and catch them. The time was the time of wheat harvest, when the standing grain was dry and ripe. The early rains had ceased and there would be no more rain for several months. The watercourses were dried up or drying up as is usual in the summer. Samson started catching jackals, tying them in pairs tail to tail and fixing a burning truss of straw or similar material to each pair of tails. The terrified animals struggled frantically with each other, darting madly about as each sought to rid itself of the flaming encumbrances, setting fire to the growing grain in a myriad places as they fled. The account says Samson thus treated three hundred of them. It is not necessary to suppose that he caught the entire three hundred at once and released them simultaneously; rather it is more reasonable to think that he went about the countryside catching and releasing jackals wherever he could. The Philistines, desperately endeavouring to quench the rapidly spreading flames which burst out anew in one place as fast as they extinguished them in another, would have little time to spare to hunt down the instigator of the trouble, who in any case could easily keep one jump ahead of them all the time. By the time the last fire was out and order had been restored, Samson was nowhere to be found.

The loss to the Philistines must have been enormous. It was not only a question of their grain supplies for the coming year; it was the fact that the land of the Philistines was the main grain producing centre for their own homeland of Crete, seven hundred miles away across the Mediterranean Sea. An area of something like a thousand square miles, some of the richest agricultural land in Canaan,

was held by the Philistines for this purpose, and Samson's three hundred jackals could easily have destroyed crops over the major portion of this territory. In the dry season, with water scarce and the fields packed with ripe grain, the conflagration must have grown to epidemic proportions and raged for days, leaving at the end miles of blackened fields and burned out homesteads. The disaster might easily have been the turning point of Philistine fortunes in Canaan. They had been in the land for more than eight hundred years without their power being seriously disputed; from Samson's day onwards the Hebrews waged what was a gradually increasingly successful warfare, until in the days of David, not much more than a hundred years later, their power was broken and they were finally subdued. It might well be that the Philistines never recovered from the damage done by this widespread catastrophic fire and that this event marks the real fulfilment of the prophecy "*He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines*". But if so, there is no credit to Samson on that account. This is one more instance in which God "makes the wrath of man to praise him". Samson may have diverted the course of history but all he was thinking of at the time was personal revenge.

The Philistine authorities were also in the mood for revenge after this. Samson himself was beyond their reach, but the mob, as mobs always do, demanded a scape-goat. It would appear that the whole trouble had been started by the betrayal of the husband's secret by the wife, and the betrayal of the husband's rights by the father-in-law. Mob justice is seldom conducted on judicial lines and is characterised more by expedition than discernment. "*The Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire*". That did not restore the ravaged grain fields but it probably did help to pacify the homeless and hungry mob. It also did something else. It raised Samson to fresh fury. Throughout the story his intention to be the one to strike the last blow stands out. The Philistines should not have the last word. He had destroyed their crops, but now, learning of the fate that had befallen his ill-fated wife, he declared "*Yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease*". He sallied forth once more across the frontier, "*smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter*", and withdrew as quickly back into the territory of Israel.

This brought out the Philistine army. Samson was becoming too much of a menace to

be ignored. An occasional frontier skirmish in which one or two men were killed could be treated as beneath official notice, but the way things were going it could be that this Samson would be putting himself at the head of an Israelite army of rebels and that would be a very different thing. The five rulers of the Philistine colony gave orders and the soldiery advanced into Judah to apprehend the trouble maker.

Samson had taken refuge in the precipitous crags of Etam, a jagged peak in the centre of Judah some thirty miles from Zorah and fifteen from the frontier. As he looked down upon the plain he found that he had roused a veritable hornet's nest this time. "*The Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi*". For the first time he was on the defensive. The men of Judah, in whose territory he had taken refuge, were not disposed to help him. Apprehension for their own safety outweighed any feeling of support they may have had for the man who would fain be their national champion. "*Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us?*" they asked him plaintively "*What is this that thou hast done unto us?*" Samson's sullen reply "*As they did unto me, so have I done unto them*" did not influence their attitude, perhaps understandingly, for the Philistine soldiers had only just told them that they sought Samson "*to do to him as he hath done to us*". The craven-heartedness of the men of Judah is shown by their willingness and even anxiety to hand over Samson, bound, to his enemies in order to save their own skins. Samson might well have asked himself if Israel was worth delivering, but he submitted to being bound in confidence that he himself could burst the bonds when it suited him so to do.

So it came about. The Philistines shouted for triumph as their enemy was brought into their lines, securely trussed up with fine new ropes; their exultant shouts changed to cries of alarm as the wild-looking Nazarite's bonds snapped like flax under his muscular efforts, and alarm became panic as the giant seized the only handy weapon, an ass's jaw bone lying on the ground, and advanced threateningly into battle.

There must have been a great deal of superstitious fear in the Philistine attitude to Samson. In this case a thousand men are said to have been slain. A man even of Samson's calibre and physique can hardly have been expected to prevail against an army of that size. The nature of his past exploits and the

fact that he had always emerged unscathed, coupled with the terror induced by his personal appearance, a giant of a man, flowing locks and beard, enormous muscles, probably a grim and fear-inspiring countenance, all might well have built up a legendary atmosphere about him which could easily throw the Philistine ranks into confusion once their opponent was seen to be free.

It is quite likely that the men of Judah, seeing him free himself and advance into combat, shook off their fears after all and rallied spontaneously to his support. The account says "*the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him*" and something of that Spirit might have communicated itself to the watching men of Judah and caused them to remember the past glories of Israel when their ancestors fought to establish a foothold in the land. Perhaps the Battle of Lehi that day was in very fact the first real blow Israel struck for her independence from the Philistines. It is much more reasonable to think that Samson, wielding his jawbone to good effect in the midst of the Philistines, was assisted by a goodly contingent of men of Judah armed with whatever they could lay hold of, since the result of the battle was the defeat of the enemy with a thousand left dead on the field.

There is a strange little sequel here. Samson, after the victory, thirsted, and for the first time in the story of his life is shown calling upon the Lord. Regrettably, it was only for an immediate benefit, a drink of water, but it does at least indicate some acknowledgment of God. "*Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant*" he said "*and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?*" His mind was still on himself and the material things, but God, ever ready to respond to the slightest trace of faith, gave answer. The hero found water suddenly bubbling out of a cleft in the rock, and drank, and was revived. There used to be a queer idea that God performed a miracle here in bringing forth water from the discarded jawbone; the Authorised Version says "*God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw; and there came water thereout*". The translators were confused by the fact that the Hebrew word for jaw, *lehi*, is the same as the name of the plain on which the battle took place. Rightly rendered, "*God clave an hollow place that was in Lehi. . .*"

The result of this battle established Samson as the recognised leader of at least the southern half of Israel, including Judah, Benjamin,

Simeon, Dan and Ephraim, and possibly the remainder of the tribes also. He remained "judge" of Israel for twenty years although at no time during that twenty years was Israel freed from the Philistine yoke. Such law and order as there was in Israel was vested in Samson. Such freedom from oppression and victory over enemies as was achieved was due to the leadership and prowess of Samson. But there was no religious revival, no national return to God, no restoration of the covenant. The fact that their subjection to the Philistines continued is evidence of that, for whenever Israel did repent and return to God He gave them actual deliverance from servitude to their enemies; that was a condition of the covenant. The rule of Samson, Nazarite though he was, remained a purely secular one, without God. Small wonder that it ended in disaster.

Not very long after Samson's death another Nazarite child, born of a God-fearing mother, and devoted to God from his birth, was born in a village of Ephraim. Samuel, like Samson, was brought up under the Nazarite discipline, but Samuel, unlike Samson, had an ear to listen to God's voice from earliest years. Samuel also had to contend with the Philistines but Samuel put his trust first in God; and Samuel it was who did deliver Israel for at least part of his life from Philistine domination. Samuel, the last and greatest of the Judges, has the story of his judgeship recorded in extreme detail in the Old Testament and every incident in the story reflects his abiding faith in God and sterling loyalty to the laws of God. The only incident in the judgeship of Samson that is recorded concerns his visit to a harlot in Gaza, the Philistine capital. It is not a particularly edifying story. The Philistines had observed his coming and had shut the city gates and laid in wait for him with the intention of capturing him in the morning. Samson remained with the woman until midnight and then, finding his egress from the city barred, pulled down the closed gates complete with gateposts and crossbar and carried the lot to a hill near Hebron, full forty miles away in the territory of Judah. He would have to cross fifteen miles of Philistine territory in order to get to the frontier and one wonders how he could have done that without interference and what was the size and weight of the gates that he carried. The action seems to have been a completely irresponsible one and the record of this incident seems to serve no other purpose than to indicate that Samson during his

judgeship manifested the same characteristics as at the beginning, overwhelming indulgence of his animal passions and complete absence of any consciousness of responsibility toward God. It seems that the Philistine endeavour to capture him was at all times a half-hearted one; he came and went to the Philistine cities more or less as he pleased, and for twenty years figured in the public eye as the leader of Israel. He seems to have remained in possession of prodigious physical strength coupled with a flair for outwitting his enemies on every occasion so that they despaired of

ever getting him into their power. It is almost certain that during those twenty years he was a constant thorn in the side of the Philistines and probably waged a desultory guerilla warfare against them, leading sudden raids into their territory and generally keeping them always in a state of tension. But he did nothing whatever to lead Israel to trust and faith in God and in consequence he never achieved real deliverance. At the end of the twenty years the Philistines were still their masters, and Samson himself was still a man in whose life God had no place.

(To be continued)

"We must not betray the reputation of the "Good News" by puerile mistakes we ought never to make, or by palpable errors which a little reading would prevent. Even when he scorned "enticing words of man's wisdom" in his preaching, as he did at Corinth (1 Cor. 2. 4), Paul's hearers knew that they were listening to an intelligent, educated man. That impression undoubtedly prepared a way for the message. The same thing is at least desirable, if not increasingly essential in those who seek to sow and cherish the seed of the Word in the intellectual climate of our times."

The foregoing quotation, origin unknown, makes good sense. In matters of scientific or general knowledge Christians must accept the findings of the current generation whilst realising that all knowledge is progressive, and the next generation will render much of

to-day's knowledge obsolete. The Christian tendency to be out-of-date on such things is apparently an old trouble, as witness the writings of St. Augustine on the subject in the Fifth Century. He said:

"It very often happens that there is some question as to the earth or the sky or the other elements of this world, respecting which one who is not a Christian has knowledge derived from most certain reasoning or observation, and it is very disgraceful and mischievous, and of all things to be carefully avoided, that a Christian speaking on such matters as being according to the Christian Scriptures should be heard by an unbeliever talking such nonsense that the unbeliever, perceiving him to be as wide from the mark as east from west, can hardly restrain himself from laughing."

Psa. 149. 9. *"To execute upon them the judgments written; this honour have all his saints."*

The setting of the Psalm shows that the reference is to the coming Age. This psalm was first written for and applied to Israel. Israel expected that when the Last Day had come and the Messiah appear in the glory of the Kingdom they, his people, would be called to execute his judgment upon the wicked—which to the average Israelite meant the Gentile nations. Their expectation was right in principle, but their knowledge of the Divine Plan was deficient. When the Messianic Kingdom is set up there will be a heavenly people, the Church, associated with the King for judgment, as well as the earthly people, Israel, in the Holy Land, even although that earthly people does have a share in the privilege of doing God's work in that Age. It is correct therefore to apply this Psalm to the Church as well as to Israel, but the time of its fulfilment is in the future just the same—

in the Messianic Age.

The Psalm itself indicates this. First of all, the faithful are exhorted to sing unto the Lord a new song, to praise his name in the dance, to sing praises with the timbrel and harp. This is a theme of joy and triumph, therefore, not of grief and humiliation. *"Let the saints be joyful in glory"* says verse 5. It cannot be insisted too much or too often that the saints are not in power or glory now; glory is reserved for the future. *"Let them sing aloud upon their beds"*. This is an allusion to the time of rest from labour and entrance into eternal habitations. (See Isa. 57. 2. See also Psa. 132. 13-14 where the Lord is said to "rest for ever" in His habitation of Zion).

Verses 6-9, referring to the two-edged sword and the executing of vengeance upon the nations, binding their kings with chains and executing upon them the judgment written, refer to the judgment work of the Age, the work of destroying evil institutions and things that afflict mankind.

THE THREE-FOLD INJUNCTION

An exhortation
from Thessalonians

"Rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks!" (I Thess. 5. 16-18.)

The difficulty in these three injunctions is their absoluteness. It is easy to rejoice on occasion, but to rejoice evermore is a different proposition. To pray at times, and regularly, is common, but to pray without ceasing is another matter. It is a pleasant thing to the thankful in spirit to give thanks for benefits received, but to give thanks for everything—is that not expecting just too much?

In this chapter the Apostle Paul gives us twelve brief and pointed rules for Christian conduct. Nine of these have to do with our relations with others. The three just quoted refer to our relations with God. Since our relationship with God is that of children to a Father, these are statements of what He expects of us as his children. Viewed in this light they may be seen to be not only possible, but reasonable and necessary. They represent characteristics pertaining to the home, both natural and spiritual. Let us examine them from this point of view. Stated in terms of the home life, they represent the three common qualities of happiness, fellowship and gratitude.

"Rejoice evermore." Every parent wants his child to be happy, so much so that the father cannot be happy if the child is miserable. But it is impossible to be happy to order. Joy can only come as a result of circumstances making for happiness. These may be intermittent and brief, or deep and abiding. Only if they are deep and abiding is happiness possible. All young life is naturally joyful through the exuberance of animal spirits. Add to this a child has special occasions for joy: birthdays, Christmas time, holidays, etc. None of these sources of joy is permanent. They all pass away. In the proper home, however, the child has a deep and abiding source of happiness. This is found in his faith and hope centred in his parents and the assurance of their love. To realise how supremely important these are, think of what it would mean to him to be suddenly bereft of his parents' fond love and care and sent to be brought up in an institution for orphans!

In like manner God wants his children to be happy and is affected by their joy. On one occasion we are told that when the disciples were overjoyed at some experience, Jesus exulted in spirit. This message "rejoice evermore" is a personal one from God to every one of his children. He gives us many special occasions for joy in the natural blessings with which our cup runs over. Like the natural child, however, the deep and

abiding source of our joy is in Him, in our faith and hope in God, and the realisation of his love. Permanent joy can only spring from permanent sources and the three principles which abide, Paul tells us, are faith, hope and love.

The joy of Jesus consisted in the fact that He was so supremely "God conscious." This world was to him no alien place but a mansion in His Father's house. It was the Father that caused the sun to shine and sent the rain; made the lilies grow and noted the sparrow's fall. How much more then would the Father look after his own children. Enough to them to know "your Father knoweth what things ye have need of." Like Jesus we too may joy in God; joy because of our faith in him. He will not give us, for bread, a stone; for a fish, a serpent; for an egg, a scorpion. He knows and loves and cares; nothing this truth can dim. We joy in God also because of our hope in him. Having called us, He will qualify us and perfect that which concerneth us. Under training and discipline now we eagerly anticipate the time of our adoption, our coming of age, when we shall enter fully into our glorious inheritance. But above all we rejoice evermore in the everlasting love of God. *"He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up to death for us all, how shall He not with him freely give us all things?"* We rejoice evermore in the love of Christ that passeth knowledge, saying with Paul, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

"Pray without ceasing." The idea is that of fellowship. This is characteristic of the natural home. The parents want their child's confidence and the child instinctively goes to them with all its joys and sorrows, doubts and fears, plans and perplexities, receiving in return instruction, advice and encouragement. This sense of being in fellowship is continuous, unless there should occur some estrangement which, so long as it lasts, produces a cloud over the lives of both parties. These principles operate in the spiritual life. God wants his children's confidences. Nothing is too small or trivial to take to him. "The prayer of the upright is his delight." We cannot go too often to our Heavenly Father, or tarry too long in his presence. But there is also in addition to these specific times of communion a continual sense of being in fellowship with God provided that no estrangement arises to interrupt it. When the conscious

mind is occupied by life's necessary duties, the vast region of the sub-conscious can be tuned in to the wave length of the Father's love, and spirit with spirit can meet.

If we would enjoy a sense of continuous fellowship with the Lord, it is important that we have daily, definite times for direct communion. The mid-week prayer meeting has proved to many of the very greatest help to their prayer life. Both with regard to this meeting and also our daily private devotions, the Word of God should be taken as a basis. Just as we meet in fellowship on the basis of the Divine Word when we gather together as a company of the Lord's people, so when we meet with the Lord in private, or in united seasons of prayer, the Word of God should be basic and central. Samuel Chadwick in his book on *"The path of prayer"* speaks thus of his own experience. *"I read through the portion in a prayer spirit again and again, then go over it clause by clause on my knees, turning its statements into prayer and thanksgiving. Before I found this method I used to try to work myself into a praying mood but I lacked resourcefulness, and praying became 'prayers' again, and listening a void. Prayer has been an experience of thrilling wonder creative meditation and real fellowship since it has been instituted, quickened and inspired by the Word of God."*

"In everything give thanks." There is progression in these three qualities. Joy leads on to fellowship and fellowship to thankfulness for everything. The child, early in life, learns that though it is his father's desire that he should be happy and that his own happiness is bound up with the happiness of the child, this does not mean that everything is ordered with a view to the child's immediate pleasure. The boy might much prefer play to school, holidays to lessons, idleness to industry, but the discharge of his parental duties makes it necessary for the father to insist on training and discipline. Many things not in themselves easy or pleasant must be experienced and it is a special joy to the parents when the child understands and appreciates the situation, and accepts it, not in a negative spirit of mere resignation, but in a positive spirit of thankfulness.

So it is with God and his children. This quality of thankfulness is underlined. After saying *"In everything give thanks"* Paul adds *"for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you"*. It is God's special message conveyed to us by the life and teaching of our Lord. It is his special message because it is so difficult and because the possession of this grace implies a very close walk with God and maturity in fellowship with him. It is easy and delightful to give thanks for many, many

things. *"When all thy mercies, oh my God, my rising soul surveys; transported with the view, I'm lost in wonder, love and praise."* For all things beautiful we thank him, for days of sunshine bright with praise, when all our life is set fair. But when life's sky becomes clouded and the surges rise and rest delays to come; when youth has gone and health and strength begin to fail; when loved ones are removed and we are left lonely; it is not easy then to give thanks for everything.

Sometimes some of God's people are called upon to experience specially trying conditions. Like Job they are outstanding examples of suffering but, thank God, like Job they can also be outstanding examples of the power and grace of God. Job was a spectacle to angels, as we are, and by his unswerving loyalty and love vindicated God's glory and discredited the Adversary. This too is our great mission, to make God's victory over the Devil moral before it is physical, when the Lord shall take hold of him and bind him. Job's sufferings have been an inspiration to countless numbers of the Lord's people because of his patient endurance. He stands among the great cloud of witnesses urging us forward. So it may be with us if we are called upon to suffer in a special way. Our example may encourage others to take up and bear more bravely the lighter loads that they are carrying and fainting under. As Job because of his special trials got a special vision of God, seeing him whereas before he had only heard him, so it will be with us. Paul stands before us as one supremely tried and yet so supremely blessed with the abundance of the revelations that he expresses himself thus *"Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, compared with the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"*.

"In everything give thanks", for all things work together for good to those who love God. This may not be apparent to us now but sometime we will understand. We are like the tapestry weaver of old with the pattern to work from hung over his head, and working away with the reverse side of the cloth to him. Blindly he works the shuttle back and forth with the varying colours, dark and bright, unaware of how beautiful is the work he is doing as seen from the other side. So with us. Until our weaving is finished and we get to the other side we shall not see the glorious outcome nor understand the meaning of the many things which perplex us now. How grand the assurance that working to his pattern the Lord will be able by and by to present us faultless in the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. Let us then rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks, for as his dear children, God expects this from us.

We are advised that the usual monthly turnover calendars with scriptural pictures in colour for 1960 are available from Christian Institute, 174 Forest Hill Road, S.E.23 in two styles, at 3/3 and 4/- respectively, post free, or both together 7/-. Please send direct for these and not to Lyncroft Gardens.

It is customary at this time of year to mention, for the interest of many of our readers, the special fund administered by Bro. E. Allbon, 20 Sunnymede Drive, Ilford, Essex, and to say that contributions will be utilised in the wisest possible manner.

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