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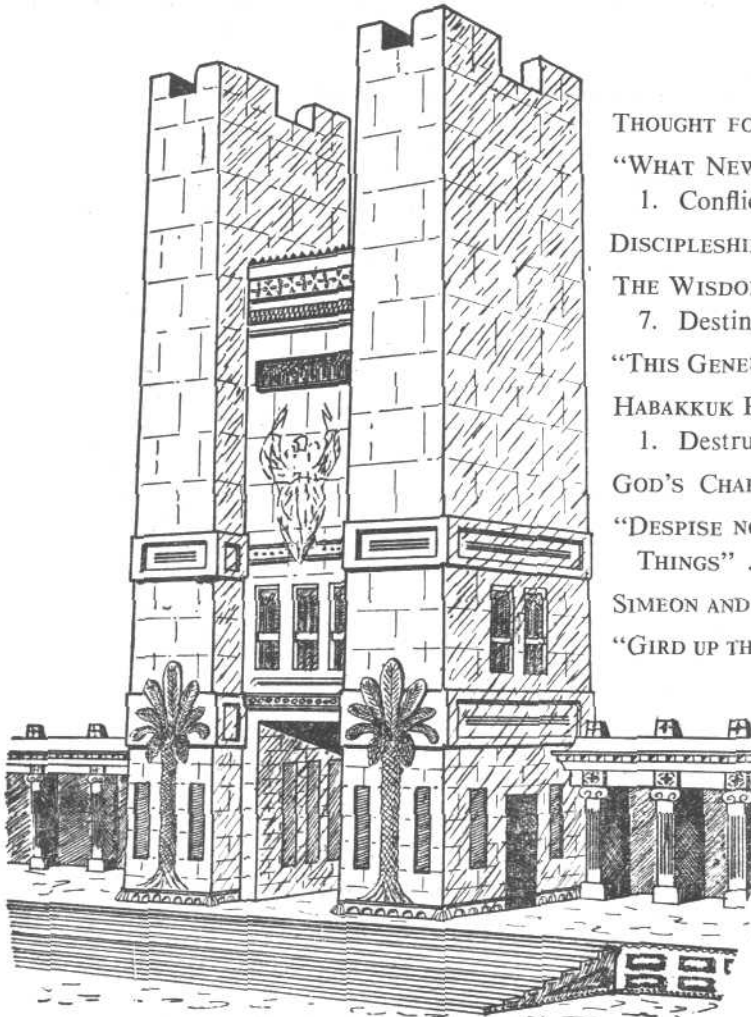
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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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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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. And they know not that they walk in darkness.

But all men are not like this! 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. 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 bushels 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.

WHAT NEW THING IS THIS?

Some reflections on the power of Christianity

I. Conflict with Judaism

"...he entered into the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes... and they were all amazed, in so much that they questioned among themselves, saying 'What thing is this? What new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him!'" (Mark 1.21-27).

Right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry men realised a new thing had come into the world. For many years they had known only the stereotyped tradition-serving pronouncements of the scribes, barren alike of illumination or inspiration. All their lives they had been familiar with the glorious history of the long-distant past, when the arm of God was demonstrably outstretched to bless and protect, and miracle wrought by prophet or seer, or by the direct intervention of God, was no uncommon occurrence, but they in their own lifetimes had never seen a miracle. Now the unbelievable had happened; a man, a messenger of God, stood in their midst, teaching and preaching with the confidence of Divine authority, and healing the sick and diseased of body and mind in token of that authority. No wonder the people cried to one another in wonder "What new teaching is this? What new thing is this? With authority this man teaches and commands, and his teaching is positive and his commands imperative! Even the demons listen, and obey! What does it mean?"

Jesus found the first real response to his ministry at Capernaum, the Romanised town on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He had travelled a little in the countryside around Nazareth and become somewhat known—Luke says "*there went out a fame of him through all the region round about*" (Luke 1.14) and then he returned to Nazareth and ministered in the synagogue there before the townsfolk who knew him so well, reading to them the 61st chapter of Isaiah and applying it to his mission, there and then commencing. His own people rejected him; he went back to Capernaum, and preached to good effect, and performed his first mighty works. The marriage at Cana of Galilee, at which he turned the water into wine, must have been just before this, and since according to Matthew (4.13) he did about this time leave Nazareth to dwell in Capernaum, teaching every Sabbath in the synagogue, it is possible that the entire family migrated to Capernaum, perhaps induced to leave Nazareth

after the scene in the synagogue and probably subsequent ostracism on the part of neighbours. John 2.12 may indicate something like this.

It was at these sabbath synagogue services in Capernaum that there became manifest that which has been the distinguishing mark of Christ's message and of Christianity from that day to this. Luke has it; he says (4.32), speaking of the worshippers' reaction to this One who had so revolutionised the teaching in their synagogue, "*they were astonished at his teaching; for his word was with power.*" That word was to recur a great many times in the history of Jesus and of his apostles before their lives' work ended; it has recurred many times since, and will recur, for the great secret of the faith which is one day going to save the world is that it is faith of power. Seemingly impotent in the face of the world's sin and the forces of evil, there is nevertheless a mighty force lying quiescent beneath the surface, waiting for the due time; when that time has come there is nothing in all God's wide creation that will be able to prevent its exercise to full effect.

The people judged rightly when they asked "what new teaching is this?" for despite the fact that it was built upon the Law and the Prophets the teaching of Jesus was definitely a new thing, destined to supersede that which was now decayed and waxed old and ready to vanish away (Heb. 8.9.) Here is the first leading characteristic of our faith, of Christianity, its NOVELTY. What we receive from Jesus and what we in turn hold out to the world is NEW. Mankind built up the records of history over long millenniums of years without sensing or glimpsing anything like the wondrous revelation of God that came in the person and message of Jesus Christ. They were weary and sick of heart long before the light appeared, so much so that the prophet speaks of them as the people who walked in darkness and dwelt in the land of the shadow of death. But he declared in the same breath that at the time of their extremity a great light was seen, and that light came and shone upon them. That was what the people of Capernaum experienced and what every generation to which the gospel of Christ has been preached has experienced. They have seen and heard something new and it has been something that they have never seen or heard before.

Nowhere is this new power that came into the world shown up in greater relief than in the narrative of the early chapters of Acts. Peter, stand-

ing up with the eleven, evoked an astonishment and an amazement on the part of his hearers which was only equalled by that which had been caused three and a half years previously when *Jesus commenced his ministry. It is noteworthy that the same expression is used in both accounts, in Mark 1.27 and in Acts 2.12 "and they were all amazed."* The result of the first Christian sermon delivered was, as we well know, that the whole concourse was stricken with remorse and cried out to the apostles "Men and brethren, what shall we do?". There and then the Holy Spirit convicted those men and women of sin, as Jesus had foretold would be the case (Jno. 16.8) and the spirit of repentance came upon them. In obedience to the Apostolic injunction many gave themselves in submission and consecration to the Lord they had previously rejected, "*and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls*".

Thus was the Christian society established, a new brotherhood of kindred minds the strength of which all the forces of evil immediately began to test. But the proud gates of Hell have never prevailed against it. The Christian society remains in the world to-day, two thousand years later, and nothing of all the forces that have been brought to bear against it has ever successfully resisted that power by which it lives, the power that was given to the Church at Pentecost, the power of the Holy Spirit.

It could not have been many weeks before the second great test came upon the new society and it emerged stronger than ever. Peter was preaching again, and this time had taken his stand in the courts of the Temple. Once more we meet the familiar expression; the people "*were filled with wonder and amazement*" at the miracle that had been performed by Peter. Once more the power operating through the Christian community, the power of the Holy Spirit, had manifested itself to the people and forced them to consider anew this new thing that had come into the world. Once more they were compelled to listen to the ringing declaration, so unwelcome to those in authority, "*the God of our Fathers hath glorified his Son Jesus... whom God has raised from the dead*".

Those authorities did not dare delay any longer. Mysterious though this new power which inspired these men may be, they must in sheer self-defence take some action to preserve their interests. Peter and the others had given them a loophole by speaking to the people from the Great Court, within the jurisdiction of the priesthood having charge of the Temple area. They could be charged with an offence against the ecclesiastical regulations. And so the Temple guard, a kind of Jewish

ecclesiastical police, entrusted with the task of maintaining order in that area which was barred to the Roman soldiery, was called in to arrest these presumptuous men and put them in ward until the Sanhedrin could be summoned. The apparent triumph of the priests must have been tempered with chagrin, for as a result of the day's events another five thousand converts had been made (Acts 4.4). Temple guard or no Temple guard, the new and apparently irresistible power was still at work, turning men from the power of darkness and ushering them into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

The account of this assembly of the Sanhedrin—possibly the first occasion of its gathering since it met to condemn the Lord—is vivid with the overshadowing power of the Holy Spirit. Here were Joseph Caiaphas the legal High Priest, his father-in-law Annas who had been High Priest during the boyhood of Jesus, and, maintaining his hold on power, was still tacitly known as such, John and Alexander, and other prominent members of Jewry. It was only a couple of months after they had, as they thought, removed the threat to their positions and interests by putting Jesus to death, and now here was the heresy arisen again in apparently greater strength than before. The expression in Acts 4.13 "*they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus*" means, in the Greek, that the judges recognised Peter and John as men they had before-time seen with Jesus. Then, the prisoners now before them had been frightened, panic-stricken men, deserting their Master in his hour of trial and denying knowledge of him with curses and oaths. It had seemed so eminently reasonable an expectation, then, that with the death of the leader, Jesus, the whole movement would collapse and nothing more be heard of it. Now, two months later, they looked at these same men, noted their bold, fearless demeanour, their absolute determination to continue with the preaching of this new doctrine, their insistence that Jesus, Who admittedly had been dead, was alive again, their uncompromising accusation that "*ye crucified... whom God raised*". Once again, we have that familiar comment, "*they marvelled*".

Now notice the striking difference in the behaviour of the Sanhedrin. Only two months ago this same assembly had not hesitated to condemn to death the Man of Nazareth, despite what they knew of his super-human powers and his uprightness of life. They had cajoled and threatened the Roman governor in order to achieve their purpose. There was no fear either of God or man before their eyes. Surely then it would have been expected that without further ceremony they would have meted out the same treatment to

these two men who were bent upon restoring and propagating the teachings of the One the Sanhedrin had crucified. What had been done once could surely have been as easily done again. It must have been as great a mystery to that Sanhedrin that they could not do so as it would be to us, did we not know the reason.

The reason that the Sanhedrin was impotent was that the new power, the power of the Holy Spirit, was present at that assembly, and they could not fight against it. When Jesus was taken, no such power was in operation. He himself told them, in the garden "*this is your hour and the power of darkness*" (Luke 22.53) and it was willingly that he went forth to death, submissive in the grasp of his enemies, conscious that the Father could indeed send, if it were necessary, twelve legions of angels to save him, but conscious also of his own inflexible determination that it should not be so. The Sanhedrin had power on that dark night because all other power was deliberately withdrawn. The powers of darkness had full licence and liberty to work their worst, but it was for the last time. When the same Sanhedrin faced the same disciples two months later the position was reversed. The disciples were confident, assured, conscious of power, and the Sanhedrin weak, hesitant, vacillating, dreading they knew not what and realising already that the initiative had slipped from their hands and they were fighting a losing battle.

Hear their dubious, faltering words, so unlike the arrogance and vehement hate of the previous occasion. "They could say nothing against it;"

"What shall we do to these men . . . we cannot deny it;" "let us threaten them;" "They let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them." Who would have believed that this was the Sanhedrin which condemned and crucified Christ?

Peter and John went back to their brethren. The assembly rejoiced and praised God and prayed for more strength and boldness in the preaching of his word. "*And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 4.31). That was the secret. In their consecration and devotion to God and their zeal for his service and for witnessing to his Truth they found a new strength and laid themselves open for the ingress of the Holy Spirit with power, not only as individuals but as a community. That was why the Early Church did such mighty works. The power of the Spirit was upon them and in them, in more abundant measure than has ever been the case since.

So closed the first chapter of the Church's conflict. It had come into the world to supersede Judaism: it had challenged that dying system which commenced with Moses at Sinai fifteen centuries earlier and it had conquered. But in the very hour of triumph a new foe faced the infant Church, and with that foe it must now engage in a still more deadly conflict. That foe was Paganism.

Part 2 next month will tell of the conflict with Paganism and how, once more, Christianity was victorious.

Seiss on the Book of Revelation

"There is also a peculiar efficacy and power in the doctrine of Christ's speedy return. Like a magnet, it lifts the heart of the believer out of the world, and out of his low self, and enables him to stand with Moses on the mount, and transfigures him with the rays of blessed hope and promise which stream upon him in those sublime heights. It is the most animating and most sanctifying subject in the Bible. It is the soul's serenest light amid the darkness and trials of earth. And the great end and aim of this book is to set forth this doctrine. The things of which it treats, are things touching the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ, and which it describes as "things which must shortly come to pass." *The impending Advent* is the theme which pervades it from its commence-

ment to its close. And just in proportion as he who is awake to the great truth of the Saviour's speedy coming, and is engaged in waiting and preparing himself accordingly, is a better man, and in a safer condition, and really more happy, than the half-Christian and the lukewarm;—in that same proportion is he who reads, hears and keeps the words of this prophecy blessed beyond all other people. This book, at least its subject-matter, thus becomes to him an instrument of security and attainment to save him from surprise when his Lord cometh, and from the tribulations which shall try the indifferent; as well as a passport to admit him to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and to the highest awards of eternity. Precious book! and happy they who study it!"

Dr. Joseph Seiss 1875

DISCIPLESHIP

Discipleship! How little has this been in consideration during the great doctrinal disputes which have marred the history of the visible Church! Rather it has been orthodoxy, measured by strictness of adherence to a creed or system of interpretation. But, no matter how correct views might be regarding the teaching of the Bible, simply holding correct views is not being a follower of Jesus,—is not discipleship.

The word disciple as used in the New Testament is not an exact synonym for pupil, or student, or scholar. It implies not only an adherence to the teachings of Jesus, but also an attachment to the personal Jesus himself. Being simply students of the Bible in no way implies discipleship; the word carries with it the idea of being disciplined, being trained and developed by instruction and exercise in godliness.

There are many Scriptural illustrations of the relationship existing between Christ and the Church, but this one of discipleship is that by which our lives and conduct are being measured by God, the Father; and, whether we are aware of it or not, by those with whom we come in contact day by day. When Jesus was on earth He could say, "*As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world*"; but knowing that He was not to remain here He said to his disciples, "*You are the light of the world . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (Matt. 5. 14-16; John 9.5). Disciples have no light of themselves; whatever of the light of truth the world may see in them has to be that much of Christ that is reflected.

There is a tendency to put outward activity in place of the inward work of grace, transformation of life and character, sanctification. In the closing portion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7. 21-23) Jesus warns against this, saying, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven", for many will come presenting their works, to whom Jesus will say, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity". In astonishment they might ask, Workers of iniquity? What was wrong about preaching in your name? casting out demons? doing wonderful works? They were doing this on their own, having their own programme and activities, disregarding the Divine instructions, not being "co-labourers with God".

In Romans 12.1-2, the Apostle beseeches his readers to present their bodies living sacrifices. He urges them to be transformed, not merely to become informed as to God's will and purposes, not to reform in the sense of becoming moral, but to be transformed by the renewal of their minds in order to demonstrate that God's will is a good will, a perfect will, a most acceptable will. How often the will of God is disassociated from the idea of sacrifice, and sacrifice from the expressed will of God. This is well illustrated in the presumptuous presentation of the burnt offering by King Saul and the prophet Samuel's rebuke, "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15.22).

In the Beatitudes, as arranged in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus gives a series of qualities that would characterise his followers, and distinguish them. It has been said that the Sermon on the Mount does not fit this world. Jesus never said that it did. It is said by some that these teachings of Jesus are for the Kingdom Age; they are not practical in this Age. But "do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Cor. 6.2). The saints could never teach the world the righteous laws of the kingdom if they had never applied these rules to themselves in this life. The teachings of Jesus are for disciples, now; their moral and spiritual excellency is not attractive to fallen human nature.

Consider some of the conditions of discipleship: forbidding even a word of contempt; having no impure desires; loving and praying for those who spitefully use one; rendering good for evil; warning against hypocrisy; warning against being over concerned about daily sustenance; warning against judging, and, at the same time showing the necessity of judging between a true and a false prophet; exhorting to build on a rock. The question arises, "Who is sufficient for these things?". Jesus foresees the difficulty, and prescribes, "*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you*".

Many a professed Christian has taken false comfort in these words, thinking that this is of general application, that here is a blank cheque which needs only to be filled in and presented for payment. And we, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, are often overtaken in this same fault, as writes James, "You ask, and receive not, because

you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your own lusts" (Jas. 4.3). Self-interest dominates fallen man, and still clings even to disciples.

The first requisite to discipleship is, as expressed by Jesus, to be "poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"—that is, blessed are the self-renounced. And this agrees with the oft reported words of Jesus, "Unless a man deny himself, he cannot be my disciple". Self and self-will must be warred against in order that God's will may have its way. Self-will and God's will cannot peacefully co-exist in the mind of the would-be disciple. Faith is necessary for this, because the natural man can see only the natural; and the naturally unseen must become the most real in order for one to put implicit trust in, and obedience to, the teachings of Jesus, confident that He is what the Scriptures say He is, "the Son of the living God", the manifestation of God to man (Heb. 1. 1, 2; John 1. 1-18; 1 John 1. 1-4).

There are three laws which have to do with self: self-preservation; self-interest; self-denial. The first of these is good, for "self-preservation is the first law of Nature". That is why God has woven the quality of fear in the composition of man's makeup. Fear, of itself, is a good thing; it guards against a discontinuation of existence. This law of self-preservation is seen even in the vegetable world as each blade of grass, each shrub, each tree, seeks to maintain its existence in its environment. But the second of these laws, that pertaining to self-interest, characterises all of Adam's posterity, inherited from him who introduced self-will in opposition to God's will. Self-interest elevates the individual self as important above all else; it makes self that around which all in its world revolves; and the more self-centred, the more miserable and loveless is the individual. But the third of these laws, that of self-denial, is basic to the Kingdom of God. It was enunciated time and again by Jesus, "Except a man deny himself, he cannot be my disciple".

To deny self is no easy matter, for it is not denying self of something, but denying the very selfhood, the ego. Necessarily, there has to be an adequate motive to induce this submerging of self, and that motive is declared to be "the redemption which is in Christ Jesus". Labouring under deep conviction of sin, and finding that struggling for personal righteousness accomplishes little but a deeper awareness of this enslavement, the Divine Spirit directs to the grace and mercy of God, to "the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1.16).

It is the office of the Holy Spirit to "convict of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment", so the one coming under conviction is already being dealt with by God for the purpose of leading to repentance and eventual discipleship. As Jesus said, "No one can come unto me, except it is given unto him of my Father" (John 6.65). But even though one has come to God for forgiveness, and has heard the call, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me", yet the response must be entirely voluntary. There is no coercion. This was so even in the case of Jesus, who was "called of God" (Heb. 5.4). His response was, "I delight to do thy will (Psalm 40.6-8; Heb. 10.5-7), and again, "I lay down my life for the sheep... Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life. No man takes it from me, I lay it down of myself" (in accordance with God's will, Heb. 10.10). "I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again". Even in Gethsemane He could have had twelve legions of angels at his command to deliver him from the impending ordeal of trial, crucifixion, and death. Hear his prayer to the Father: "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt". Here we see Jesus crushing out of himself every possibility of his own will being exercised contrary to his Father's will.

Self-denial and cross bearing must coexist. This idea of cross bearing is much misunderstood, as it is mostly thought of as being the enduring of that about which nothing can be done anyway. Although it is said of Jesus that He "endured the cross, despising the shame", yet it is also written, "What shall I say? Father, deliver me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour (John 12.27). It was not the enduring of that which could not be escaped; it was his delight to be an instrument in the outworking of the Father's plan in putting away sin by the sacrifice of himself (2 Cor. 5.21).

Cross bearing was spoken of by the Lord before He was taken to be crucified; therefore it must have had significance which would be recognised by his hearers, else Jesus would not have used it as a figure of speech. What is its meaning? Crucifixion was the Roman method of execution for cases of extreme lawlessness; in showing contempt for the condemned, as well as making a public example of Rome's ruthlessness in punishment, the condemned was compelled to carry to the place of execution the wooden beams that were to be the material for his cross. Thus, this custom became the source of the figure of speech which Jesus used; and it meant, as He used it,

that the faithful continuance in doing God's will might be that which would lead to murderous hatred by earthly powers and associates of whatever degree. And so we read in Rev. 2:10: "Be thou faithful unto death" for it is the degree of faithfulness that is expressed. It is obedience to the Father's will as it becomes known, no matter what the outcome may be. Such it was with Jesus who not only (a) "made himself of no reputation", but also (b) "was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5-11). "He learned obedience by the things which he suffered" (experienced), and became the "author of eternal salvation to all who obey him"; follow him as his disciples, hearkening submissively to him.

In Luke 14:16-24 one of the lessons illustrated is the reluctance of the human heart to enter into God's Kingdom, to partake of the feast of favours offered to faith, to have fellowship with Christ in things that are of heavenly origin. Whenever there is set before us God's blessed will, always along with it is a logical reason why we should be doing something else, as in the parable: "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go see it"; "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them"; "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come". All of these are only excuses; the real reason for declining the invitation is that earthly ties and interests, all real and good, are given priority over interest in the things of the Spirit.

But there is the inability of the natural mind to grasp and understand the significance and wholesomeness of the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14). This is well seen as recorded in Matt. 16:21-24 when, after Peter's confession of Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God", Jesus began to show to his immediate followers that "he must go up to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed . . . Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men". Then Jesus continued "If any will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me".

As intimated in the above passage, Satan will see to it that the way of self-denial and cross bearing, instead of being a delight in doing the will of God, will be presented as an offence, while to him who is dedicated to the will of God, to suggest other-wise is an offence. We read of the 144,000 in Rev. 14:4: "These are they who follow

the Lamb whithersoever he goeth". Another has well said, "There is no such thing as easy discipleship". Why should there be? Think of the magnitude of the reward for following Christ. To be confessed before the Father and all the holy angels; "to be like him, to see him as he is"; to be a partaker of his glory; to sit with him in his throne, and reign with him in bringing the covenanted blessings to all the families of the earth! It is still a "strait gate, and a narrow way", but it leads to life—eternal life, the Divine nature.

"As great multitudes followed Jesus, he turned and said unto them, If any come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." Then He explained why not in two parables—parables which have been much misunderstood: the parable of the building of a tower without sufficient funds to finish it; and that of a king going to make war against another king with superior forces (Luke 14:25-35). What Jesus is teaching in these is that half-heartedness will not do, nor insincerity, for unless there is wholehearted devotedness to the will of God, there will eventually be compromise. The intimation is clear in verse 26 that opposition may come from one's own household, family, friends. If there is any compromise it has to be on the part of the would-be disciple, for the world has nothing to compromise! "Count the cost" does not, or rather, should not, convey the thought of discouraging discipleship; instead, it is a warning that it must be sincere, or there will be compromise, defeat, and confusion. Earthly ties, altogether fitting and human, will challenge our love and faithfulness, our devotion to Christ and his teachings. And then, Jesus adds, "Salt is good: but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?". This, the salt that has lost its savour, is the once professed disciple who has conceded to the prejudices of those who find the way of Christ—the way of righteousness and godliness—objectionable. Such a one is no longer able to bring conviction and witness to the reality of eternal life and eternal judgment.

Let us then, "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God".

(From the "Herald of Christ's Kingdom")

THE WISDOM OF ELIHU

A study in
Job 32-37

7. Destiny of the Wicked

Although chapter 35 is a wonderful exposition of the love of God, Elihu has more to say on this aspect of the Divine character before he passes on to the final one, the power of God. Here in the first twenty-one verses of chapter 36 he takes up the theme again; even although a kind of climax was reached at the end of chapter 35 with his reproof of Job's lack of spiritual insight into this matter, he returns to his discourse and now relates the love of God to the greatest mystery of all—the consequence and penalty of wilful, deliberate, incorrigible sin. The story of the Prodigal Son is sufficient to show that God will never shut the door against any whilst there is still hope of repentance and reconciliation; even though the prodigal be gone completely out of the life of his Father and his place be not known, and all his resources and possessions dissipated and vanished, so that he has nothing, he has but to say "I will arise and go to my Father" and put that resolve into execution, and the Father will go out to meet him. But even so, it remains that some may be found who resolutely reject all that God can do to bring them back to himself, will deliberately turn away from the Saviour's appeal and elect wilfully and determinedly to continue in sin for sin's own sake. When, in the infinite wisdom of God, He sees that there is no possible hope, that the sinner has destroyed within himself his own capacity for repentance, that sin has become a fundamental part of his being, then, says Elihu, the love of God is manifested even here in withdrawing the life of which the recipient can make no proper use. There is no escape from the Divine law "the wages of sin is death", and that death, when the sinner is irreclaimable, means the absence of life—merciful oblivion.

"Suffer me a little" says Elihu "and I will show thee that I have yet to speak on God's behalf" (36. 1). Rotherham discerns something else in the Hebrew; he renders "I will show thee that yet—for God—there is justification". On either rendering the young man is God's champion; he maintains stoutly that God is right in what He does and it is the part of man quietly and reverently to observe his works and accept them in confidence of faith. In that settled conviction he still ascribes all that he knows and can say, to God his maker, "I will fetch my knowledge from afar; and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker: for truly my words shall not be false; one of competent knowledge is with thee" (36. 3. 4). The

last half sentence is from Rotherham; the Authorised Version "*he that is perfect in knowledge is with thee*" does not convey the intention with the modern sense of "perfect" read into the verse. Once more Elihu stresses the fact that his words and his philosophy come, not from his own intellectual reasoning, but from a great distance away, from heaven where God dwells, and come clothed in the raiment of truth and righteousness. That, and that alone, is the reason he can claim so confidently that he is "one with competent knowledge". In that he joins hands with that whole gallery of Bible heroes who, each in his own day and circumstance, has spoken the message of God in full conviction and assurance, knowing of whom he has received it. Noah, a preacher of righteousness, knew the verity of the things he preached when as yet no outward evidence existed of the imminent, tremendous convulsion of Nature which ended the first great epoch of human history. Joseph and Daniel, each in the presence of human greatness in the persons of powerful monarchs, spoke forth with clarity and simplicity the unalterable decree of Almighty God. The Apostle Paul, renowned for his forthright, authoritative, almost dogmatic, ministry, declared the basis of his assurance at the last when he said "I know him whom I have believed, and am persuaded . . ." Every Christian ought to be like that, convinced in his own heart of the verity of the things he has accepted as truth. Whether there is power in the lips and tongue to make these things known or not is of lesser consequence. What is of importance is the being sure in one's own heart and holding on steadfastly throughout life to "those things which are most surely believed among us."

"Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not (better, not to be despised) mighty in strength and wisdom (better, mighty in strength of wisdom) He will not preserve the life of the wicked, but giveth right to the poor" (36. 5-6). A quiet affirmation of confidence in the supremacy of God, that, coupled with a simple expression of basic Divine law. The one is the guarantor of the other. Because God is omnipotent in both power and wisdom, that which He has ordained as the basic principle of this creation will surely stand. Evil will not continue for ever; the evil-doer must certainly come to an end. Righteousness will assuredly be exalted to its proper place; the righteous man is destined to enjoy life in God's creation forever. It may not be without reason

that Elihu makes righteousness more or less synonymous with poverty; Jesus himself said that the poor in spirit are heirs of the kingdom of heaven. It may well be that in both cases the idea of poverty is used more as an antithesis to the arrogance and pride of the wicked than as a reference to the paucity of material possessions—the poor of this world, rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to them that love him.

There follows now a relatively lengthy passage, right down to verse 18, in which Elihu seems to be at pains to stress what he has already dwelt upon time and time again in his discourse, the mercy and favour of God showered in abundance upon those who have come into heart harmony with his righteousness and the inevitability of the judgment of death upon all who elect to continue in sin. He has said so much about this before that its repetition begins to seem almost wearisome; yet there must be a reason for the continued repetition of this one theme, this constant harking back to the relative destinies of saint and sinner. Perhaps it is not so very strange after all; even to-day the orthodox Christian evangelist is just as unwearied in constant appeal to his listeners to avoid the pitfalls of sin and come into a state of reconciliation with God. Elihu believed, no less than do the modern preachers, that the first essential for any man is to "get right with God" and to that end he was never tired of repeating his burden, the ultimate penalty of sin, the ultimate fruit of righteousness.

"He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous; but with kings are they on the throne; yea, he doth establish them forever, and they are exalted." (36.7). The instructed Christian cannot mistake the meaning of this allusion: Kings, exalted and established for ever upon thrones; these can be none other than those who in the Book of Revelation are kings and priests unto God, reigning with Christ a thousand years. The New Testament presentation of Christian discipleship is that of a steady progress out of the weakness and humiliation of the present to a future destiny which involves exaltation to the heavens, in association with Christ, to reign as kings over the world for the blessing of mankind. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13. 43) was the expression Jesus used to define that happy state. The disciples were promised that they would sit on twelve thrones, judging the tribes of Israel (Matt. 19. 28). All the way through the New Testament this idea of a future reign of the Church over the nations, for the blessing of those nations, is stressed, and here in the Book of Job we have the first early glimmering of what afterwards blazed out as a shin-

ing truth. God, who turns his eyes away from the wicked and will not preserve their lives in perpetuity, does not so withdraw his eyes from the righteous. To the contrary, He sets them as kings on thrones; He exalts them to heavenly glory and establishes them forever. Some words spoken by the revealing angel to the aged Daniel, more than a thousand years after Elihu had gone to be with his fathers, are very apposite here. *"And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him."* (Dan. 7. 27). That kingdom is the Messianic Age of prophecy, and the "saints of the Most High" are the Christian Church, exalted forever to a perpetual kingdom which, as verse 14 of the same chapter states, is "an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away; a kingdom that shall not be destroyed".

"But they that are bound in fetters shall be holden in cords of poverty. Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and" (as Rotherham puts it) *"breathe their last, no one knowing."* (37. 8-12).

The first sentence in verse 8 is from the Septuagint, the "but" being more accurate than the Authorised Version "and if they be" which latter rendering, grammatically, would identify the evil-doer of these verses with the righteous of verse 7, a palpable absurdity. The LXX rendering puts the evil-doers in contrast with the righteous and so brings to the fore-front the second great phase of the Divine Plan. Whereas in verse 7 the Christian Church of this present Age is represented, and the promise given that they will reign as kings on thrones, verses 8-12 point to the remainder of mankind, the nations, over which the Church will reign during the thousand years of the Millennium. And the law of that Messianic era is here plainly stated. It could hardly be put more succinctly. First of all, those nations and all the individuals of those nations, in bondage still to sin, unreconciled to God, children of wrath, blinded by the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4. 4) are truly "bound in fetters" and therefore "holden in cords of poverty". That is their condition at the time the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ (Rev. 11. 15) and the time of the fulfilment of Isaiah's glowing words "to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them

that sit in darkness out of the prisonhouse," (Isa. 42. 7). According to the twentieth chapter of the Book of Revelation the Devil is to be bound for a thousand years "that he should deceive the nations no more". Then comes the time, the blessed reign of Christ and his Church, when God moves to the enlightenment and the education and the conversion of the nations. In Elihu's words, God "sheweth them their work and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline and commandeth that they return from iniquity". This is the whole principle of the Millennial Age; God will show mankind what a sorry mess they have made of the world during this whole long period during which they have had their way without interference. He will show them how that the blame for their failure is laid fairly and squarely against their sin,—their transgression. Then He will bring them into what Ezekiel calls the "bond of the covenant" (Ezek. 20. 37), although that prophet's reference is to regathered Israel in the End Time rather than to the entire world in the Millennial Age. But the principle is the same; all mankind will be subject to the discipline of that Age, a discipline which encourages and urges their return from sin and iniquity, their sincere repentance and conversion, and at the same time, by virtue of the absolute righteous and equitable rule of Christ and his Church, will demonstrate the blessings and benefits of righteousness. For the first time in the history of mankind, the righteous will flourish undisturbed by the machinations of the evilly disposed. The thirty-second chapter of Isaiah is only one of the many passages that describe the glories of that transcendent day; in that chapter Isaiah declares "a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment . . . and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever". This is the promise to those who respond to the Divine leading. "If they obey and serve him" says Elihu "they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures". That is the blissful state of everlasting life in a state of sinlessness amid the glory of a perfect society, the society of the redeemed. "Come, ye blessed of my Father" invites the King when He has, at the end of that Age, separated the sheep from the goats "inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world". (Matt. 25. 34). "The ransomed of the Lord shall return" sings Isaiah "and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away". (Isa. 35. 10).

What if the man does not respond? The blessed destiny is for those who enter wholeheartedly

into the Divine arrangement, who by way of repentance, conversion, acceptance of Christ, reconciliation with God, turn their backs on sin and walk hereafter in the ways of God. Some there may be who will not repent. Elihu has a word for them also "But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and breathe their last, no one knowing". There is a terrible finality about those words. The sword of the Lord is swift and very powerful and descends unerringly to execute Divine judgment. There is a vivid picture in Rev. 19 of the final conflict at the end of this world when the rider on the White Horse descends from Heaven to overthrow all enemies and establish his Kingdom on earth. The name of that Rider, says the prophet with awe, is "The Word of God" and out of his mouth goes a sharp sword with which He is to smite all opposing forces—the wild beast, the false prophet, the kings of the earth, and their armies—; the victory is utter and complete. So with all who pit their evil against God's holiness. It is not that the Divine patience is exhausted; not that the Father of all has ceased to be merciful. It is that He perceives, in his infinite wisdom, that these particular recipients of his goodness can never make rightful use of the life He has given, can never take their place in his eternal creation or fulfil the function for which they were created. So life is withdrawn; quietly, unobtrusively, they slip away from among men. They breathe their last, no one knowing, says Elihu. Jesus had this same withdrawal of conscious life from the incorrigibly impenitent in mind when He exhorted his disciples not to fear men who could only kill the body and after that could do no more, but rather to fear God who is able not only to destroy the body, but also to destroy the soul in Gehenna. (Matt. 10. 28). Gehenna is the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem where all the city refuse was burned to ashes—fitting symbol of the utter destruction of the wicked.

Elihu has his own comment on all this; he wants to show that he himself fully endorses that which God has decreed. "The hypocrites in heart heap up wrath; they cry not when he bindeth them" (36. 13) he says. These are they who deliberately flout the decrees of God; they continue in their own way, storing up wrath against a day of reckoning, taking no heed, or pretending to take no heed, of the constraints (binding) God is putting around their freedom to work the works of evil. So, says Elihu, endorsing and declaiming the inevitable judgment "Therefore let their soul die in youth, and their life be wounded by messengers of death; because they afflicted the weak and helpless; and he will vindicate the judgment of the meek" (36. 14-15 LXX). This is a

strange expression, the unregenerate soul dying in youth, but it is founded upon the idea that, compared with the everlasting ages of life stretching out before the righteous, the death of the wilfully wicked at the end of the Messianic Age of trial will assuredly seem like a "dying in youth". Isaiah uses a similar expression, speaking of the same thing, when he says (Isa. 65. 20) "As a child shall one die a hundred years old; the sinner at a hundred years old shall be accursed". It is noteworthy too, that Elihu attaches a prominent reason for the condition of heart which leads to the judgment "they afflicted the weak and helpless" which was later to be repeated by our Lord himself. Reverting again to the parable of the Sheep and Goats, which pictures this same division between righteous and unrighteous in the Last Judgment, the unrighteous question the cause of their condemnation and the King tells them that they failed to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to visit the captive. (Matt. 25. 41-45). The prime fault of those who lose life at the last is their failure to accept and live up to the fact that all men are interdependent, living not unto themselves but unto others, and without thus taking their place in the community of life God has ordained they have left no basis for the continuance of their conscious existence.

There now comes another passage (36. 16-21) which has given the translators a great deal of trouble; several of the best versions render from diametrically opposite standpoints and this largely because it is difficult to discern from the verses themselves whom Elihu is addressing or to whom he is referring. The result is that verse 16 at least is almost unintelligible. The clue to Elihu's meaning comes with the realisation that verse 21 concludes his discourse on the Love of God and verse 22 commences his fourth discourse, that on the Power of God. Since both the previous discourses concluded with a direct warning and injunction to Job himself it would seem reasonable to expect the same climax here, and this assumption opens the door to the understanding of 36. 16-21. Ewald and Cook in their time—a long time ago now—have each played their part in the elucidation of this rather difficult part of the text, and the rendering here adopted is theirs, with the assistance of Leeser, and a partial retrogression to the Authorised Version. "And thou also hast been seduced from listening to the voice of affliction by thy boundless prosperity, and by the ease of thy table which was full of fatness. But if thou art full of the judgment of the wicked, judgment and decree will support each other. Because there is wrath, let it not seduce thee in thine affliction and let not the great riches which thou couldst offer in atonement turn thee

aside. Will he esteem thy riches? No, not gold, nor all the forces of strength. Desire then not eagerly the night, when nations pass away in their place. Take heed, turn not thyself to wrongdoing, so that thou wouldst choose this because of thine affliction". (36. 16-21).

Here is Elihu's injunction to Job as he concludes his eulogy on the Love of God. Job, he says, has allowed himself to become oblivious to the presence of sin and suffering in the world by reason of his own prosperity and richness of possessions. The fact that Job is said to have done many good works among the poor and unfortunate during the time of his prosperity need not be thought to deny that fact. Many a man distributes from his store to mitigate the evil in the world with sincerity and true sympathy for the unfortunate without that evil and that distress really cutting him to the heart as an intolerable thing which God himself abominates and is working to eliminate from his creation. Many of us are like that to-day, rich in good works and generous with our talents and opportunities but still not sensing the inherent evil of this world order under which such evil things are possible. Now Elihu is trying to point out that this attitude of mind is one which is likely to win a good man over to the side of evil, even though unwittingly. Many an upright Christian, blessed with this world's goods, has used his wealth mightily in the relief of pain, suffering, insufficiency and at the same time has gone on supporting the established institutions of this world which are themselves largely responsible for that pain, suffering and insufficiency. To that extent he is hindering the powers of the world to come. And to that extent also such an one will suffer loss when the kingdoms of this world give place to the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, as they surely will. That is what Elihu meant when he went on to say "But if thou art full of the judgment of the wicked, judgment and decree will support each other". The judgment is the Divine expression of condemnation against the institutions and kingdoms of this present evil world; the decree is the Divine command which goes forth to replace this world by the next, under the kingship of Christ. Condemnation; command; the one supports the other and the Divine sentence is put forthwith into execution. Job is warned against finding himself, even in measure, on the side of anti-God—we would say antichrist—when that time comes. Although this condition does now exist in the world, says Elihu, do not allow the thought of the great riches you can expend on godly works blind your mind to the fact that God will not esteem such gifts to anything like the extent He will esteem an intelligent self-surrender of heart

and life to know and do the will of God. "Hath the Lord as great delight in sacrifices and burnt offerings as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" asked Samuel scornfully of Saul. Neither gold nor all the forces of strength, all the means of power and influence a man may possess, are of any interest to God, says Elihu. He might have said, as the Psalmist did on a later occasion, that all the silver and gold is God's, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. So Job must not turn his thoughts and bend his interests to the affairs of this world of darkness, so soon to pass away. "*Desire not eagerly the night, when nations pass away in their place*". Job's desire, and ours too, must rather be for the new day, the new world of light and life, when the nations will walk in the light of the New Jerusalem and enter, undefiled and clean, through its gates to enjoy the everlasting felicity of the eternal city. "*Take heed*" is Elihu's solemn warning in the face of all this, "*turn not thyself to wrong-doing, so that thou wouldest choose this because of thy affliction*".

Job had known prosperity and ease, and served God even if, as Elihu seems to infer, he had not plumbed the depths of God's love for man and appreciated what is involved in the sin of the world. Now he was plunged into affliction and penury himself; take heed, urges the younger man, that you do not forsake your earlier faith because of this adversity, but on the contrary use it as a means of realising, as you never could realise before, the depths of suffering and sin in which this dark world is sunk, and the necessity for stern allegiance to the things of God that you may become an instrument in his hand for the recovery of the world from that sin and that suffering.

Here Elihu rests his case. He has now discoursed on three of the Divine attributes. Wisdom, Justice and Love. Later he takes up his fourth and last thesis, and interprets to Job the philosophy of suffering against the background of the Fourth Divine attribute, God's Power.

(To be continued)

"THIS GENERATION SHALL NOT PASS"

*A Study of
Matt. 24. 34*

"This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." (Matt. 24. 34).

Many attacks have been made by critics upon the bona-fides of our Lord as a teacher sent from God on account of his words in verse 34. Looking at the long category of events foretold in this Olivet conversation, and not noting with sufficient carefulness what proportion of these forecasts were included in the scope of "all these things" they have claimed that Jesus' words were falsified by events. This is a serious charge to lay against One who said "*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away*".

They have included all the signs and portents connected with his Second Advent in the scope of "these things". Manifestly that is a wrong thing to do. The "All these things" of Matt. 24. 34, must be governed and defined by the meaning of the same words, from the same lips, as recorded in Matt. 23. 36. "All these things" refer only to the crimes perpetrated upon the Prophets by the fathers, and to the "filling up of the Cup" by that generation as it slew the Stephens, and the James and Peters and Pauls, who came in Jesus' Name, and the retribution that came from "*All these things*" could fall only on that people, and only while they were unrepentant concerning their crimes. Jesus spoke of many things associated with his return which lay outside the scope

of "all these things". It will not be forgotten that Jesus was answering three questions, not one. It would therefore be most improper to place all his words in reply to the one question "When shall these things be?" Even the sign of the budding fig-tree—the return of Jewish favour—should not be included; for that indicates punishment ending and restoration begun.

Again, signs applying to peoples other than the Jew should not be included, for they were not the children of those ancient fathers who had slain God's prophets. Further, the particular signs applicable to the Christian Church, in verses 42-51, must obviously be omitted from "all these things".

However, when we have cleared the ground of our enquiry from all these mistakes and misunderstandings, there yet remains one other point to be cleared up, and set in order. That point has to do with the word "fulfilled" in verse 34. It is generally understood that this word should have the same meaning as the words "accomplished" or "completed". But the word used by our Lord does not mean "come to pass" in the sense of being ended; but "come to pass" in the sense of beginning to happen, or beginning to take place.

One Greek scholar and writer says on this word "The Lord concludes this special prophecy

of the tribulation by adding, '*Verily I say unto you this generation shall not pass till all these things begin to take place*.' He then explains that the Greek word *Genetai* used by our Lord here is a derivative of the Greek *Ginomai*, which has a wide variety of meanings, few of which are so definite as the thought in our word "fulfilled". He further says "The word *genetai* is from *ginomai* and means 'to begin to be'; 'to come to be'; and is quite different from *pleroo* which does mean 'to fulfil'." In Luke 21, 32, which is the parallel passage, we have the former word "begin to be", while in verse 24, we have the latter word "fulfilled" (referring to the Times of the Gentiles). Professors Young and Strong, in their concordances verify this suggestion regarding *ginomai*. Young shows it to be translated "be"—(the verb "to be") 249 times; "come to pass" 82 times, and many other forms which show a present and not a past fulfilment. Strong says *ginomai* (to cause to be; "to become")—is used with great latitude. He then gives a list of words which include "arise" "be assembled"; "be" "be brought to pass", "continue" and many more indicative of a present happening. As an instance we may note a form of *genetai* in John 13, 2, which in our Authorised Version is translated "and supper being ended". It is quite clear from verses 26-28, that supper was not ended but was only just beginning. The Revised Version renders it "and during supper". The Diaglott translates it "as supper was preparing".

What the Lord really said was "This generation shall not pass till 'all these things' 'begin to happen'." And they did begin to happen to that very generation! As if to show that this is the correct thought the Lord throws in a very illuminating phrase when He said "THE END is not yet"—"these are the BEGINNING of sorrows".

This throws a new light on this baffling passage. The cup of Divine retribution was placed to the lips of that generation, and they drank deeply of its bitter draught, but that generation

did not empty the cup. The great tribulation only BEGAN in their days. The overthrow of their city and nation was only the beginning of those special curses incorporated in the terms of their national Covenant. Warning the fathers of the penalties which the forsaking of their Covenant would entail (Deut. 28, 15-68) he told them God would pluck them out of their land and curse them in field and home, and cast them into the wide places of the earth. Nowhere, not even in the Papal catalogue of cursings, are such terrible words to be found; and in their infliction there is nothing so terrible to be found in the records of history. That it had a portion of its fulfilment in the siege of Jerusalem is certain when we read verses 49-57; and that the nation from far is the Roman nation seems to admit of no doubt whatever. Then verse 64 says "The Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from one end of the earth to the other". Jesus said, "And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations" (Luke 21, 24).

Evidently then, while the sack of Jerusalem saw the beginning of their "great tribulation", yet, terrible as it was, it was only the beginning of sorrows and not the end. It was to continue till they should repent and be prepared to say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord". Our Lord calls it "the tribulation of those days". "Those days" span an Age—the period that lies between Jerusalem's destruction, and that happier day when God pours upon them the spirit of supplication, when every family shall weep apart. (Zech. 10, 12).

When therefore the Lord said "this generation shall not pass till all these things begin to come to pass", his words were not intended to cover all the signs and portents associated with his *Parousia*, but had reference only to the retributive measures due to be inflicted upon that rebellious nation, and to have their beginning with that then present generation.

Warrington Convention. The usual Easter Warrington Convention is planned for 25-27 March 1978 (D.V.) in the Masonic Hall, Winmarleigh Street, Warrington, commencing at 3.0 p.m. Saturday 25th. For details and accommodation write Mr. E. Haslam, 39 Downs Drive, W. Timperley, Altrincham, Cheshire (Tel: 061 969 5487) or Mrs. Dorothy Shaw, 25 Fothergill Street, Warrington, Cheshire.

Yeovil Convention. A convention is to be held in Yeovil over the week-end 13-14 May 1978. For details and accommodation write Mr. P. Chislett, 108 St. Michaels Avenue, Yeovil, Somerset.

HABAKKUK — PROPHET OF FAITH

An exposition of the
Book of Habakkuk

Chapter I — Destruction from the North

He was, in all probability, director of the musical service at the Temple in the days of King Jehoakim and just before the shadow of Babylon fell across the land. He was a prophet; the particular form of the title used, applied only to Haggai, Zechariah, and himself, appears to indicate that he held a definite prophetic office. He was not one of the wandering seers like Elijah, nor a layman like Nahum, but a priest or a Levite whose prophetic gift had been so far recognised by the ecclesiastical authorities that he was officially accepted as a prophet of God. His life therefore must have been spent in and around the Temple and its services.

He might have known Ezekiel and Daniel; the latter was a boy at the time. He must certainly have been acquainted with Jeremiah and the two men were probably close friends. They both lived at the same time, were probably of much the same age, and shared the same outlook on the things of God. They were both passionate for the righteousness of God and both waited longingly for the coming of his Kingdom. But whereas a great deal is known of the life of Jeremiah, from his youthful days in the reign of good King Josiah until we lose sight of him forty years later in Egypt after the destruction of Jerusalem, nothing whatever is known of the life of Habakkuk. He comes upon the scene and delivers his prophecy, calm in its faith and resplendent in its presentation of the majesty of God, and passes out into the unknown. Whether he lived to witness the fall of the city twenty-five years after his prophecy, and was carried into captivity with his nation, or on the other hand had by then been laid to rest to await his reward at the Last Day, we have no idea. His prophecy is his history and his only monument.

Habakkuk was essentially a prophet of faith. He gave the Apostle Paul the inspiration for that greatest of doctrines, justification by faith. "The just man shall live by his faith" cried Habakkuk. Paul sensed the inner truth behind the words and carried them to an infinitely higher plane when he showed that the life enjoyed by the just man can only be received in Christ and through belief in and acceptance of Christ. Habakkuk's own personal faith is revealed from time to time in his prophecy, shining forth like illuminated gold and red initial letters on an ancient parchment. His sterling confidence in God's holiness and justice despite the apparent triumph of evil (chap. 1. 12-13); his steadfast belief that God would perceive

his standing on his watch, and reveal to him his plans (2. 1); his plea that God would preserve alive his work with his people in the intervening years between the early and the latter fulfillments (3. 2); his willingness to "rest" in death until the time of Israel's deliverance and glory at the end of the world (3. 16); and his determination to honour and praise the Lord despite the apparent utter failure of his promises (3. 17), all attest the deep-rooted faith which enabled this man clearly to see, not only the faults and shortcomings of his own people and the retribution that must surely come upon them in consequence, but also the Divine intervention which, at the end of time, would restore that people, repentant and purified, to its destined inheritance, destroy its enemies, and exalt righteousness over evil for ever.

It would be a matter of surprise, therefore, if such a man did not see, in prophetic vision, something of the circumstances attending the dawn of that great day, the day of the Messianic Kingdom. Sure enough, his words do convey some very definite foreviews of these circumstances, and stamp him as one of those prophets who "spoke" of the coming "Times of Restitution" to which Peter referred in his sermon to the people of Jerusalem (Acts 3. 21).

The prophecy of Habakkuk is a striking example of the manner in which "holy men of old" were led to a perception of things relating to the "last days" only after they had been prepared for that perception by an understanding of the presence of sin in the world and the cause of that sin. In these three short chapters there is a whole process of development which must be repeated in the life of every Christian disciple who would understand intelligently "what his lord doeth". Habakkuk was first led to supplicate God on account of the injustice and apostasy which was rampant in his own day. "Why does God permit such evil?" was his question. "*How long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear; even cry unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save?*" (Chap. 1. vs. 2.). The answer of God when it came to him was not one of reassurance. True, it showed that God was not heedless, and that the wicked would not escape retribution, but it also showed that retribution was to come in the form of an invasion of the land by the Chaldeans, "that bitter and hasty nation", under Nebuchadnezzar, and that the land would be destroyed and laid desolate. Habakkuk, filled with dismay at the drastic nature of the remedy, approached God

once more and appealed to his holiness and righteousness, that He would remember his promise and purpose with the children of Israel, and not permit them to be utterly destroyed by the heathen. There was apparently no immediate answer to this plea, and it was then that Habakkuk rose to the heights of faith and took his stand upon the watch tower to await further instruction from God, instruction which he knew would come, because he knew that God was faithful.

His faith was honoured, and the message came through to him. It was a message of woe and condemnation against the persecutors of Israel. It was to be for a long time; as with Daniel not many years later, the vision was for the "time of the end" but at that time it was to speak plainly and not lie. And then, at the end of the message, God appeared to the prophet upon the throne of his holiness in the glory of his heavenly Temple, just as He did to Isaiah (Isa. 6. 1), and gave this faithful servant a vision of the "end time" set against the background of the Exodus incidents. Under those vivid symbols there appears a dual picture of the great Time of Trouble that is to close this Gospel Age and usher in the Millennial Kingdom; a picture that shows, first, God's working in the affairs of men during the "Time of the End", the period during which the kingdoms of this world are disintegrating and breaking down in face of the imminent Kingdom of Christ, and second, arising to intervene in that short and final phase of human resistance to the incoming Kingdom which is called "Jacob's Trouble", the invasion of the Holy Land by the forces of "Gog and Magog". And perceiving the final glorious outcome, Habakkuk closes his prophecy with an expression of his own confidence in his awakening from the "rest" of death when that day shall have come, and all God's promises would certainly be fulfilled.

So his first complaint serves but to awaken him to a consciousness that all is not well with man's world; it is sunken in sin and iniquity. "Why dost thou . . . cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me . . . therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous" (Chap. 1. vs. 3-4).

Habakkuk's complaint was fully justified. The reforms instituted by King Josiah had lapsed very soon after his death. His son Jehoiakim, a young man of twenty-five, had no reverence for God and was much more interested in political bargaining with Egypt. He appears to have been a "modern" ruler surrounded by a "smart set" which had but scant respect for older and wiser counsellors such as Jeremiah, the men who saw

quite plainly to what this state of affairs must lead. In consequence public morality declined, injustice and oppression flourished, unbridled commercialism forced the observance of the Sabbath into virtual disuse, and the Temple of God was neglected. The nation had repudiated its covenant with God—the covenant entered into at Sinai upon their organisation as a nation—and in accordance with the terms of that covenant, national disaster must surely follow.

Verses 2 to 4 record Habakkuk's prayer. Verses 5 to 11 tell of God's answer to that prayer. It is a message of condemnation and judgment; prophetic, because the events of which it spoke were yet future. "*Behold ye among the nations . . . and wonder . . . for, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs*" (1. 5-6). Within a very few years the word was fulfilled. Nebuchadnezzar with his armies invaded and ravaged Judah, captured or slew successive kings and many of their godless princes and nobles, and took the people captive into Babylonia. For nineteen years or more he continued those raids until at length the Temple was burned, Jerusalem destroyed, and the land utterly desolated. The historian rightly attributed this great disaster to the people's neglect of the things of God, and their mocking his messengers "till there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36. 14-20).

The description of the Babylonian invaders struck fear into the prophet's heart. Neither he nor his people knew much about the Babylonians. They had but recently, under Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar, become a power in world affairs. The Assyrians had been known and feared, but Nineveh had been destroyed forty years before, destroyed by these very Babylonians, and the once-dreaded names of Sennacherib, Sargon and Shalmaneser were dreaded no longer. But this was a new menace. "*They are terrible and dreadful . . . their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves . . . their horsemen shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to the prey . . . they shall come all for violence . . . they shall scoff at kings, and princes shall be a scorn . . .*" (1. 7-11). No wonder that the heart of Habakkuk failed him at the terrible prospect and he betook himself again to God, praying this time, not for judgment against the unrighteous, but mercy upon the wayward.

Verse 11 requires re-translating. It should be rendered rather "Then he sweeps by like a wind, he, the guilty, whose might is his god". An apt description of Nebuchadnezzar, the man who said later "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of my kingdom and by the might of

my power?" (Dan. 4. 30). The keynote of this prophecy is the triumph of Divine influence over the material might of man: it commences with the growth of Babylonian world dominion, the "head of gold" of the world-image (Dan. 2. 38) and its decline to ultimate destruction, and it concludes with the greater world-empire of the end of this Age and that empire's utter overthrow by Divine intervention at the time of Christ's Kingdom upon earth.

Now Habakkuk (in vss. 12-17) comes before God in supplication that Israel might not perish utterly. He reminds God of his own glory and power, and of his infinite righteousness. "*Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? We shall not die... thou hast ordained them for judgment... established them for correction*" (vs. 12). Because God is, and because He is the God of Israel, and his promises are bound up in Israel, it is unthinkable that the nation should die. The Babylonians were "ordained" or appointed for "judgment" and "correction" upon the faithless nation, but not to exterminate it utterly. That is Habakkuk's first reaction. But then there comes another thought to his mind. Is not the Lord violating his own principles by inflicting evil in order to purge from evil? Is He doing evil that good might come? "*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil... wherefore lookest thou upon them (the Chaldeans) that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he, and maketh men as the fishes of the sea... They take... them with the angle... in their net... in their drag... and are glad*" (1. 13-15). In this wonderful picture the prophet alludes to the helpless condition of his

people, as fish in the sea, swept up by the nets and drags and torn away from their native habitat without strength or power to resist. Can this be the will of God, God who is pledged to destroy all evil, God Who said to Moses that He would fill the earth with his glory? (Num. 14. 21). Had the Lord indeed given the earth over to destruction and all people on it to slavery and death? These all-conquering hordes had subjugated Assyria and the northern peoples, they held Damascus and the land of Israel to the north of Jerusalem, they ruled Moab and Edom and the desert tribes to the south. Only Judah and the coastlands were left, and now it seemed as if they were to be swallowed up also. What was to become of all God's promises? The heavens were dark unto Habakkuk and the Lord seemed very far away, almost as if He had forgotten his people, and yet the prophet knew within himself that such a thing could not be. But the prophetic message, so full of tragedy and disaster, was trying his faith to the uttermost, and he broke out in the anguish of his heart with the despairing cry which closes the first chapter, "*Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?*"

* * *

But it was at this crisis that Habakkuk's faith inspired him to take his stand upon the watch tower and hearken diligently for the Divine message; and from this point that his prophecy expands into increasingly glorious stages of revelation, taking him far beyond the events of his own days and showing him that which was to come upon his people "at the end of the days". Next month's chapter will tell of his experiences.

The plague of Beth-shemesh

1 Sam. 6.19 states that fifty thousand and seventy men of Beth-Shemesh died by the hand of the Lord because they committed the forbidden act and sacrilege of looking into the Ark of the Covenant when it was returned by the Philistines in the days of Samuel. This seems an inordinately high number for what was only a small village. The Arabic and Syriac versions give the number as five thousand and seventy, which is more reasonable and would point to some misreading of ancient Hebrew numerals which led to the greater number in some Hebrew manuscripts. A more important point is the apparent severity of the punishment for what was, although sacrilege,

a relatively minor crime. The explanation lies in the fact, deduced from the context, that the Ark came back from the Philistines' land infested with bubonic plague, a fairly common epidemic in the East. The plague apparently struck the Philistines at the same time as they captured the Ark at the battle of Aphek and took it in triumph to their own land; in consequence they attributed it to the wrath of the God of Israel and returned the Ark post haste. The men of Beth-Shemesh, handling the sacred object, caught the infection and many died. Naturally enough the chronicler attributed the deaths to Divine judgment.

GOD'S CHARIOTS

According to a Bible dictionary a chariot is "among the ancients, a two-wheeled vehicle for war, racing or pleasure." Coming to the present day, a chariot is defined as a stately vehicle or a god's car. There are many gods today; we are concerned only with the God we know as the Great First Cause, the creator of the Universe, so the question arises "What need has He for a car?". In seeking an answer to this question we must try to put from our minds the thought that He has the form or personality of a man. As creatures strictly limited by the bounds of time and space, we cannot wholly dismiss this way of looking at God, so, like the ancients, we have to think of God as needing some means of moving about his universe.

One of the more spectacular pictures of this means of transport is seen in the book of Ezekiel in which the prophet describes a vision of that which is sometimes called "the throne-chariot" (Ezek. 1.4-28; 10.1-20). It must be emphasized that this was a vision, not a solid reality as depicted by some artists. No useful purpose would be served in considering the details of this theophany; sufficient is it to say that it defies any rational or physical explanation, being far superior to any space-vehicle used by the cosmofliers of today. It was a strange mixture of storm, fiery-cloud, living creatures having no counterpart on earth, wheels that do not obey any physical laws, bathed in a light which cannot be looked upon with unprotected eyes. Within this chariot the prophet sees what he describes as the appearance of a man, even more brilliant than the surrounding radiance, which was to him the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God. Other O.T. worthies had similar visions. God spoke to Job from a whirlwind (38.1. & 40.6). The Psalmist describes in some detail his vision of God in Psa. 18.7-14. Zechariah sees God traveling in a whirlwind with the sound of a trumpet, accompanied by lightning (Zech. 9.14). Habakkuk saw a vision of God coming from the south so frightening that he declares "my whole inner self trembled, my lips quivered at the sound, rottenness entered into my bones and under me my feet trembled" (Hab. 3.3-16). These were visions of God on the move, approaching men with judgments poured out in his righteous anger.

In Ezekiel 30.3. Matt. 24.30 and Rev. 1.7 the clouds bring woe, mourning and wailing, but this is only one aspect of God's approach to man. Psalm 104.3. declares that God makes the clouds his chariot, and walks on the wings of the wind,

but these clouds are not always indicative of trouble. In Zech. 10.1 Zion is urged to ask of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain, so the Lord shall make bright clouds and give them showers of rain. "Bright clouds" is better rendered as "lightning clouds" which describes the lightning flash in the time of the winter rains, which take the form of frequent bad storms. The latter rains, falling in the springtime, are copious supplies which fill up the dried-up rivers and wadis. This brings to mind Psalm 68.4-17; God is described as riding upon the heavens (clouds) pouring down a generous rain, reviving the land as it languished, (*Moffatt*) then in verse 17 the writer declares "*the chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels, the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place*". Translations of the last phrase differ considerably, but it seems that God is among the myriads of chariots, having come from Sinai into the sanctuary of the holy place. This suggests God's movement from dealing with the children of Israel under the law of Moses to the preparation of the Gentiles in the building of his "temple not made with hands", these myriads of chariots being ever available today.

We cannot and do not expect to see visions of God in his burning chariot today, as did some of his servants in a previous age; but we have the blessed assurance that He can and will attend the least of his little ones when they cry to him. We must not, however, think of him in human terms. We can only be in one place at a time, and it takes time for us to travel from one place to another, but the God of the Universe, the Father of his children, has myriads of chariots at hand, and, not being limited by the bounds of time and space (an attribute quite beyond our human conception) can make his presence known in any place at any time. When God revealed his glory to his faithful servants in ages past, they were unable to look upon it with unveiled face. When we seek the presence of God in our extremity, we must not expect to see him in all his glory, rather should look for him in the cloud, which is his chariot.

Hast thou a cloud?

*It is Jehovah's triumph car; in this
He rideth to thee, o'er the wide abyss,
It is the robe in which He wraps his form,
For He doth gird him with the flashing storm.
It is the veil in which He hides the light
Of his fair face, too dazzling for thy sight.*

God cometh in that cloud.

DESPISE NOT THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

There are musical notes too high for the human ear to hear. There are places too remote for the human eye to see and concepts too majestic for the human mind to grasp. Our senses are strictly limited. The figures quoted by astronomers have little meaning for the man in the street. The sheer immensity of the universe confounds those who try to comprehend it. At the other end of the scale man fails to understand the minuteness of God's creation. An atom! Yes, even less than an atom is the basic unit of our world. On television, aided by the use of modern microscopes and cameras are revealed millions of tiny plants and creatures, beautifully made, all different, fantastically adapted to their environment, each one created by and known of God. As the Psalmist viewing the skies without the use of a telescope, exclaimed in awe, "*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained*", he was constrained to add "*What is man, that thou art mindful of him?*". Meditating on all the marvels of creation, how can man fail to be "lost in wonder, love, and praise"?

But the Psalmist goes on to reveal that God is mindful of man, and the wonder of it is that generally speaking it is not the greatest and wisest of men who most evoke his interest, but rather, as Paul says, "*God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty*". As God uses something smaller than the atom to work his will, nothing else is too small for his purpose.

"*A small round thing.*" It lay on the ground like hoar frost. So small, so insignificant that its very name means "What is it?" and yet it provided food for all the Children of Israel throughout their forty years' wandering and was a wonderful picture of the Heavenly Manna which sustains the Christian in his pilgrimage through this world.

There were five pebbles in a brook, small and round; a boy, younger than his brothers and a boy's sling, yet these were all used to defeat the giant enemy of Israel when the king in his armour and all his army were powerless to do so.

There was a little maid in Syria, taken captive from Israel. She had two fine characteristics, faith in the prophet of the Lord and love for her earthly master, although she was a slave. So God

used her, little as she was. Her master was cured of his leprosy and acknowledged the God of Israel.

Gideon had an army to fight the Midianites but the army was too great for the Lord's use. God told Gideon so, adding, "*lest Israel say 'Mine own hand hath saved me'*" (Jud. 7.2.). So the numbers were reduced from a somewhat mixed company of 32,000 to 300 who were devoted to the cause, and the Lord delivered Israel from the Midianites. This lesson seems to be one which Israel has yet to learn in our day. Not until she is prepared to give God the glory will her final deliverance come. The principle on which the Lord always works is "Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit".

God says of Bethlehem, "*Thou, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that shall be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*" What an honour for that little town! Jerusalem might have been chosen—perhaps it might have seemed to us more appropriate—but Jerusalem is remembered as the city where our Lord was crucified. Perhaps the people of Bethlehem had a more humble spirit than those of Jerusalem over whom Jesus wept with the words "*How often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not*" (Matt. 23.37).

The manna lay on the ground. David was content to mind the sheep. The little slave girl had faith in God. Gideon gave up his army without question to put his trust in the power of God. Bethlehem must have recognised its humble position.

Does not the manna remind one of the five loaves and two small fishes? Only a boy's lunch, but the lunch of a boy who was willing to give it to Jesus for his use, and the multitude was fed. This was a wonderful demonstration of the power of God, of the compassion of Jesus and of the bread which represented his body which He would give for the life of the world. Such a little in the hand of the Lord can mean so much.

Unlike the little slave of Naaman, the slave Onesimus, who is the subject of Paul's letter to Philemon, ran away from his master. But he knew where to run. Obviously, even at that

stage, "a lover of good men", he went to the apostle Paul. He was only a slave and even good slaves in those days were of less account than the animals. Onesimus apparently was an unprofitable slave. But evidently God was "mindful" of him and it is wonderful to know from the letter to the Colossians that Paul can later say "*Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you*" (Col. 4.9).

Jesus had much to say about the little ones in the Kingdom. Such are in God's sight greater than the prophets. His warnings are grave against causing them to stumble in the way.

So it is evident that the things and the people regarded by men as of little account are precious to God and can be used by him to his glory.

But there are warnings too about some small things, "the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vine". Are these the so-called "small" sins, the slips, which with a greater devotion to the Lord could be avoided? Are they the careless thoughts and words and deeds which do not bring honour to God? Are they the little ways in which we neglect the needs of others, or perhaps the small anxieties which show our lack of trust?

James reminds us of one little fox which causes a great deal of trouble. He says "*The tongue is a little member and boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth*" (Jas. 3. 5 & 6).

But, praise God, that same member can be used as a real evidence of consecration to the Lord, as the word of love, of encouragement, of humble witness to the Lord's faithfulness is expressed. It is through the power of the tongue that the Gospel is preached and every Christian can play a small part in this. The tongue is in use when "confession is made unto salvation" and by this same little member the people of God can "offer the sacrifice of praise, giving thanks to his name".

Paul points out how all the members of the human body can be yielded to God as instruments of righteousness.

So it is with the spiritual reality of which the human body is but a picture. Every member of the "Church which is his Body" not only may but must play a significant rôle if the Body is to be healthy and growing. The way Paul expresses it is, "*The whole Body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the Body unto the edifying of itself in love*" (Eph. 4.16).

One may consider that one has no talent at all and therefore no part to play. In our Lord's parable all had at least one talent and the owner of the one was severely reprimanded for not making

good use of it in the master's service. When it is remembered, too, that the Christian's service does not relate only to his relationship with his brethren but to every aspect of daily life, a little thought on this might reveal many hidden talents which could be cheerfully devoted to the praise of God. As the hymn says:—

*"The daily round, the common task
Will furnish all we need to ask,
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God."*

The called ones are still members of the Body even when not actually in contact with the other members and in each one a character is being formed which will affect the whole. So the small, the least member, like the little slave girl, may glorify God. How true are the poet's word "On the strength of one link in the cable, dependeth the might of the chain". God's values are so different from those of men.

How important is such a small thing as a moment! Every decision ever taken is arrived at in a moment. It is true that one may ponder an idea for days or weeks or years, but a single moment only is needed for the final decision, sometimes irrevocable. The first decision to yield to Satan was the work of a moment. Abraham, called of God, immediately went forth in obedience. Daniel determined once for all to serve the God of Israel. In one moment Pilate gave up Jesus to crucifixion. In one moment each of the apostles decided to dedicate his all to God. For each Christian, though the work of preparation and the actual working out of his consecration may span many years, there is surely one moment when a definite decision is made for the Lord. One moment only is necessary for a resolution which can have results reaching to eternity.

An atom, a pebble, a young boy, a little girl, a boy's lunch, a runaway slave, a part of the body as small as the tongue, one talent, a moment of time, the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. How insignificant in the eyes of men, how important in the eyes of God!

"*Who hath despised the day of small things?*" says the Lord by the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 4.10). The foundations of the Temple being laid after the captivity seemed to give no promise of the great and glorious building to come, but if the building is the Lord's the grand result is never in doubt.

So, to those who in the eyes of the world and perhaps in their own opinion are small and unimportant, but who nevertheless are willing to commit their way to the Lord, came the words of Jesus, "*Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom*".

SIMEON AND THE CHILD JESUS

An old man, ready to depart this life, and a baby newly come to earth. An age in history, waxing old and ready to vanish away, and a new age, flushing into the roseate hues of dawn. These four met on the day that the aged Simeon came into the Temple and saw this young couple bringing their first-born child to be dedicated to the Lord. He had seen many such during his long life of service for his God, but this time there was a difference. That inward voice which had been his guide and mentor so many times in the past spoke again, and now for the last time. God had fulfilled his promise; the Spirit's assurance possessed his mind, and he knew with certainty that at last he was looking upon the Lord's Messiah.

Simeon was evidently one of the few in Israel who were prepared to receive the Messiah in the way He came, as a child, born in humble circumstances, without pomp, ostentation or show. The majority expected him in vastly different guise, as a mighty conqueror, bursting upon the world in all the splendour and power of his Heavenly glory. The many rejected him because of the manner of his Advent; the few, like Simeon, accepted him because by dint of reverent study of the Scriptures and constant waiting upon God they had a more accurate idea what to expect.

The child Jesus was six weeks old. According to the law of Moses, as recorded in Lev. 12. 1-8, a woman was considered unclean after the birth of a child, and—in the case of a boy child—must come to the sanctuary with an offering at the end of forty days. A lamb for burnt offering and a young pigeon or turtle dove for a sin offering was stipulated, and after the offering of these by the priest she was ceremonially clean again. A further stipulation provided that if the woman was unable—through poverty generally—to furnish a lamb, she could bring two turtle doves or pigeons, and the intimation in Luke 2. 24 that Mary did in fact avail herself of this concession is an incidental evidence that Joseph and Mary were in poor circumstances. The Lord of all chose to identify himself with the poor rather than the rich when He laid aside the glory which He enjoyed with the Father "before the world was", and became man for the suffering of death. The expression in Phil. 2. 7 that He "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant" was literally true to the extreme. But, despite her poverty, Mary came also to present her child in dedication to God,

to offer back the gift she had received from him to be devoted to his service. That also was a requirement of the Law. Whenever a woman's first-born child was a son, that son was to be presented to the Lord. In ceremonial fashion that child was particularly the Lord's, and although whilst still on the way to the Promised Land the Lord arranged that the tribe of Levi should be exchanged for the first-borns of all tribes, so that the Levites became the dedicated ones to serve the people in the things of God, the people of Israel still retained the custom of presenting their first-born before the Lord in his sanctuary. So it came about that Mary and Joseph were to be found in the Temple on this particular day for the accomplishment both of the cleansing and the presentation.

It was thus that Simeon found them, as, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he came into the Temple Court. We do not know much about Simeon. He never appears again in the Gospel story and is not referred to anywhere else in the New Testament. The memory of the incident itself must have been preserved by Mary and related years later to Luke, for none of the men who afterwards became Jesus' disciples were there; most of them were probably not even born. There are a few distinct clues in the description from which some definite inferences can be drawn. Luke says that Simeon was "*just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ*". (Luke 2. 25-26). Only Mary could have known these facts and imparted them to Luke; it seems clear that Mary must have been previously acquainted with Simeon or at least knew him by repute. The word "just" could equally well be rendered "upright" or "righteous"; that for "devout" is one that is used to denote the more scrupulous and rigid aspect of religious life. This, added to the fact that Simeon was one who looked for the imminent coming of Messiah, and believed that when He came He would be a light, not only to Israel, but also the Gentiles, to all people, an unorthodox belief among the Jews of his day, makes it strongly probable that Simeon was a member of the little-known body of people called the Zadokites. During the century that immediately preceded the First Advent there had grown up a community which looked for the coming of Messiah in much the same way as the

past two centuries have witnessed a similar expectation of the Second Advent among Christians, and who based their expectations upon the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, and certain chronological calculations drawn from the same. With that outlook was associated a strong sense of dedication to God's service and holiness of life which caused many of them to withdraw to a considerable extent from contact with the world around them. The sect known as the Essenes was strongly imbued with these views—the recently discovered “Dead Sea Scrolls” have thrown new light upon this sect—and although Simeon was a very common name in Israel, and it is impossible to identify the one who is mentioned in Luke's account, it is of interest to note that at the time of the death of Herod there was an aged Essene named Simeon who had gained some fame as an uncompromising critic of the King's misdemeanours. This man may have been the same as Simeon in Luke's account.

“—waiting for the consolation of Israel” (vs. 25). This word “consolation” has the meaning of one coming to the side of a person needing succour, comfort or salvation. It is rendered “consolation” or “comfort” on about twenty occasions in the New Testament, such as Acts 4. 36 “Barnabas, son of consolation”, Heb. 6. 18 “We have strong consolation”; Rom. 11. 4. “That we by patience and *comfort* of the Scriptures might have hope;” 2 Cor. 1. 3. “The God of all *comfort*”. “*Parakletos*”, the Comforter, in John 14, referring to the coming of the Holy Spirit, is from the same root. In the context of Luke's narrative the expression is used to denote the fulfilment of Israel's national hope, the coming of the Messianic Kingdom which should exalt Israel to the headship of the nations and fulfil the Divine promise to Abraham, “*in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed*”, although it has to be admitted that Israel at the First Advent had largely forgotten that wider extension of God's purpose. But Simeon was one who did believe, and now, by the inspiration of the Spirit, he knew the time had come.

It is not likely that Simeon was the priest into whose hands Mary's offering was to be entrusted. He is not stated to be a priest, and in fact, the expression “a man in Jerusalem” seems to militate against the idea that he held official position in the Temple. There is also the fact that he was a prophet, and it is not usual for priests to be prophets. It seems more probable that Simeon was in the line of prophets whose last representative in the Old Testament was Malachi, and the last of the line John the Baptist. Both Malachi, four centuries before, and John the Baptist, thirty years after, spoke of the Light that was to en-

lighten the world; Simeon held that Light in his arms.

So he gave voice to that wonderful pæon of praise which has become an established part of formal church worship. “*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people.*” The old man had lived through the time of Israel's greatest glory since the days of David and Solomon, that brief period after the Maccabees had won freedom for the Jews, and Rome had not as yet fastened her grip upon the nation. He had seen the boundaries of the Jewish State pushed as far as ever they had been by Solomon, and Jewish ambassadors represent his country even at Rome, the greatest of Empires. Then he had seen disaster and civil war, and finally Pompey the Roman general ride into Jerusalem to force Judea into servitude again, and all the golden expectations vanish. With his fellows who had regard for the law of God he had writhed at the spectacle of Herod, the hated Edomite, ruling over the people of Israel, and had mourned the scandals and violent deeds which disgraced the once holy priesthood of Aaron. But now all that was forgotten; he held in his own arms the Lord's Messiah, and with that inward conviction which is the inviolate possession of the man who is habitually guided by the Holy Spirit of God he knew that at last the promise had been fulfilled; God had indeed visited his people; the Christ had come.

The word “Salvation” in verse 30 is not the noun of that word, but the neuter form of the adjective, “that which brings salvation”. The Septuagint of Isa. 52. 10 “all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” uses the same form of the word; the reference in both instances is to the fact that Christ is the one who brings, and effects, the salvation that God has planned for “whosoever will” of the entire human race. Simeon saw that clearly, and hence he was able to describe both that salvation and the Child who was to be the medium of that salvation as “*a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.*” (V. 32). The full force of that tremendous expression is only felt when one realises that the word “Gentiles” embraces all of mankind who are not Israelites, and hence is best rendered, as it is in so many modern translations, “nations”. “A light to lighten the nations.” “*That was the true light*” cried John “*which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*” (John 1. 9). God's words cannot fail. Whether we understand the philosophy of the matter or not; whether we appreciate the Scriptural doctrine or no, whether we comprehend the Divine Plan for

mankind or find his purpose dark and mysterious, it is true and gloriously true that every human creature that has ever been, or will ever be born, will, at some time before the final decision is taken, be enlightened by that light and be brought to a full realisation of the issue between good and evil. The fact that some may be impenitent and unregenerate to the end and wilfully refuse entry into life does not affect that. Not one single human soul will ever be able to say to God "I never had a fair chance".

It was this vision which Simeon had. He saw the Kingdom of Messiah as Paradise in which the foreview of Isaiah would be fulfilled "Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm (Christ) shall rule for him; behold, his reward is with him and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arms and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." (Isa. 40. 10-11). In this Babe he saw the future King who was to fulfil Isaiah's prophecy, and he rejoiced, knowing that God had now moved to deliver, not only his own people Israel, but all mankind, from the thralldom of sin and death. He was ready now to go to his own rest, confident that like Daniel of old, he would stand in his lot at the end of the days. (Dan. 12. 13).

"And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him." (V. 33). Most of the principal manuscripts have "his father" here but the A.V. follows the Alexandrian with "Joseph". It is of little consequence. If Luke did use the term "father" it was only because inevitably the common usage favoured this; obviously

Joseph was the generally reputed father of Jesus, and only a very few could possibly have known of his virgin birth; Luke was, in any case, fully aware of that for he gives the best account. Joseph and Mary marvelled, not in the sense of astonishment as though they had not previously known of the Child's destiny, but in awe and wonder as they listened to Simeon's words and realised the magnitude of this great thing.

Then Simeon turned to Mary with a personal word for her: "*This child,*" he said, "*is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel . . . that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed . . . and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also.*" (vs. 34-35). How much did the saintly old man, so near the end of his earthly course, see into the events of the next forty years, and perceive the figure of Jesus among the people, preaching, exhorting, reproving; healing the sick, raising the dead, winning the love of the common people and incurring the enmity of the Scribes and Pharisees? How much did the Holy Spirit show him of the Crucifixion, the little knot of women at the foot of the Cross, the distraught figure of the mother of Jesus? Did he even see, in shadowy outline, the figures of the Twelve, preaching to the dwellers in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost? How much of the future he did perceive we may not know, but that Simeon the just and devout, the one who waited all his life for the consolation of Israel, was indeed in the line of the Hebrew prophets, speaking and seeing as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit, we do know. Like John the Baptist thirty years later, he could truly say "*I saw, and bare record, that this is the Son of God.*"

Feelings

It is most important to note the difference between "deadness" to feeling and the "repression" of feeling. To "feel" angry or anxious, and to repress the expression of the feeling is to court physical trouble. Indeed, much physical trouble can be accounted for by repression of some part of our nature. Many truly Christian people do violence to themselves by self-limitation of thought and feeling; they think it wrong to let their love go out fully and freely; they fear to indulge their longing for beauty or give their creative instincts free play. If the "whole" man is to be "healthy" we must open wide all channels of our nature, at all its varying levels, and let the Divine creative life pour free through them and uplift and transfigure them. There must be some

right outlet for every God-given instinct, and if we desire the perfection of our whole being as a witness to our Maker, opportunities for the use of all our powers will surely present themselves as we are fitted to make use of them. Those who make the service of the Master their first joy in life find it offers possibilities in them which they had never suspected they possessed. But that service must be undertaken in the free joyous child-spirit of dependence on the Heavenly Father, not with the burdened sense of personal responsibility. We are always "workers together with God" and God only gives us to do what it is possible for us to accomplish. All else we can leave trustfully in his hands.

(selected)

"GIRD UP THE LOINS OF YOUR MIND"

A note on
1 Pet. 1.13

Though written so long ago, the above words of exhortation lose none of their force. They were penned for the instruction of the whole Church, down to the end of the Age. The introductory, "Wherefore," refers to the glorious hope of the high calling, and of the necessarily severe measures required to fit us for this exalted inheritance. Peter would have all appreciate what it is to be called with such a high calling—to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith (vs. 14). He asserts that, if faithful, we are to be made "partakers of the Divine nature", joint heirs, with Jesus Christ, of all things (2 Pet. 1.4).

As the Spirit of God draws the heart into closer fellowship and sympathy with the Divine mind, the value of these "exceeding great and precious promises" is more and more fully realised, until there glows in the heart the same holy enthusiasm that filled the hearts of the apostles. And only when the heart is thus warmed and the mind thus awakened are we prepared to understand the Apostle's "Wherefore", upon the inspiring comprehension of which depends our ability to heed the earnest exhortation which follows.

If the heart is not duly inspired with this hope—if we have begun to esteem it lightly, or to forget it, or to think of it as an idle tale—to heed the counsel of Peter, here given, will be impossible. If, therefore, it is realised that a spiritual lethargy has to any extent been creeping over us, imperceptibly numbing the spiritual senses, so that the truth is losing its inspiring power, the first duty is to betake ourselves to prayer and to communion with God and his Word, that its sanctifying power may be realised.

"Wherefore", then, you who discern the prize of the High Calling, endeavouring to press along towards the mark, "gird up the loins of your mind"—as in the illustration; strengthen and fortify your purposes and efforts; renew your determination; redouble your diligence; cast aside the weights of unnecessary worldly cares; increase your zeal; and, as the Apostle Paul also urges, run with patience the race set before you. Run, not like one who is merely beating the air, but like one who has a purpose in view, and who, in desperate earnest, is determined to make his calling and election sure (Heb. 12.1. 1 Cor. 9.26).

Having thus "girded up the loins of your mind" for a long, steady and determined effort, he further counsels,—*"Be sober:"* do not allow yourself to become excited and under the spur of

excitement to exhaust all your spiritual vitality in a very short time, and then to suffer a relapse into coldness or discouragement, but thoughtfully to consider and prepare for a long and patient endurance of all the discipline and trial of faith and patience necessary to prove an overcomer and worthy of the blessed reward promised "to him that overcometh". The race is not one to be run by fits and starts, but by "patient continuance" in well doing. Soberly, thoughtfully, weigh and endeavour to realise the import of the exceeding great and precious promises and gather from them their invigorating inspiration; earnestly apply the mind and heart to the instruction of the inspired Word of God, availing oneself also of such helps—of "pastors and teachers" and their literary productions — which prove harmonious with, and helpful to, the study of the Scriptures; diligently and patiently submit yourselves to the transforming influences of Divine grace and truth; and then, loyally and faithfully, devote your consecrated talents, however few or many, to the great work of preaching this gospel of the Kingdom to all who will hear.

Such a sober view of the situation fortifies the mind against discouragement, and enables us, as the Apostle suggests, to "hope to the end for the grace which shall be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ". Such a sober view keeps Reason on the throne of our minds. And Reason says, the Divine call to joint-heirship with Christ clearly implies eligibility to the exalted office; the Divine promise clearly ensures Divine grace to enable me to fulfil the conditions; the Divine provision for my justification, by faith in the precious blood of Christ, releases me from condemnation to death; and the righteousness of Christ fully supplements all my weaknesses, so that before God, I stand approved in him. Sober reason also says the directions given in the Scriptures to those who would run the race are clear and explicit, and make plain every step of the way to those who are truly and fully consecrated to the Lord. The examples of the Lord and the Apostles shine on the pathway with a moral lustre and glory that cannot lead astray. By walking in their footprints the goal will assuredly be reached.

Therefore, in this sober view of the High Calling and its privileges, and the abundant resources of Divine grace, do not be discouraged or overcome in any way, but hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.



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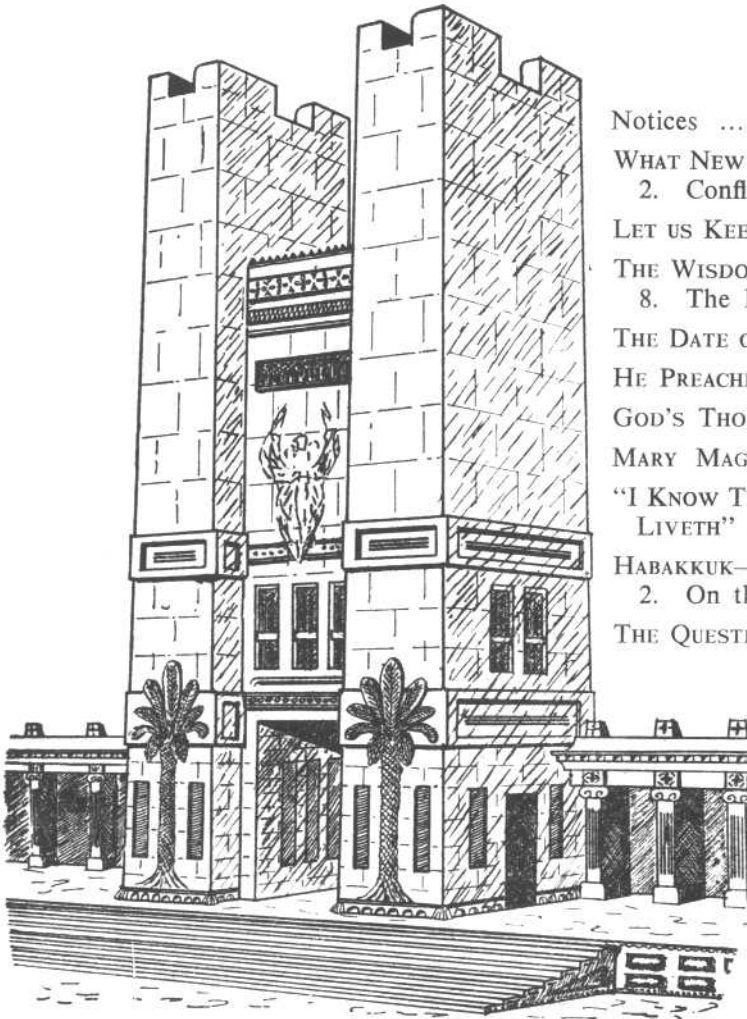
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

Published March 1st

Next issue May 1st

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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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NOTICES

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Renewals. Readers whose address serial numbers fall within the 3000, 7000 and 8000 ranges may find a pink "renewal notice" in this issue. This is normally enclosed when we have received no communication for the past six months or so and its object is to assure us that you still desire to receive the "Monthly". It is important that you return the renewal notice intact without delay, or a letter in lieu thereof; without this intimation we have no assurance that you are in fact still receiving the "Monthly" safely. It has been our custom to continue sending for a considerable time even though the renewal request has not been returned, but with the increasing costs of printing and postage we are being compelled to be a little more severe from now on. **IT IS THEREFORE ESSENTIAL THAT YOU RETURN THE RENEWAL NOTICE OR ELSE A LETTER ASKING US TO CONTINUE THE "MONTHLY"**. Although we are very happy to continue sending whether or not you feel able to contribute to the cost, we definitely do not wish to send where there is little or no interest, and your request is the only means we have of knowing of your interest.

Another point: if someone else entered your name when you first became a reader do not rely on them to remember to do it in subsequent years. Sometimes they do and sometimes not. Return the renewal notice for yourself and so be certain that all will be well.

A further point. We know that some of our readers are aged and sometimes unable to write, although able to read and are sincerely interested and do not want to lose their issues. In such case get someone else to write on your behalf, or else let us know the position and arrange that upon

your decease someone advises us of the fact. We can then arrange to send continuously without expecting to hear from you.

In some cases a new reader has been entered by some friend or acquaintance who believes they would be interested but in fact it is not so; in such case we have no wish to send the journal unnecessarily and would greatly appreciate word to that effect from anyone thus placed so that we can discontinue sending without delay.

Readers whose serial numbers do not come within the above ranges, 3000, 7000 and 8000 will NOT find renewal notices in this issue; their turn comes in September.

Back numbers. Back numbers of the "Monthly" for the past six years are available upon request for new readers who have not seen them.

Anonymous. Bro. J. H. Shepherd of Bradford requests us to acknowledge with sincere appreciation the receipt of anonymous gifts of £10 (Maidenhead) and £20 (Manchester) towards the special fund administered by him and two others, and to express their joint appreciation to all those who have demonstrated their interest in this service.

Gone from us

- Bro. L. Ansell (*Chelmsford*)
- Bro. P. R. Bainton (*Bristol*)
- Sis. B. M. Bonner (*Luton*)
- Bro. W. D. Grey-Rees (*Neath*)
- Sis. — Parnham (*Nottingham*)
- Bro. D. Topping (*Belfast*)
- Sis. A. Walding senr (*Bexley Heath*)

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

WHAT NEW THING IS THIS ?

Some reflections on the power of Christianity

2. Conflict with Paganism

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto death." (Rev. 12. 11).

This wonderful panorama in the Book of Revelation pictures the conflict between the infant Church and the entrenched forces of Paganism, in a setting which calls all the militant ardour of our souls to the front. This was war, and war to the death. No compromise was possible; one side or the other must eventually give way under the strain, and break down, and be swept away. There was no room in the Roman world for both Christianity and Paganism; one had to go. Paganism had the entrenched strength of nearly a thousand years close-knit organisation and its roots in the mythologies of long-past ages; it had State and people on its side and all the malevolence of a demon-controlled priesthood alert to challenge and resist the new power that had appeared in the world. Christianity, from the worldly point of view, had nothing; an insignificant band of peasants and fishermen, without education, without money, without friends, without influence. How the Pontifex Maximus—Supreme High Priest of the entire Pagan priestly hierarchy—in his splendid palace at Rome, must have smiled—at first—when tidings of the new faith reached him. He was not smiling later, when the hidden power which inspired that band of simple disciples began to be manifest in the changed lives of men and women, and the temples which for so long had claimed the allegiance and the gifts of all people began to be deserted, with vacant courts and empty coffers.

But the battle was not won without casualties. Nearly four centuries were to elapse before the triumphant song of Revelation 12 could become a reality. The gods of Olympus did not vacate their marble palaces at the first onslaught. The philosophies of Greece and Persia, no less than the ruthlessness of Roman State policy, were to create havoc in the growing Church and set back its development time and time again. The fatal urge to compromise with the enemy, to gain time by means of strategic retreat, was there, and just as it was in later days, and has been in our own times, the relatively few bold spirits who plunged forward with drawn sword to engage the foe in mortal combat all too often found that their fellows had fallen back and withdrawn from the fierceness of the fight. The love of the many that

waxed cold was as much of a menace to those early champions of the faith as it is to us to-day.

Nevertheless, they won through. The gallant little ship which from the outset faced up to mounting waves and howling winds, the evil forces of earth and heaven, of pagan priests and demon-gods, sailed through at last into the sunlit glory of a quiet and peaceful ocean. And although other dangers still lay ahead of the stout-hearted mariners, the Church's second great foe, Paganism, was utterly broken and unable ever to raise its ugly head again.

The battle was joined almost immediately after Pentecost. The challenge of Christianity to the Gentile world was a bold and uncompromising as it was to the Jewish world, and the Gentiles took up the challenge. A system of thought and a way of life which threatened to destroy at one and the same time the popular gods of the masses and the cherished philosophies of the elite invited opposition from both parties and the opposition was not slow in coming.

Paganism in the First Century had two aspects, both destined to give way before the advance of Christianity. The first aspect was the worship of pagan gods, which was general among the ordinary people, who crowded the temples and whose lives were regulated by the ritual observances imposed upon them by the priesthoods, and made burdensome by the exactions and gifts wrested from them. The upper classes—the educated—in general had given up faith in the existence of the gods, and treated the national religion with a kind of amused tolerance, merely yielding formal observance to the extent required by the State. The educated classes in general adopted the philosophies of one or another of their leading thinkers—Plato is acknowledged to be the most well-known if not the greatest of these—and Greek or Oriental philosophy served such instead of religion. Christianity attacked both the gods of the poor and the philosophies of the rich, and demolished them all.

The Roman system of worship was taken almost entirely from Greek mythology, the names of the gods and goddesses being Romanised. Thus Zeus of the Greeks (Jupiter to the Romans) was the supreme god dwelling in his palace on the top of Mount Olympus in Greece. The brothers of Zeus were Poseidon and Hades. Poseidon (Neptune to the Romans) was the god of the sea and Hades (Pluto) the god of the underworld, the

world of the conscious dead, for the immortality of the soul was an inherent feature of Greek religion. Beside these three there were "gods many and lords many", as Paul remarked in 1 Cor. 8.5. The teaching of the apostles was carried on against this background. Barnabas and Paul, visiting Lystra (Acts 14.8-18) were mistaken by the natives for Jupiter and Mercury come down from heaven, and only with great difficulty could they restrain the people from offering sacrifices to them.

That was only a casual contact with the symbols of Paganism. A little later on, during the course of Paul's next missionary journey, Paul and Silas, visiting Philippi (Acts 16. 16-23) made closer acquaintance with some of the darker forces behind the gods that were no gods. A damsel possessed with what the Authorised Version calls a "spirit of divination" followed them and gave testimony to the truth of their mission. The correct rendering of the expression is "a spirit of Python". The Python was the serpent-oracle at Delphi to which men resorted from all parts of the world to enquire about the future. The Delphic Oracle was esteemed above all other oracles of Greece; its demon-possessed high priestess was revered and feared as one who had veritable communion with the other world—as indeed, she had. The damsel who met Paul and Silas at Philippi was another such, and being a slave, brought much gain to her masters by reason of the revelations she was able to make in consequence of her obsession by demons.

Here was a direct challenge to the power of Christianity. True, the demons had publicly acknowledged the superiority of *El Elyon*, the Most High God, and proclaimed to all within earshot that these men had the message of salvation. That acknowledgment was on a level with the declaration of the demons who testified Jesus to be the Son of God. But it also by implication maintained the standing of the pagan gods. The Most High was not the only God, but merely the highest and most powerful of gods. Paul rejected the offered compromise forthwith. Without entering into any kind of treaty with the demons, he commanded the obsessing spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of the unfortunate girl, and the demon had no option but to obey. "*He came out the same hour.*"

The sequel to that encounter was the casting of Paul and Silas into prison, the earthquake, the conversion of the Philippian jailer, and the coming of the city authorities personally to entreat the two missionaries to leave the city peaceably. That was the first step in the overthrow of the ancient gods.

Paul must have had this incident in mind when, writing to the Ephesians long afterwards, he penned those immortal words "*We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against angelic princes, against spiritual powers, against the world rulers of darkness, against spiritual hosts of evil in the spiritual realm*" (Eph. 6.12). None knew better than the Apostle how intimately involved with those dark spiritual powers of evil were the regilious and civil powers of the Roman world, and as he looked into the future he must certainly have foreseen the fierce nature of the conflict that was yet to be waged before paganism was finally overthrown.

The first decisive blow at the enemy was dealt at Ephesus. Paul had dwelt there for two full years and the power of the Spirit had been mightily manifested, in the casting out of demons, in miracles of healing, and in the growth and development, in Christian grace and steadfastness, of a church that was later to be famous throughout the world. Ephesus was an important city and it was moreover the home of one of the "Seven Wonders of the World", the Temple of the goddess Diana. "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" was the cry of the people. For nearly four hundred years had the world come to Ephesus to see and to worship in the wonderfully beautiful edifice that had been built by Alexander the Great, and during all that time the pagan gods and goddesses held undisputed sway. But after the incident related in Acts 19 the story was never the same. As the church at Ephesus increased in power so the worship of Diana declined. The mighty structure fell into disrepair and was eventually used by the Roman emperor Justinian as a source of materials for building a Christian church. Throughout mediæval times the site of the temple remained a stagnant marsh thick with reeds and rushes and tenanted only by water fowl. Not until the year 1869 were the ruins of the great temple of Paul's day discovered beneath the water and the mud.

Whilst Paul was attacking the ancient gods in their own strongholds, the battle was also being joined on another front. Peter, holding up the banner of the Gospel in Judea and Samaria, met the first onslaught of Eastern philosophy, the "wisdom of this world". Strangely enough, as at Paul's encounter with the Pythoness damsel, so Peter's first contact with the enemy offered an opportunity to compromise. Simon Magus was converted by the preaching of Philip and baptised (Acts 8.9-24), and upon meeting Peter offered money in exchange for the impartation of miraculous gifts. Simon Magus is said to have been at one time a disciple of John the Baptist, to have

been born in Samaria and educated in Alexandria in Egypt, where he studied Eastern philosophies and came back possessed of certain supernatural powers which are referred to in Acts 8. The reply of Peter was sharp and to the point; Simon could expect no part nor lot in the work of the apostles and indeed no share in the fellowship of the church until he had given evidence of a true and sincere repentance of his wrong condition of heart.

Simon Magus was one of the early leaders of that blend of Oriental mysticism and Greek philosophy which was known as Gnosticism. Greater havoc was wrought in the Early Church by Gnosticism than by any other form of paganism. The Gnostics took to themselves various items of the Christian faith, incorporated them with the theories of Plato, the religion of the Persians, the wisdom of Egypt, and produced a composite and insidious doctrinal belief which seduced many immature Christians from their faith. The warnings of the New Testament against false doctrine and false teachers are nearly always directed against the Gnostics. The "deeds of the Nicolaitanes" of Rev. 2.6, in the message to the Church at Ephesus, refer to Gnostic doctrine. Some of the "doctrines of demons" thus taught were that the world was not created by the Most High God, but by a lesser god; that God, who dwelt in the unapproachable light, the "pleroma", produced two mighty but lesser beings, one of each sex, and from them came further such beings (the "æons") of whom Christ and the Holy Spirit were one pair. Some declared that Jesus of Nazareth was an ordinary man and that Christ entered into him at Jordan and left him just before he died on the cross. Others said that Christ never had a real human body but was a phantom, an appearance. These are the teachings St. John condemns in 1 John 4.1-3. During the century following the death of John, the last of the apostles, Gnostic meetings, seceding from the Christian assemblies, were formed in many towns. The worship of Mithra, the Sun-god of the Persians, was a prominent feature of Gnosticism. With all this the apostles and their faithful co-workers had to contend. The educated classes, the rich and noble, the soldiers of the Empire, all who laid claim to knowledge superior to the common people were peculiarly liable to be attracted by the specious theories of Gnosticism, and so it was that St. Paul on Mars Hill in Athens, the cultural centre of the world, challenged the whole system of this world's wisdom with the simplicity of Christ crucified.

Acts 17.16-23 tells us that some of those who listened to Paul on that historic occasion were of

the Epicureans and the Stoics. The Epicureans derived their philosophy from Epicurus, who had lived three and a half centuries earlier. They maintained that the gods were not interested in mankind, that there was no immortality, no after life, no reward or retribution for good or evil. The highest aim in life was to seek pleasure and satisfaction without causing harm to others. The Stoics held that the Divine Mind pervaded all the universe and inspired men to high ideals, but was itself quite indifferent to pleasure or pain. Hence the Stoics steeled themselves to endure whatever life brought them without complaint, and prided themselves on uprightness of life with little sympathy for others.

Paul cut through all this involved reasoning by presenting a God Who does care for mankind and is actively planning for man's welfare and happiness. Moreover he declared that while God had in the past allowed men to reason in their own way and philosophise to their hearts' content, the time had now come when they must listen to him. "*The time of this ignorance God overlooked, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*" That tremendous utterance sounded the death-knell of Paganism. The wisdom of this world must now give place to the wisdom of God, and although those philosophers shrugged their shoulders and speedily forgot Paul and his preaching, yet those words lived on. Today the doctrines of the Epicureans and the Stoics, the theories of the Gnostics, and the worship of Jupiter and Mercury and Diana are no more. But the command of God through Paul, for all men everywhere to repent, lives on.

So, as the Apostles fell asleep, and their immediate disciples and followers followed them into rest, the Church, spreading outward into every part of the known world, continued the conflict. Paganism was not overthrown in the First Century nor yet in the Second. Nearly four hundred years were to pass before the cry of victory could be raised, and meanwhile the Church must pass through much tribulation. Time and time again the dark forces of evil rallied their ranks and held the Christians at bay. Persecution and martyrdom attested the reality of the conflict, and the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church. False teachers attacked the assembly of the faithful and the churches found foes within as well as without. Manes, the Persian mystic, in the Third Century embraced Christianity and then tried to combine the teachings of Mithraism, Persian sun-worship, with his new-found faith. His theology declared that man, created by the Prince of Darkness, was delivered by Christ, whom he identified with

Mithra. After his death Christ returned to his place in the Sun, Manes himself being the promised *Paraclete* or Comforter. The heresy of Manes, Manicheism as it was called, attracted great numbers and became a great religion—but to-day it is as dead as the Mithraism from which it was derived.

So the years passed by. The dark days of Diocletian, incited by pagan priests to conduct a persecution more fierce than any that had gone before, tested the Church's faith and strength to the uttermost. But the power of paganism by the year 300 was dying. Diocletian's persecution ceased in the year 311. The next year, 312, the new emperor, Constantine, gave all Christians everywhere full liberty to practise their faith and in 325 he decreed that Christianity should be the State religion, thus cutting the bond between civil power and pagan priest, between State and Temple, which had endured since the founding of Rome a thousand years earlier.

Paganism made one last dying effort. Under the Emperor Julian, nephew of Constantine, the temples were re-opened and the pagan faith re-established upon a basis of equality with Christianity. Julian, brought up under the tutelage of Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia, renounced Christianity at twenty years of age in disgust at some of the abuses that were already creeping into the now triumphant Church. An enlightened man, of naturally noble temperament, he prohibited the Christian persecution of pagans which was already becoming noticeable (for which reason Church historians usually call him "Julian the Apostate") and devoted himself to encouraging the revival of paganism. He also commenced the rebuilding of the Temple on Mount Moriah

in Jerusalem, desolate since Titus destroyed it three centuries earlier; this work was frustrated by an earthquake and abandoned.

It is probable that Julian was too farseeing a man really to believe that he could thus put the clock back. Perhaps he never really expected to restore the pagan faith; maybe his fight was in protest against the emergence, in the new hierarchy of priests, of just those evils for which the old one had been condemned. Julian ruled for less than two years, and in the middle of his plans for exalting Paganism above Christianity was mortally wounded fighting the Persians. It is said that as he expired he raised his head and uttered the words "Thou hast conquered, O Galilean".

That was the end of Paganism. Less than twenty years later the Christian emperor Theodosius the Great had rooted out the last remnants of the old faiths. The ancient gods no longer dwelt on Olympus, their temples had become Christian churches, the philosophers had yielded place to Christian theologians, and throughout the world the message of the man of Nazareth was preached without let or hindrance. In four centuries that new thing which came into the world in a Capernaum synagogue had overthrown and taken the place of established religions and philosophies a thousand years older. At long last, men looked on the Church, and beheld a Church triumphant.

But in this hour of triumph even greater dangers threatened. The war with Paganism was over but the true Church turned from the conflict only to face a still more ruthless foe—ecclesiasticism. Next month's instalment will tell of that battle.

The Holiness of God

"Be ye holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11.4). If God's Holiness is thus the only hope for ours, it is right that we seek to know what that Holiness is. The Holiness of God is that infinite perfection by which He keeps himself free from all that is not Divine, and yet has fellowship with the creature, and takes it up into union with himself, destroying and casting out all that will not yield to him. Holiness is that awful glory by which Divinity is separated from all that is created. . . . but where the distance and the difference is not that of the creature only, but of the sinner. Who can express, who can realise the humiliation, the reverence, the shame with which we ought to bow before the voice of the Holy One? The connection between the fear of God and holiness is most intimate. "O fear the Lord ye his holy ones". "Per-

fecting holiness in the fear of the Lord".

God's Holiness is his glory that separates him by an infinite distance, not only from sin, but even from the creature, lifting him high, above it. But God's Holiness is also his love, drawing him down to the sinner, that he may lift him into his fellowship and likeness, and make him holy as He is holy. Holiness is not so much an attribute of God, as the comprehensive summary of all his perfections. It is not only on earth, but in heaven too, that the Holiness of God is his chief and most glorious attribute. It is not only on earth, but in heaven too, that the highest inspiration of adoration and praise makes mention of his holiness.

(Andrew Murray 19th Cent.)

LET US KEEP THE FEAST

A timely
discussion

Once more the hour of remembrance draws near in which those who love the Lord will draw aside from the cares and duties of this life in order to show to each other their deep regard for his death, and all that it stands for in the believer's own life. Another year of Divine watch-care lies behind us—a year of intense strain and conflict, but withal a year of vital contact and *communion with the things that make for peace*; with God, with Jesus, and with much sanctifying truth.

Each and all of us have lived away another measured round of time, and have grown one year older in the way of the Lord. Our days have gone from us never to return; their opportunities have passed away beyond recall, and we stand to-day another year's march nearer home. The wool on the skein is shorter to-day than when we last took the cup; its thread has been woven into the pattern of life, or else clipped off and cast away unused; some of the warp may have run faultily into the woof, but it is too late now to correct the mistakes. The loom passes on—it cannot be stopped. What is done is forever done; if it has been well done we can rejoice; if it has been ill done we may repent, and propose that we will do better in the years to come.

It is no light thing to realise that life's moments are flitting away with every setting sun, and with each evening prayer something has passed right over the stage into our increasing yesterdays. There is an increasing accumulation behind, with a constantly decreasing amount before, and nothing we do can redress the disparity between what has already been and what has yet to be ere the journey's end is reached.

But there is no need to repine because Father Time cuts swathe after swathe of our days and years, if so be we are walking with the Lord. Even though there was smut on the corn, or if it was short in the straw, because our souls were dry, we need not despair. And if, instead of tilling the soil of our hearts purposely, we lazed away our time, allowing weeds and thistles to smother up the grain, even then we need not sink into despondency. And if, moreover, we failed through irresolution to maintain the fences of our mind, and destructive trespassers broke in and ate up our unripe corn, there is still no need to sink down and drown in the quagmire of distress. And though all these faults—and many more—were found in every swathe of yesteryear's sowings and growings, the child of God

can still take heart and look up to the skies. The God of grace and comfort foreknew and foresaw the handicap of all such frailties and perversities, and made provision to meet them all. Unerring Wisdom understood how extensively sin could sap the morale and determination of the human heart, and made its own plans to meet that need. God knew that weeds could choke the corn, that *scorching adversity, and even sunny prosperity*, could dry out the soil and that the grain might wither as it grew; and then because He knew and understood all the hindrances, the wealth of grace outflowing from his heart devised the means to counteract them all.

If then the year behind us has such failures to record, the evening of remembrance can open out a clean new page for each and all. As we obey the Master's word, and seek access to the table of the Lord, we can bethink us of that dark night, and that solemn scene, where on the threshold of Gethsemane and Calvary, our beloved Lord told his scarcely-heeding followers what He was about to do. Sincere reflections concerning the price He paid in suffering, pain and death, during those dark hours, surely cannot fail to unlock the flood-gates of the heart and cause the fountain of repentant tears to flow—if so be repentance is the key to restored fellowship. But if instead of such apathy, our conscience has been keen and quick, and every lapse from rectitude at once confessed, even then we need the gifts of grace, and must approach the tokens of his sacrifice with *humility and self-abnegation*, seeing that with so little to give we have so much to receive at his hand. The very frequency and magnitude of our blunderings, together with the utter stupidity of our occasional waywardness, even for the most alert and conscientious souls in our company, are reasons more than enough for humbling us to the dust, what time we venture forth to seek communion with such unsullied holiness. Even if by his grace there have been days and weeks, and even months of conquest in the good fight of faith, or of unwearied labour when accorded the privilege to serve him and his; and if to our own thinking we have brought armfuls of fair sheaves to show for our husbandry, still have we need to approach humbly to the table of the Lord. We have not repaid the debt we owe—we are still servants without profit to the "Cause." Our standing is still a debit one—we still have need to receive a grant of righteousness from him, and realise that were it not for

him we would never stand approved before the all-seeing eye. Seeing, then, we all need his righteousness, let us draw near to his special hour of deeper fellowship with keen desire, greatly chastened by our sense of need, yet, *always the while deeply assured by a keen sensibility of his power to meet that need, and that in these moments of intense expectation, and of ardent up-reaching desire, He does meet that need; and bestows satisfaction, full and deep upon every seeking soul.*

Then, having received the gifts He has to bestow, we may have reached the mood to heed attentively what He then asks us to give up to him. Having surrendered all for us, He asks our "all" for himself, and looks and waits expectantly till we have renewed our vows to be "dead with him". Can any consecrated child of God, who knows, of old, the sacred hush of this solemn hour (and who, believing that highest Heaven is bending down to this sad earth to bless this trusting hour), not long with strong desire to take again the "remembrance tokens" of his death and be thus linked up again with the unseen things of that higher world? Here the Christian breathes his native air; here he enters the holy place; here he takes the Bread of Life; here he walks in the Spirit's light—for him these exclusive things have been prepared, and for the enjoyment of these exclusive things he too has been made.

Here, in this exalted state, spiritual things give vitalising energy to the spiritual man, and they who begin the hour in weakened weariness may go forth therefrom, made strong and resolute to live and walk each coming day with Christ.

Jesus died, and his sacrificial death threw open wide the way to God. His sinless body broken for our sake is to us the token of life-giving Bread

—of a new Loaf, to be broken to satisfy our need. His moral excellence (his blood—his life) we take as transferred from him to us, and because of our mystic union the life that was in him we believe is now in us. This is the mainspring and source of a new life for us—our new life, native to a loftier sphere.

But the new life is in a fallen human receptacle, which tends to blunt and dull its sensitivity to its own higher destiny, and leads it, betimes, to neglect and overlook its heavenly interests for those of this lower plane. That is why our field is often but ill-cultivated; and why the corn is short in the straw, and parched before it is full grown; and why the weeds abound profusely, and why the fences are broken down, and open to all vagrant intruders.

Of course we see these things in our lives all through the year, and any time is the right time to repent and confess our frailties in the kindly ear of God. This we should do morning, noon or night when the uneasy consciousness of such a state is brought home to our mind. But this one night is a special night because of what it commemorates, and because of the simple ceremonial which the dear Lord himself appointed for a "remembrancer" and because sincere observance of the Lord's desire brings such satisfaction to the deeper needs of the inner man that they who drink deep thereof can never thereafter forget.

Let us come together again, therefore, to remember him—to remember his unique super-excellence as a man; to think of his incomparable essential sacrifice as the Man of Sorrows—as the "perfect" Man, and as we ponder and reflect say "*He loved me, and gave himself for me*".

A note on Matt. 6, 27

"Which of you by taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?" (Matt. 6.27).

The word rendered "stature" has two meanings. It can refer to a person's height or to his age. In the case of Zaccheus (Luke 19.3) it denoted his height. In those of Jesus "increasing in wisdom and stature" (Luke 2.52) and the healed cripple who was "of age" (Jno. 9. 21, 28) it denoted age. In this example in Matthew it is more likely that Jesus intended age rather than physical height. The question at issue was taking thought for the future (vs. 25), rather than seeking first the kingdom of God, and trusting him

to "add all these things" according to need. By no amount of taking thought for the future can one increase one's length of life; that is what Jesus was intimating. Had he intended physical stature he would hardly have used the word for cubit, which was eighteen inches, an absurdity; more likely he would have used daktylos, the smallest measure, equal to three quarters of an inch, or palaste, three inches. The Psalmist in Psa. 39.5 used a similar short measure, the tepach of a little over three inches, when he says "thou hast made my days as an handbreadth". The length of our lives is in the hands of God and no amount of foresight on our part is going to make any difference to that.

THE WISDOM OF ELIHU

A study in
Job 32-37

8. The Power of God

"Behold, the Mighty One shall prevail by his strength; who is so powerful as he is?" (36. 22. LXX). The commencement of Elihu's fourth discourse marks his final plea on God's behalf. He has already appealed to the wisdom, the justice and the love of God. Now he appeals to his power and shows that no evil thing can stand against that. Wisdom may permit evil to flourish for a span of time unchecked; justice seem tardy in being executed; love very long suffering and offering every opportunity for repentance; but at the last Divine power operates swiftly and effectually to overcome all resistance to God's righteousness and to institute a new heavens and new earth in place of this present world of sin and death. The unbounded power of God is the ultimate guarantee that at length and in his own pre-destined time, the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And no man will be able ever to question either the rightness of his words or the effectiveness of his acts. "Who is he that examines his works" asks Elihu "or who can say, He has wrought injustice? Remember that his works are great beyond those which men have attempted." (36. 23-24 LXX). That last declaration is one that ought to come very closely home to us today, for we live in an age when men have attempted many very wonderful things, and are destined in the near future to attempt a great many more. Who would have thought only a generation ago, that men would sit before contrivances of knobs and dials, of wires and coils, devices born of their own ingenuity, and by such aid control the course of man-made satellites circling the earth hundreds of miles above its surface, or send space cruisers speeding millions of miles on a vast course round the sun? Scientists today are receiving radio signals from the depths of outer space which started on their long journeys to the earth eight thousands of millions of years ago. And now Elihu tells us that the works of God are great beyond anything that man has attempted. Of course they are. Men may discover, as they do claim to have discovered, how long ago the universe was created and what were the characteristics of the universe at the moment it was created. What they cannot tell us is how it was created and who created it. That is why the works of God are greater than anything man has attempted or even imagined. With that knowledge we have confidence that God is omnipotent.

There is a serious word attached to this "Every

man may see it" proceeds Elihu "man may behold it afar off." (36. 25). The meaning only emerges after thinking about this a little. Every man may behold these evidences of the power of God; every manifestation of the power of man tells of the far greater power of God which is behind it. The manifest power of man is a shadow of the hidden power of God. But the second clause of the verse has the greater force. Man beholds the power of God only, as it were, afar off. We see as through a glass, darkly, beholding the glory and the power of the Almighty as from a vast distance.

"Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out." (36. 26). There seems to be something of reverence and awe in the young man's voice as he utters these words. "God is greater than we can know" is Rotherham's way of putting it. The more that scientists and astronomers delve into the mysteries of Nature the greater and more unknowable does God become. In these our days intense efforts are being made to uncover the hidden secrets of the universe. Radio telescopes probe the distant recesses of space, bringing back evidence of starry clusters which lie far beyond the range of the largest optical telescope. Astronomers exultantly proclaim that they are penetrating to the "edge of space"; but they do not know what lies beyond that edge. They talk of the beginning of the universe at a finite time so many thousands of millions of years ago; but they do not know what was the condition of things before that beginning. They describe atoms coming into existence and fusing together to form mighty stars; but they have no suggestion whatever to offer as to what power created those atoms. Here is a sphere which man cannot penetrate, perhaps will never penetrate. God is greater than we can know. There appears at this point something worth thinking about. Elihu has made this statement regarding the greatness of God's power and the impossibility of knowing or understanding those mighty works of God, but he does not stop there. He goes on to speak of the mighty works of God which man can see and in measure understand. He does not waste time philosophising on the unknowable; he turns instead to the things that are, in part at least, known. In this field he finds abundant evidence of the power of God and to this field he turns for support in the development of his argument.

"He withdraweth drops from the sea; he filtereth them through as rain from his mist, which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly." (36. 27-28) Driver's rendering is adopted for verse 27 to make the sense plain. The wonderful thing about this passage is Elihu's apparent understanding of the circulation of water by evaporation from the sea, forming clouds which are carried in the upper air until they condense into mist and finally fall as rain upon the earth, so completing the circuit. Did ancient man understand this, or is Elihu here purely an instrument of the Holy Spirit, speaking words he understood only partially or not at all? Solomon seemed to have the same knowledge for he said *"All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers came, thither they return to go."* (Eccl. 1. 7). Without this ever continuing circulation of water life on earth would be impossible; here, says Elihu, is one evidence of the mighty power of God exerted for human welfare. It is not until we experience a tropical downpour resulting in widespread floods that we realise how that millions of tons of water are floating serenely over our heads a mile or so up; it is by the power of God vested in Nature that these waters remain up there until they are needed for the welfare of all that lives and moves upon the earth.

Now comes a greater and more spectacular demonstration of Divine power in Nature—the thunderstorm. *"Can anyone understand the spreading of the clouds, the thunderings of his pavilion? Behold, he scatters his lightning about him, and covers the tops of the mountain."* (36. 29-30 SRV). The Masoretic has "bottom of the sea" instead of "tops of the mountains" in verse 30 and this appears in the Authorised Version, but Driver has shown that "tops of the mountains" is intended. This is a vivid picture of the gathering storm—it is developed to its full fury in chapter 37—and the storm is seen as a manifestation of Divine power. God is in the storm. The heavy storm clouds are described as the tabernacle or pavilion of God; He dwells within them, shrouded from mortal sight. Now the clouds spread over the sky, appearing to grow menacingly larger and heavier as they approach. The lightning is seen flashing ("he scatters his lightning about him") and the mountain tops themselves disappear in the gloom and are covered by the lowering clouds. This is something with which man cannot contend. The power in the storm must be left to work its will for no man can resist it or divert its course. Naturally enough then Elihu sees it as an instrument of Divine judgment *"By those things he executeth judgment on people, he giveth food in*

abundance" (36. 31 Rotherham). There seems at first sight something incongruous in this combination of cursing and blessing, in the coming of judgment at the same time as giving of food, both by the same instrument. It is not really incongruous. The power which executes judgment on the evil-doer is the same power that preserves the righteous. That which is out of accord with the Divine ways is destroyed; that which is in accord is preserved. "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him". Even in the natural order the same thunderstorm which brings fire and death by its lightning stroke is also a means of purifying the air and vivifying the crops that life may be preserved upon earth. On the larger scale of God's dealings with man the same thing is true. Times of judgment always have associated with them times of refreshing and of new life. It was so at the Flood; judgment came upon the world but there was salvation and new life in consequence. Judgment came upon Egypt in the days of Moses but Israel began a new life. Judgment came upon Israel at the First Advent but the Christian Church was born. And in the last great cataclysm with which this age will end, Armageddon will pass and give place to the light and life of the Millennial Kingdom where Christ is King. So it is not surprising that Elihu should picture the storm as bringing both judgment and food in abundance.

Now the approaching storm becomes a symbol of Divine power moving in to the execution of God's judgment. In a sense this is a fitting climax to Elihu's long discourse, the picture of the utter devastation of all that sets itself in opposition to God. Elihu pictures God as riding the storm clouds and taking the lightning in both his strong hands to hurl it upon the objects of his condemnation. The A.V. translation is not very good and by no means lucid in these two final verses of chapter 36. Rotherham renders it better. *"Upon both hands he putteth a covering of lightning and layeth command upon it against an assailant."* (36. 32) Then as Driver has it *"The thunder declareth his indignation and the storm proclaimeth his anger."* (36. 33) That rendering is so plain that it needs no exposition. Perhaps the RS Version is worth adding *"Its crashing declares concerning him who is jealous with anger against iniquity"*. The prophet Habakkuk saw something very similar in his vision of the End Time. He says that the sun and moon stood still (*Heb.*—were silent, obscured, hidden) in their habitation, the sky, at what he called the light of God's arrows and the shining of his glittering spear. (Hab. 3. 11) And the Psalmist

declares that God's lightnings enlightened the world; the earth trembled, "...the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook". (Psa. 77. 18). Of all the metaphors used by the writers of the Old Testament to represent the power of God none is used more frequently and tellingly than this one of the thunderstorm.

At this point Elihu calls his listeners to reflect. It is unfortunate that the chapter division occurs at this point, for Elihu has not finished speaking. The first four verses of chapter 37 ought by rights to have been included in chapter 36. "At this" he says "my heart trembleth and is moved out of his place". (37. 1) It is not fear or apprehension which thus moves Elihu; it is awe and reverence. He perceives in this raging storm the power of God in active operation to the destruction of evil and the purification of the earth, and he wants his listeners to perceive that too. "Hear attentively the noise of his voice" he urges, "and the sound that goes forth out of his mouth". (37. 2) This rolling thunder is God speaking to man; this flashing lightning is God revealing himself to man. Give attention, take heed, presses Elihu, that you may be of those who escape judgment and are found able to stand in the light of the Divine Presence. This voice of God and this revelation of God's pur-

pose is universal, for the benefit of whosoever will of men, and "every man that cometh into the world" must sooner or later hear those words and be enlightened by that revelation. We, from our superior viewpoint, can see how truly Elihu's foreview was fulfilled when "the Word became flesh and we beheld his glory, a glory as of the only-begotten of the Father". Elihu could only see that wonderful Advent in the terms of this thunderstorm but he is in no doubt as to its world-wide scope. "He directeth it under the whole heaven, and his lightning unto the ends of the earth. After it a voice roareth; he thundereth with the voice of his excellency; and he does not restrain the lightnings when his voice is heard." (37. 34). That last half sentence is from the R.S.V. It pin-points the understanding of the whole passage. The voice of God's laws and the revelation of God's purpose, his thunder and lightning, goes out into all the world, first at the instance of the Man Christ Jesus and then at that of his faithful followers. all down this Christian Age until at the last He comes again in power and great glory to complete his work. That is what Elihu sees in the thunderstorm, the work of God among men in the world of sin, judging, destroying, enlightening, saving, until at last, the darkness and the storm clouds pass away, and the new earth enters into its "afterward of peace".

(To be concluded)

THE DATE OF THE CRUCIFIXION

Of the several dates ranging from AD 29 to 34 which have on various grounds been propounded for the true date of our Lord's death, the Scriptural evidence allied with modern more accurate knowledge of the secular history of the times seems to point to AD 33. It is known that Jesus was born in late September or early October BC2 from which the fact that He was thirty years old at the commencement of his ministry, which itself lasted three and a half years, indicates the Spring of AD 33 as the time of his death.

Two independent lines of evidence support this conclusion. The first is based upon Luke's statement (ch. 3. 1-2) that it was in the fifteenth year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius that John the Baptist entered upon his mission. Tiberius became emperor on 19th August AD 14 so that his fifteenth year extended between 19th August AD 28-29. John's birth, five months

before our Lord's, was in April BC2 so that his mission, beginning upon attaining legal manhood at 30 years of age, commenced in April AD 29. The baptism of Jesus when He in turn became 30 years of age took place therefore in October AD 29. His mission lasted 3½ years, so indicating that his death was at the Passover of AD 33.

The second is derived from the mysterious darkening of the sun which three of the Gospels record as occurring between the sixth and ninth hours (3.0 to 6.0 p.m.) whilst Jesus was upon the cross. This same inexplicable darkness is also recorded in the writings of Phlegon, a Greek historian born towards the end of the First Century. He says ("Treatise on the Olympiads" Book 13) that in the 4th year of the 202nd Olympiad there was a great obscuration of the sun, greater than had been known before. At the sixth hour the day was changed into night and

there was a great earthquake in Bithynia. The Greeks reckoned time in Olympiads of 4 years each. The 4th year of the 202nd Olympiad extended from July AD 32 to June AD 33 so including the date of the Crucifixion derived from Luke 3.1-2 within its span.

The acid test as to the accuracy of these deductions is to ascertain whether 14 Nisan AD 33 actually fell on a Friday. From the Gospel accounts, whatever the year, the Crucifixion must definitely have been on 14 Nisan and on a Friday. This problem has been worked out several times by competent astronomers and others from which it appears that in AD 33 the 14th day of Nisan commenced at 6.0 p.m. on Thursday 2nd April and ended at 6.0 p.m. on Friday, 3rd April. Our Lord died at the ninth hour which would therefore be 3.0 p.m. on the Friday.

Some of the authorities responsible for this elucidation of the problem are:—

W. P. Boyle 1863—*"Inspiration of the Book of Daniel"*.

J. K. Fotheringham 1934—*"Journal of Theological Studies"*, Vol. 35 P158-160.

Parker & Dubberstein 1956 *"Babylonian Chronicles 626 BC—AD 75"*.

Jack Finegan 1959 *"Handbook of Biblical Chronology"*.

Dr. Adam Rutherford 1961 *"Bible Chronology"*.

It would appear that over the period AD 27-34 there were only two years—AD 30 and 33—when 14 Nisan fell on a Friday. The full list is:—

AD 27	April 10 Thursday.
.. 28	March 30 Tuesday.
.. 29	April 18 Monday.
.. 30	April 7 Friday.
.. 31	March 27 Tuesday.
.. 32	April 14 Monday.
.. 33	April 3 Friday.
.. 34	March 24 Wednesday.

A connected point which has often provoked questions is the apparent discrepancy between the time of the Last Supper and the observance of the same Passover by the Jews. Jesus partook of the Passover with his disciples on the Thursday night and followed the ceremonial with that of the Last Supper. The Jewish Passover supper, however, was celebrated on the Friday night, just after the commencement of 15 Nisan at 6.0 p.m. (John 18.28) The explanation of this difference is that most of Friday was taken up with slaughtering the many lambs needed and preparing them for the ceremony, for which reason the 14th day was called the "Preparation" (Mark 15. 42. Jno. 19.14). In Jerusalem the lambs were all slaughtered in the Temple although eaten at home. The actual Passover ceremony was there-

fore carried over to the 15th day which commenced in the evening of Friday. Thus Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover twenty-four hours before the Jews of Jerusalem, although it is probable that in the country districts where there was not the same problem of slaying and preparing so great a number of lambs the feast was observed on Thursday night as with Jesus. (Full details of this practice at the First Advent are given in J. Finegan *"Handbook of Biblical Chronology"* 1968 edition, Oxford University Press.) Incidentally there is confirmation from another source, the *"Book of Jubilees"* of the 1st century B.C. *"Remember the commandment which the Lord commanded them concerning the Passover, that thou shouldst celebrate it in its season on the fourteenth of the first month, that thou shouldst kill it before it is evening, and that they should eat it by night on the fifteenth from the time of the setting of the sun"* (Jubilees 49.1). It must be remembered that the day commenced with sunset at 6.0 p.m.

Once this is realised the events of that tragic day fall into place naturally. Jesus and his disciples assembled in the Upper Room for the Passover meal, followed by the institution of the ceremony of bread and wine which has since become known as the Memorial of our Lord's death, at 6.0 p.m. on Thursday. They were probably at table for about three hours and at 9.0 p.m. set out for the Garden of Gethsemane. The arrest must have been at about midnight; at 3.0 a.m., the time known as the "cock-crowing" because at this time the Roman bugles announced the changing of the guard, Jesus was before Caiaphas and Peter denied his Lord. Between then and 9.0 a.m. He was taken before Pilate, sent to Herod and returned, and finally condemned. There was evident haste on the part of Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin to effect the condemnation and execution urgently because of the Passover meal due that evening. At 9.0 a.m. Jesus was crucified; at noon there came the earthquake and the supernatural darkness, the veil of the Temple rent and the graves outside Jerusalem thrown open. At 3.0 p.m. Jesus died.

There remained three hours before the commencement of the Sabbath, when all business ceased. During those three hours two of the women, probably Salome and Joanna, for they are not mentioned as being with the other women at the burial, had time to go out and buy the spices for the embalming (Mark 16.1; Luke 23. 56). During this same three hours Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had secured Pilate's permission for the burial of Jesus' body and by 6.0 p.m. it was safely interred in Joseph's own new tomb. It was probably early on Saturday

morning that the priests waited on Pilate with the request that a guard be posted at the tomb in case the disciples should attempt to steal the body, to which Pilate retorted that they had a Temple police of their own and they could use

them. The guard was set and remained at the tomb throughout Saturday and into the early hours of Sunday morning. Then came the Resurrection.

HE PREACHED TO ANGELS

Thoughts on a perplexing text

"... put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit, by which he also went and preached to the spirits in prison which sometime were disobedient in the days of Noah" (1 Pet. 3. 18-20).

Theologians and commentators alike have puzzled over the meaning of this text. The general assumption for centuries has been that it tells of Christ descending into Hades at the time of his death and preaching repentance to some of the unconverted dead—those who died at the time of the Flood. Why these alone should have been singled out for this favour is neither understood nor explained. The fact that orthodox Christian theology does not, and did not, permit an opportunity for conversion after death rendered the text particularly difficult, although some of the celebrated theologians of the past got over this by asserting that Christ went to Hades to preach, not repentance and conversion, but unchangeable condemnation for past unbelief. The descent into Hades became a Church doctrine but one which was always fraught with some difficulty.

The problem disappears when it is realised, as it does tend to be realised nowadays, that the "spirits in prison" are not dead human beings at all. A correct understanding of Genesis 6 and the nature of events at the time of the Flood makes it clear that these spirits are the rebellious angels who apostasised from their lawful estate and assumed human form to live on the earth as men, and were condemned, after Divine judgment had been passed on them, to remain in the imprisoned state, neither on earth nor in heaven, which St. Peter describes in 2 Pet. 2.4. as "*tartarus*" (*hell* in the A.V.) to await final judgment and sentence. "*Tartarus*", its only occurrence in the Bible, is not hell or Hades. It is the term employed in Greek mythology to describe the prison of the Titans, semigods who rebelled against the chief gods and were overthrown. It was said to be situated as far below Hades as Hades was below earth. It is a condition of existence rather than a place and is probably synonymous with the "abyss" or "bottomless pit" of Revelation and the "deep" of Luke 8.31. To the Bible student it is obvious that the myth of the

Titans is a traditional reminiscence of the historical event recorded in Genesis 6, especially so in that these Titans were said to have been the offspring of Uranus the heaven-god and Gea the earth goddess, just as the *nephilim* of Gen. 6 were the offspring of the celestial sons of God and the terrestrial daughters of men.

It may be taken then that Peter is saying in this text that after his death Christ preached to the imprisoned fallen angels. Where and in what manner did He do this?

It has often been suggested that this "preaching" was by force of example, that the imprisoned spirits, witnessing our Lord's loyalty to the Father while on earth, observing his devoted life and unresisting death, and his subsequent exaltation to the highest pinnacle of celestial glory at the right hand of God, were thereby recipients of a powerful sermon in action. It is thought that thereby at least some of them might have been influenced to repentance and conversion and therefore reconciliation with God. Col. 1.20 is definite that Christ will reconcile some apostates from the celestial world in addition to men upon earth. There is therefore nothing unreasonable in this suggestion, unless it be the fact that Peter presents the preaching as being after our Lord's death whereas the "sermon in action" would have been made largely during his life on earth before his death.

There is one factor in the text which seems to require an alternative explanation. The A.V. says He "went and preached". The Greek is *poreutheis* which is the aorist form of the verb *poreuomai*, to go or to pass from one place to another. It implies that Christ definitely went to the imprisoned spirits for the purpose of this preaching. The A.V. rendering of the text is not so accurate as it ought to have been; "*quickened by the spirit, by which*" should be "*in the spirit, in which*"; it is so rendered by every reputable translation aside from the A.V. Perhaps the N.E.B. has it best "*in the body he was put to death; in the spirit he was brought to life. And in the spirit he went and made his proclamation to the imprisoned spirits*". The Greek word *en* properly means "in" but not "by means of". For the more scrupulous the literal rendering of the

Greek text is "... being put to death flesh but being made alive spirit, in which also to the spirits in prison having gone, he preached".

Our Lord was in the grave three days. On the third day He rose from the dead. It was only then that He was "made alive spirit". Only then did He resume his former spiritual glory and re-enter the world He left at the commencement of his humanity. Only after that time, the time of his resurrection, could the statement in this text be true. It is at least possible that after his resurrection, perhaps after He left his disciples and ascended to the Father, our Lord did in fact go to the spirits in prison and proclaim his evangel to them. Perhaps at that point they did for the first time have the door of salvation through repentance opened.

If that be the truth of the matter, then there

is an analogy with the position of humankind. After many long centuries of the power of sin, "having no hope and without God in the world", the people who walked in darkness perceived a great light. The Light of the world came to them and proclaimed the way of salvation. Is it not feasible to suppose that at the same time the same Light would be sent to those angelic sons of God who likewise had walked in darkness over much the same period of time? The judgment of both men and angels is to take place simultaneously in the day of the Church's triumph (1 Cor. 6.1.) Maybe this present Age and the future Messianic Age constitute a period in which not only men, but angels, have the grace of God offered to them by his messenger, and can, if they will, turn from sin to serve the living God.

GOD'S THOUSANDS OF MESSENGERS

An intriguing calculation can be deduced from Psa. 68.17. The A.V. has it "*The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels. The Lord is among them, as in Sinai, the holy place*" and the R.S.V. "*With mighty chariotry, twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands, the Lord came from Sinai into the holy place*". Neither grasps the true sense of the passage. Hebrew mathematical terminology is involved here, which is perhaps why the 17th century translators failed to understand it. The literal Hebrew is "*God's chariots, two myriads of thousands of two myriads of thousands*" i.e. (the myriad, *rebabah* or *ribbo*, being ten thousand) $20,000 \times 1000 \times 20,000 \times 1000$, which comes to the respectable sum of four hundred English billions (millions of millions; 4 followed by 14 noughts; but see note below). The word for "chariot" equally denotes the horseman driving the chariot, or alternatively the two together, so that the intimation here is that God has at his command a host of 400 billion angelic charioteers, accompanying his movements and carrying out the commissions with which He entrusts them. That works out at about one hundred thousand angels to each human being now living upon earth; the Lord has plenty of celestial forces at his command!

When John the Revelator stood and beheld the vision of the Heavenly Court he saw many angels surrounding the Throne of God, the number of whom, he says, was "*myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands*" (Rev. 5.11). He failed to specify the qualifying quantity at the commencement of his number; if the smallest one possible, two, is taken, the expression could be equal to two myriad myriad thousand thousand, which comes to 200 billion, just half of that of

the Psalmist. Of course neither Psalmist nor Revelator intended the numbers to be taken literally; in both cases they express poetically the vast resources of the Most High in that celestial world which lies beyond the range of human sense and, perhaps, by comparison of those numbers with the so much smaller community of men upon earth, indicate the tremendous scope and extent of the spiritual creation as compared with the terrestrial. Daniel was much more modest. In his vision of the Last Judgment (Dan. 7.10) he saw only one million angels ministering to the Most High and a hundred million standing before his Throne. Perhaps the lesson there is that an infinitely lesser number of angels is needed to deal with Divine judgment on evil than is employed about the creative purposes and administrative operations of God in his creation, which could lead to the thought that the presence of evil in the world, although looming so prominently before our own vision in this life, by no means exhausts all the Divine energies in the attention He gives to working for its elimination. And that should give us renewed confidence that God is in full control, and that away in the heavens there are vast resources and abundant power and many willing messengers, with which He will bring the power of evil amongst men to a full end, in his own due time.

* * *

(NOTE: An English billion is one million millions; an American billion is only one thousand millions. In U.S.A. therefore the above 400 billions must be read as 400,000 billions. Most regrettably, the official modern tendency in this country is to employ the American billion instead of the native British one, to the utter confusion of anyone reading both old and new literature.)

MARY MAGDALENE

She came slowly towards him, head held proudly within its aura of braided hair, dark eyes flashing, sensuous lips curved mockingly. The richness of her garments set off the striking beauty of her features, a beauty of which the arrogance displayed in every look and movement betrayed her awareness. Men were her slaves; Mary of Magdala knew it, and they knew it. The bystanders looked on interestedly and intently as she came to a leisurely halt and directed her gaze fully upon the man before her.

"They tell me"—her voice was rich, vibrant, and sardonic—"they tell me that you can heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, make the lame to walk . . ." She looked at him, the kind of look which had made the senses of many a man swim. She looked, and waited.

Jesus, his eyes fixed on her, said nothing.

"It is said that you can cast out demons." Her voice was still derisory, but there was the faintest trace of anxiety in the mocking tones.

Jesus did not answer. His gaze met her imperious eyes.

"You were at Simon's feast the other day and you forgave a woman her sins . . . Who gave you the power to forgive sins?" The question came almost as an accusation, a challenge, and yet the words held a note of urgency.

"Because the Father sent me, I can see into the heart and I know how and when to forgive." The quiet words fell softly on the still air.

The dark eyes were mocking again now. "Look into my heart, and tell me what you can see, and what there is to forgive." She stood, proud in her youth and appeal, facing Jesus insolently.

The calm answer came. "I see a heart given over by day and by night to every kind of indulgence and weakness and sin. I see a heart which in the early morning hours reaches out for a better life and knows not where to find it, and when daylight comes goes back to the way of sin because it knows no other. I see a heart possessed by demons which give no rest by day or night. And I know that last night, when the sun had gone and the moon rode high in the heavens, you fell to your knees beside your bed in your despair and besought God for release from the demons which have driven you to these things, without any real hope that He would listen or would answer".

She stood, motionless. The mockery in her eyes had given place to astonishment. The scornful smile had gone; her lips were trembling.

"You—know?"

Quietly came the answer. "I know, my child."

"Then—it is true, after all—what they say." Suddenly she crumpled at his feet, rich garments trailing in the dust, her raven hair falling confusedly about her shoulders, face buried in hands. "O Jesus—Master—save me." She was sobbing incoherently.

Gently Jesus raised her to her feet.

"Fear no more, my daughter. The demons have gone; they will not trouble you again. If now you will turn away from the life you have lived and yield yourself to God you will find happiness and peace".

He eyes now held only humility and adoration. Gone was the old hard voice; the accents were soft and low.

"Master—let me follow with your disciples."

Almost imperceptibly Jesus shook his head. "Go now to your home, Mary, and make your peace with God. Go to him in prayer and He will receive you. Then, if you will, you may come."

Slowly, head bowed, heedless of the curious stare of the onlookers, she went.

* * *

Whether the conversion of Mary Magdalene was in fact something like this will never be known with certainty until the days of the world to come. All that is known about her life before becoming a disciple is that she was one out of whom Jesus "cast seven demons". (Luke 8.2). The association of her name in that verse with those of Joanna and Susanna, both wealthy women, might lead to the assumption that she likewise was a rich married woman who, like them, "ministered to him of their substance". There is, however, an age-old tradition that she was a woman of bad character, plying her trade among the Roman soldiers and others in the lake-side towns—Magdala was a town on the shore of the Sea of Galilee—and the casting out of the demons by Jesus delivered her from that life. The Western (Latin) Church has maintained this view from the sixth century and identified Mary with the "woman a sinner" at Simon's feast recorded in Luke 7 although there is nothing in the Gospel narratives to warrant this conclusion. The fact that in Luke 7 there is no mention of the casting out of demons and the woman's forgiveness was on account of her evident repentance and sorrow would rather appear to indicate the opposite. Nevertheless the Latin Church (but not the Eastern, Greek, Church) has maintained the tradition and in fact the English Prayer Book up to its revision in 1552 had a feast-day for Mary Magdalene on 22 July

with the reading from Luke 7. The Talmud, written nearer the time, also vouches for the tradition, describing her wealth, beauty and shamelessness.

A more definite pointer may be found in the claim that women of Mary's profession were known by the name of their town or village rather than, as was the case with other women, the names of their husbands or other relatives. Thus in the Gospels we have "Mary of Magdala" (the meaning of the Greek "Magdalene") as against, for example, Mary the wife of Cleophas, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Joanna the wife of Chuza.

That she was young in years, probably in her early twenties, when she became a disciple can be inferred from the fact recorded in John 20.2 to the effect that upon finding the body of Jesus missing from the sepulchre "*then she runneth, and came to Simon Peter . . .*". Only a young woman would, or could, have run the distance of over a mile separating the sepulchre and the house of Mark's mother where the disciples were assembled. An older woman would have had to walk.

So we are left with the probable position that Mary was a young woman sorely afflicted in the grip of an evil life or of supernatural evil powers whom Jesus met during the course of his ministry in the lakeside towns of Galilee. Magdala, three miles north of Tiberias and about five south of Capernaum, was probably visited by him fairly frequently, although it is mentioned in the New Testament only twice, once in Matt. 15.39 in connection with the feeding of the four thousand, and once in Mark 8. 10 where it is called Dalmanutha. It appears in the Old Testament (Josh. 19.38) under the name of Migdal so the town was of some antiquity. To-day it remains as a village and is called Mejdal. But it might have been in any of the lake-side towns that the meeting took place; the nature of the encounter cannot now be surmised, only that it occurred during the first year of our Lord's ministry, probably about August-September, and that after the casting out of those seven demons Mary became a fervent and devoted disciple, faithful to her Lord to the end.

Strangely, nothing more is said about her until the crucifixion. It is not really likely that the women disciples of Jesus, the five Marys, Martha, Salome, Susanna, Joanna, and others, accompanied Jesus and the men as they went from place to place preaching the Gospel. Had they done so the proceeding would almost inevitably have given rise to comment and scandal. In any case most of them were married and had husbands and perhaps children to consider. It

is more likely that they assisted in the provision of the disciples' expenses, as Luke 8.3 indicates, extended the hospitality of their homes when in their districts, and rendered services such as the provision and mending of clothes and so on. It was not until the crowning tragedy of the Crucifixion that they were all drawn together to be with their Lord in his last hours on earth, and so it is perhaps not surprising that nothing is said about them prior to that time.

Mary's sterling character is revealed by her behaviour during the trying experiences of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Of the little band of some nine or more women who were present at those times Mary was almost certainly the youngest, nevertheless she is the one who evidently took the initiative and was by common consent their leader. Of the ten occasions when her name is mentioned in conjunction with those of the other women, she appears first in nine. She, with one companion, was an observer of Jesus' burial when all the men disciples had gone into hiding. She was first at the sepulchre on the morning of the Resurrection and the one to bring the news to the men, still in hiding. And she had the inestimable favour of being the first to talk with the risen Lord. There is not much doubt that her courage and steadfastness held the little band of women together during those three days when they were bereft of the support and protection of the men. For a short time the men "forsook him and fled"; Mary never forsook him. She remained firm in her faith throughout.

What happened to her afterwards? No one knows. She may have remained a stalwart member of the Church at Jerusalem which had its beginning in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost for the rest of her life, going with the rest of them to Pella in AD 69 to escape the destruction of the city which they knew from Jesus' prediction was about to take place. She may have gone back to her old home in the lakeside cities and there lived a quiet life among the believers there. The Greek church has preserved a tradition that in about AD 50 she accompanied the Apostle John and Mary the mother of Jesus when they migrated to Ephesus, and died there about AD 90—which, if true, testifies to her youthfulness when she first met Jesus. The Emperor Leo, in the tenth century, allegedly removed her remains to Constantinople to repose there in his ornate church. But no one really knows: we are left with the picture of a woman whose undying devotion in the closing stages of our Lord's life bears witness to the wonder of the miracle by which He had changed her life, delivering her from the power of darkness and translating her into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

"I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVETH"

An Easter
Message

Something like forty years ago there was a report in a British newspaper concerning an incident that had just occurred in Russia. During the course of the Soviet anti-religious campaign the presiding minister of one of the largest Orthodox (Catholic) churches in Moscow was told that he must allow an official spokesman to put the case for atheism to his congregation and he could afterwards disprove the arguments in his sermon, if he could. At the appointed time the advocate for atheism entered the pulpit and began his lecture. He said that religion had developed out of the unreasoning fears of primitive men faced with the vagaries of Nature—thunder, lightning, earthquakes, typhoons and so on, and they concluded there must be some mighty unseen power causing these disasters and tried to propitiate that power by offerings and sacrifices. From that, he said, came the idea of a God who could send either evil or good to mankind and would reward those who pleased him and punish those who did not. Jesus of Nazareth, he went on, was a young man like any other man but a revolutionary at heart, burning with desire to overthrow the imperialistic Romans and the capitalistic Pharisees, and bring freedom to the oppressed common people. As Jesus' life continued he came to believe that he had been sent by God, that he was inspired by God, and finally that he was the Son of God, but it was all a delusion and when at last his enemies encompassed his death that was the end of him as it is of all men. There never was a Resurrection and the faith that had been built upon that belief was all a myth. He finished his lecture and sat down complacently to see what arguments the minister would bring forward to disprove what he had said.

The old man climbed slowly into the pulpit and stood for a moment surveying his flock. When he began to speak, he uttered just five words. "My brethren" he said, "Christ is risen!" In a moment the whole congregation was on its feet and every one joined in a response that swelled up to the roof of the building; "He is risen indeed!" There was no more said, for there was nothing more to say. The newspaper report commented that the effect was as if a noted scientist had spent an hour proving to a distinguished audience that human flight through the air is impossible and will never be achieved and just as he finished an aeroplane passed overhead. All the arguments and alleged proofs in the world are valueless

against positive knowledge, and those Russian believers had that positive knowledge. They knew within themselves that Christ was risen; their lives' Christian experiences told them that Christ was risen; the illumination of the Holy Spirit in their hearts was proof to them that Christ was risen, and that knowledge was an infallible bulwark against doubt and unbelief.

All have heard the saying "Knowledge is power". Our knowledge of Christ's Resurrection, our belief in his Resurrection, is the power of our faith. This is the driving force which gives us the strength to continue in the Christian way. Solomon declared in Prov. 24.5 that "*a man of knowledge increased strength,*" and again in 11.9 "*through knowledge shall the just be delivered*". When at the beginning of his reign the Lord asked him what He should give him, what gifts did he desire, Solomon asked not for riches, wealth, honour or power, but for wisdom and knowledge, that he might be a good king. And in consequence he received all things. Said the Lord to him, because he had asked thus, "wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee: and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that were before thee, neither shall any after thee have the like (2 Chron. 1. 7-12). In choosing the better thing Solomon became heir to all things. But on the opposite side of the coin God said regarding Israel "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4.6) and Jesus, talking to the Sadducees who by their question regarding the Resurrection betrayed their utter ignorance, said "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures and the power of God". (Matt. 22.29). Had they sought after the true knowledge of God instead of the traditions and inventions of men they would have known better than to ask the question they did. The importance of positive knowledge is stressed for us in John's Epistle (1 Jno. 5.20) "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true". The stress is always laid upon conviction of truth, knowledge of the basis of our faith. If we would be faithful to the end of life, unshaken by doubts or denials, we must know that upon which we have based our life and calling.

This was the inward power which sustained Peter and John at their trial before the Sanhedrin shortly after Pentecost. The story is recorded in Acts 4. They were commanded not to speak or teach again in the name of Jesus Christ. But they

were quite unperturbed. Their judges, they told them, could decide for themselves whether it was right in the sight of God to hearken unto them rather than unto God, but as for us, they said, "we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard". How was it they were so supremely confident in the face of their accusers and judges? Because they knew! They had seen Jesus after his resurrection. They had heard his voice and received his instructions as to their future life's work. Their eyes beheld his form ascending to the Father the while his promise that at the Last Day He would return to them was sounding in their ears. Nothing and no one could shake their faith in these things thereafter because they had seen and heard them with their own eyes and ears and they knew the truth of all that they had been saying. When their judges saw this boldness in the two disciples, we are told, "they marvelled". And they were afraid to do anything about it. They admitted the miracle but did not know what it portended. They accepted the unshakeable determination of the disciples but did not know what was the power that had given birth to that determination. They found themselves quite unable to resolve the situation and they did not know how to silence the testimony of these two to the Resurrection and living power of Jesus Christ. So, weakly, all they could do was "threaten them and let them go"; whence Peter and John, filled with the Holy Spirit, went back to their mission and "with great power gave witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all" (Acts. 4.33). Three things always go together: knowledge, power, grace; the imparting of these three is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, and by the possession of these three the Christian warrior is enabled to wage that good warfare which ensures steadfastness through life and victory at the end.

Many years later, Peter, writing his second epistle, went back over his life's experiences and recalled some of the wonderful things he had seen and heard, to the establishment of that faith and confidence which never wavered afterwards. "We have not followed cunningly devised fables" he declared triumphantly "but were eyewitnesses of his majesty." The R.S.V. renders that allusion "cleverly devised myths", a translation that is very apt. A great many contemporary scholars—some of them, unhappily, in the Christian ministry—airily dismiss the historical narratives of the Old Testament as mythical stories and ancient folklore having little or no basis in fact, and the prophetic delineations of the coming Messiah, his office and work, the unassisted product of fertile enthusiastic minds obsessed

with the idea of the future greatness of Israel and the triumph of good over evil, owing nothing to Divine inspiration or the illumination of the mind by the Holy Spirit. Peter dismisses all such ideas without hesitation; the truth of what he believed was guaranteed by the evidence of his own senses. "This voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount" (2 Peter 2. 16-19). There, on the Mount of Transfiguration, he saw his Lord arrayed in heavenly splendour; he saw the two great champions of Israel, Moses and Elijah, conversing with him, and he heard the voice of God from heaven acknowledging his Son. Jesus told him that what he had seen was a vision, but the wonder of the sight, and the reality of the voice, remained with him for ever; he knew that what he had seen and heard was a manifestation of Divine power, and that to him was sterling proof. We saw; we heard; therefore we know! Thirty-five years later his faith was still unshaken, and remained so to the end, even though that end was martyrdom. And Peter had another source of strength which is given to all his brethren also, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts". The expression "more sure" means trusty, reliable, *more than ever confirmed*. Wilson's Diaglott has it "we also have the prophetic word confirmed"; that is, what we have seen and heard is confirmed by the prophets. Remember that Peter only had the Old Testament as the "sure word of prophecy". There was no New Testament in his day. When he found Christ in all the Scriptures it was only in the Old Testament that he found him. But that finding gave him the confidence of knowledge. To that confirmation ye do well to take heed, he says, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts. What is this day star that is thus to arise? Is it the knowledge of Christ gained by dedication of life to him and Christian experience through life, the inward illumination which is the result of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God at work in the consecrated heart? An intellectual knowledge of the prophetic and Messianic themes of the Old Testament is one thing; the heart's appreciation of Jesus and his message in the New Testament is quite another, but only this will keep us unharmed by the enemies of the Christian way. To know about Jesus is a good thing and a necessary thing, but to know Jesus is a greater.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the experience of Job. "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day

upon the earth" (Job. 19. 25-27). A marvellous passage! Here is a man who knows God and knows what is God's purpose for him and for all men and rejoices in that he knows. For a moment the burden of misery and torment is lifted from him and he shouts to the heavens the glory of that knowledge which is his. "*Though this body be destroyed, yet in my flesh shall I see God*". Here is faith that transcends the mystery of death and the finality of the grave, and sees beyond both a re-union with God, whom he has always served, who will not let him go even in death. At the time he uttered these words Job's own skin was marred and ulcerated from the terrible disease with which he was afflicted; from the natural point of view he had no hope of remedy and only death awaited him. Now he cried aloud his conviction that notwithstanding this apparently inevitable fate the day would yet come when in the possession of a whole body in a whole skin he would see God. From whence did he have this knowledge and this conviction? There was no Old Testament in his time and we know of no written record of Divine revelation that Job could have had. It can only be concluded that his knowledge of God's purposes had been handed down from father to son through the ages, preserved by godly men who retained something of the primitive faith, which the earliest men must have passed on from the time of the Flood or even earlier. It is very possible—even probable—that Job was descended from Uz the son of Nahor, Abraham's brother, and we know that Nahor venerated God. But in addition to any knowledge that Job received from Nahor or others, there is no doubt that he also acquired much of his understanding by virtue of direct communion with God. He must have been a man particularly receptive to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and he was certainly able to learn of God and the things of God in the wonders of creation. By whatever means he acquired it, he did have an understanding of the coming Redeemer who would effect such a wonderful recovery to life and restoration of his flesh and he understood that the scene of his restoration was to be here upon this earth. And it was to be a personal restoration of his own identity. "In my flesh shall I see God . . . whom I shall see for myself, and not another to see him for me . . . though this body of mine be now destroyed." Here is the first avowal of belief in the preservation of identity in the resurrection—I, who must go down into the grave and be totally destroyed so that of my body nothing is left, even I shall live again. And then scholars say that the doctrine of the resurrection is not to be found in the Book of Job! One of the

finest expositions of the doctrine is here and the more remarkable because it appears in all its fulness long before God began to reveal his purposes to Moses and all Israel.

We in our day have more in common with Job than we have with Peter and John in that, like Job, we have not seen and heard Jesus in the flesh as did Peter and John. On the other hand we are in one direction even more favoured than Peter and John in that we have the benefit of two thousand years' Christian progress in the knowledge of the faith in the light of the complete New Testament. Have we ever thought what a bulwark to faith that is? Men have believed and pondered and advanced in understanding in every generation and nation during all that two thousand years and died for their faith, and we have inherited their knowledge and been encouraged by their example. Other men laboured and we have entered into their labours. And all because they believed in the resurrection of Christ and all that springs from it.

This same knowledge is our strength and our incentive to preach the Gospel. Solomon said "Have I not written to thee excellent things in counsel and knowledge, that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that enquire of thee?" (Prov. 22.20-21). Here is the source of Christian confidence and Christian evangelism. To know the certainty of the words of truth: this is the essential preliminary to effective Gospel witness. Without knowledge we are at best inefficient workers. "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?". The pity of it is that so many evangelically-minded Christians do not know; they can talk only of the simple principle of salvation in Christ but know nothing of the consequent work which must be done in the hearts of men to fit them for eternity or of the Divine purpose working in history to bring all things into one, in Christ. And so they cannot answer questions. This should be our pride, that we can answer questions, because we know.

But at this point we must take care not to pin our faith to intellectual knowledge, to the accumulation of facts, the memorising of data out of a book, the ability to participate in debates upon fine points of theological principles. The true knowledge is that which is an inner enlightenment consequent on the power of God operating in the life, the indwelling influence of the Holy Spirit. Paul knew about this when he spoke (Phil. 3. 8-10) of the "*excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*" when he declared his desire "*that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection.*" A significant

expression, that! There is a power in the resurrection of Christ which is influential towards the Church. Not just the effect of belief in the Resurrection, leading to stimulation of effort and maintenance of confidence. Because Christ rose again, and lives again, there is a power, an energy, flowing from him to his followers which instils into them new life. Someone once said a dead Christ could save nothing and nobody. How true that is! Even though Christ's death on the Cross was a Ransom for All and provided an opportunity for life to "whosoever will" upon their awakening from the dead in the resurrection, it is still true that life eternal to the reconciled can only come through and from Christ, and by union with Christ, a living Christ. A dead Christ can not give life. In his Resurrection resides the power that eventually gives life to both the Church and the world. That word power in the Greek is *dunamis* and it means energy. In the world of Nature it is energy that changes things. Sunlight that has travelled the ninety-three million miles from the sun in eight minutes falls upon a living plant and in combination with water and air is changed into plant structure, and builds up the plant. It was invisible energy which reached the plant from the sun but it reappears as leaves, flowers and fruit which can become the food of man. As food it goes into the body processes and reappears as energy which gives heat to the body and powers the muscles for action and the brain for thought. All this is life and it is all the product of what is in the beginning Divine power. So it is with the Resurrection. "Divine energy loosed the bonds of death because it was not possible that Christ should be holden of it" says Peter in Acts. 2. 24, alluding to Psalms. 13. That word "not possible" means literally "no power to hold". There is no energy in death but there is great energy in life. So death is unable to resist the superabundant energy of Divine power and so soon as God takes action the grave cannot hold its dead. Hence the trium-

phant word of Christ to John the Revelator—"I am he that liveth, *and was dead*, and behold I am alive for evermore." And here is the connection between the Resurrection of Christ and the call of the Church, dependent upon that Resurrection. Give heed to the majestic words of Paul in Eph. 1. 19-20 (*Diaglott*), when he dwells upon this theme "*the surpassing greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the energy of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ, having raised him from the dead and having seated him at his own right hand in the heavens.*" Behold what intimate relation there is here between the power by which Christ was raised and the power of God in his resurrection operating in us. God's power is surpassingly great; that same power which raised Christ from the dead and set him in the highest heaven supreme over all created things is operative in just the same way to Christ's church, first giving life and resurrection and then exaltation to those same heavens in eternal association with Christ Jesus the Lord.

This then is our confidence. The certainty of our own resurrection is based on the fact of his resurrection. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, says Paul, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and in that rising has become the first fruits of all that sleep. Because He rose again, we shall rise again also. Happy are we if, when the shadows begin to close around us, as they must to each of us in turn, we can say with Paul, "*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. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*"

The Anthem of the Flowers

Almighty Jehovah, we adore thee!, thou who studdest the earth with our beautiful faces. Decked in all the colours of thy glorious rainbow, we glow with tender radiance in the soft moonlight or unfold in a thousand brilliant hues 'neath the sun. We carpet the hillsides. We riot in the meadows. We fill with fragrance and beauty the dim aisles of the forest. The waters lovingly reflect our sweet faces and the snow proudly wears us as gems on her bosom.

With rapture, little children hold us close to

their hearts and in their own language prattle sweet love words. We bring to the bedside of the weary and sick the breath of the forest, the glory of the meadows and the breath of the roadside and the garden. We rejoice in our loveliness. We rejoice in our mission to delight the eyes of men and to lift up their heads in wonder and adoration.

Oh Jehovah, our Creator, if all the glory and beauty of our tiny faces is but an infinitesimal reflection of thee, what must thou, thyself, be in

all the glory and beauty of thy Being! and what must be the rapture not only of those who behold thee, but those also who shall yet have the glorious privilege, not only to look upon thee, but to

be made like thee, as they fall before thee in praise and worship. We, too, lift our thousand faces unto thee in silent adoration. Jehovah we adore thee. (Rebecca Fair Doney.)

HABAKKUK — PROPHET OF FAITH

An exposition of the
Book of Habakkuk

Chapter 2 — On the Watchtower

Habakkuk's second message came to him after a time of waiting, a time spent on the "watch tower" in looking and listening for guidance and light. So it is with all who wish to know God's plans; it is necessary first that they come to a realisation of man's own folly and sin, that, to quote Paul in Romans 3. 12 "there is none that doeth good, no, not one" that men are held in the grip of evil powers and forces. But after there has been a time of quiet contemplation whilst this truth is sinking in there comes the assurance that things will not always be thus, that God is working to destroy the power of evil and that his judgments will certainly come upon the powers that have wrought evil. The theme of Habakkuk's second chapter is his realisation through his "watch tower" experience of the certainty of Divine retribution upon the evil forces of the world.

"I will stand upon my watch" he says, "and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd"—more properly "what I shall say concerning my plea". The first requirement of prophetic insight is watchfulness. Those words allude to the watchmen of Israel, stationed on the city walls to perceive in advance the onset of untoward happenings, the approach of travellers, or the coming of dawn. "Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth" the Lord commanded Isaiah (Isa. 21. 6) and in obedience to that command the watchman looked and listened "diligently with much heed". It was in consequence of his watchfulness that he saw the evidences of the downfall of great Babylon, and—abruptly changing the picture—the merging of earth's long night of sin into the morning of Millennial day. "I have set watchmen upon thy walls. O Jerusalem" says the golden tongued prophet again (Isa. 62. 6) "which shall never hold their peace day nor night; ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence... till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth". It was in the inspiration of these words that Habakkuk took up his stand in patient waiting on the Lord for the answer to his "plea", the suit that he had brought before God. And it is important to note that he watched, not so much to learn what God

would say "unto" him, in the words of the A.V. of verse 1, but rather as in the margin, what God would say "in" him, that is, *through him to others*. It is the purpose of Divine revelation that it be passed on, and the prophet who by reason of patient watching has been entrusted with a knowledge of the Divine Plan is thereby obligated to make it known to those who need that knowledge. God will speak to men "in" him.

It was not a literal watch tower upon which Habakkuk took his stand. Like Daniel a little later, he was waiting upon God in prayer and supplication, perhaps in the silence of the desert, perhaps in the quietness of the Temple sanctuary, and because of his readiness to be the recipient of Divine revelation, God was able to use him. "And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry". (Hab. 2. 2-3).

This is the first indication that Habakkuk's prophecy reaches beyond his own people and time, and touches the end of this Age and the beginning of the next. The prophet is bidden to write down the vision for the benefit of later readers, for its fulfilment is not wholly in his own day but is also in the "appointed time", an expression with which we are familiar in Daniel as betokening the day of Divine intervention for the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. The message certainly did have a direct application in the prophet's own day and was without doubt delivered orally to Israel at that time, but the writing down was equally evidently for the benefit of a future generation. "Now go" says the Lord to Isaiah (Isa. 30. 8) "write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for a latter day..." In these few words of God to Habakkuk we have evidence that a substantial part at least of the subsequent message is intended to apply to the day when God rises up to overthrow evil, and this conviction is heightened by the expression, later in the second chapter, to the effect that the earth is to be filled with Divine glory just as the waters fill the sea. That will not be fulfilled until the Kingdom is established.

The phrase "*that he may run that readeth it*" has to do with the ease or rapidity with which the enquirer may read that which has been written. Rotherham has it "that one may swiftly read it" and Leeser "that everyone may read it fluently". The "tables" (*luach*) were clay tablets, used in Babylonia for writing material. The soft clay, inscribed, by means of a stylus, with characters known as "cuneiform" (arrow-shaped) was baked until hard, and was thereby rendered practically indestructible. It may not have been without design that Habakkuk was told to write on "*luach*", imperishable tablets, instead of "*sepher*", the usual Hebrew term for book; for "*sepher*" in Habakkuk's day referred to parchments written with ink, and perishable. No such parchments have survived to our day, whereas plenty of clay tablets have been recovered. Perhaps this is an indication that Habakkuk's message was, as it were, to be preserved in permanent form, for God had purposed that nearly three thousand years after he had uttered it, there would be readers waiting to "read it fluently".

In verse 3 the prophet is warned that there will be misunderstanding and disappointment over the apparent non-fulfilment of the prophecy. "*The vision is yet for an appointed time.*" The term is the same as that used in Daniel; "at the time appointed the end shall be" (Daniel 8. 19). Further occurrences in the Old Testament indicate that a definite, preordained point of time is meant. Daniel was told several times that the full understanding of the vision could come only at the "time of the end", the time appointed for its fulfilment, and he was counselled to rest in patience for that day. This is the message to Habakkuk also: The two occurrences of "tarry" in verse 3 are two different Hebrew words, each having a distinct significance. The first means to linger or delay in coming, and the second to stay behind as though never to come. Thus the phrase is better rendered "though it *linger*, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not *fail to come*". To many in past days the vision has appeared to linger; the word comes to them as it did to those Israelites who complained in the days of Ezekiel that the days were prolonged and every vision had failed (Ezek. 12. 22-23) "thus saith the Lord God, the days are at hand, and the effect of every vision". So it is in these days when the Kingdom is imminent: for the message of the hour is "*though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come*".

The first clause of verse 4 "*His soul which is lifted up is not upright in him*" is rather obscure. It breaks the sense of the passage. There is a suggestion that it refers to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Babylonian invaders, contrasting him

with Habakkuk, the just man who is living by his faith. The Septuagint gives a different thought altogether, one that is more in harmony with the context, and the fact that it is the Septuagint that is quoted by the writer to the Hebrews in Heb. 10. 37-38 gives this rendering an added authority. It runs "*though he tarry, wait for him, for he will surely come and will not tarry. If any man should draw back my soul has no pleasure in him; but the just shall live by faith in me. But the arrogant man and the scorner, the boastful man, shall not finish anything...*" etc. Here, surely is a picture of the man who, because the vision has apparently "tarried", draws back and "walks no more with him" (John 6. 66), and on account of that failure God no longer has "pleasure" in him. The just man, the one who does not lose faith, goes onward and into life because of that faith and in the strength of that faith. It is his faith in the unseen things that sustains him when there is nothing seen that can give confidence. This understanding of the text is the one adopted in the tenth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, a passage so stirring in its exhortation and so adaptable to this present time in which we live, a time when the vision has apparently tarried and yet is now about to be fulfilled, as to deserve quoting in full:

"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." (Heb. 10.35-39).

Those words are redolent of supreme confidence, a confidence so well founded, so unshakeable that it stands in the New Testament as does the prophecy of Habakkuk in the Old, a beacon light shining to dispel the shades of doubt. The hope of the Messianic Age, when Messiah would reign as King over redeemed Israel and through them enlighten the nations, was the hope of every Israelite in the centuries between Habakkuk and Christ, and led many to be "in expectation" at the time of the First Advent. That hope was not fulfilled just as they expected. "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" asked the disciples with rapidly fading hope as they realised that He was about to ascend to heaven and leave them (Acts 1. 6). The hope of the Millennial Age, when Christ would reign over all the earth, and through his glorified Church in the heavens as well as through restored and purified Israel on earth, not

only enlighten but convert and reconcile to God "whosoever will" (Rev. 22. 17) of all nations was the hope of every member of the early Church from Apostolic times up to the close of the third century. But "hope deferred maketh the heart sick" (Prov. 13. 12) and when the failure of their chronological understanding in the fourth and fifth centuries revealed that the longed-for earthly Kingdom was not yet to be, there were many who did cast away their confidence. Although they had "done the will of God" they were not able to wait with patience for the fulfilment of the promise. So it was that the churches of that day began to listen ever more closely to men who belittled the glorious promise of an earthly restitution of all things, men who made light of the Divine calling of this Age to Christian discipleship in preparation for the administrative and missionary work of the next, and degraded the teaching of Jesus to an impassioned exhortation to "flee from the wrath to come". Their highest conception of Christian teaching was a call to escape the terrors of hell and achieve the blessings of heaven, a purely personal salvation.

To-day we have come back to the apostolic principles and we know that God is, in this Age, setting a premium upon faith. His purpose stands firm, his promise is sure, and in his own due time this earth will be filled with his glory. It is our part as disciples to hold fast to that conviction and wait in quiet assurance that the tarrying One will surely come. And by that faith men shall live.

The Apostle Paul in the first chapter of Romans shows the intimate connection between faith and the revelation of God's righteousness, and quotes Habakkuk's words to support his argument. The revelation of that righteousness, he says, is "out of" faith, in consequence of faith, and it is "in order to" faith, it leads on to further faith (Rom. 1. 17) as it is written "the just shall live by faith". The epistle to the Romans is a progressive enlargement of this dominant

theme; **THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY HIS FAITH!** Abraham was justified by faith (Rom. 4. 3) and so are we, *if we believe* (4. 24). By this avenue we come to a condition of freedom from condemnation and acceptance with God (5. 2) leading on by full surrender to Christ, to baptism into his death and a rising to walk with him in newness of life (chap. 6). So the fleshly mind passes away and the spiritual mind takes control and we are joined forever to the company of Christ's brethren (chap. 8). From that position Paul goes on to show that Israel after the flesh must also tread the same path, leading to full acceptance with God, and in their turn live, by faith (chap. 9 to 11). So comes that great crisis in the outworking of God's Plan when "all Israel" has been saved through faith, and is ready to embark upon its pre-destined mission of enlightening the nations, who in their turn, during the Millennial Age, are also to be saved through faith. And it is precisely that climax in the affairs of Israel to which Habakkuk's prophecy also points. Where Paul perceived the culmination by means of theological reasoning, his predecessor saw it in prophetic vision.

* * *

Now even at this point Habakkuk was not quite ready to have the vision of the future revealed to him. God must now acquaint his mind with the inflexibility of Divine judgment upon evil. What a man soweth, that shall he reap. Consequently the remainder of chapter 2 is taken up by a "song of taunting", to use the Hebrew expression, in which the sin of Babylon and the corresponding retribution is set out in five-fold form. That is the theme of our next instalment; and after that comes the great prophecy of the Last Days.

Abraham's Tomb

The "Jerusalem Post" under date 9 November 1976 reported that the United Nations have formally recorded Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah at Hebron from Ephron the Hittite for use as a tomb for himself and his wife (eventually for his son and grandson and their wives) at the request of Israel. It is difficult to see what practical utility there is in this action; the tomb and its surroundings have known many changes of control since the Patriarchs were laid to rest.

When the Israelites re-entered Canaan under Joshua Hebron was held by Canaanites and Caleb had to dispossess them. Probably this is a tactical move to emphasise the antiquity of Israeli claims. Since however both Moses and Mahomet were descendants of Abraham it may well be that when the Patriarch himself appears on earth in the Messianic Age all such matters will be settled amicably.

? **THE QUESTION BOX** ?

Q. *In a recent note regarding Elijah and Elisha it was stated that neither of these could have ascended into heaven in their physical bodies since, as Paul declares in I Cor. 15, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God". If this be the case neither could our Lord have entered the presence of the Father in his body of flesh. Is this so?*

A. This is correct. Our Lord was put to death a human being but he was not raised from the dead a human being. His humanity was left behind for ever at the Cross. He prayed to his Father "Glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17). Our Lord was not a man before He came to this earth. He took upon himself our human nature "for the suffering of death" (Heb. 2.9), but when that object had been achieved He rose again to the life and union with the Father He had enjoyed before coming to earth. We do not—cannot—understand or visualise that life and that world. Our human bodies are designed to enable us to live on this terrestrial earth and to relate to this environment. In order to live in another, the celestial, world the life that is in us must be "clothed upon" with another kind of body, a celestial body, adapted in the same way to correspond with that other and different environment. The Apostle Paul makes this plain in 2 Cor. 5.1-4 when he speaks of our earthly body being replaced by one from the heavens. Thus our Lord when He rose was freed from the limitations of human nature and once again took upon himself the glory and powers of the celestial.

A factor that has beclouded a clear understanding of this matter is the fact of our Lord's appearances to his disciples after his resurrection, always in visible human form. It has to be realised that in these instances the resurrected Christ appeared in a body of flesh assumed for the occasion because in no other way could he communicate. As a celestial being He is of necessity invisible and inaudible to human senses. Note that in each case his appearance was different. Mary took him for the gardener; to the two on the way to Emmaus he was a stranger; those fishers on the lake did not recognise him. Only by some familiar gesture or word did they realise who He was. Only to doubting Thomas did He appear in a body bearing the wound-prints. These bodies were not the real Jesus; they were the

means used to reveal himself in just the same way as angelic visitors in previous times, appearing as men and then disappearing when their mission was accomplished.

In just the same manner, of course, we the followers of Christ must expect to leave our earthly bodies behind at death, and rise again in the resurrection in those new spiritual, celestial, bodies which will fit us for life in the beyond. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be" says John "but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (I Jno. 3.2). Paul describes this experience as a "change", "in the twinkling of an eye" (I Cor. 15.51-52), in the case of those members of Christ's Church who are living at the time of his Advent. They die, leaving their terrestrial bodies for ever, but are "clothed upon" with their newly created celestial bodies and find themselves in the celestial world, with Christ.

* * *

Q. *2 Cor. 3. 13 reads, "Moses put a vail over his face for the sons of Israel not to gaze intently to the end of that being abolished" (Diaglott). I have always understood that the vail was to prevent injury to those sons of Israel who had to look at him, the brightness being too much for them. I understand that another explanation, that "Moses was ashamed of the glory" is now current. What is your opinion?*

A. Without further details it is difficult to see anything worthy of discussion in the alternative suggestion. The account in Exodus 34 makes it perfectly plain that Moses at the first was quite unaware that his face carried a permanent reflection of the glory of the Lord and it was the fear of Israel to approach him that led him to put the vail on his face, which he wore while talking to the Israelites, but removed every time he went in to speak before the Lord. The Apostle's usage of the incident, in 2 Corinthians, likens this vail to the obstruction of hardness of heart that prevented Israel in his own day from perceiving the glory of God in the Christian Gospel. When they shall turn to the Lord, he says, the vail shall be taken away. It seems perfectly plain from both of these considerations that the questioner's own understanding of the matter is the correct one.



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

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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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Thought for the Month

"Lo, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him." (Rev. 2. 7).

More than ever, those who are wearied with the distress and suffering that is in the world tend to look to the heavens for help. From earliest times men have looked for the "Coming One" to appear in glory and power to bring deliverance. That is why men were so disappointed two thousand years ago when, instead of a supernatural apparition in the skies they found only a baby in a manger—and thirty years' silence after that. But that baby changed the course of history! To-day, as then, the majority fail to realise that John's exclamation in Rev. 2. 7 was a poetic outburst in the spirit of Daniel's vision; the reality of that coming in the clouds is something far more vital than the visible descent from the upper air of a transcendently radiant human form. In fulfilling his promise to return for the accomplishment of all things written, the Son of God comes, not as a human being, for the body of his humiliation was put off at the Cross, but in the spiritual power and splendour of his Divine majesty, something which can never be perceptible to the five human senses. Men will know

of his Advent by the outward results, the progressive destruction of evil institutions and evil things, the appearance of the visible agents of God's Kingdom on earth armed with powers of control men can neither understand nor resist, the firm suppression of all that hurts or degrades and the widespread promulgation of right and true things. This is the time of which our Lord spoke when He told his disciples *"In the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel"* (Matt. 19.28). Regeneration means the giving of new life. The Second Advent is a time of giving new life to the world, and the promise that men shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory will be fulfilled when men see on earth the visible evidences that God's Kingdom is established. An increasing number of Christians are coming round to the conviction that the blessed time is imminent and as one looks round at this present world rapidly dissolving into chaos and threatened with destruction one can only echo the age-old prayer "Lord Jesus, come quickly".

NOTICES

International Pyramidology Convention. Readers who are interested in the science of Biblical Pyramidology will perhaps like to know of this function which is due to be held in Los Angeles, Calif. U.S.A. over the period 19-21 May of this year. British sponsors are the Institute of Pyramidology, 31 Station Road, Harpenden, Herts., AL5 4XB, to whom all enquiries from British readers should be addressed, and in U.S.A., Miss E. Bennett, 4950 Franklin Avenue, Los Angeles, Calif. 90027, U.S.A. All arrangements for flight to U.S.A. and accommodation whilst there will be made by the Institute at Harpenden and full details will be supplied upon request, including various sight-seeing tours which are additional options.

Yeovil Convention. A convention is to be held in Yeovil over the week-end 13-14 May 1978. For details

and accommodation write Mr. P. Chislett, 108 St. Michaels Avenue, Yeovil, Somerset.

Chesham Convention. Arranged for 17-18 June 1978 at the Malt House, Elgiva Lane, Chesham, Bucks. Details and accommodation from Mr. F. Binns, 102 Broad Street, Chesham, Bucks.

Gone from us

Bro. S. Bodle (Warrington)
Bro. R. Clipsham (Welwyn)
Bro. H. Panteny (London)
Sis. M. Russon (Whitstable)

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

THE WISDOM OF ELIHU

9. Immortal, Invisible, God only wise

A study in
Job 32-37

"God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend" (37. 5). One waits here to perceive what mighty exhibition of Divine power is now to be adduced by Elihu in further support of his argument for the power of God and it is with a sense of anti-climax that we find he is going to refer only to such everyday things as snow and rain. Not much evidence of the power of God here, surely. And yet..... it was not so long ago that at a time of unusually persistent rainfall, a cartoon appeared in a London daily newspaper depicting a rain-drenched and flooded landscape in the midst of which a figure clad in oilskins stood with hands upraised to heaven in an attitude of despairing supplication. The caption read "I can split the atom; I can fly faster than sound; and yet....." With all his wonderful achievements that lonely figure was powerless in the face of Nature's rain. And how true that is! It only needs a blanket of fog or snow and the whole complex system of human transport comes to a stop; only a few spots on the sun or a magnetic storm out in space and the world's radio communications resolve into meaningless gibberish. The light and heat of the sun are rightly regarded as the most beneficent influences which bless the human race, but it only needs a little too much sun combined with not enough rain, and the crops fail and man perishes from the face of the earth. With all man's boasted scientific achievements and his claimed control of the forces of Nature, he is still absolutely and altogether dependent upon the orderly working together of those forces for his continued existence upon earth. His claimed control is no control at all: he is utterly at the mercy of Nature, and only God can control Nature.

Elihu saw all this plainly and used this very illustration. "He saith to the sun, Be thou on the earth: likewise to the small rain, and to the great rain of his strength" (the "former" rains, light, soft showers, came in the spring-time when the seed was growing fast, the "latter" rains, drenching downpours, "great rain of his strength" in the later summer when the crops were ready for harvesting) "He sealeth up the hand of every man that all men may know his work" (37. 6-7). Says Rotherham "On the hand of every man he setteth a seal that all men may take note of his doing". The power of God manifested in the irresistible force of Nature has

the effect of constraining, binding, limiting man until he realises his own impotence in the face of God's work. "That every man may know his own weakness" is the manner in which the LXX renders this last sentence. Sooner or later men will have to realise their own weakness and littleness in the sight of God; all their marvellous inventions and all their wonderful works can be rendered impotent by one little snowstorm which only God can avert.

The lower creation, it would seem, is more sensible than man. In the face of the great snowstorm or the persistent rain, says Elihu, "the beasts go into dens, and remain in their places" (37. 8). Their instinct tells them of the futility of fighting against the way God has ordained the course of Nature. Modern man thinks he knows better. He thinks he can bend Nature to his will and do things even better than Nature can do them. He fails to realise that he is thus defying God and the ordinance of God and will surely fail. Only by co-operating with Nature, and so with God, will man come into his inheritance; but that time is not yet.

Elihu continues his theme. "Out of the chamber cometh the whirlwind and out of the storehouses the cold. By the breath of God ice is given and the broad waters become solid" (37. 9-10). Driver has shown that "south" and "north" in the Authorised Version should be rendered "chamber" and "storehouses" respectively. The allusion is to the ancient belief that the winds were stored in great chambers and storeplaces above the sky, and that portals were opened to allow them to blow upon the earth. The entire picture is that these things are held in Divine power to be let loose in the earth at God's pleasure and in God's time. So it is with the clouds that float above the earth — Elihu knew that these clouds were the rain carriers. "Also by watering he wearieth the thick cloud: he disperseth his lightning cloud. It is turned round about by his counsels; that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth" (37. 11-12) or as Driver again has it "upon the face of his habitable world". The close connection of all these powers with the race of men is constantly stressed. These forces of Nature and these natural functions of rain, snow, ice, storm, lightning, sunlight: all these things are not just casual happenings in an inanimate creation, the

outward manifestations of the operation of some blind natural law. They are not even merely an essential part of the economy of a world of unreasoning vegetable and animal life. They are devised to have a direct effect upon man and profoundly to concern the very basis of his being. Elihu knows that too. In a wonderfully eloquent and far-sighted remark he sums up the whole truth of God's power in Nature's phenomena. "He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy" (37. 13). Three purposes for which the rain, the snow, the storm, the sunshine, all these things, are sent to come upon the earth. Sometimes for man's correction, to warn and chastise him and turn his mind, if he will, to the better way; sometimes simply and plainly for the good earth, the land, that it might be fertilised and freshened, and bring forth its fruits, that man might continue to live before God. Sometimes—and this more particularly in the last great dispensation of God's dealings with mankind, the Messianic Age and reign of Christ upon earth—for mercy. In that glad day all the forces of Nature will combine together to make the wilderness and desert place to blossom as the rose (Isa. 35. 1) and the earth yield its increase to the glory of God.

This verse is just one of the many instances in the Bible where this dual aspect of God's dealings with his children is expressed. "Correction" is *shebet*, the rod of chastisement and of guidance. In Psa. 2. 9 the victorious Messiah is to break the rebellious of the earth with a *shebet*—a rod of iron, whilst in Ezek. 20. 37 backsliding Israel is to be brought to pass under the *shebet*—the rod of iron, and into the bond of God's covenant. New Testament references to Christ ruling all nations with a rod of iron (Rev. 2. 27 and 19. 15) come from the same root, rendered into Greek. A firm, strong and just rule in which evil and wickedness meets with instant retribution is indicated by this rule of the iron rod. That is one aspect of God's dealings. The other is characterised by mercy—*chesed*, a word which means loving kindness. "Because thy lovingkindness" (*chesed*) "is better than life, therefore my lips shall praise thee" (Psa. 63. 3). "Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness" (*chesed*) "and tender mercies" (Psa. 103. 4). The combination of these two is very aptly shown by the writer to the Hebrews. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12. 6). In our Father's providence the outward circumstances sometimes bring to us the rod of correction and sometimes the sunshine of his approval, but always it is to the end that we may be fashioned and conformed

into his likeness—which is, after all, the original meaning of the word "chastening". So then the strong power of God is exercised toward men, sometimes in correction, sometimes in loving-kindness, sometimes in the general progress of his plans for the earth and man upon it, but always does it bear the impress of a God of love.

And now with an arresting and a peremptory demand for attention Elihu comes to the end of his long series of orations. For the last time he calls the attention of Job to the inescapable logic of his words. "Hearken unto this, O Job; stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God. We know that God has disposed his works, having made light out of darkness" (this latter sentence from the LXX) (37. 14. 15). This is a reference back to the beginning, to what might be regarded as the most momentous thing that happened at the time God moved to the creation of things that exist. "Let there be light, and there was light." That is the sublime introduction to the story of the Divine purpose. Men do not know, even now, what light really is, only that it is fundamental, not only to life, but to matter. The narrow band of vibrations which register on the human optic nerves as light does not by any means exhaust all the vibrations there are; perhaps there is light, more widespread, more penetrating, more lovely, visible to other intelligent created beings which is quite outside the range of human comprehension. Somehow we think of the condition of unformed chaos which existed before God commenced to create as an impenetrable and universal darkness. Somewhere in that darkness God dwelt, immortal, invisible, the only wise and omnipotent Deity, inhabiting timeless eternity. Somewhere in that darkness He decreed light, and light began, and with it time began, and from then onwards this creation of radiation and matter which scientific men claim to resolve back into a magnificent and almost incomprehensible system of vibrations, had its existence and began its ordered development. Many, many years later St. Paul, his spirit-filled mind illumined with this same understanding, recalled Elihu's words and gave them a new meaning as he talked of an even more wonderful creation which God was even then bringing into being. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. . . ." (2 Cor. 4. 6). The whole story of the developing plan of God is the coming of light where there was formerly darkness, and of the victory whereby the light eventually dispels the darkness and takes its place. So Elihu, as he draws his long discourse to its close, and

makes his final plea for the power of God manifested in his wondrous works, puts the creation of light out of darkness as the first and most noteworthy.

"Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge, you whose garments are hot when the earth is still because of the south wind? Can you, like him, spread out the skies, strong as a molten mirror?" (37. 16-18 R.S.V.). From the unknowable to the known, the unseen things to those that are seen, Elihu leads his argument. No man saw the dawn of the first light to shine in God's creation; no man witnessed the mighty cataclysms which gave birth to the first stars; but every man, and Job himself, could clearly perceive the clouds sailing majestically over their heads without ever understanding how they maintained their position up there in the sky without falling down. Every man, and Job himself, experienced the heat of the south wind, blowing from the sun-scorched deserts of Arabia, without ever knowing what it was that gave the south wind its heat when the north wind and the west wind and the east wind brought snow and rain and cold as Elihu had just been reminding them in the earlier part of this chapter. Every man, and Job himself, could look up into the heavens on those days when there were no visible clouds, just a shimmering field of azure tinged with a slight haze through which the sun shone in his strength—for that is the kind of sky indicated by the Hebrew word here—and ponder, as men did ponder in those days, how God stretched out that mighty veil which divided the earth which is man's domain from that far-off realm which is the abode of God. Strong as a molten mirror: mirrors were made of burnished copper in those days and the shimmering sun-filled sky could well be likened to a polished mirror. No man, not even Job himself, could hope to understand how the sky maintained its position and distributed the light and heat of the sun over all the earth to the joy and comfort of man.

So Elihu finishes his appeal. He has no more to say. His arguments have rested all along upon two inescapable facts, first that God is inherently right in all his decrees and secondly that God is supremely powerful in all his works. Even though man cannot discern all his ways he can trust, because of these two facts. And in those truths lie Job's condemnation and that of his three friends for every word they have spoken against the absolute wisdom, justice, love and power of God. Elihu throws down the challenge, his final challenge, before he ceases to speak. From here to the end of the discourse the

Septuagint rendering rises to a height which cannot be approached by the Authorised Version and with little variation that rendering is adopted here. *"Wherefore teach me, what shall we say to him; and let us cease from saying much"*. (and then Rotherham) *"were any man to say aught he might be destroyed"* (37. 20). It is not a challenge he expected to be taken up. These men had already shown their inability to answer Elihu; his own personal faith in God and knowledge of God had carried him to a height they had not as yet attained. Even Job, approved as he was by God after the discourses were ended, had these things to learn of Elihu before he could say, as he did say at the end of his story *"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I repent, and abhor myself in dust and ashes"* (Job 42. 5. 6). And it was the closing words of Elihu's discourse, magnificently sublime, which brought Job to that position at last.

"But the light is not visible to all; it shines afar off in the heavens as that which is from him in the clouds. From the north come the clouds shining like gold; in these great are the glory and honour of the Almighty. We do not find another his equal in strength; as for him that judges justly, dost thou not think that he listens? Wherefore man shall be in awe of him and the wise in heart shall reverence him" (37. 21-24).

That is the conclusion. The light is there, shining in the far distance, where God dwells, but all men do not see it. The light is there, but it has not yet penetrated all the darkness and many of the people who sit in darkness have not yet seen the great light. But all that is to be remedied in God's good time. *"From the north come the clouds shining like gold."* The light of God comes to men in measured stateliness and nothing can hinder its advance. It was in "the fulness of time" that Jesus came, a great Light in the world, a light that can never be put out. *"We beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father"*. (John 1. 14). Truly did Elihu foresee this when he saw the clouds coming from the north shining like gold and exclaimed *"in these great are the glory and honour of the Almighty"*. And how true to say we do not find another his equal in strength. As the hymn puts it *"None other could with him compare, among the sons of men. He's fairer too than all the fair, who fill the heavenly train"*. Of course Elihu spoke these words of God who is forever invisible to man; but in Jesus Christ God becomes manifest to man and these words then become true of "the Word made flesh" who

men could see and with whom they could converse. So the Son manifests the Father's glory and exercise his power, executing the provisions of his purpose and commanding obedience to his decrees. Naturally and obviously, then, "*men shall be in awe of him and the wise in heart shall reverence him*".

It seems so simple a word with which to conclude this long exposition of the wisdom, the justice, the love and the power of God. Elihu has taken us to the very mountain tops of spiritual pilgrimage in his endeavour to show us the revelation he himself sees so clearly; he has urged us through depths of heart-searching and self examination and turned our eyes to great manifestations of Divine power and goodness, but at the last he leaves us in a quiet meadow with this simple conclusion that because of all these things, we should reverence God. "Fear

God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" said the Preacher a thousand years later (Eccl. 12. 13) and we, who live yet another three thousand years later, can still do no more than repeat the injunction uttered by that zealous young advocate of utter and unyielding faith in God and his righteousness. Nearly four thousand years have passed since Elihu was laid to sleep with his fathers; his words live on, and because they are words full of the Divine glory and because they look forward to the One who himself manifested the Divine glory, they are words which will never die.

THE END

A few back issues up to No. 8 of "The Wisdom of Elihu" are available, and new readers who missed the earlier instalments may have such issues as they desire, free on request, while they last.

A Note on Luke 12.37

A diligent reader of the B.S.M. who is familiar with the Greek text, commenting upon the exposition of the above Scripture on page 84 of the July/August 1977 issue, points out that the words "to meat" in the A.V. do not appear in the Greek text, in either the received Text or the Griesbach Text. He suggests that this fact could widen the field of interpretation, that the Lord does not necessarily "come forth and serve them" with spiritual food, "meat in due season for the household of faith", as suggested in the article referred to, but might well come forth to serve them in the sense of conferring the reward of their faithfulness, which can only mean the "entering into the joy of their Lord", i.e. the promised crown of life.

* * *

It is certainly true that the two words do not appear in the original. The word that does appear is *anaklinel*, which means to cause to recline, and mainly to recline at table, which in turn is in New Testament times for the partaking of food. This is probably why the A.V. translators added "to meat" in order to make the phrase intelligible to Western readers. Of other modern translators, the R.V., Rotherham and Ferrar Fenton follow the A.V. The N.E.B., R.S.V., Moffatt and Weymouth have it "*recline at table*" or "*sit at table*", Young "*recline (at meat)*" and the Living Bible, which is a paraphrase and not a true translation, "*serveth them as they sit and eat*". One might logically ask for what purpose would the Lord make them to recline if it were not for the purpose of par-

taking of a meal? In such case one would have to assume that this reversal of the normal order of things, viz., the master waiting upon and serving food to his servants instead of the reverse, is intended to indicate some very special relationship and favour not to be expected in the ordinary way—perhaps something analogous to the favour indicated in Rev. 14. 13 "*blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth*". It is this, and the fact that there is something incongruous in the idea of the Lord acting as servant to his glorified Church when she experiences the time of rewards beyond the Veil, that leads to the interpretation formerly suggested, to wit, that the Lord is serving his people with new and enriched understanding of his Truth in this present time of the "days of the Son of Man".

The alternative suggestion is that the parable refers to the final triumph and reward of the Church, expressed in such texts as Luke 19. 15-19 (parable of the pounds) Phil 3.21; 1 Thess. 4.7; 2 Tim. 4.8, all descriptive of the change to heavenly conditions which is the lot of all who are faithful unto death. It is true, of course, that these Scriptures apply to all who have made their calling and election sure from Pentecost to the present, whereas verse 37 is only obviously applicable to those actually living and found watchful at the time of his Advent. Probably in this as in so many matters of interpretation, it is a case of "every man being persuaded in his own mind".

AQUILA & PRISCILLA

One of the brightest experiences to befall the Apostle Paul during his first evangelistic tour in Europe was the unexpected meeting at Corinth with two fellow-Christians. In company with Silas, Timothy and Luke he had crossed the sea from Troas in Asia to Neapolis in Greece and visited one Greek city after another, preaching Christ. In most places he encountered Jews and took part in their synagogue worship but it was becoming increasingly evident that his real mission was going to lie with the Gentiles. For the most part his fellow countrymen would have none of him. Eventually he found himself at Athens, where he expounded the faith to an audience of the most cultured intellectuals of his time, but they were all Greeks and at the end there seemed to be little to show for his efforts (Acts. 17). It must have been with a somewhat heavy heart that he went on to Corinth, some sixty miles farther, perhaps wondering what good he would be able to do in that notoriously dissolute city, and there he met Aquila and Priscilla.

It was probably in the synagogue that he met them, for Aquila at least was a Jew—born in Pontus, the Asiatic province towards the eastern end of the Black Sea, and therefore a Jew of the Dispersion. It might have been many generations back that his forebears left the land of Israel; that his family had long since become thoroughly acclimatized is shown by the fact that his name Aquila is Roman and not Jewish. His wife's name is thought by some to indicate her connection with the Prises, a noble Roman family who were prominent in early Roman history and many of whose members filled various public offices. If this was indeed the case then Priscilla was a native Roman, not a Jewess, and being thus highly born was probably cultured and intellectual, which could account for her apparent position of equality with Aquila in the various matters which are recorded of them. But Aquila, and Priscilla his wife, were Christians. That unexpected and welcome fact must have gladdened the Apostle's heart, and his interest must have been the more aroused when he learned that his new-found friends had themselves been in Corinth only a short time, having come there from Rome itself. This was the first contact Paul made with the city in which above all cities he longed eventually to visit and preach the Gospel.

The story commences in Acts 18. Aquila and Priscilla, living and gaining their livelihood in Rome, were caught up in a decree issued by the Emperor Claudius Cæsar banishing all Jews from Rome. Where they were to go he cared not, but go they must. Acts 18.2 says they had but recently arrived from Rome and this enables us to confirm the date of this part of Paul's journeyings. This edict of Claudius was issued in A.D. 52—it is mentioned by one or two Roman historians—and it was almost certainly in the latter part of that year when Paul arrived in Corinth and met them.

There was an additional bond. Aquila and Paul were of the same craft; they were tent-makers. Aquila was such by necessity; by this craft he earned his daily bread. Paul, as a Pharisee, was bound to learn some craft by which he could gain a livelihood if necessary, even though a Pharisee was normally in the happy position of not having to labour with his hands. Paul, however, although he had given his life to the ministry, was accustomed to earning enough to meet his modest needs, and so it seemed the most natural thing in the world for him to join forces with Aquila for the duration of his stay in Corinth. The arrangement also provided him with a home; *"because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought; for by their occupation they were tentmakers"* (Acts. 18.3). The craft thus described denoted the weaving and fabrication of a heavy goats hair, produced mainly in Cilicia and in Pontus, into tents and ships' sails and the like. Paul's birthplace Tarsus was in Cilicia—the fabric was called cilicium after that name—and so this would have been an obvious trade for him to learn in his youthful days. Aquila was born in Pontus and here again it was a natural occupation for him to take up in that district.

So passed two years, during which the Church at Corinth was established and grew from a handful of converted Jews and Greek proselytes to an influential community which, for all its heterogeneous nature and many failings, was ever after very dear to the Apostle's heart. Much of the "spade work" must have been done by Aquila and Priscilla, and much of the credit must go to them.

There were probably a number of other Roman Jews in Corinth at this same time. When Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans some six

years later, he sent greetings to Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16.3.) who therefore must have been back in Rome by then. He also mentions by name a considerable number of other believers in Rome, some twenty-five altogether, some of whom had apparently shared experiences with him. "*Urbane, our helper in Christ*", "*Mary, who bestowed much labour on us*", and so on. Paul had never been in Rome and could not have met these Roman brethren there. The implication is that many of those whose names appear in Rom. 16 had emigrated to Corinth on account of the edict and that they formed part of the Corinthian Church during its first few years. It is known that the edict was only of limited effect and many Jews remained in Rome; Claudius died two years later and his successor Nero did not continue the ban so that gradually many of the expelled Jews returned. That could explain how Paul, writing to Rome six years later, could send greetings to so many by name; he had laboured with them for a while in Corinth.

After two years Paul was on the move again. He intended to go to Jerusalem and finally Antioch, thus completing his second missionary journey. To do so he must cross the sea to Ephesus in Asia. In A.D. 54 he was in that city, and Aquila and Priscilla went with him. (Acts. 18.18). There they stayed for a few years although there was not as yet any Christian community in Ephesus. Paul had fellowshiped in the synagogue during his short stay and the other two continued to do so after his departure (ch. 18. 19-26). But their missionary spirit was not to be stifled; there were probably more than a few who began to share their faith and acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Just a glimpse of their zeal is granted in the end of chapter 18. An eloquent and cultured Alexandrian Jew, Apollos, came to Ephesus. He was a disciple of John the Baptist; he had probably never seen the Baptist but heard of his message and believed it. Aquila and Priscilla expounded the Scriptures to him and in consequence he too accepted Christ. Later on he went to Corinth and became a power for good in that church; but in the meantime he would almost certainly have been an invaluable help to the other two in their promulgation of the faith. His learning and eloquence might have supplied something which they themselves lacked "*he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ*" (Acts. 18.28).

Three years passed, and then Paul appeared again in Ephesus, as he had promised (Acts 18. 21), during the course of his third missionary

Journey. This time he found a Christian church in being; this we know because it was on this occasion, whilst resident at Ephesus, that he wrote and despatched his first Epistle to the Corinthians. In the course of that Epistle he conveyed, to the brethren at Corinth, greetings from the Ephesian church. "*Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house*" (1 Cor. 16. 19). The implication is that when Paul reached Ephesus on his third missionary journey there was a Christian community in the city holding its meetings in the house of Aquila and Priscilla. This would imply that these two were the founders of what afterwards became the most famous and celebrated church in Asia, one that had the honour of coming first in the gallery of the "seven churches" in the Book of Revelation. Since Ephesus became the centre of Christian evangelism in Western Asia it could be that this devoted couple were used by the Lord to initiate and direct a mighty work which developed and flourished long after they themselves had gone.

For they did not stay in Ephesus. They were certainly there in the Spring of A.D. 57 when Paul sent his first Epistle to Corinth, conveying their greetings and those of the church in their house. But not much more than a year later, when Paul, now himself at Corinth, despatched his Epistle to the Romans to Rome, he sent greetings to his two former co-workers, now at Rome, and again "*the church that is in their house*" (Rom. 16.3.5.). Apparently by this time Aquila and Priscilla had returned to Rome and within a few months of their arrival gathered a community of Roman Christians to meet in their house as they had done at Ephesus.

It would seem then that when Paul arrived in Ephesus there was this small band of Christians meeting in the house of Aquila. There is no mention of this in Acts 19. The narrative there reads as though Paul was the founder of the church. That is because Luke was narrating primarily the story of Paul. What apparently happened is that Paul first encountered the small group of disciples of John the Baptist, twelve in all, converted and baptised them, (Acts 19. 1-7) then spent three months in the synagogue to which he had promised to return when previously in Ephesus, but finding an opposition which had not previously been apparent, withdrew and commenced a series of meetings in a secular debating establishment (the "school of one Tyrannus") which continued for some two years. There is nothing unlikely in the supposition that for a few months—six at the most—the "public" evangelical meetings in the school of

Tyrannus and the more "student" meetings in the house of Aquila for growth in the deeper truths of the faith went on side by side and during this period the First Epistle to the Corinthians was written and despatched. Then Aquila and his wife returned to Rome leaving Paul and his companions to carry on both works; probably the two "meetings" then fused together and when, ten or twelve months later, Paul wrote to the Romans he had knowledge that Aquila had established another church in his house at Rome and Paul sent greetings to that church. Then when Paul left Ephesus for Macedonia not many months later (Acts 20.1) he left duly ordained elders from among the Ephesus converts to guide the future destinies of the church—the elders referred to in Acts 17. Something like that is probably the picture.

It is not possible to say with precision why Aquila and his wife returned to Rome. Claudius had been dead now for four years and his edict was dead. Perhaps Rome offered a better livelihood and once the obstacle was removed they felt the urge to rejoin the brethren there from whom they had been separated these six years past. It is known that many Jews did return to Rome at this time once the way was open. Perhaps Aquila felt the work at Ephesus was now well established and being well cared for by responsible Asiatic Greek and Jewish brethren and he and his wife could be of more use in Rome. At any rate they returned. They were probably among those who met and greeted the Apostle Paul when, a further three years later, he himself arrived in Rome, a prisoner, to be tried before Cæsar.

Paul was only at Rome for two years. After his trial and acquittal he left the city and the Scriptures afford no clue to his whereabouts or

his journeyings until about six years later, when he reappears in Greece. Some time during this period, probably before Paul's acquittal, Aquila and Priscilla left Rome again and returned to Ephesus. We know this because Paul, writing to Timothy at Ephesus from his condemned cell in Rome in the early part of A.D. 68, sends greetings to his two old friends. (2 Tim. 4.19). Here again the reason for their abrupt departure is difficult to surmise. It might well be connected with the changed attitude of the State to Christianity occurring at this time. When Paul left Rome a free man the faith was still tolerated by the State; it was no crime to be a Christian. But a year or so later, in A.D. 64, there occurred the great fire of Rome, which was blamed on the Christians, and the intense though shortlived persecution by Nero was the result. A great many Christians were martyred and when it was over the church of Rome was sadly reduced in numbers. It might be that Aquila and Priscilla were able to escape from the country during that persecution and in such event the most natural place for them to go to would be Ephesus.

There we have to leave them. There are no further inferences from which we can deduce how much longer they served the Lord Christ, or with whom. Probably they spent the rest of their days as co-labourers with Timothy and Onesiphorus, and Tychicus, and later on, the Apostle John, with others whose names are unknown, in building up the church at Ephesus until it became the most influential in all Asia, renowned for its missionary zeal and its deep spirituality. "I know thy works" said the resurrected Lord to them "and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted" (Rev. 2. 2-3). That all had its start in the devoted labours of two Roman exiles, Aquila and Priscilla.

A Story of Elijah

It is written in Arab history that upon an occasion in the year A.D. 638 a party of three hundred Arab warriors fighting in Syria had encamped for the night and found themselves joined in their prayers by an old man with staff and attired like a dervish (holy man). Upon being asked his identity he declared that he was the prophet Elijah, left in the world to wait the coming of the Lord Jesus at his Second Advent (The Mohammedans esteem Jesus Christ as a prophet and believe in his second coming at the end of the world.) Upon being asked by Fadhilah, the commander of the Arabs, when

the Lord Jesus would come, the old man replied "at the end of the world and at the last judgment". Fadhilah further enquired what would be the signs of the approach of that time, and Elijah said "When men and women shall forget their respective places; when abundance of provisions shall not lower their price; when the blood of the innocent shall be shed; when the poor shall ask alms and receive nothing; when love shall be extinguished; when the Holy Scriptures shall be turned into songs; and when temples dedicated to the true God shall be full of idols, know that the day of judgment is very near". Having said this, he disappeared from their sight.

"HIS FLESH UPON HIM SHALL HAVE PAIN"

Examination of a curious text

"His sons come to honour, and he perceiveth it not; they are brought low, but he knoweth it not of them. But his flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn." (Job 14. 22).

If any Scripture could be said to support the eternal torment doctrine, this surely is the one. Taken as an isolated text, it stands as a bald statement of the condition of man after death—a condition of conscious pain.

That it supports the traditional idea of Hell is a position that cannot be maintained when one reads this entire chapter—the 14th of Job. The chapter is devoted to expressing the brevity and unsatisfactory nature of human life, and this final verse is made applicable to all men without distinction. Since not even the most convinced of "hell-fire enthusiasts" will claim that all men, good and bad alike, must go to hell, the verse should be rejected as a statement of the fate of the wicked. It is rather a statement of the fate of any and every man, irrespective of their worthiness of everlasting bliss or otherwise.

We should connect this chapter, which is part of Job's answer to Zophar, with the latter's words in chapter 11. Zophar's argument, founded upon worldly wisdom, is that if Job is really a righteous man he will be rewarded by earthly felicity, and go into the grave at a ripe old age after a full and prosperous life. This is a similar argument to that of Eliphaz in chapter 5, who maintained that the righteous man will see the prosperity of his posterity, and end his life in full satisfaction with the world and everything in it.

Job, on the contrary, in this 14th chapter, stresses the unsatisfactory nature of a life which, after all the toil and suffering which comes to man, ends in death, and, from the human standpoint, no further interest in the world and its affairs. The righteous man is not necessarily prosperous, and, like Job himself, he may be cut off by disease and death without any assurance of the prosperity and happiness of his posterity. He may even, again like Job, have his last hours darkened by the knowledge of misery and loss upon his posterity. So that, from the worldly standpoint, unilluminated by Divine wisdom, man concludes an unhappy and unsatisfactory life by going into death without seeing or enjoying any of the things for which he has laboured. Whether his sons come to honour or grief, he knows not, lying unconscious in *sheol*. Death

comes at the end of a life which is only pain and mourning, so that, as Barnes has put it, man goes "lonely and sad to the land of shades and of night separated from his family and friends". "*Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.*"

In striking contrast to this hopeless creed is the faith of Job himself, expressed in this same 14th chapter. He has already expressed the common view of the unbeliever, "*there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, it will sprout again . . . through the scent of water it will bud and put forth boughs . . . but man dieth, and wasteth away . . . man lieth down, and riseth no more*" (vs. 7-12). He then voices his own belief in the Divine promise of a resurrection: "*Oh, that thou wouldst hide me in sheol, that thou wouldst appoint me a set time and remember me. If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee; thou shalt have a desire to the work of thine hands*" (vs. 13-15).

The expression "if a man die shall he live again?" is a rhetorical question on Job's part designed to fasten his hearer's attention to the important truth he was about to utter. Only in the promise of God that there will be a future life, and that that future life is attained by means of a resurrection from the dead, is Job able to give a satisfactory answer to the riddle of existence. Not by any system of rewards for a good life now, nor by the satisfaction of following the results of one's works, or fortunes of one's posterity, from the world beyond the grave, does Job attempt to satisfy the instinctive cry for justice. He faces up to the fact that this world is evil, and that man's life is oftentimes wholly unsatisfactory—but he knows that a life to come, when the reign of evil has run its course, will continue the life begun under these unsatisfactory conditions, and give to every man the desire of his heart.

The pain and mourning, therefore, belong to this life. It is before the man has died, whilst he is progressing through life and slowly descending into the grave, that "his flesh upon him shall have pain and his soul within him shall mourn". Then comes death, from which Job expected to be awakened in God's own time. "*All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.*"

THAT TIMBER ON MOUNT ARARAT Appendix 2 to the "Story of the Deluge"

An outstanding consequence of the past thirty years' exploration of Mount Ararat is the discovery of a massive timber structure buried in a glacier four thousand feet below the summit. Some of the Ark-seekers claim that this must be the remains of the Ark, on the ground that, as several have said, if it is not the Ark, what is it? Apart from this rather unscientific assumption, and although many experts have been brought into the discussion, no serious attempt at a logical evaluation of the discovery appears to have been made.

In the endeavour to substantiate his belief that this timber is actually part of the Ark, M. Navarra, who discovered it in 1955, brought home a piece and submitted it to the radio-carbon test in order to determine its age. This is a method of assessing the age of any organic material by measuring the contained amount of radio-active carbon, which constantly diminishes from the time the sample ceases to be living. Hailed as infallible when invented in 1958, it is now known to be subject to error. Two European authorities at the time gave the age as 4000/5000 years. Much more recently four responsible laboratories, including the N.P.L. of London, have given figures ranging between 1100/1300 years, and this would seem to be the more likely. It is possible that it has been "up there" since the seventh century A.D. and the question remains "What is it?"

The timber lies just below the ice at the present edge of the ice-cap. (The ice-cap extends and recedes from time to time through the years in response to changing climatic conditions.) It is hand-tooled and there are perhaps fifty or more tons of it. Navarra was not the first to find it. In 1930 an Australian, Hardwick Knight, exploring the ice-cap, found himself walking over an extensive rectangular timber framework the vertical members of which were just protruding above the surface. He attached no particular significance to his find at the time. Earlier, in 1876, a British traveller, Lord James Bryce, found a four foot beam five inches square, also hand-tooled, on the south-western flank. He brought a piece home and lectured on it before the Royal Geographical Society but was not taken seriously.

The many stories of alleged "sightings" of the Ark on Mount Ararat may have their origin, in part, to the existence of this timber structure,

whatever it is. These stories go back to 1883; none of the fourteen or more explorations between 1800 and 1882 reported finding anything. In 1883 Turkish experts investigating avalanches on the mountain came across an enormous wooden structure protruding from a glacier. It appeared, said one newspaper recording the find, "to be the rude facade of an ancient dwelling". The party entered the structure and found it divided into rooms fifteen feet high. Local villagers said they had seen it for the previous six years. There the matter rested until in 1887, four years later, a Nestorian ecclesiastic, Dr. John Nouri, climbed Ararat and afterwards declared he had found the Ark "sticking out from a glacier". His description was not unlike the structure reported previously by the Turks. Since those days the villagers and peasants in the vicinity tell various stories of men who have climbed to the spot and seen for themselves. One account alleges that Russian military personnel investigated a wooden structure during World War I, and another that photographs of the object were taken during World War II. The only picture claiming to be a representation of whatever it is, dependent upon the recollection of one man, shows a wooden building with a gabled roof something like a farm barn, partly concealed by the ice. There is, however, one other significant fact. When Jordanus Catalani, Bishop of Columbun, passed through Armenia in A.D. 1330 he said of Ararat "in a certain part of the mountain is a dwelling which Noah is said to have built on leaving the Ark" (Jordanus, "Wonders of the East" Latin 14th Cent.). None of the present claimants are likely to have read Jordanus... his work is difficult to secure... so that his testimony may well be taken as evidence that such a building was known in the 14th century independently of the 20th. The logical inference from all this is that from some time during the Middle Ages a massive timber building did stand on Mount Ararat and its remains now lie buried beneath the ice. If the reputed age of the timber is at all reliable the building may have been erected as early as A.D. 600 or so. What kind of building may it have been and for what purpose?

Armenia has been a constant battleground between contending powers... Scythian, Roman, Persian, Parthian, Mongol, Saracen, Turk... About A.D. 600 the Eastern Roman Empire was

locked in combat with Persia and Armenia was the cockpit. This continued for half a century and then came the Moslem Arabs, after that the Turks and then the Mongols; the land was never free from war. Geographically, Mount Ararat commands the pass which invading forces from the north had to traverse to meet the Persians, and vice versa. The ancient trade route from Trebizond on the Black Sea to the cities of Persia and India passed by Ararat through this pass. *The Roman Emperor Heraclius led his troops through it on his way to attack the Persians in A.D. 623.* The place where the timber has been found is at an elevation of 13500 feet on the western flank of the mountain, just above a wide grassy area where to-day the shepherds bring their flocks, overlooking the pass far below. What more natural than that in those stormy times a fortification stood here, a lookout post from which the movements of the enemy in the valley might be observed and counter-measures taken. From this altitude an observer looking to the plain below would be able to see a distance of 125 miles. As a point from which to detect the approach of an advancing army Mount Ararat offered a considerable advantage.

If such a building was indeed erected during those early centuries it was not built upon the glacier. The ice came later. C. E. P. Brooks, in *"Climate through the ages"*, (1949), has shown that the historical period A.D. 400—1200 was characterised by a world-wide warm and dry climate with no Arctic ice and a diminution of snowfall and glaciers over the world. It follows that at that time the Ararat ice-cap was either non-existent or of considerably smaller size than at present. The site where the timber is now buried in the glacier could then have been ice-free and probably covered with herbage as the mountain now is just below. Between 1400 and 1800 world climate was much colder, coldest since the Ice Age, for which reason climatologists call it the "Little Ice Age", and the Arctic froze up to the limits it reaches to-day. During this period the Ararat glaciers would have extended, enveloped and probably concealed the building. Since A.D. 1800, says Brooks, the world

has warmed up again and glaciers have receded everywhere. This could account for the building having been known to Jordanus and his contemporaries in A.D. 1330 and then lost to sight until rediscovered by the Turks in 1883, and is supported by the recorded fact that when Parrott explored Ararat in 1829 the main glacier, which commences just above the Great Chasm at 12,000 feet, extended three miles towards the plain (*"Journey to Ararat"* 1845); when Lord James Bryce climbed the mountain in 1876 it had shrunk to one mile (*"Transcaucasia and Ararat"* 1896) and when Lynch followed in his steps in 1901 it was a mere half mile (*"Travels in Armenia"* 1901). Lynch remarked in his book that the glacier had been receding since 1844.

The timber has been found to be oak; it is claimed that no oak grows within three hundred miles of Ararat and it is hardly likely to have got there unless in the form of a drifting ship. This suggestion ignores the fact that tree-clad areas were much more extensive in former times. Braidwood in *"Prehistoric investigations in Iraqi Kurdistan"* (1960) says that in early times extensive oak forests covered the land from Iraq to Palestine; more recently travellers Sir Robert Ker Porter in 1817 and Isabella Bishop in 1890 found prolific oak forests around Lake Van, less than sixty miles from Ararat (*"Travels in Armenia and Persia"* Ker Porter 1821, and *"Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan"* Bishop 1891). Human activity has steadily depleted the forests and there is no reason to doubt that in the seventh century and much later there were plenty of trees in the vicinity of Ararat for building purposes.

All things considered, what seems to be the most reasonable solution to the riddle of the buried timber on Mount Ararat is that it represents the remains of an ancient building, anything up to 1300 years old, which once stood on the western slopes, probably as an observation post and fortress to watch for hostile armies. That leaves quite untouched the question whether the Ark did or did not ground on this particular mountain but it does offer a valid hypothesis as to the origin of the much-discussed timber.

On Long Life

As relating to the longevity of the lives of men in ancient times recorded in the Bible it is of interest that the celebrated Roman naturalist of the First Century, Pliny, asserts in his *"Natural History"*, Book 7, chap. 48. 154, that in his own

time there was still a country in which men lived for 200 years. He may have been speaking of the Russian Caucasus where to this day lives of up to 150 years are not uncommon, but in any case his record is one more testimony in support of Biblical statements which today are sometimes ridiculed.

THE THEOLOGY OF WASTE

"What a waste!" the disciples exclaimed in some horror as they saw a woman pour a costly jar of scent over Jesus. Their view in Matthew chapter 26, verse 8 was justified by the assertion that it could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus, however, had other thoughts. He did not contest the sheer economics of it, nor the magnanimous offer to charity from traveling people, themselves poor. He first of all called attention to personal relationships; they had judged her on the act, not the motive. They had further criticised her for the gesture without seeking an explanation. In so doing, they had gratuitously insulted her; doubted her wisdom and integrity, and grieved her. They had been offensive; that was the first point. He went on to appreciate what had happened on a personal level in the perspective demanded by the disciples: "the poor you always have with you, but Me you have not always". He then interpreted the act for them: "her object was to prepare Me for burial", and added "wherever in the whole world this Good News shall be proclaimed, this deed of hers shall be spoken of in memory of her."

No more is said of the matter in the Gospel account, but Matthew notes that it was at that time Judas went to the High Priests to fix the price of betrayal. The two deeds are not separate and the story of the woman with the ointment is no side issue, no sentimental cameo. It certainly has to be told wherever the Good News is proclaimed—of necessity.

The first lesson Jesus teaches from the incident is that God looks upon the heart, whereas man looks on the outside. The worry is not financial—after all, who owns the cattle on a thousand hills; who gives and who takes away; who gives manna from heaven? The worry is heart; who will be pure of heart who will be pure so that all things can be pure?

In this encounter, the woman illustrated the teaching that what the mind determines is as good as done. God judges intention, and her intention was good. It was as good an intention as that of the widow and her mite. The first in riches and the last in riches in economic terms are one in Christ Jesus. But the disciples did not see it that way. Their outlook was of the kind whereby Jesus declared "Get behind Me, Satan" on another occasion. When Peter received this, he was looking not at intention but at appear-

ances. In both cases, Jesus was up against common sense. The disciples had divorced the motive from the act. With such a philosophy, little wonder that they could not cast out demons. Little wonder that demons could only come out of others when the exorcists themselves had been cleansed by prayer and fasting. The prayer and fasting had to begin as judgment at the house of God.

Thus as the disciples put Mammon before God in their attitude, they quite ignored how the woman had put God before Mammon. She had acquired this costly substance for herself, and herself alone. It would have certainly made her presence more acceptable to others, but this was primarily a focus upon herself. Now in pouring it upon Jesus, she had demonstrated that He had usurped self; He had become Master of her deepest inclination. She did not consider it waste. Even on the lowest human terms, it is no waste what a Friend gets. She was acting from the highest of motives and the only motives that a sharing community can acknowledge. In their criticism, the disciples had outlawed themselves—they took no part in the gift and opposed it, yet claimed the right to direct where it should have gone if a precipitate action had not denied them. Jesus upheld the rights of the individual. "To your own Master you stand or fall."

But the teaching goes deeper still. If the woman had placed the ointment at the disciples' feet and they had sold it, they would merely have led someone else into the sin the woman had just cast off, the sin of self. Someone else would have been adorning themselves in an act of worship of the creature, the idol. Where, in such a financial transaction, could there be any glory to God?

No, the money had been spent once and it must be taken out of circulation to eliminate human weakness and self-adoration. It had to go to Jesus. If it had been given to the poor (note, not spent on the poor), there is no guarantee that it would have been used wisely, no guarantee that it would have done more than alleviate temporal conditions. If Jesus is right about the spiritual condition, then his message cannot be diminished into a programme against poverty. Had the ointment not been used on Jesus, the Christian message could have shared a platform down through the ages with every humanist concern on offer and in these latter

days with the claims of Karl Marx. Jesus puts no evaluation upon possessions — the farmer's barns are nothing on the night of his homecall, or of the lightning. The only value is in the soul's condition. The woman could have poured water upon him, if she considered it holy. Likewise, the value is between donor and recipient, not set by the market.

Jesus emphasised that he was the One to judge the value of anything appertaining to him but from this local incident he has given us a guideline for all mankind's dealings with each other; the value of anything is not to be fixed by competitive offers, arriving at the lowest common denominator so that rich and poor are held in continual tension. The haves and the have-nots are to be all one in Christ Jesus by an acknowledgement of values that transcend the material. A commodity like a jar of ointment is *not to be priced by the cost of its ingredients* in terms of scarcity, difficulty in manufacture, hours of labour and availability of cash or any other factor. A commodity is valued by the consumer, not the producer. This goes against current economic thinking where needs are created and jobs are created to meet false needs governed by Commerce.

The disciples subscribed to such a philosophy. In their eyes, the fact that the ointment could be sold meant a "need" was there. Even if the

"need" was one removed, at the poor, the philosophy still undermined the Christian assertion that God the Father knows needs, as against vain desires; and needs as such will always be met, if asked of him. Even if it had been carefully explained to the poor how they were getting the benefit and they were exhorted to seek first the Kingdom of God for tomorrow's diet—how many would have done so? As a realist, Jesus said "The poor you always have with you".

But the thrust of his teaching was still to come. "Her object was to prepare me for burial" He said. Thus He indicated that the disciples were unaware that the woman had the Holy Spirit with her. She was prophesying. Indeed, the disciples were so unanimously of the opinion that the incident was trifling, they did not ask Jesus what He meant by according it such momentous notice. Had they discussed the matter as assiduously as they jostled for position beside Jesus in Heaven, they might well have deterred Judas from promptly going off to get the market price for Jesus. In this respect, Judas did not act alone. It is a sobering thought that the poor did in the end get the cost of the ointment; Judas flung the thirty shekels into the sanctuary where the High Priests declared it illegal for Treasury purposes and agreed to the purchase of the Potter's Field as a burial place for people "not belonging to the City"... a paupers' graveyard.

Not Always Right

There is a canoe in the London Museum which was found in the Thames sixty years ago. The experts examined it and said that it was several hundreds of thousands of years old, which of course implied that man had existed upon earth all that time. Much more recent examination has revealed that in fact it was made in the 14th century A.D. only six hundred years ago. The original experts were sincere enough; they gave their opinion based upon the knowledge then available and the prevailing conclusions respecting the antiquity of man. But they were mistaken nevertheless. So it is with many of the conclusions of scientific thought; the superior knowledge of a later generation is apt to upset them. Only Bible knowledge remains unassailable, and the more the Bible is studied and better understood the more is its factual accuracy demonstrated.

Divine Guidance

A very great mistake which some have made, in view of conflicting ideas as to what is truth, has been to discard every human instrumentality and expect God's guidance through the Bible alone. Such forget that God gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ; that we are exhorted to build one another up in the holy faith and to esteem the servants of God for their work's sake. Ever since the Church has had an existence, God has raised up from its midst, as special servants of the Body, some who have special teaching ability. Blessed is that servant who at the Master's appearing is found giving the meat in due season to the household of faith (Matt. 24. 26), and no less blessed are they of the faithful household, who, like the "noble Bereans" of old, search the Scriptures daily to see if these things be so—who prove all things, as the apostle exhorts, and hold fast that which is good.

(selected)

HABAKKUK – PROPHET OF FAITH

An exposition of the
Book of Habakkuk

3. What a man soweth

Habakkuk had now been brought to realisation of the fundamental causes underlying human distress, man's own sinful, fallen condition, and of the way of escape therefrom, repentance and justification through faith. The details of the process of reconciliation could not yet be revealed; that had to wait for the advent of Jesus, but sufficient was given the prophet to show him that God had devised a way, that the oppression and injustice from which his soul revolted would not endure for ever. Now God had something else to show him, the inflexibility of Divine judgment upon evil; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap. That law is as true in the case of nations as in individuals, a lesson that needs to be brought home to-day and indeed is being brought home to those who have regard to the significance of current events. And in order to impress this lesson with all the sharpness it required, the Holy Spirit cast it in the mould of a "taunt-song", a form of poetic composition in which the Hebrews excelled. One of the earliest "taunt-songs" is that of Miriam the sister of Moses, composed to rejoice over the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea (Exod. 15). This one in Habakkuk is directed primarily against the Babylonians, exulting over their coming fall, in veiled language touching upon the great moments in their history when their arrogance and opposition to God's holiness was thrown up in sharp relief, dwelling upon the "poetic justice" of the retribution that was surely coming upon them at the hands of the Persians. But the taunt-song has a wider scope of application than that, for its principles also fit the greater world system which, built on the same basis as Babylon of old, has by reason of its greater magnitude and extent infinitely excelled the empire of Nebuchadnezzar in the weight of its oppression and the cruelty of its yoke. And that greater system also must fall with the weight of its own corruption, perishing in the fires of retribution which follow inevitably upon the filling up the full measure of its evil course, to be succeeded by the glorious Kingdom of Christ in which the hands of the oppressor will be felt no more. The terms of this taunt-song, framed at first to fit the Babylon of Habakkuk's day, can be suited very easily to this present world order in which we live.

"Shall not all these take up a parable against

him (Babylon) and a taunting proverb against him, and say 'WOE to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and that ladeth himself with pledges.'" (vs. 6). This is the first of the five "woes" of the song, each describing one outstanding sin of Babylon. Here it is the sin of usury, consistently condemned in the Scriptures. Much of the distress of our modern world is due to the place of usury in its financial system, and the opportunity thus given the unscrupulous to exploit the needy and defenceless. In the case of Babylon the prevalence and practice of usury is known to go right back to the beginning of the city's existence, prior to the time of Abraham. In Habakkuk's day Babylon was the centre and controlling power of the world's commerce and trade. But, "*shall they not rise up suddenly that smite thee*", cries Habakkuk, "*and thou shalt be for booties unto them?*" (vs. 7). The Persians were destined to destroy Babylon's usurious practices, and Babylon, that had preyed for so long on others, would in turn become the prey of others. "*Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee*" (vs. 8). Babylon steadily declined in commercial importance after its capture by Cyrus, its trade being transferred in later days to the new city of Seleucia on the Tigris, and it never recovered its place among the nations.

The second "woe" may very well contain a veiled allusion to Babylon's first great crime against God, the building of the great Tower from which God might be defied (Gen. 11). "*WOE to him that gaineth an evil (dishonest) gain to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the hand of evil*" (calamity — *Moffat*). The word for "nest" denotes an eagle's or other bird's nest set high up in the crags of the rocks, and also any kind of sanctuary or abiding place built on high. Speaking to Edom, God says "though thou exalt thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down" (Obad. 4) and to Bozrah "though thou shouldst make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from thence" (Jer. 49. 16). Those godless men of early times set out to build a tower whose top should scale the heavens; they would challenge God in his own realm. Men are doing that today, and the fate of their work will be as catastrophic as was that of their predecessors. In Daniel's time,

the tower, still standing, enlarged and beautified by almost every successive king since its erection, was crowned with a golden sanctuary dedicated to the Babylonian god Bel, the god to whom was devoted the treasure looted by Nebuchadnezzar from the Temple (see Dan. 1. 2). The literal Bel has been destroyed as was prophesied of him (Jer. 51. 44, Isa. 46. 1); and his modern counterpart is fast meeting the same fate.

"WOE to him that buildeth a town with blood, and establisheth a city by iniquity" (vs. 12). That is an apt description of the building of great Babylon, one of the mightiest cities the world has ever seen, largely in the blood and tears of the helpless captives taken from other lands, its gigantic walls, magnificent palaces and stately temples monuments of oppression and iniquity. WOE to it all, cries Habakkuk, for it will all come to naught. *"Behold, is it not of the Lord of hosts that the people shall labour for (Heb.) the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for nothing? for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea"* (vs. 13-14). In other words, man has erected this great edifice of evil on the misery and sorrow of his fellows; and when it is completed the Lord will sweep it away as by fire and the labour will have been for nothing, for it is the Divine intention to fill the earth with Divine glory, a glory which will brook neither sorrow nor sighing, neither unhappiness nor pain, but demands that the former things shall pass away (Rev. 21. 4). So "Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling-place for dragons, without an inhabitant" (Jer. 51. 37). To-day, the Baghdad-Basra railway crosses a wind swept waste of broken brickwork and heaps of rubble, inhabited only by jackals and scorpions, all that is left of proud Babylon. That is a fitting picture of the end of this world. The rule of unrighteousness will perish, and the evil that man has created be swept away, as God arises to "turn to the people a pure language that they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve him with one consent" (Zeph. 3. 8-9). In the midst of the darkness and gloom of these five woes, with their dark recapitulation of human sin this fourteenth verse shines like a beam of light piercing the storm clouds. It is an assertion of the inflexible Divine purpose that cannot be frustrated. The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea—a universal, world-wide knowledge of the glorious gospel of Christ, the ultimate fruit of the work of the Millennial Age.

"WOE unto him that giveth his neighbour drink . . . and maketh him drunken also" (vs. 15).

It was literal intemperance and drunkenness that marked and contributed to the final capture of Babylon by the forces of Cyrus. The carousal at Belshazzar's feast, when the aged Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall as spelling the doom of Babylon, is well known. When the Persians laid siege to the city they effected an easy entrance because the whole city had been given over to feasting and debauchery. In a metaphorical sense Babylon had made all the nations drunken by seducing them into the worship of her own system of brute force, in much the same way that present-day materialism is seducing the people more and more away from true religious faith and belief. Both then and to-day the prophet's words are true: "Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad" (Jer. 51. 7). It was during their captivity in Babylon that the Jews, before that time mainly a pastoral people, learned the arts of trade and acquired the financial acumen for which they have since become famous — or notorious. They too have been intoxicated by the influence of Babylon. To-day all the nations partake of the same "mixed wine" and in their intoxicated condition cannot see that this vast edifice of greed and gain has come at last to the point where the judgment of this woe will be executed, and that without remedy.

"For the violence done to Lebanon shall return upon thee and the slaughter of beasts shall terrify thee." (vs. 17). This is the literal meaning of the verse. The cedars of Lebanon, so ruthlessly cut down by the invaders (see Isa. 14. 4-8) are poetically used as a symbol of God's people; there will be a dual judgment upon great Babylon, retribution for the violence done to the saints of God (Rev. 16. 6) and a great destruction of earthly evil powers, the "wild beasts" of the earth, which, in their fall, will involve in ruin the entire evil system which is symbolically termed "Babylon the Great" (Rev. 17. 16).

The final woe is a sentence upon idolatry. Babylon, by means of her power and ruthlessness, first intoxicated the nations and then led them into idolatry, the worship of the created thing rather than the Creator. *"What profiteth the graven image . . . the molten image . . . dumb idols?"* cries Habakkuk. *"WOE unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach. Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it"* (vs. 18-19). There is a modern counterpart to all this. Men to-day have set up science as a god, a god of their own creating, a god to which they devote all their powers and

wealth, laying it over with silver and gold, and saying to it, "Arise—it shall teach!" And the prophet scornfully regards their handiwork and says "there is no breath at all in the midst of it". Though all people in the world bow down before the image they have made and cry to it for deliverance from their distresses, there will be no answer. "They bear him upon the shoulder" says Isaiah "they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth... one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble" (Isa. 46. 7). So it was with Babylon, and so will it be at the end of this Age. Men will plan and put into execution all their schemes and devices for bringing peace and prosperity to the earth without God and without righteousness, and all their endeavours will fail, because there is no breath at all in the midst of them. There can be no peace without righteousness, no righteousness without morality, no morality without Divine law — despite all that the "moderns" say to the contrary—and no Divine law without the Holy Spirit, the "breath" which is of God to inspire and vivify. It is when all these plans have utterly failed to bring about any deliverance in the earth that God's time will come, and He will intervene in his own way to establish lasting peace amongst men.

And so Habakkuk, comforted and reassured by this revelation of Divine judgment impending over the oppressors of his people, looked up

into the heavens and saw the beginnings of a new and marvellous revelation. The darkness was rapidly giving place to an effulgent golden glory. Like Elihu in the days of Job, suddenly perceiving in the heavens a light that he had never seen before (Job. 37. 21-22), and Isaiah, waiting to be used of God, beholding the wondrous vision of the throne (Isa. 6. 1), so now Habakkuk, realising at last that evil shall not always flourish but that the time of the dispensation of evil is known to, and fixed by, the Almighty, looked up into the skies and saw the temple of God open in heaven, and the Lord seated upon his throne with his attendant angels around him; and in the glory of that vision cried out in exultation "*The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him*".

And in his fervour of soul he bowed himself before that great sight and waited in silent reverence for the vision of the End Time that God, by his Spirit, was about to show him.

* * *

Sin — justification — retribution. These three great truths had to be seen in their true relationship to each other before the necessity and nature of the Time of Trouble could be rightly understood. Now comes the great prophecy which shows God arising to perform his "strange work".

Nothing new under the Sun

When William Loftus was excavating the ancient city of Uruk ("Erech" of Gen. 10) in 1850 he unearthed a number of inscribed clay tablets two to four inches long and one to three wide which, when deciphered, proved to be banknotes of the time of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, precisely similar to the Treasury notes or dollar bills of today. Besides giving the date of issue in the day, month and year of the reigning king and the name of the monarch, the tablets were inscribed with their value, redeemable for that value in gold or silver upon presentation at the Treasury. Not so convenient as our modern paper money, although a good deal more permanent—unless the owner dropped one on the pavement. Perhaps the banks of the day were accustomed to the presentation of a handful of shattered pieces of banknote and provided that the pieces fitted would issue a replacement. The prophet Daniel must have used such tablets when making purchases. Today forty of them repose in the British Museum.

Timnath Discovered

An archæological expedition has recently discovered the site and remains of Timnath, where Samson went to take the Philistine woman as his wife. This is one of the Old Testament places whose location has until now been in doubt. The excavators found that a Canaanite town stood here until soon after the entry of Israel into the land, and was then destroyed by fire. That could have been an incident in the conquest of the land under Joshua. Above this are the remains of a Philistine town, with various Philistine remains. Later on, in about the time of Solomon, a fortified city stood here. Situated on the border between Judea and the area of Philistine settlement, the town was of importance. The discovery confirms the accuracy of the narrative in the Book of Judges.

AND GOD REPENTED

*Enquiry into a
perplexing subject*

The assertion, some eight times repeated, that God "repented" of something that He had done has often given rise to the question what is implied. Common sense dictates that it is impossible for the Creator of all things, having all knowledge and foresight, to regret his action in some specific instance and wish it had not been so done. "*With him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning,*" is James' comment on God's ways (Jas. 1.17). The fact that we cannot think of this "repentance" of God in just the same way as we understand the term—which nowadays has for the most part a theological significance and signifies repentance for past sin—is evidenced by the words of Balaam in Num. 25. 19 "*God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it?*" God is all-wise and omniscient; He is in full control of the creation He has brought into being. It is inconceivable that He can ever be in the position of wishing that He had not done something which He has done.

If this be conceded, it remains to consider what is implied by the several occasions on which it is said that God "repented".

The foremost example—and the first—is at the time of the Flood, when "*God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth . . . and it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart*" (Gen. 6. 5-6). The common view of this text is that God regretted having created mankind and resolved to destroy them as unfit for further life. That this view cannot possibly be true is evidenced by the fact that at a much earlier period, in the days of Eden, God had told the first human pair that He proposed eventually to undo the harm that had been done by the advent of sin, that there would be a saviour from among those yet to be born of their descendants. This pre-supposes that God envisaged the presence of mankind on the earth long after the Flood had come and gone.

In these circumstances, the first thing to do is look at the word for which the A.V. (and earlier) translators selected "repent" as the English equivalent. "*Nacham*", like many Hebrew words, has a variety of meanings, largely determined by the grammatical class, whether passive, active, intensive, and so on, most of which is beyond the comprehension of any but

competent Hebrew scholars and will not be enlarged upon here. Suffice to say that the general use of the word in all the Scriptures, with whatever English words it is translated, is the best guide. In this particular case the word is derived from the idea of drawing in the breath in order to contain one's grief. Hence in the O.T. its meaning is to lament or grieve over something that has happened, (48 times), to grieve on account of a person or persons—to pity (twice) to comfort others or oneself (45 times), to be comforted (8 times). Of all these the A.V. translates the word by "repent" 41 times and "comfort" 61 times, and on one occasion (Isa. 1.24) "I will *ease* me of mine adversaries".

That such divergent ideas as repentance and comfort can be presented as the meaning of the same Hebrew word only underlines the difficulties faced by translators. To some extent, of course, theological beliefs and human standards of conduct must have their influence. It could be very difficult to see how God could take comfort in the state of affairs before the Flood; much more understandable to think that God, in his grief, was sorry He had ever made man and wished He had not done so, which is how the N.E.B. puts it "*He was sorry that he had made man on earth . . . I am sorry that I ever made them*". But when in the account of Isaac's marriage to Rebekah, it is said (Gen. 24.67) that "*Isaac was comforted* after his mothers death", where "comforted" is the same word "*nacham*" it is obviously incongruous to suggest that he repented of his action in marrying Rebekah, so "comfort" was the English word used. Likewise Judah was "comforted" in Gen. 38.12, David in 2 Sam. 13.39, Rahel "refused to be comforted" for her lost children in Jer. 31.13. All these and other examples are in the same passive form of the verb as in Gen. 6.5-6. Many more in the active sense include Gen. 5.29 where Lamech says of Noah "this same shall *comfort* us concerning our work and toil . . ." which hardly includes the idea of repentance; Gen. 37. 35 where Jacobs sons "rose up to *comfort* him" at the loss of Joseph; Job 2.11, Job's three friends came "to mourn with him and to *comfort* him"; Psa. 23.4 "thy rod and thy staff they *comfort* me; Isa. 61.2 "to *comfort* all that mourn; Zech. 1.17 "the Lord shall yet *comfort* Zion". There are many more examples; these are sufficient.

From all this it would appear that the Divine "repentance" at the time of the Flood was a deep personal grief at the fact of human sin because He himself was man's Creator and Father. God grieved at the consequence of his making man, not regretting that He had made man, but regretting the sorry state of affairs which had resulted. The Septuagint says that "God laid it to heart that he had made man on the earth and he pondered it deeply". There is a small grammatical point here; "*chay*" is a relative conjunction "that" and also a relative causal particle "because". The translators have to choose which meaning best fits the sense. If, instead of "that" we say "God repented *because* he had made man . . . it repenteth me, *because* I made them" the emphasis changes. God grieved for the sinful state of man because He had been responsible for their creation in the first place, and so, to bring in the New Testament, was in the position of the father in the parable of the prodigal son. There was no suggestion of reversing his plans for this earth and destroying it for ever, but there is the plain statement of what God would do to deal with the situation. He declared, in short, that He would alter the course of history, for man's own sake. The human society upon earth was altogether corrupt; if tradition be true, the terse words of Genesis 6 constitute a masterly understatement of the position. Violence and murder were the order of the day; in the expressive words of the Book of Enoch, "*as men perished, they cried, and their cry went up to heaven*" (1 Enoch 8.4). So God determined to take away all that generation and make a new start.

It was a merciful decision. There is a future for all of them. They will come back in the resurrection to a far happier state of society than the one they knew, and be able to hear of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Much later on, God acted similarly in the case of the perhaps equally corrupt people of Sodom and Gomorrah. "I took them away as I saw fit" He said.

On a subsequent occasion God told Samuel "It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king; for he is turned back from following me" (1 Sam. 15.11). The decision grieved Samuel "and he cried unto the Lord all night". Could it have been a matter of less grief to God himself? He had chosen Saul and presented him to the people, and Saul, at first so full of promise, had defected and shown himself unworthy. Here surely is another case where God was compelled to change the course of events but did so with grief.

A different aspect is presented by a number of texts in which God is said to repent of the "evil which he thought to do to his people" (Exod. 32. 14). In each of these cases, about nine or ten in all, the position is that the people of Israel had violated their covenant and apostasised from God, and in accordance with the terms of that covenant they were due in consequence to reap trouble and disaster of all kinds—failure of crops, famine, invasion of enemies, and so on. But Israel repented and came back to God so that He lifted the threatened retribution. Perhaps the English word "relent" would be the best to employ in such cases. God relented, not capriciously in an irresponsible fashion, but because the people had fulfilled the conditions necessary for the lifting of the sentence. "It repented the Lord because of their groanings" says Jud. 2. 18. "If that nation turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them" (Jer. 8.8). When the inhabitants of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not" (Jon 3.10).

A rather striking usage of the word is found in Ezek. 5.13. The Lord is talking to Ezekiel about the grave unfaithfulness of Israel and warning of the consequences that must follow. After detailing some of these consequences the Lord says "Then shall mine anger be accomplished, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be *comforted*". The word *nacham*, here rendered "comforted", has the implication that God is both sympathetic towards and solicitous for his erring people coupled with satisfaction that the right thing has been done. They have received the treatment which at the last will effect their final reconciliation with God. The same idea occurs in Isa. 40.1-2 "*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye to Jerusalem and cry unto her . . . that her iniquity is pardoned for she hath received at the Lord's hand double for all her sins*". The same word, *nacham*, certainly not meaning repentance, for her iniquity is now pardoned, but a message of comfort and hope for the future, because God has turned from his chastening and is now commencing to bless.

It has been said that these references to God "repenting" should be understood as his changing his course of action in view of changed circumstances, but not his ultimate intention. Saint Augustine, commenting on Gen. 6. 6-7, says that the Divine action was "an unchanged ordering of changeable things. For God repents not of

anything He does, as man does" (*"City of God"* Bk. 15 chap. 23). The reverse of this idea, a change in the direction of action, is indicated in such expressions as Hos. 13.14 "O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: *repentance* shall be hid from mine eyes: Psa. 110.4 "The Lord hath sworn and will not *repent*; thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek"; Ezek. 24.14. "I the Lord have spoken . . . I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I *repent*". In

such instances the fixity of Divine intention is indicated and probably "relent" is the best word to use.

All in all, it seems that the repentance of God defines his concern at a condition of things existing out of harmony with his will, and his determination to change it, allied with feeling of pity or grief for those affected, yet combined with satisfaction or comfort in the knowledge that in the onward progress of his overall plan all things will yet be well.

SURPASSING WORTH

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto 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 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 persuade 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 delights as it once did. While speaking to his followers on conditions of 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. Irksome duties are willingly done "for him" and He shares the family sorrows. It is 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.

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?

WHAT NEW THING IS THIS?

Some reflections on the
power of Christianity

3. The rise of ecclesiasticism

Both chief Apostles, Peter and Paul, foresaw the dangers to which the Church of the future would be exposed at the hands of false teachers and ambitious men. "I know" declared Paul to the Ephesian elders when he took his leave of them for the last time "that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20.29). Peter, many years later, in his parting epistle to his converts, predicted that "there shall be false teachers among you who privily shall bring in damnable heresies... and many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they make merchandise of you..." (2 Pet. 3. 1-3). Even Jesus, before his death, spoke of the time to come when "many false prophets shall arise, and deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24. 11-12). The great Founder of the Church, and those who laboured so manfully after his resurrection to establish that Church in faith and practice, were under no illusions as to the experiences through which it would be called to pass in a day yet far future; but they knew also that the Church would survive, tried as by fire but emerging strong and virile to continue its course to the end.

During the first three centuries, while Paganism was in control of the world, the Church remained relatively pure in practice and in doctrine. There were heresies and disputes but because Christians were in a minority, and to be known as a Christian was to incur social and economic disadvantage, if not much worse as at the times of Pagan persecution, those who did espouse the name of Christ were necessarily sincere and devout in their profession. It cost a lot to be a Christian — very often life itself. Under such conditions the Christian society was indeed what its name implied. The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church. The commission to evangelise the world despite the opposition and persecution that surely came was taken seriously and to such good effect that by the end of the Third Century Christianity had penetrated to every part of the Roman Empire from Britain in the West to the Euphrates in the

East, and beyond that into India and parts of Africa.

But with the end of the Third Century there came a great change.

Christianity became fashionable.

The Emperor Constantine, newly come to the seat of power, was looking for a unifying force with which to hold together the motley assemblage of peoples which now comprised his widely-spread Empire. Paganism was in ruins, crumbling before the onslaught of the advancing Christians. In any case the deities and religions of outlying nations such as Britain and Africa and Asia had little in common with the more sophisticated worship of Rome and Greece. But Christianity was in all these countries; its adherents were to be found in all sections and classes of society, and they were bound together in a brotherhood and a loyalty which had no equal and was not to be found elsewhere. So Constantine decided to make Christianity the State religion and outlaw the Pagan worship.

Constantine was not a Christian. In fact he was not baptised until just before his death thirteen years later. It is true that twelve years earlier when marching on Rome to overthrow the usurper Maxentius he suddenly saw a vision of a cross in the sky and the words "In this conquer" — or so he said — and so explained his acceptance of the faith, but to the end of his days he knew little or nothing of Christ.

To the Church this was deliverance. From being subject to the Pagans, the Pagans were now subject to the Christians. A later Emperor, Theodosius the Great, at the end of the Fourth Century, more or less completed the extermination of Paganism. Soon afterwards the celebrated Saint Augustine produced his famous book "*De Civitas Dei*"—"The City of God", which laid out the framework for the reign of the Church in the flesh over the nations, hand in hand with the civil power. Augustine's thesis was that the Millennium was already in progress, the Church now established in a position of authority over the world, reigning as kings, commissioned to convert the world in readiness for the Second Advent to occur at the end of this, the Church's Millennium. All of which seemed perfectly reasonable to many ardent souls elated at this new-found alliance with the secular state.

Of course many Pagans, sensing the wind of

change, professed Christianity, for the most part remaining Pagans at heart or else caring little either way. The prelates of the Church began to inherit the temples and property and not considerable wealth of the Pagan system they had supplanted; in order to accommodate the sudden influx of erstwhile Pagan worshippers they began to adopt and adapt to Christian worship many Pagan customs and rituals. The simple faith of the earlier believers, with their implicit acceptance of Scripture, began to be formulated into definitions of doctrine, with the introduction of new and strange teachings and practices. The doctrine of purgatory, the worship of saints, veneration of images and relics, celibacy of the priests, all had their birth during the Fourth Century and before its end the Virgin Mary was being worshipped as a goddess. The controversy between Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, and Arius, a presbyter of the same city in A.D. 318 over the relation between the Son and the Father resulted in Constantine convening the Council of Nicæ in A.D. 325 at which the Athanasius definition won the day and led to the drafting of the Nicene Creed. It also led to a major division between Arians and Trinitarians which has continued to this day. The Arian faith was retained by the more outlying Churches such as those in Germany, Britain, Eastern Europe and Northern Africa, to whom the simple idea of the subordination of the Son to the Father was easier to grasp, whilst the more abstruse Athanasian definition of one God in three aspects was adopted by the Church of Rome and became the orthodox creed of Christendom.

By the end of the Fourth Century many of the privileges and rights appertaining to the assemblies of believers and their presbyters had been usurped by the bishops, who in turn were contending between themselves for the supremacy. Four notable bishoprics were pre-eminent, those of Rome in Italy, Constantinople in Greece, Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt. Beneath these there grew up an elaborate system of church government involving a host of dignitaries, exarchs over several provinces, metropolitans over each single province, archbishops over districts, and bishops over cities. Magnificent churches were built, adorned with rare pictures and life-like images, where cultured and elegant sermons were delivered, and the audience encouraged to respond with hand-clapping and applause. The Last Supper began to be celebrated every week and the bread and wine was elevated in the sight of the congregation for their reverential admiration.

In so short a time, only one hundred years, had the outward facade of the Christian Church degenerated into an almost exact replica of the Pagan system it had superseded. No wonder some of the very few cultured and intelligent Pagans who were left were bitter and scathing in their condemnation. But unknown to them, and ignored both by the complacent prelates and for the most part by the historians of the period were those who remained true to the principles of the Gospel and in their devotion to the Lord Christ. Behind the scenes were those who, like the true Israelites in the days of the Hebrew monarchy, sighed and cried for the abominations that were done. Despised and ignored by the official Church, they kept the knowledge of the Faith alive and passed on to their successors, generation after generation, the inspiration which has never died out since Apostolic days. The warnings of the Apostles had come true; all praise to those who in these dark days kept the flame of faith and hope alive.

The following two centuries saw the rivalry for supremacy between the four pre-eminent bishops narrowed down to two — Rome and Constantinople. The Catholics in Italy and Greece began to persecute the Arians, and the Arians in North Europe and North Africa, where they were in the majority, began to persecute the Catholics, in both cases with the active connivance and support of the civil powers. In the East, Nestorius, a Syrian bishop, developed the Nestorian church, which came to equal in power and influence both Greek and Latin churches and extended its influence over Syria and the lands farther east so there were now four great rival church systems—Greek Catholics, Latin Catholics, Arians and Nestorians. The practices of confession to priests and of monasticism appeared; the Faith was increasingly submerged and on the surface it appeared as though true Christianity was doomed. One notable voice raised against the prevailing corruption was that of Vigilantius of Lyons; he was silenced and branded a heretic. Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome, in A.D. 596 sent the monk Augustin (not the celebrated Saint Augustine of the 4th Century) to Britain to suppress the native British Christian Church and establish Roman Christianity. Such remnants of the pagans as still remained anywhere were as ruthlessly persecuted as Christians had formerly been.

Towards the end of the Sixth Century the missionary spirit, which has always been the life-blood of the true Church, began to come to the top. In the East the Nestorians had pushed

on beyond India and had introduced the Gospel to China. Within another century they had evangelised the nomadic tribes of Eastern Siberia. It is to be feared their conversion was little more than a profession of belief in Christ and all too often they remained as savage and warlike as before, but the seed of the Gospel was there to bear better fruit in later times. The ancient British church had measurably held its own against the Romanising tendencies of Augustin, and British missionaries were busy in Northern Europe. But Europe as a whole was in turmoil. Continual harassment of Italian domination by the uncouth and uncivilised tribes of Northern Europe was leading to the virtual collapse of European civilisation and the development of a state of anarchy in which trade languished and ceased, travel and communication became difficult or impossible, culture and learning disappeared except in some monasteries, and what is known as the Dark Ages commenced. Yet in the midst of that darkness there was light; many of the lesser orders of priests and of monks proved, despite their allegiance to the institutional Churches, to be true men of God, instructing and ministering to the helpless people as true disciples of the Lord. Wedded to a system alien from true Christianity, they nevertheless proved themselves men of Christ, manifesting something of his Spirit in a world which in the main comprehended it not. Men such as Bede of Jarrow in Britain, in the Eighth Century, were towers of strength to the forces still fighting to keep the truths of the Gospel alive and to inculcate them in the minds of the people.

Still greater disasters were to follow. In A.D. 800 Leo III of Rome crowned the Frankish conqueror Charlemagne King of the Holy Roman empire. (It has been aptly remarked that Charlemagne's empire was neither Roman nor holy.) This was the commencement of the temporal power of the Popes, destined to increase manifold in subsequent centuries, and to enforce by the rule of law the unremitting persecution of independent Christian thought which was to endure for the next seven or eight hundred years. One example of this was the treatment accorded to the Saxon monk Godeschaleus, who in the Ninth Century originated and propagated the doctrine of Predestination. He was hounded down, tried and condemned, and died in prison. This was not the only enemy which the true Church had to face. The rise of Islam, the religion preached by Mahomet, in the Seventh Century, was now becoming a menace to both nominal and true Christianity. The Saracen Moslems were in Spain and only with difficulty

restrained from advancing farther into Europe; the Christian churches in the East from Arabia to China began to give way and fall back. It seemed as if the faith preached by the Arabian prophet was destined to abolish and supersede the evangel of Christ over a great part of the world. But this very circumstance served to reveal the strength of the hidden Church. When the Moslem forces challenged those of the Christian Emperor Heraclius in A.D. 636 it was Heraclius who suffered defeat and the whole of the Asiatic dominions of the Roman State-Church system became Moslem. But beneath the surface true Christian faith survived and was handed down from generation to generation. It never died, and when in the Tenth Century the Moslems were threatening Christianity in India and China, the Nestorians were evangelising the wild tribes of Western and Central Siberia and the faith was being preached, for the first time, by dedicated Roman missionaries in Poland, Eastern Europe and Scandinavia.

So the first thousand years of the Christian era closed with the true Church of Christ still contending with its enemies; the same enemies as at the beginning although they now went under the name of Christ instead of Jupiter or Zeus. Proud prelates at Rome and Constantinople headed and directed a world-wide organisation which most men accepted as representing the Christian Church—but already some within its ranks were beginning to look at the Scriptural description of Antichrist and ask themselves if in fact they had not been nurturing the Antichrist and they were now living under its power

Away in the mountains of southern France and northern Italy a stout-hearted community of believers had for centuries maintained a measure of independence and transmitted the faith of Christ from father to son. Persecuted from time to time by the official Church, their isolated situation was a defence and a hindrance to their enemies. Now, as a second millennium of the Christian era dawned, they began to become the spear-head of those scattered and sub-merged groups all over the world who had not become absorbed by the State-Church. Very soon now they were to become known as the Waldenses. The true Church was about to challenge the false.

* * *

The battle was not yet won. Next month's issue tells the story of the manner in which the vested interests of the established State-Church were locked in conflict with the rising power of the Reformers.



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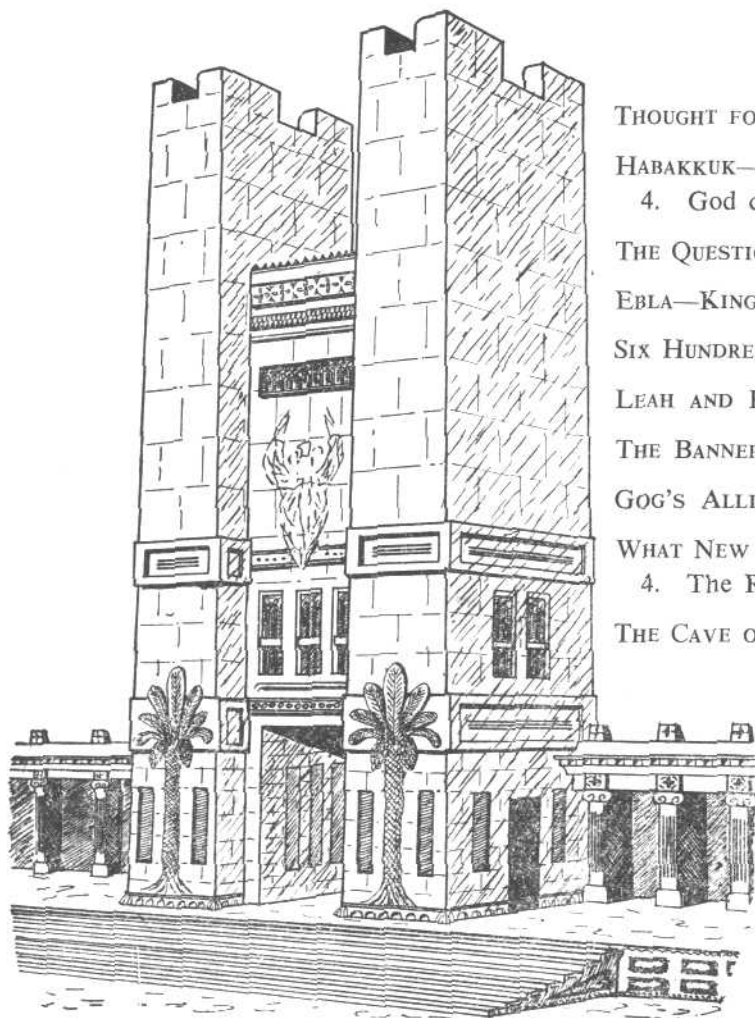
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

Published July 1st

Next issue September 1st

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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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Thought for the Month

"And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." (Rev. 22. 1).

The daily Press tells us that modern medical research is tending more and more to the serious investigation of so-called "old wives' remedies", those preparations of herbs and roots which for so many centuries in human history played their part in the alleviation of pains and ills. For a long time now it has been the fashion to decry reliance upon the products of Nature when synthetic drugs can be so cheaply produced in the chemical laboratories of big manufacturing concerns. The underlying assumption has been, as in so many spheres of human achievement, that the material things of the earth were all very well when men were at an immature stage of development but now that we have so complete a knowledge of the structure of matter and the ability to produce chemical combinations and artificially made materials of almost any kind we wish, men can beat Nature at her own game and invent something better than Nature ever produced.

In all of which, of course, men are grievously wrong. Nature is not a blind force, a mere meaningless jumble of spontaneously existent atoms moving round each other and entering into purely chance combinations without rhyme or reason, plan or design. Modern man in his arrogance likes to think so but modern man is really a rather ignorant, and certainly puny, weak creature, puffed up by his own conceit, ambitious to ride to the stars yet incapable of prolonging his own conscious existence for more than the most infinitesimal fraction of time measured by the revolution of the smallest of those stars. When men despise Nature they despise God, for behind Nature stands God, and all the wonderful phenomena of plant life upon which the continuance of human life absolutely

depends has been designed and ordered by God.

In that much-to-be-desired order of things which is to be established on earth at the coming again of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ there will assuredly be a great reversal of thought. Under the benevolent but firm rule of Christ and his Church men will be caused to learn how God has provided for the needs of man to be met, and well met, by that which the earth brings forth. The great laboratory of Nature in which the sun and the rain, air and water, light and darkness, all play their parts will be shown capable of bringing forth not only food to sustain men in health but all that is necessary to restore to health that which has been ravaged by disease. It is not for nothing that the prophet Ezekiel, in his vision of the coming kingdom, sees a river of life flowing from the sanctuary and out to the Dead Sea, and, says he, *"the waters shall be healed"*. It is on the banks of that river of life that he sees the trees of life, bringing forth their fruit every month, fruit which he says *"shall be for meat"* (food)—*"and the leaf thereof for medicine"*. (Ezek. 47. 12). Men will realise then that the Divine way is best after all.

Gone from us

— * —

Bro. G. Chitty (London)
Bro. E. Plummer (Oxford)
Bro. W. L. Shepherd (Cardiff)

— * —

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

HABAKKUK — PROPHET OF FAITH

An exposition of the
Book of Habakkuk

4. God came from Teman

The third chapter of Habakkuk's prophecy opens with prayer and closes with praise. Between these expressions of worship there is a wonderfully eloquent account of Israel's last trial and Divine deliverance at the end of the Age, told in language which takes for its inspiration that other glorious epoch in Israel's history, the time of the Exodus. The prophecy is written in poetry—Hebrew poetry—and in form to be sung at the Temple services to the accompaniment of musical instruments. We may not doubt that in after days the noble strains of Habakkuk's psalm often were heard in Jewry, the hearts of the people beating fast with excitement and their eyes growing bright with pride as they thought of the salvation that one day must surely come.

"A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet in dithyrambic measure." That is the superscription, the title, of the psalm, appearing in the Authorised Version as verse 1. The translators were uncertain as to the meaning of the last part of the phrase and so left the Hebrew word "*shigionoth*" untranslated, to the lasting puzzlement of future generations. Scholars now know that it referred to what we call the 'metre' of the song. In the original Hebrew the lines are of the impetuous, lofty style, composed in a state of deep mental stress or excitement, to which the Greeks gave the name of "dithyramb"; hence the title "upon Shigionoth" is best translated "in dithyrambic measure", as Moffat renders it.

It is sometimes suggested that this third chapter was written at a much later period in Habakkuk's life, and that this accounts for the change in style. What is much more likely is that the vision awakened the dormant fire in Habakkuk's life, and that this accounts for the all the passionate zeal which lay beneath his faith. In chapters 1 and 2 he had talked with God, prayed to God, and interceded with God—and God had answered and talked with him; but it is certain that at the end of chapter 2 heaven had been opened before the prophet's eyes and he had seen, first, the Lord seated upon his heavenly throne (ch. 2 vs. 20) and then the stupendous vision of the Lord coming forth to bring to pass his "strange work" (Isa. 18. 21) upon the earth. And it was that vision which, in the intensity of his excitement, he recorded in such glowing, vivid symbols in verses 3 to 15 of Chapter 3.

It was this experience that led him first of all to utter what must surely be one of the most moving prayers in the whole of the Scriptures. "*O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid; O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known, in wrath remember mercy*" (vs. 2). He had realised at last that there was ordained a great gap between his own day and the day of the vision when Israel would be completely and finally delivered, and he was concerned that God should save alive his people, the work of his hands, during the intervening time. The word really means "preserve alive" as well as "give new life at the end", and is as often rendered "save alive" as it is "quicken". Habakkuk acknowledged that he had heard God's words, but although the scenes of the vision had filled him with joy and exultation, and given him a new confidence as to Israel's ultimate destiny, he was still "afraid" as to the intervening period. He knew that his people time and again would merit Divine condemnation for their faithlessness and hardness of heart. He knew how often they had been scattered and enslaved in past times because of their apostasy, and although he could not doubt God's faithfulness, his heart failed him when he thought of Israel's waywardness. And so, like Moses of old, he besought God on behalf of a stiff-necked and perverse people, that God would not cause his purpose to fail even although the people would prove undeserving of his bounty; that in his chastisement He would always save a remnant, and in the end "bring forth judgment to victory". "*Preserve alive thy work in the midst of the years*" he pleaded "*in wrath remember mercy.*"

With that his mood changed. Even as he uttered the words he knew that God would be faithful, that deliverance would surely come, and with it the utter overthrow of all those evil forces which threatened and oppressed his people. And as the glorious history of the Exodus flooded into his mind he lifted up his eyes to the distant horizon and the Holy Spirit quickened his spiritual faculties so that before his wondering gaze there appeared the splendour of the God of Israel, a glory overspreading the skies and putting even the sun to shame as He advanced in the forefront of his ancient people, destroying their enemies before them and leading

Israel into her desired haven. To the prophet's lips there came, unbidden, words which at one and the same time combined the events of the Exodus, the upheavals of Nature which so aptly symbolise the arising of God to set up his Kingdom, and the details of that last conflict in the empire of men which the Scriptures elsewhere call "Armageddon" and "Jacob's Trouble".

What did Habakkuk actually see? He beheld a great manifestation of natural forces—all in vision—the gathering and the breaking of a terrible tempest over the earth; in the midst of the tempest, riding upon the wings of the wind, Jehovah himself in his war chariot, hurling celestial thunderbolts upon the wicked and burning up his enemies round about (Psa. 97. 3). He saw Israel, a helpless people, surrounded by hostile nations invading the Holy Land, and he saw those nations swallowed up in the zeal of God's fury. He watched the storm die away, and Israel, resplendent in the calm sunlight of Divine favour, delivered for ever from all her oppressors. That was what he saw, and as he looked he clothed what he saw in the language of the story he knew best, the story of the Exodus; at the same time he described the later conflict that is yet to come, the one that closes the end of this Age.

We can be certain of that because it is that conflict which results in Israel's final deliverance and the fulfilment of all the prophecies concerning the Kingdom, and as if to make doubly sure, Habakkuk in verse 16 places on record his knowledge that he himself was to "rest" until that day arrived. If this prophet is in fact to be one of the heroes of faith who will rise again to lead Israel in the day of Christ's Kingdom, then there is a very definite fitness about the words of verse 16. But of that more presently.

In reading the verses that follow, it needs to be remembered that Habakkuk is writing in what has been called the "prophetic perfect" tense, that is to say, he took his stand, mentally, at the time of the fulfilment of the vision and described the events as having already occurred. This is a common practice in Hebrew prophecy; the absolute certainty of the things seen, even though still many years in the future, justifying the use of the completed tense. We appreciate the force of the symbolism best if we, in thought, range ourselves alongside the prophet and behold what he beheld, our imagination fired by the glory of his language.

"GOD CAME FROM TEMAN, and the Holy One from Mount Paran." That is the tremendous announcement with which Habakkuk heralds

his vision. Then comes the rubric instruction "*Selah*", the command for a reverent hush and pause in the Temple service, for priests and people to keep silence, as it were, before the God Whose majestic presence has so solemnly been declared to them. And if the people thus kept silence before the ineffable Name upon every occasion that this Psalm was sung in their worship, with what more awesome reverence must the prophet have viewed the opening scenes of the vision which gave birth to the words. He was evidently looking southward toward Teman, (Edom or Seir), and Paran (in the Arabian desert), the two centres from which God had arisen to lead his people to the Promised Land, and he saw the dawn of a golden radiance that told him of the Lord's rising up once again for deliverance. He might have thought of the words of Moses "The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from Mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of his saints"—holy ones—(Deut. 33. 2). He must certainly have recalled the inspiring words of the 68th Psalm "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him . . . O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; the earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God; Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel"; for this is the song of Israel's march toward the land under the leadership of God, as the historian declares in Num. 10. 35; "And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said 'Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee'." For a moment Habakkuk may have seen what Balaam, seven hundred years previously, had seen in vision, the ten thousands of Israel surging homeward to their land of inheritance under that golden radiance of the Divine presence, and have repeated to himself Balaam's words on that great occasion: "From the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him . . . how goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel . . . God brought him forth out of Egypt . . . He shall eat up the nations his enemies . . . Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee" (Num. 23 and 24). And as Habakkuk watched, the brightness of the Shekinah glory, the "pillar of fire by day", illumined all the sky and all the earth, preceding and guiding Israel in the way. So did he break out into the glowing description that follows the pause. "*His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light; rays streamed*

forth out of his hand (Leeser) and in them was hidden his might" (Ferrar Fenton). The whole picture is that of a great sunrise of golden fire advancing from the horizon to overspread the heavens and resolve itself into the glory of the Lord, the *Shekinah*, leading the hosts of redeemed Israel back home.

And the question we have to ask ourselves is this: to what event in the end of the Age does this opening portion of the vision refer? Where is our starting point for the final application of Habakkuk's prophecy?

Analogy points us to the day when God will "set his hand the *second time* to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt . . . and from the islands of the sea . . . and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth" (Isa. 11. 11-12). And not only so, but to a time when God begins to rise up for the salvation of all men from the power of sin and death, a time when He commences to set in motion those forces which result in the glory of the Second Advent, to inaugurate the "sending" of the Lord Jesus Christ, in all the "Times of Restitution of all things" (Acts 3. 19-23). The vision as it proceeded showed that the golden glory was to be followed by a dark storm before the ultimate "afterward of peace", but prior to the storm there was certainly a phase in which the sunshine of Divine favour shone for a brief space upon the earth, an earnest of good things to come. And that fact gives us our starting point. The vision dates the commencement of its fulfilment at that time in the history of this world—the nineteenth century—when both Christian and Jew became conscious of the active working

of God in their separate destinies. The Christian world—that section of it which was "watching for his appearing" — realised the approaching consummation of the Age and the imminence of the Advent of its Lord, and the Jew who still prayed in sincerity and earnest longing "next year in Jerusalem" saw the outward evidence of forces moving toward the accomplishment of his desire. Before the storm clouds of this present time of trouble had begun to gather there was a period of golden glory during which light from the Heavenly Throne was illumining the Plan of God as never before, and the roseate prospect of the coming Kingdom, for both Christian and Jew, became clearer and more entrancing as year succeeded year, "This Gospel of the Kingdom" said Jesus, "shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24. 14). That word was fulfilled in that century as never before. An understanding of the nature and purpose of the Millennial reign was attained such as had not blessed the Church in previous centuries. The knowledge of "Advent Truth" relating to the coming again of Jesus was brought to a higher and more complete stage than had ever been known. On the Jewish side the movement for the return to Palestine—then drawing its inspiration largely from religious sources—was born, and men began to talk of a Jewish state and nation. In a score of ways the golden light of Divine favour overspread the earth and caused men to look up and lift up their heads, sensing that deliverance was drawing nigh. In very truth "a mighty angel" had "come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory." (Rev. 18. 1).

To be continued

A question of location

The Jewish historian Josephus, narrating the story of Lot's wife, declared that the pillar of salt into which the Genesis story says she had been changed was still standing in his own day and that he had seen it. Not surprising, perhaps; there are many strangely-formed salt-encrusted pinnacles and the like in the region of the Dead Sea. The Coptic Church of Ethiopia, however, do not agree and claim that Josephus has it all wrong. The scene of the Sodom and Gomorrah catastrophe, they assert, was in the Danakil depression in Ethiopia, the bed of a long since dried-up inland sea and now a vast desert of salt. They point out Lot's wife, still standing where she met her untimely end all those thousands of years ago, an erect pinnacle of salt aggregate about ten feet high.

This tendency to transfer the scene of Scripture stories to local sites is very common all over the world. There is a village in South America which the natives claim is the scene of Jesus' birth and boyhood. For some obscure reason they have a wooden statue of Joseph in their local church and once a year hold a ceremony at which they commiserate with Joseph on the untimely death of his Son.

Maybe we should not be too superior about such things. It must be that the Lord Christ looks down and accepts the spirit and motive which inspires these apparent oddities and is not unduly concerned that the geography is a bit incorrect. He was born in Judea of the Jews and lived his whole life there, but He does belong to all the world.

? THE QUESTION BOX ?

Q. *Who are, or were, the nations mentioned in Ezekiel's prophecy concerning the invasion of "Gog and Magog"?*

A. An adequate explanation requires more than a short paragraph on this page and a treatment of the subject will therefore be found on page 89 of this issue under the heading "Gog's Allies". (On the general subject of Gog and Magog, see BSM for Nov./Dec. 1977. Ed.)

* * *

Q. *What is the explanation of the mystic number six hundred and sixty-six in Rev. 13. 18?*

A. This again also requires more than a brief note in reply and a summary of what has been the general thought of students through the Age appears on page 81 of this issue.

* * *

Q. *"Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand or to the left'" (Isa. 30. 21). Does this imply that we should expect audible or inward voices to guide us on our Christian way?*

A. No. The verse is a Millennial promise to Israel applying after the chastening experience of "Jacob's Trouble". The context shows this. *"The people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it he shall answer thee, and though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of oppression, yet shall*

not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee . . ." and so on. Here is God's promise that in the time of Israel's greatest extremity, when the great forces of evil, the "hosts of Gog and Magog", are descending upon their rebuilt and prosperous land, God will await the cry of faith and will answer it. Whatever of trouble and distress is in store for the people at that time, deliverance will come, and the "teachers" of Israel — the "Ancient Worthies", the resurrected heroes of old time—will no longer be despised and rejected, ("Which of the prophets have your fathers not persecuted?" asked Stephen at his trial, Acts 7. 52) but thine eyes shall see (look upon) thy teachers, and thine ears shall hear (listen to) their word." And those Ancient Worthies will say to Israel, "this is the way, walk ye in it". Thus will Israel, after their deliverance from their enemies and the establishment of the Kingdom, commence to walk up the Highway of Holiness of Isa. 35. 8. and be followed by all the hosts of redeemed mankind, pressing toward true conversion to Christ and perfection of life. Verses 22-23 describe the end of idolatry consequent upon the establishment of the Millennial reign, and the climax comes in verse 26 where the enlightenment of the Millennium is described as the light of the moon being as the sun, and the light of the sun being increased sevenfold, in that day when "the Lord shall reign in Zion, and before his ancients, gloriously".

Strong Delusion

The words about a "strong delusion," or "working of error" (v. 11) are an example of what is taught as clearly in the New Testament as in the Old—that judicial hardening follows wilful blindness and persistent sin. God will never send any delusion upon those who have not first deluded themselves. Thus Pharaoh hardened his own heart before it was ever said that the Lord hardened his heart. God has so ordered things that sin brings its own judgment in this way, and the Hebrew writers were so greatly impressed with the basic fact of the sovereignty of God that they expressed themselves in the most direct language about it. The conviction that all things were under the Divine ordering and control saved them from a pagan dualism such as would regard evil as existing under separate authority, beyond Divine control. In this conviction, they represent everything as directly within the sphere of Divine action—not that God

is the author of evil or desires evil for anyone, but that human action out of harmony with the Divine ordering inevitably brings its own judgment; and it is a real judgment of God, because God has so ordered things as to involve this inevitable consequence.

For our consolation, it appears to be indicated that delusions of this kind cannot affect believers (Matt. 24.24; Mark 13.22). But persistent rejection on the part of those who will not welcome "the love of the truth" (2 Thess. 2.10) results in the terrible "working of error" that leads them to "believe the lie" (v. 11); the Greek involves just that arresting contrast, more emphatically than appears in our own versions—"the lie" as the opposite of "the truth"; not merely "a lie," but "the lie," as thus opposed. May we not link this thought with our Lord's own declaration, "I am . . . the Truth," and say that He has his antagonist "the Lie"?

("Life of Faith")

EBLA—KINGDOM OF THE PAST

Archaeological
Survey

A certain amount of excitement and considerable discussion in Christian journals has been occasioned by the discovery, in late 1976 and early 1977, on an excavation site in North Syria called Tel Mardikh, of many inscribed tablets indicating that an important city, perhaps the capital of an extensive empire, once stood here. The discovery is of intense interest to Bible Students since the people who dwelt here were of the same race as Abraham—Semitic—several generations before his day, and used a language closely akin to Hebrew, which may in fact have been the precursor of the Hebrew language itself. Decipherment of the tablets—18,000 of them so far—will take many years and it will take several years at least before the full importance of the find and the light it will throw upon the Old Testament is properly known.

Pending this, all that is being said and can be said about the discovery has to be accepted with a certain amount of reserve. Already a number of sensational and more or less unscholarly statements have been widely circulated—without the endorsement of the archaeologists who made the discovery—such as that one Ibrum recorded as being the King of Ebla was probably Eber the patriarch, progenitor of the Hebrews and an ancestor of Abraham. But aside from these irrelevancies there is no doubt that this discovery, and the fruits of the further investigations which are still proceeding at the site, will be of inestimable value in throwing further light on Old Testament history and adding confirmatory evidence to the accuracy and the antiquity of the Genesis records.

Tel Mardikh is a mound fifty feet high not far from the city of Aleppo in Northern Syria. Its nearest Biblical connection is the town of Antioch (now Antakya) some seventy-five miles away, where Paul served and the early disciples were first called "Christians". One of hundreds of such mounds in the Middle East, each one concealing the remains of some ancient settlement, no one had any idea of its importance until Italian archaeologists began excavating it in 1964. The first few years yielded evidences that the site had been inhabited up to about the time of the Exodus but since then left desolate and gradually covered with sand and earth. As the diggers went deeper they found signs of an increasingly important and more civilised centre until in 1968 there was discovered a statue bearing the name of a

king of Ebla. Now Ebla hitherto had only been known in archaic Sumerian inscriptions of the pre 2,000 B.C. period as a powerful city-state situated somewhere in Syria; nothing more was known about it. The fact that Tel Mardikh was thus shown to be the capital of this ancient city-state ranked therefore as a discovery of the first importance.

By 1973 the excavators found themselves digging out city remains which they tentatively dated at about 3,000 B.C. (this has since been amended to something like 700 years later). The highlight came in October 1976 when they broke into the royal palace and found in the palace library thousands of baked clay tablets stored on shelves which had collapsed, leaving the tablets lying in heaps, a position in which they had remained undisturbed for more than four thousand years. To date some 18,000 of them have been removed for examination and decipherment; many more remain, and no one yet knows what the rest of the palace may contain.

Of course there are many cuneiform tablets in the hands of scholars and museums—the British Museum has more than 250,000, many still undeciphered although they have been there for sixty years or more. In the main, these Ebla tablets are written, or rather inscribed, in the Sumerian language (that of the sons of Ham), Akkadian or Assyrian (sons of Shem) and sometimes Hittite (of Japheth). Although all these languages are represented on the tablets found at Tel Mardikh the scholars were amazed to find that many were in a hitherto unknown tongue, one that was Semitic (of Shem) and strongly resembling a kind of archaic Hebrew. Fortunately for the scholars some of the tablets are "bilingual" texts, i.e. containing parallel passages in the unknown language and in Sumerian or Akkadian, so that by comparison the unknown language might begin to be understood—something like comparing the Greek and English in a polyglot New Testament such as the Emphatic Diaglott. Various grammatical lists have also been found so that the structure of the language can be understood.

Already there have been wild assertions that this proves that Abraham and Israel originated, not from Mesopotamia as indicated by Genesis, but from Syria, and that here in Ebla is the source of the Hebrew language and people. All of this can be dismissed as fanciful. This is not

the first time that such proto-Hebrew texts have been found in Syria. In 1929 the world was electrified by the discovery at Ras Shamra, on the coast of North Syria, only fifty miles from Tel Mardikh, of a similar hoard of tablets dating roughly to the time of the Exodus, in a very similar form of Canaanite-Hebrew tongue and throwing a flood of light upon conditions in Canaan just before the conquest under Joshua. Then in the period 1936-39 there was found the centre of another important city-state at Alalakh, forty miles from Tel Mardikh, with more inscribed tablets covering roughly the same period as these now found. The group of languages applicable to the peoples of Syria and Canaan is called West Semitic in contrast to those spoken and written by the Semitic people of Mesopotamia, the Assyrians and Babylonians, and their predecessors the Akkadians, which is termed East Semitic. It seems probable that the language of Ebla will prove to be of the West Semitic group and perhaps the earliest form of that group. But this is no evidence that the Hebrew people originated here; when Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees and took up residence in Canaan he and his descendants would naturally increasingly adopt the language of their adopted country. In just the same way the Jews went into the Babylonian captivity speaking pure Hebrew; they came back seventy years later speaking Aramaic.

One tablet mentions the town called "Ur" (now Urfa in Southern Turkey) and this has revived an ancient "side-line" idea that the Ur from which God called Abraham was not the famous city near the Persian Gulf but this northern one so much nearer to Canaan. A little reflection disposes of this. The Genesis definition is "Ur of the Chaldees" which defines it as a Sumerian city and not a Semitic one. Then when Terah and his family set out, ostensibly for Canaan, they stayed at Harah in Aram-Naharaim for a few years until Terah died and Abraham moved on. The northern Ur (Urfa) is only twenty-five miles from Haran; they were not likely to interrupt their pilgrimage after so short a trek. From Ur of the Chaldees to Haran is a little under 600 miles, and Canaan 400 miles more; Haran was thus a likely place for a halt. Most important of all, the first eleven chapters of Genesis, outlining the history up to Abraham's departure from Ur, is replete with Sumerian and Akkadian words. The geographical setting and terms of Genesis 2-10 are those of Mesopotamia in the 3rd millennium B.C. and could only have been written by a dweller in that land. The evidence is conclusive that Abraham was born and lived in the Sumerian

city of Ur on the Euphrates and God called him to make the thousand mile journey to the "land which I will show thee".

One noticeable aspect of the tablets is the similarity of many of the proper names to those of early Bible characters. Names such as Abram, Ishmael, Michael, Israel, Esau, and so on, occur. Here again some enthusiasts are eager to trace a vital connection, such as suggesting that the Biblical Abraham came from these people, but there is really no basis for this. It stands to reason that a great many people over many generations must have borne the same name, such as George, say, in English. Great play is made of the alleged fact that the name of the king of Ebla most mentioned in the tablets, Ibrum, is the same as Eber the patriarch of Gen. 10.24, suggesting that the Biblical Eber was in fact the king of Ebla so that Abraham was of royal descent, even though Ibrum's father in the tablets, Risi, is not the same name as that of Eber's father in Genesis. In fact all the Semitic peoples used names similar to those found in the O.T.—the Arabic nations do to this day—and so to some extent did the Sumerians. Abram is a Sumerian name and often found on Sumerian inscriptions. It is of interest though that many Biblical place-names occur; in particular the mention of Jerusalem is the earliest mention of that city yet discovered, by several centuries.

On the more positive side, the contribution to Old Testament knowledge that will be made when these tablets are fully deciphered, will without doubt be enormous. Particularly is this true in the realm of writing. Not so many generations ago nearly every theologian solemnly averred that writing was unknown before about the 8th century B.C. Since then earlier and still earlier examples have turned up so that at the present time it is usually admitted and held that writing was known in Egypt and in Mesopotamia by about 2500 B.C. and this is roughly about the probable date of the newly discovered tablets. It is being claimed in some quarters that this, together with the very full historical details of the pre-Abrahamic period given in the tablets, a period on which Genesis is virtually silent, infers the probability that language and writing developed in Syria in post-Flood days and not in Mesopotamia as usually believed. This position cannot be maintained without affecting the authenticity of Genesis. It is based on the same principle as the now discredited belief that writing was invented only in the 8th century B.C. on the ground that nothing earlier had been discovered. There is no guarantee that at some

future time tablets even earlier than those found at Ebla will appear.

There is an element which has not been taken into account by the proponents of the "Ebla-writing-the-first" hypothesis. In the days of Ebla and Sargon of Agade cuneiform writing, in half a dozen languages, Sumerian and Semitic, was already an established art, and must have had at least several centuries of development behind it. But there is a point in Sumerian history prior to which it does not appear and it has been assumed in the past that this point was where cuneiform writing was invented. Ebla has shown that this was not so; it did exist earlier. Now this point does coincide with the last of the three disastrous floods of Sumerian history which over a period of some two centuries devastated the land of the two rivers and swept away much of its culture. The population was extremely small at this early time and it is very possible that most of the written records then existing were destroyed with other property by the floods and any that did survive have not as yet been discovered. This could account for tablets existing in Syria when tablets of the same period in Sumer are unknown. This supposition is reinforced by the fact that prior to cuneiform and prior to the floods a pictographic script existed of which only a very few examples have been found, at Kish and Uruk, but sufficient to show that the knowledge of writing existed in Mesopotamia long before the days of Ebla.

The history of the ancient Bible nations will not have to be re-written in the light of these new tablets, as has been somewhat rashly claimed, but it will without doubt be tremendously supplemented by what they will reveal. Particularly there might be a filling up of that tantalising gap in Genesis, covering the twelve hundred years

between the Flood and Abraham, of which Genesis records only one incident, that of the Tower of Babel. There must have been some faithful men of God during that long period and one is tempted to wonder why some records of their lives' work was not included with those of Noah, Abraham, Isaac and so on. Perhaps the man who first compiled Genesis 10 and 11 found himself confronted with this situation; the historical records of his nation were destroyed and he had perforce to content himself with the bare recapitulation of his ancestors throughout the period. It must follow, though, that had detailed knowledge of those days been necessary to the faith and practice of either Jew or Christian during these later centuries, the power of the Holy Spirit of God, overruling all that was written, would certainly have ensured that it was included.

But it will certainly be interesting to read, in due course, what these ancient historical tablets have to say about happenings in those far off days when Eber, the patriarch of all the Israelis and all the Arabs, begat two sons, whose progeny, more than any other of the sons of Shem, have made the Israeli-Arab world what it is today.

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.

SIX HUNDRED AND SIXTY-SIX

A note on
Rev. 13. 18

The mystic number in Rev. 13.18 has puzzled many and given scope for various interpretations from the beginning of the Age. It is intended to indicate in a covert manner the identity of the seven-headed beast whose exploits are related in that chapter and the problem is perhaps best seen in the words of the N.E.B. rendering; "*Here is the key, and anyone who has intelligence may work out the number of the Beast. The number represents a man's name and the numerical value of its letters is six hundred and sixty-six*".

Before the advent of the Arabic numerals used

by most nations at the present time numbers were denoted by letters of the alphabet. It was thus possible to produce a number from any word by adding up the values of its constituent letters. In this instance the puzzle was to find the word, having been given the number.

To those first century Christians who read John's Revelation the "Beast" of Rev. 13 represented a man, a man whom they would recognise if they could find his name from the number. It may be asked why John should go to such lengths to conceal the name; why not state it right out

and avoid the mystery? The answer is that John had a very good reason for concealing the name. The man to whom he pointed was Nero, in the not too distant past the hated emperor of Rome and savage persecutor of Christians. Even although he had been dead now for some years it would not be safe to put his name down in black and white for some Roman official to see. The primary object of John's book was to give comfort and encouragement to the persecuted believers but he had to state some things in terms that would be intelligible to them and meaningless to others. The consequences of being found in possession of treasonable literature were serious in those days as it is frequently serious in some countries today.

Hence 666. John could have chosen any one of three languages for his cryptogram, Latin, Greek or Hebrew. In each case the number would be different since each language had its own system of letter-numbers. He chose Hebrew, obviously because that language was least likely to be sufficiently known to Roman officials and so least likely to mean anything to them. On that basis the numerical value of the letters for Nero Cæsar, as written in Hebrew, add up to 666.

Nun Resh Vav Nun Kuph Samech Resh
 N R O N K S R
 50 200 6 50 100 60 200 = 666

No first century writer seems to have committed the solution to writing. It was probably too dangerous so to do. Without much doubt it was known and repeated one to another by word of mouth. The first writer who does commit himself is Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons (130-203) who about A.D. 178 went on record on the matter, but he has a different solution a great deal more guarded than the direct one. He said the number denoted "the Latin man" (*Lateinos*) when spelt in Greek and using Greek numerals.

L A T E I N O S
 30 1 300 5 10 50 70 200 = 666

He also suggested, as an alternative, a Greek name for the sun-god, *Teitan*, a covert allusion to Nero's claim to be Nero-Apollo the sun-god.

T E I T A N
 300 5 10 300 1 50 = 666

The 5th century saw Victorinus, Bishop of Pettau near Vienna, propound the view that the "Beast" of Revelation 13 was a figure of Antichrist so that the Latin *Diclux*—Antichrist—was the solution, in, of course, Latin numerals.

D I C L V X
 500 1 100 50 5 10 = 666

These explanations held the field for a long time until the Roman empire had passed away

and there was no longer any need for concealment. By now, however, Christian scholars and commentators were looking for some more up-to-date interpretation for the seven-headed Beast and early in the 15th Century Nicholas of Cusa came up with the opinion that the role was filled by the prophet Mahomet and the religion of Islam which he preached — again spelling the name in Greek and with Greek numerals.

M A O M E T I S
 40 1 70 40 5 300 10 200 = 666

This suggestion was never very popular. Very soon Protestant theology was looking for an opportunity to award the rather doubtful honour to the emerging Papal system and in about A.D. 1500 Osiander of Nurnberg introduced "*Roman*" spelt in Hebrew and adopting Hebrew numerals.

Resh Vav Mem Yod Yod Tau
 R O M I I Th
 200 6 40 10 10 400 = 666

But at the end of the 16th century Andreas Helwig of Berlin produced what has remained a firm favourite for those who viewed the "Beast" as the embodiment of the Papal Church-State system, the official name of the Pope, *Vicarius Filii Dei*—Vicar of the Son of God—using Latin numerals.

V I C A R I V S F I L I I D E I
 5 1 100 - - 1 5 - - 150 11 500 - 1 = 666

A fair number of other and mostly bizarre explanations have been offered in the interests of one or another of the many commentaries on the Book of Revelation that have been written—such as that of James Brebem, a London minister who in 1831 applied the title to Louis XIV of France under the Latinised form of his name, *Ludovicus*, which in Latin numerals adds up to 666. Most of the latter-day European dictators have had the doubtful honour bestowed on them, sometimes on very questionable foundations.

It might be taken that the primary significance to the Early Church was that the seven-headed beast represented Nero and his empire and this in turn implies a First Century primary application for the 13th chapter. It is generally agreed that Revelation has a secondary and a more momentous application to the events of the entire Christian Age leading up to the Millennial reign of Christ over the earth; the mystic number, denoting Nero, must then point to some power or institution which during his Age has filled the same role, on a larger scale, that Nero did in the days of the Apostolic Church.

LEAH & RACHEL

Two sisters, both married to the same man, both desperately in love with him, each contending for his favour; this is the story of Leah and Rachel, wives of Jacob progenitor of Israel. The story is recounted without passion or sentiment, but passion and sentiment there must have been. The unfortunate Jacob was called a prince with God on account of his place in the Divine purposes, but in domestic life he knew little peace and must sometimes have been hard put to it to hold the balance between the two sisters who became his simultaneous wives.

It was not altogether Jacob's fault. He had been deceived by his father-in-law Laban. He wanted Rachel for his wife and only Rachel. The story makes clear that he had no eyes for the elder sister Leah. But there was an element of poetic justice in the situation, for Jacob's very presence in this land was in consequence of his deception of his father Isaac in the matter of Esau and the birthright. Following that episode he had set out for his uncle's establishment five hundred miles away to get out of Esau's sight, and immediately upon arrival fell passionately in love with his cousin Rachel. She was about seventeen and he was fifty-seven (which, taking into account the longer life-span of men in those days was equivalent to mid-thirties today). Laban, perceiving which way the wind was blowing, proposed that Jacob enter his service on the stock farm for seven years, after which he would consent to the marriage, and this Jacob accepted. So the story runs; "*Jacob served seven years for Rachel: and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her*" (Gen. 29.20).

Came the end of the seven years and time for fulfilment of the contract. Laban, however, had been thinking. Rachel was apparently a very attractive girl, but there was the older sister, Leah, who, if the Hebrew term is correctly translated, was what we today would call bleary-eyed. Laban would like to get her off his hands; Jacob had proved a very useful member of his workforce but once he had married Rachel he would want to be off home again with her. With a little astuteness he might bind Jacob to him for another term of years. So he called all the menfolk of his acquaintance to the wedding-feast. When it was over Jacob was conducted to his quarters and his bride brought to him. Not until next morning did he discover, to his consternation, that the woman beside him was not Rachel, but Leah.

This time it was at least partly Jacob's fault. For this kind of deception to have worked it could only be that Jacob had imbibed much too freely at the feast on the previous evening—Laban had probably seen to that anyway—and was in no condition at its end to differentiate between one and the other. Only when he sobered up in the morning did he realise the truth.

Of course, he expostulated, but Laban was ready with an excuse and a fresh proposal. It was not the custom of his country, he explained, to permit the marriage of the younger daughter first. It seems a bit feeble; he had had seven years already to have acquainted Jacob with the marriage customs of the country and only when it was too late did he think it necessary so to do. But, he went on soothingly, Jacob could have Rachel also if he would consent to remain another seven years in Laban's service. He must give Leah the first seven days, then the second marriage could take place. There was nothing Jacob could do but agree.

One wonders what part the two sisters took in all this. Leah must have been a consenting party. The narrative shows that she also was in love with the handsome stranger who had come into their household and since she could not get him by fair means was not averse to becoming his wife by trickery. Rachel also must have known about it and she certainly would not have consented willingly. A distinct impression is given that both the girls had to do as they were told; Laban is pictured as a rather unscrupulous and domineering personage who intended to have things his own way. Women were of little account in those days and it was very much a man's world; Rachel was probably told she could have Jacob on her father's terms or not at all. The sequel shows that she never forgave Leah. And Laban's dominance over his daughters is highlighted by the alacrity with which they seized the opportunity to get away from him when, much later on, Jacob proposed that they all migrate to Canaan and the home of Isaac his father.

The second seven years passed. Leah had given Jacob three children, Reuben, Simeon, Levi. Rachel was childless. With each child Leah reiterated her belief that her husband would be reconciled to her on their account but it was a vain hope. Jacob was indifferent; he performed his duty as a husband but that was all. Rachel was his one and only love and he could not for-

get Laban's deception. But Rachel was getting desperate. In accord with the beliefs of the times, her only hope of retaining Jacob's love was to give him children. So she pleaded with her husband "Give me children, or else I die" (Gen. 30.1). It is possible that the Hebrew term is better rendered "Give me children, whether or not I die" and this casts a better reflection on Rachel's character; she was prepared to give her life if need be to experience the happiness of bearing a child to Jacob. His rejoinder sounds harsh and unsympathetic in the A.V. rendering; his "anger was kindled against her"—"am I in God's stead?" he asked, but this attitude and these words are quite likely the outcome of his own feelings of disappointment and frustration. He was probably quite as bitter at the turn events had taken as was Rachel.

At this point Rachel, evidently fearing that, although still only thirty-one years of age, she would never become a mother, invoked the old Sumerian and Hurrian laws which still prevailed in Syria, and took the same action as Sarai the wife of Abraham, in similar circumstances, more than a century previously. She exerted her legal right and privilege of giving her handmaid Bilhah to Jacob so that any resulting children would be accredited to Rachel as the legal wife. The next few years saw two sons and perhaps a daughter or two result from this union and Rachel was more content. "God hath heard my voice" she said "and given me a son". Rather less worthily, perhaps, when the second of Bilhah's sons was born, she gloated over her victory over Leah; the old jealousy was still there. Leah was not slow to retaliate. She had a fourth son, Judah, by now and probably a daughter or two also, but then came a halt and in the endeavour to maintain her advantage and not be outdone by Rachel she followed her sister's example and gave her own handmaid Zilpah to Jacob. This brought two more sons into Jacob's growing family so that after about seventeen years of married life he had eight sons and an unspecified number of daughters, together with four wives between whom he had to keep the peace. Quite enough for one man! When his mother Rebekah sent him to her brother's home to find a wife from her own family she could hardly have expected this denouement.

At this time there occurred the incident of the mandrakes (Gen. 30. 14-16). Reuben, the eldest child of Leah, now about sixteen years of age, found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother. Rachel, seeing them, coveted, and asked Leah for some. Leah struck a bargain; if she could have Jacob's company that night

Rachel could have the mandrakes. Rachel assented, and the result was the birth of Leah's fifth son, Issachar.

No one knows for certain just what plant is represented by the Hebrew *dudaim*, translated mandrake, only that the term means love-plant or love-apple, but there is every probability that the botanical mandrake is the one. Had the writer of the account any idea that thousands of years later his story would still be read he might have given an explanation but as it was everyone in his day knew what the term implied. The mandrake is a tap-rooted plant bearing small flowers and apple-like fruits, native to Middle East countries and carrying a superstition that it is conducive to fruitfulness when eaten by barren women; this might very well be the plant referred to. The association in this particular case is obvious. Apparently the finding of the fruits was something of a rarity and Rachel grasped at this straw of hope that by this means the dearest wish of her heart might be fulfilled.

Another son, Zebulun, was born to Leah, and the one daughter of Jacob whose name is mentioned, Dinah; at about forty-nine years of age Leah seems to be content with six sons of her own and two by Zilpah. A comparison of ch. 29. 31-34 with 30. 18-20 appears to indicate that she had by now given up all hope of winning Jacob's love, and had settled down to an acceptance of the position. Her eldest sons were approaching manhood and with Rachel still childless Leah must have been increasingly looked upon by Jacob's servants and retainers as the matriarch of the clan.

Ten years after the incident of the mandrakes, and twenty-seven since the date of Jacob's two marriages, the unexpected happened. Rachel, at last, gave birth to a son.

At fifty-one years of age she must have long since given up all hope. Now her native faith came to the top and she acknowledged the goodness of God; in a flash of prophetic insight she voiced her belief that He would give her a second son. Jacob, at ninety-one, must have felt a sense of overwhelming satisfaction. This was the son he had always wanted and it is clear that he looked upon Joseph as his principal heir and possessor of the birthright. The well-known jealousy of the older brothers at a later date stems directly from this fact. Joseph, the son of his beloved Rachel, was always the dearest to Jacob's heart.

From this point of time Jacob began to fret to go home. He had got the wife he came for, he had got his heir, but he was still in Laban's service. He had little of his own. Whether his

intimation to Laban that he now wanted to return to Canaan was as sincere as appears on the surface or merely a ploy to facilitate some bargaining of his own with Laban is impossible to say but at any rate by the time the two men had fenced around the position and come to terms Jacob had secured an extremely favourable agreement. The details of that agreement form no part of this story; suffice that within the short space of six years the older sons of Jacob, now in their twenties, were managing an increasingly prosperous stock farm on their father's behalf whilst Jacob, sixty miles distant, continued to supervise Laban's interests. The story says of him that during that six years "*the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maid-servants, and menservants, and camels, and asses*" (Gen. 30.93).

Not unnaturally, Laban's own sons began to grumble. They saw their father's and so their own prosperity begin to diminish as that of Jacob increased. "*The countenance of Laban*" was "*not toward Jacob as before.*" Although the agreement had looked on the surface as though Laban would reap the greater advantage he now realised that he had been outwitted by a man who knew a great deal more about stock-breeding than he did himself, and this he did not like. Jacob formed the opinion that it was about time to pack up and go. His wives agreed with him. They saw a better future for themselves and their sons five hundred miles away from Laban in Canaan. It remained only to organise a quiet and successful departure.

The opportunity came at the annual sheep-shearing which was an occasion of much ceremonial feasting and ritual, when normal work ceased for a week and all the outlying workers came into the headquarters of the establishment to participate. Jacob assembled his people on his own territory which was already sixty miles in the direction of Canaan from Laban, and set out. By the time some local busybody had got to Laban to tell him what had happened Jacob had already something like a hundred miles start. By the time he had cleared another hundred miles Laban and his men had caught up with him and there ensued the acrimonious altercation which is recorded in Gen. 31.25-55. Of the many complaints that Laban had, the one which annoyed him most was that Jacob in departing had, so he thought, stolen his "gods"—his *teraphim*, to use the Hebrew word—an accusation which Jacob hotly denied. And this is where Rachel comes back into the story.

Rachel—who like everyone else in her family, seems always to have had an eye to the main chance—had packed with her belongings the

"images", the *teraphim*, which belonged to her father. Says ch. 31.19 "*Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's*". She had a purpose in so doing which overshadowed all considerations of morality. These "*teraphim*" were miniature figures of ancestral family gods which were handed down from father to son and esteemed as guardian deities warding off illness and danger to the house and its occupants. The predominant race occupying and ruling the land in which Laban lived was the one known today as the Hurrians, and by Hurrian law physical possession of the family *teraphim* entitled the holder to a share in the father's estate. It would seem that Rachel's object in stealing and concealing them was that upon Laban's death she could claim a share of his estate, perhaps fearing that her young son Joseph might be deprived of any share in that of Jacob by the older sons of Leah. At any rate, when Laban, at Jacob's demand, searched his wives' tents for the missing treasures, Rachel adopted a successful subterfuge by reason of which he went away empty-handed. Not that it did her much good. A little later Jacob had all the *teraphim* and other symbols of idolatrous worship throughout his establishment given up and buried. For him and his people there was to be only one God, the God of Abraham. The incident does reveal that for all their professed worship of God, the religion of Laban and Leah and Rachel was tinged with idolatry.

Now the sands were running out for Rachel. The long five hundred miles journey to Canaan, encumbered as it was with flocks and herds, occupied three years. They must have been three tedious years, and Rachel was no longer young. Added to that, she was to know motherhood again. The climax came when they were almost within sight of their destination. At a little country place which afterwards became Bethlehem, Jacob's twelfth son, Benjamin, was born, and simultaneously Rachel breathed her last. She was sixty-three.

One can only guess at the thoughts of Jacob, as he buried her there by the wayside and erected a pillar of stone to mark the spot, a spot which is still marked today by a monument. For her, and for him, and for Leah, life had been a long disappointment and frustration. Later history has shown that they were all instruments in the hand of God, but sometimes it is a hard thing to be an instrument in the hand of God. They all were subject to the shortcomings which are common to all men, but at any rate they did their best. Of Leah we hear no more. When Jacob and his family migrated into Egypt thirty years later to escape the famine her name is not mentioned;

she probably died quietly in the interim. Her passing severed the last link binding the family of Abraham to that of Nahor his brother. When Israel returned from Egypt four centuries later the descendants of Laban were enemies. He must have fathered an influential nation, for in the 8th Century B.C. the Assyrians called North

Syria the land of Labanu, and in fact his name survives in the name Lebanon applied to part of that land today. Unworthy as his character may have been, the crowning glory of Laban the Syrian was that his two daughters became the mothers of the Divinely chosen nation of Israel.

THE BANNER OF TRUTH

"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 material things into existence 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 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 is identified with Truth, so that we can logically say God is Truth in the same way that "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 are brought together: Truth; Justice; Righteousness. In all the developing story of God's ways 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, if men are to order their lives by its principles and so fulfil the Creator's intentions. 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 intelligently to take the place in his plans for which He created them. So it became necessary for God to reveal himself, and his Truth, in a manner men 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 to thy dwelling-place"*. (Psa. 43. 3).

How then 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 "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 can he reveal himself to man?

The Apostle John gives 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 a very vital connection between the Truth of God and the Word of God.

"The Word was made flesh!" That 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. *"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 . . . 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 revealing himself to mankind by his Word, that mysterious Wisdom who both undertook the mighty works of creation and brought the Divine message to man. We are told that the Lord by Wisdom made the heavens (Psa. 136.5.) and founded the earth (Prov. 3.19). We find that "the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the Word of the Lord." (I 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 such cases the subjects of such visits were made aware that they had to do with a visitant from God. There is 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 they 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."* 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 a 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 a witness to the Truth which could not be gainsaid, and that is 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 (I Cor. 1. 24) and the message He proclaimed testified alike to the power and the wisdom of

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, manifested in the flesh, and the words which He uttered 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 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", others, men and women who themselves had been illumined by this Light would 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. 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 fulfilment 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, 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 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; 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 creedal 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, the first step on the way that leads 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*" 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 will 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.*"

GOG'S ALLIES

*A dip into
History*

A question often put by prophecy students concerns the identity of the latter-day nations pictured in Ezekiel's vision of the "Gog and Magog" invasion of Israel at the end of this Age (Ezek. 38/39). Of the then contemporary nations there listed most have now disappeared from history. To whom then, in the fulfilment, does Ezekiel refer?

There are two main systems of interpretation. One takes the prophecy as strictly literal, the invaders emerging from the north upon horses and wielding swords although such accoutrements of war are long since out-moded. They will be those nations now inhabiting the lands occupied in Ezekiel's time by the tribes he named. The other regards the vision as built upon an actual happening in the prophet's own time or previously which forms a picture in miniature of a later fulfilment on a greater, a global, scale instead of a localised one. The issues involved in the kingdoms of this world giving place to the incoming kingdom of God are so world-embracing that the final conflict predicted by Ezekiel must affect the whole earth. So the elements of the prophecy must be expanded to their global counterparts and the invasion of Gog lifted from a purely local foray to a much more sophisticated world-wide endeavour to destroy the incipient kingdom of God as represented by restored and converted Israel.

This article does not treat of the relative merits of these two systems of interpretation. It aims to set out the known facts regarding the peoples named by Ezekiel, as an aid to students of the prophecy. Whatever the interpretation, it must be based on the facts.

Twelve national or tribal names appear in Ezek. 38/39. Four of them are subject to the one man named, Gog the instigator of the invasion. Five more are allied peoples who join in the enterprise. The remaining three are merchant trading peoples who stand by to make some commercial gain from its success. These names are taken in order.

"*Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal*" is Ezekiel's introduction (Ezek. 38.2). Gog (Gaagi in Assyrian inscriptions) was a noted Scythian leader two generations before Ezekiel. His sons Sariti and Pariza were captured and imprisoned by the Assyrians. His grandson Madyes actually led the great invasion in the days of Josiah which forms

the background of Ezek. 38/39. These four tribes were all ruled by Gog, and all originated in Southern Siberia many generations before Ezekiel.

MAGOG. A warlike tribe which five centuries before Ezekiel was infiltrating Eastern Europe. Known to the Greeks as the Gogarene and the Assyrians as the Sakhi, they were overrunning what is now modern Turkey in Ezekiel's time and in conflict with the Assyrians. Collins' "International Classical Atlas" (1870) and Dent's "Atlas of Ancient and Classical Geography" (1921) shows the Gogarene as occupying the district just north of Ararat in Armenia up to at least the 3rd Cent. A.D.

ROSH. The A.V. has "chief prince of Meshech and Tubal" instead of the correct "prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal" due to a mistake to Jerome when translating the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate). He took "*nasi rosh*" to mean "chief prince" although to have this meaning it should be "*rosh nasi*". Nothing was known of a tribe called Rosh and he did not realise it was a proper name. The name does not appear in any extant Assyrian inscription, which is our chief source of information and it is not otherwise known in history.

In about the 9th A.D. Century a conglomeration of Swedish and Finnish peoples began pushing their way into northern Russia, at that time largely uninhabited, and eventually clashed with the Scythian tribes which still remained in the south. These peoples were known as the Ruotsi which became corrupted to Rus. The Arab historian Ibn Fossian in the 9th cent. says that in his time they were dwelling along the river Rha (now the Volga). By the 10th cent. they were penetrating Armenia, where the river Aras (near Mount Ararat) is said to have been named after them, and the Crimea, where they were stoutly resisted and driven back by the Khazars, a hybrid Jewish-Scythian nation which had embraced Judaism and served Jewish kings. (In the 9th cent. Khazaria extended from the Ukraine to the Caspian Sea.) This Rus was the source of the name Russia for the whole country but all this was fifteen hundred years after Ezekiel and he could not have referred to the Swedish Ruotsi.

MESHECH. A better known Scythian tribe, Mushku to the Assyrians and Moschi to the Greeks. In Ezekiel's time they were located between the Black Sea and the Caspian; a few

centuries later they had moved into Armenia. Even so far back as 1100 B.C. they were a thorn in the side of the Assyrians. Ezek. 27.13 shows that they had commercial dealings with the Phoenicians of Tyre.

Meshech has been connected with Moscow because of its similarity to the Greek name Moschi. There is not likely to be any connection. Moscow, Moskvi in Russian, was not founded until 1147 A.D. and did not become the capital until 1325, Kiev having been the previous capital. There is no evidence that the Scythians penetrated so far north and the similarity of names is probably coincidence.

TUBAL. The fourth Scythian tribe, Tabalu to the Assyrians, Tibarene to the Greeks. In Sennacherib's time they had moved into Cappadocia, which he called the land of the Tabalu in consequence, and were still there two centuries later in Ezekiel's day. Like Meshech, they traded with the Phoenicians.

Tubal has been identified with the Siberian city of Tobolsk and this is sometimes cited as evidence that Tubal, like Meshech, signifies the Russian people. The connection, if any, is very tenuous. There was no Tobolsk in Ezekiel's day. Tobolsk dates from A.D. 1242 when Sheibani Khan, leader of a Mongol tribe, led his 15,000 people northward into uninhabited Siberia and founded the first settlement, where his successors ruled until Yermak the Cossack invaded Siberia in 1587 and annexed the territory to emerging Russia. The city, however, stands on and is named after the river Tobol, which rises five hundred miles to the south-west, in the area from which the tribe of Tubal originated. It is very possible that the river took its name from the tribe in the remote past; but the tribe was extinct long before the city was founded.

These four tribes constituted the backbone of the invasion. They had five allies not subject to Gog but associated in the venture. The A.V. lists these (Ezek. 38.5-6) as Persia, Ethiopia, Libya, Gomer, Togarmah. Because the latter two were racially akin to Gog's host they will be taken first

GOMER, TOGARMAH. The Cimmerians to the Greeks; the Gimirrai and Til-Garimmu of Assyrian inscriptions. Originating in Central Asia, they were pushed into Europe by the Scythians and first settled in the Ukraine and the Crimea, which takes its name from them, then being forced across the Black Sea into Asia Minor in the 9th Cent. B.C., so coming into conflict with the Hittites. Togarmah at least was a powerful and warlike tribe for in the 7th Cent. B.C. it invaded Assyria, the strongest military power of the times, and only after a protracted

campaign was it defeated. Northern Turkey continued to bear their name for many centuries; in the 12th cent. A.D., when Rabbi Petachiah of Ratisbon crossed Turkey from Sinope to Nisibin on his travels he referred to it as the land of Togarmah.

PERSIA. Modern Persia was in Ezekiel's day the seat of two nations, Media in the north and Elam in the south. The Hebrew in Ezekiel is *Paras* which denoted a minor tribe of Iranians who had come from the east and settled on the shores of the Persian Gulf in the 10th cen. B.C. Their own name for their country was Fars or Farshumash. This relatively insignificant tribe was transformed by Cyrus in the days of Ezekiel to a conquering power which dispossessed the Elamites and then the Medes, and created the empire which still exists. It is to be noticed that whereas the Elamites were Semitic, of Shem, the Iranian Persians were of Japhet.

ETHIOPIA. Not the modern country of that name. The Ethiopia known to Ezekiel was the land now called the Sudan but this was only one section of a widely spread ancient people. Ethiopia is a Greek word applied indiscriminately to all tropical peoples; the Hebrew in the O.T. with the Egyptian and Semitic name, is *Cush*. The son of Ham, his descendants migrated from their homeland in Mesopotamia, on the one hand across southern Arabia into eastern Africa and on the other across southern Persia into India, where they founded a great civilisation later on wiped out by Iranians from the north. So great was the fame of this people that the whole of the southern oceans were known to the ancients as the Ethiopian Ocean and the coastlands between East Africa and India were known as Ethiopia. So late as the 17th Cent. A.D. an English ambassador to Persia, Sir Thomas Herbert, describing in his book "*Travels in Persia*" his voyage round South Africa in 1627 to take up his appointment, referred to the Indian Ocean and its surrounding lands as "Ethiopia", a striking example of the persistence of names.

LIBYA. This was the name given by the Greeks and Romans to the entire continent of Africa so far as it was then known. ("Africa" was the Roman name only for their provinces on the northern, Mediterranean, coast.) The Hebrew word in the O.T. and in Ezekiel is *Phut*. Phut was another son of Ham, and became the progenitor of another widely-spread and powerful people. The Phutites migrated into Africa from Asia and spread over the whole of northern and central Africa to the Atlantic, building up a cultured civilisation of craftsmen and traders. It is probable that most of the native races of Africa

are descended from Phut, but the civilisation they built up was largely destroyed, long after Ezekiel's day, by the progressive desiccation of northern Africa and the formation of the Sahara desert, which was green and fertile in their heyday. So late as the 3rd Cent. A.D. Jerome records that there were still Phutites in north-western Africa. (The Roman word "Punic" to denote Africans is derived from "Phut".)

Three peoples remain, not taking part in the invasion but standing by, interested, so to speak, in what is going on. They appear in Ezek. 38.33 and their interest is in the "spoil" expected to be taken by the attackers. These three are nations of traders; in ancient time traffickers and merchants would attend upon the victors of a battle to buy up what they could of the loot that had been taken. Examples in the O.T. are allusions in Obad. 11-14 and Joel 3.4-8. These three, therefore, are intent upon gaining commercial advantage from the outcome.

SHEBA, DEDAN. Two tribes of these names were descendants of Abraham through Keturah (Gen. 25.3), nomadic herdsman loosely allied with the Edomites and Ishmaelites, their homeland northern Arabia in the vicinity of Edom. They were the Sabeans of Job 1.15 and with other Semitic tribes became the Nabatheans of classical history who built cities and irrigation works in Judea and Sinai in the early A.D. centuries.

The other two tribes Sheba and Dedan were descended from Cush (Gen. 10.28). These in O.T. days occupied the extreme south of Arabia (now called Yemen Arabia) and here they became an influential merchant people controlling the trade routes between India and Europe. Inscriptions and remains in that area dated 700-600 B.C., just before Ezekiel's time, show them to have spoken a Hamitic language and this fixes their identity. Goods from the far East came by ship to a point near Aden, from whence the Shebites and Dedanites operated trade routes over the whole length of Arabia to Egypt, Babylon, Damascus and Tyre, from whence the Tyrian ships of Tarshish continued the journey to the countries of Europe. The celebrated Queen of Sheba who

visited Solomon was of this nation; her visit was almost certainly, in part at least, to advance commercial interests. It is of interest that the Venetian traveller Marco Polo in the 14th Cent. A.D. travelling this way on his return from China, found the descendants of these same peoples still operating the same trade routes. So Ezekiel pictures this Sheba and Dedan hasting from their home in south Arabia to make profit from defeated Israel.

TARSHISH. That the name denotes a specific country is evident from Jonah 1.3 and Jer. 10.9. There is little doubt that it was applied to Britain, with which the Phoenicians carried on a considerable trade. Ezek. 27.12 lists commodities of which some, such as tin, could only have come from Britain. At the same time it is true that the name stood in a general sense for all the remote lands of the west to which only the Phoenician ships knew the way, and since there are plenty of evidences that they also traded with West Africa, Spain and the Americas it is logical to accept Ezekiel's reference as denoting all these lands, much as our expression the Far East denotes everything between India and Japan. Thus the Phoenician port of Tyre was the connecting link between Sheba and Dedan from the East, and Tarshish from the West, all trading nations avid to gain some profit from Gog's attack upon Israel.

It is to be noted that of these twelve named nations not one is of the Semitic race. Eight are of Japhet and four of Ham. None of the Semitic Arabs or other traditional enemies of Israel are involved, not even Egypt. This is the more remarkable in that, in Ezekiel's picture, in order to invade Israel at all, the invaders must pass through one or another of these Arab lands.

The basis of Ezekiel's vision is the Scythian invasion of a little before his own days; is it that in the "end-of-the-Age" fulfilment Israel has to face enemies from every part of the world, the whole power of organised rulership in the earth roused to resist the incoming of the Kingdom of God? From every point of the compass come Israel's enemies, representing all the peoples of the earth. In Israel's faith in God lies her strength—and God delivers.

Have you noticed that in the history of this planet God turns a leaf about every two thousand years?

God turned a leaf, and this world was fitted for human residence. About two thousand more years passed along and God turned another leaf, and it was the Deluge. About two thousand more years passed on and it was the appearance of

Christ. Almost two thousand more years have passed by, and He will probably soon turn another leaf. What it shall be I cannot say. It may be the demolition of all these monstrosities of turpitude, and the establishment of righteousness in all the earth. He can do it, and He will do it. I am as confident as if it were already accomplished. (Talmadge, 19th Cent.)

WHAT NEW THING IS THIS?

Some reflections on the power of Christianity

4. The Reformation

"He, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." That is how Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, described the "man of sin" whom he foresaw arising in a then far future day to oppress and persecute the Church. He would take to himself all the prerogatives of God and rule men in place of God; but the Lord at his coming would consume and destroy him. Even in Paul's own day the seeds of this "man of sin" were evident, but, said the inspired and farseeing Apostle, *"he that now hindereth will hinder, until he be taken out of the way, and THEN shall that wicked be revealed"*. Under the figure of this "man of sin" Paul delimited a powerful anti-Christian system claiming Divine authority but in reality being a tool of Satan. The "hindering one" was revealed by later events to be the Roman pagan Church-State system; only after that system was taken out of the way would the "man of sin" come into being and continue until destroyed by the Lord Christ at his Second Advent. So it came to pass; the pagan power was "taken out of the way" by the end of the fourth century; the "man of sin" succeeded it and was in the full hey-day of its power in the tenth. *"It was given to him"* says John the Revelator *"to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth whose names are not written in the book of life shall worship him"* (Rev. 13.7-8). For nearly a thousand years the religio-secular system which had usurped the name of Christ ruled the world in his name but not in his spirit, while those relative few who held still to the faith handed down from Apostolic days remained submerged and waiting God's time for action.

That time came in the 12th century when Peter Waldo, a wealthy merchant of Lyons in France, employed a priest, Stephanas de Erisa, to translate the Gospels into French from Latin. The enlightenment which he thus received led him to renounce established religion and seek to coalesce into one body the scattered groups of true believers in France and Italy, so forming the people known later as the Waldenses, the first really organised group of reformers. There was no introduction of doctrines variant from those held generally at the time; the emphasis was upon a return to primitive purity of life and practice and total rejection of ecclesiastical

government. The movement was ignored by the hierarchy at first as too insignificant to be of importance but it was in a very real sense the commencement of the Reformation. After eight hundred years of ecclesiastical rule the tide was beginning to turn.

The next century saw another development. The renowned Francis of Assisi founded the Franciscan order independently of the Catholic church whilst remaining within the Catholic communion. In protest against the opulence and corruption in the church his order was devoted to purity, simplicity and poverty. There was still no protest against the doctrines of the church but a definite attitude against its inherent abuses. It was not long before Pope Innocent III formally recognised the new order and so obtained sufficient hold over it to influence its basic principles so that it presented less of a threat to the institutional church. Nevertheless the Franciscan order prospered and was always an enemy to the corruption of the Roman church; a later famous Franciscan, Jean d'Olive, published a book in which he branded the church of Rome as the woman on the scarlet beast of Revelation 17.3. It is perhaps not generally known that the first writer to make this application was himself a Catholic. Although St. Francis cannot be classed among the Reformers it is true that his work and the movement which he founded was another force making for freedom from the shackles of the then apostate church. Other reform groups sprang up during this same century and, taking alarm at last, the Church, under Pope Gregory IX, instituted the Holy Inquisition, with agents in every city, to investigate and extirpate heresy of every form and any kind of opposition to Rome. The persecution and martyrdoms which followed were more savage and relentless than any known in preceding ages.

But the wind of change was in the air. The Reformers were not the only ones to challenge the Papal Church. Some of the secular rulers were getting restless. The 14th century featured a quarrel between Pope Boniface VIII and Philip, king of France, which resulted in Philip overthrowing the Popedom at Rome and installing a new Pope of his own appointing at Avignon. The Papal see remained at Avignon for seventy years (this has been called, in derision, the "Babylonian captivity of the Papacy"). For another fifty years thereafter there were two Popes,

one ruling at Avignon and one at Rome, each claiming to be the true Pope and calling the other one Antichrist. During the early fifteenth century there were no less than three Popes ruling simultaneously but in AD 1429 the schisms were healed with the installation of Pope Martin V at Rome, agreeable to all parties. But all this was a severe blow to Papal authority and many more dissident movements began to emerge, sometimes looked upon with favour by various European monarchs and governments. John Wycliffe in England and John Huss in Bohemia both attacked the corruption and severity of the Roman church but still without departing to any extent from her doctrines. Alarmed by this rising tide of resentment, eminent dignitaries of the Church convened the Council of Constance and later the Council of Basle to investigate this corruption in the endeavour to cleanse the church. Opposed by the Popes, these attempts came to nothing. An endeavour to reconcile the Latin and Greek churches, Rome and Constantinople, failed. The "consuming by the spirit of his mouth" of 2 Thess. 2 was to occupy many more centuries but it was here that it had its start. There was as yet no incipient reformation of Church doctrine but there was a striving towards recovery of the lost true spirit of Christ and Christianity.

Then in the 16th century the tide came in at full strength. Martin Luther, monk and Professor of Divinity at Wittenberg University, in 1517 broke with the Roman church, nailed his famous 95 theses to the church door, and formed his own communion, which still survives as the Lutheran denomination. For the first time doctrine began to come under the microscope although freedom from false doctrine was itself going to be a slow process. Simultaneously Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland began his work, opposing many doctrines of the church. In 1530 came the Augsburg Confession, enshrining the principles of Protestantism, under the protection of Charles V, Emperor of Germany. At the same time Henry VIII of England defied the Pope and established the Church of England. Similar secessions took place in almost every European country despite frantic endeavours on the part of the Inquisition to seek out and burn the heretics. In the middle of the century the Treaty of Passau gave complete religious liberty to Protestants in Germany. John Knox wielded immense influence in Scotland and John Calvin in Switzerland. The Huguenots emerged in France and were persecuted, but survived. The Papacy resisted these things but lost much of its power and tried to atone for this by intensive missionary work in the newly-

discovered countries of South America, Africa, Asia and India.

Hardly had the Protestants begun to achieve stability than some of the old evils began to return. Calvin preached predestination and Geneva became the centre of that faith; but Calvin also achieved political control and burned Michael Servetus at the stake for heresy. Elizabeth of England passed an Act of Uniformity to regularise Protestant worship in England; the Puritans refused and were persecuted accordingly. Anabaptists stood for adult baptism and the Millennial reign of Christ and were persecuted by the other Protestant churches. (They ultimately developed into the present Baptist denomination.) Robert Brown in 1581 promulgated the thesis of each individual congregation being sole arbiter of its own affairs without centralised bureaucratic control and so laid the foundation of the Congregational Church. Faustus Socinius of Venice came out strongly for Arian views, associated with what to-day is known as "conditional immortality" and his teachings have remained; at the same time Universalism and Unitarianism and a great number of doctrinal theses which had remained submerged almost from Apostolic days came into the open. The 16th century was a time when men's minds were questing for the truth and the shackles which had held them for so long could hold them no longer. Despite the mistakes and errors and excesses of the Reformers, their zeal and vigour did bring the true Christian faith to the top and give opportunity for those who were truly devoted to Christ to practise and preach their faith and demonstrate that it had survived the long centuries of oppression and was as real and virile as ever.

The spirit of religious persecution never died. Now that the Protestants were supreme in some countries, notably England, Germany and Switzerland, the minority groups began to feel the pressure. In 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers had to leave England to found a new homeland in America to find freedom to worship according to their consciences; less than a hundred years later they too were persecuting their own minorities. George Fox and his Quakers appeared and received the same treatment. James Arminius, a professor of the University of Leyden, challenged Calvinism with his exposition of the doctrine of Free Grace as it is set out in the New Testament, and divided the Protestant church. Finally John Wesley in the early 18th century founded the Methodist Church, the last of the major denominations. In little more than two hundred years most of the great reformers had appeared and

done their work, and Christendom was now divided into Catholic and Protestant.

But not necessarily any more Christian!

The old evils of bigotry and intolerance remained. Whenever a church or sect or group attained power and freedom from oppression, it used that privileged position to oppress those who would not conform. It still remained that the real Christian faith was preserved and practiced by the relative few, of mainly lowly estate having little or no worldly power or possession, but rich in faith toward God. "*In the world*" said Jesus "*ye shall have tribulation*" and that has been true of every generation of the true Church. And the faith has survived. Despite all the efforts of official Catholic and Protestant alike to suppress the truth and efface the image of Christ from the minds and hearts of men, there have always been the faithful few, both Protestant and Catholic, who have received from their fathers in God the true gospel and have passed it on to their sons in the faith. So it has come to pass that the last two or three centuries, which have witnessed such an abounding increase of understanding in every department of human knowledge, have also given opportunity

for Bible exploration on a scale never before possible and a consequent unfolding of Divine truth which no preceding generation had known. The old conception of a vengefully Deity intent on consigning to everlasting hell every creature who displeased him began to give place to that of a God of love who has created mankind for a purpose and is steadily working towards the fulfilment of that purpose and the eventual happiness of all who will accept his gift of everlasting life.

But victory was not yet. The battle for religious liberty was fought, and measurably won, but this was not to say that the true Church had vanquished all its enemies. A new and more insidious one was on the horizon. The first whispers of atheism appeared in the 17th century. Within a very few more years the discoveries of scientific men began to pose questions which were to challenge the basis of the Christian faith. And so by the 19th century Christianity was facing its new foe—Modernism.

* * *

Chapter five will tell how the Church faced, and still faces, this new threat to its continued existence.

THE CAVE OF ADULLAM

A story of
David

The words of James (2.5) "*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?*" are well illustrated by the life and experiences of David and his men in the cave of Adullam. When David was forced to leave Saul's court he went into the wilderness and found a large cave in which to dwell. He then gathered a company of men who shared his trials and experiences as an outcast, a fugitive; later on they shared with him his glory when he became king. These experiences of David between his rejection by Saul and the time he became king lasted seven years, and well picture this present Age, during which our Lord has been gathering out a little band, not only from the tribes of Israel, but from every kindred, tongue and nation. These are called to follow him through difficult experiences now; later, when He is the recognised King over all the world, they are promised a place with him.

Who were the men thus drawn to David, and

what were their characteristics? 1 Sam. 22. 1-2 says that his brethren and all his father's house went thither to him, also every one that was discontented, and he became captain over them. Some were drawn by ties of relationship, others by admiration of David himself and his character, but the majority were drawn by personal trouble. Some were in distress, some in debt, coming to David to escape from their oppressors and creditors. Others who had incurred Saul's wrath, as had David himself, came to David by way of escape, while some were discontented on account of the tyranny and oppression of Saul, and so joined David. From some viewpoints they were not at all a desirable band. So it is with the company the Lord is selecting, and reminds us of the Apostle's words: "*Not many wise, not many noble are called. Hath not God chosen the poor of this world?*" Some have, indeed, been drawn to him because of their great love for him, others by an appreciation of his sacrifice, but the majority by personal affliction and trouble. Worn out by the trials and troubles of the world, they seek rest; discontented with the

oppression and tyranny of the god of this world, we come to the Lord and say: "Jesus has satisfied, Jesus is mine." Perhaps on account of mental difficulties or the loss of loved ones, some seek rest, and are so drawn to him.

When these men came to David they found no very hard conditions laid down before they could enter into the company. Any might come to him; he set no age limit, no standard of fitness. Some were strong, mighty men; others were men of weakness, so weak that on occasion they had to be left behind as unfit to stand the fatigues with the rest of the band. David did not pry into their past lives; some had been noble, fine characters, others ignoble, but David was willing to let bygones be bygones; only two simple conditions were laid down; Do you accept David as your deliverer; do you believe he can deliver you from your oppressors and Saul? Do you accept David as your leader; are you willing to follow just wherever he leads? It will cost you something; you will need to be, as David is, an outcast, a fugitive. You will come under the scorn of Israel. Are you willing to share his outcast experiences? These conditions were accepted by David's followers, as is shown by their exclamation, "*Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse.*"

During this Age those who would follow the Lord find no hard conditions laid down; He places no age limit. Some come and give their entire life to him in their youth, and others come after having spent the larger portion of their life in pursuit of wordly hopes, pleasures and aims; yet the Lord accepts both. He sets no standard of fitness. Some have many talents to bring, while others feel they have nothing whatever. Jesus does not pry into the past life of any who would become his disciple. Some have spent their lives in the service of others, others have been ignoble and selfish, but the Lord only says, "the past is under the blood". There are just two conditions laid down! Do you accept Jesus as your Saviour; do you believe He can deliver you? Do you accept him as your leader; are you willing to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth? Sit down and count the cost, for it will cost you something. It will mean standing for unpopular truth and going unto him "without the Camp, bearing his reproach".

When these men came to David they entered into entirely new experiences. Old things passed away and all things became new. All did not run smoothly in the caves; they had many trials. They had come to David to escape trials, but they found trials right there in the cave. There were men from every tribe in Israel, varying in

habits and temperament. How apparent to each other their weaknesses would become; how often their ideas would clash. There would certainly be many difficulties in the cave; they would often rub one another the wrong way. One thing, however, would tend to bind them together, the desire of their leader that they should live together as one family. Gradually that desire began to soften their disagreements.

We have similar experiences, for the Lord has drawn his people from every kingdom, nation and tongue. He knew full well that differences would and will emerge and we will view things from different standpoints. There will be differences of opinion, but the desire of our Leader is that we should keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Remember our Lord's prayer; "*Father, I pray that they whom thou hast given me may be one as we are one*". We know that our love for the Lord will be measured by our love for the brethren, and we are called to keep the unity of the Spirit. We cannot countenance revolution in the cave. The Lord measures our love for him by our desire to live in peace. When the children of Israel murmured on account of the report brought back by the spies sent to view the land of Canaan, Caleb was able to "still the people before Moses" (Num. 13.30) and the secret of Caleb's power is given in Num. 14.24: "*But my servant Caleb, because he has another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully*". He had the spirit, not of strife, but of peace, and the secret of his great influence lay in the fact that he followed God fully. If we would preserve the spirit of unity we must not have the spirit of strife and agitation, and we must follow God fully.

The experiences of David's followers would not all be trying; they also had blessings. They came under the influence of David's life, and his life was one of devotion. He was a godly man, a man of prayer, very often pouring out his soul in prayer to God; and he was a man of praise. Oft-times he would take up his harp in tuneful song. How this would soften their harshness! David was so skilful on the harp that when, prior to his Adullam experiences, he played before Saul, the evil spirits that possessed Saul left him. He delighted to meditate on the law given to Israel through Moses, and probably would often call his followers and read to them from the law (see Psalm 34.11). His influence must have worked wonders on the hearts of his rough followers, as is shown by the testimony paid them when protecting the shepherds of Nabal's sheep. The record is: "*The men were very good unto us and we were not hurt, neither missed we any-*

thing as long as we were conversant with them. They were a wall unto us both by day and by night" (1 Sam. 25. 15-16). What a splendid tribute to pay to these men, who, before they came under David's influence, robbed and plundered whenever possible.

As with these men, so with the followers of the Lord. We come under entirely new influences, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, under the influence of the mind of the Master. Jesus gathers us to him to instruct us. "Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them." The Scripture does not read "Where two or three are come together," but "are gathered together", neither does it read "there will I come". Jesus is already there, and we are gathered unto him. We come together to hold communion with Jesus.

*"Where two or three in sweet accord,
Meet in Thy name, O blessed Lord,
Meet to recount Thine acts of grace,
O how Thy presence fills the place."*

These men entered into a new security. The name "Adullam" means "resting place". The cave was situated six miles south-west of Bethlehem, and to reach it one had to pass along a narrow way along the side of a precipice. On one side was a rocky gorge, and on the other high, towering rocks. Then one entered a crevice, leading sheer into the face of the rock, so low that it was impossible to stand in an upright position; one must enter in a crouched attitude. Against David and his men in the cave Saul was powerless, no matter how large an army he brought against them. They had to pass in single file along the narrow path leading along the mountain side, and enter, one at a time, what appeared to be a pitch dark hole in the rock; David and his men had the advantage of looking towards the light and could see each one as he entered. They were quite secure; only in the day-time dare Saul attack them. At night they went down into the neighbouring villages for supplies.

Here is pictured another blessing in our Adullam life. We enter into a new security; "Your life is hid with Christ in God". No power in the universe can hurt the spiritual life of a Christian. None can pluck us out of his hand (1 Pet. 3. 13). If our faith is as strong as our security is good we will never be afraid (Psa. 27.1).

Another phase of the life of David and his

followers is given in 1 Chron. 11.3. David is now anointed king over Israel. No longer an outcast with but six hundred men, thousands flock to his side. It is popular to be one of David's followers (1 Chron. 12.23 and 40). What now becomes of the faithful six hundred? Are they forgotten now that David has so many? No, the time has come for them to be specially remembered. They shared in David's trials; they are to share in his honour. 1 Chron. 11 from verse 11, and chapter 12, 1-24, tell of his faithful Adullam band. We know that we are about to enter the greatest change the world has ever experienced; soon it is to become popular to be on the Lord's side. All will then want to give themselves in full consecration, but only those who have shared with Jesus in his Adullam experiences will have a place on the honours list of the Kingdom. "No cross, no crown" (Matt. 19. 28-29). The honours list is already partially written, and it is interesting to see the names written there, and the great deeds that have won them distinction. There is Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. When his persecutors came against him he said "I see Jesus standing on the right hand of God", prayed "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge". Col. 4 records a number of faithful saints who have found a place on the honours list; verse 12 mentions Epaphras, an invalid who laboured "fervently for you in prayers". Rom. 16.3 mentions "Priscilla and Aquila, who have laid down their own necks for my sake"; among others mentioned in this chapter is "Rufus, and his mother and mine". Rufus' mother had apparently a very warm place in the Apostle's heart, in thus referring to her as his own mother. Afterwards, this honours list will be published to the world. They will learn that "such and such a one is born in Zion, and the Highest himself has established them". Just at the foot of the honours list there are yet some vacant places. Will our names be there? Are we following in his Adullam footsteps? If we are, the Lord will certainly record our names, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom". The matter rests with ourselves. We are exhorted to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, remembering that God hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which He hath promised to them that love him.



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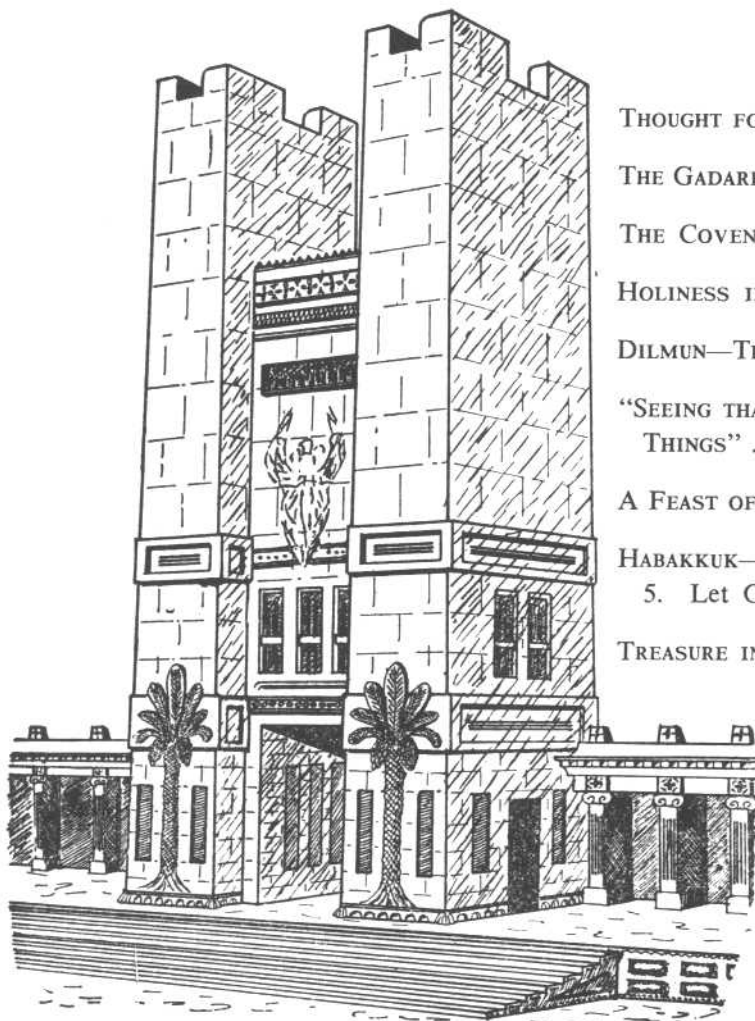
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Next issue November 1st

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

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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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NOTICES

"What New Thing is this?" It is regretted that adverse circumstances have prevented the appearance in this issue of the final instalment of this series. It is expected that it will appear in the November issue.

Renewals. Readers whose serial numbers on the envelope lie in the 5,000 and 9,000 ranges and who find a pink "renewal notice" in this issue are desired to return same, or other intimation of their wish to have the "Monthly" continued, promptly so that we can be in no doubt as to their wishes. Where no renewal notice is enclosed we have already entered the reader for the ensuing year.

Gone from us

— * —
Sis. E. Eyley (*Mablethorpe*)
Sis. E. Oakley (*Atherstone*)
Bro. D. C. Quinton (*Wimborne*)
Bro. C. Storey (*Gateshead*)
Bro. A. Tebbutt (*Nottingham*)

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

Rule of the Gospel Age

The failure of the Christian Church to win converts for Christ is due in no small measure to the fact that the message and fellowship of the early church has been lost sight of. Our only means of discovering our commission to the world is by an attentive observation to the life and teaching of the early disciples. We cannot preach a social gospel merely because it is fashionable in some sections of the church. We cannot cease to preach the hope of the coming Kingdom merely because it is unusual in the usual thought of the Christian Church. Our message must be based solely and simply upon the Word of God. There has been no radical change in the condition of men's hearts or of their need since Christ's first advent, nor even since men first lost their fellowship with the Creator as recorded in Genesis 2. The first step in coming to a knowledge of the truth of God is "getting right with him."

Rule of the Millennial Age

"By mercy and truth iniquity is purged" (Prov. 16. 6). How different a sentiment from the old theology, which presented God as anxious above all things to punish, to all eternity, those who were subject to iniquity. In our day, we know that God, who will not tolerate sin for ever, has provided a means whereby it may be purged away from the hearts of men. The Millennial reign of Christ is set apart in the Divine Plan for this very work, to deal with men along merciful and upright lines so that they may, if they will, come into full harmony with the Father and with his beloved Son, their King. The "rule of the iron rod" is in reality the "rule of the shepherding rod." "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd." The penalty for sin is no less certain, and no less final. "It shall come to pass, that every soul that will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people," but not until every possible approach has been made, in the mercy of God and by the truth of God, to draw the sinner from the error of his way, and bring him into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Thought for the Month

"All men shall stand in awe, and shall declare the work of God, for they shall wisely consider of his doing" (Psa. 64. 9).

We live in a day when the ear is assailed on every side by the blatant claims man makes for himself. Politically, commercially, scientifically, there never was such a time when man declaims to the heavens "See what I can do!" Each new achievement strengthens his confidence in himself and increases his arrogance, and convinces him more than ever that there is no need to include God in any of his calculations or his plans. And with that loss of sense of responsibility toward God goes loss of sense of responsibility toward men. Man is no longer his brother's keeper. His fellows are creatures of earth to be used and exploited, if by any means he can find the power to use and exploit them, just as much as are the lower creations, the animal and vegetable worlds, and the inanimate things, the minerals and the basic elements and all upon which man can lay his grasping hand. Politically, men are potential units for the service of the State, having no rights beyond those granted by the State, and the State becomes an ever bigger and bigger concept until at the last there is one supreme world State holding the entire human race in thrall. Commercially, human beings are objects of exploitation, to make possible the selfish indulgence of the few, whether that indulgence be in terms of monetary wealth or power or whatever else. Scientifically, human beings are subjects for experiment, the acquisition of knowledge through their willing or unwilling co-operation being considered of greater importance than their individual welfare or happiness. The number of men who use political, commercial or scientific power for the enrichment and happiness of humanity is infinitesimal compared with those who use it to man's detriment.

But God is neither disinterested, idle, nor powerless. A certain Pharaoh of Egypt, many years ago, thought that He was, and found out his mistake when God arose in power to deliver his people. So it will be again. There is one theme running all through the Psalms of David, coming continually to the top in texts such as that quoted above, that the arrogant, God-dishonouring and man-despising course of those who live life without God and who oppress God's creatures and

defile God's creation will be brought suddenly before the bar of his judgment. "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered" was the ancient battle-cry of Israel, and on more than one occasion He did so arise and his enemies were scattered. Now in the end of time, when it would seem as if man has about completed his plans for organising all human life upon earth without any place for God, the predictions of all the prophets will be fulfilled at once and the Rider upon the White Horse will sally forth from Heaven to do battle for righteousness. It has become fashionable among many people, Christians and otherwise, to deny this belief in ultimate Divine intervention as a too literal acceptance of primitive ideas of God which we have now outgrown. There could be no greater mistake. The dominion of evil upon the earth has reached a point where it can be halted and overthrown only by the direct action of the powers of Heaven, and the Scriptures are consistently full throughout of assertions that those powers will ultimately be invoked.

Then will the words of this text be fulfilled. Men, to-day, goggle and wonder at the marvels of science, heatedly approve or disapprove, according to political sympathies and the effect upon their own pockets, of happenings in the political and commercial worlds; then they will stand in awe, speechless in the face of what God has done. And speedily—for "a short work will the Lord make upon the earth"—they will come to realise the inestimable benefits of the Rule of Righteousness which He will establish and find their voices again, this time to declaim and declare the works of God. "This is our God" Isaiah declares they will shout "We have waited for him, and He will save us". They did not know, before, that they were waiting for him, but so it was. Then at last, men will "wisely consider of his doings" and realise that; after all, the ways of God are right and true, and that man can ignore them only to his own loss. The whole purpose of God in the permission of evil is that men might learn a much-needed lesson and when material for the lesson has been adequately provided—and the state of the world to-day is witness how adequate is the provision of material now—God will bend down from heaven and say "Stop—and listen to Me".

THE GADARENE SWINE

*An incident
in Jesus' life*

The story of the Gadarene swine who were possessed by a legion of demons and in consequence drowned in the lake is an interesting sidelight upon the general Scriptural presentation regarding the "fallen angels". The incident itself is well attested, having been recorded by all three synoptic writers—Matthew (8. 28-36), Mark (5. 1-20), and Luke (8. 20-34). The three narratives agree in all main points except that Matthew declares there were two demoniacs involved and the others tell of only one. The probable explanation is that two men were in fact concerned but one became the centrepiece of the incident and the demons spoke only through this one.

This short note will not touch upon the general subject of demon obsession, which would require much more space for anything like adequate treatment. It will merely be remarked that according to the New Testament it was a very real thing, and trained observers in this present century have come across cases in their own experience where it has been a very real thing also. It is not suggested therefore, that the unfortunate victims in this incident were simply cases of epilepsy or psychological unbalance. Their brains were in sober fact under the control of malevolent spirit creatures, angelic beings living in a state of active rebellion against God and only deterred from their evil course by such restraints as God placed and enforced upon them.

The wider view of this matter is well known to students of the Old Testament. There has been at some remote past time a rebellion against God and righteousness by certain of the angelic creation, which rebellion was dramatically arrested by the Most High at the time of the Noachic Deluge. The story in Genesis 6, coupled with various New Testament allusions affords a sufficiently detailed picture of what happened. The angels concerned, already in a state of rebellion, "kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation" to use Jude's words, and after materialising into physical bodies lived a lawless life as men upon earth. The Flood came and thereafter they were deprived of the power thus to materialise again, but at the same time were excluded from the spiritual world which is the place of the Divine throne (see Jude 6, 1 Pet. 3. 19-20 and 2 Pet. 2. 4). The history of witchcraft and spiritism through the ages since has been largely the history of these rebellious spirits endeavouring to break through the restraints that have bound them, and continue their evil ways.

Hence these two men, like so many before and since, having at some time or other willingly given themselves over to the influence of the evil spirits, found their brains so controlled by them that they no longer had any will-power or volition of their own. Outwardly they manifested all the characteristics of incurable and violent insanity; but the insanity was not the result of a physically diseased brain. It was due to the operation of many supernatural intelligences—a "legion" we are told in the accounts—all working simultaneously on the one human organism.

This was the state of the crazed wretch who met Jesus as He walked up from the shore of the lake. The local inhabitants would be keeping their distance; the madman had been kept habitually manacled but such was his demoniac strength that he continually broke free from his fetters and did quite a lot of damage before he could be overpowered and restrained again. He appears at this time to have been free and the impression given is that he rushed upon Jesus immediately the latter had stepped ashore from the boat. Perhaps there was in the madman's dark mind some glimmering realisation that here was the means of deliverance from his fearful plight if only he could get near to the Man of Nazareth. But to speak of his own volition was evidently beyond his power. When his lips did move, the words were controlled by the evil influences that possessed his mind and they were words not of pleading but of resentment. "*What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come thither to torment us before the time?*"

Now that is a most important statement in Christian theology. "Before the time"; what means this frank avowal, first of Jesus' Divinity and Messiahship at a time when his own friends and followers had not as yet realised the fact, and second of the fact that a future judgment awaited them but that the time had not yet come? "Torment" in all three narratives is "*basanizo*", which means trial and testing and judgment as well as the execution of the consequent sentence. These evil angels, speaking through this crazed man's lips, admitted their knowledge that the Man before whom they stood was indeed the Son of God and tacitly admitted his authority over them. They admitted their realisation that judgment and sentence upon their evil course had yet to be passed but asserted that the time was not yet. In short, they accused Jesus of coming upon

them for judgment before the time that had been pre-set in the Divine purposes. All of that implies that we are dealing here with definite super-human intelligences who, despite their admitted evil, did possess some detailed knowledge of the Divine Plan.

The Apostle Paul had some such knowledge when, twenty years or so later, he told some of his disciples that, if faithful, they were destined to "judge angels" (1 Cor. 6. 3). He was thinking of the "time" to which these referred in their question to Jesus, the Millennial "Day of Judgment" when not only evil amongst mankind but evil amongst the angelic creation is to be rooted out and all wilful evildoers, human or angelic, finally destroyed.

A significant expression in this narrative takes us back to very early times in human history. Two out of three accounts represent the evil spirits as using the expression "the Most High God" in referring to the Deity. "*Jesus thou Son of the Most High God.*" It is significant because so far as men are concerned this particular name for God dropped out of use several centuries before Christ. It seems to have been the earliest appellation by which men knew God, in its Hebrew form of "*el elyon*", being succeeded then by *El Shaddai*, "the Almighty", and later by the incommunicable name quite incorrectly transliterated into English by "Jehovah" but meaning "the Eternal". These fallen angels, addressing Jesus, used the term that was current in the days that were before their restraining, the days before the Flood. It is significant that the angel who appeared to Mary at the Annunciation (Luke 1. 32-35) and those who sang to the shepherds (Luke 1. 76) used the same expression (Greek *hypsistos*, equal to the Hebrew *el elyon*).

So the demons, perceiving that Jesus intended to bring their domination of this unhappy man to an end, "*besought him*" according to Mark "*that He would not send them away out of the country*", but according to Luke "*that He would not command them to go out into the deep*". Be it noted there was no attempt at defiance or resistance. They recognised the authority of Jesus and would obey, but they endeavoured to get the best terms they could. In Mark, "country" is "*choras*", meaning one's own proper place or where one should rightfully be, hence, one's own country. In Luke, "deep" is "*abyssos*", the English "abyss", the same as the "bottomless pit" of Rev. 20. 1, into which the Devil is cast for the whole period of the Millennium. Neither Mark nor Luke were present at the time; all their information must have come from one or other of those disciples who were there. It may well be that both expressions were used; the

accounts are quite likely to be abbreviated and Mark may have had his information from one, and Luke from another, of the witnesses.

By the "abyss" the demons may well have meant the same thing as Peter refers to in 2. 4, of his second Epistle "*God spared not the angels that sinned but cast them down to "tartarus", and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment*". *Tartarus* in Greek mythology was the prison of the Titans, who rebelled against the gods and were overthrown and imprisoned forever in a place "as far below Hades as earth is below heaven"—an apt description of the "bottomless pit" or "abyss". It would almost seem from these and other allusions in Scripture, that these "fallen angels" are constantly seeking to evade their restraints and sometimes partially succeeding. In this case it would appear as if Jesus acceded to their request not so to use his power to return them to "*Tartarus*" or the abyss, but definitely to command them no longer to obsess the man. So the "legion" of spirits "came out", and in the absence of any prohibition by Jesus—with his permission—they took possession of the nearest living creatures in view, a herd of swine which happened to be feeding in the vicinity.

Whether this is a unique case of demon obsession of brute beasts and just what such a thing involves we have no means of knowing. It can only be assumed that, as with the men, so with the beasts, the effect on the brain was similar to that of madness. The herd exhibited all the signs of sudden terror and panic and in a mad gallop they raced across the greensward, over a little cliff, and into the water, where they quickly drowned. Mark, with all his usual passion for descriptive detail, tells us there were about two thousand of them.

The question has often been asked; is such a proceeding in keeping with the known character of Jesus? Was it thus necessary to encompass the death of two thousand dumb creatures? In another place Jesus had said not even a sparrow can fall to the ground without the Father's knowledge. We may not intrude into the Saviour's motives for acting as He did, but we can assemble a few related facts.

How did the swine come to be there? The use of swine's flesh was forbidden to the Jews and even though the religious observance of many had become perfunctory their inherited antipathy to swine's flesh remained. The explanation is that the district around the sea of Galilee was largely cosmopolitan; five sizeable towns contained a considerable Greek and Roman population and there was a good demand for pork. Here in Gadara certain not over scrupulous Jews were

making a good living rearing pigs for market. The quick death by drowning of this particular herd only anticipated a much more painful death that would have been their fate a little later on. Viewed against that background, Jesus' act was one of mercy.

But the people of the district thought otherwise. They came to Jesus and they besought him to depart. They evidently feared He would do the same thing to more of their herds and they were more concerned over the preservation of their vested interests than the casting out of demons from the obsessed. It is an ironic comment on the hard-heartedness of mankind that whereas at first they all went in fear of the madman who infested their cities they now went in fear of the One who had delivered them from that scourge. In their eyes the remedy was worse than the disease. The casting out of demons was one thing, and a very acceptable thing it was, and all honour to the stranger who had landed on their shores to do this thing. But when it came to touching their financial interests and causing them to lose trade and money the whole attitude changed. That was too heavy a price to pay, and so "the whole multitude" "besought him to depart from them".

That part of the story is a parable indeed. There are plenty in this world to-day who would gladly be delivered from the bondage and oppression of sin, but when they learn what the after obligation will be they turn away. True it is that the saving power of God is free to all, but then that is not the whole of the story. God does not just forgive sin so that man can make a clean start and sin again. God created man in the first place to have definite obligations toward him and to assume definite responsibilities in and towards God's universe. No man will ever attain everlasting life without willingly taking upon himself those obligations and so fitting into the pattern of life which God has devised for him. So, after

deliverance, there is a price to be paid, and even although the service of God is perfect freedom, it is still service and man must enter and remain in it.

The man who had been healed realised that. The story closes with the one-time demoniac, clothed and in his right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus. He, at any rate, having come in contact with the power of God which is unto salvation, was not going to lose touch with it again. Luke tells us (8. 38) that this man also besought Jesus. But it was not that he "besought him to depart from them". He "besought him that He might be with him". He wanted to give his life, for what it was worth, to Jesus. He wanted to be a disciple.

Jesus accepted him. It is true that the text says "but Jesus sent him away, saying, return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee", but that does not mean that Jesus rejected his proffered service. He accepted it, and sent the man straight away to be a missionary to his own people. Obviously his preaching would be much more effective in a circle where his past history was known than in a strange environment where he was just another convert to Jesus of Nazareth.

There the story ends, as so many of these stories do end, on a missionary note. The man who is first sighted coming forth out of the dead world of the tombs, exceeding fierce so that none could approach him, naked and demented, is last seen going forth into the world of living men, childlike and peaceable, clothed, in his right mind, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of peace. Jesus has done that same thing for so many in every generation. "Come unto me, ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest". There is a price to pay, yes, but "take my yoke upon you and learn of me... for my yoke is easy and my burden is light, and ye shall find rest unto your souls".

"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.

THE COVENANT OF NOAH

God's promise
to the earth

The Covenant made between God Most High and the patriarch Noah immediately after the Flood is noteworthy as being the first of a series of covenants entered into by the Creator on the one hand and his creatures on the other. In a very important although restricted sense it is the basis upon which the three great Covenants of the Bible, the Abrahamic, the Law, and the New, have their standing. Without the carrying into effect of the provisions of the Noachic Covenant the other three would not have been possible of fulfilment. The ninth chapter of Genesis, which records the making of this covenant, is therefore a most important document for the study of doctrinal truth.

Take a glance, first, at the background of the narrative, the conditions existing at the time. The great Deluge, darkly prophesied by the saintly Enoch several centuries earlier and plainly preached by Noah for a hundred and twenty years, had come and gone. A wide expanse of the earth's surface—how wide we do not definitely know, but certainly including the whole of the country now known as Iraq—had been completely desolated by that mighty convulsion of Nature. In all the vast area affected, no animal life and no human life had survived, save those few who, drifting in the Ark, at the mercy of the waters, found themselves at length in the fastnesses of the mountains. They came out to a new world, a world from which, at least, the shadow of fear had flown. The *Nephilim*, those terrible oppressors of men, were no more. The angels of Lucifer, who had misused their celestial powers for rapine and cruelty and murder, had been overthrown in the spiritual sphere at the same time as Divine Judgment was executed on this material world, and were no more able to interfere with the normal lives of human beings upon earth. The catastrophe had effected a complete elimination of evil and evildoers from the earth, and restored the remaining human family to something like the position obtaining at the time of man's creation. But as Noah and his sons looked down from the mountain slopes upon the ruined and devastated earth which they must perforce rebuild and restore if life was to continue, the thought must have come to them; at what terrible cost had the deliverance been achieved! We in our day know little of conditions in antediluvian times; probably the population of the world was small in comparison to that of to-day. That a high order

of civilisation, of knowledge of the arts and sciences, existed we must conclude from the evidence that we have, scanty as it is. And all that, all the material achievement of something like two thousand years, had been swept away in one irrevocable act that blotted out all that men had created upon the earth as though it had never been. The thought must have come to Noah, musing upon the desolation before him; will it always be thus, and must God periodically blot out all earth's achievements and make a fresh start in order to preserve righteousness and truth from absolute extinction in the earth? And if so, what becomes of the promise, made to mother Eve and cherished through the centuries in the family of which Noah himself was an honoured descendant, that the seed of the woman was to bruise the serpent's head? What guarantee could there ever be, after this, that all the striving after righteousness and godliness, all the worship of an Enos or the walking with God of an Enoch, all the quiet faith of a Lamech or the militant evangelism of a Noah, would not be nullified and made of no avail in another general destruction which must from its very nature blot out the victories of righteousness in the world at the same time as the works of evil?

It was to answer questions such as these, and to commence the definition of God's gracious purposes, and the principles of his Plan, that the covenant with Noah was promulgated and concluded.

The covenant with Noah is like the Abrahamic Covenant which followed it a thousand years later; it is an unconditional covenant. It is an expression of something that God undertakes to do without attaching an "if" as in the case of the Law Covenant at Sinai. It was made with Noah as the chief opposite contracting party not on account of anything he undertook to do in the future, but on account of the faith and loyalty he had manifested in the past, just as in the case of Abraham. The great difference is that whereas the Abrahamic Covenant is the formal guarantee of God's intention to bring into being a "seed" and through that seed to bless all the families of the earth, the Noachic Covenant is the formal guarantee of his intention to preserve the earth and all its processes and amenities from any further destruction in order that it may remain to all perpetuity a suitable and fitting scene for the operations of that "seed" and a home for the blessed families of the earth. The

fulfilment of the Abrahamic Covenant requires a perpetually fertile and replete earth for those blessed under the Covenant. The Noachic Covenant guarantees such an everlasting earth. The Scriptural basis for the belief that the earth "abideth forever" is rooted in this ninth chapter of Genesis and this covenant with Noah. The surest argument we have against the mediæval idea that the earth is to be destroyed and burned up is founded upon it also; this too ought to weigh as a powerful consideration with those who, normally in general agreement with Millennial hopes, tend in consequence of recent developments in atomic science to think that, after all, there may be some kind of literal annihilation in store for the order of things on this earth, before the Kingdom of God shall come. Any such belief is really a retrogression to the "crack of doom" theology of the Dark Ages and is by no means a "walking in the light". The Covenant with Noah, rightly understood, defines for us the physical principles upon which "this present evil world" will pass into and become "the world to come, wherein dwelleth righteousness".

Now it was when Noah, after his safe deliverance from the destruction that had engulfed the world, built an altar and offered burnt offerings upon it that God enunciated and ratified the Covenant. It was a solemn and important occasion, for a new world was about to be born, a world that was to witness all the strange events associated with the Divine Plan of salvation, and the whole future of that world rested with those four men gathered around that altar.

"And God spake unto Noah and to his sons with him, saying

'And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you;

And with your seed after you;

And with every living creature that is with you;

Of the fowl,

Of the cattle

And of every beast of the earth with you;

From all that go out of the ark;

To every beast of the earth'."

(Gen. 9. 9-10).

Note especially that this covenant is made, not only with Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, and their children, but with the lower creation also. The great God and Creator of all things here pledged faith with the birds of the air, the cattle of the pasture land and the wild beasts of the jungle. It is a sobering thought; God has respect to, and regard for, the dumb animals which his own hand made and this covenant contains a promise to them. This is not the only place in the Bible where Divine care for

the animal life of the earth is declared. All Christians are familiar with the words of Jesus about the sparrows. *"Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?"* (Luke 12. 6). Jesus may have had this very covenant in mind when He spoke those words. Jonah, sitting sulkily under his booth outside Nineveh, heard the Lord say *"Should not I spare Nineveh, that great city wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons . . . AND ALSO MUCH CATTLE?"* (Jon. 4. 11). Surely God must have remembered his Covenant with Noah at that moment! Fourteen verses of the one hundred and fourth Psalm are given to a rhapsody on God's care for the animals and the fact of their dependence upon him for life. It is an important thing to notice, therefore, that this covenant is made between God and all earthly creatures, of whatsoever kind they be.

What was its purpose? The Covenant of Noah was established to record in formal fashion the Divine pledge that never again would the earth be destroyed. Man and beast alike might go about their respective commissions, to multiply and fill the earth, make use of its bounty, and fulfil their places in creation without fear that their activities would be brought to an untimely end by another universal catastrophe. Here are the terms of the pledge; they might well be said to constitute the charter of the Millennial earth. On the basis of these words rests the whole fabric of Millennial belief. *"I will not again curse (destroy) the ground any more for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more everything living, as I have done.*

"While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease.

"I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there be any more a flood to destroy the earth.

"This is . . . the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations. And I will . . . remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth" (Gen. 8. 21-22 and 9. 11-16).

In these present dark days, when the hearts of men are failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming upon the earth (Luke 21. 26), and the world's leading men are proclaiming their belief that atomic warfare will lead eventually to the extinction of the human race and the desolation and perhaps annihilation of the planet itself, it is comforting to remember God's Covenant with Noah. Here is

Divine assurance that such a dreadful climax to human history will never be reached; God will not allow his creation to be hopelessly marred. In his own due time and in the exercise of his supreme power He will intervene and restrain the forces of evil before they can destroy humanity and the earth. "Except those days be shortened" said Jesus, speaking of this same time "there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matt. 24. 22).

For a long time must Noah and his sons have knelt around that altar, listening to the voice of God. The terms of the covenant had been recited and the little group had accepted their commission, marked out for them in the Divine Plan, to be the progenitors of a new race of men out from whom should be taken, in after days, the future ministers of reconciliation between God and men. But that could not be until a later and greater covenant, the Abrahamic, had been made. The smoke of the sacrifice curled lazily upward, symbol of God's acceptance of the four men gathered around the offering, and as their eyes followed it up into the heavens, their gaze fell upon the sign!

In order that future generations should not be without witness of this first of all covenants, God appointed a sign, a token, of his faithfulness, a sign that should be observed in times of rain and give assurance. The graceful arch of the rainbow gleamed down upon them from heaven. "And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make . . . I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth . . . and the bow shall be in the cloud; I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant . . ." (Gen. 9. 12-16).

The impression made on the minds of those watchers must have been tremendous, for not only the Genesis record, but every mutilated and distorted tradition of the Flood, lingering among all peoples of the earth, gives prominence to the incident of the rainbow. As men divided and spread over the face of the earth, despite their increasing forgetfulness of God and apostasy from his ways, they took with them the fixed idea that the rainbow was the sign and assurance of security and of faithfulness. Without any doubt it has become the symbol of Divine faithfulness and deliverance in the Scriptures. "Thy faithfulness" says the Psalmist "shalt thou establish in the very heavens" (Psa. 89. 2). It is difficult to resist the conclusion that David was thinking of the rainbow and the covenant of Noah when he uttered that sentiment. Isaiah, later on, caught a word from the Lord, when under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he cried, a spokes-

man for God "As I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I will not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For . . . my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord." (Isa. 54. 9-10). In all such words there is an evident connection of thought between the covenant made with Noah and the much later fulfilment of Divine promises in the protection and salvation of his people.

Ezekiel, beholding the glory of God advancing to the deliverance of his people captive in Babylon, saw the sign of the rainbow again. "As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was . . . the likeness of the glory of the Lord." (Ezek. 1. 28). There was yet much tribulation for Israel to undergo, but protection was theirs, and deliverance in due time; and Ezekiel saw at the end the glorious vision of the restored Temple. Centuries later, John the Apostle, filling in New Testament days the position that Ezekiel occupied in the Old Testament, saw also the vision of God upon his throne, and of the Divine Plan about to move into action, as it were, for the overthrow of evil, and once again there was the rainbow, the sign (Rev. 4. 3). More gloriously still, at the last, the great Deliverer comes to earth finally to deliver the whole creation from the bondage of corruption and usher them into the glorious liberty of the children of God, and John sees him as One having a rainbow upon his head. (Rev. 10. 1). The mighty angel comes down from heaven, enshrouded with clouds, unseen of men, but the eye of faith perceives the rainbow and takes courage, knowing, as did Noah so many millenniums ago, that the word of God is sure and that what He has promised will surely come to pass. Says Ferrar Fenton, translating Gen. 9. 16, "the rainbow shall be in the cloud, and appear as an eternal record of the covenant between God and all animal life existing upon the earth."

The Covenant of Noah has no place in the arrangements whereby God is developing the instruments of his purpose for the reconciliation of man and the cancellation of sin. That was left to later times, the time of Abraham and his Covenant, and of Moses and his Covenant, and of Christ and the Covenant of which He is Mediator and under which mankind in the next Age will have their hearts of stone converted into hearts of flesh. But the Covenant with Noah was a necessary preliminary. It provided the necessary guarantee that this good earth, with all its wealth of mineral and vegetable and animal life, is to continue uninterruptedly upon its course into the perpetual ages of glory of the

infinite future. All who give themselves to God, whether in this Age under the Abrahamic Covenant or in the next Age under the New Covenant, can do so in full assurance that their whole-hearted devotion and consecration to the Divine

ways will not be lost, that having become reconciled to God they will go on into all eternity resting in the faithfulness of God and the integrity of his eternal purpose.

HOLINESS IN CHRIST

Until man, both as a creature and a sinner, learns how high God is above him, how different and distant he is from God, the holiness of God will have little real value or attraction. The thought almost looks like blasphemy, until we listen again: "He hath chosen us *in Christ* to be holy". **IN CHRIST:** The phrase denotes two moral facts—first the act of faith whereby a man lays hold of Christ; second the community of life with him contracted by means of this faith. But there is still another fact—the greatest of all—that it is by an act of Divine power that I am in Christ and am kept in him. In Christ I see what God's holiness is, and what my holiness is. In him both are one, and both are mine. In him I am holy; abiding and growing up in him, I can be holy in all manner of living, as God is holy.

And how can one who is longing to know Christ fully as his sanctification come to live out what God means and has provided for us "in Christ"? The first thing that must be remembered is that it is a thing of faith and not of feeling. Just when I feel most deeply that I am not holy and can do nothing to make myself holy, when I feel ashamed of myself, just then is the time to turn from self and very quietly say "I am in Christ". Here he is all around me. Like the air that surrounds me, like the light that shines on me, here is my Lord Jesus with me in his hidden but Divine and most real presence.

Of God are ye in Christ. It is not as if God placed and planted us in Christ, and left it to us now to maintain the union. NO, what God gives, He continues with a never-ceasing giving.

What manner of men ought we to be in all holy living? This is a question God has written down for us. Might it not help us if we were to write down the answer and say how holy we think we ought to be? The clearer and more distinct our view of what God wishes, of what He has made possible, of what in reality ought

to be, the more definite can our acts of confession, surrender and faith become.

Is there any dear child of God at all disposed to lose heart as he thinks of what manner of man he ought to be in all holy living, let me call him to take courage. Could God have devised anything more wonderful or beautiful for such sinful, impotent creatures? Just think, Christ, God's own Son, made to be sanctification for you. The mighty, loving, holy Christ, sanctified through suffering that He might have sympathy with you; given to make you holy. What more could you desire?

He will make me holy; my tempers and dispositions will be renewed, my heart and mind cleansed and sanctified, holiness will be my new nature, and it is not I, but Christ liveth in me. Do not trouble or weary too much to grasp this with the intellect. Just believe it, and look in simplicity and trust to Jesus to make it all right for you. To love Jesus *fervently*, and obey him *simply*, is the sure path to holiness, and the fullness of the Holy Spirit. If you find that the more you meditate and study, the less you can grasp this infinite holiness: that the more you at moments grasp it, the more you despair of a holiness so Divine, remember that such breaking down and such despair is just what the command was meant to work.

Heathen philosophy had not even the idea of using the word holiness as expressive of the moral character of its gods. In losing the light of the glory of God, we have lost the power of knowing what sin is. And now God's first work in drawing nigh to us is to make us feel that we may not draw nigh as we are; that there will have to be a very real and a very solemn putting off, and even giving up to death, of all that appears most lawful and most needful.

(Andrew Murray, late 19th Cent.)

We ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed. We should not wonder if in the be-

ginning we often failed in our endeavours but at last we should gain a habit, which will naturally produce its acts in us, without our care and to our exceeding great delight.

DILMUN—THE GOLDEN LAND

An archaeological survey

In the legends of the Middle East Dilmun was the golden land of ancient times where wrong doing, unhappiness and disease were unknown, and all men and all beasts lived together in harmony. Only a fable, said the experts, for no such land ever existed, and could be put on the same level as the Garden of Eden story of the Bible, which was sometimes said to have had its origin in this ancient Sumerian legend. Not surprising, maybe; the story described Dilmun as a glorious and holy land where the wild beasts were tame and gentle, living in peace with the cattle; men were kindly and just one to another, there was no violence in the city, neither was there sorrow or grief. The sun shone brilliantly always and the crops yielded abundantly. Quite a strong resemblance to the story of Eden so that it is quite understandably generally known as the "Sumerian Epic of Paradise".

The first hint that there might in fact have been such a land, even though not so Utopian as the old story suggested, came in 1914 when archaeologists from the University of Pennsylvania, working in the ancient ruins of Nippur (the "Calneh" of Gen. 10. 10) came across a tablet recounting an already well-known story, the journey of Gilgamesh king of Erech (Gen. 10. 10) to a far country where his ancestor Khasisadra—the man who survived the Flood in Sumerian legend, hence the same as Noah—dwelt with the gods, to obtain from him the secret of eternal life. This new tablet gave the name of this country as Dilmun. This was not taken very seriously for it was then widely held that this Gilgamesh was a mythical figure and no such man ever lived and the story was itself a fable. This complacent attitude did not last long for with the continual progress of research several other historical tablets found in various places were being deciphered and found to mention the same name as that of a country with which the Babylonians and Sumerians had trading relations. Thus Ur-Nanshe, king of Lagash about 26 centuries before Christ, recorded having received timber from abroad in ships of Dilmun. Then the renowned Sargon of Agade, three centuries later, claimed to have reached the "Lower Sea" and conquered Dilmun, thus giving a clue to its location, for the "Lower Sea" was the Sumerian name for the Persian Gulf. Another Sargon, king of Assyria, (the Sargon of Isa. 20.1) in the 8th cent. B.C. boasted that he

had extended his empire as far as the border of Dilmun, and that Uperi, king of Dilmun, whose abode was 30 "kasbu" away in the midst of the "sea of the rising sun" sent him gifts. The "kasbu" was the distance a man could march or a ship sail in one Babylonian hour, equal to two modern hours, some seven miles on land or ten by sea. Thirty "kasbu" by ship is 300 miles and this distance measured from the head of the Gulf reaches to the island of Barhein which was thus indicated as the site of the capital city or centre of Dilmun.

When, in 1930, Woolley was excavating Ur of the Chaldees (and found the clay deposit which was hailed at the time as evidence of the Biblical Flood) he unearthed business documents, invoices, bills of lading, and so on, of one Ea-nasir, import and export merchant, of some 2000 years before Christ, who carried on a thriving trade with Dilmun in all sorts of commodities, showing that Dilmun was a kind of halfway house for goods brought by ship from as far away as India and East Africa. The mythical land had become a material reality.

Finally, Gilgamesh turned out to have really lived. When historical records recounting events of his time, and cylinder seals bearing his name, emerged from the sands of Iraq it was no longer possible to doubt his identity. It is established that he was the fifth king of the first dynasty of Erech (Gen. 10. 10) and lived probably about 2600 B.C. This would make him more or less contemporary with Eber and Peleg of Gen. 10.

After all which, of course, it remained only to discover what evidence may still exist on site attesting the reality of this ancient land. For more than twenty years now Danish archaeologists have been working in Bahrein and have uncovered the remains of what must have been an extensive and influential civilisation extending also along the neighbouring Arabian coast. As a nation it was at its zenith in the time of Abraham but must have had its rise at least six hundred years earlier. This would correspond very well to the period when, if the Septuagint chronology is correct, the Sumerian descendants of Ham were penetrating eastern Arabia during their generation by generation expansion into Africa. That time is of course far removed from that of the Garden of Eden. Some remembrance of the story of Eden has been written into the legend of Dilmun. This nation was a nation of

traders and does not seem to have had any aggressive designs against its neighbours as was characteristic of so many of the near-by countries. In consequence it probably enjoyed prosperity and peace when other lands as often as not were being ravaged by invasion and war. Hence its reputation for freedom from the evils which normally afflict mankind and the development of the idea that it had its origin in the time of Eden—for the Sumerians preserved the recollection of that story and held that the site of the Garden was somewhere in the area now occupied by the Persian Gulf. But what is of more definite interest is the connection of Dilmun with the story of the Flood, a connection that was discovered in a very strange way.

Excavations in 1970 on the island of Failaka, two hundred miles north of Bahrein and off the coast of Kuwait, and probably on the northernmost border of the old land of Dilmun, revealed that what had been revered for centuries as the shrine of Al Khidr, a Mohammedan holy man, was in fact a Sumerian temple more than four thousand years old. Al Khidr was recognised as an Arabic corruption of the old name Khasisadra of Sumerian legend. Al Khidr in Moslem legend, as mentioned in the Koran, the Moslem Bible, like Khasisadra in the Sumerian stories, lived in Bahrein and possessed eternal life. In other words, worship in honour of the man who survived the Flood has been going on uninterruptedly on this little island for over four thousand years — almost back to the time of the historical Gilgamesh and within a thousand years of the Flood itself. That is in itself a striking testimony to the truth of the Flood story. It also

supports the Sumerian insistence that Noah (Khasisadra) after the Flood went to live in the south beyond the sea and was seen no more, and that the Ark was built, and landed, in the south of the country near the present Persian Gulf. The story of the Flood in Genesis gives no geographical indication save that the survivors came from the East and settled first in the plain and founded Babel (Babylon) but this does support the hypothesis that the first settlements were towards the south. Gen. 10 infers that the sons of Sala, four or five generations later, occupied the territory round the head of the Gulf. Nothing is said in the Bible as to the place of Noah's death but it would be quite possible and in keeping with what could be expected if, after the debacle over the Tower of Babel, Noah and some of his descendants migrated still farther south to find on this island of Bahrein a quiet spot where he could end his life away from the rebels who had apostasised from God. This, if a fact, would then easily give rise to the legends which perhaps a thousand years later could be attached to the person of Gilgamesh irrespective of whether or not his claimed journey to find his ancestor was fiction or fact.

The Gilgamesh legend is believed to date from about the 20th century B.C. Internal evidence in the first few chapters of Genesis supports the view that they were in writing at least not later than the 25th century. This suggests that the legends are based upon original records which are now extant in Genesis and not, as is so often claimed, the other way about. The discoveries at Dilmun have added greatly to the substantiation of that conclusion.

“SEEING THAT YE LOOK FOR SUCH THINGS” A dissertation on 2 Peter 3.14

When Peter penned these words he and his brethren were passing through a period of intense strain and testing. His nation was at war with the mighty Roman Empire, having been goaded thereto by the harsh tyrannical measures of the Roman Governor. The clash of battle was slowly drawing nearer to the City and Temple, which once had been accounted “holy unto the Lord”, and as the victorious troops advanced, desolation spread over the face of the land. Thousands of Jews had been slain, thousands had been sold into slavery, or sent to the galleys—a fate worse than death. Some local successes had keyed up the Jewish spirit to a state of fanatical daring, and many deeds of heroism, as well as of cruelty, were wrought by the bands of untrained and unseasoned men who ventured forth to contest the

day with the disciplined armies of Rome.

For a while events at Rome, such as the death of Nero, and the accession to the throne of two or three usurpers, prevented intense prosecution of the war. This tardiness of military effort encouraged the Jews to fiercer resistance, many interpreting it as an omen of their victory. The growth of this fanatical combative spirit made life much harder for the Christians. On account of obeying their Master's teachings, no Christian could join the ranks of the Jewish armies, nor even lend support to the warlike spirit which swept over the nation. Consequently, they were stigmatised as shirkers—traitors to the national cause, and hated and persecuted the more on that account.

The Christian's lot in those days was a heavy one. Persecuted by Rome and its provincial governors, to the lion, the sword and the flame; hated, harassed and hunted to the death by their own kinsmen, with the ravages of war and desolation daily growing sharper and more widespread, it is not to be wondered at that these despised followers of a hated cause came to think that the whole realm of Nature was closing in upon them, and that the end of the world was near. Peter himself, in a previous letter, had given vent to an almost identical expression, when he assured his scattered brethren that "*the end of all things is at hand*" (1 Pet. 4.7). That this was a prevailing idea amongst the brethren is apparent also by the works of John (1 John 2, 18) "*little children, it is a last hour*" (not the last time, as A.V.), and also of James, "*... the coming of the Lord draweth nigh... behold, the Judge standeth at the door*" (Jas. 5. 8-9).

These words of John and James are quoted to show that they held thoughts similar to Peter's, and that it was a current understanding among them all, Apostles and brethren alike. They were not at fault in drawing such conclusions from the events and signs of their day, for who among them could avoid the conviction that if Judea was overtaken by destruction, the whole world must suffer destruction too. To their understanding the world was allowed to exist only because of Judea's position in it, and if Judea fell, which among the nations could stand? They lived and worked and wrote their letters, keenly alive to a sense of impending doom — of a world-order about to crash, of a visitation in terrible majesty of the retributive hand of God. But they had a better side to the story as well. A new heaven and earth was destined to follow the fall of this present world, one in which righteousness would dwell, and men would learn to live in peace and concord in harmony with the Will of God. A King should reign in righteousness, and of his Kingdom there should be no end.

These things, too, were according to the common understanding of the Church—the Apostles and the brethren, but they had to look through the pall of darkness that everywhere lay around into the dim future to envisage that better day. How far the golden future lay ahead on the stream of time no one on earth knew. As it was, the desirable day lay farther on in the mists of tomorrow, while the pall of darkness and gloom, and the inhumanities of their kin, filled the whole round of experience for to-day. Faith had to pierce the gloom that pressed close on every hand, and hope could only soar through the leaden clouds where love was hot and endurance strong.

The Apostles did not hide from the brethren the risks and dangers of their day—but spake out fully and with emphasis about the tragic events transpiring, and more fearful consequences impending. But they said, with Peter, "*seeing that ye know these things*", look forward hopefully, never doubting that the Kingdom of God will come, and that his Will shall be done in all the earth, even though today the world is rocking and shaking to its destruction. One kingdom only was destined to withstand the earthquake shocks, and that was the Kingdom of God—the kingdom of their own hopes and expectations, in whose honours and blessings they knew they would participate. Men can stand mid the rending convulsions which shatter nations and kingdoms only when they know God reigns above the earthquake and the storm, and that his hand can direct and, at need, restrain the furies of the depraved human heart.

So it was that these men of God could stand unshaken and undismayed even though the institutions of their fathers, having withstood the shocks of time almost unchanged for one and a half thousand years, were, at last, in dissolution before their eyes. What mattered though the heritage of centuries disappeared if God, and the Word of God, continued unchanged and unchangeable? A stalwart faith, deep-rooted and robust, the product of the great Husbandman's prunings and attentions, could look out on the gathering storm, and face even the crashes of doom, without wincing. And with their own feet firmly planted on the Rock of Ages, the Apostles reached out to help their weaker brethren also to plant their feet firm on the solid rock.

But even when men know these things, it is always essential that remembrance should be stirred from time to time. Not only are we handicapped by faulty memories, but courage and resolution tend to evaporate and wilt under the strain. That calls for the re-bracing of firm intention, the re-fortification of strong determination, and the quickening of faith and trust in the power of God. Peter said: "... *I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them and be established in present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle to stir you up by putting you in remembrance.*" Peter thought it was "meet" to say, amid the gathering storm, "Take courage, my brethren, be strong in the Lord. Commit your way unto him". And Peter was not debarred by a sense of too much originality from repeating himself again, and yet again, if only their pure minds could be stirred up thereby.

To-day another cycle of God's Times and

Seasons is almost run. Another conjunction of the Ages has come with all the stress and strain that these transition epochs bring. Another hour of destiny is about to strike, and indicate to a seething world that another day—man's day—is nearly done. Again, but this time on a larger scale, the hand of God is lying heavy on the race, and the whole world is about to feel its chastening power. The institutions of men, built by human hands, and run according to human wisdom, are reeling and tottering beneath its blows. Twice within one generation the nations have bathed their swords in each other's blood, and made stricken hearts to mourn. Multitudes of widowed and fatherless outcasts have groaned and still groan out their sorrow to the skies—and not yet is the end of the shambles come. The inventive power of man has been harnessed to destruction's chariots, and a thousand dreadful weapons have been the result. The man of science, with all the skill and technique of the laboratory, has forged a "great sword", and thereby the dread carnage of war has been increased manifold. Never before, since man began to war, has such terrible destruction been within his ruthless grasp. Amid all the din hymns of hate are rising to the skies—the hearts of men keeping step with their destructive implements. "Global war" and "total war" today crown the follies of nineteen centuries, while scorched earth and total ruin mark the ebb and flow of the un-governed tidal waves of war. From pole to pole the surging current engulfs all nations in its resistless sweep; from the meridian where the day is born in full circumference, to where the same day dies, every race and people are caught up in the swirl of the overflowing flood — and there is no escape!

Is it true that there is no escape from this universal deluge? Colossal and wide-spread though this stranglehold of death appears to be, it is not the biggest thing in the affairs of men. The Plan of God, working onward in its resistless sweep towards the still far-off Divine Event, is greater far, and much more comprehensive in its grip upon the universal state of things. Inasmuch as God is incomparably great above man, and heaven is immeasurably high above the earth, so is the Plan of God transcendent in its magnitude above all the works of men, be they bad or good. This is the bedrock of the Christian's comfort in these tumultuous days. If he can but rise to the height of his calling to become an associate of Christ Jesus in the honours and dignities He had so rightly won, then he can stand among the rending kingdoms, and, amid mad passion's tempest blast, be at peace in God, and know that his way is best.

It is the Christian's privilege to know that the voice of the Living God will begin to speak again through the words of the ancient prophecies, their accents of warning and encouragement becoming supercharged with living vital power—with the Spirit of Almighty God. Then they that wait on the Lord will be able to place the events of these tumultuous days in their right relationship to all the long train of inter-related events which belong to this transitional period.

What can we say of these things today? The strain of life is heavier and more exacting, fears for the safety of home and loved ones creep into every heart, the long-drawn unceasing tension frays the nerves and disturbs the mind. Even at best, humanity cannot suppress, at times, the sign of weariness, nor check the unspoken wish that these disturbing happenings were at an end. And when, above all which we ourselves experience, come the heart-rending stories of those who have lost all they possessed, and have neither food nor work nor comfort — unwilling victims of the world's dread spasm of inhumanity—then how can we suppress the pent-up cry, "How long, O Lord, how long ere Thy Kingdom come to terminate this night of sin and shame"?

It is at such times that the child of God calls to mind Whose he is, and Whom he serves, and that the hand that shapes his life does rule the world. He can remember that this spell of madness is but a short interlude upon the stream of time, and that the whole period of the reign of sin and death is but an episode in its relation to that mighty Plan which designs to make the earth (yea, and the things of heaven as well) into one brotherhood, submissive to the throne of Christ and God. Let him recall that this brotherhood is the one really "big thing" of measured time, and of an unmeasured eternity to come. Every willing living soul of man, and every radiant angel of God, with all the wealth of earth and sea and sky, for all the unending ages yet to be, will be the constituent elements of that great fraternity into which neither sin, nor sorrow, nor death will ever intrude again.

When the long-drawn tedious days, or the overweight of strain, tends to stifle love, or crush hope, deaden faith, call to mind that the promise is sure to those that endure to the end. "We count them happy that endure" "He that endureth to the end shall be saved".

"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for these things, give diligence that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless in his sight . . . beware lest . . . ye fall from your own steadfastness . . . but grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ".

A FEAST OF WINES

"Come, buy wine . . . without money and without price" (Isa. 55.1).

Neither the title nor the text would have much appeal for a temperance worker fighting the evils of strong drink, yet the words come with assurance and the ringing voice of invitation through one of God's most eloquent mouthpieces. Teachers and reformers have used the things about them common to everyday life to convey to people the messages of God concerning their personal or national life.

Wine is primarily an Oriental drink. From the days of Noah to the Revelation given to John, the books of the Bible are plentifully sprinkled with references to the vineyard, the gathering of the grape harvest, the treading of the wine press, the drinking of the cup filled with its varying contents to gladden the heart of man, to sadden or madly intoxicate the misguided and weak who drink to excess.

The land of Palestine was rich in vineyards. They grew on the terraced hills and were cultivated with much care and skill. Jacob's blessing on Judah was of an abundance of vines, choice vines so full of juice that he could, if he had wished, wash his garments in their wine (Gen. 49. 11). The words seem an oblique forecast of that one whom Isaiah saw coming from Edom and Bozrah, red in his apparel, his garments like those who tread the winepress (Isa. 63. 1-3). One cluster of the grapes of Eschol was brought to Joshua by the two spies, hung on a pole carried between them as a specimen of what the promised land could produce. To dwell under their own vine was a dream of domestic bliss, a vision of a future prosperity for everyman. The poor did not own vineyards but to those rich enough to build their own houses the vineyard was as essential as a garden is today to the average householder. The vine is a clinging plant originally grown along the ground, later trained on poles, in some instances developed into trees with long sturdy branches from which the grape clusters hung thickly. Severe pruning and rich feeding was the secret of successful vine growing, from which many valuable lessons have been drawn. In the highly picturesque language of the Scriptures the vine illustrates truths on the state of man and society which Jesus, the supreme teacher, was quick to use to further portray his own mission to mankind and his close relationship to his followers. Perhaps no plant has lent itself so readily to metaphor as the vine. Fruitful,

painfully pruned, walled or hedged for protection; neglected, wildly entangled, pillaged, trodden down by wild boars, the vineyard presents a clear picture of the varying states of life, singly or as a whole. The keeper of the vineyard was constantly caring, always on the watch, for the slightest intrusion of the enemy, "the little foxes which spoil the vines". Broken down defences let in larger foes which trampled down and destroyed a promising crop.

Israel was portrayed as such a vineyard, planted by God, whose early promise and fruitfulness was laid waste by wild beasts and casual passers-by, who plucked at the neglected, broken-down vines with contempt and indifference. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" wrote the Psalmist, but that nation is in poor shape spiritually and morally which has once known that blessedness and allowed it to be trodden down, treated with derision, losing its fruitfulness and beauty because it neglected to keep its defences in order. When men of faith go out other things come in, bringing their evils with them. The fruitful vine then deteriorates into a strange vine whose fruit is sour, whose dregs are bitter, of no possible use to the welfare of man. In personal life the disorder is no less vivid. The "Song of Songs" mentions one who was so busy looking after the interests of others she neglected to keep her own in order. "They made me the keeper of the vineyards but my own vineyard have I not kept."

The busy character, full of good works, always on the run from one activity to another, forgetful of the maxim that "charity begins at home", too full of affairs for a little quiet reflection, for silent meditation or a little honest self-scrutiny, may be an admirable worker for good causes but a personal failure in private life. Slackness and carelessness in thoughts and words are the small holes in the hedges through which come the nibbling little foxes and later on the boars, the trampers-down of faith and truth, then the passers-by who casually snap the fingers at a profession whose practise is as undersized and poor as the fruit of a neglected vine. Writing to the Corinthians St. Paul confessed to such a danger in himself, lest having worked and travelled and suffered and preached, he should become a castaway through neglect and cultivation in himself of the fruits of the spirit.

Not only Israel, or the church drawn out of all nations, have been the vineyard of God, but in a

larger sense the earth and the race of man which answers the same description. In each case the owner of the vineyard is portrayed as a careful husbandman who has planned and planted, provided the watch tower and the wine press, expecting fruit in due season from those to whom he has leased the work of cultivation. But those tenants or workpeople refuse the owner his just dues. Arrogantly regarding the property as their own they beat down all demands and opposition to their own claims. While God claims Israel, the church, and the earth, as the work of his hands, there has been a strong move to deny that claim, to get on without him, to take the fruit and the credit as their own just dues and accomplishments, a situation for which there is only one humiliating remedy, a severe rebuke by the lawful owner.

The vat and the winepress are essential implements to the vine grower, for the grapes are not grown merely to look luxuriously tempting to the eye and taste, but to be crushed together into a common pool in which all their identity is lost in bringing vigour and satisfaction to those who partake in moderation of the life-giving fluid, for as such it was regarded by the ancients. Sweet wine was part of the priestly offering on both pagan and holy altars, designated by connoisseurs as "the nectar of the gods". Its medicinal values were recognised by that "Hebrew of the Hebrews" who advised his young friend Timothy to "take a little wine for thy stomach's sake".

Like every good thing provided for the pleasure and use of man it has been grossly abused. From first to last its intoxicating effects have reduced the over indulgent to a state of stuttering, reeling helplessness, lowering to human dignity. If metaphorical wine be the social, religious and political doctrines of nations by which they too have become drunken from time to time by the potency of strong and strange delusions, it cannot be surprising to find them reeling to and fro in a perilous state of collapse. Under such symbols of a brimming wine-cup, vats overflowing with wickedness, grapes of wrath trodden by anger in a mighty press, of inhabitants drunk on the heady wine of lawlessness, a picture is vividly drawn of a world hopelessly mad, out of control and in urgent need of attention. Jesus described himself as the True Vine, so implying a false vine, a counterfeit plant whose fruits were as deadly as his own was life-giving, a plant which like the tares sown by the enemy hand would have to be dealt with in due time and its evil fruits destroyed.

The juice of the grape was originally extracted by crushing between two stones, the resultant

liquid being the sweet or best of the wine, while the rest was trodden by the feet, the gushing liquid later fermented for more general use. Thus there was and still remain in some old vineyards both the press and the vat for first and second grade wines, even third and fourth grades, sour and unrefined, the daily drink of the poor in purse. Often the treads of the grapes were dyed to the thighs with the rich juice, their garments soaked and splashed as they trod with strength and shouts of triumph the glistening loads cut and carted from the sunny terraces to their ultimate destiny. It is of such scenes that Isaiah writes when he asks "Who is this that comes with dyed garments? Why art thou red in thine apparel and thy garments like him that treads the wine vat?" to which comes the ominous answer "I have trodden the winepress alone. I will trample them in mine anger. I will stain all my raiment." The grapes of wrath and the Divine trampling of the winepress have passed into classical literature as that action which may be seen or expected when righteous indignation moves against deliberate wickedness in a thorough stamping out of evils which slander his Holy Name, which mock all that is good, just and virtuous, which destroys life without mercy or regret, even the beauty of the earth itself by a ruthless exploitation of its treasures. It is an ever-present warning to the waywardness of man, a statement of fact that the evil fruits of the world must at some time be sickled and cast into the winepress to meet their inevitable end at the hands and under the feet of Divine justice.

There are other less forceful pictures in which the domestic element is invoked for the encouragement of those struggling with the ups and downs of life, endeavouring to accept philosophically its iniquities, and find some pleasure in the mixed cup of their own lot. They have something to sing about as those did who cheerfully left their homes to lodge in tents in the vineyards during the time of the grape harvest. Whatever their share of the spoils or their pay for a day's labour, they rejoiced together as they piled up the baskets or carried them shoulder high to the vat to be flung at last between the great presses or trodden underfoot to emerge as good wine to gladden the heart of the husbandman or add sparkle to some local feast.

Such a feast was the marriage at Cana where Jesus was an invited guest. Before it ended the wine ran out and Mary his mother told him of the dilemma of their host. The miraculous making of wine without grapes has delighted and taxed the imagination of all familiar with the story, the crux of which seems to have been in keeping the good wine to the last. It can hardly

be thought likely that Jesus would employ his wonderworking power merely to save the face of an embarrassed neighbour. This, his first of miracles, must have had some deeper significance; the words of the governor of the feast to whom the first cup of the new wine was offered seem to provide the purpose. No doubt he was a connoisseur of vintages. It is easy to see him passing the cup before his nose, sniffing the fine aroma, delicately tasting the liquid before allowing it to circulate among the guests. His wonder was such he called the bridegroom whom he thought responsible for this change-about in festal hospitality. Most men gave the good wine at the beginning, getting down to the sour and the second rate when all else was gone but this unusual man had kept his good wine until the end.

Was there in this incident a hint to the race of man that He himself was the bridegroom who would at some future date serve the good wine of abundant life to those who had known only the bitter draught of existence? Some have come to the board of life to be offered its best first, riches, titles, high positions, opportunities above and beyond the less fortunate, yet none have escaped the bitter dregs of disappointment, suffering and death. On a broader scale mankind down the centuries has received the wine of life in varying quality and measure. Both people and nations have received blessings, riches, successes and advancement blended with the tragedies, disaster and defeats common to man. The best that human wisdom and skill can provide have been placed upon the universal board. For some the best of the sweet wine, for others second best, for yet others the sour dregs of the dispossessed, the outsiders who perforce take the lowest place at the banquet, the poor bedraggled haunters of the byways and the hedges.

But the Lord of the feast with unerring wisdom and kindness has reserved the best wine to the last. When men are at their wits end and provisions have run out then the good wine of the Kingdom will be dispensed without regard to status to "whosoever will". With joy will they drink of the sparkling cup of peace and happiness, blessings which only God can provide. The good wine, abundant and rich, will be served with true appreciation when the "feast of wines on the lees well refined" has been made and offered to all people.

Wine on the lees is one without dregs, a sweet, robust vintage notable for richness of colour, aroma and flavour. Such a wine of life has never yet been the portion of mankind. All have tasted tears, partings, pain and bewilderment. Life is God's gift. Free of charge, free of dregs, full of

vigour, it will be there for the taking when the kingly Bridegroom makes his feast and bids his guests to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. When Jesus took the cup and blessed and shared it with his disciples, making them one with himself in spirit, in service, in aim and hope, He said; "I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine until that day that I drink it new in the Kingdom of God" (Mark 14. 25).

What did He mean by the new wine? He was then shortly to drink of the cup of suffering and death of which the literal cup had been partly a symbol. The new wine in the new Kingdom could only mean a brimming cup of new life, of blessings of a new nature which would be to all people; a full realisation of the glad tidings of great joy of which the angels sang at Bethlehem. When He drank the full cup of the world's sorrows and sufferings, He tasted death for every man. Nothing was spared him of its misery. The sins, the treacheries, the humiliations of mankind went into that cup which he drained to its last bitter dregs. By so doing He substituted the cup of woe by the cup of blessings which is to run over for those members of the human race who are ready enough, intelligent enough, to discern its value, and eager enough to partake of its sparkling vigour.

The new wine of the Kingdom will be a rare vintage in which even the elect, those called and chosen out of every race for a superior position in that Kingdom, will drink at the feast with the Lord of Life. During the twenty centuries of the Gospel age theirs has been a mixed cup. They have shared with their Lord the cup of humiliation and sorrow, tintured with the joys of redemption and salvation: with hope in an everlasting future for themselves and mankind in general. But then it will be for them a cup of immortal drink, of dregless vintage, brimming with all the joys of realisation which will far outstrip anticipation or the finest imagination, as it is written, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him." (I. Cor. 2.9).

At present few love God because they do not know him. They cannot discern him through the thick screens of ignorance, fear and superstition. They cannot get through the barriers of confusion, of mixed doctrines and the babel of beliefs, all shouting their wares in the market place of society and system. They cannot see him, high and lifted up, worthy of worship and trust, through the heavy veils of disaster and death which hide great spiritual truths from the eyes of natural man. But a day approaches when these veils will be removed from them, when

"the Lord of Hosts will destroy the covering cast over all people and the veil that is spread over all nations" (Isa. 25.7). It coincides with the feast of fat things, the feast of wines. When the shrouds are removed the feast is spread to be followed by heartfelt appreciation and universal rejoicing. "Lo, this is our God. We have waited for him!" Israel has waited, the church has waited, mankind has waited through long centuries of tyranny, deprivation, disappointment, suffering and death but at last the curtain is lifted, the banquet is ready, the invitation is issued and the time has come to swallow up death, to dry the tears, to end the miseries, to begin the songs of praise and joy.

Jesus taught the futility of putting new wine into old bottles. In the East the wine bottle was often the skin of a goat. To put a new vintage into a worn out skin was an explosive, wasteful experience. The same applies in a metaphorical sense. There have been many attempts to put new ideas into old institutions, to infuse new life into dying causes, to pour a new spirit into an old system but it is a vain employment. What is old and effete cracks and breaks down under the force of new ideas too strong for its waning fabric. The new wine needs the new bottle, the new heavens and the new earth, for the righteousness and justice of God cannot mix with the violent corruptions of this world.

Human philosophies cannot purge the world of its sins, nor can science heal its diseases or save it from death. New ideas strain the old systems until at last they fall apart beyond use or repair. Individuals as well as nations may lament their lack of power to live as they ought. The solution is the same for all, a shedding of

the old ways, the old habits, the old beliefs, the old selves. The endeavours of medical men to give the ailing a new heart is only a temporary, ineffective expedient. Human hearts for the most part are cynical, selfish and impure. They are not the sort to be gladdened by the new wine of the Kingdom. There is little taste for all that is just, wholesome, peaceful and lovely. The relish for righteousness, true goodness, has been blunted by strange brews which disorder the whole system. Only a new heart, a new mind, will thirst after and enjoy the new wine, and that also is the free gift of God. Cleansed from the evils which defile the earth, from the idols of gain and pleasure with which men and women have substituted the love of God, a new heart will come as a generous bonus.

"A new heart will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you." (Ezek. 36.26).

"All things new" is God's unceasing law and universal programme. Old things pass away. All things become new. New wine without money and without price means new life in a new world; new conditions, a new order in a rejuvenated earth, a feast of such blessing it will carry the willing feet of mankind to the very throne of God. Intoxicated with joy, the songs of the revellers will roll on through time and space until all are joined in eternal love.

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude and as the voice of many waters and as the voice of many thunderings saying;

Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Let us be glad and rejoice and give honour to Him.

Age honoured

With every year that passes I am growing older. Teach me, therefore, the art of growing old gracefully.

Let me not imagine that my years have instilled into me all the wisdom of the ages, and that I know all there is to know on every subject.

Let me not, therefore, say something on every subject on every occasion.

Save me from the impulse of telling other people how to run their lives.

Keep me from being moody, intolerant, and dictatorial.

Keep my mind clear. Let me keep my powers of concentration and not to waste time in the circumlocutory repetition of meaningless details.

Give me the sense to keep my increasing catalogue of aches and pains to myself, even though

the joy of advertising them becomes greater with every year.

Give me the grace to listen to descriptions of the aches and pains of others with patience—if not exactly, with joy.

Teach me the lesson that it is possible that I may, at times, be mistaken.

Keep my disposition sweet. Do not allow my advancing years to turn me sour.

Let me use my huge store of accumulated wisdom wisely and not dispense it too lavishly, for, Lord, I wish to have a few friends left at the end of my days.

Let me see unexpected good things in people, and give me the grace to tell them so.

(Selected)

HABAKKUK — PROPHET OF FAITH

An exposition of the
Book of Habakkuk

5. Let God Arise

God came from Teman! We left Habakkuk dazzled by the glory of the vision; God rising up to the deliverance of his people in a blaze of light which eclipsed all other light. *"His glory covered the heavens . . . his brightness was as the light: he had horns coming out of his hand, and there was the hiding of his power."* (ch. 3. 3-4). That last phrase is badly translated; the meaning is that of rays of light streaming from his hands as though held in a clenched fist, and his hidden power "veiled" as though concealed in that hand ready to be let loose upon the earth in judgment. Certain mythological gods have been depicted in ancient sculptures holding flashing lightnings in their hands in the same fashion; here the thunderbolts of Jehovah are about to be rained down upon a world ripe for judgment. Since in this third chapter of Habakkuk's prophecy we have been carried forward to the last great day of this present world, the day when God stands up to intervene in human affairs once more and bring in his Kingdom of everlasting righteousness, this judgment is the one that is to terminate this day and age in which we live, a judgment the beginnings of which we already see in our generation, a judgment which is none the less of God though it be the direct fruit of men's own selfishness and wickedness leading man to the fearful impasse which at this present time confronts him.

"Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet" (vs. 5).

This is the first hint of the gathering storm. In front of the advancing Lord go pestilence and disease, bred by man and taking their revenge upon man, decimating the hosts who would oppose the onward progress of God's Plan. Here is a fit symbol of war, the great desolator of mankind, war which breeds pestilence and throws fire upon earth.

And now it is as though the Most High, arising to "shake terribly the earth", has paused for a moment to take stock of the position. *"He stood, and measured* (i.e. took the measure of) *the earth. He beheld, and drove asunder the nations, and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow* (before him) *whose ways are everlasting"*. This is not the coming forth of God to actual judgment. It is preparation for that judgment, and as such corresponds very well to this Twentieth Century when the nations struggle in a morass of tumult and strife, war and revolution, famine and disease, distress

and disaster which is effecting the scattering of the symbolic mountains, the kingdoms of this world, and the driving asunder of the nations. God has not yet come forth in judgment. He is yet in the day of his preparation, calling the nations to Armageddon and gathering them into the valley of threshing. *"Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles,"* He commands, *"prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near . . . let the weak say, 'I am strong'. Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye nations, and gather yourselves together round about: thither the Lord will bring down thy mighty ones . . ."* (Joel 3. 9-14). This is how God measures the earth, drives asunder the nations, scatters the everlasting mountains, and brings low the perpetual hills. We in our lifetime are seeing this very thing come to pass; to-day this gathering of the nations to judgment seems to be all but completed and the stage set for the final act in the drama.

Men sense that fact, and they are afraid, just as afraid as were the inhabitants of Arabia and Canaan when they beheld the advancing hosts of the Most High coming out of the desert with the Shekinah glory cloud at their head. Habakkuk knew of their fear, and described it in moving words. *"I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction, and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble."* (vs. 7). "Upon the earth" said Jesus there will be "distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking to that which is coming upon the earth." (Luke 21. 26). The time in which we live is such a time of fear, and the fear is well founded, for the sword of the Lord hangs in the sky above this doomed social order. How long before it descends, as Isaiah said it would descend, "upon the people of my curse, to judgment" (Isa. 34. 5)?

The evidence of Divine displeasure with the earth increased as Habakkuk continued to behold the vision. He broke off his account for a moment to ask two questions—rhetorical questions. *"Was the Lord displeased against the river?"* he asks *"was thine anger against the rivers? Was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses, and thy chariots are salvation?"* In the Exodus story, the Red Sea and the river Jordan were barriers to the onward progress of God's people into their inheritance. The Red Sea was driven back, and the Jordan was restrained from flowing, to give the people

free passage. In our day there are symbolic rivers and a symbolic sea which alike oppose the onward progress of the Divine Plan and they too will experience the Divine displeasure. The river symbolises human autocracy and the sea human democracy, both playing a prominent part in the affairs of nations to-day but both destined to give way before the triumphant march of the King of Kings. That the sea symbolises "the people" in prophetic lore, is demonstrated by Isa. 17. 12-13 "*Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing of mighty waters. The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters, but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like thistledown before the whirlwind*". Of the great host that is to be raised up from the north parts to invade the land of Israel at the end of the Age it is said "their voice roareth like the sea" (Jer. 6. 23) an indication that their savage onslaught has behind it the irresistible force associated with a mighty overwhelming flood of waters sweeping over the land and carrying away everything in its course. "*In that day*" says Isaiah, speaking of this same great host that will invade the Holy Land at the end "*they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea*". (Isa. 5. 30). The picture is that of a tumultuous host of people recognising no authority save that which proceeds from their association together; the roaring is the roaring of "mob rule", of government by the masses, of democratic government without God; and God is against it. "*Was thine anger against the sea?*" asks Habakkuk. God's anger at the time of the end will most assuredly be against the sea.

And the rivers? The great rivers of the Bible—the Nile in Egypt, the Euphrates in Babylonia and the Tigris in Assyria—became the centre of each nation's life and the source from which each drew wealth and sustenance. To the river the nation owed everything, fertility of land, food, facilities for trade; all came from the river. So "the river" very easily becomes a symbol of kingly power and rule, contrasting with the sea, general or mob rule. Ezekiel alludes to this, identifying Pharaoh king of Egypt with the river Nile "*Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said "My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself"*". (Ezek. 29. 3). Jeremiah, seeking for a simile to describe the coming of Pharaoh-Necho, king of Egypt to do battle with the Babylonians at Carchemish, cried "*Who is this that cometh up as a flood, whose waters are moved as the rivers? Egypt riseth up*

like a flood, and his waters are moved like the rivers;" (Jer. 46. 7-8). Just as the sea pictures or symbolises the restless masses of humanity seeking to evolve their own system of government, so do the rivers symbolise the more autocratic rule of kings and princes, of military powers and commercial interests; and the anger of the Lord is against them all. God comes forth upon his horses, to war—and the chariots of salvation are following him.

What are these chariots? They are the forces of heaven, coming forth to bring Millennial blessings to mankind immediately the judgment is ended. "*The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.*" (Psa. 68. 11). Elisha's servant was permitted, for an instant, to see the chariots of God in the mountains, sent to defend the prophet of God (2 Kings 6. 17). Daniel saw the angelic messengers around the throne in his great vision of the inauguration of the Kingdom (Dan. 7. 10), and John the Revelator, seeing something of the same in his vision, said of the heavenly ones with the returning Lord "the armies which are in heaven followed him" (Rev. 19. 14).

The next verse marks the completion of God's day of preparation. "*Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word—SELAH.*" (vs. 9). This is a poor translation and the meaning is obscure. The word for "tribes" also means an instrument of chastisement, and it is thought that the most likely rendering of the passage is "*Thy bow shall be bared, even the chastisements sworn by thy word*". Now if that is the true rendering—and it is certainly more intelligible and more closely connected with the context than is the A.V. rendering—we have a picture, from verse 4 to verse 8, of the "day of his preparation", the gathering of the forces that are to play their part in the closing scenes of this "battle of the great day of God Almighty" (Rev. 16. 14) and then, in verse 9, all things being ready, God, as a great warrior, as it were, draws back his bow and lets loose the winged shaft that will bring judgment, swift and decisive, upon the forces that have arrayed themselves in determined opposition to his incoming Kingdom.

This conception of the swift descent of judgment upon the evil host is illustrated by allusions in other parts of the Scriptures. "*For my sword shall be bathed in heaven*" says God through the prophet Isaiah, "*behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment*" (Isa. 34.5). The prophetic song of Moses recorded in Deut. 32 has a similar strain when the Lord promises that at the end of time He will remember the

sorrows of his ancient people and deliver them, inflicting judgment upon their enemies. "For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment . . . I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh . . ." (Deut. 32. 40-42). "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed" says the Psalmist, but "he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure." (Psa. 2. 2-5). Perhaps the most biting, burning, moving words of all are those of Jeremiah, directed, it is true, to the Philistines of his own day and having no prophetic application, but in their impassioned eloquence a fitting commentary on what has already been said. "O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still. How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given it a charge against Ashkelon, and against the seashore? There hath he appointed it?" (Jer. 47. 6-7). How can it be quiet, indeed, when all the sin and iniquity of the long millenniums of human history has filled up the measure of human guilt and the earth cries to high heaven for judgment? How can it be quiet, when the outraged holiness of God will brook no further delay, and the seventh angel is raising his trumpet to sound (Rev. 11. 15), and the nations are angry, and the time of judgment is come, and of reward to the faithful saints and prophets, and of destruction to the corrupters of the earth? (Rev. 11. 18). "He gathered them together" says the Revelator "to a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon". (Rev. 16. 16). "After many days" says Ezekiel, addressing this

same great evil host "thou shalt be ordered forward" (Ezek. 38.8).

Thus the stage is set; the world in general, exhausted from its experiences in the "Day of His Preparation", passively beholding the welding of every power for evil in the world into one great striking force, gathering and setting itself in array, against the Prince of Peace and all that is inherent in truth and righteousness; and on the other side, unseen and unknown to men, the raising of that sword of the Lord, that terrific spiritual power which is to descend and in one swift blow annihilate for ever the greatest confederation of evil forces the world will have ever known. Ezekiel and Zechariah have vied with each other in finding words in which fitly to describe the overwhelming disaster which will descend from the heavens upon those who have dared to fight against God.

And at this point the prophet, overawed by the solemnity of the situation, breathes a reverent "Selah". In the Temple service there was a pause, a hush, as for a full minute the worshippers contemplated that gleaming sword upraised in the heavens, poised that in a moment it might strike down.

Just so, it may be, shall Christian workers in a day yet future realise, as did Habakkuk, that the "gathering to Armageddon" is complete, the armies in position, the "land of unwalled villages" encompassed on every side, and wait with bated breath for that fearful maelstrom of Divine judgment which will demonstrate to all men without possibility of doubt that "verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth".

(To be continued)

If we are indeed building upon that Rock which is Christ, there can be no disappointment, no disillusionment, no discouragement, for we shall be in very truth continually beholding, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, and are being changed into the same image, not because our idols do not have feet of clay, but because of that very fact. Not because there is nothing in our life that saddens and wearies us, but because by means of these very things we are inspired to lay hold the more tenaciously to that which entereth as an anchor, within the Veil.

The simplicity of the Gospel message is mirrored by the simplicity of the words in which it is conveyed to us. That is why the Bible has a message for all, learned and unlearned alike. Books written to explain the Bible are often far more difficult to understand than the Book they profess to explain. And that is true of many sermons and addresses and expositions given from the pulpit and platform. In all our service and ministry let us seek for simplicity of expression, for that will appeal to the greatest number and effect the greatest good.

TREASURE IN HEAVEN

An
Exhortation

"Lay not up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where moth and rust do not corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal." (Matt. 6. 19-21).

This laying up of treasure is for a purpose. It is not just an idle storing up of something that is valuable and is not to be touched or used again. It is not a mere amassing of wealth for the sake of possessing wealth, or for the self-satisfaction that misers feel in the knowledge of their riches. There is no place in heaven where goods may be stored up for possible use in a future "rainy day", neither are there any strong-rooms devoted to the custody of possessions not at once required by the owner but the benefit or use of which he will not allow to others. Everything in Heaven is live, virile, dynamic, and neither idle beings nor idle forces can be found in all its wide realm. Whatsoever therefore is laid up in Heaven is serving God's ever-working purpose even in the time of its laying-up.

Neither is the laying up of treasure in heaven merely a kind of insurance whereby a seat in the realms of celestial bliss is guaranteed the depositor when at length he must depart this life. There are politicians, business men and others who realise that for various reasons a day will come when they must flee the country of their residence and end their lives in a foreign land. In order to make preparation for the event they take care to invest their money in the land of their choice, and acquire the title to property there, so that when at length they land on its shores they will have the wherewithal to live and eat. "Salting it away," the process is called, in the expressive language of our times. But if anyone should think that God will sit on the throne of his holiness accepting the offerings of his people for no other purpose than that, he must needs think again. The Most High is not so short of resources, nor yet so niggardly, that He will not make abundant provision for the future lives and activities of those whom He eventually receives into the glory of his presence. Jesus has already gone to prepare places for his disciples in the heavenly mansions. And what God will have ready for the entrants into heaven will far transcend anything that we weak, puny mortals could hope to "lay up" for ourselves by way of fruit of our own efforts. *"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of*

man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him." (1. Cor. 2.9).

We who are Christ's have given our lives to him for purposes of training. Christians today are in training for a great future work, the work of reconciling the world to God. It is not going to be an easy work: the habits of sin and the effects of sin have become deeply ingrained in the human character, and even although men and women will rise from the dead at the commencement of the Millennium with new and perfect bodies, their minds and characters, carried over and reproduced from the old life, will still be imperfect and need regeneration. That work will not be done as it were miraculously, at the wave of a magic wand or in obedience to some potent word from the Almighty. Had it been so, the story of sin and death need never have been enacted and the Fall would not have occurred. Men and women in the next age will need to be converted and induced to accept Christ, so becoming reconciled to God, just as truly as is the case in this Age. And they will need, in their endeavours to obtain human perfection, the assistance and guidance of those who know and understand the difficulties in the way because they themselves have faced the same difficulties and found the way to overcome them. It is the ability thus to be "merciful and faithful priests", "ministers of reconciliation", in that Age, that constitutes the "treasure in heaven" which we are bidden to lay up in full confidence that it will not fail us when the time for its use has come.

Knowledge —experience —character—ability; these are the things which we shall never lose, once we have acquired them. They will all be laid up in the memory and power of the Father, and when the call comes, and we divest ourselves of this earthly frame and appear before him in all the glory of the spiritual body, we shall receive all these things back in full measure, and go out from the Divine presence fully equipped for saving the world. But not unless we have gained them first and so entrusted them to the Divine keeping!

In this there is a place for all, and none need feel discouraged or doubtful because another appears to have greater ability, deeper strength of character, wider experience, or more accurate knowledge. The same variety which characterises God's earthly creation must be manifest in his spiritual creation also, and just as now, in the

flesh there are "differences of administration, but the same Lord" (1 Cor. 12.5) so it will be then. Each one of the glorified New Creation will assume quite happily and willingly the place that God has marked out, working in harmonious co-operation with his fellows in the ministry, knowing that it is of the Father, who doeth all things well. The restricted experience and lesser knowledge of a faithful soul whose opportunities in life have not been great will without doubt be just the "treasure" that the Father requires to fit into a certain place that could not be so well fitted by anyone else. There is the same spirit of service in the heart and it is that which is of importance.

It is this spirit of service for others, this willingness to become the servants of men for their salvation, and to use one's own powers and possessions to that end, that is the real lesson behind the story of the man who had such increase of goods that he had to pull down his barns to build greater. "Soul," he said to himself, "thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Eat, take thine ease and be merry" (Luke 12. 15-21). The sin lay not in acquiring great wealth, providing that he came by it honestly, and there is nothing in the story to suggest that he did not. Neither was there anything immoral in his enjoying greater wealth than his neighbours and in being rich beyond them all. His offence lay in that, having the command of all these material advantages, he proposed to reserve them entirely to his own selfish enjoyment instead of using them, the bounty of God, in the service of and for the benefit of God's creatures. His sin was self-sufficiency. He asked nothing of God nor of any man; he proposed to give nothing to God nor to any man. His riches were the increase from that which God must have given in the first place, for God made all things, but this man owned no obligation on that account and made no acknowledgment thereof. His motto was "What I have I hold" and in his own strength he proposed to stand.

Now the law of God which is at the same time the law of creation declares that no man liveth unto himself. We are all members one of another, and that is as true in the natural realm as in the spiritual. In the Millennial Age the man who does not take his rightful place in the community and assume his rightful obligations as a member of the human family will die; there is no alternative. He either fits into his destined place or he is wastage—a castaway. It is not surprising therefore that in the story Divine judgment follows immediately upon the impious man's bold declaration. "Thou fool" came the stern, scornful words "this night shall thy soul be

required of thee. Then whose shall those things be in which thou hast trusted?"

The spirit of service and sacrifice, then, is essential if we are effectively to lay up treasure in heaven. Our Lord exemplified this in the highest degree when He gave himself on the cross for the sin of man, and undertook all that He did undertake in order that He might be able to lead men back to God. "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points proved like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4. 15). Jesus himself said "I am among you as he that serveth" (Luke 22. 27). "Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8. 9). That is the very negation of the attitude displayed by the man who built bigger barns in order to keep his riches.

All the same, service for one's fellows is not enough. So many Christians have made the mistake of thinking that it is, and have devoted their lives and all their powers to doing good for their neighbours and to all men, believing—and believing rightly—that the Christian commission is made up in large part of this very doing good unto all. "As we have therefore opportunity" writes the inspired Apostle "let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6.10). "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this" says James "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1. 27). All this is right and proper, and to the extent that we ignore the injunction to go about doing good, as Jesus went about doing good, to that extent we shall find leanness to our souls. But that is not all, and the reason why it is not all is revealed to us in the story of the rich young ruler.

He was a likeable youth, this rich young ruler. Brought up, probably, in a comfortable and cultured home, he had all the refinements of speech and bearing which the education befitting such an upbringing would involve. Jesus, looking upon him, loved him. There is a world of significance in that remark. Jesus loved all men, and because of that love He was in the world to save them: for the chronicler to record especially that Jesus loved this one it must have been evident that there was something in his freshness and sincerity that made a special appeal to the Saviour.

"All these things have I kept from my youth up!" There is no mistaking his honesty. So far as he himself could see, he had performed very faithfully all the commandments of Moses. He had been a true son of Israel, and he looked for

the reward of the covenant—eternal life. Yet it was denied him, and he wanted to know why.

There were two reasons, said Jesus, two reasons which were really one. "*Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor*"—that was one reason. "*Come, take up thy cross and follow me.*" That was the other: and at that the young man went away grieved, for he had great possessions.

Must we of necessity assume that the young ruler's stumbling block was the exhortation to give of his possessions to the poor? It has often been so suggested. But if this man had indeed been as scrupulous about keeping the law as he himself had averred—and Jesus did not deny the validity of his claim — he surely must already have done something for the poor, for that was enjoined in the law of Moses. Is it not much more likely that it was the second injunction that found him wanting? Whilst he could retain his comfortable home and respected station in the midst of his neighbours, dispensing his benevolence in such fashion as not to cause him any personal inconvenience or any appreciable financial loss or sacrifice, then indeed he could with clear conscience claim to have kept all these things from his youth up, and still enjoy to the full those good things of this life that were in his possession. To take up the cross was a very different proposition. He looked around at the intently listening circle of dusty, travel-stained disciples. He noted their rough clothing, their tanned faces. He knew they led a life of labour and discomfort, scorned and derided and even persecuted by those to whom they would minister. Was it *that* from which he shrank, and the prospect of a life of sacrifice and suffering that caused him to bite his lip, and draw back from the kindly gaze of Jesus to reflect awhile, and then in sadness and disappointment of heart to turn and go away sorrowing? Jesus' words to the

disciples, as his figure retreated into the distance, seem to suggest as much. "*Children, how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God!*" The rich young ruler could have sold possessions, and given to the poor, without entering into the Kingdom of God; he could by no means enter into the Kingdom of God without he first took up his cross and followed Christ. And that, it was plain, he was not willing to do.

There is the lesson for us! Our laying up of treasure in heaven can only be if we have added to our good works the taking up of our cross to follow Christ. That means nothing less than the full and wholehearted consecration of our lives, our possessions, our talents, our abilities, all, to the service of God to be disposed in accordance with his will. Thus, and thus alone, may we rely upon the safe storage of all that we commit to God, that it may be ours again in that day when we shall need it wherewith to give life to the world. The experience we have gained and lessons we have learned, the abilities we have developed and the talents we have improved, all will be of inestimable value to us in that day when it shall be the privilege of each one of us to carry the word of life to a sin-sick but hopeful world. It will only be by what we have developed in this Age that we shall be qualified to deal with man in the next; that which we develop now of knowledge and experience, of love and mercy, of patience and hope, of righteousness and justice, of faith in the goodness of God and understanding of the wisdom of God, all is being stored up for us, treasure in Heaven that can never be corrupted or stolen. And the power of these things will be bestowed upon us in the great Day of revealing when the kingdoms of this world have passed away, and the time has come that "the saints possessed the Kingdom," and those who have this treasure laid up for them will "shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of the Father" to the deliverance of all mankind.

The Christian is a traveller, his life is a journey, Heaven is his end, his road lies through a wilderness. How earnestly and devoutly ought he then to pray "*O send out thy light and thy truth that they may lead me and bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy dwelling!*" For surely "*the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the ways of life.*" The Word of God discovers to us our errors; it shows us where we lost our way, and

how we may find and recover it again. If we take this "lamp" in our hand, it will not only enable us to perceive the right course, but it will also direct us in every step, and guide our feet aright in the path of holiness and peace. Only let us apply our heart to the word of life and walk with God, then we may sing his praises as we pass through every trouble, and we shall sing them for ever.



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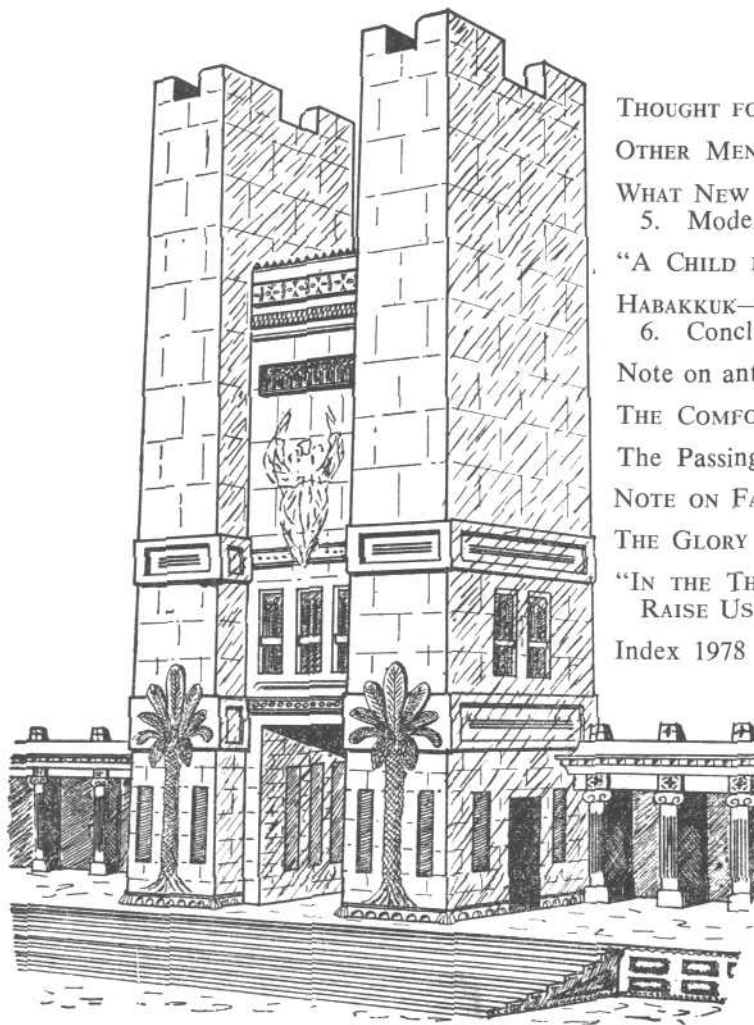
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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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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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).

A recent 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 the price demanded 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 tranquility 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. "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 approach 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, 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".

Gone from us

— * —
Sis. Maud Halton (Hyde)
Sis. L. Ketterer (Glasgow)
Sis. E. Lardent (London)
Bro. J. T. Read (U.S.A.)
Sis. G. Shreeves (London)
Sis. J. Smethurst (London)

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

OTHER MEN LABOURED

An end-of-the-year
reflection

"I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours" (Jno. 4. 38).

In their eager acceptance of the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ the disciples did not realise the debt they owed to men of past generations. It is true that, like all Jews, they revered Moses and the prophets and esteemed their writings sacrosanct, the veritable Word of God on which their beliefs must be modelled and their lives guided. But like most men, then and now, they did not appreciate how much the favoured position in which they stood had been made possible by those who had preceded them. In the enthusiasm for the commission they had received, to preach Jesus the Messiah to the Jews and Samaritans and all to whom they were to be sent, they did not stop to think that those peoples' receptiveness to the message would be conditioned largely by previous instruction received at the hands of earlier men of God, preparing the way for this later revelation. So Jesus told them they were to reap a harvest that was not of their sowing, that the seed had been planted by others who in their own time and way had been faithful servants of God, and having done their work had been laid aside in rest after passing the flaming torch to successors waiting and qualified to receive it.

Here is a fundamental truth; every generation owes a debt to the past. Each generation must take up the stage of knowledge or the point of development to which it has been carried by the labours of that which it has succeeded. No generation save the first, no man save Adam, has ever had to start from the beginning. Always there has been some level of achievement and some store of knowledge, left by those who have gone, upon which those who come anew upon the scene can build for themselves, and departing in their turn, leave what they have accomplished for the enrichment of their successors.

Behind all this there is a law which decrees that nothing in Nature and nothing in life can remain static; development and growth must always be in progress. Jesus illustrated this truth when He likened the coming of the kingdom of God to the growth of seed cast into the ground. First there is the sowing and then the seed springing forth and commencing to grow (Mark 4. 26-29). Then, said Jesus, comes the blade, the tender green shoot; then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear. Finally the fruit is ripe

and the harvest is come. Here is the key to human history and to God's purpose for mankind. From the creation of Adam to the end of the Millennium is one long story of development from a rudimentary beginning to the attainment of maturity; maturity which itself must constitute the beginning of a fresh stage of development extending into the unknown future, the time which is sometimes referred to as the "ages of glory". But we are concerned now only with this present stage, this process of endeavour and achievement in which we each, individually, have a part to play, and a contribution to make. That contribution and that part is dependent upon the heritage we have received from those who have gone before. We each must build upon a foundation which other men have laid. Adam was the only man who had no fund of knowledge and experience on which to draw. He had to find things out for himself, but once a thing had been discovered it remained for his children to take it and use it and improve it, time after time as generation succeeded generation, all the time making progress nearer and nearer to realisation of the Divine mandate to have dominion over the earth and use its resources for the nourishment and enrichment of their lives. Long ages ago an unknown man in Paleolithic times made the first ox-cart, a simple wooden structure with two wheels on a primitive axle, and shafts whereby oxen could be harnessed to draw the cart and its contents along—but that ox-cart was the forerunner of those marvellously complex rockets which in our day have taken men to the moon and back. Four thousand or more years ago the early Sumerians drew simple pictures to represent articles and ideas and names, and all unknowingly set in motion a chain of improvements which led through the invention of alphabets and the rules of grammar to the printed books of to-day. Primitive tribes in the days when the world was young lit beacon fires on hilltops or made smoke signals to convey news to their fellows at a distance, and in so doing initiated the science of communications which to-day has culminated in the wide-spread use of radio-transmission. Inventor followed inventor, and discovery followed discovery, but in every case men laboured, and other men coming after them entered into their labours.

So has it been in the things of God. Holy men of old spoke and wrote as they were directed by the Spirit of God, says Peter, but in their speak-

ing and writing they were laying the foundations of all that we have to-day. The progressive enlargement of understanding in every aspect of Divine revelation is plain in the Word of God for us to trace. The four principal fields of Scriptural instruction are those of history, prophecy, ethics and theology. The name of the first Bible historian is lost in the mists of pre-history; it might have been Noah, or most certainly some reverential man of his line before the time of Abraham. But the history he commenced, which survives to-day in the early chapters of Genesis, was continued by many writers of many and varied cultural backgrounds until its final chapters were written three millenniums later by that careful and devoted observer, St. Luke, in the Book of Acts. That long story enshrines the entire progress of what St. Paul calls the "times of ignorance", (Acts 17) the period during which mankind, from its small beginning, overspread the earth and made use of its amenities in an increasing spirit of selfishness and a decreasing consciousness of God. In a very real sense it is the story of man without God, making much progress in material things but retrograding in the things of the spirit.

The first prophecy was uttered by Enoch, if Jude's reference to his words is to be taken as confirmation by the Holy Spirit that they did in fact originate with the historical Enoch and not the second B.C. century compiler of the Book which bears his name; or in the substitute case it could have been Balaam. Both these prophecies speak of Christ, but both are brief, vague and obscure, just a misty foreview of the day when He will come in triumph and glory at his Second Advent for the elimination of sin and the salvation of the world. But the vision grew clearer and more detailed with each successive prophet, the shape of things to come becoming easier to understand as the years went by and the time grew nearer until Jesus himself and John the beloved disciple between them filled in the picture with the vivid colours of Jesus' predictions in the Gospels and John's visions in the Revelation. Each prophet drew on the past for his allusions and his metaphors, but each added a contribution of his own which made for the increasingly greater enlightenment of those that were to follow.

The first propounder of what afterwards became Christian ethics was Moses — but they were not Christian. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" was the highest level to which men could rise in that day, even although the law of Moses represented a distinct advance on the standards by which men had governed their lives prior to Sinai. But although Israel failed lament-

ably to live up to their Covenant—"the commandment which was ordained to life I found to be unto death" (Rom. 7.10)—there was progress. Samuel taught that God is better pleased with devotion and sincerity than with material offerings and sacrifices, Solomon that God is Spirit and cannot dwell in material temples made with hands, Isaiah that God is infinitely above man in his holiness yet is to man as a Father. So the men of the First Advent, unbelievers as they were, nevertheless were capable, as the generation of Sinai never would have been capable, of understanding and receiving, if they chose so to do, the message of Christ himself, the expression of ethics which truly was Christian and has been the inspiration of the Christian church throughout its existence. And yet those Christian ethics were built upon the foundation of the Mosaic Law. As Jesus said "I came not to destroy (the Law) but to fulfil".

The patriarch Job was without doubt the first theologian. His understanding of the principles of Divine law, with that of his friend Elihu, is the beginning of Biblical theology. But that was way back before there was a nation of Israel, before God had begun to reveal himself to man and open any way in which man could come into relationship with him. The institution of the Mosaic Covenant at Sinai added the beginning of the philosophy of the Divine purpose to that of Divine Law, and thereafter the two developed hand in hand until the greatest theologian of all time, the Apostle Paul, set the seal upon this aspect of Divine revelation. But even Paul built much of what he had to say about theology upon the labours of all those men from the past. So do we, today, base our present understanding of Divine truth upon the words of Jesus and of Paul and yet, as we view these things against the background of world history and present human knowledge, find that we can view the purposes and the laws of God with even greater clarity than did those early Christians who first emerged from Judaism into the dawning light of Christianity.

How does all this apply to we who are the disciples of Christ at this present time? If Jesus found it necessary to remind the twelve of the debt they owed the past, is it any the less necessary now? It is true that in all spheres of life the wisdom of the past tends to be ignored by the men of the present. Particularly is this true of any man when he is young in years. The enthusiastic youth, inexperienced as yet and totally unconscious of his lack of knowledge, thinks that he knows it all and his elders are now woefully out of date. He sees the ideal before him but knows nothing of the obstacles in the way. To him the

problems are so simple; he is impatient that the generation above him has not solved them already. And as for the remote past, he has not yet had time to find out whether there even was a remote past. To all such there comes a word from the Old Testament by the lips of Bildad the sage, friend of Job and sympathiser with him in his troubles. Bildad was almost certainly a mature man in his seventies or eighties and his words must have been framed on the basis of his own experience. "Enquire, I pray thee, of the former age" he invited "and consider the experience of their fathers; for we are but of yesterday and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow. Shall not they (the fathers) teach thee, and utter words out of their wisdom?" (Job 8. 8-10). Faced with the paradoxical problem of a righteous man like Job apparently coming under the curse of the Almighty he had to appeal to the wisdom of the past as supplement to his own knowledge. Bildad knew not the answer, but he had the inestimable advantage of knowing that he knew not, and that he must draw upon the legacy left by wise men of past times to make his own knowledge complete.

There used to be an old jingle, accredited to proverbs of ancient times, which ran like this;

"He who knows not, and knows not that he knows not, is a fool; shun him.

He who knows not, and knows that he knows not, is a child; teach him.

He who knows, and knows not that he knows, is asleep; wake him.

He who knows, and knows that he knows, is a wise man; follow him."

There is no short cut to knowledge; it cannot be gathered from a book. The mind can be stored with an accumulation of facts gleaned from books, but that is not knowledge. Those facts have to be intermingled with experience and experience is a question of time. Especially is that true of spiritual knowledge, of the wisdom that cometh from above. The attainment of that wisdom is a progressive work and maturity comes only with time. "Whom shall he teach knowledge and whom shall he make to understand doctrine?" demanded Isaiah, and immediately found his own answer; "them that are weaned from the milk" (Isa. 28.2). There is a milk stage for the young and necessarily immature and a solid food stage to follow as soon as they are able to accept it. "Every one that useth milk is unskilful in the work of righteousness, for he is a babe" says the writer to the Hebrews "but strong meat" (i.e. solid food) "belongeth to them that are of full age, who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5. 13-14). Admonishing the young

men of his day, King Solomon the wise king of Israel exhorted them to "bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge. . . . Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth" (Prov. 22. 17-21). And again, in what is perhaps one of the most profound utterances of Scripture in this field, "the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it" (Eccl. 7. 12). The Book of Proverbs was written as a manual of instruction for the young and immature, and one of its basic tenets is "the reverence of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but foolish ones despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1. 7). The end of that course is the antithesis of the life that is associated with wisdom, for "foolish ones die for want of wisdom" (Prov. 10. 21). The whole purpose of human life is the acquirement of that wisdom which ensures eternal life, and that is indissolubly bound up with God.

Just so surely as that wisdom is acquired by building on what has been inherited from past generations, so must it be handed on to future ones. The 78th Psalm sets out this principle very eloquently. "I will utter dark sayings of old which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord. . . . a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children, that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children. . . ."

All that goes back to the sage counsel of Moses the Lawgiver of Israel, the man who welded an assorted medley of tribes into a united nation and taught them the worship of the One true God. He knew how necessary it was that the people in after days should remember the great deeds of their fathers and the manner in which God had led and sustained them in the wilderness, and given them a code of conduct which if adhered to would make them his people through all their generations. "Remember the days of old" he urged in his last exhortation before his death "consider the years of many generations. Ask thy father, and he will show thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee" (Deut. 32.7). This was the standard which was set before Israel at the very beginning and it is of no less force to us to-day.

And so, in any one generation, knowledge leads to experience, and the fruit of the two is wisdom, a wisdom which leads on to increased knowledge and so the cycle is repeated, generation after generation, without end, onward into

eternity. We, each one of us, form a link in the chain, progressing individually from youthful enthusiasm without much knowledge to the calmer serenity of later years illumined by the wisdom that greater knowledge has brought. This is the portion of all who have through the course of life acquired the heavenly wisdom which prepares and fits for the next stage of life's experience, that stage which lies beyond the end of earthly experience.

What of the future? What of the time that comes to each one of us in turn, when youth has merged into middle age, and middle age into old age, and at last we close our eyes to the scenes of this earth and open them again to a new world in which everything is transcendently greater and more wonderful than anything we have ever known, and we realise that at last we have attained that state of being where death is no more; life is endless. Does further development and progress and achievement stop at that point? Do we then exist in an eternal "now" where everything is static and nothing ever changes? Was it true theology which led the legendary charlady who had spent a long and hard life scrubbing floors, to have inscribed upon her tombstone "Gone to do nothing for ever and ever"? The answer should not be difficult to find. God is essentially and perpetually a Creator. Exod. 31. 17 tells us that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed. That word "refreshed" has the meaning of stopping a moment for a breath, or as we would say, to "take a

breather". It cannot be conceived that the Most High needs to take a period of recuperation as does man after excessive labour, for He is the source of all energy. The expression can very well indicate that for a moment in time, as it were, He did cease from creative activity so far as the bringing into existence worlds of intelligent beings are concerned, and that in turn implies that He will resume that creative activity. So we can logically expect that there will be continuous creation and extension of God's universe into the eternal ages, and we who are Christ's and are to be associated with him during the infinite future will have some definite part to play in that work. That in turn implies the infinite extension and enlargement of our own knowledge and experience.

But, of course, the old men of the present will have become boys again then. At the time of the "change" to heavenly conditions of which Paul speaks in 1 Cor. 15.51 the trappings of old age are laid aside and the one experiencing that change comes forth into eternal youth. At the time when the young of to-day have themselves become old their elders will have become young and entered upon a new stage of life's experience. So the wheel turns full circle, with an addition to our knowledge and perception of the things of God, and our devotion and dedication to him, each time. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall walk, and not be weary; they shall run and not faint."

"Temptations never give us notice. Can we expect them to do so? The sailor does not expect to have notice of every gale of wind that blows upon him. The soldier in battle does not reckon to have notice of every bullet that is coming his way. By what apparatus could we be kept aware of every advance of the evil one? The very essence of temptation often lies in the suddenness of it. We are carried off our feet before we are aware. Yet we must not say, because of this 'I cannot help it; for we ought to be all the more watchful, and live all the nearer to God in prayer. We are bound to stand against a sudden temptation, as much as against a slower mode of attack. We must look to the Lord to be kept from the arrow which flieth by day and the pestilence which walketh in darkness. We are to cry to God for grace, that, let the gusts of temptation come how and when they may, we may always be found in Christ, resting in HIM, covered with his Divine power."

(C. H. Spurgeon).

Unless a man is omnipresent, unless he is at this moment in every place in the universe, he cannot know but that there may be in some place a manifestation of a Deity, by which even he would be overpowered. If he does not know absolutely every agent in the universe, the one that he does not know may be God. If he is not himself the chief agent in the universe, and does not know what it is, that which is so may be God. If he is not in absolute possession of all the propositions which constitute universal truth, the one that he wants may be that there is a God. If he cannot with certainty assign the cause of all that he perceives to exist, that cause may be God. If he does not know everything that has been done in the immeasurable ages that are past, some things may have been done by a God. Thus, unless he knows all things, he cannot know that the Being whom he rejects does not exist."

John Foster (19th Cent.)

WHAT NEW THING IS THIS ?

Some reflections on the power of Christianity

5. Modernism

There is an eloquent passage in the Book of Isaiah (chap. 29) in which the enquirer after Divine revelation hands the book to a learned man that he might read and expound its contents, and he has to confess his inability so to do, because it is to him a sealed book. With all his boasted wisdom he is unable to understand what God has written, and therefore, says God, the wisdom of that wise man shall perish and his turning of things upside down shall be brought to nought as the potter crushes the marred vessel on his wheel into a formless lump of clay and starts again.

That is an apt picture of the intellectuals of this present day who endeavour to measure the things of the Spirit by standards which from their very nature are only applicable to the creations of men. A certain pride in human achievement, and especially the achievements and knowledge of modern times, leads them to dismiss the faith and belief in unseen things manifested by earlier generations as symptomatic of naive credulity and childish ignorance. Men consider themselves so much wiser today that even the basic truths of the Christian faith must come under scrutiny and be reinterpreted or revised in the light of modern ideas. There is a sense in which this is a right and proper thing; as the knowledge of man increases and he attains to a heightened perception of the nature of things, the extent of the created universe, and so on, it is inevitable that the truths of the faith are seen in a clearer and more accurate light. But it is essential to retain the realisation that God is behind all creation and that his unseen power is operative in and through all things by the agency of the Holy Spirit. It will never be that the supernatural is expunged from our understanding and experience of the things of God, but it is just this that many otherwise knowledgeable and usually well-meaning intellectuals of the present day try to do. This is the modern enemy with which instructed Christians have to contend.

Jesus said upon one occasion that "because lawlessness shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24.12). He was referring to the present time, the end of the Age and of the present world order. The word means to be without law, whether by ignorance of it or contempt for it. That is the position of every man who, knowingly or unknowingly, flouts a basic law of God, that man is destined to occupy a definite place in his creation, a creation that includes

much that the mind of man is utterly unable to grasp or visualise and yet is as substantial and real in its own sphere as the things we do see and touch are to us in our sphere. The fashionable thing in many quarters to-day is to deny the reality or the existence of anything which cannot be sensed and measured by instruments of man's own devising; when this woefully untrue hypothesis is accepted the consequence is to destroy faith in the inerrancy of the written word of God, the Bible, and induce doubt as to the reality of religious experience. The Christian faith is reduced to the level of a man-made philosophy, founded upon the insight and the thinking of particular individuals of former times and claiming for its background the myths and folklore of the past. So, said Jesus, the love of many shall wax cold. "When the Son of Man cometh" He queried on another occasion, referring to his promised Second Advent "shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18.8) as though it was a problematical question whether He would. The text has the article "the faith" as though He was referring to the Christian faith itself. He certainly seemed to foresee a time when the last great enemy of the faith would have almost succeeded in destroying it from the face of the earth.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the same spirit which inspired the Reformation also led to the emergence of this latest enemy of the faith. Men's minds were questing for the truth and they no longer tolerated the bonds which held them in thrall. The same spirit of enquiry into the truths of Christianity was also reaching out into other spheres of knowledge and so the new enlargement of scientific knowledge developed and with it, naturally enough, questions as to the relation of this new knowledge to the old theology.

There was no discordant note at first; the birth of this kind of scientific investigation was in the 17th Century and the scientists of that day were, in the main, sincere Christians and viewed their discoveries and achievements against the background of their faith. Men like Sir Isaac Newton and William Whiston were as noted for their contributions to Christian thought as to scientific discovery. It is true that Galilei Galileo, renowned for his achievements in mathematics, natural science and astronomy — including the discovery of Jupiter's satellites—was arraigned before the Inquisition and forced to repudiate his assertion that the earth rotates around the sun and not vice versa as had until then been be-

lieved, but that was no reflection upon the relation between scientific and Christian thought. The Ptolemaic cosmogony, which was accepted by scholars and Christians alike until the 17th Century, maintained that the earth was the centre of the Universe, that the sun, moon, planets and stars moved round it in concentric spheres, and that the outermost of these "crystalline spheres" was the site of heaven and the throne of God. In demolishing Ptolemy's crystalline spheres Galileo with his predecessor Copernicus had unwittingly demolished heaven itself, and for this attack upon established theology the Papal Church could not forgive him. This was perhaps the first notable conflict between science and religion and it has to be admitted that on this occasion religion was in the wrong. Nevertheless the century closed without any real challenge to the faith from the men of science.

The 18th Century told a different story. The challenge came, but it was not from scientists; it was from theologians. This was the century which saw the emergence of Textual Criticism and Higher Criticism. The former has to do with the relation of the many manuscript sources of Bible books to the resultant accepted text and renders valuable service to the progressive student and in enhanced understanding of the faith. The latter has to do with the structure of the original texts, the dates of their writing, their authorship and origin, and so forth. It is here that untold harm has been done by men who, however sincere, have treated the Bible in a fashion it was never intended to be treated. The fundamental principle of Higher Criticism is that the Bible must be analysed just like any other ancient book and its statements viewed in just the same way, and judged by just the same standards and criteria. This is wrong in principle for the Bible is not like other books; it is unique. The Bible is the Divine revelation; its origin and preservation has been due to Divine overruling power and its message is stamped with Divine authority. And the only men who are qualified to pronounce on its message are those who are dedicated to Christ and have received of his Spirit. But this is very much an inward thing. The average man is prone to judge more by the outward appearance and apparent erudition of ostensibly learned men. So their pronouncements are heeded and go into print and are quoted and copied time after time until they become accepted as established fact; any dissent is branded as ignorance or fanaticism.

The original basis of this type of Biblical criticism was laid down by Baruch Spinoza, a Jewish philosopher of Amsterdam, who in 1670 advanced the claim that the art of writing was unknown before the 8th Century B.C. so that

Moses could not have written the books which bear his name. At that time no evidence existed to deny his thesis and it became widely accepted; although since then plenty of written records going back to two thousand years before Christ have turned up, the old idea still lingers in some theological quarters and in many theological books. The effect was to throw doubt upon the integrity of the Bible and before long many so-called scholars were vying with each other to prove that this or that part of the Old Testament was written by some other than its claimed author and considerably later than its claimed date. A French theologian, Jean Astruc, pointed out in 1753 that there are two separate accounts interwoven in Genesis which he called the J and E accounts, from the predominant use of Jehovah in one and Elohim in the other for the name of the Deity. This soon led to a proliferation of suggestions which in the end led to ten different authors of the Book of Genesis and plenty more for the rest of the Old Testament. Astruc did however lay the foundation of sober textual criticism which in itself has been a good thing. The third member of a notable trio was Johann Eichhorn who in 1787 invented the term "Higher Criticism" to denote this rapidly growing science of reducing the Bible to the level of an ordinary book. By the middle of the following century the historical narratives were doubted or accredited to folklore or ancient myths, the miracles denied, the verity of the prophetic passages doubted, and the whole Bible surrounded with an aura of uncertainty. The most influential and able figure in all this was the German theologian Julius Welhausen (1844-1900) who has been to modern criticism what Saint Augustine in the 4th Century was to Church doctrine. Time has long since exploded many of Augustine's misconceptions of doctrine and is now doing the same for modern criticism. The researches of archæology during this present century particularly have disproved many of the conclusions and assumptions made by the critics and are steadily disproving more. Scholars of the 20th Century are generally more careful and less extreme than their 19th Century counterparts, but the basic principle is still upheld, one that cannot be assented to by any dedicated and knowledgeable Christian, viz., that the Bible appeared in writing only between the 8th and 1st Centuries B.C., is based upon folk-lore and myths handed down from earlier times, and is no more reliable as history than any other like legends in the world. To that extent modern criticism is still an enemy of the true faith.

The 19th Century saw the rise of the Evolution theory of human origins as opposed to the literal understanding of Genesis. Not altogether a new

thing, for even the ancient Greeks had speculated along such lines. But now it began to be set upon a scientific and rational basis. Its two great protagonists were Charles Darwin (1809-82) and the German Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919). Darwin was a Christian and saw no disharmony between his expressed views and the fundamentals of the faith; Haeckel, an atheist, thought otherwise and the cleavage between the two philosophies was largely his doing. Since those days evolutionary thought has developed into a definite dogma that life does arise, and has arisen, from non-living matter. There has always existed a certain amount of acrimony between "fundamentalist" Christians and avowed evolutionists on matters such as the "missing link"—which admittedly has remained missing for nearly two centuries now—the alleged age of the earth, and so on, but these matters are of small moment. The vital difference is the evolutionist's facile assumption that the material of the universe has always existed and that life developed spontaneously out of this dead material. This implies that individual personal life has no meaning and no future since it must in such case eventually return to nothingness. The Christian knows that God existed from eternity, that our universe and all created matter was brought into existence by him, and that all life comes from him and is sustained by him. Without the Creator, God, there can be no such thing as life and intelligent being. These two philosophies are irreconcilable and there is no common ground between this type of evolutionism and the Christian faith.

These three factors, arising in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries respectively, have converged in this 20th century and constitute the greatest present challenge to the Faith at a time when almost the whole population relies for information and instruction upon the media—the Press, the television, the accepted educational authorities, and so on. In every field people follow the self-styled experts, whether scientists, journalists or ministers. With few exceptions, these all speak with one voice, and take the side which glorifies man and belittles God. This is the fashionable thing to do. The most powerful educational medium to-day is the television screen; the occasional screening of an Old Testament subject usually refers to the historical narratives as mythological or derived from old legends, and no opportunity is ever allowed for the presentation of evidences for the contrary case. The impression that Christianity is an out-dated religion, not really relevant to modern times, and valid only for its ethical content and not for its supernatural claims, is sedulously fostered. Indifference and apathy are Christianity's worst enemies and these

are in the forefront of the battle line to-day.

But the Faith will survive even this. There is something in man which needs God. Although men in the euphoria of their new-found knowledge and consequent achievements think and declare that they have no need of God there is still that in the depths of their being which gives the lie. Mankind in extremity has always turned to God for succour. It has been remarked that the uncertainty and confusion which undeniably does afflict society to-day is due to an unconscious but real internal conflict between the traditional knowledge which has its basis in the Biblical view of God, and that materialistic non-purposeful view of the meaning of life which is all that science, unaided, has to offer. Man is the creation of God, and when God introduced this new kind of creature into his creation He knew what his potentialities could be — and, too, that only through a course of severe experience could those potentialities be realised. "*God hath made man upright*" said the wise King Solomon "*but they have sought out many inventions*" (Eccl. 7. 29). The day will come when those inventions will be relegated to the sphere of forgotten things and men will realise that "verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth" (Psa. 58. 11). Christianity will achieve its supreme triumph when the words of Isaiah are realised "*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 will be glad and rejoice in his salvation*" (Isa. 25.9). Men do not know, now, that this is what they are waiting for. They will realise, then, that this is what they really wanted all the time, and in the enlightenment of that revelation will come to the company that bears the name of Christ for instruction and guidance in the ways of God.

That culmination to the Christian warfare will come when Christ has returned, as He promised, to unite his Church with himself preparatory to commencing his Millennial reign and mission for the conversion of the world. There will be no universal conversion during this present Age. The Church will be locked in conflict with its enemies until the last, and true Christianity will always be, as it has always been, submerged; never in the ascendant. Only after the ending of this Age and the assumption of world rulership by the Lord Christ will the enemies of Christianity be finally vanquished and the time come to which Jesus alluded when He said "*Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father*" (Matt. 13.43). Kings, but not as kings are to-day. The kings of that future Age will be the servants of all, ministering to men the rich provision God has made for human welfare. The ancient Sumerians at the dawn of history had

one word only to denote both a king and a shepherd. The kings of the future will be like that—shepherds to needy men. And the outcome will be that foreseen twenty-seven centuries ago by the golden-tongued seer *“The ransomed of the*

Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away”.

(The end)

“A CHILD IS BORN”

A Christmas study

Many are the titles of the Son of man—the man Christ Jesus, Son of God, made flesh that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man. The first name given in the list of the Prophet is “Wonderful”, and is surely appropriate. His is the most wonderful career and the most wonderful character of which we have any knowledge. He left the glories of the heavenly state for human conditions, as He himself said, *“No man hath ascended up to heaven save he which came down from heaven”.* (John 3. 13). He left the glory which He had with the Father before the world was; He exercised that wonderful faith in the Father which permitted him to sacrifice everything with joy, delighting to do the Father’s will, with confidence that in due time the Father’s favour and love would more than compensate for every sacrifice.

Wonderful was his life amongst men, the Light shining in the darkness, the darkness comprehending it not. More and more as we come into the light ourselves we are able to comprehend this Wonderful One. As the Apostle suggests, the eyes of our understanding being opened, we are able to comprehend with all saints the heights and depths and lengths and breadths of the love of God which passes all understanding; such love being manifested, exhibited, illustrated in this Wonderful One. Wonderful was his resurrection, the “first that should rise from the dead”, “the first-born amongst many brethren”, highly exalted, given a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. (Rom. 8. 29; Col. 1. 15, 18; Phil. 2. 9, 10).

The second name on the list, “Counsellor”, also appropriate. Who else is such a Counsellor? Who else is able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities? Who else has assured us that all things shall work together for our good? Happy are they who have made the acquaintance of this Counsellor, whom God has set forth to be the satisfaction for our sins and to be the Counsellor, the Leader, the Guide, the Instructor of his people, and to bring them out of darkness into his marvellous light, out of the chains of sin

and bondage of death back to full liberty of the sons of God.

“The Mighty God,” another of his names, is also appropriate. If angels appearing to men in the past were called *Elohim*, gods, because they were the representatives of Divine power, surely much more appropriate is the name of him whom the Father specially sent as his special messenger to men. If *Elohim* signifies mighty ones, surely He is above all mighty ones, and may therefore most properly be termed the mighty *Elohim*—the Mighty God — the one mighty amongst the mighty. “Mighty to save” we sometimes sing; yea, says the Word of the Lord, *“He is able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto the Father through him”.* (Heb. 7. 25). Such a mighty Saviour we need, one not only able to sympathise with us and to instruct us, but able also to deliver us from the Evil One and from our own weaknesses as well as from the Divine sentence against our race as sinners. Let us exult in this “Mighty One” whom the heavenly Father has sent forth for deliverance from sin and death.

The title “Everlasting Father” will in due time be appropriately his—but not yet. These words are a prophecy; some of them have been already fulfilled and others are yet to be fulfilled. When they were written Jesus had not yet left the heavenly glory. Jesus is not the everlasting Father to the Church. The Scriptures reveal him as our elder Brother, and again as our Bridegroom. The Apostle most explicitly tells us that *“The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath begotten us”*—we are his children. The dear Redeemer himself taught us to pray, *“Our Father which art in heaven”*; and again after his resurrection He sent the message to Peter and others of his followers, *“I ascend to my Father, to my God and your God”.* (John 20. 17).

In due time He will be the everlasting Father to the world—to those of the world who, during the Messianic Age, will hearken to his voice and receive of his life — restitution blessings. Jesus purchased Adam and all of his children by the sacrifice of himself; they are his, to make out of them everything possible and to bring as many

as possible back into harmony with the Father and to eternal life. They died under Divine condemnation; what they now need is life, and the Father has arranged that Jesus may be their Life-Giver, and to this end He has given his life, purchased them, that in due time, during his Kingdom reign, He may offer them the return of all that was lost in Adam, for it is written, *"He came to seek and to save that which was lost"*.

Since that life which Jesus will give to the world is the fruitage of his own sacrifice, therefore He is said to be the Father, the Life-Giver, to the world. And since that life that He will give will not be merely a temporary one, but by obedience to him all those who receive of his life may be brought to perfection, and maintain that life eternally, therefore He is the Everlasting Father. He gives everlasting life in contradistinction to Adam, who attempted to be the father to the race, but through his disobedience brought forth his children to a dying condition. Not so the everlasting life: the life which He gives to his children during the period of the Millennium, and which will accomplish the regeneration of the world, or of so many of the world who will accept his favour, will be unto life eternal.

Not yet is He the Prince of Peace and King of Glory, but very soon He will take unto himself his great power and reign. Far from peaceful will be its beginning. The Scriptural description is that the nations will be angry and Divine wrath will come upon them, and that they shall be

broken in pieces as a potter's vessel: that the Lord will speak to them in his sore displeasure, and that there will be a time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation. (Psa. 2. 5; Dan. 12. 1).

But the Lord wounds to heal, he chastises to correct, and will not "keep his anger forever", but will ultimately prove that He is "plenteous in mercy". The result of his righteous indignation against sin and all unrighteousness and iniquity will be the establishment of justice upon a firm footing throughout the world. Then as a consequence peace will reign and the King of Glory will be known as the Prince of Peace, whose blessings will fill the earth for the refreshment of every creature and the bringing of so many as will into full harmony with God through the processes of restitution.

As we long for the glorious day let us prepare our hearts that we may be approved of the King—that we may be accepted even as his Bride through his mercy and grace. Let us not forget that there are conditions expressed by the Apostle in the words, *"If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him", "If we be dead with him we shall also live with him"*—"heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together". A little while; the trials shall be over. A little while; if faithful we shall have the crown and hear the blessed words, *"Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joys of thy Lord"*.

Greater Works

Jesus said, *"Greater works than these shall ye do, because I go unto my Father."* Have any of the Lord's disciples done any greater miracles than Jesus did so far as healing physical ailments are concerned? We have no record of greater works of this kind than are recorded in the Gospels. Have any of the Lord's disciples at any time done as great works according to the flesh as Jesus did? Have any of them ever waked the dead? Surely none except the Apostles have done this wonderful work. What then could our Lord have meant by this expression, *"Greater works than these shall ye do?"* We see that Jesus in his ministry dealt only with the natural man, and could not communicate to natural man respecting spiritual or heavenly things except in parables and dark sayings, which could be but imperfectly

comprehended until after Pentecost gave the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. The greater works, therefore, that have been done by the Lord's followers since the ascension have been such works as related to the hearts of men rather than to their bodies. The whole creation is groaning and travailing in physical discomfort, but the worst of all groans and pains comes from the anguish of the soul—broken hearts. The Lord's followers, in proportion as they receive of his Spirit, may communicate it through his word and bring to wounded and broken hearts peace and joy and blessing, regardless of physical conditions or discomfort, so that, as the Apostle explains, they may rejoice even in tribulation, knowing what the tribulations are working out for them in the way of greater glory and blessing and association with the Lord in his Kingdom.

HABAKKUK—PROPHET OF FAITH

An exposition of the
Book of Habakkuk

6. Conclusion

"Behold, it is come, and it is done, saith the Lord God; this is the day whereof I have spoken." (Ezek. 30. 8). There is a ring of finality about those words. Well may there be, for they speak of the most comprehensive and spectacular judgment against evil that will ever be witnessed upon the earth, not even excepting the judgment of the Flood. The sword of the Lord will descend, and things on the earth will never be the same again. It is this final arising of God to judgment in Armageddon that is prefigured in the remainder of Habakkuk's vision.

That "*Selah*" in the middle of ch. 3 verse 9 divides the "Day of his Preparation" from Armageddon, or as it is sometimes called, "Jacob's Trouble". The preparation is ended; the nations have been gathered together in the symbolic "Valley of Jehoshaphat" and God is ready to reveal himself for the salvation of his people. To this time belong the events of Zechariah's vision recorded in the last three chapters of his prophecy. Israel has been regathered and is settled in prosperity and faith in the land of promise; the forces of evil have laid their plans and set out to crush this new power for righteousness which has arisen in the earth with its centre at Jerusalem; there is a temporary and partial success—"*half of the city shall go forth into captivity*" (Zech. 14.2) — probably a cleansing of the land from fainthearted and faithless elements; and then, with the people and their governors waiting in faith and assurance the further onslaught of their enemies, the unbelievable thing happens—God intervenes.

Habakkuk in his vision saw the breaking of the storm which had been gathering, and all the forces of Nature joined together in one great onslaught against the earth. Behind the storm he saw the majestic figure of the God of Israel, coming forth to judgment. "*Thou didst cleave asunder the rivers of the earth*" cried the prophet in wonder, as he saw the earth rent by the breaking forth of mighty waters from its depths. "*The mountains saw thee, and they trembled; the inundation of the waters swept along; the abyss uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high.*" Habakkuk saw a repetition of the Flood of Noah's day, sweeping all the enemies of God away and overwhelming them in its depths. "*Upon the wicked he shall rain burning coals, fire and brimstone, and a burning tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup.*" (Psa. 11. 6). The word which is rendered "deep" in the A.V.

is the Hebrew *tehom*, the primeval chaotic abyss which harks back to the waste and void condition of the earth described in Gen. 1. 2, the condition in which it stood before God began to prepare it for human habitation. The use of the same word here seems to indicate that Habakkuk witnessed a gigantic upheaval of the earth and the bursting forth of the waters of the abyss, destroying completely all the works of man. "*The deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high*" as though with a roar like thunder the earth opened to permit the uprush of a giant waterspout from its depths. That is the picture, and it fitly describes what may yet prove to be one salient feature of the Last Days, an uprising of the peoples which will shake and destroy the symbolic mountains, the autocratic kingdoms of earth.

But the storm is not finished at this—it increases in fury. The sky grows darker and the sable curtain of clouds overcomes the sun and moon so that they seem to withdraw themselves and retire from the scene. "*The sun and moon stood still in their habitation; at the light of thine arrows they went, at the shining of thy glittering spear.*" (vs. 11). "*The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood*" says Joel, referring to the same happenings. The sixth chapter of Revelation, describing the breaking of the "sixth seal" uses a very similar expression in connection with the same events. In Habakkuk's vision it is as though the brilliancy of the lightning (the "light of the arrows" and the "glittering spear"—the darting flashes being likened to the celestial arrows and spears of the Almighty shooting down upon his enemies) has so outshone the heavenly luminaries that they have ceased from their onward progress across the sky and gone into the storm clouds out of sight. There is an allusion here to the day that the "sun stood still" when the Lord fought for Joshua against the Canaanites.

Now the Lord is pictured coming forth at the head of his legions. "*Thou didst march through the land in indignation; thou didst thresh the nations in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed*" and then, following Rotherham, "*thou hast crushed the head out of the house of the lawless one, baring the foundation up to the neck*". (vs. 12-13). Here is depicted the active intervention of God to the physical scattering of the invading host, an assertion that God has gone

forth in order to effect the salvation of his people, regathered Israel, and the intimation that He is accompanied in this onward march by those who are described as his "anointed". The New Testament gives the clue to the fulfilment of this vision by describing the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ at his Second Advent accompanied by his saints, the Christian Church of this Age, to establish the earthly Messianic Kingdom. The Church — the assembly of true Christians everywhere irrespective of denominational affiliation—is that "anointed", associated with the Lord Christ in the rulership and administration of the Kingdom. *"They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years"*. (Rev. 20. 4).

This allusion to the "anointed" being with him at the time He is revealed in glory for the defence of Israel is particularly apt, for our Lord will have already returned and gathered his Church before these events of "Jacob's Trouble" have commenced, and hence quite logically will have his Church with him when He is revealed in judgment against the evil forces and in mercy upon those that have put their trust in him. This verse in Habakkuk therefore corresponds very well with the "opening of heaven" in Rev. 19 where the rider upon the white horse emerges, followed by the "armies which were in heaven" to do battle with the forces of evil gathered upon the earth.

Here there is another "Selah", another pause in the Temple service. At the last "Selah" the worshippers were able to contemplate the vision of God arising to judgment; at this one they see him marching through the earth scattering his enemies; when the story is resumed the work is complete and the workers of evil have been utterly routed. The prophet looks back on what he has seen. *"Thou didst strike through with his staves (weapons) the head of his villages. They came out as a whirlwind to scatter me; their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly. Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters."* (vs. 14-15). The first phrase in the 14th verse is very significant. It implies that God has turned the enemies' own weapons back upon themselves—thou didst strike through with his weapons the chief of his warriors" is one rendering, thus paralleling the expression in verse 12 "the head out of the house of the lawless one". There seems to be some suggestion here that the mighty enemy of God will in part at least encompass its own destruction by means of its own weapons. The prophet permits himself one word of exultation in a minor key. *"They came out as a whirlwind to scatter me"* he says, identifying himself

with those of his people who would be living when the great day came—*"their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly"*—a word reminiscent of Ezekiel 38 where the same host plans to swoop down upon an apparently defenceless people "to take a spoil and to take a prey".

There the vision ends. The evil host has been scattered. Israel has been delivered, and Habakkuk is satisfied. From what he has seen he is content; he knows now that even though the time be long and Israel suffer yet further agonies of distress and persecution, at the appointed season God will come forth and save them with an everlasting salvation, and in that knowledge he can rest.

But although Habakkuk was content, he was by no means unconscious of the severity of that final trial upon Israel. Well did he realise the horror of the situation; although his heart leapt at the prospect of Israel's final glory, it sank at the thought of the trouble that must needs precede it. And it is here, in this 16th verse, that we stumble across one of the most amazing statements to be found in any of the prophecies; amazing because it reveals Habakkuk's own knowledge that he himself was destined to live again upon earth and witness for himself the stirring events which he had just seen in vision.

"I heard" he says *"... and I trembled in my place, that I should rest, waiting for the day of trouble, when he that shall invade them in troops cometh up against the people."* This is the Revised Version rendering. It declares in plain language that Habakkuk expected to rest in death until the events which he described come to pass. The implication is plain that he expected his period of "rest" then to end that he might share with his people the experience of that great day of invasion and deliverance. Leeser renders the passage *"That I should rest till the day of distress, till the withdrawing of the people that shall invade us with his troops."* There seems to be no doubt that this is the literal meaning of the text, and the amazing thing is that Habakkuk saw so clearly that he, and those who, like him, were "heroes of faith" of old, were destined to be raised from the dead in order to witness the overthrow of the powers of this world and take over the reins of government on behalf of earth's new King, Christ Jesus. *"I will restore thy governors as at first, and thy princes as at the beginning"* says God through the prophet Isaiah. Habakkuk must have known the inner meaning of those words, and looked forward in faith to the day when he should stand once more upon earth and witness Israel's final glory. *"For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee"* (Isa. 54. 7).

It is this same understanding, and this same time, to which Zechariah refers when, speaking of the gathering of the nations against Jerusalem, he says "In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about" (Zech. 12. 6). These "governors" are the resurrected "Ancient Worthies" or "Old Testament Saints" as they are variously called, and Zechariah's words indicate that they will have returned from the grave and be in control of affairs in the regathered holy nation when the great onslaught is launched.

It is at this climax that Habakkuk has given expression to one of the finest expressions of faith to be found anywhere in the Scriptures. The confidence engendered by the vision he has seen is such that he can now regard the greatest of disasters with assurance. Even though every aspect of his people's national life be destroyed, every activity prove fruitless and the very land itself turn against them, still will he not only

believe, but will even find occasion for joy. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

No matter how adverse the earthly circumstances, he knew that all was well with the Plan of God, because God himself was working out that Plan. On that note he ends; a note of utter confidence and joyous confidence. His faith has progressed from a silent faith to an ebullient faith, a faith of peace to a faith of joy, and in his ecstasy of heart he set his prophecy to music that it might be used for ever afterwards in the Temple service to the glory of God, a living witness to the faith of the man who saw in vision what God will one day do in reality, and laid himself down to rest in utter confidence that so surely as God had spoken, so surely would it come to pass.

(The end)

Note on the antiquity of writing

It is sometimes said that, while admitting that the art of writing was known in ancient times, it was practiced only by priests and kings and the ordinary people were totally illiterate. Here are two of many inscribed clay tablets found at Nippur—the Calneh of Gen. 10—which demonstrate the truth of the opposite. They were both written to persons living in Nippur at about the time Abraham was living at Ur of the Chaldees not far away.

A young Government official, stationed in a remote village, found it difficult to obtain the kind of food to which he was accustomed. He wrote to his father at Nippur sending money for the purchase and despatch of his wants.

"To my father, from Zimri-Eramma. May the gods Shamash and Marduk keep you alive for ever. May all be well with you. I write to enquire after your health; please let me know how it goes with you. I am stationed at Dur-Sin, on the Bitim-Sikirim canal. Where I live there is no food which I am able to eat. Here is a one-third shekel piece, which I have enclosed and send you. Send me for this money fresh fish and other food to eat."

One can only hope that the fish was still fresh when he got it!

A young man, taking up work in a distant city, writes to his girl-friend at Nippur—a grammatical construction in connection with her name shows that she was not a blood-relative of his—saying how much he misses her and wants to see her again.

"To Bibeya, from Gimil-Marduk. May Shamash and Marduk grant you, for my sake, to live for ever. I write this in order to enquire after your health. Let me know how it goes with you. I am now settled in Babylon but I am in great anxiety because I have not seen you. Tell me when you will come, that I may rejoice. Come in the month of Arakhsamna (November) May you, for my sake, live for ever."

The expression "may you live for ever" reminds one of the use of the same phrase by Daniel before King Darius; this was evidently a Babylonian custom but it was not a Hebrew one. Had the Book of Daniel been written by some pious Jew three centuries after Daniel was dead, as is claimed in some quarters, such an expression would not have appeared. Casual touches like this serve to establish the authenticity of the Old Testament books, that they were indeed written at the times they claim.

THE COMFORTER

"The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father shall send in my name, shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (Jno. 14.26).

The function of the Holy Spirit in the hearts, the minds and the lives of all Christians is to be to each and all now what Jesus in his personal presence was to the disciples and believers during his sojourn on earth. The word "Comforter" is not a good rendering; "*parakletos*" really means one called to one's side as a helper or an advocate (it is translated by the latter word in 1 John 2.1 "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ . . ."). It appears four times in John's Gospel, always with reference to the Holy Spirit in its function of standing by and helping the disciples and all who would follow them in the way of Christ.

"Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age" (Matt. 28.20) Jesus had told them; it was by means of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit that his promise was fulfilled. In a very real sense Jesus was still with his disciples and this is what He meant when He said *"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (Jno. 14.18)*. The Holy Spirit was to be sent "in my name" (ch. 14.26), i.e. in and with the power of Jesus, to impart only the words and instruction of Jesus and nothing else (ch. 16. 13-15), so speaking as it were on behalf of Jesus; to teach, testify, guide, recall, foresee, reprove. In these three chapters, 14, 15 and 16 of the gospel, all these operations are mentioned. Christ's entire work of pastoral care and spiritual enlightenment toward his followers is conducted through the medium of the Holy Spirit of God, and the fact that He says the Spirit proceeds from the Father, and is sent from the Father, in the same breath that He declares He himself sends the Spirit (ch. 14.16; 15.26; 16.7) supports the conception of a oneness of thought, action and power between the Father and the Son which the New Testament so strenuously upholds.

Three times in John's gospel the Holy Spirit is equated with the Spirit of truth as though the two are identical (ch. 14.17; 15.16; 16.13) but this is only one aspect of that mighty universal Divine energy which the Scriptures denominate the Holy Spirit of God. It is the aspect in the mind of St. Paul when he told the Corinthians (1 Cor. 2.9-14) *"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that*

love him; but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searches into the totality of the deep things of God". The office of the Holy Spirit in this connection, therefore, is to act as the instructor and revealer of Divine truth in all its aspects to those who have by dint of total surrender and dedication to the Lord Jesus Christ entered into a state of union with God and so are capable of being reached by his Spirit.

The Holy Spirit has many aspects. The earliest in time so far as man is concerned, and the most outwardly spectacular in a material sense, is that described so vividly in the first chapter of Genesis at the time of creation. The earth was unformed; there was only chaos. The Spirit of God hovered over that chaos, and God spoke: *"Let there be light! And there was light!"* Simple words, but indicative of a tremendous manifestation of energy, the energy that had its source in God and was mediated to its consequence by the operation of God's Holy Spirit. From that point ensued the colossal action and interaction of natural forces which brought into being the earth as we now know it. All those forces were born of the Divine energy which is the Holy Spirit. And having brought this material creation into existence and introduced man to it, God exercises a continuous control over its ordering and its destinies. The latter part of the 40th chapter of Isaiah is definite to the point of dogmatism as to that. Do ye not know who is God? he asks in effect. *"It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers"*; bringing the great men to nothing and giving power to the weak. He controls the whole universe by his word of command; the stars themselves follow their courses in accord with his command. A remarkable picture of this universal oversight of his creation is afforded in the visions of Zechariah in the O.T. and John the Revelator in the N.T. The Holy Spirit is depicted as the seven eyes of God, continuously scanning the whole earth and always cognisant of all that is going on. In Zechariah chapter 4 the seven lamps in the vision, yielding light from the olive oil which is always a symbol of the Holy Spirit are the *"seven eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the whole earth"*. In that vision the application has to do with the moving of the Holy Spirit to the deliverance of Israel from the bondage of the Babylonian captivity, but John in the Book of Revelation sees the same seven

lamps and seven eyes in a far more vital context. He sees (chaps. 4 & 5) the triumphant Christ moving to the deliverance of all mankind from the bondage of sin and death. In the presence of the Almighty Creator-Father upon the heavenly throne stand the seven lamps which are synonymous with the sevenfold Spirit of God, waiting to go out upon this mission of deliverance. But then John sees the triumphant Christ himself, also having the seven eyes which are the sevenfold Spirit. So the Son is identified with the Spirit here just as He is in the gospel of John; the operation of the Spirit is the manifestation of Divine power emanating from the Father and channelled through the Son.

Beyond the material lies the spiritual. Just as the power of the Holy Spirit is evident in material phenomena which we call the works of Nature, so is it manifested in its energising effect on the minds of believers. The first and perhaps most striking example of this was the impartation of powers not previously possessed by those gathered in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost. A group of quite ordinary men, from the lower walks of life, they were distinguished only by one thing, their common faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and their whole-hearted devotion to him and his cause. There came suddenly upon them a new power, suffusing their minds and nerving their souls to deeds of daring they would not have dreamed of undertaking of their own volition. There was an outward sign, some kind of celestial radiance filling the room above their heads — “tongues of fire”, the historian termed it—and that to them was the *sign of the impartation of the Spirit which had been promised*. Immediately their minds were quickened and they saw all things in a new light. The dimly understood prophecies of the Old Testament came at once into focus with the things that Jesus had told them about himself and his coming Kingdom. The injunction so recently laid upon them to go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation suddenly opened out into a broad and clear vision of their future lives’ work. In the inspiration and enthusiasm of that mystic and yet enthralling experience they went straight out into the streets and preached as they had never preached before; wrought miracles as they had never wrought before; defied their priestly enemies as they had never defied them before. And made converts on a scale they had never made them before. It was upon that memorable day that the energy of the Holy Spirit was exerted so to work upon the minds of a few totally dedicated men as to achieve the mightiest and most significant of all God’s works since the beginning of creation—the

institution of the Christian Church.

That was not the end of this wonderful aspect of the Spirit’s working. “*To every man*” says Paul in 1 Cor. 12 “*the manifestation of the Spirit is given*”. Various gifts and powers, he says, but all by the same Spirit. Various kinds of ministries and services, but all for the same Lord. Various directions in which Divine energy is exerted, but all from the same God (“operations” in 1 Cor. 12.6 is from a word meaning superhuman or spiritual energy only). In no better way could the Apostle have stressed the essential oneness existing between the Father and the Son in all that they accomplish through the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is that which is beyond even this. The Holy Spirit is a life-giving force. Put more accurately, the life which comes from God to his creatures—and all life is from God; there is no other source—comes by the Spirit. We already know that life is only to be had through Christ; “in him was life, and the life was the light of men”; “whoso hath the Son hath life, but whoso hath not the Son hath not life”; and we have to accept therefore that life is of God, by the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the vehicle of life, the joint power of Father and Son conveying spiritual eternal life to the believer—and, in a more material sense, the modicum of transient terrestrial life which is all that man now possesses. This was the truth Jesus imparted to Nicodemus (John 8.5-8). The earthly life is but a short-term travesty of what real life can be. If Nicodemus would have the true eternal life which is God’s purpose for man he must receive an infusion of *new life preparing him and fitting him for that world which is to be*—he must, to use an easily understood earthly expression, be “born again”. Nicodemus found that hard to understand. So did the disciples at that time. They realised the truth better later on. Paul was then able to say “*If the Spirit*” (of God) “*dwelt in you*”, (God) “*shall also revivify your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you*” (Rom. 8.11). The dying life inherited from Adam, which of itself can only lead to the grave and extinction, is superseded by a new and eternal life which after the dissolution of this body leads to a new and never-dying life in the eternal beyond.

The basis of that wonder was laid down in the Old Testament for those with insight to read and understand. Talking about the brute creation, whose lives also depended upon God, the Psalmist says (Psa. 104.27-30) “*... thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created, and thou renewest the face of the earth*”. At a much earlier date Elihu the deep-thinking friend

of Job expressed the same truth in relation to man. *"The Spirit of God hath made me"* he said *"and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life"*; *"If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust"* (Job 33.4 and 34.14). That is the fundamental truth of creation, the basis upon which all things exist. Ignored and denied by the wise men of this world, many of the world's scientists and philosophers, it stands always as an irrefutable fact. God is the source of all life; without God, life and creation cannot be.

From this it follows that the Spirit of God in us, our "possession" of the Holy Spirit, is the power which links us with God. This is not just a figure of speech, it is reality. The Apostle in 1 John 2.1 tells us that we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. The word there rendered "advocate" is *parakletos*, the same as is rendered "comforter" in John's Gospel. So the Comforter which He promised to send after his ascension was his own power and influence present with his disciples when He was no longer bodily in their company. So we are united with God in Christ through the medium of the Spirit of God and Christ extended into our hearts and lives. The reality of this union is stressed time and again in the gospel of John. "I am in the Father". "The Father is in me." "Ye are in me," "I am in you," ". . . that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." And so, as H. Wheeler Robinson says in his *"Christian experience of the Holy Spirit"* in customary theological language, *"the Spirit is conceived as the projected presence and activity of Christ himself with his Church, and this explains the personalisation of the conception"*.

Closely associated with the idea of union with God is that of intercession. Christ is depicted in Hebrews as one who *"ever liveth to make intercession for . . . those who come unto God by him"* (Heb. 7.25). As a rule this word "intercession" is associated with the thought of Christ interceding with the Father for forgiveness for sins committed and so on, but in point of fact the word *entugchano* means primarily to meet, consult or converse with a person, and only secondarily to supplicate. The idea of communion with God is inherent here so that Christ is an intercessor not as a supplicant but as a communicant. The eighth chapter of Romans also comes to this position and allies our Lord with the work of the Spirit. Christ is risen and makes intercession for us at the right hand of God, says Paul in vs. 34, but in vs. 26 the Spirit, the *Parakletos*, is the medium which makes inter-

cession. There is an identification here between Christ in person in the presence of and at the right hand of the Father and Christ present with his faithful upon earth by the medium of the Holy Spirit. The "groanings which cannot be uttered" of vs. 26 mean, literally, a deep sighing from that which is felt but cannot be expressed in words (as in Mark 8. 12 where Jesus "sighed deeply in his spirit" at the Pharisees' obtuseness in seeking an outward sign) and so we have here in Rom. 8 a vivid presentation of the company of believers striving to maintain our faith and hope against all the apparent discouragements, knowing not how to approach the Father for reassurance on these matters, and the Holy Spirit within us becoming the medium to assist us in our weakness and insufficiency (not "infirmities" as in vs. 26) to convey our unspoken and unutterable feelings to our Lord in heaven and He in succession to the Father. And the Father, who in these things is one with the Son, already knows! *"He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit"* ("mind" here is thoughts, intents purpose) again related to the fact that in this oneness the Father already knows the unspoken thoughts which are being conveyed to him from the believer by the Spirit. And the result is the assurance that all things are working together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

Finally there is the power of the Holy Spirit in Christ. According to Heb. 9.14 it was through the eternal Spirit that Christ "offered himself without spot to God". In what manner did the Spirit assist in the act of Christ offering himself? That the exercise of Divine power was mightily involved in the events surrounding Calvary is evident; Eph. 1.19-20 tells us that God exerted "his mighty power" in raising Jesus from the dead. The reality of our Lord's death is declared in the Book of Revelation in perfectly unambiguous terms, and so is the reality of his resurrection. *"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore"* (Rev. 1.18). The Holy Spirit is the medium of the power of God in active operation and the New Testament makes it clear that the power of the Spirit was in and over Jesus throughout his earthly life in a very special sense. At the very commencement the angel told Mary *"the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore that Holy One which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God"* (Luke 1.35). When, thirty years later, Jesus came to be baptised preparatory to embarking upon his mission, the heavens were opened and a visible apparition signified a new impartation of Divine power whereby He could go forward upon

that mission (Matt. 3.16). Following his subsequent period of quiet consideration in the wilderness he returned "full of the Spirit" (Luke 4.1) and when, very soon after, he made his first public appearance, He declared to his listeners "*the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me—the Lord hath anointed me...*" (Luke 4.18). Throughout his earthly life the Holy Spirit was the connecting link, the medium of communion and power, between the Father and the Son, which enabled Jesus to do all that He came to do and to say at the end "*I have finished the work*

which thou gavest me to do. Now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17.4-5).

So the Comforter, the Parakletos, the Holy Spirit of God, which Jesus promised his disciples would be their life-long guide and instructor and inspiration after his departure, has indeed proved to be, to them and to us, the entire activity of the Father in relation to us and to all men as mediated through Christ.

The Passing of Daniel

Daniel was old, too old to take in any more, too old to do any more writing. He began to realise that now. He had to accept the fact that his life's work was finished and he must lay down the responsibility and wait for the call. Now he was ready to yield himself to the care of God whom he had served so faithfully. He prepared himself for the rest of death, knowing of a surety that at the end of the days he would stand in the resurrection of the just and see with his own eyes the reality of the visions he had just now recorded. With that he was content.

So the old man closed his eyes in complete confidence that it would surely come. He knew and had proved throughout a long life the faithfulness of God. Perhaps his mind went back to the early days of boyhood, when he first learned of God and his plans for eventual world deliverance, at the feet of his mentor, Jeremiah the prophet. Maybe he recalled dimly, because it was a long time ago, the journey to Babylon as a youth of eighteen or so, and his companions Azariah, Hananiah and Mishael, who together with him had refused the rich foods of the palace and because of their abstemiousness had eventually found the king's favour and attained high office in the State. That would have brought before his failing eyes the picture of the arrogant king whom he had been able to serve so faithfully, and the king's family which he had known so well, the gentle Queen Amytis, and Nitocris the king's daughter who had remained so staunch a friend through all the vicissitudes of a lifetime and into old age. They were all dead now and only he was left. He remembered the king's dream of the image, and how God had given him the interpretation and the understanding that four great empires were to rule on earth and then the kingdom of God come. The leaping flames of the fiery furnace flickered before his eyes, and again he heard the awed voice of the king "*I see four men, loose, and the form of the fourth is*

like a son of the gods." The thin hands moved restlessly; again he was in spirit endeavouring with Queen Amytis to restrain the mad king as he sought to emulate the beasts of the earth, and once more he knew the thrill of hearing the voice of Nebuchadnezzar, restored to sanity, professing allegiance to the God of heaven. The days of dreams and visions passed across his mind, the visits of the revealing angel, the years of study and reflection when he lived as a private citizen waiting in patience for the revelation of God from heaven. The shadows in the room gathered and he entered again into the darkness of Babylon's last night, when the Persians besieged the city; the blaze of light at the palace banquet, the writing on the wall, the end of the empire, his brief time of service under the Median King Darius, his deliverance from the lion's den. Rapidly the pictures passed before his mental vision and at the end of them all, a golden glory in the background, he saw the fair beauty of the world that is yet to be, the world for which he had waited all his life, the world in which he himself was to stand, in his lot, at the end of the days.

He could see them more plainly now, those his friends and companions of days so long ago. They had all gone in front of him; he had not seen them for a long time. They were there, waiting for him. In the land yet to be, in the end of the days, he would take up his task with renewed strength and ability, and once more serve God to whom he had been faithful, and who had been so faithful to him; serve him in that glory transcendent that will never pass away.

The room was getting very dark now, and it was quiet, quieter than Daniel had ever known it. The golden visions flickered on, beckoning him. . . . He was going to rest now, as the angel had promised. . . . but he would stand in his lot. . . . at the end of the days.

A NOTE ON THE FALL OF BABYLON

The prominent part which the end of the Babylonian empire in the days of Daniel occupies in the history of Israel, and in the framework of dispensational prophecy, has led to a general impression that the city of Babylon was completely destroyed by the invaders at the time of Belshazzar's feast, and that all the O.T. predictions—in Isaiah and Jeremiah—of Babylon's eventual fate were fulfilled. This was not actually so in fact. Babylon was not destroyed in the days of Belshazzar and Cyrus; it experienced a change of sovereignty but the life of the city went on much as usual and the prophecies were not completely and finally fulfilled until many years afterwards.

The Elamite forces captured the city on 16 October 539 B.C. This was apparently the time of Belshazzar's feast and of his own death. He drops out of the historical records at this point and only the Bible, in the Book of Daniel, records the fact of his death. Cyrus entered the city a fortnight later, by which time order had been restored under the "Darius the Mede" whom Daniel records as having "received" the conquered kingdom. The picture given in the sixth chapter of Daniel is that of a change of political control and the appointment of officers, among whom Daniel, at least, was one of the native notabilities included. Life proceeded more or less as before. The contemporary tablets which have been recovered, written at the time, also have it that many of the native Babylonian officials were re-appointed, and that the people generally welcomed the change of political rulership with enthusiasm. (It is true that we have only the word of the conquerors for this; these tablets are the official records written by the Cyrus administration at the time.)

Cyrus was formally enthroned at Babylon on 27 March 538. He was not personally present, being away fighting elsewhere at the time; his son Cambyses acted as his representative at the enthronement. At some time during 538 Cyrus issued his celebrated proclamation authorising whosoever wished of the Jews to return to the land of their fathers and rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar some fifty years earlier. This was the end of the "Babylonian Captivity" and the time of the restoration of the Jews to their own land. Cyrus told them that their own God, the God of heaven, had commanded him to have the Temple rebuilt, and he was therefore releasing them from their captivity in order that this charge be

accomplished. It is also true, although this fact is not recorded in the Bible, that he told the native people of Babylon that their god Marduk had instructed him to restore and renovate their own temple in Babylon, and the people of Ur that the Moon-God Sin had told him the same thing as respects his temple in Ur. Probably he did the same in sundry other provinces of the empire. Cyrus was apparently a good tactician and intended to get on the right side of his new subjects. This is not to say that the Scripture narrative is in any way inaccurate. The Lord had prophesied through Isaiah nearly two centuries earlier that there would be a Cyrus who would be raised up to authorise the rebuilding of the city and Temple, even before they had been destroyed or Cyrus had been born. It is probably the right conclusion that the Lord did put this thing into the mind of Cyrus as respects the Jews, and to this end he was definitely, if unknowingly, an instrument in the hand of God. Possibly it was this which suggested the idea to his mind as respects the other peoples and temples concerned.

After the enthronement Cambyses acted as viceroy for Cyrus in Babylonia, with his headquarters and residence at Sippar, some two hundred miles north of Babylon. Cyrus was away most of the time fighting to extend and consolidate his widening empire. It is probable that Daniel died during this period; the latest note of time we have in his book is the third year of Cyrus, 536 B.C.

At about this time, and as evidence of the continuing prosperity of those Jews who elected to remain in Babylon, there was in existence the prosperous Jewish banking firm of Egibi and Son, masses of whose commercial documents, discovered by archaeologists, show that they dealt in almost every imaginable commodity and type of financial transaction from the time of Nebuchadnezzar to that of Xerxes of Persia, a period of nearly two centuries. A great deal of modern knowledge of this period has been derived from the very comprehensive business records of these enterprising Jews, who seem to have stored all their documents—written on imperishable clay tablets—and never thrown anything away.

In 530 B.C., eight years after his enthronement, Cyrus was killed in battle and Cambyses became king, ruling for eight years in turn until his own death in 522. He was succeeded by Darius I (not the same as "Darius the Mede" of Dan. 6), the Darius of Ezra, who immediately

found himself faced with a rebellion in Babylon, led by an impostor who claimed to be a surviving brother of Belshazzar. Darius put down the rebellion, with considerable damage to the city, demolished the inner walls, and slew the rebel. Following another rebellion under another impostor the next year, easily suppressed, Babylon settled down to a quiet and reasonably ordered life.

Forty years later (482 B.C.) during the reign of Darius' successor Xerxes, there was another and more serious rebellion led by a native Babylonian, Belshimanni. Xerxes acted promptly and ruthlessly. This time Babylon was completely destroyed, its massive outer walls pulled down, the Temple of Marduk demolished and the great Tower of E-temenanki — the Biblical Tower of Babel—brought to ruin. The eighteen feet high golden image of Babylon's god, Marduk, was melted down and taken away as spoils of conquest.

This was the end. Without the Temple, the priesthood and the image of the god, no native king could be enthroned. The national kingship was gone for ever. What Nebuchadnezzar had done for Jerusalem a century earlier Xerxes had now done for Babylon. This was the final and true fall of Babylon, the fulfilment of the prophecy of Jeremiah "the broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken down, and her high gates shall be burned with fire" (Jer. 51.58). It had taken fifty-seven years for the fall of Babylon to be fully accomplished, but when it came the fall was utter and complete.

Notwithstanding all this, the life of the city continued. The houses of the citizens were gradually rebuilt and the city re-organised, but no longer in its former magnificence. Its importance as a trading centre and religious sanctuary rapidly declined. When Alexander the Great overthrew the Persian empire in 332-323 B.C. he determined to restore the city's greatness and rebuild the ruined Tower and Temple, but after conquering the known world as far as India and establishing the empire of Greece he died at Babylon. Some twenty years later his successor Seleucus Nicator built the new city of Seleucia on the river Tigris and took most of Babylon's inhabitants to populate it. Seleucia became the new trading centre and Babylon suffered accordingly. About 275 B.C. Berossus, a Babylonian

priest at the Temple of Babylon, compiled a history of Babylon in Greek for the benefit of the Greek rulers. By this time the priests of Marduk were almost the only inhabitants but after a century of desolation the Greek ruler Antiochus IV tried to create a Greek city from the ruins with an imported Greek population. This effort failed and in the year 29 B.C. the last of the priests abandoned the city and left the great Temple to its fate. In A.D. 24 merchants from the Syrian city of Palmyra founded a trading colony amidst the ruins which endured for fifty years, by which time, according to the 1st century Roman historian Pliny, only the Temple was still standing and the rest was desert. There was a certain amount of new building and habitation during the period of the Parthian empire, between about A.D. 150-200. From then onward the site was deserted.

During mediæval times a number of small villages grew up around the outskirts of the ancient city and along the banks of the river Euphrates which used to run through its centre, the present quite important town of Hillah being the principal one of these. But no one ventured to build on the principal sites where the temples and palaces had stood.

The first modern traveller to visit the city were Englishmen, Eldred and John Cartwright, who explored the ruins in 1583 and 1603. They said that the Tower was still as high as the stonework on St. Paul's steeple in London (not the present cathedral, but "old St. Pauls," destroyed not long afterwards). That steeple rose 520 feet above the ground so on this basis the height of the Tower in the 17th century was still something like 250 feet). During the past two centuries, however, Babylon has become a quarry for every builder in Iraq who wants good bricks and for the building of dams and the like; to-day there is nothing left of the Tower save a few lines of brickwork about four feet high and remnants of its great stairway. The Temple of Marduk, where Nebuchadnezzar placed the golden vessels and treasures looted from Solomon's Temple (Dan. 1.2), was excavated by Prof. Robert Koldewey in 1914 but apart from its ruins and those of Nebuchadnezzar's palace there is little above ground save masses of broken brickwork. The foretold utter desolation of Babylon eventually came to pass as foretold so long ago by the prophets. It was a lingering death, but it was final.

THE GLORY THAT IS TO COME

The Scriptures abound with pictures portraying God's holy Temple, that house in which He will ultimately dwell with men. The visions described in Rev. 21 and 22 are the climax of these, but there is a wealth of detail in the O.T. providing many clues as to the building of this symbolic structure and the worship centred therein in days to come. The edifice known as Solomon's Temple comes first to mind. Although this was built by Solomon, much of the material used, the plans and specifications for its construction and the order of service, were provided by David. The gold, silver, bronze, precious stones and marble used in its decoration were provided by David and the chiefs and princes of the people. These were all free-will offerings, but David makes it quite clear that all these gifts came from God, and that they were only giving back what was his (1 Chron. 29). This temple was beautiful in every aspect, but its glory was that of the Divine Presence, which filled it with ineffable light.

The temple portrayed in Ezekiel's visions is also a picture of the temple of the future, and this too was filled with that same ineffable light. In these same visions the presence of God is seen leaving the city and its temple, to return later. This is a graphic portrayal of the result of Israel's defection and consequent rejection as a nation, but there are many prophecies which foretell their return to favour and the place they will occupy in relation to the future Temple.

The rebuilding of the temple under Zerubabel the governor and Joshua the priest give us an insight into this return to favour if it is viewed in the light of other prophecies. The word of the Lord which came to Haggai in the statement in chap. 2.6-9 makes it definitely topical today. God declares that once more He will shake the heavens, the earth, the sea and the dry land, and that He will shake all nations. Who will deny that this is now taking place and that men are trembling at the sights and sounds which indicate the hand of the Lord at work. In the midst of all this students of the Bible look rather at the outcome.

The word of God continues "*the desire of all nations shall come and I will fill this house with glory*". In the minds of many this "desire of all nations" is peace, based apparently on the closing words of vs. 9, but a critical examination of vs. 7 suggests that it is the desirable precious things of all nations that will come to the temple. Another

thought is that the things valued by God will come, but other Scriptures seem to favour the first suggestion.

God declares that He will fill the house with glory, and that the silver and the gold is his. This is in line with David's declaration already quoted from 1 Chron. 29, but there are many other "desirable precious things" referred to in this connection. King Solomon is symbolic of the ruler in the New Jerusalem, and when the queen of Sheba visited him she came with a great caravan bearing spices, much gold and precious stones. The navy of Hiram brought eighteen tons of gold from Ophir with a wealth of sandal wood and precious stones. The traders brought tributes from all the kings and governors of Arabia. Every three years Hiram's navy brought gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks. All the earth sought Solomon and every man brought tribute, vessels of silver and gold, garments, armour, spices, horses and mules (1 Kings 10).

When the king's daughter (the glorified Church) is in the king's palace, the daughter of Tyre will be there with a gift, and the rich of the people will bring their treasures (Psa. 45.12).

While darkness covers the earth and thick darkness the people, Zion, prostrate with grief, is called upon to rise to a new life and shine, for her light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon her. Then the kings and nations gather to her light. Riches of the sea flow to her, and the wealth of nations is hers. Foreigners build her walls and kings minister to her. Her gates are never shut and the wealth of the nations will come in, headed by the rulers of the earth.

The word of the Lord continues "*the glory of Lebanon shall come to thee, the cyprus, plane and pine tree together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary, and I will make the place of my feet glorious*" (Isa. 60). The "place of his feet" makes particular reference to God's dwelling with men upon the earth (Rev. 21.3), but how can such gifts bring glory to God's holy temple? This great structure is not a building embellished with gold and silver, encrusted with precious stones, but a living vital organisation, having the glory of God as its light. Its foundations are the twelve living Apostles, its fabric is made of living stones, the glorified Church, its twelve gates are guarded by the tribes of Israel restored to favour. It is a place of assembly, its gates are always open, ready to receive the kings and the nations

of the earth bringing their glory and honour to it. But the glory of God and the Lamb is its light; how then can men's gifts contribute to its glory? Those who brought their most precious gifts to Solomon are symbolic of all that is proud, haughty and selfish in this evil world; none of these will bring glory to God, but men's hearts of

stone are to be changed to hearts of flesh, and thus changed they will discern the glory of God shining from the temple in the future, and like the magnetic needle drawn to the pole will flock to this centre of assembly, and will add to the glory of God in the sense that He will be vindicated at last in the minds of men and angels.

"IN THE THIRD DAY HE WILL RAISE US UP"

"After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight" (Hos. 6.2).

A striking feature of the Divine Plan is its orderly development, each successive step advancing the work of the overthrow of evil one stage farther. There are three main phases, each having its own special time and place, each preparing the way for its successor and waxing old and passing away when its work is done. One might almost trace an analogy between these successive phases and the account of the creative week in Genesis when at the end of each period of time, or "day", devoted to some specific development, God looked upon what had been achieved and pronounced it "good". At the close of the sixth day, when He had created earth's crowning glory, man, and placed him in his home, God looked upon all that He had made, and pronounced it "very good". So one might imagine him looking upon the finished work of each Age in history, and approving the progress toward ultimate redemption from sin, and then, at the end, when Christ has delivered up the Kingdom to the Father, viewing with serene satisfaction the triumphant outcome to his great plan of salvation and endorsing it "very good".

The Scriptures indicate that there are two "salvations", two destinies, provided for in the Divine plan. The Early Church saw this matter more clearly than did the ecclesiastical systems of later times. The influence of the great theologian Augustine has profoundly affected the beliefs of Christendom and since he set his face resolutely against the earlier beliefs founded upon Scriptural teaching of an earthly salvation upon a restored and perfected earth, the doctrine of the Millennium, or "Chiliasm" as it has been called, has almost completely disappeared from ordinary Church teaching.

The vital principle behind God's intention was this: the earth had been created, and man placed upon it, to be an everlasting feature of Divine creation. What forms of spiritual life existed before this earth came into existence we do not know, and Scriptural revelation on this point

does not tell us much. What intentions God has regarding other spheres of material life akin to the human, on other worlds, we do not know and the Scriptures are even less clear as to this. They do seem to indicate, however, that the human race has been created to live on and to enjoy this earth in all perpetuity, and that the power and commission given to man to increase and multiply is in order that the planet may be adequately populated. When this end has been achieved it is expected that such powers will lapse and cease, and this is perfectly in harmony with the Scriptures as they are at present understood.

Now out of this human race, and whilst it is still in process of learning for itself the dire results of sin, God is calling to himself those who are prepared to yield up all they are and have, even to life itself, to become co-workers with him in the execution of this Plan. The significant thing about this is that all who accept this invitation and devote themselves to the interests of God and his Kingdom do become his representatives and missionaries among men, and will be appointed positions of service in that Day when his Kingdom is established over all the earth; but they will not all serve in the same sphere.

It would seem that the faithful ones of the age prior to Christ will be of the earth, human beings, resurrected to a human perfection such as they will have never previously known, and that those of the days since Christ came will inherit the heavenly salvation and become members of the spiritual world, for ever associated with the Lord Jesus Christ in his work of reigning over and blessing the nations. Why there should be this distinction made between men and women who, although separated in historical time, are yet one in their devotion and loyalty to God, it is not our province to enquire. Without doubt there exists good reason for the Divine arrangement, and we may well expect, as we come to comprehend more and more clearly the mysteries of God's ways, to discern something of the reason for this differentiation.

The selection and preparation of these two companies of "workers for God" has been and

remains the principal work of the Divine Plan and will continue so until the heavenly company, the "Church" of this Age, is complete. The time will then have come for God to turn his attention to the world of men in general and, with his two companies of trained workers at his command, to set about the final phase of the elimination of evil by the conversion of all mankind—"who-soever will".

Of the three phases of this Plan, therefore, two—the first two—are concerned with the selection and preparation of these two companies, and the third has to do with their appointed work of reconciling the "residue of men" (Acts 15.17) to God and undoing the effect of sin in their lives. The first phase has to do with the preparation of the earthly people and the Old Testament reveals an interesting chain of development in this connection.

Two thousand years before Christ, God called Abraham, a Hebrew living in the Sumerian city of Ur, and, finding him responsive to his leading, told him that in him, and in his seed, all the families of the earth were to be blessed. This promise marked the beginning of active measures for the development of the "chosen peoples". Abraham became the progenitor of a line of patriarchs whose loyalty to God was unquestioned, and of a family the descendants of which, six hundred years later, became a nation, the nation of Israel.

There can be no doubt that God saw in Abraham and Sarah his wife qualities which, reproduced in the nation that sprang from them, rendered that nation particularly fitted for the duties it was afterwards called upon to perform. The claim of the Israelites to be the "chosen nation" is a valid claim; the authority of the Old Testament can be invoked to support it; but it will only be those members of that nation who have entered fully into sympathy with God's design for mankind, and have devoted themselves to the Divine will for them, who will eventually be brought together as an earthly missionary nation for the execution of God's work on earth. The fact remains, however, that by the time of the First Advent a goodly number of faithful men and women had been laid aside in death waiting for the time that God should call them forth to enter upon their destined work.

For two thousand years longer, a second "day", a second phase in the Divine Plan, God has worked in the world calling men and women

to come to him by faith in Jesus Christ that He might fashion and conform them to the likeness He has foreordained, conforming them to the image of his Son. This calling is a spiritual calling, and the standards to which the Christian is called to attain are higher than those which were set before the pre-Christian "saints". This calling is to a higher sphere and this training for a greater work. Whereas the earthly people are to administer affairs in the Kingdom of God upon earth and stand as the permanent visible representatives of the spiritual government of Jesus Christ, the heavenly people are to be associated with him in the government (Rev. 3.21), and will direct the work of the Kingdom, causing life and blessing to flow to those who are coming willingly into harmony with God through faith in Christ, and bringing to bear all Heaven's powers of persuasion upon those who still exercise their prerogative of free will to remain in sin.

The first phase ended at our Lord's First Advent. The second ends at his Second Advent, which is designed in the Plan for the dual purpose of completing the gathering of the Church and so bringing this "Gospel Age" to an end, and introducing the "Millennial Age" with all that it holds of life and blessing for every man.

The third phase is the Millennium, the Kingdom of God upon earth. That day is to be pre-faced by the General Resurrection, in which the earthly people of God will be restored from their graves and established in their own land, the Holy Land, from whence the Law of the Lord will go forth (Isa. 2.3). The Church will have been completed and gathered to spiritual conditions, ready for its own work. The Devil will have been bound, that he might deceive the nations no more (Rev. 20.1-3). By the end of that Age it will be true that "everything that hath breath shall praise the Lord". The inevitable result of sin will have come upon any who refuse to turn from sin to serve the living God, and with the disappearance of such, the earthly creation will have been purified and perfected. Sin will not again invade the habitation or the heart of man. Men will have entered into eternal life, realising at last that it is in God that they live, and move, and have their being (Acts 17.28).

"In the third day he will raise us up and we shall live in his sight" (Hos. 6.2). The words were spoken of Israel's final restoration and entry upon her destined position in the dawn of the Millennial Age, the "third day", but they are a fitting commentary upon the three historical aspects of the Divine Plan.

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