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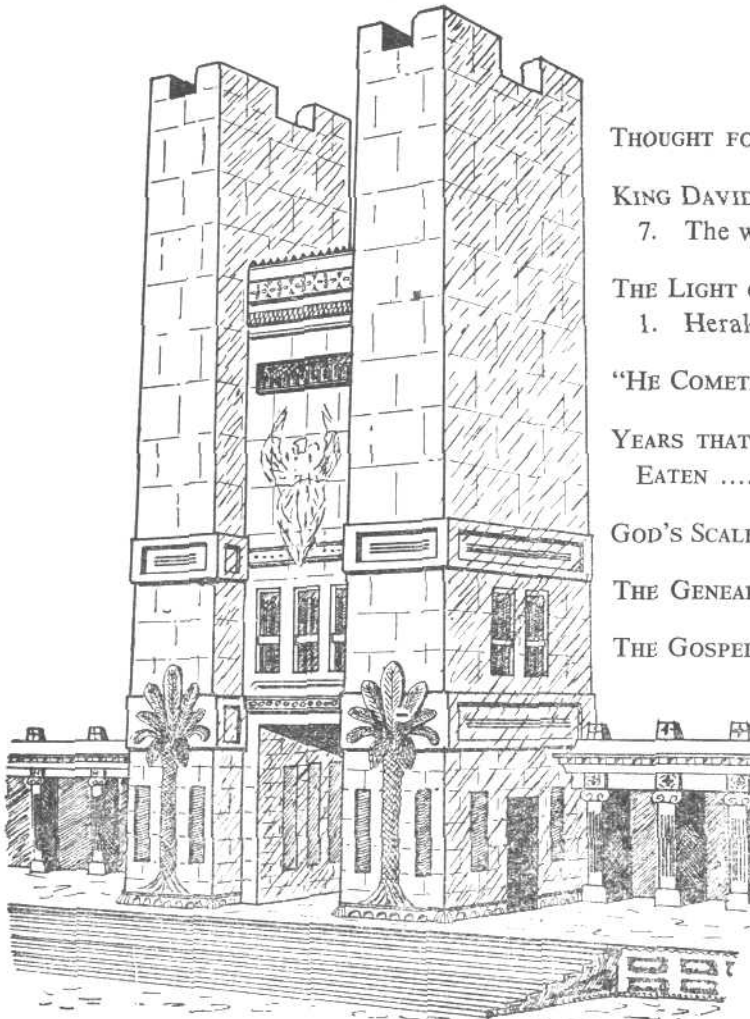
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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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 Lord hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Prov. 16. 4).

That text as it is rendered in the Authorised Version looks suspiciously like an attempt to make God responsible for the existence of evil, both in the heart and in the world; from that it is an easy step to assert a moral obligation upon God to recover all men from evil and usher them into everlasting bliss at last irrespective of their own wish or will, and this has been a tenet held by some Christians in almost every generation since the beginning of the Age. Quite apart from the oft-debated question whether all men will or will not eventually be saved—and since the deliberate expunging of the 42nd article in A.D. 1562 that has to be regarded as an open question in orthodox Church theology—it is altogether out of accord with the known character and attributes of God to picture him as in any sense of the word initiating or introducing or actively pursuing evil or evil works in order to accomplish his purpose. Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of his throne, and He is of purer eyes than to behold evil. When God created, He saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. Evil is an intrusion subsequent to the time of creation, and had its origin in the deliberate and conscious rebellion of created beings against the laws of God. That their Creator did not stamp out the rebellion at once and nullify its effects in the creation it threatened does not make him responsible for the introduction of evil but only for its permission, for toleration of its existence for a span whilst He works out his purpose among the rebellious ones, allowing them to learn by bitter experience the destructive effect of evil

and by his persuasive love be induced, if capacity for repentance be not entirely destroyed, to renounce evil and be restored to harmony and reconciliation with him. The word "himself" in the text more properly denotes purpose or destiny, and other translations render the phrase more lucidly; thus Margolis has *"the Lord hath made all things for his own purpose"* and Leeser *"for its destined end"*. Here is enshrined an important principle, that of purpose in all that God does. The whole progress of Divine creation from the moment when the first atoms appeared out of nothingness to the time yet to come when the temporary intrusion of evil will be a thing of the past and every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father, is the embodiment of a great purpose existing in the mind and Will of God and therefore certain of realisation. Within that purpose lies the end of evil. The Septuagint renders the verse *"All the works of the Lord are done with righteousness and the ungodly man is kept for the evil day"*. There is expounded the law of retribution. What a man soweth, that shall he reap. The wicked are kept for the day of evil that both evil day and evil men, if such there then be, shall perish out of God's universe together. That will not be until God has used every weapon in his armoury to induce the erring one to repent, and be reconciled, and take his rightful place in God's creation. It will be the work of the coming Age to demonstrate that not one son of Adam is left without abundant opportunity thus to accept of the grace of God in Christ. If, after that, there are those who prove themselves completely and irrevocably impervious to the entry of Divine life and Divine love there can be only one possible end. *"He shall not see life."*

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous King*

7. The Wife of Uriah

King David was at rest in his palace. The reason he was at rest in his palace was that the Lord had given him victory over all his enemies and Israel was at peace and secure. That is what the chronicler of 2. Sam. 7 declared, and the outward facts appear to establish the justice of his claim. The traditional enemies of Israel, the Philistines, had been effectually overcome and expelled from the land. They were now back over the border and confined to their own land. Probably not since the early days of Samuel had such a happy state of affairs subsisted and the reason is not far to seek. Once again, as in those early days of Samuel, the ruler of the land was God-fearing and righteously inclined and the people in general followed his lead. "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord" was David's own testimony (Psa. 144.15) uttered perhaps at just about this time. If the rulers of the nations today would but take God as their Lord, ruling by principle rather than expediency, dealing justly without fear or favour, the peoples of earth would be far happier than they are. But that desirable condition of things cannot be until the One whom David prefigured comes in the plenitude of Divine power to rule with righteousness and wisdom, establishing justice and equity in the earth, in the days of his promised Messianic reign. Meanwhile the world must wait.

During this period David built himself a magnificent palace at Jerusalem. His alliance with Hiram, king of the Phoenicians at Tyre, gave him access to all the materials he needed, costly stones and timbers, precious metals for ornamentation, and luxurious furniture. He probably travelled to Tyre to see these things for himself; it is unlikely that the friendship which it is known had grown up between these two men did not involve a succession of visits to each others' capitals. And when David saw with his own eyes the richness and luxuriance of all which this world had to offer he straightway, it would seem, fell in with the idea of a palace befitting the Jerusalem he intended to create out of the old Jebusite fortress. So Hiram named his price—for the Tyrians were traders and merchants first and last—and David became a willing customer. Before long Phoenician ships were sailing down the coast from Tyre to Joppa, there to have their cargoes unloaded and transported by Israelite labourers forty miles up the steep ascent to Jerusalem, and soon the dream palace had become reality. King David the monarch, with his many wives and

concubines and numerous progeny, had come a long way from the guileless shepherd boy of the Judean hillsides.

But despite all this his heart was still towards God. He sat on his ornate throne and he thought. The fruit of his meditations began to take shape in the form of a dream, a dream of something grander and even more glorious than the splendid palace he had built for himself. So he sent for his spiritual counsellor, Nathan the prophet.

Not much is known about Nathan the prophet. He must have been a very young man at this time for he was still alive at the end of Solomon's reign seventy years later. According to 1 Chron. 27.29 he recorded the history of David's reign, and 2 Chron. 9.29 the history of Solomon's reign, in the "Book of Nathan the prophet". He was a historian and probably, like Isaiah, a statesman and an influence in the royal court. The Book of Nathan has not survived but would have covered much of the same ground as the existing second Book of Samuel, which was of course written long after Samuel's death. So the youthful prophet came into the presence of his king.

David came to the point. I am dwelling in a luxury palace, he told Nathan, but the Ark of God, the sacred symbol of his presence with us, is still housed in a flimsy tent of curtains. I want to build a magnificent temple here in Jerusalem, one that will give glory to God and excite the wonder and admiration of the surrounding nations. The Tabernacle in the wilderness made by Moses at Sinai was adequate enough when the people made their way here from Egypt, and in the days when they were getting themselves established in this land, but now we are a great nation, looking forward to a glorious future, and I want to create a Temple that will be a fitting sanctuary for the God of all the earth, a building to which all men can come to worship. Nathan, listening, felt the same enthusiasm rising in his own heart, and impetuously he replied, "Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the Lord is with thee" (2 Sam. 7.3).

That night the Lord came to Nathan and shattered the rosy dream. "Go and tell my servant David", He said, "thou shalt not build me an house for me to dwell in". (This is the correct rendering of 2 Sam. 7.3 as in the parallel account in 1 Chron. 17.4 not "shalt thou build...?"). He went on to tell the prophet that He had been

content to dwell with his people in a tent of curtains and never at any time had sought anything more ambitious. What was far more important than the erection of a material edifice in the city which would then inevitably suffer the ravages of time and eventually pass away and be no more, was the creation of a solidly founded and enduring kingdom which should subsist for all time as the means of Divine blessing to all the world. And this the Lord purposed to do. He would, he said, establish the seed of David to be a royal dynasty which would endure for ever. A son of David, yet unborn, would finish the work begun by David and build the house and royalty of David so that it would eventually be for the glory of God's Name. We know, now, that in his foreknowledge God was speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, in his humanity of the royal line of David, in his Divinity the only-begotten Son of God, who will in the fulness of time establish that earthly kingdom which will abolish evil and establish universal righteousness. David could hardly be expected to understand all that in his time; yet his later utterances show that he did appreciate in measure the purpose of the Lord and realised that in after times there would be One who would be both his son and his Lord through whom the ancient Abrahamic promise "in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" would at last have its fulfilment. Here, at this time, as recorded in 2. Sam. 7 the Messianic hope had its birth and its first proclamation. From now on the true aim and hope of Israel was to be the coming of the Messiah.

There was another reason why David was not permitted by the Lord to build the Temple which was so much upon his heart, a reason which was not so much to David's credit. That reason is stated in 1 Chron. 22.8. It was because David had been a man of war and had "shed blood abundantly" in God's sight. The Temple of the city of peace must be built by a man of peace, and David had not been a man of peace. His warlike propensities led him into many a course of action which exceeded by far the commissions given him by the Lord. The honour he coveted would, therefore, be gained by his more peaceable son, Solomon, David seems to have accepted the Lord's decision with submissiveness and loyalty. In later years he began to get together the materials for the construction of the Temple but he abode by the Lord's decision that Solomon should build it. So, for the present, he put the dream aside and continued with his task of governing Israel in the reverence and service of God.

But not for long. His restless spirit yearned for the field of battle and soon he was out in the field with his men against his old foes the Philistines. The accounts of his wars at this period of his life are a little disjointed and difficult to fit into a consecutive framework, but it does appear that he reigned peacefully in Jerusalem only about six years before he embarked again upon a series of campaigns against neighbouring peoples which was to occupy his time more or less for another seven years. First it was the Philistines (2 Sam. 8.1) whom he defeated yet again; they were probably the aggressors and he treated them as he had done before. Next it was the turn of Moab, east of Jordan. His brutality to them would seem to be quite indefensible; as the NEB has it (2 Sam. 8.2) "*he made them lie along the ground and measured them with a length of cord*" (a measuring line) "*for every two lengths that were to be put to death, one full length was spared*". In other words, two-thirds of the fighting men taken prisoners were massacred in cold blood. "*So the Moabites became his servants, and brought gifts*", i.e. tribute. The land of Moab was, in effect, added to David's dominions. Next he turned his attention to the north of Israel, where existed a number of petty Aramean states of which Syria with its capital at Damascus was chief. David conquered them all and extended his borders to the Euphrates, slaying many thousands and exacting tribute of precious metals and articles of value, all of which he brought to Jerusalem. Then it was the turn, successively, of Amalek and Edom, and finally Ammon. Every one of the surrounding nations was compelled to submit to the conqueror. From the borders of Egypt to the Euphrates, David ruled supreme and none dared to challenge him. It might well be that, intoxicated by success, he began to partake more and more of the character of a ruthless Eastern despot rather than a benevolent and justice-loving man of God. His loyalty to the God of Israel was unquestioned; his passionate conviction that he had been called of God and empowered by God to lead Israel into a position of supremacy over the nations was fixed and unshakeable. But the God he worshipped was the God of battles, benevolent to his own people but a terrible destroyer of his enemies. David was in the line of Moses and Joshua and Gideon and Samson, men who interpreted the Spirit that was in them as a spirit of destruction, beating down the enemies of God in the power of their own right arms. It could hardly have been otherwise, in the then state of Israel's development. It was an early stage of human history and mankind was still very im-

mature. They could only visualise the promised kingdom of righteousness of the future in terms of the kingdoms around them, the only ones they had known, organised and maintained by brute force and the shedding of much blood. The promised eternal kingdom of David and his seed was necessarily pictured in such terms, with the proviso that it was to be David and his kingdom which was to be on top, and the other nations sternly repressed. A kingdom of love and peace was still far from their comprehension and the idea of the brotherhood of man and universal fatherhood of God quite absent from their thoughts. It was Solomon, the man of peace, the son of David, who first glimpsed the sublime majesty of One who could not be contained even in the heaven of heavens and yet could bend down to hear, and heed, the cry of the most insignificant of his creatures. It was Solomon who first spoke of love, and mercy, and judgment, and peace, in the dealings of the most High with erring men, and of his readiness to forgive. David never reached that height. He was the last of an old school of stalwarts for God who took their inspiration from Sinai. After him came men—kings and prophets—who began to see God and the ways of God in a different and softer light, taking one more step on the road which was eventually to lead to Christ. *"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good"* cried Micah two centuries later *"and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"* (Micah 6.8).

So David continued on his career of conquest. It was during that career that an incident occurred which was to have far-reaching consequences. Nahash, king of the nation of Ammon, died. The territory of Ammon, descendants of Lot the nephew of Abraham and therefore of blood-kinship to Israel, lay on the other side of Jordan more or less east of Jerusalem. It would appear that David and Nahash had always been on friendly terms and no animosity existed between the two peoples (2 Sam. 10. 1-2). Not unnaturally, David sent an embassy to the new king, Hanun, to commiserate with him on the death of his father, and probably to reiterate his pledges of friendship. Hanun, however, being in all probability a young man, allowed himself to be advised by his probably equally young advisers, treated the ambassadors with contempt and shameful insult, and expelled them from his country. David, furious at this affront, and despite his past friendship with Ammon, immediately declared war and sent his forces under Joab, his nephew and commander-in-chief, to teach Hanun a salutary lesson. The Ammonites,

knowing that conflict was inevitable, called upon the Syrians to come to their aid and when Joab arrived he found himself facing the joint strength of Ammon and Syria. In the ensuing melee the Syrians were the first to give way and withdraw from the contest; this induced Hadadezer the king of Syria to call up reinforcements from his outlying dominions and allies and send Shobach his own senior military commander to direct operations. This escalation of the conflict brought David himself to the scene of operations with a greatly augmented force of Israelites. The result was that the Syrians were defeated and largely annihilated, their commander Shobach slain, their equipment captured by David, and only a pitiful remnant got back to Syria to tell the tale to Hadadezer. In consequence Syria and her allies became tributary to Israel and David extended his dominions still farther. The Israelite historian who recorded these things in 2 Sam. 10 concluded his account, a trifle maliciously and certainly with relish *"So the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more"*.

David, flushed with success, now set out to even up the score with Ammon. He sent Joab again, with a suitable force, to lay siege to Rabbah their capital city. It is evident that Hanun was next on the list for the chop. Joab and his men took up their positions and David relaxed from the rigours of war in his palace.

That relaxing was his undoing. He would have been better employed in communion with God giving renewed thanks for his unparalleled succession of victories, for the peace and safety Israel now enjoyed, and seeking guidance for the future. Instead he took a stroll upon the roof of his palace, much as did King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon upon a later memorable occasion, looking over the city he had built, and perhaps congratulating himself upon his achievements as had that king. It was while thus occupied that his gaze was attracted by a movement in the courtyard of a private house below him not far from the palace. From earliest times the houses of the relatively well-to-do in Eastern countries consisted of rooms built completely round a central courtyard open to the sky. Complete privacy was afforded in such a courtyard except from above and probably the roof of the palace was the only vantage point from which a view into this courtyard could be obtained. The king looked more closely; a woman was there, engaged in her ablutions, and he could see that she was beautiful. How long he gazed is not stated; eventually he descended to his apartments and summoned a servant. The servant was to ascertain the identity of the

woman residing in the house he described. David waited rather impatiently for the man's return.

The answer came. The woman was Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite. Uriah was one of the thirty stalwarts who had adventured with David and stood by him in those dark days of Adullam when Saul was seeking his life—he was one of David's loyal supporters and a close friend. He was, also, at this moment, not at home in Jerusalem; he was away at the battle-front with Joab, fighting the Ammonites. David thought for a moment, then came to a quick decision. "Bring her to me", he ordered curtly, and turned and retired to his own apartments. The messenger went as the king had commanded.

Let it be realised that Bath-sheba herself had no choice in this matter. The king was supreme; he could do as he liked and he did do as he liked. The messengers came, and she had to go with them. Afterwards she was permitted to go to her own house and so far as David was concerned that was the end of the matter—or so he thought. But a little later on his complacency was rudely disturbed. He received a message from Bath-sheba which said, in the succinct words of 2 Sam. 11.5, "*I am with child*".

David probably panicked a little at first. Not because he had committed adultery, and that more or less by force, but because of the scandal in Israel this would create. The king stood as the champion and example of the Divine law and should appear always beyond reproach. And there was the probable reaction of Uriah when he found out. He was a tough and hardened warrior and not likely to take this lying down. The war with Ammon must end eventually, and he would be home. Kings had been toppled from their thrones for less than this. David did some more thinking and in consequence despatched an urgent message to Joab to send Uriah back to Jerusalem for consultations.

The warrior entered into the presence of his king. David, all affable, made him welcome and discussed with him the conduct of the war, the welfare of the troops and how Joab was standing up to the strain. They probably chatted a little about old times, and then David, still affable, told Uriah he deserved a short respite from the rigours of the campaign and he was sending him home to spend a few days with his wife before going back to Rabbah. So Uriah went out from his presence and David leaned back in his chair feeling that all would now be well.

Unfortunately for David, it was not. There was a nobility in the character of Uriah upon which the king had not reckoned. When morning came David's servants told him that Uriah

had not gone down to his own home; he had found himself a bed for the night with them. In some annoyance, not unmixed with a certain perturbation, David sent for him and demanded an explanation. He got the answer. The army, and Joab, were enduring the rigours of war in the open fields, said Uriah, and while they are there I will not enjoy the comforts of my home, "*Shall I then go into mine house*", he said "*to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As thou livest, and as thy soul livest, I will not do this thing*".

David was baulked. His very obvious plot had failed. He must think of something else. But meanwhile he had another try. He called Uriah to a private convivial evening for the two of them and plied his quest with liquor, until he had made him thoroughly drunk. Then he told him to go home to his wife for the night, hoping that he had made him so drunk that his resolve would weaken. But when morning came the position was as before.

The king was getting desperate. Had he been in his right mind he would not have done what he did do next. He was not in his right mind; he was desperately worried and clutching at any expedient which offered a way out of his dilemma. He sent a letter to Joab by the hand of Uriah telling Joab to set Uriah in a battle position where he would be isolated and slain by the Ammonites. "*Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die*". To his former crime he was now adding that of murder.

Joab did as he was told. Before long another messenger appeared before David with dispatches from the battle-front. As a casual descript Joab had added "*Uriah the Hittite is dead also*". David told the messenger to assure Joab that he was not to be cast down "*for the sword devoureth one as well as another*" he added unctuously, conscious of an inner feeling of relief that the matter had now been very satisfactorily settled. He began to think of Bathsheba again and the beauty that had first attracted him. She, when she heard that her husband was dead, says the narrator, "*mourned for her husband*" but probably nobody took any notice of that. And after an appropriate period had elapsed, "*David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son*". He most likely felt that this was the easiest way to regularise the matter and avoid any breath of scandal later; one more wife added to the eleven or twelve he already had was neither here nor there. Bath-sheba's own wishes were, of course, not consulted, but with her husband killed in battle she might have felt this

to be the best solution to her own personal problems. David must have developed an affection for her later for she became his favourite wife and it was one of her sons that he designated to succeed him as king.

But in all his self-congratulation David quite forgot one factor, and that an important factor. The narrator records it at the end of the story. "*The thing that David had done displeased the Lord*".

From that moment nothing went right for David. The first eighteen years of his reign were marked by continuous and unqualified success in everything he undertook. Then came his sin against God in this matter. The remaining twenty-two years were times of continuous disaster, treachery, rebellion, and heartbreak. David ultimately received Divine forgiveness for his sin, but its repercussions never left him to the day of his death. *To be continued.*

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

A panorama of the way of Christ

1. Herald in the Wilderness

It is two thousand years since a man came on the stage to play a part in the great drama of human history. He claimed to be the Light of the world, to be the Truth and the Way in which men and women must walk if they want to live in peace and security, with hope and confidence in a future in which existing evils would be finally eradicated. For centuries many have endeavoured to walk in that light, to seek the paths of truth and righteousness which lead to abundant life; yet the aspect of the world, with its brilliantly lit streets and stores of knowledge, is still dark. All the evils of which darkness is a symbol abound, while the good for which light is a synonym is often opposed. That light, neglected and ignored, shines on as it did in those early days of crisis and confusion when the thinking part of the population hardly knew what to do or which way to turn. To them came the voice of a prophet recalling them to a sense of duty. He came to prepare the way, to herald the coming of One greater than himself. It was a period of change, the end of an era when old things were passing away. In what appeared to be wilderness conditions the prophet raised his voice. His words were the introduction to an age of grace and salvation, to light and truth, to a new revealing of God's concern with man by the example and sacrifice of the one he had chosen to be the Light of Men. "*The voice of one crying in the wilderness*" (John 1.23).

A wilderness is a wild place, uncultivated, uninhabited by human beings. Nature, untrained by the hand of man, runs riot, producing a pathless, tangled tract which leads nowhere and serves no purpose, except as a haunt for those less attractive birds and beasts which shun the light of day. To be lost in a howling wilderness is a grim and depressing experience. Yet the herald of Christ, coming out of his desert abode to make known the approach of One who would be great in history, described himself as one

making his proclamation in the wilderness, where there were none to listen or respond to his message. To run around in a pathless waste, shouting out good news to wild, unheeding Nature, seems a deplorable waste of energy. John might well have wondered what he was about, if, after all his youthful discipline, his preaching fell on deaf ears. The society of his day had become decadent, its religion a mere formalism, a lifeless system of creed and ritual. People were confused, groping as the half-blind in a twilight pathless place where there was neither order, purpose nor fruitfulness. Futility, discouragement and apathy is the general air of a wilderness. In such conditions do peoples exist when there is no vision, no aim, no light, no drive, no knowing what they are doing or where they are going.

A wilderness is not a dead thing. It grows, often in rampant luxury. Its very vigour is often the source of its most ensnaring entanglements. The traveller forced to proceed through its territory has to hack a way through climbers and creepers which snatch at arms and legs. Low branches smack him in the face and jutting stones trip his feet. A wilderness is no exaggerated picture of an affluent, knowledgeable society, undisciplined, without faith and without vision, each man going his or her own way, with a general contempt for law and order and a complete disregard for all that is lovely and of good report. These latter things thrive in a well ordered society, in the full light of day, while the dense underworld which crowds the floor of the wilderness stretches out its vigorous tentacles in a secretive gloom.

Whatever the facade of John's world, to his trained senses it was a wilderness. His was a lone voice crying among a people walking in darkness. He stood at a cross-roads in history. A pagan age was dying of its own corruptions. A new one was about to take its place and he

hailed it with stirring enthusiasm. Few took him seriously. Like many prophets he created a sensation. Power and intrigue were at hand to silence him. Those who might have benefitted by his words plunged heedlessly on to greater perils.

So it has been with most of God's messengers. They have cried in the wilderness to the deaf and the blind who have preferred the entanglements and deceptions of this world. Lonely, discouraged, opposed, they might well doubt both mission and message but for the glorious example of their forerunners who spoke up loud and strong for a better way and a better day. The echoes of those lone voices crying in the wilderness of man's bewilderment come to us out of the past with an urgent message for the present to 'Labour on!'

*Go labour on! 'tis not for nought
Thine earthly loss is heavenly gain
Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not
The Master praises—what are men?
Toil on, and in thy toil rejoice
No toil for Him shall be in vain.*

"*Make straight the way of the Lord*" (John 1.23). There was no way through the wilderness, no road upon which wayfarers might travel, sure of their direction and their destination. John, crying in the wilderness of human gloom and perplexity, called upon his hearers to bestir themselves, to get to work, to clear a path, to make a way through the entangling growths which caught and ensnared them into ever deeper perplexities. The way he called upon them to make was no ordinary track serving as a makeshift means of getting to nowhere in particular. It was the way of the Lord, the King's highway, which he wanted them to build of strong, enduring substance.

The highways of the world are well known and well named. Far from being temporary structures they have existed from ancient days, carved originally through the waste lands of the earth, permanent roads over which history, merchandise and men have travelled on their varied errands to a known destination. John, looking on the world around him, saw it as a waste land without a highway and without an aim. There was only a confused running around, with no future, no way to anywhere. Such times are ripe for change. A new vision appears to the eyes of men tired of the out-worn past. New hope, new ideas will spur people on to enthusiastic endeavours. The foremost will hack a way through the jungle to some new and nobler prospect, and feebler souls will travel on behind in safety and in confidence.

The call is a challenge. It is not merely a stimulus to survival but an act of renewal. New work for a new goal is the preparation for a new mode of life. In a personal way, on an individual scale, the call comes at a crisis in life to get up and get going, to get something done, to start out on a new venture, to pave the way that others looking on may take heart and venture also on a fresh start and some useful work.

Nations have their prophets and their call to cut through the wilderness of waste and confusion to a nobler and better life where even the simple may walk safely. John was clearing a way, casting up a highway for a King, whose advent brought new light and life, new goals and visions to mankind. That age has ended again in the wilderness. Yet once more the voice of the prophet cries out—"Make way, Cast up a highway! cut through the entanglements, the snares, the stifling growth, throw out the stones, Prepare the way, not for any earthly title but for Our God". "*For every valley shall be exalted, every mountain and hill made low; the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain.*"

What is this but a blossoming, rejoicing wilderness, a new vision, a new hope, a new life, a new world; the voice of One crying "All things new", "*for the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.*"? When that which is old is on its last legs, staggering with weakness and confusion, the new, vigorous, glowing with health, is already at the door, and expectant hearts lift up their voice in song.

*Hark the glad call! The Lord has come!
The Saviour promised long.
Let every heart prepare his way.
And every voice a song.
He comes, the Sun of righteousness,
To roll earth's clouds away,
To make its desert wilderness
Bloom in eternal day.*

"Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1.29).

When John saw Jesus walking towards him at the river Jordan, he immediately identified him as the Lamb of God, whose mission was to take away the sin of the world. Twenty centuries later such a pronouncement is almost as mystifying to the average listener as it was then. John did not urge the bystanders to go to church, to put faith in creed or ritual, in law or government. He pointed them to a person, to one man with a special title which endowed him with life-saving qualities. The nation of Israel were well aware of the passover lamb by whose life-blood they had been preserved, when the angel

of death was abroad over the land of Egypt. Every year each family commemorated that deliverance, but the ritual did not preserve them from the failings, the sicknesses and death common to man. They were still in a wilderness state, groping for a way and a place, subject to Cæsar, to all the miseries of foreign rule. Their problems were less moral and physical than national. Freedom from taxation and a hated yoke of government was their chief concern. Yet John, a prophet and a patriot, did not speak of taxes, of sectarianism or of political intolerance. He spoke of sin, enlarging the race of his own people into that of all races, he did not say "Behold a king, a leader, a deliverer", but "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world". It probably was a disappointing statement after such fiery oratory as had brought the crowds out to be baptised in the swiftly flowing Jordan. Sin would be no more a likeable word than it is now. Whatever name is given to the misdeeds of men, they are still the root cause of all human tribulation. Man's inhumanity to man may have half a dozen substitute names for sin, but it is still the words and actions of depraved human nature which makes the race suffer.

To take away all that is crooked, cruel and unjust is a sublime vocation and one man was chosen for that high office. Could that generation have seen then, as now this Age might see, that the selfishness of sin is the evil root of all the world's troubles, they would gladly have plucked it out that the plant of goodness might dispense instead its fruitful blessings. Goodness is not a thing to be jeered at but a Divine alchemy whose mystical properties can transform the heart of man and through him the entire world from a state of hideous jungle to a planet of abounding peace and plenty. The Lamb of God went about doing good; his spirit of compassion, of giving, of simplicity and truth was God's answer to the world's evils of hatred, cruelty, greed, ambition, selfishness and falsehood.

"Behold the Lamb!" Could we have looked on him as people then looked upon him we should not have seen the knitted brows, the tight lips, the jutting jaws, the proud spirit of those leaders of men whose blunders have made the angels weep. He was one over whom they sang with joy, innocent as his title implied, benign, a man of peace and prayer, a man of moral and spiritual power, the friend of children, of the outcasts of society, of the widows and the weary, of the sick and sorrowing. He walked with dignity, his face serene, his hands full of healing,

his voice stronger than the elements, his words laden with wisdom and life. Wherever his penetrating eye fell, sin fled before him. Only a king of that calibre is fit to rule the world. Only his goodness can prevail against the world's sin and wickedness. Only his love has the power to make the human race into one agreeable whole without destroying one vestige of individual personality. Behold the Lamb of God! He whom saints have followed for twenty centuries will yet take earth's government upon his shoulder.

"What seek you?" (John 1.38) Man, during his chequered history, has sought for many things; for silver and gold, for precious gems, for new continents, for the sources of great rivers, for things long extinct which reveal the primeval nature of the great globe he inhabits. The elixir of life with its promise of eternal youth, the philosopher's stone with its promise of easy wealth, the secrets of sea and sky, of life and death, are some of those quests after which the dedicated have followed with all the tenacity of the knight who sought the Holy Grail.

*"But the best courage man has ever shown
Is daring to cut loose and think alone.
To seek for truth as blind men grope for
light."*

In the days of John, the last of Israel's prophets, centuries of heathen philosophy enclosed the world in a pagan twilight. Such worship of the one true and living God as there had been had deteriorated into mere lip service. The preaching of John had stirred thoughtful minds from their indifference. When he pointed out a Man greater than himself, two young men who were his disciples noted that man and followed him. Jesus turned and saw them coming after him. He did not on this occasion ask, Whom do you seek, but What? The young men wished to talk with him, to ask questions, to hear his answers. What they sought was knowledge of a special kind, which they felt he had, a knowledge not to be obtained in the public thoroughfares but in private, so they replied simply, "Master, where do you live?". Graciously they were invited to his lodging place, where they stayed with him one whole day learning from the lips of One who spoke the words of God in the simple language of men and Nature, secrets hidden hitherto from the wise and prudent.

What they discovered in that interview became apparent in their lives in after years. As Jews they sought the King of Israel, and their questions no doubt turned on Israel's future, but as men they sought life. Later in his ministry, when men began to forsake him because his

words and deeds were not those of a military leader, he gave these young men a chance to go with them. It was then that one of them revealed the true object of their search in the words—*"To whom shall we go, You have the words of eternal life."*

Knowledge, however ample, falls short of the ultimate. The old passes away as the new makes itself known. Wealth fails to satisfy the heart, and health eventually succumbs to the weakness of age and the earth takes back her dust. What then is left to man worthy the seeking which will outlast time and his own feeble frame, which will satisfy the deep places of the heart, uplift his spirit, fortify his mind and make him one forever with the great fountain of life and light which owns and controls the vast, mysterious

universe? Men have sought and found many strange inventions, affording a temporary pleasure or producing long-lasting evils. Only one search has found that power which enables man to triumph over both the best and the worst of this world. Those who followed Jesus to his dwelling found it in what he said—*"The words I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life."* "What seek you?". If life in everlasting measure, there is only one source.

*Christ, the blessed one gives to all
Wonderful words of life
Brother, list to his loving call
All so freely given,
Blessed boon from heaven
Beautiful words! Wonderful words!
Wonderful words of life.*

A Note on Psalm 149.9

"To execute upon them the judgments written; this honour have all his saints." (Psa. 149.9).

The setting of the Psalm shows that the reference is to the coming Age. This psalm was first written for and applied to Israel. Israel expected that when the Last Day had come and the Messiah appear in the glory of the Kingdom they, his people, would be called to execute his judgment upon the wicked—which to the average Israelite meant the Gentile nations. Their expectation was right in principle, but their knowledge of the Divine Plan was deficient. When the Messianic Kingdom is set up there will be a heavenly people, the Church, associated with the King for judgment, as well as the earthly people, Israel, in the Holy Land, even although that earthly people does have a share in the privilege of doing God's work in that Age. It is correct therefore to apply this Psalm to the Church as well as to Israel, but the time of its fulfilment is in the future just the same—in the Messianic Age.

The Psalm itself indicates this. First of all the faithful are exhorted to sing unto the Lord a new song, to praise his name in the dance, to sing praises with the timbrel and harp. This is a theme of joy and triumph, therefore, not of grief and humiliation. *"Let the saints be joyful in glory"* says verse 5. It cannot be insisted too much or too often that the saints are not in power or glory now; glory is reserved for the future. *"Let them sing aloud upon their beds"*. This is an allusion to the time of rest from labour and entrance into eternal habitations. (See Isa. 57. 2. See also Psa. 132. 13-14 where the Lord is said to "rest for ever" in his habitation of Zion).

Verses 6-9, referring to the two-edged sword and the executing of vengeance upon the nations, binding their kings with chains and executing upon them the judgment written, refer to the judgment work of the Age, the work of destroying evil institutions and things that afflict mankind.

God's handiwork

"Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth." (Psa. 104.30).

The wonderful diversity of God's handiwork is nowhere better exemplified than in the manifestations of life which are apparent on so many different planes of material existence. From the simplest forms of living cell, through every ramification of the two organic worlds—the vegetable

and the animal—up to that marvellous organism which is a human being, life displays its many-sided aspects to the serious minded student of Divine creation. The secrets of organic structure of men and mammals, of the growth and development of plants and trees, are understood, but the mystery of life itself, from whence it comes, how it passes through successive generations, is not known at all. It still remains true, as in the days of David, that the spirit and power of life is held by the Almighty (Psalm 104. 29-30).

"HE COMETH WITH CLOUDS"

One of the grandest pictures of our Lord's Second Advent is that which shows him coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The imagery is taken from the seventh chapter of Daniel, where one like the Son of Man comes thus and is brought near before the Ancient of Days to receive his Kingdom. Jesus made use of this symbol when declaring the certitude of his Second Coming to Caiaphas (Matt. 26. 64) and John the Revelator avowed his faith in that great event in the same terms (Rev. 1.7). The early Christians, familiar as they were with the symbolism of Old Testament prophecy (technically called "apocalyptic") understood these allusions in the manner intended. It was inevitable that in the Dark Ages, when priestcraft had reduced Bible truth to a jumble of literal crudities and absurdities, this "coming in the clouds" should be viewed as a literal and visible event. One of the great achievements of modern times has been to make clear the true object and manner of our Lord's return, but although the *object* still remains tolerably well understood, it is to be feared that there is a considerable tendency to retreat into the old literal understanding of the *manner* of his return. The drift is quite understandable; hopes and expectations respecting the speedy coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, nurtured and cherished for a long term of years, have not been fulfilled so speedily as was anticipated, and the inevitable disappointment has destroyed confidence in many Scripture interpretations formerly held and implicitly believed. But the tendency cannot be placidly accepted for all that; we as Christian students ought to be aware that in whatever direction we have attained an advanced understanding of truth, in that same direction there will always be the forces of reaction tending to draw us back. The suggestive power of "orthodox" Christian thought, as endorsed and propounded by Christendom generally, has a greater influence on our minds than many of us realise, and it has to be resisted. All too often some claimed "wonderful new light" has proved to be traceable to commentator Albert Barnes, or Doctor Bullinger, or some other worthy Christian of a century ago, instead of leading onward in the bright pathway that stretches before us unto meridian day (Prov. 4. 18).

In considering this subject it may well be the most profitable approach to look at the "literal"

interpretation first, with all its implications. In so doing it will be necessary to take into account the narrative of our Lord's ascension (Acts 1, 9) when, as the disciples gazed into heaven "*a cloud received him out of their sight*"; the various allusions to clouds in connection with the Second Advent, and Paul's intimation to the Thessalonians that at the end the Church will be "*caught up . . . in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*" (I Thess. 4. 17). No apology is going to be made for treating the subject realistically and trying, within the limits of our knowledge, to visualise these events just as they are going to happen. Almost every Scripture text relating to this subject, the Second Advent, has been so dissected, analysed, classified, and explained that there is grave danger of forgetting that these words were not given to provide a kind of intellectual jig-saw puzzle for our mental stimulation and exercise, but to convey to our minds, in this generation, with the background knowledge of God and his Plan that we already have, as accurate a picture of the true nature of the Second Advent as we within our limits can receive.

The account of the Ascension in the first chapter of Acts is concise and eloquent, easy to understand. It is a description of an actual happening. We call it a historical narrative, therefore we take it literally. The disciples really did go out to Olivet with Jesus. He really did ascend visibly before their eyes, there really was a cloud into which He disappeared and thereafter they saw him no more. Two heavenly messengers did materialise into human form and speak to them and then the disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

Unless God deviated the usual course of Nature, which was not necessary and is therefore unlikely, that cloud was not less than half-a-mile from the earth's surface and not more than six miles. It is only with difficulty that a human form can be plainly described at half-a-mile distance on the level ground; we have to assume therefore that the ascending Lord was almost out of sight when He entered the cloud. Until that moment, He was visible in human form, wearing the normal garments of the day. It is hardly necessary to observe that the Lord Christ did not proceed on his way to his Father's presence still in that form and wearing those garments. The entire incident was enacted because He must needs show the disciples that He

had now finally left them. A simple disappearance would not do; He had appeared and disappeared a dozen times before since his resurrection. This visible ascent into the cloud was to show them that He was now ascending to his Father and would not be seen on earth again. The two angels "dematerialised" on the slopes of Olivet after giving their message, and returned, spirit beings, to the heavenly courts. The Lord laid aside that human form and those human trappings as He entered that cloud, and so ascended in his glorious Divine nature to the same heavenly courts.

The visible ascent must have been majestic and dignified, and therefore leisurely. The disciples must have stood, looking upwards, for at least ten or fifteen minutes while the form of their Master receded steadily into the distance. Any shorter time would have imparted a discordant note incompatible with the solemnity of the situation.

Now we come to the Second Advent. Jesus told Caiaphas at his trial "*Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming upon the clouds of heaven*" (Matt. 26. 64.). If that statement is to be understood literally then it means that Christ returns visibly and is seen by human beholders, at his Second Coming. But is it to be understood literally?

If it is so to be interpreted, then it follows that Caiaphas and those with him must be raised from the dead *before* the Lord comes "*in the clouds*" to be seen of men, and *before* He has gathered his Church if that gathering is to take place at his appearance. That presented no difficulties to the old "twenty-four hour Day of Judgment" theology when everything took place at the signal of Gabriel's trumpet, but it certainly presents difficulty now. Caiaphas is not due to be raised until the General Resurrection, which takes place *after* the Lord's appearing and establishment of his Kingdom and not before. Whatever there is in the Divine Plan of a literal outward manifestation when the Lord takes his power and establishes his Kingdom "*in the sight of all people*", only the nations then living will witness it, not the dead. Certainly not Caiaphas. The Lord's words to him must be understood as having a significance that he appreciated, but not a literal one. The thought of Caiaphas being resurrected before the Church, whose is the First Resurrection, is out of all accord with the Plan as we know it.

Caiaphas was not the only one to whom Jesus spoke of his coming "*with the clouds of heaven*". He told his disciples just the same things. Speaking of the signs of his presence and of the coming of the Kingdom He said "*Then shall appear*

the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24. 30; Mark 13. 26; Luke 21. 27). The phraseology is quite clearly taken from Daniel 7, the vision of the destruction of the powers of this world and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Jesus was telling both Caiaphas and his disciples, in effect, that He was the One Who will return and fulfil the terms of that vision. If the clouds He speaks of are literal, then the clouds of Dan. 7 are literal, and if they are literal, so is the rest of the vision of Dan. 7. We do well therefore to go back to that chapter.

Daniel 7 is quite well known. It describes four great mythical beasts who are brought for judgment before the "Ancient of Days", Who is clearly God himself. At the same time there is One like the Son of Man, who comes with the clouds of heaven and is brought before the Ancient of Days. In that sublime Presence this Son of Man receives an everlasting kingdom, which in the angel's subsequent explanation is shared with the "saints of the Most High".

No one will contend that this is a literal description of what is to happen, that God is in Person like unto a white-haired old man, that the Last Judgment is upon strange and mythical beasts having wings and horns and so on, that the dead are judged out of literal books. This is symbolic prophecy. The "clouds of heaven" of the prophecy are as symbolic as the four beasts and the expressions "Ancient of Days" and "Son of Man". And if the "clouds" of Daniel 7 are symbolic, so must they be in Matt. 24 and Matt. 26 where Jesus is manifestly alluding to the same thing. So must they be in Rev. 1. 7 where John the Revelator in his exultation of spirit goes back to the language of the Old Testament and cries out, as though he actually saw the sight before him "*Behold, he comes, with clouds, and every eye sees him, even those that pierced him. Even so may it be*". John spoke there in the present tense, passive, as though the event he described was being enacted before his eyes. He did not say "He will come with clouds" as of something still future, but "*Look, here he comes, with the clouds that were prophesied, and everyone is mourning as was prophesied*" and then, as if conscious that what he saw was only in the spirit of his mind, he uttered the heartfelt prayer "Even so, Amen". "Even thus let it be"—in due time.

It remains then to decide what is meant by the symbolic clouds of heaven which are associated with our Lord's Second Advent. It can be said quite simply that those clouds picture the

majesty and glory and power of God manifested to men at the Second Advent. We have to go behind Dan. 7 now to trace the origin of this. These clouds are clouds of promise as well as clouds of judgment. The Second Advent is associated with judgment but when the time comes that the Son of Man is established in his Kingdom and all men are made aware of the fact, the judgment is mainly in the past and the promise of the Millennial calling, the new Age, is before them. Now that is how it was at the beginning. The first great time of judgment in man's history followed by a new Age was at the Flood. Immediately after the Flood, which was the judgment, God put his bow of promise in the cloud. In that radiant cloud was seen the promise of the future and in that manifestation of Divine power and glory men entered upon their new Age. Similarly at Sinai; God said He would be revealed in the thunders and lightnings of a thick cloud, and it was in the majesty and magnificence of that setting that Moses emerged, with his face reflecting the Divine glory, to lead the people into a new era of covenant relationship with God. The darkness of the cloud spoke of judgment; its lightnings and its glory spoke of promise. So the prophet in after days, speaking of that great event, cried "*God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens . . . and his brightness was as the light*" (Hab. 3. 3-4.). The Psalmist, catching the same thought, sang of God "*who maketh the clouds his chariots, who walketh upon the wings of the wind*" (Psa. 104. 3). Isaiah, too, saw the Lord riding upon a swift cloud, and the idols of Egypt being moved at his presence (Isa. 19. 1). Note here the difference between history and prophecy. The clouds of Sinai and of the Flood were literal because the accounts in which they are mentioned are history. They became the basis for the prophetic poetry of David, Isaiah and Habakkuk where the clouds are symbolic. None of us really thinks that God literally rides on clouds as in a chariot. The language is metaphorical, poetic, symbolic, call it what we will, and it is carried into the New Testament as such.

"International politics shall no longer vex the world with war, for the Lord Christ will rule, "even in the midst of his enemies," and "all dominions shall serve and obey him." The problems of government shall then be solved. Oppression, ignorance, want and crime shall cease, for "the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and shall possess the kingdom for ever." No less than this is the glorious prospect, given

It is on the basis of these things that both Joel and Zephaniah described the Time of Trouble that closes this Age and ushers in the Kingdom as a "*day of clouds and thick darkness*" (Joel 2. 2; Zeph. 1. 15). Daniel's vision followed those of these two prophets; his is much more comprehensive. It reveals not only the judgment but also the glory that is to follow and the whole vision has as its background the majesty and power and glory of God expressed, not only in judgment, but also in promise.

The clouds of heaven of the Second Advent, therefore, are symbolic. They picture the manifestations of Divine power and glory associated with that Advent, perceived at first only by those who are "watching for his coming," and by those who realise that He is now setting in motion the forces which shortly shall make his Kingdom an established fact. The rainbow-promise of the Flood, the covenant-promise of Sinai, the Kingdom-promise of Daniel, and all the judgments on the evil things of this world which are associated with each of those three happenings are all enshrined in the "clouds of heaven" which accompany our returned Lord.

Those who believe in the fact of our Lord's Advent now and in this day have already seen those clouds and in measure entered into them, like the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. In another respect we need to be like those disciples, who "feared as they entered into the cloud". We too should fear, being very careful as we consider these things and talk about them, realising our own limitations of understanding. Just as Peter "wist not what he said" on that wonderful occasion, so we need to realise our own insufficiency as we attempt to "touch things that involve so much". But of this we may be sure; the clouds of heaven, of our Lord's coming, already overspread the sky; it is not given to all to see them as yet, but all in their turn will see them and rejoice at the Coming of the Promised One. Even in their "wailing" they will rejoice, for that universal mourning is not one of terror but of remorse. And they will all thus look upon the One whom they pierced. Even Caiaphas!

us alike by Isaiah, the evangelical prophet, and John the prophet-evangelist, of that millennial time when God shall fully accomplish the sending forth of Messiah's "strong staff out of Zion." Almost all students of the prophetic word agree in believing that the indications of its glad approach are thickening around us. The shadows of evening are falling fast upon the day of this dispensation." *Rev. Jas. Neil, M.A. (1874).*

YEARS THAT THE LOCUSTS HAVE EATEN A Reflection

"That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten, and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten, and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten" (Joel 1. 4).

A sad and sorry tale indeed. To an agricultural and pastoral people such as Israel it was tragedy. All their labours of the past gone for nothing, their crops destroyed, their pastures barren, their flocks and herds perishing for lack of food. These four ruthlessly destructive forces, the palmerworm, the locust, the cankerworm and the caterpillar, the Lord's great army which He had sent amongst them, had completed their mission and become the instrument of Divine judgment on Israel. Because the nation had forsaken the covenant, apostasised from the true faith, and gone after other gods, the Lord had done according to his Word and brought blight, mildew and decay upon all their goods and leanness into their souls. The land that once had been so goodly a land, rich in vines and fig-trees, flowing with milk and honey, had become a sun-scorched and barren waste, offering no sustenance to man or beast. All the work of years and all the achievements of the past were as nothing, for God had hidden his face and the glory of Israel was departed.

It is easy to dismiss all this as the penalty of Israel's unfaithfulness and to leave it so, but the problem is not so simple as that. Israel was not wholly unfaithful and not all her people were apostates. There were many faithful hearts in each generation, men and women who truly loved God and sought so far as in them lay to honour and keep the covenant made with their fathers. And even of those who turned aside from the way and served other gods there were many who repented and turned back again to renew their vows to the Lord of hosts. Israel was not wholly bad and the light of God's truth was never entirely extinguished. In even the darkest times there was a Samuel or an Elijah to hold aloft the sacred standards and seven thousand beside who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Yet in spite of all this the calamity was all embracing and complete. The good as well as the bad were included in the common ruin. All alike looked up to heavens that were as brass and upon an earth that was dry and barren. All alike beheld their enemies invade their land, capture their cities and spoil their goods. All alike at the last went into captivity and saw their land no more. And although the bitterness

of loss was no sharper in the hearts of the righteous than in the hearts of the evil, the righteous did have the added realisation that their suffering was not of their own making. Nothing they had done deserved the fate that was theirs and all the work they had done for God in past years was now as though it had never been. The Temple was destroyed and no more would the sweet singers of Israel beautify the holydays with the strains of sacred song and the notes of harp and trumpet. The priests had been slain and no longer would holy sacrifices be offered that the people be cleansed from sin. The young men had been taken into captivity and never again would the schools of the prophets attract the fervour and enthusiasm of youth, pupils sitting at the feet of some saintly prophet or teacher that they might in their turn go forth and keep the faith of the one true God alive in the land. All these things had gone and it must have seemed to Joel, as it did to so many of his contemporaries, that God had forsaken his people and made null and void all the glorious things that had been done in his Name, and all the triumphs that had been achieved in years that were past. Like a swarm of all-devouring locusts, the judgments of God had visited Israel and left them nothing but desolation and the bitterness of memories.

But God always delivers at the end. His wrath does not endure for ever, lest the spirit should fail from before him and the souls that He hath made (Isa. 57. 16). In wrath He remembers mercy, as Habakkuk pleaded with him. So it comes about that Joel was not only a prophet of judgment but also a prophet of deliverance. The dark night would eventually pass and the fair morning come, the brightness of the day when God would regather his people and pour out his spirit upon all flesh. He waits only for the repentance of those who have strayed away from him and so brought his judgment upon themselves. So we have it that when the priests and the people obeyed Joel's fervent summons to assemble before the Lord, to weep between the porch and the altar, to acknowledge their sin and beseech the Lord for the deliverance that only He can give—God delivered. He removed far off from them the great army of judgment that had destroyed their land, He promised peace and plenty for the future, and a wiping out of all the sorrows of this time of trouble. *"I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten"* He told them. The work and

achievement of past years, so ruthlessly destroyed by the invaders, was not lost after all. God would restore it and set all things that are good in their former places. What a heart-cheering message that must have been for those in Israel who had laboured long and faithfully in the Lord's service only to see their life's work vanish like smoke in the troubles and desolation brought about by the judgments that came upon the nation.

A parable for our own times! We too, we who are the Lord's ambassadors in the world, have seen so much of our life's work wither away and die in these last times. We look back to our earlier days in the way of the Lord, the fervour and enthusiasm with which we preached the message, the numbers who came to listen to our presentations, the meetings, the activities, the joyous gathering together for study and worship, the convocations and conventions and the many-sided aspects of our fellowship together. To-day we sadly write "Ichabod" across that colourful page of our lives' experience, for truly the glory has departed. And the more thoughtful must surely at times ask themselves "Has it all been wasted? Was it all really so important and momentous a period in the history of the Church, and the world, as we were led to believe? What has become of all that was said and done in those halcyon days; has it all vanished into oblivion as though those things had never been? Has God made no use of all that was done after all?" To all those questions that thus intrude themselves from time to time there is one answer. "*I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten.*" It matters not that the increasing apathy toward Christian faith and teaching so characteristic of this generation makes a work of the dimensions known in times past quite out of the question. It matters not that increasing age and the failure of the youth of this generation to pick up the flaming torch from failing hands gives small hope of any such work being done again in our time. It matters not that our own failure to measure up as much as we might have done to the tremendous concept of a Christian brotherhood fully illumined by an accurate knowledge of the Divine Plan standing before the world as a living witness to the coming Kingdom has found us out at the last. We have not done all that we might have done; we have done many things that we ought not to have done; but we have at least tried to manifest the Kingdom in measure. And nothing of all that has been done is wasted. We are living in the time of Divine judgment on the world for its evil and we cannot help but be involved in those judgments. The locusts are abroad in

the earth and our own work must needs be affected by that fact. But we have the promise. "*I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten*". In that confidence we can wait in quietness and confidence for the deliverance the Lord has promised, knowing that when it comes it will mean the outpouring of the Divine Spirit upon all flesh.

Holy men of old knew this experience. It was the lot of most of the heroes of faith of Old Testament times to see their life's work vanish away and to die in comparative obscurity if not disappointment. Elijah converted the nation and wrought a mighty work in Israel. Kings quailed before him, courtiers and priests were silent in his presence, the common people adored him. Yet at the close of his life, spectacular as it was to Elisha the only onlooker, the nation was already in great measure relapsed into idolatry. Samuel the uncrowned king, the last of the Judges, at the height of his career went from place to place every year administering justice, and all Israel hung on his words. But the last we see of him is an old man living obscurely in a country village teaching the ways of God to a few young lads while another reigns as king over Israel. Moses led Israel forty years in the wilderness and nurtured a virile and unconquerable generation in the desert preparatory to the victorious assault on the Promised Land which gave Israel a land they could call their own. But Moses was destined not to enter that land himself. He died, alone, upon a mountain top under conditions of such obscurity that no man knoweth of his grave to this day. John the Baptist had kings and people paying him court; to his desert retreat there came Jerusalem and Judea, hanging upon his words and being baptised of him. It is probable that his short ministry of six months was more successful outwardly than that of any other of the prophets. Yet he ended his days in prison under the hand of the executioner. Jeremiah strove hard to preserve a remnant who retained faith at a time when the whole nation was going to pieces, but he spent his last days an exile in Egypt. The Apostle Paul, the greatest of them all, and perhaps the man who had done the greatest works for God and suffered more than any for the sake of his mission, knew that most certainly his work would be vitiated after his death by "*grievous wolves, entering in among you, not sparing the flock,*" and when, on that spring morning in A.D.68, he walked out of Rome along the Appian Way to the place of execution, and bent his head to the executioner's axe, he died knowing that the glory of Christianity as he had preached it was already overshadowed by the superstition, error,

faithlessness and fanatical hatred that was to endure for so many centuries. But to all of these faithful stalwarts the promise holds good "*I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten*" and in a time yet to come the real fruitage of all that they have done will be manifest to the glory of God and the blessing of redeemed humanity.

These are our examples and the stories of their lives should give us courage. No matter what discouragement and disappointment this present "day of small things" brings to us we have always to remember that the day is still to come when God arises to pour out his Spirit on all flesh, and in that day we ourselves will have restored to us "*the years that the locust hath eaten*".

GOD'S SCALE OF VALUES

"Who hath . . . meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure." (Isa. 40.12).

In our daily lives, whatever our vocation may be, we are governed by a scale of values. Deeds and words are comparable with other deeds and words; we judge an action by its results. We adopt one course of conduct in preference to another course and invest it with inherent value. When we become children of God a change takes place. The process is not changed, but the ideal, the standard, is altered. Things which seemed important have lost their importance; things which seemed unattractive have assumed an irresistibility. We have accepted a different scale of values.

Four instances in the New Testament demonstrate how necessary it is for a man to take the Divine viewpoint if he is to receive the full blessing of God. He must look at things from the highest viewpoint and accept God's standard to guide his life.

The first is described in Mark 10. 17-22. This young man had high ideals but he did not feel sure of the eternal life promised to those who kept the Law, and because he could not feel sure of living eternally, he thought it must be on account of something he had not done. He was perplexed; could this new Teacher help him? It was in this frame of mind that he came to Jesus asking "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" and received the reply, "If thou wouldst enter into life, keep the commandments". Having been trying to do this, he naturally asked, "What lack I then?". Jesus knew he had been trying. He knew why he was not satisfied, and He gave him the remedy. "ONE THING THOU LACKEST." If you would have a mind at rest, go and sell all you have and give to the poor and follow me; lay aside your wealth and take your place with my followers; exchange the friendship of the world for mine. This was the supreme moment in the

young man's life, but the answer was unexpected. He found that he valued his wealth above all other things, and above the peace of mind which Jesus promised. In his failure, he went away grieved, but he left behind one who was grieved too. We are privileged to see what he did not see, that Jesus was asking only what the Law asked; he had not realised what was meant by loving the Lord with all his heart, soul and strength. He had made wealth his god and loved it more than the Lord; therefore he was not worthy of that life to which he aspired.

This test is still being applied today. Real consecration demands all. If, when we made our consecration, we withheld something, we shall be lacking when the test comes, and will fail like this young man. We cannot serve two masters, having the smile of the world and the smile of the Lord too. Jesus set a standard which must be maintained when He said "He that forsaketh not father and mother cannot be my disciple".

The second instance is in John 9.25. This chapter tells the story of a man who had been born blind and to whom Jesus had given sight. Having anointed the man's eyes, He said, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam". The man said to his questioners, "I went, and washed, and I received my sight". This man's gratitude constrained him to become a disciple. It was no good trying to tell him he was dreaming; he knew that he once was blind and that he could now see. Jesus had come to relieve spiritual blindness, but he could only do that to those who realised their need. The Pharisees who questioned the man who was healed said "We know this man is a sinner", for Satan had blinded their eyes. The man's reply was "Whether He be a sinner I know not.—ONE THING I KNOW, Whereas I was blind, now I see" and he revelled in his new-found light.

We came into the light because we felt we were blind and needed healing, and so we have been brought out of darkness into the know-

ledge of God's Son. A realisation of something missing—a conviction of sin—must precede cleansing. That these Pharisees did not know they were spiritually blind is revealed by verse 40 "Are we blind also?". But the corresponding truth is revealed by the Psalmist in Psa. 32.1-2 "Blessed is the man whose sin is covered". It is only when man does not cover his own sin that God covers it.

The third instance is Luke 10. 38-42—**THE ONE THING NEEDFUL**. Mary is one who is known as having chosen that part. To get the idea of what Jesus meant we must compare Martha and Mary. Martha thought of the dignity of her house. There was so much to see to; Jesus was such a distinguished guest. Martha's words to Jesus (verse 40) were a direct reproof; but perceive how gently He answered, in so many words, "You lack a sense of proportion! you have not a proper scale of values. I have come into your house, not because of any need of mine you can supply, but for your sake. I have meat to eat that you know not of; if you had known that, you would have come to me as Mary had done. It is better to partake of my spiritual food than to busy yourself getting a meal for me". This lesson we can easily apply to life's experiences. The question should be; if we want to entertain the Master, what would He prefer above everything else? But do not let us search our own supplies as Martha did, drawing on our own reserves, without consulting his wishes. Let us first of all find out what He wants us to do. Many have made this mistake in the past, and many do so today; they fret and fume to work out what they think would be to the honour and glory of God, and they find, and will find, that their work is not approved. There was so much to do that Martha had no time to sit at the Master's feet. Many have tried to convert the world and spend money and energy and life to do that, to prepare a kingdom for Jesus, to prepare a "feast of fat things" for him, forgetting that the Lord is going to do all these things himself in his own due time.

THE ONE THING NEEDFUL today is the Lord's approval, and to have this we must adopt his standard of values—but how difficult this is today; the non-essentials are so large, they obscure the more important things. How should we apportion the proper time for providing the things needful, and engage ourselves in witnessing to the Lord and his Kingdom? Have we divided our time in such a way as to win the Lord's approval or have we missed the one thing needful? Are we using the time we are able to give to the study of God's Word to the best advantage? Are we day by day trying to live

more closely to the pattern of the Master or are we spending our time in more or less fruitless discussions? We need heavenly wisdom in this matter of reading and studying his Word with a view to our best development, for that is the one thing needful. God is guiding his people through his Word; there is in it encouragement in trial, guidance in doubt, promises of help and protection in the dark days of disappointment, difficulty and despair. The food is there on our table, Divinely provided truth! Do not get so busy about other things as to neglect to eat what the Lord has provided, for doing this we shall be starved.

The fourth instance is Phil. 3.13—**THIS ONE THING I DO**. Paul had a busy life in the service of the Truth. He was always an ardent follower of God with a zeal which makes us admire him. He could, no doubt, have made a great name for himself, but towards the end of his career he looked backward, reviewed all his advantages and said "I count all things as loss because of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord". Why had he taken upon himself a life of privation and suffering? He had seen Jesus, and that made all the difference! Before the glory of the heavenly vision all other objects of attraction faded. He turned from his own efforts after that righteousness which is in Christ Jesus. He had a vision of the glorified Christ and learned that only by identifying himself with the death of Christ could he take part in the First Resurrection. It was the moving force in his life from the day he saw Jesus in the way and not all the experiences he suffered could efface the impression made upon him or dim the supreme hope of being found "in him" at the last. He must witness to Jew and Gentile and open blinded eyes and turn men from darkness to light. To know the Divine Will was to do it; to have a vision of the Holy One and witness for him was sufficient explanation of his having been apprehended of Christ Jesus.

We have likewise been apprehended of Christ Jesus for a similar work of witnessing, to tell forth the way of consecration. Paul longed for the Kingdom to be set up; and so do we, but we are much nearer the kingdom than he was. Faithfulness to the call to the end is the only way. Paul realised that although he had preached to others he might himself become a castaway if he proved unfaithful (Phil. 3. 12-13). "Not that I have already attained, but **THIS ONE THING I DO**". He was willing to give himself for him who had laid hold on him and bound him to his service with the cords of love. Only so could he be found "in him" at the last and attain that honour, glory and immortality

which is the reward of faithfulness.

We can now summarise our findings in these four instances.

(1) The young man who could not make the great renunciation. He failed to appreciate heavenly values, and he lacked the one thing necessary; but how good it is to know that he will come back again and ask the same question "what must I do to inherit life?". He will remember the last time when he refused the Master's way of life and chose his own way. "There is a way that seemeth good unto a man but the end thereof is death." He found it so. It would be a matter of surprise if he again refuses when the offer of life is made to him.

(2) The young man who rejoiced in his new light. He would not be long in the society of Jesus before he learned more of the Master's

scale of values, unlike the Scribes who, blinded by their own pride, were in their pride of heart made ready tools for Satan. They adopted his methods, and, as the Lord himself called them, were thereby the children of Satan.

(3) Martha, who, though she loved Jesus dearly, made sad blunders in the values she put on things, setting too great a store on minor things and neglecting the greater. Surely she took the Master's reproof to heart and learned a great lesson.

(4) Paul, who put all earthly wealth, glory and honour on one scale, and found it immeasurably outweighed by the peace of God which passeth all understanding, the love which passeth knowledge, and the fellowship of Jesus. He looked not on the things which are seen, but on the things which are not seen, things lasting and eternal.

IN THE BEGINNING

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." In those few words is enshrined the story of countless ages. Long before man came into being, long before the infinite variety of animal and vegetable life which now inhabits this planet was brought forth, the work of God was going steadily forward. In the mighty crucible of Nature He was moulding and fashioning a fitting home for humanity, compelling the tremendous forces of the Universe to work together in slow but ceaseless motion until after the lapse of ages upon ages the angels looked down upon this solar system of ours with the parent sun majestic in the centre of its family of circling worlds.

The Earth was one of those worlds. Long epochs had yet to pass before even the humblest form of life could appear on its troubled surface. Great eruptions of Nature from within, avalanches and floods from above, all combined to keep this new world in a state of perpetual unrest. But eventually there came a time when the tumult was stilled, when the boiling seas subsided and the land had some measure of peace from warring elements, and in that eventful day life was born on earth.

A small thing is a great thing if God is in it. His power creates the tiny flower bud, the opening leaf, the blade of grass. He forms the grain of sand, the tiny globule of water, the glittering crystal of the snowflake. And it is these small things that make up the mighty oceans with their sand-girt shores, that clothe the vast forests, the rolling fields, and the snow laden landscape.

No man saw it come. No human history can go back to those first beginnings when lowly creatures of the seashores were the lords of material creation. Long years afterwards the chronicler wrote *"And God said, Let the waters bring forth the moving creature that hath life . . . and it was so."*

So passed the centuries, the millenniums, the epochs during which God worked silently, in that orderly development which characterises all his works, preparing a home for a new creation which He purposed. At length the watching angels saw a new wonder at which they shouted aloud for joy. Beings—intelligent, perfect, capable of love and gratitude, worship and service—made to be the crowning glory of that creation which had taken so long a time to bring to this climax. *"The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy."* (Job 38.6). With what serene pleasure must the Father have gazed upon the first material beings and foreseen the wonders of a future age when the earth shall be fully perfected, and when mankind shall have achieved the Divine ideal and attained to the image and likeness of God.

God uses all his works. The weakest thing has a service of its own. The dewdrop, the little bird upon the tree, the flower of the field, the flitting butterfly, the busy bee. All creatures serve him, small and great, and He can use us though we be the weakest of them all.

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THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS

The genealogy of Jesus from David is given in Matt. 1 and Luke 3. Matthew has Joseph the reputed father of Jesus descended from David through Solomon and the kings of Judah, whilst Luke traces his mother Mary's descent from Nathan the younger brother of Solomon. Both lines converge on Zerubbabel the governor of Judah at the Return from Babylon and then they diverge again. There are some points of difference with the royal genealogy recorded in I Chron. 3. The A.V. rendering in Luke appears to make Joseph the son of Heli Mary's father instead of Jacob; this is due to the translators having added the words "*which was the son of*" in each case, for which there is no justification. The Greek reads like a family tree, from Heli upwards, "*of Heli, of Matthat*" etc., and the passage is more lucidly rendered "*Jesus, about thirty years of age, (supposedly the son of Joseph), of Heli, of Matthat*" etc., Heli his mother's father being his immediate male forebear in that line and Mary his mother as a woman omitted from mention. It is usually said that a complete pedigree from David is not to be found in the Scriptures but a study of the subject may well lead to an opposite conclusion.

Luke's account gives 19 generations from Jesus back to Zerubbabel; Matthew gives only 11. Since the period is nearly 600 years it is obvious that Matthew at least has omitted some names. Matthew's account gives Abiud (*Heb. Obadiah*) as the son of Zerubbabel but according to Chronicles the latter had no son of that name and the only Obadiah recorded comes two generations later and he was not in the royal line. Luke gives Joanna (*Heb. Johanan*) as son of Zerubbabel; here again he had no son of that name (Zerubbabel's son in the royal line was Hananiah, which is a name closely akin to Johanan, but Hananiah had no son named Judah as demanded by Luke). It does seem therefore that in both the Matthew and Luke versions there is the omission of some names immediately following Zerubbabel. Luke mentions a Rhesa between Zerubbabel and Joanna, but this is not a name. "Rhesa" is the Aramaic word for "prince", equal to Hebrew "*rezin*", prince or noble, and this points to Luke having taken his data from a list written in Aramaic, the general language in use after the Babylonian captivity, having the entry "*Prince Zerubbabel*", his recognised position as leader of the restored nation under Cyrus.

It is evident then that neither Matthew's nor Luke's lists between Jesus and Zerubbabel are complete. Resource must be had to the royal pedigree of the Davidic line in I Chron. 3 for assistance.

This chapter gives the line of descent of the kings of Judah from David to Jehoiachin and the continuing royal line for another eight generations, ending at about 432 BC in the days of Nehemiah. This line is clear cut and positive; the problem is to fill the gap, if gap exists, between this record and those of Matthew and Luke. This involves the probable number of generations in both the royal and the non-royal lines between Zerubbabel and Jesus. It would appear that the interval between firstborn to firstborn during late Old Testament times in the Middle East was an average 22 years, Examples are:—

Davidic kings, Solomon to Jehoiachin 379 years, 17 gens. = 22.3 years per generation.

Israel kings, Jehu to Zechariah, 103 years, 5 gens. = 20.6 per generation.

Assyrian kings, father to son, 911-781 BC 130 years, 6 gens. = 21.7.

Parthian kings, from 3rd cent. BC 384 years, 17 gens. = 22.5.

Seleucid kings, from 3rd cent. BC 247 years, 11 gens. = 22.5.

On this basis it might well be concluded that the generations in the royal line to Jesus averaged 22 years each. From the birth of Zerubbabel to that of Jesus, so far as can be deduced from relevant data, was about 560 years, and this implies 26 generations. Chronicles has 7 generations and Luke has 18, a total of 25, which seems near the mark. Luke's earliest name is Joanna (Johanan). The final generation in Chronicles lists the names of the seven sons of Elieoenai without saying which of them carried on the royal line, but one of those names is Johanan!

Does this imply that Luke gave the full list of Jesus's forebears through his mother Mary back as far as the last name in Chronicles, Johanan, and then went straight to Zerubbabel, knowing his readers could get the intervening names from the O.T.? From there he gave the full line to Nathan, the son of David and younger brother of Solomon. If Luke's Joanna and Chronicles' Johanan are one and the same, the total number of generations would be 24, but some part of this line, the non-royal part, would involve later-born sons with corresponding longer generation intervals. This would fit in well with the

26 just mentioned. It remains then to consider Matthew's line.

Matthew goes from Jesus back to Abiud, 10 generations, on this basis a matter of 220 years. This implies a gap in Matthew's record of some 340 years. Since Luke traces Mary's line back to Zerubbabel as does that of Matthew with Joseph, it is obvious that Mary's line must have diverged from the royal line at some time after 432 BC where Chronicles ended. Is it conceivable that Matthew gives the forebears of Jesus through Joseph in the legal royal line back as far as Abiud, and that this was the point where the two lines diverged? From there he skipped all intervening generations to Zerubbabel, and then continued with the royal descent of Judean kings back to Solomon the son of David. He did, even then, omit the three apostate kings, Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah as unworthy of inclusion in his list, and also Jehoiakim, father of Jehoiachin, but this is not material since these appear plainly enough in O.T. history.

These 10 generations in 220 years would place Abiud about 220 BC and so perhaps make him the firstborn son of Amos in Luke's list, to preserve the total 25 generations back to Zerubbabel. This would make him the elder brother of Mattathias son of Amos in Luke's list, and there were then 8 generations from Mattathias to Mary against 10 from Abiud to Joseph, which is what would be expected if Mary's line was from later born sons—the average generation being 27 years against 22 for the royal line.

If all this is a reasonable hypothesis, the position is:—

Luke gives the complete pedigree of Mary back to Johanan in about 432 BC. Chronicles carries on from Johanan back to Salathiel, father of Zerubbabel and Luke then traces their ancestry back another 20 generations to Nathan, son of David. There is only just enough room in this period to get that number of generations in, so that this list must be complete. Thus there is a complete pedigree from Mary back to David, and this was the natural "blood-relationship" line which made Jesus literally a son of David.

Matthew gives the first ten generations from Joseph back to Abiud, about 220 BC, where it is joined in the person of Amos by the non-royal line from Mary. Matthew breaks off here and resumes again at Zerubbabel—the intervening generations are all cared for by Luke and Chronicles. Matthew credits Zerubbabel and Salathiel as descended from Jehoiachin the exiled king which puts them in the line of ascent to Solomon and not Nathan. He then goes up the list of kings of Judah until he comes to Solomon. Again there is a complete pedigree but this time it is

the official "legal" royal line from David through the kings of Judah.

This brings up the apparent disagreement as to the parentage of Salathiel and Zerubbabel. Chronicles and Matthew make Salathiel the son of Jehoiachin of Solomon's line but Luke says he was the son of Neri (*Heb. Neriaiah*) of Nathan's line. Matthew and Luke both say Zerubbabel was the son of Salathiel, but Chronicles of his brother Pedaiah. The resolution of this problem involves a little excursion into history.

The last legal king of Judah/Israel was Jehoiachin, deposed by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC and taken prisoner to Babylon where he died more than forty years later. (His uncle Zedekiah was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar to succeed him but he could not be true king while Jehoiachin lived; Zedekiah was deposed by the Babylonians eleven years later). Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon at 18 years of age, with at least two wives (2 Kings 24. 3-14) but still childless. It had been decreed by the Lord that because of his apostasy no man of his seed should ever rule on the throne of David; he would be declared childless (Jer. 22. 28-30). A like sentence had been passed upon his father Jehoiakim "*he shall have none to sit upon the throne of David*" (Jer. 36. 30). At the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar took steps to destroy the entire royal house so that none remained to rally the people again (Jer. 52. 8-11). The Lord also said through Ezekiel at the same time that there should no more be a king in Judah until Christ should come "*whose right it is*" (Ezek. 21. 25-27). It is evident therefore that the literal blood descent of the royal house of Judah came to an end at that point.

The means by which this was brought about had been indicated to King Hezekiah three generations earlier. His posterity, he was told, would end up by being eunuchs in the palace of the King of Babylon (2 Kings 20, 18. Isa. 32. 7). It was the custom of the Babylonians, and other warlike nations, having defeated a troublesome or rebellious people, to render their king and his sons incapable of fatherhood, so that the dynasty would die out and be unable to form a rallying-point for possible future rebellion. This is what happened to Jehoiachin and any sons he had while in Babylon. With Zedekiah's sons already dead, Nebuchadnezzar could feel that the Davidic dynasty was extinct and would give no further trouble. What he did not reckon with, probably through ignorance, was the peculiarly Israelite custom of Levirate marriage.

An element in the Mosaic law was the provision for continuance of the family line where

a man died without sons. In such case the brother or nearest relative took the dead man's wife and the son of such union was accounted legally the dead man's son and heir of his estate. The relevant law is stated in Deut. 25. 5-6 from which it is known as Levirate marriage. The story of Ruth and Boaz is a notable instance. It would seem that since from the point of view of male issue Jehoiachin was as good as dead, this law was invoked so that Neri (Neariah) of the line of Nathan took Jehoiachin's wife, and the son of that union, Salathiel, became credited to Jehoiachin as his legal son and heir and entitled to carry on the royal line.

But this did not happen at once. According to Chronicles, Jehoiachin had seven sons, all born in Babylon, of whom Salathiel was one. One of the others, Pedaiah, appears as father of Zerubbabel but the other five are named and not referred to again. (An eighth name, Assir, does appear in I Chron. 3. 17 but this is an A.V. translator's mistake. "Assir" is Hebrew for captive, and the sense of the verse should be "*and the sons of Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) the captive, Salathiel his son*" . . . etc.). The question arises, where and how do these five fit into the picture. The answer to this conundrum came only forty years ago in an unexpected manner. When Prof. Koldewey excavated Daniel's Babylon in 1914 he sent home to Berlin three hundred cuneiform tablets which were stored awaiting decipherment. They remained unexamined until 1939, when the Assyriologist Wiedner translated them and found one dated in the 13th year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar which mentioned the captive Jehoiachin, King of Judah and his five sons, the five being under the care of a Jew named Kenaiah. The 13th year corresponds to 592 BC, by which time Jehoiachin had been in Babylon five years. Since he had at least two wives, perhaps more, there is nothing unlikely in his having sired five sons during that time, and one might ask why, in such case, was Salathiel the son of Neariah proclaimed heir-apparent to the throne. The answer to that may lie in the realm of political expediency. When Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive in 597 BC he probably did not intend to extinguish the Jewish monarchy; he left Zedekiah as king and took Jehoiachin to Babylon as hostage for good behaviour. But eight years later Zedekiah rebelled, the Babylonians returned in force, and in 586 BC, after three years savage fighting, destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, killed Zedekiah's sons, took the rest of the people to Babylon and virtually depopulated Judea. It looks as though it was at this point that Nebuchadnezzar decided to extinguish the royal line and so any

hope Jehoiachin may have had that one of his five sons, now between five and ten years old, would carry on his line was finally and brutally extinguished.

So Salathiel was born from Neariah and Jehoiachin's wife, perhaps about 582 BC, declared legal son of Jehoiachin with the right of succession, grew to manhood, and married at the usual age of 18. By this time Nebuchadnezzar had perhaps become aware of the significance of the Levirate marriage and nipped this attempt to circumvent his intentions by treating Salathiel as he had treated Jehoiachin. Once again the royal line came to an end.

Then, in 561 BC, a few years later, Nebuchadnezzar died. His son and successor, Avil-Marduk, (Hebrew name Evil-merodach) was much more tolerantly disposed toward Jehoiachin, releasing him from prison and showing marked signs of favour (2 Kings 25. 27-30; Jer. 52. 31-34). If, now, in this new climate of tolerance, the youthful Salathiel invoked the Levirate law as did his reputed father, so that his wife was given to his half-brother Pedaiah and of them was born Zerubbabel, he could be proclaimed legal son of Salathiel and so in his turn heir to the throne. Avil-Marduk, now king of Babylon, took no notice and so the royal succession of the Kings of Judah was assured. Both Salathiel and Zerubbabel were in fact of the non-royal line of Nathan but by means of the Law declared legal descendants of Solomon in the royal line. Pedaiah must have been the son of Neariah and his own wife since he does not figure in the royal succession and his inclusion as one of the sons of Jehoiachin in I Chron. 3 is probably to show that he was a link in the transmission of the royal line from Jehoiachin to Zerubbabel, although not a true son, which would have nullified the Lord's prohibition on the succession of any true son of Jehoiachin.

Thus seen, the natural line of descent of both Joseph and Mary came from Nathan the non-royal son of David, but by means of the Levirate Law both Salathiel and Zerubbabel were adopted into the royal line and so their descendants carried the right of succession until, probably, Amos in about 220 BC had two sons, Abiud (Obadiah) the eldest, who inherited the royal rights which ultimately led to Joseph, and Mattathias, a younger son, leading to Mary. Scripture declares that Jesus is the rightful heir to the throne of David; it must follow that Joseph was the senior member of the Davidic line and, despite his humble station in life, the legal claimant to the throne had that throne been established in his own time.

THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO ABRAHAM

"And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations through faith, preached beforehand the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed" (Gal. 3. 8).

The Gospel, preached to Abraham! In what sense was the Gospel preached to that old patriarch, two thousand years before Christ? It is true that Jesus said of him *"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad"* (John 8. 56). What did Abraham, back there in the middle of human history, see of the future day of Christ which gave him that happiness? We do not know all that God did say to him in his hours of communion; we do have one definite statement and that statement is the key to all God's outworking purposes in the realm of human history. *"In thee, and in thy seed"* said the Lord *"shall all nations of the earth be blessed"* (Gen. 12.3; 22.8; 26.4). That promise runs like a golden thread through all the centuries since Abraham, confirming that at the last, in some sunlit day of the future, the tragedy of Eden will be rectified and all mankind enter into happiness. That implies the abolition of evil and the end of death. It demands that the prospect which stretched before the first man at the beginning, before sin and death entered, will be restored. Man will at the end enter upon the ages of eternity and life everlasting. That was the Gospel preached to Abraham, in outline and obscurely, granted, but in sufficient detail to give him a basis for that faith which never left him to his dying day.

It was a long time before God elaborated on his promise. It was reiterated to Isaac (Gen. 21. 12) and then to Jacob (Gen. 35. 12) but it was not until Israel stood before God at Mount Sinai on their way to the Promised Land that the light began to shine. By then it was known and accepted that this foretold "seed of blessing" was to come through the line of Jacob. Neither Ishmael nor any other of the sons of Abraham, nor Esau the twin brother of Jacob, were in this aspect of the Divine plans. Israel, the nation sprung from the twelve sons of Jacob, were to carry the line on to the seed of blessing and in the meantime they themselves were to represent the things of God in a godless world and preserve his Truth and his standards and laws through coming generations. In a sense they were already to be a blessing to the nations and to that extent partake of membership of the promised Seed. "A chosen people, a holy nation, a royal priest-

hood" is how the Lord described them, to declare his standards and his salvation to the ends of the earth.

Sadly, they failed at the outset. Despite their initial enthusiasm *"all that the Lord hath said we will do and be obedient"* (Exod. 24.7) they soon tired of the commission and demonstrated their unworthiness. But Moses their leader did not lose heart, and that was because he too, like Abraham six centuries before him, had received intimations of the Lord's future purposes in his talks with him at the top of the Mount. *"The Lord your God will raise up unto thee a Prophet... like unto me. Unto him ye shall hearken... and the Lord said unto me 'I will raise them up a Prophet... and will put my words in his mouth... and it shall come to pass that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him'"* (i.e. call him to account) (Deut. 18. 15-19). Where Moses had failed to preserve the nation's loyalty to its commission the new Prophet would succeed — but Israel must pass through a long period of sore travail first.

Fifteen hundred years later the Prophet appeared. Israel had never forgotten Moses' words. They waited and hoped for the promised Leader who would show them how to become the Seed of blessing. When John the Baptist appeared they sent to ask him if he was "that Prophet" who should appear in the Last Days (John 1.21, 25, 45), and John had to tell them he was not; he was only a herald of the One that was to come. But in the halcyon days of preaching immediately following the resurrection of Christ the fulfilment was made known. Peter, speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, reminded his hearers of the prediction of Moses and told them that the promised Prophet had come in the person of the Lord Christ (Acts 3. 19-24). Jesus Christ had presented himself to them, been rejected by the majority but accepted by the few, must now return to his Father until the time was ripe for the full realisation of the promised blessing, and would then come to earth as the promised Seed of Abraham for the purpose of blessing all the nations of the earth. The heavens must receive Jesus, said Peter, *"UNTIL the Times of Restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began"*. At last and in the fulness of time the one whom Moses had foreseen in prediction and Abraham had beheld in

vision had appeared amongst men for their salvation and would yet appear the second time for their eternal blessing.

In the meantime another aspect of the promise had been made known. Five hundred years after Moses came David, king of Israel. David was the first of a royal line which the Lord told him was to culminate in the promised Messiah, synonymous with the Prophet of whom Moses had spoken. Whereas Moses had declared his prophetic and priestly office as a teacher and pastor of the people, David was given a vision of his royal office as leader and King (2 Sam. 7. 12-16). The 89th Psalm enshrines David's recollection of the Lord's words. David himself is the figure-head named in the Psalm but it is easy to see that the allusions are to the greater David of the future, of whom the first king of Israel back there a thousand years before Christ was just a representative or type. This coming King is anointed by God to his commission (vs. 20; see also Psa. 2). He is destined to be known as the firstborn Son of God and superior to all the kings of the earth. Phil. 2.9-11 reiterates this, that He is supreme over all created things in heaven or on earth, and that to his name shall every knee bow and his lordship every tongue confess. To the Ephesians St. Paul declared that He ascends far above all heavens, omnipresent in all things. (Eph. 4.10). He is to endure for ever; his kingship is eternal (vss. 29-37). All this is abundantly confirmed by virtually all the prophets and holy men of old time in their pen-pictures of the coming Millennial reign of Christ over the earth when all men will hear the Gospel proclaimed as it has never been proclaimed before, and the consequent blessings following on the conversion and reconciliation to God of those who respond to that Gospel appeal will make the original promise to Abraham a glorious reality.

In a third sphere of thought this great Prophet and King is also foreshadowed as a Priest—not a sacrificing Priest like the Levitical order headed by Aaron the brother of Moses, but a royal Priest whose office begins after all the suffering and sacrifice is over, one whose mission is to dispense blessing. David, again, foresaw this in his 110th Psalm, where he pictures Christ as a "Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek". Melchizedek was a combined king and priest "of the Most High God" in Canaan in the days of Abraham. All that is known of him is that in the exercise of his kingly and priestly dignity he dispensed gifts to men. Even Abraham acknowledged his superiority. David—and later on the writer of the Book of Hebrews—makes him on this account a prefigure of Christ, not in his coming to earth to die for man's sin, which was pre-

figured by the office of Aaron, but in his resurrection glory when He comes again in the power of his kingdom to bring blessings to mankind. Hence the 110th Psalm has to do with the Second Advent and the Millennial reign of Christ, when He will, as the Psalm says, overthrow all his enemies, the forces of evil, and establish justice in the earth. The 72nd Psalm has a lot to say about this. "*In his days shall the righteous flourish and (there shall be) abundance of peace . . . men shall be blessed in him and all nations shall call him blessed . . . and let the whole earth be filled with his glory*".

The promised Seed of Abraham which is ultimately to bless all families of the earth, then, is Christ. Christ, at his Second Advent, when He comes to wind up the affairs of earth now under the undisputed rule of man, a rule which has brought misery, disaster and finally utter ruin upon the world we know. Christ, at his Second Advent, when He comes to establish what Peter calls "*a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*" (2 Pet. 3.13). Christ, who will bind Satan that he deceive the nations no more (Rev. 20. 1-2), restrain the outward operation of evil in the earth so that nothing shall hurt nor destroy (Isa. 11.9), lead all men to the point of decision, for conversion and acceptance of Christ or the reverse, with the consequent outcome of eternal life or death, so that ultimately the whole creation shall be purged of sin; these are the blessings to be dispensed by the Seed of Abraham, earth's Prophet, Priest and King, our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham so many centuries ago. This is the Gospel preached to Abraham.

There is a further factor. Paul, writing to the Galatians, showed that Christ is the promised Seed in the words "*to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ*" (Gal. 3.16). By this he indicated that not all of Abraham's eight or more sons were included in the promise, but only through one, Isaac, and so through David to Christ. But in Gal. 3.29 Paul goes on to say "*and if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*". In that brief sentence Paul uncovers one of the deepest truths of the New Testament, that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is associating with himself a company comprising those who have been his consecrated and dedicated followers in this life, as a Body to a Head, his Church, to serve with him in the administration of the promised blessings to all in the next Age. This is what John the Revelator meant when he saw in vision the

glorified Church of Christ reigning with Christ a thousand years (Rev. 20.4). This is what our Lord himself meant when He said to his disciples *"ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel"* (Matt. 19. 28). And that lays stress upon the supreme fact

that the call to Christians in this day and Age is to complete dedication of life and talents and possessions to the Lord Christ and his service, that at the end they may be included in that elect company which shall possess the privilege of bringing blessings to all the families of the earth.

KHAZARIA

Questions are sometimes asked about a Jewish kingdom said to have existed during the Middle Ages in southern Russia. Although receiving scant attention in the history books it is a fact that such a kingdom did exist. The Russians as a people did not appear until about the 10th century and then only in the north. Prior to that time the southern area, now known as the Ukraine and the Caucasus, was populated by descendants of the ancient Scythians (the Meshech and Tubal of the Old Testament). During the 6th century there developed an infusion of Jews of the Dispersion among these Scythians, and this joint nation under their influence became a powerful commercial and military force in the world. The empire they created stretched from the western end of the Black Sea to the shores of the Caspian and the people were known as the Khazars. By the 8th century it was at the peak of its power. In AD 740 the then ruler, Bulan, embraced Judaism and from then on the empire was ruled by Jews. Their ships traded with every country in Europe and their ambassadors resided at many European courts. One of their kings proposed to the Pope of his day a joint Papal-Jewish crusade to free Jerusalem

from the Moslems, offering to put three hundred thousand warriors in the field as his contribution. The Pope declined the offer.

By the end of the 10th century this Jewish empire of Khazaria began to decline before the rising power of Russia and in another two hundred years it had disappeared. The celebrated Rabbi Petachia of Bavaria travelled through the land in AD 1170 visiting his compatriots and recorded his findings in his *"Travels"*, but after that they virtually disappear from history.

The present-day Jews of Russia and Poland are believed to owe their descent in large measure to the Khazars. To the question whether they have any place in the prophetic Scriptures the answer has to be "No". The present population of the area is Russian and to the extent that any true Jews remain, they, or any of them, like Jews all over the world, can only come into the framework of prophecy if and when they return to the land of their forefathers and share in the experiences of the Holy Nation which will one day come into existence there and fulfil the promises made so long ago by God to their fathers.

The Accuracy of St. Luke

In Luke's Gospel and in the Acts the writer adds numerous interesting facts, incidental to the main story and which could leave him open to serious criticisms if they were inaccurate. In fact, during the past hundred years, many scholars have endeavoured to discover faults in his writings. But their suspicions and suppositions have proved groundless. The more that Biblical and archæological advances, the more evidence accumulates corroborating Luke's statements. The matter is summed up in the words of Rendle Short in his book *"Modern discovery and the Bible"*, *"Luke correctly describes and gives the names of so many towns which he and Paul passed through in their travels that many of our Bibles contain maps to show the exact routes followed. He shows the true Greek love*

for the sea. He constantly, and for no apparent reason gives the names of islands passed, tells on which side the ship sailed by, whether they ran in a straight course before the wind or whether they tacked, whether the wind was favourable or unfavourable, what ports served inland towns, in which direction the harbour looked and so on." Later Rendle Short quotes from Bishop Gore *"It should, of course, be recognised that modern archæology has almost forced upon critics of St. Luke a verdict of remarkable accuracy in all his allusions to secular facts and events. Perhaps the greatest living authority on ancient history, Eduard Meyer, has called the work of Luke 'one of the most important works which remain to us from antiquity' and Meyer has certainly no prejudices in favour of religious tradition."*



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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

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. Although we are very happy to continue sending whether or not you feel able to contribute to the cost, we 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, 5000, 6000 and 9000 will NOT find renewal notices in this issue; their turn comes in September.

The Memorial. The anniversary of the last supper falls this year on Sunday, March 27.

Coming Conventions: Yeovil one-day, Sunday, May 1st, Westfield School. Details Bro. H. Charlton, 14 Orchard Road, Milborne Port, Sherborne, Som. Later conventions; Yeovil, Moose Hall & Hillgrove, May 27-31; Blaby (Leics.) May 28-29; Chesham, June 18-19. Details in May issue.

Cost of the "Monthly". As is well known to our readers, the "Monthly" is sent without charge and the voluntary gifts of readers are relied upon to meet the cost of

printing and postage. There are no salaries or honoraria to meet—those engaged in the preparation, publishing and distribution of the journal give their services on a voluntary basis, "as unto the Lord". Quite often however we are asked how much the "Monthly" costs to produce as a guide to giving. In order to be up to date on this point it can be said that the cost of one year including postage is at present approximately £3.30 in U.K. and £3.50 or seven dollars overseas. In passing on this information we do so with the proviso that we are happy to send the "Monthly" no matter what value of gift is sent—some may be able to manage only the postage and this is just as acceptable. Our Lord overrules so that the necessary funds are found.

12 and 16-page pamphlets. These pamphlets deal with various aspects of the Christian faith. Copies sent willingly upon request, including extra for one's friends or for other purposes, without charge, but we do ask for postage, which please include at the rate of 20p. for the first ten copies and 15p. for each ten copies thereafter (30 copies one dollar).

- No. 31 The Bible—the Book for To-day.
- „ 32 World Conversion—When?
- „ 33 The Divine Permission of Evil.
- „ 34 Everlasting Punishment.
- „ 35 Conversion in the After-life.
- „ 36 The Resurrection of the Dead.
- „ 37 The Second Advent—Nature and Purpose.
- „ 38 The Call and Destiny of Israel.
- „ 39 The Personality of Satan.
- „ 40 The Gifts of the Spirit.
- „ 41 Man—the Image of God.

Gone from us

— ❁ —

- Sis. O. Harburn (*Bournemouth*)
- Sis. M. Harris (*Coventry*)
- Bro. P. Rowe (*Sudbury*)
- Bro. M. H. Tutt (*Petersfield*)

— ❁ —

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

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous King*

8. Retribution for sin

The guard appeared in the doorway and strode noiselessly across the floor. He bowed low before the throne.

"The prophet Nathan seeks audience with thee, O king", he said.

David stared at him morosely. "Let him be admitted" he said at last. His eyes betrayed a slight apprehension.

The guard bowed again and retired. David waited, chin on hand.

The curtains parted to reveal a tall, commanding figure, flowing locks and beard belying apparent youthfulness, piercing eyes and firm mouth giving evidence of a maturity of character beyond his evident thirty or so years of life. He moved with deliberate steps across the room and stood still, inclining his head slightly in acknowledgment.

"And what, O man of God, have I done wrong now" asked David sarcastically.

The prophet regarded him impassively. "I come, O king, that you give judgment on a matter of wrongdoing".

"Give judgment" echoed David a little blankly. The apprehension faded from his eyes. "Are there no judges in Jerusalem who can hear the case?"

"This is a matter which only the king can judge."

David settled himself more comfortably in his seat. He regarded Nathan more amiably.

"Proceed then".

"There were two men in the city" Nathan began, "one rich, one poor. The rich man possesses great wealth in flocks and herds, the poor man only one ewe lamb which he had nurtured. The rich man had a guest. Instead of taking from his own flocks for his needs he sent and deprived the poor man of his one ewe lamb to provide the feast." He stopped and looked straightly at the king.

David's quick temper flared out. He rose from his seat. "As the Lord liveth" he declared hotly "the man that hath done this thing shall surely die....." He stopped abruptly. Nathan had raised his arm; his accusing finger pointed directly at the king.

"Thou art the man!"

David sank slowly back to his seat, face paling.

"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel" declared the other "I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul, and I gave thee thy master's house, the house of Israel

and Judah. . . . wherefore then hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord to do evil in his sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword and hast taken his wife to be thy wife. . . ." He paused a moment. David had shrunk back in his seat and buried his face in his hands to avoid those accusing eyes. The remorseless voice went on. "Hear therefore the word of the Lord. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house. Because thou hast despised me, and taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife, and hast slain him, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes and give them unto thy neighbour. Thou didst this thing secretly, but I will do it before all Israel." He ceased and waited.

There was a long silence. David lifted his head at last. His countenance was stricken; his voice broken.

"I have sinned against the Lord!"

There was no softening of the austere features confronting him. "The Lord hath spoken. Thou shalt not die, but the child thy wife hath given thee shall surely die!"

"No, no, not that" cried the distraught man. He received no answer. Nathan had gone.

How long David sat there he never knew. His mind was in turmoil. The transgression was some two years in the past now and he had virtually forgotten it; his passion for Bath-sheba had continued and he dearly loved their year-old child. The war with the Ammonites, which had given opportunity for the death of Uriah, was in its closing stages with Joab permanently at the battle-front and David making periodic visits to the scene of operations. He knew that a few more months would see the end of the conflict and with that victory he had been looking forward to a period of peace and ease such as he had enjoyed during most of his past thirteen years in Jerusalem. Now all that was changed; his sin had been brought up before his face and he knew, now, that nothing could ever be the same again. Wearily he got up and went out of the throne-room.

Through the open door of the vestibule he could see, across the palace gardens, a small crowd around the entrance to the house of the women. At first he regarded the scene disinterestedly, and then something caught his attention. He beckoned an attendant. "Is not that Malachi the physician going in there" he exclaimed,

"What is going on?" The man looked confused. "I will go and find out, sire" he replied, and promptly disappeared. David waited awhile, then crossed the garden himself towards the crowd. It melted as he approached and he stopped before the guard at the doorway. "What is happening here?" he demanded. The guard looked at him with a troubled expression; he spoke reluctantly. "The child of the lady Bath-sheba is sick". The words were hardly out of his mouth before David had pushed past him and was taking long hasty steps to his wife's apartment. The Levite, bending low over the child's couch, straightened up as the king approached and bowed before him. David had time to discern the little form, pale and still, stretched out upon the couch, and Bath-sheba's tearful face. "Tell me" demanded the king of the other, "can you cure him? Will the child live?" He waited an eternity for the answer.

Malachi looked down again at the infant, next at the mother, and then at the anxious face of the king.

"O my king", he said, "I know not what this malady is. Only the Lord God of Israel can save him now." He bowed low again and left the room.

"And the Lord God of Israel has decreed that he must die, because of my sin" groaned David. He went slowly back to his own apartments.

It was a week later. David had remained all that time in close seclusion, seeing no one. Affairs of state were neglected and forgotten. His ministers came for audience and went away as they came. He refused all food and drink. Prostrate on the ground, he besought the Lord to rescind the sentence and spare the life of his infant son. The entreaties of his ministers and his servants alike were ignored. All else was abandoned in his frantic pleas to the Lord to spare the life of his child.

On the seventh day the child died.

The palace servants were afraid to tell David. "If he behaved like this while there was yet some hope that the child would live" they told each other "what is he going to do when he knows he is dead". So for a while there was a conspiracy of silence, until David perceived by whisperings and glances, when they thought he was not looking, that there was something amiss.

"Therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead?"

"And they said, he is dead!"

And thereupon David rose from the ground, washed himself and donned fresh garments, and went to "the house of the Lord", the tent he had erected in Jerusalem to house the Ark of the

Covenant, and there he worshipped. Returning to the palace, he called for food, and began to eat.

Greatly daring, his servants asked the reason for this sudden change of demeanour. Apparently quite affably, he told them that while the child lived, there was always the chance that God would heed his distress and listen to his plea. Now the child was dead and God had not listened, there was no longer any point in keeping up the supplications; he might as well return to normal life. "I shall go to him" he said, "but he shall not return to me".

"And David comforted Bath-sheba his wife, and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon".

* * *

To what extent David felt sincere remorse for his crime it is impossible to say. The only indication in the narrative is his frank avowal to Nathan "I have sinned against the Lord". It has often been suggested that Psalms 32 and 51 were composed by David to express his feelings after realisation of his sin came to him, or was forced upon him by Nathan. The language of both Psalms is very fitting, especially his heartfelt plea in *Psa. 51. 14. "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God"*. In the light of those two Psalms it is probably right to conclude that he was indeed remorseful and repentant, and sincerely regretted the momentary weakness which had led him astray and involved him in so grievous a calamity. It is likely that for the rest of his life he was haunted by the memory of the valiant soldier who had served him so faithfully, and whom he had so basely betrayed and murdered. If he was indeed thus sincerely repentant, then of course the Lord did extend him forgiveness; but even so, the consequences remained. The Divine law "what a man soweth, that shall he also reap" cannot be avoided or set aside. The death of his child was not the only penalty David was destined to suffer. The rest of his reign was filled with a long succession of disasters, characterised by outrage and murder, all stemming in some degree from the implications of his crime against Uriah.

For the present, David picked up the threads of life again. There is no doubt that Bath-sheba became his favourite wife; there is no mention again of any of the others, and she was almost certainly a much younger woman, as is evidenced by other Scripture deductions. For the present he was still occupied with the war against Ammon. At about this time Joab had virtually ended the campaign by capturing the capital city of Rabbah. He called David to come down and receive the people's submission in person, which

David lost no time in doing, and it must be said with regret, treating the defeated citizens with atrocious cruelty, if 2 Sam. 13.31 and 32 is to be accepted as a true record. His justification probably was the fact that the Ammonites were themselves one of the cruellest of the ancient nations and had treated Israel in much the same way in times gone past; David probably reflected that the Mosaic Law demanded an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and he was only doing what Moses commanded.

Less than a year later Bath-sheba presented David with a second son, whom he named Solomon. From him came the kings of Israel, the royal line. In later years there was a third son, Nathan, who became the blood ancestor of both Joseph and Mary, and through Mary, of Christ. Then there was a fourth son of whom no further

mention is made. David, at fifty years of age, had what was virtually a second family; there were probably some girls as well as boys. His earlier sons were by now mostly grown to early manhood; he had at least fifteen such of whom Amnon, the eldest, was now twenty-one years of age. In the ordinary way he would be the prospective heir to the throne but David was now manifestly showing his preference for Solomon the child of Bath-sheba and obviously Amnon would be looking a little askance at this interloper. He was not the only one. Others of the older sons of David had their eyes on the throne and here were all the seeds of the conflict which led eventually to the murder of at least three of David's sons. From that casual glance from the roof of his palace on that fateful afternoon David was to reap a bitter harvest. *To be continued.*

"BECOMING"

"And are become such as have need of milk and not of solid food." (Heb. 5. 12).

The Christian life is one of "becoming". It is not static or stationary. Either there is growth and progression, or there is decay and retrogression. In the text the Apostle addresses some who had "become" such as had need of milk again and not the more solid food. And for this he felt it needful to administer words of reproof, for by that time they to whom he wrote ought to have become teachers of the Word. Instead of having progressed to that more favourable state they had retrogressed from an intermediate stage of development until now they were back at the point where their Christian growth began.

Naturally in the first phases of the Christian life milk is the proper food for all believers. And the more developed and mature rejoice exceedingly to see the new beginner imbibing and absorbing milk, but it must be cause for much concern and regret for them to see believers who have had the Truth for years retrogressing and becoming such as have need of milk again.

It would be cause of considerable concern and alarm in our domestic life if our boys and girls of "teen-age" growth were becoming such as had need of milk again. We hold it right that they should have milk—good milk indeed—in the first few months of life, and even good supplies of milk along with solid foods for the first few years, but should they once have reached the first threshold of adolescence and puberty and then begin to retrogress and become again such as had need of milk—all milk—this would

be to us a very serious matter indeed.

That is exactly what had happened, in a spiritual sense, with the brethren of this text. A rather considerable period of time had elapsed since they first believed and were fed with milk, but now by reason of that stretch of time they ought to have been developed as far as "teacher-hood". Instead of that there had been malnutrition and decay, and they were neither able to be of service to others in the teaching capacity, nor could they be taught the deeper things which a Christian needs to know.

If these Christian brethren were of the "first" generation of believers some thirty years would have elapsed since they began to imbibe that milk of the Word, and, in that span of time (or even in one-third that span), they surely ought to have grown up to teacher-hood, and have been able to pass on the milk to other new believers any day, and every day, of their lives! They ought to have been teachers of the Word! Yes, God counts the time from when we first believe, and rightly expects to see progression and development in the way of the Truth, and if, as the years go by, there is no such development, He may want to know the reason why!

The brethren in the text had become "dull of hearing", apathetic, sluggish, and somewhat indifferent to the Truth in its deeper, wider fullness. Teachings which the Apostle wished to impart were to them "hard of interpretation". Not that they ought to have been hard to impart had the brethren been alert, with their senses spiritually exercised. They were "hard of interpretation" — hard to put over by the

teacher, solely because the brethren had become dull of hearing, and could not exercise their senses enough to discern the good things of the Truth, and the evil nature of their lethargy. That was the tragic side of their Christian life, for while they drifted backwards and became as babes again, the deeply flowing currents of their day and nation were sweeping onwards towards the crisis-hour of their national and religious overthrow. Every day and month was carrying them nearer to that national catastrophe concerning which the deeper truth they could not learn would have been deeply instructive. In the vortex of the swiftly moving current they were likely to be as helpless and useless as children caught in the rapids of a river in spate.

Perhaps nothing is so pitiable in human experience as the decline into a second childhood. In the first childhood—the infant childhood—the vital powers are expanding and developing; the days of milk are followed by the days of “the crust”, and then of “meat”. Here the days of milk are temporary and in proper season—and indeed this is Nature’s way; but in the second childhood the vital powers are spent. Degeneration and decay become paramount, and senility and death loom ahead.

So also with those who, after juvenile growth spiritually “become” such as have need again of spiritual milk. They are “becoming” old, decrepit, and senile—old-age babes.

There are certain marks which are indicative of babyhood which can become accentuated in a second spiritual childhood.

First, it is right and proper for an infant babe to be carried about from place to place, and even to be tossed about in parental hands. Correspondingly it is a sign of immaturity to be tossed about by any and every wind of doctrine that blows about (Eph. 4. 14). This is often seen after some long-trusted teacher is removed by death or other circumstance. Such growth as there may have been is arrested and the reverse procedure begins. Uncertainty and insecurity replace conviction and trust, former beliefs are relinquished and new ones take their place with every shift of wind.

Secondly, the babe tends to “belong”—as a baby claims to have its crib, its toys, etc. The religious babe has its denomination, its church, its sect, its class, and is very careful to “belong”. “My church”, “my class”, “my people”, is its

Spiritual and earthly are all of one and if men are unable to appreciate the reality of spiritual things it is not because it is unnatural for them to do so but because they have lost the link that binds the two worlds together. Whilst it will always be true that the purely natural,

watchword. And this becomes very obvious as its inner helplessness becomes complete.

Next, the babes in spiritual things tend to glory in men, to rhapsodies over “so and so’s” preaching or “so and so’s” ideas. Like the Corinthians, they can say “I am of Paul” or “I am of Apollos”, or in modern terms “I am of Wesley” or “I am of Calvin” or “I am of Brother—”. Paul had to treat the Corinthians as babes in Christ, whom he had need to feed with milk, because they had turned aside from deeper things. “*Are ye not carnal*” he asks them. Yes, carnal Christians — Christians who had “become” carnal! Not necessarily wicked Christians but Christians living on the level of the flesh. Christians dividing up into groups exactly as the politicians do, or professing preference for this leader or that. When seen at work this attitude is always indicative of the fact that the great central truth of the Church’s oneness in Christ is either lost, or is become obscured, and so likely to become lost in future days.

Again, babes need much sleep. So do some decadent and relaxed Christian souls. The vigour of youth is spent, the fires of enthusiasm are dying (or have died) out, and a spirit of slumber and lethargy creeps slowly over the soul. The sense of ambassadorship is lost, the spur of the ministry of reconciliation is spent, and the tired one lies down to vegetate till senility damps out the fires.

It is an inescapable fact that every one of us is “becoming” this or that. Either we are “becoming” strong in the Lord and in the power of his might with all the senses rightly exercised to discern both good and evil, or we are “becoming” weak and need only milk for our sustenance. There is nothing to-day exactly as it was yesterday, nor will it be tomorrow exactly as it is to-day. It is either growth or decay, vigour or decrepitude, health or disease—a matter of daily change, for good or ill. It behoves us all to give attention to this matter of “becoming”, for

*To sow an act is to reap a tendency;
To sow a tendency is to reap a habit;
To sow a habit is to reap a character;
To sow a character is to reap a destiny.*

God grant us to be found among those who are being changed from glory unto glory with every passing day, and so “becoming” Christ-like in consequence.

material man will never understand or be able to visualise accurately the things of the spirit, he will when restored to the Divine image realise and know that there is a spiritual order of things, transcendentally high above the natural. He will believe and accept the fact.

HIS MEMORIAL

"O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows" (Nah. 1.15).

The Apostle's admonition to "keep the feast" comes with special solemnity at this season of the year. With sincerity of heart and quiet joy Christians memorialise four great matters:

First—the death of our Lord as the Passover Lamb.

Second—our relationship to the sufferings of Christ, the death of Christ, as followers in his steps and sharers in his cup.

Third—the great deliverance which will follow the passing over of the present night time. This deliverance will affect first of all those passed over, the Church, the antitypes of the priesthood and the Levitical tribe. The deliverance of these will come in the morning of the Millennial Age.

Fourth—the great "feast of fat things" (Isa. 25. 6) which will follow the passing over of the Church, when the passed-over ones have been associated with their Lord, in his heavenly kingdom, as the great Prophet, Priest, Judge, Mediator and King over all the earth, to bless and uplift the human family through the merit of his blood.

These different points should be kept separate and distinct from each other if we would have the greatest blessing from this Memorial.

Looking unto Jesus as "the Lamb of God", we behold his spotlessness, "*holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners*". We behold how "he was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth" (Acts 8.32). By speaking the word He could have resisted those who were intent upon his destruction. He assures us that no man took his life from him; He laid it down himself, voluntarily. He laid it down, not in obedience to law, for justice could not demand sacrifice, but in accordance with the Father's Will, saying, "*I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy Law is written in my heart*".

From this standpoint the Christian believer can rejoice greatly that the Redeemer spared not himself, but freely delivered himself up with foreknowledge that in the Divine purpose the effect of his sacrifice would redound first for the blessing of his followers and subsequently for the blessing of all people. Hence in partaking of the broken bread we memorialise the purity, the sinlessness of One who gave himself to be the ransom price for all mankind. From this stand-

point his shed blood signified that his death was necessary in order that our condemned humanity might be restored to life. Our hearts should here pause to appreciate not only the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, but also the love of the Father, who designed the programme, and the justice of God thus exemplified, and the wisdom of God in making the arrangement, and the faith to grasp the power of God as it will ultimately be manifested in the full carrying out of all the glorious purposes and promises which are memorialised.

The second point is scarcely less important than is the first. The first blessing from the Redeemer's sacrifice has been offered during this Gospel Age to such as have a hearing ear and an appreciative heart. This blessing is most outstanding. It purposes a still further favour to such of mankind as turn from sin and accept by faith the grace of God in Christ, and present their bodies living sacrifices, in full consecration, vowing to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. To all such during this Gospel age, and until the completion of the elect number, the Redeemer will accept their offering to the intent that they may experience the begetting of the Holy Spirit now and in birth to a spiritual life in the resurrection. Thus as his glorified members they may be associated with him in his Millennial kingdom, when He shall act as Mediator between God and men.

The partaking of the bread symbolically represents the appropriating the fleshly perfection of the man Jesus. We partake of his perfection by faith, and not actually. He covers in the Divine sight the blemishes and imperfections of our fleshly bodies, which we have tendered to God as living sacrifices. Since we have the treasure of the new nature in this earthly, fleshly vessel, the Father's acceptance of us includes our justified flesh, and all of its interests. It is only those who have thus partaken of the merit of Christ, and whose sacrifice God has accepted, who are privileged in conformity to their covenant of sacrifice to drink of our Lord's cup and to be immersed daily into his death.

The cup is not ours, but our Lord's. The life symbolised by the blood is not ours, but our Redeemer's. We are given the privilege of partaking of it. This offering to us of the privilege of participating in the Cup of Christ's suffering and death is not to indicate that it was insufficient nor to mean that we could add anything to

it. The offer illustrates the grace of God—that He is willing to receive us and to make us joint-heirs with our Lord and Saviour, if we have his Spirit.

The spirit which actuated Jesus was one of devotion to the Heavenly Father's will even unto death. This same spirit must be in all those whom the Father accepts as members of the Body of Christ, his Church. Hence our Redeemer emphasised the matter, saying that all who would sit with him in his throne must drink of his cup of self-denial, self-sacrifice, and be immersed into his death. This is what Paul points out to us; namely, that our Lord is the true Bread, the Loaf which came down from heaven, and that we are invited to be participants in the one Loaf and ultimately accepted by him according to the Father's plan and thus become members with our Lord in the larger Loaf. Hence, as Paul suggests, when we break this bread together as a memorial not only do we symbolise our Lord's broken body, but in a larger sense we symbolise the breaking of the Church and our breaking or dying as members of that Church. *"The loaf which we break, is it not the communion (the common union or participation) of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one loaf, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one loaf"* (1 Cor. 10. 16, 17).

The cup of the fruit of the vine symbolises the sacrificed life of our Lord. But, additionally, it

teaches that in becoming his disciples we accepted his invitation to share his cup. To us this means faithfulness in self-sacrifice as the Lord's representatives, even unto death. *"The cup of blessing which we bless (for which we give thanks as the greatest imaginable favour of God bestowed upon us,) is it not the communion (the general union, the fellowship) of the body of Christ?"* Does it not represent our Lord's sacrifice and our share with him in his sacrifice, by his invitation and in harmony with the Father's pre-arranged plan, in which He foreknew us with Jesus from before the foundation of the world?

What depth of meaning attaches to the communion cup from this stand-point! What heart-searching should go on with the accepting of it! How evident it is that this communion cup represents not merely the turning from sin, not merely believing in Jesus, not merely preference for right over wrong, but chiefly the presentation of believers' bodies as living sacrifices to God—sacrifices considered holy, sacrifices which God has accepted, begetting the offerer to the new nature as a "new creation" (Rom. 12.1).

Let each year then make increasing appreciation of this glorious memorial in its expression of "love Divine, all love excelling" whose breadth and length, and height and depth, surpasses all human comprehension.

HOLINESS AND LOVE

The believer may not understand how faithfulness to the leadings of the Spirit is essential to all fuller experience of his power and work as the Spirit of Holiness. A very tender and willing teachableness to imperfections and the Father's perfect will concerning him, is the only condition on which the Holiness of God can be more fully revealed to us and in us. Whilst most intent on discovering the secret of true and full holiness from the Divine side we may tolerate faults which all around us can notice, or remain ignorant of graces and beauties of holiness with which the Father would have us adorn the doctrine of holiness before men. He may seek to live a very holy life, and yet think little of a perfectly blameless life. There have been such saints, holy but hard, holy but distant, holy but sharp in their judgments of others, holy, but to the men around them, unloving and selfish. (The half-heathen Samaritan was more kind and self-sacrificing than the holy Levite the priest).

"The Lord make you to increase and abound in love towards one another, and towards all

men, to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness". The holiness (the positive hidden Divine principle) and the blamelessness (the external and human life practice): both are to find their strength, by which we are to be established in them, in our abounding and ever-flowing love. When Jesus sanctified himself that we might be sanctified in truth, that was nothing but love giving itself to the death that the sinful might share his holiness.

As the Spirit reveals to us where we are dwelling, in Christ and his love, and that this Christ is a living Lord and Saviour, there awakens within us the enthusiasm of a personal attachment, and the devotion of a loving allegiance, that makes us wholly his.

The child of God knows that he cannot be in any situation without the will of the Father permitting it. In accepting adverse circumstances as the will of God to try and prove him, he is in the right position for now knowing and doing what is right.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

A panorama of the way of Christ

1. Herald in the Wilderness

"He knew all men. He knew what was in man" (John 2.24-25).

It is a peculiar fact that men and women do not know each other. The partial knowledge of human nature is responsible for much misunderstanding, bad feeling, pain and disappointment. Suspicion, jealousy, lack of trust, repression of affection, poison and destroy what might be otherwise happy human relationships. Sometimes the faulty are exalted and the worthy set aside. Deceived, disillusioned and doubtful, the greater proportion of mankind flows on its way never knowing what qualities, what thoughts or yearnings, what affections lie in the minds of all about them. The true self, hidden, inarticulate, or lacking opportunity is rarely revealed in its fulness.

While exploring man has invented many sorts of seeing eyes which probe the vastness of celestial dominions, which magnify the minute, which penetrate solid substances, the human eye remains blind to what concerns its owner, unable to penetrate to the hearts and minds, to the motives and character of those with whom they are chiefly and often most closely concerned. Not only do human creatures deceive each other, they deceive themselves. The power to see and know each other as we truly are might save a lot of trouble. A few lines written by a Scottish poet express the view—

*"Oh wad some power the giftie gie us
To see ourselves as others see us
It wad fra' mony a blunder free us
An' foolish notion."*

Here is the constantly recurring problem. If only we had a true knowledge of other people, life would be sweeter. If only we had a truer knowledge of ourselves we might live more profitably, doing well the thing we can do. There are, in a way, three selves in every person, the self seen by self, the self other people see and the self God sees. Only the self seen by the eye of the Spirit is the true one.

That is the one which, put unreservedly into the hands of God, can be trained, schooled and disciplined, its faults eradicated, its talents developed, its weaknesses strengthened, its finest qualities gradually unfolded, until a whole new personality emerges, equipped and poised to play a useful part in life. God has taken hold of the weak things of the earth to confound the mighty.

It is a tribute to faith and the working of invisible forces in human life, that confusion, weakness, wantonness and all other evils by which human nature is beset, have been overcome in a life put into the care of the Great physician, who knows what is in man. He knows the depths of doubt and despair, the pressure of events and the limitations of human judgement.

Then, if pilgrims would know peace, the self knowledge which frees from the blunders of conceit, the self-confidence which comes from a sure repose in unerring wisdom, it is to God and to Christ they should turn for instruction. The illusions of the world will fade before the brighter realities of the City of God. Patience, understanding, tolerance and love will more and more replace the doubts, suspicions and distrust of its inhabitants. *"Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life. They testify of me" (John 5, 39).*

Books are a synonym for knowledge. The world's massive stores of literature provide a reservoir of information for the inquiring mind. Those who study or any who wish to know something about one particular subject, look it up in books. Books have become an essential part of life, yet for all their well packed pages they have not and cannot produce life. They are only pointers directing attention, or keys unlocking further reserves of instruction. The sacred Scriptures were to the Jews the source of all truth, the text book of rules, the manual of laws, the revelation of God and the prophetic guide-book to the future. They had entered into a dispute with Jesus over the healing of a lame man on the Sabbath day. This good deed was not according to the Law. It angered the formalists, not that a man should show mercy, but that he should set aside the written rules. They observed the words but not the spirit of the words, as St. Paul was later to say, "the letter kills but the spirit gives life".

The disputers, like many more since, set great store on what was written in the books. Jesus told them to search their books, to discover their true meaning. A formal adherence to these sanctified writings had no life-giving effect. It was an illusion to think that they had. From beginning to end the Scriptures, by their historical narrative, their recorded laws, their prophetic utterances, pointed forward to a Person, a living Word who would be far greater than the written

word, for by his deeds he would demonstrate his power of life. He who could heal the sick was greater than the book, however hallowed, as he who by his deeds fulfilled the spirit of the law was greater than the law. Christianity was not founded upon a book but upon a Person, the man Christ Jesus. Since his day, books by the million have been expressing a wide variety of views, giving interpretations and theologies over which men have wrangled, debated and fought with stubborn certainty and intolerant bigotry. The book invariably produces the creed and the creed the sect, while Christ and the spirit of Christ are lost sight of in a welter of words, in empty ritual and formal lip service.

The written word is still searched and studied, as though the printed page contained some life-giving power. Authors of great books as well as the books they have produced are regarded with reverential awe, as minds incapable of error, while still there stands the One who is greater than all the books, who declared himself the Way, the Truth and the Life. Jesus eclipses all books, for in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Books instruct and educate but they do not have all the answers to the vast problems of life. Knowledge passes away; what was new last year will be old next year. Even the Book of books, the world's best seller, is only a valuable collection of ancient words unless the reader of its pages is led by the Spirit to link his life with its central figure, Jesus Christ, and to place his unshaken trust in the Living God.

The Bible makes a strong person to person appeal. "Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God and there is none else." "Without Me you can do nothing." "My word shall not pass away till all shall be fulfilled." I, Me and Mine predominate the sacred pages. The living, life-giving all powerful personages are greater than the book. The printed page may teach and inspire but it is to Christ that all must look for life. "On Christ the solid rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand."

"How can you believe which receive honour one of another and seek not the honour which comes from God only" (John 5.44).

Civilised society has always had a strong mental inclination for titles. Men bow before lords and bend before kings for no other reason than that they bear illustrious names. 'Your grace', 'your excellency' and 'your majesty' have a ring to them which titillates the vanity of those who wear them and those who court their favour. To be tapped on the shoulder by a monarch or to

be patted on the back by a high sounding name, to be given a title of any sort, is an honour and distinction sought after and cherished by the ambitious and discerning sons of men.

Had Jesus come to the world of his day with a fine title or a row of scholarly letters after his name, he would have been received with honour and listened to with rapt attention, even though what he said might not have been worth listening to. Coming as he did, without pomp or ceremony, from a village carpenter's shop, even though his deeds showed astonishing power and his words were weighty with truth and wisdom, he was not received except by the poor who heard him gladly. Knowing what was in man, knowing the trend of the heart towards honours and titles and the high places, toward fine raiment and wealth and the respect which these things win from the fawning and the gullible, who see only the outward show, He knew they could not believe on him as the sent of God, who had none of these things. He made himself of no reputation. Simplicity was the key-note of his life. He called on his hearers to "Learn of Me for I am meek and lowly of heart". The only title He ever bestowed upon himself was "Son of Man". To him a man was a man, no more and no less. The titles and honours by which they set such store were only trappings. Not what a man had but what a man was, was the core of his teachings and example.

The Scottish poet who wrote:—"The rank is but the guinea stamp; the man's the gold for all that" was but expressing the essence of that teaching which set at nought the mighty who sought after the perishing glories of this world but exalted the humble and meek to the glory of the sun and the brilliance of the stars in the kingdom of God. The kingdoms and empires of earth pass away. The pomps and vanities of the world perish. Kings and lords return to the dust as does the pauper and the outcast of a proud society seeking the dazzling prizes and the glittering places for a few brief years. How transitory are all these things when weighted in the balances with eternal life. How few, how rare the discerning souls who in Christ and through him have seen the invisible treasure, have glimpsed a kingdom that is yet to come, which will overthrow and outlast all the unsatisfactory kingdoms of men.

He who sought no honours at the hands of men, who came titleless, who elected to be homeless, who found his friends among the poor, who consorted with sinners and laid his hands upon the lepers, is yet to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords over the nations, and before him

every knee shall bow. Those true followers of his, that little band of pilgrims who have followed him in every age, despised, persecuted, obscure, unknown, their qualities and worth like his, unguessed at by the indifferent world, what shall their name and place be then? To be called the sons of God, the brethren of Christ, will be greater honour than this world can bestow. Its best baubles will be poor beside that pearl of great price.

"This is the work of God that you believe on him who he has sent" (John 6.29). Works versus belief. This was the theme on which the inquiring people sought information as they followed Jesus round the shore of Gallilee. He had by now healed their sick and fed the hungry multitudes with bread. Looking upon them with that penetrating wisdom which saw through their seeming eagerness, to their real motives, He faced them with themselves as they were, seekers after personal gain. Their interest lay no deeper than the need of the moment. Their desire to please God or fit themselves for the future was superficial. Life was full of confusing issues. Few had recognised in Christ the greater than Moses, or had grasped the idea that there might be more to living than bread and temporary freedom from pain and anxiety. The certainties of life were more real and urgent than the uncertainties of faith. Everlasting life was a nebulous future beyond the reach of the average mind concerned with lesser things. Nevertheless the idea of pleasing God, of being on the right side of improvement, of any possible advantage, did strike a chord. What had they to do, what works did God desire of them?

Here was the touch-stone, the standard, the requirement which brought man into harmonious relationship with his Maker. Not works of the hands but of the mind, belief, a strong belief that Jesus was sent to them from God. He had given them bread in the wilderness as God had given their fathers manna in the desert but still they doubted his credentials. They would see

some other work. When no work was forthcoming, when faith and acceptance was expected of them both in his power and authority to grant them ages of life, they murmured and made difficulties. In the end they were offended that one man should make such claims for himself, that he should demand and expect their belief in him as the long awaited One.

Had he asked of them a busy activity, an outward service, no doubt they would have done something. To believe was a different matter. So St. Paul says that the people of Israel failed to attain the gift of God because they sought it not by faith but by works of the law. They could not believe and they lost the boon and blessing of life. Works have provided the same stumbling stone down the centuries since that day on which Jesus declared himself the living bread which came down from Heaven. It has become a common illusion that the Christian must work his passage to Heaven. There must be something to do, something to offer. Engagement in some frenzied activity or even a courted martyrdom have seemed to the work-minded the passport to heavenly realms and honours. In the midst of much misguided zeal these Christian candidates have lost sight of the central Figure. Whatever else they have believed in they have not believed in him, for his Spirit has been lamentably absent from many deeds done in the name of Christ.

That whole-hearted belief, that heart-winning love which quietly waits, which meekly gives itself to discipline, to sanctification and transformation, from the image of the earthy imperfect man into the likeness of the Son of God, is a rare frame of mind that has in it the imperishable seed of life. It has the Lord's *"Verily, Verily. He that believes on me has everlasting life. I am the living bread."*

*"Break thou the bread of life, O Lord to me
As thou didst break the loaves beside the sea,
Beyond the sacred page I seek thee Lord,
My spirit pants for thee, O living Word."*

To be continued.

We have before our minds two trees, the palm and the cedar, the one useful for food and the other for shelter, and the trees of the Lord are compared to these two trees. They exhibit their usefulness in thousands of ways. Like Jesus they go about doing good. They are useful in their prayers—"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." They are useful in conversation. "The lips of the righteous feed many." They deliver the poor and fatherless and

are eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. The cut-down timber becomes a pillar in the temple. It is firm in the grain, capable of a lovely polish, diffusing a perpetual fragrance; no worm will destroy a book which it protects, nor moth attack a garment which it guards. Thus when the trees of the Lord are cut down and their work on earth completed their influence will widen as the years roll on.

THE BIBLE AND THE SPADE

The earth is continually yielding fresh treasures to the excavator and the investigator and with every such discovery the Bible stands illumined in brighter hue. The days are long since past when the rash allegation that the Bible had no independent testimony to support its claim to be true history must needs be endured in dignified silence. To-day there is a host of witnesses; solid evidences of the handiwork of men living in Bible times, testifying to the accuracy of that which had already been recorded in Holy Writ. And if the preservation of these clay tablets and rocks and stones through the centuries and the millenniums, and their subsequent discovery long after the very nations in whose languages they were inscribed had passed away, is a matter of astonishment and wonder, what must be said of the Bible itself? That record has been preserved, not on enduring stone hidden away in the depths of the ground, safe from interfering and malicious hands, until its secrets could be revealed to the sober inquiry of this latter age, but in the world of men and among men. The precious manuscripts have at all times since their writing circulated in the world, read and re-read, copied and re-copied, the while great established powers among men have sought by every means at their disposal to root them out and exterminate them. No other book ever written has had such a chequered and hazardous career as has the Bible. No other book has been the object of such determined and relentless efforts to suppress and exterminate it. And no other book has survived so long and so triumphantly. Neither the burning fires of persecution nor the chilling winds of indifference have prevailed to wither and destroy its message and its influence in the world. Even to-day, when the religious apathy of the Western nations has become a byword and a proverb, the Bible remains a "best seller". Not for nothing is it described by the Apostle Peter as the "word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever". In all this world of change and decay, of tumult and unrest, of indifference and hostility, the Bible stands, serene, dignified, confident, an inflexible witness to God and to his concern and care for mankind.

That is its central truth. The historical features of the Bible are not there as an end in themselves; they are a means to an end. Its history is not myth. Men and women did live and work and write as the Bible says they did. Their hopes and fears, loves and hates, strength and weak-

ness, were all as the Bible relates of them. Even its greatest heroes have their faults and failings, their mistakes and their sins, recorded as faithfully as their triumphs of faith and the things wherein they pleased God. But all of this is but to point to one great truth—that man, created perfect and sinless at the first, fell from that high estate into sin, and so death passed upon all men; that God is working ceaselessly to recover man from the effects of that sin and to achieve his final goal of a sinless creation in which "all that hath breath shall praise the Lord"; that to achieve that end—by the only way in which that end can be achieved—the Lord Jesus Christ came from above and moved among men, teaching the true principles by which men must live, suffering himself to be put to death rather than betray those principles; that eventually all men may be brought face to face with the alternative of accepting Christ and his ways and so inheriting eternal life, or rejecting them and suffering eternal death.

That is the message and the power of the Bible. It will by no means renounce or whittle down its claim to be the authoritative expression of God's Will and exposition of God's Plan in respect to man, his origin, his present state, and his destiny. It takes us back to earliest times and shows us man as he was—pure, upright, sinless, perfectly adapted to his environment, and capable of everlasting life whilst remaining in harmony with Divine Law. It passes on into history and leads us up to the present, showing us the dark and terrible results of human selfishness, depravity and sin, in a world that has largely rejected God and is increasingly so doing. It takes us forward into the future and shows us a world at peace, sin banished, war a thing of the past, love and good fellowship replacing hate and rancour and jealousy. It shows us the will of God done on earth as it is done in heaven, and God dwelling as it were with men and all creation at peace. Then it comes back into the present, the time of this world, and shows us the means by which that glorious consummation is to be brought about, in the person and work of Christ, and tells us in unmistakable terms that only by full acceptance of Christ and consecration of life to him can men and women be recovered from their state of imperfection and weakness and sin, and be translated into the glorious liberty of the children of God. The Bible has a lot to say about the philosophy of the Atonement.

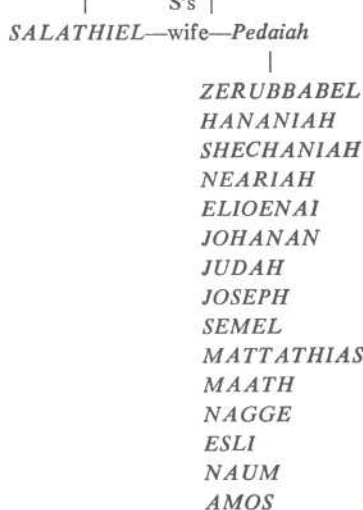
ANCESTORS OF JESUS

The adjoining family tree illustrates the thesis in last issue "The Genealogy of Jesus", showing the line of descent from David as therein suggested, Salathiel being born of Neariah and Jehoiachin's wife by Levirate law, and Zerubbabel born of Pedaiah and Salathiel's wife similarly, to ensure the legal royal succession.

- A. Royal line from Solomon shown: SOLOMON.
- B. Legal royal line from Nathan shown: SALATHIEL.
- C. Non-royal line from Nathan shown: *Nathan*.
I Chron. 3 gives A & B, Solomon to Johanan. Luke gives C, Nathan to Zerubbabel, Johanan to Mary. Matt. gives A & B, Solomon to Zerubbabel, Abiud to Joseph.

DAVID

SOLOMON	<i>Nathan</i>
REHOBOAM	<i>Mattatha</i>
ABIJAH	<i>Menan</i>
ASA	<i>Melea</i>
JEHOSHAPHAT	<i>Eliakim</i>
JEHORAM	<i>Jonah</i>
—	<i>Joseph</i>
AHAZIAH	<i>Juda</i>
JOASH	<i>Simeon</i>
AMAZIAH	<i>Levi</i>
UZZIAH	<i>Matthat</i>
JOTHAM	<i>Jorim</i>
AHAZ	<i>Eliezer</i>
—	<i>Jose</i>
HEZEKIAH	<i>Eri</i>
MANASSEH	<i>Elmodam</i>
AMON	<i>Cosam</i>
JOSIAH	<i>Addi</i>
JEHOIAKIM	J's <i>Melchi</i> N's
JEHOIACHIN	—wife— <i>Neariah</i> —wife



ABIUD	<i>Mattathias</i>
ELIAKIM	<i>Joseph</i>
AZOR	—
SADOC	<i>Janna</i>
ACHIM	<i>Melchi</i>
ELIUD	<i>Levi</i>
ELEAZAR	—
MATTHAN	<i>Matthat</i>
JACOB	<i>Heli</i>
JOSEPH	<i>Mary</i>

JESUS

ment; it does not demand that all its readers understand that philosophy in detail; what it does demand, and demands because compliance with the demand is the only possible way of escape from sin and death, is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved".

"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life!"

That verse is the crowning glory of the Bible and the expression of its deepest truth. All else leads up to it. The object of the Bible in this world is to lead men to Christ and to instruct them in his ways after they have accepted him. Its history, its poetry, its visions, its ethics, all converge irresistibly upon one transcendent Figure, the One Who is rightful King of the earth and King of all men, the One Who, in the power and glory of his Second Advent, will reign as Prince of Peace over a transformed and transfigured world of men, teaching them to pursue the arts of peace and eschew the evils of war, until in enlightenment and true reverence they come before him in voluntary yielding of all life's powers in a dedication of heart and mind that will endure to all eternity.

In their own humble way, the tablets and the inscriptions on the rocks are agents in the execution of the Divine Plan. They have played, and still play, their part in establishing faith in God. It is said of him that He hath "left not himself without witness" and this at least is one respect in which the statement is true. Jesus spoke of the very stones crying out to testify to his Messiahship; the voice of the monuments has made itself heard to declare, indirectly, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

THE OPEN HAND

*A Meditation on
Divine Goodness*

"These wait all upon thee . . . thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good" (Psa. 104. 27-28).

One of the most persistently reiterated themes of Holy Writ is man's utter helplessness to direct his life without God. At every turn of life man comes up against his NEED, though it is but rarely that he either knows or realises the extent of that need.

The absoluteness of this need is not brought home to the heart or mind of man, because of the universal generosity of Almighty God. Only if God withdrew his activities from this planet entirely would man come face to face with the absoluteness and universality of his needs. If God kept back the rains, which fall impartially upon the just and the unjust; if He withheld the fruitful seasons (Acts 14. 17) with their bounteous harvests; if He locked up his winds in their treasuries; then man would realise the utter helplessness of his position in this scheme of things. The effects of local famines have been serious and have brought ruin and destruction to man and beast. But these famines have usually been local only: there has mostly been abundance elsewhere, and relief has usually been despatched from the region of the abundance to the place of want. God has never withheld his gifts worldwide. He has never caused the universal harvest to fail. So unflinchingly, yet naturally, has the bountiful God bestowed his gifts, that men sow, doubting not for a moment but that they will reap, and call the sowing and reaping Nature's common round. But should God withhold his hand, their sowing would be vain—man may plant, and man may water but without God there would be no increase.

The other side of the question, obverse to man's need, is God's ability and disposition to GIVE. These two factors in universal life are complementary to each other. God is the source of unflinching abundance, man the creature of unending need (Psa. 104. 16-15).

Not less is this so in the religious life of man. Here again the persistently reiterated theme of Holy Writ is man's utter helplessness and universal need. Again the other side of the question obverse to man's need, is God's ability and disposition to give.

The beginning of God's generosity to fallen men dates from Eden days, when in the act of imposing the sentence required by his broken Law, God promised Mother Eve that her seed

should eventually bruise the Serpent's head—God gave her there a promise—his first Gift. This form of gift He repeated to Noah, in that He promised summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. To Abraham God gave that most wonderful promise which is the basic feature of the whole Plan of redemption. By the gift of his promises *God also gave hope* to fallen man. God said to man "I will bring blessing to you"—man, musing on the promise said "God will bring blessing to us some day", and so hope and expectancy were born.

God gave Abraham a seed—first a son, then a nation. To this nation *God gave his Word* and his Law, those "lively oracles" (Acts 7. 38) which Moses received at Sinai. That Law was the most advanced moral standard of its day, and had it been received and obeyed would have raised Israel high above the nations around. That sacred gift from Sinai forms one important section of the Holy Book we treasure as the Word of Life. *He gave Israel a Tabernacle* so that He might give them the benefit of his presence in their midst. *He gave them the good land* on which the eye of God rests with holy delight (Exod. 3. 8, Deut. 11. 12). *He gave them judges and deliverers* when they fell into captivity—reformers who led them back to their "oracles", and "seers" who carried their minds forward to higher expectations. *God gave them advancement and prominence* among the nations, under David and Solomon, when the fame of Israel's king spread to the distant quarters of the world. The dual nations which later came about were given the benefit of God's patience and long-suffering, though they were fast becoming vessels fit only for destruction. Becoming inveterately idolatrous, Israel first, and Judah afterwards were given the spirit of slumber (Rom. 11. 8). Under the conditions this was a boon to them, for the blindness which came minimised the degree of their responsibility, and because God thus concluded them all in unbelief He will be able in Millennial days to have mercy upon all, "and so all Israel will be saved".

Isaiah, commissioned to deliver the message of rejection said ". . . *the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep and hath closed your eyes . . .*" (Isa. 29. 10 16) yet he concludes his denunciation with the statement "*Is it not yet a little while and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field . . .*" (v. 17). The gift of

slumber, while it deprived the two nations of their land for centuries, and of the privilege of supplying all the Body-members of Christ, will have kept the national spirit in a state of hunger for the appearance of Messiah as an exalted King.

In due course God gave to the returned remnant nation in Jerusalem his greatest and best gift—his well-beloved Son. This was the gift that lay dearest to his own heart. He came to earth bearing the tidings of the Almighty's great Love for men, especially for those who were children of God's Friend (Jas. 2. 23, Isa. 41. 8). What tremendous possibilities God set before that generation in Jerusalem when Messiah came to them! (Dan. 9. 25). In the first place God purposed to give *repentance* for their national sins to Israel through his Son (Iuke 1. 68-79, Acts 5. 31). God desired to touch the deeper springs of their hearts by the ministry of his well-beloved, and thus to lead them to repentance.

Again, Jesus was destined to be a bringer of light to his people—God desired to bestow the gift of understanding upon that generation, so that it might comprehend what his higher purposes were—that the heavenly things were about to begin to displace the earthly carnal things. To those who were responsive to the new teachings God gave an *understanding* of the mysteries of the Kingdom (Matt. 13. 11, Mark 4. 11). "*Unto you it is given to know*" what was "hidden" from other ages.

Again, God gave Jesus to that people, to be to them as Bread of Life. In manner similar to wilderness days when God strewed the earth morning by morning with manna, so again, in another forty-year "To-day" (Heb. 4. 7). God provided *Living Bread* for the children of Abraham (John 6. 27-65). In some supernatural way the words of the Lord would have sustained their deeper life (John 6. 63) and eventuated in eternal life. In some super-mundane way his flesh would sustain the life of the world. God gave *Living Bread* to those who could eat. (John 6. 32). Again (to vary the "sustenance" figure of speech) God gave Jesus as the Water of Life—of which, if one should drink, it should satisfy his thirst forever. (John 4. 10-15).

God gave Israel a shepherd, who would have guided and pastured the flock of God in paths of righteousness (John 10. 1-16). But there was no beauty about him that they despised him. They wanted a King—a conquering Messiah; He came a sufferer, a Man of sorrow, an offering for sin. The nation rejected him—but to as many as did receive him God gave the *privilege to become his own sons* (John 1. 2). To those whose hands were open to take, God gave many other

gifts along with and through his beloved Son! Giving! *Giving!* GIVING! all the time, to those who knew their NEED.

Even after they had despised and crucified his Son, God still kept the door of opportunity open for such as needed more than the ritual and ceremonial of the Temple sacrifice. To many among them the words of Jesus had opened a new world of possibilities—He told of opportunities and privileges, of which their fathers had never heard—(Matt. 13. 35). He set new longings rising in their hearts, but because they had been powerless against the Sanhedrin and Priests, and had not been able to veto their schemes nor their fearful deed, He had been slain. How readily they listened on that wonderful morn when "Peter stood up with the eleven" and told the people that God had raised him from the dead, and again desired through him to "give repentance to Israel" (Acts 5. 31).

But only a remnant were found who desired that gift of repentance. To fill the place vacant by this hard-hearted race, God turned to the nations to take out of them a people for his Name. To these also God gave repentance unto salvation. "*Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I that I could withstand God*" spake Peter in defence (Acts 11. 17). "*Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life*" was the brethren's response. Repentance, the gift of God? Yes, verily! They who received the word into good hearts are *such as are "opened"* by the Lord (Acts 16. 14). No man comes to the Son save those whom the Father draws (John 6. 65). The "faith" that saves is God's gift (Eph. 2. 8) through the operation of his word (Rom. 10. 13-17) and of his Spirit in their hearts. The "peace" that garrisons their hearts comes from God too (Phil. 4. 7, John 14. 27). This is a precious gift to those who dwell in a tempestuous world. Perfect peace is bestowed upon all who dwell upon the Rock of Ages (Isa. 26. 3-4).

And Love—that most desirable God-like trait? Yes, that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which He gives us (Rom. 5. 5). We cannot add so little as one inch to our spiritual stature by taking thought. It is not impossible to spend too much time talking over the necessity for our growth in Love and be all the time forgetful of the fact that Love is a fruitage (Gal. 5. 22-23) and is more a matter of the husbandman's concern than that of the branch in the vine itself. God is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those that ask him than any earthly father is ready to give his children food (Matt. 7. 11). And more Holy Spirit power

in the heart means more Love to shed abroad in the life. This Love also is a gift from God, for we love because He first loved.

Again, not only is the bestowment of the Holy Spirit the basis of character development (2 Cor. 3. 18) but it is also God's pledgepenney of the inheritance we hope to receive. It is the token that God has taken us into his service, and that the final reward will be sure, if we discharge our duty faithfully, "... God... hath sealed us, and given the earnest of the spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1. 22, 2 Cor. 5. 5). Moreover this Holy Spirit gift is an energising and stabilising power. It is not a spirit of fear—but of cool reasoned courage, and of a sound mind. It produces the spirit of sanctity blended with sanity in our minds—a well-balanced properly-ordered sanctification of life. This too is a gift of God—and is by no means the outcome of psychological self-effort. It is God who hath wrought us for our resurrection change (2 Cor. 5. 5). The transformation is wrought by his Spirit (2 Cor. 3. 18). And then for the day-to-day struggle *He giveth grace* to such as repair to his Throne of Grace, humbly beseeching assistance in their time of need (Heb. 4. 16, Jas. 4. 6, 1 Pet. 5. 5). Thus the whole range of the Christian's life and experience is called into being and sustained by his gracious gifts, but it does not end even at that, for He will give the complete victory over death, and over the grave. When that which is mortal is swallowed up in victory, the faithful footstep follower of the Lord will see him and be with him for evermore. *"Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor. 15. 57).

From first to last, the Christian's life is one of receiving; for what has he that he has not

received? It is a life of faith with an open hand—with a courage to ask and take. It is the story of a great need—which grows as it feeds, and which is more pronounced at the end of the way than at the beginning. Thank God, even its deepest need does not exhaust the capacity of the bounteous Giver. Though its demands are presented every day—yea, many times a day—the riches of his grace are of ample store for each and all that call upon him.

The story of Divine grace is the record of One who has been disposed to "give," and "give," and "give" again, because it pleases him to dispense of his fulness to helpless needy men. He created man with a great "need" so that He might play the part of a great giver. Man has but to open his hand to take of that bountiful fulness which God opens his hand to give (Psa. 104. 27-28). If God withheld not his well-beloved Son *"shall He not also with him freely give us all things?"* (Rom. 8. 32). Christian experience of this and other days shows without fail that they who are most developed in grace are the ones most conscious of their need. The more one has grown in the things of the Lord, and the more tender and sensitive the heart has become, the more such saints become persuaded of their need for God. The ultimate end of every quest of the maturer heart, is not merely to accept the gifts of God, but to receive with open heart the Giver too.

It is good to accept with open hand the gifts of God; it is better far with open heart to accept the Giver himself. No wealth of earth is so desirable as the gifts of God; the whole world itself is but refuse indeed in comparison with possessing God.

Without Bars or Gates

An Israeli correspondent, writing to the *"Jerusalem Post"* deploring the national reliance on earthly weapons and glorying in their victories, says, in part, *"there are a few of us who realise God brought us here and God is keeping us. If we continue to glory so much in ourselves, refusing to give glory where it is due, we are all liable to wind up by the rivers of Babylon again"*. The correspondent has a real point here. The nation which will ultimately inherit the land in peace and prosperity, with true freedom from its enemies, will be the one that eschews all material means of defence and puts its entire trust in God, as in the days of Jehoshaphat and

Hezekiah. Such a development does not look very likely at present but it will surely come. When Ezekiel witnessed his prophetic vision of Divine intervention for the final deliverance of Israel and the overthrow of her enemies he pictured those enemies as coming to a nation dwelling confidently without any means of defence. They will not need to fight in that battle, for the battle is not theirs, but God's, as it was in the days of Jehoshaphat. Until there are signs of that change of heart in the rulers and people of modern Israel it is futile to expect this Age to end and for the Millennial kingdom of our Lord to be inaugurated.

GOD SPEAKS!

God speaks! So begins the epistle to the Hebrews; and without the customary apostolic greeting: and properly so, for the writer's qualifications and his blessing on his readers must be left unmentioned while God is speaking. He speaks to a people whose first great leader exceedingly feared and quaked when the voice of God once shook the earth, and from whose ranks arose those mighty men of word and deed of whom the world was not worthy. He speaks to a people who had heard his voice through many centuries; to a nation which could rightly claim that to them were committed the oracles. The olden prophecies had not come by the will of man for often the will of man was contrary, nor did the prophets proclaim together, but spoke at sundry times when the burden of the Lord was upon them. Being of Adamic descent they died like their hearers; yet their words have not died, and they still speak to those who listen, and appropriate quotations are made in this epistle from their writings. And the passage of time has by fulfilment of their prophecies revealed that for all their frailty they are truthfully referred to as holy men of God who spake as moved by the Holy Spirit.

But a great change of procedure is announced at the opening of this epistle. God is speaking again, and the new channel of truth is the greatest He could desire or find, or man need. We all know through whom He now speaks, but the apostle, apart from speaking of him as the Son of God, does not immediately announce his name. He first mentions some of his glories and greatness, and when he has thus prepared the minds of his Hebrew readers, he declares him, in chapter two, to be Jesus. He is not of sinful stock as the early prophets, yet his words do not abrogate the prophecies of his predecessors, for all spoke by the Spirit's direction. But this will emerge from the comparison—that if God had of old spoken through the faithful several and is now speaking through one, his Son, then He must possess outstanding qualifications and virtues. He has; and the first seven chapters of Hebrews tell, among other things, how much better, how much greater is this faithful and true witness than the stalwarts of the past. And note how, in those chapters, the faithful servants of old (the very ones revered in Israel) are one by one surpassed by Jesus the Son of God.

Early in the first chapter we see the close association of the Son and his Father, so com-

plete that He is spoken of as the reflection of the power, the character, the voice of God. But there are two facts in which the Son must necessarily differ from the Father, yet they also prove how glorious is the union of Father and Son, and they are that it is the Son who by himself purges our sin, and having done that great work sits down on the right hand of the majesty on high. This is the channel through whom the message of God now comes, and it will be noticed that this new prophet is also priest and king. And he excels all previous holders of these offices in that He possesses the power of an endless life, enough to fit him for all Israel's and the world's many needs. That he holds this immortality is seen in this chapter by his gaining by inheritance a more excellent name than the angels.

The remainder of the first chapter has as its theme the proving of the Son's superiority to the angels, and ample quotation is given from the voices of the past, which look forward to his coming and faithful performance of his Divine mission; and these in turn seal the old writers as prophets of God. The apostle propounds the question—to which of the angels said he at any time, "thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee." No answer is given, for there is none. His superiority to angels is so marked that the apostle uses that strong figure of speech—erotesis—where the unanswered question is more telling than any reply. Further quotations show the Son's work in the beginning of laying the foundations of the universe. Some of the work erected on those foundations will perish, but the founder will endure and bear a righteous sceptre in the coming kingdom.

Not to angels is assigned the great work of subduing the future habitable, affirms chapter two, yet it reasons that if the word once spoken by angels was accompanied by severe penalties we ought to give more earnest heed to the words which first began to be spoken by this new voice of God, which God himself has confirmed by gifts of the Holy Spirit. Great indeed must be the responsibility of the hearers now that the last and greatest voice from God is speaking! And, leaving the subject of angels, the apostle mentions the superiority of the Son to man. This may be an obvious truth, yet if we recall that the Son was once of high heavenly rank and became a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, or in other words that he might redeem man by dying for them, then his superiority to man can never be called in question. And his

superiority to the Devil is apparent, for by the same act of death He will render him powerless.

And then the comparison changes. Though superior to angels and man in general, He is shown as better than man in particular from chapter three forward; and the first great man in the list of worthies is Moses, one of the faithful voices of the past. It will be remembered that Moses the servant of God and of Israel the house of God, prophesied that he himself would be succeeded by another to whom they would hearken without fail; and thus he became a testimony or illustration of those things which were to be spoken after concerning Jesus the Son. But though Moses heard the voice of God and faithfully served the words to Israel, it was necessary for the house of God to be constantly prompted to loyalty by the insistent words, "To-day if ye will hear his voice." And all know that the word preached did not profit, for it was not mixed with faith in them that heard. Then the apostle mentions two more leaders in Israel, Joshua and David; yet both failed to give rest to Israel. The word of God had come to Israel through such as these at sundry times and in divers manners with but little result, and the word of God being quick and powerful spoke again and said, "They shall not enter into my rest".

It will then be reasoned that now that God is speaking by his Son, who surpasses Moses, Joshua and David, we ought to give the more earnest heed. It is as though the writer was saying, "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation, and how shall we escape if we neglect?" Yet, the warning notes of chapters three and four are tempered by the announcement of the new voice of God being a faithful high priest Who was, apart from sin, tempted in all points like as we. So we may come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help. But we must listen to the voice.

The mention of high priest will remind the Hebrews of the first and greatest, Aaron. He did not take the honour to himself, but was specially called for the post, as was Moses called to his service. In fact, each of these leaders of old time was called to his service, and it was

proper that Israel should heed them in those days when they spoke from God; but their superior has come, the princely leader of salvation, the Son, and they must listen to him. They had looked on Aaron as model high priest even as they saw Moses as the great prophet, but both are succeeded by One, in whom combines each office held by Moses, Aaron, Joshua and David. When the apostle has compared one by one the leaders of the past with their one successor they must perforce accept Messiah. Again the writer points out their responsibility (in chapter 6), but again he has comforting words to speak, for he is persuaded better things of them, even though he must speak strongly.

There seems to be only one more name in Israel to which they would cling now that each of their leaders has been superseded by Jesus, and he is the father of them all and in whom inhere the promises—Abraham. And, as we expect, the apostle shows how he too is superseded by the same one. None of them are superseded in the sense that they have been discarded by God, but the new channel of God's word and promise and deed is so much better than they, great though they were, and most worthy to be revered in Israel. Abraham received blessing from one of unknown descent and whose appointment as high priest came not in the fashion that Israel was accustomed to. Abraham gave him tithes in acknowledgment of his honour. Consider how great this man was, for he was made like unto the Son of God and he received tithes of Abraham and therefore of Levi and the whole house of Aaron, who in their turn received tithes of all Israel. Of such rank is Jesus the Son of God.

The apostle begins the eighth chapter as though the previous seven chapters are given to describing the glories of this One high Priest, for he says, "Of the things we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest", greater than angels, than man, than Moses, than Joshua, than David, than Aaron, and greater than Abraham. He it is through whom God now speaks, and we must give heed, for no better can ever be found.

Make no mistake—Satan is no fool and he's been around a lot longer than you have. He knows how to clothe the evil in garments of righteousness and present it at just the right time; perhaps when you're spiritually down or at a point when your earthly appetites are particularly sharp, or when you have allowed bitterness

to disarm you. If you believe that you can handle him by yourself without the Lord's help—think again! He has and is destroying stronger and more intelligent people than you and I and he uses a built-in weapon to do it—their own weaknesses!

"New Jerusalem Fellowship"

"TILL HE COME"

"For as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come" (I Cor. 11. 26).

That word comes to most minds at Memorial season, and it comes always with renewed emphasis. Year by year continually, for nearly two thousand years, groups of Christians have come together to commemorate the historic event which is the foundation of the faith and has given meaning to many lives. Even though for the greater part of that long time the majority of Christians have habitually celebrated the communion of bread and wine much more frequently than once in a year, they invariably attach more than usual importance to the Easter celebration. Some there are who never concern themselves over the fortnightly or monthly communions who would never dream of missing their Easter-Day communion. It is a well-established fact that the annual commemoration of our Lord's death on or about the anniversary of that death is an obligation laid upon all who claim his Name.

In these latter days when many hold that Scriptural and dispensational evidences justify the conclusion that the days of the Second Advent have already commenced, and we are now living in the first stage of that Second Coming, a point is sometimes raised. If it be a fact that the Lord has already returned, why do we still observe the Memorial, since I Cor. 11. 26 says that by eating this bread and drinking this cup we shew forth the Lord's death "till he come"? If He has come, should we not logically cease to observe the Memorial?

That is at least a reasonable question and deserves reasonable consideration. Far less praiseworthy is the hasty assertion sometimes encountered: "We still keep the Memorial; therefore He has not yet come". The only possible answer to that reasoning is the reminder that thousands of Jews still observe the Passover, blind to the fact that He in Whom the Passover was fulfilled came two thousand years ago.

We may come then to this reasonable objection that is urged. Most of those who raise the point did at one time believe in what is generally called the "Second Presence". That which was at that time convincing evidence, is now, in the light perhaps of later study and consideration, unconvincing. This very text and this very question may well be a factor in some minds leading to the rejection of the conviction which

at an earlier date did give a joy and enthusiasm in the Lord's cause that even to-day is recollected with pleasure and maybe a little longing. An examination of the text will perhaps be both appropriate to the Memorial season and helpful in the consideration of the most absorbing Scriptural study one can undertake in this day—the Second Coming of our Lord.

It ought not to be necessary to suggest that no Scripture text should be considered apart from its context—that which comes just before and just after. When we feel very strongly about a matter—as so many do on the subject of the Second Advent—we are more apt to transgress along this line than at other times. There is a story of a rather bumptious minister who was fond of boasting that he could preach a sermon on any text at a moment's notice without previous warning or preparation. His challenge being taken up on one occasion, he was given Rom. 3. 1 for subject. Opening his Bible he read out hastily "*What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?*" Closing the Book, he discoursed for twenty minutes or so to show how it was that the Jew had no advantage and the reasons why there was no profit in circumcision. Pausing then for breath, he opened his Bible again to continue his theme and read out the next few words: "*Much every way*"; and there was a long and awkward silence.

We must turn then to the general purport of Paul's teaching in this chapter and decide what he is talking about, then place the text in its proper setting and seek to understand its purpose in Paul's argument. The first thing worthy of notice is that this eleventh chapter of First Corinthians is one of several chapters in which the Apostle is giving counsel and correcting errors in respect to the public Church life of the Corinthian believers. There were many abuses existing among them extending to various kinds of immorality which were definitely unchristian and would inevitably give the Church a bad name in the sight of its pagan neighbours. In the chapter under consideration the matters particularly discussed are the behaviour of the sisters in Church worship, and the behaviour of all the believers in the Church "love-feasts". We know that it was the custom in those early days for the brethren, rich and poor alike, to assemble together for a communal meal to which all brought contributions, the food and drink thus offered being

placed on the table and shared in common. This "agape" or "love-feast" was originally a spontaneous expression of the spirit of equality and brotherliness in the Church, but these Corinthians had degraded it into a function where class distinctions prevailed. The rich, instead of sharing their bounty with their poorer brethren, kept their own good things for themselves and feasted riotously, even to the extent of becoming drunken; the poorer ones, having little to bring, were hungry by comparison.

Now all that was a direct negation of the spirit of common union, the communion of the Body of Christ which is the Christian's most powerful witness to the outside world. These Corinthians were bringing discredit upon the name of Christ by their repudiation of that spirit in their so-called "love-feasts", in which love found no place at all. From that point, (vs. 22) the Apostle goes on to show that such behaviour was directly contrary to, and did dishonour to, the spirit of the Memorial Supper itself, which was an even more important thing than the love-feast. "I have received of the Lord that also which I delivered unto you" he says "that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread . . . and said . . . this is my body, which is broken for you . . . This cup is the new testament in my blood. This do ye as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." (vs. 23-25). The practices of the Corinthians were bringing into disrepute the very ceremony which stands as an age-lasting evidence to the world of the truth of our faith and of the fact that Jesus did certainly die on the Cross back there at the beginning of the Age.

Consider that for a moment. In what way is the memory of great historic events or of great men of past times perpetuated through subsequent generations? Always by means of anniversaries. Once every year some celebration or ceremonial reminiscent of the event or individual concerned is enacted, handed down from generation to generation, keeping alive the story that otherwise might easily perish. Take an illustration that might seem a little incongruous but is nevertheless apt and well on the point. In the year 1605, a plot was hatched to blow up the British Houses of Parliament. A dozen well-known men were implicated; their names are now very generally forgotten but the man selected to accomplish the purpose is immortal on the pages of British history, and to the children of every British generation better known than any of the monarchs of England from William the Conqueror to Queen Victoria. Very few people have ever heard of Robert Catesby, Thomas Winter, Sir Everard Digby and Ambrose

Rookwood, the chief conspirators. Everybody knows the name of the unfortunate Guido Fawkes—corrupted in the vocabulary of youth to Guy Fawkes—and how he was discovered sitting in the cellar waiting for the moment to apply the match. To this day the fifth day of November is marked by the smoke of bonfires ascending all over Britain to the accompaniment of the crackle of many fireworks, the shouting of many children, and the barking of many dogs. The strongest evidence that a man called Guy Fawkes did live as the history books say he did, and that he did try to blow up the Houses of Parliament and was captured, is the fact of that annual celebration which nothing—not even two world wars with their nightly black-outs—has succeeded in abolishing.

And that is Paul's point in the text. You Corinthians, he says in effect, are striking at the very basis of our evidence that Christ did live and die for man. Our Church life is a witness and you have corrupted it with your immoralities. Our love-feasts are witnesses and you have debased them with your greed. Our Memorial is the mightiest witness of all and you have nullified it by your repudiation of your communion in Christ—"for" he says "as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup" and that is every year, "ye do shew"—witness to the world—"the Lord's death till He come".

It is to the world the Lord's death is being shown, in the very fact of the annual celebration which is never missed. The strongest evidence, to the man who will not accept the Gospels as they stand, that Christ did die and rise again as the Gospels say He died and rose again lies in the obvious fact that ever since that time there has been an annual commemoration of the event. Such ceremonies do not arise from nothing. This simple ritual, performed all over the world, year by year continually, for nearly two thousand years, commemorating the death of One Who promised to come again, is a continual witness to two great truths. He died for the world, promising to come again to the world; and He will come again.

The word "shew" means, in the original, "to declare in public", "to announce publicly", or as we would say to-day "to broadcast". As oft as we eat this bread and drink this cup we are repeating our witness, not merely to each other, but to the world, that our Lord *did* die for the world and *will* come again to the world.

That being the setting of the text, it follows that the expression "till he come" has no reference to the coming of the Lord for his saints in unobserved fashion prior to his revelation to the world. It does demand that the Memorial wit-

ness will go on *until* He "come" to the world. Whether He has or has not already returned to gather his sleeping saints to himself or to do any other of the works associated with his Advent makes no difference to that. Even though our Lord be present, those of his Church still on earth are bidden to keep this Memorial as a witness to all men of the truth of his eventual coming to all men, until He has thus come. And that clearly means that the Memorial must and will be observed until the last members of the Church have been gathered to their Lord, for only after that—never before—will He "come" to the world and be revealed to the world in whatever fashion the Son of Man is going to be revealed, with his glorified Church, "in that day".

Just one more illustration to demonstrate that point—another one from English annals. There is somewhere in London a statue to King Charles II, and there are in England just a very few people who regard his descendants as rightful heirs to the British throne. Once every year their representatives lay a tribute of flowers at the base of the statue in symbol of their faith that one day the throne will be restored to the surviving claimant. The world—and the police—look on, quite indifferent, faintly amused; but there is the witness to the faith of these few upholders of a lost cause. Now suppose one day—by some of course quite impossible turn of politics—the unlikely should happen and the restoration of the dynasty of Charles becomes an imminent possibility but as yet unknown to the citizens of England, and suppose the true descendant of the King should arrive unobtrusively and "incognito" from across the seas and

summon his few faithful supporters for some private conference and instruction preparatory to their taking power. Suppose that time of preparation, while their king was present with them unknown to others, should occupy four or five years. Would they cease from the annual ceremony at the statue at the very time when it was approaching fulfilment, on the ground that their king had in fact come to them although he had not yet manifested himself in public or taken his power? And if they did so cease, would not the bystanders conclude that the faithful few had lost faith at last and that after all there was nothing in this talk of a new king—just at the time the event was at hand?

So with us. Even if our King has come—to us; even if our personal conviction is that He is present, we are still under obligation to "shew forth his death" to all who observe our witness "till he come" in the only sense in which that same world will ever understand his coming.

I Cor. 11. 26 is no proof that the Lord *has* come. Neither is it any proof that He has *not* come. It offers no evidence either way. It was not intended so to do. It does tell us very plainly that whether we rejoice in the knowledge of our Lord's Second Presence with his Church or not, his followers will "eat this bread and drink this cup" continually until He has come *to the world*. Then, and only then, when He has been proclaimed and manifested King in the glory of his Kingdom, will the momentous ceremony first observed in the Upper Room outside Jerusalem on that fateful night so many years ago pass away and be lost in the glorious light of the Millennial Kingdom.

The Christian life must be a practical one—a living out in the daily life of the many wonderful precepts and holy maxims found in the word of God. In a day when so many amazing features of the Divine purposes have been made clear—and there has been so much to learn, and so many things to define and classify—it could become an easy matter to allow the *practice of the precepts* to fade considerably from view. From so many quarters comes the challenging appeals to "think" for oneself and to alter and adjust our thinking to this or that new definition that we could easily slide into the position of being "hearers of the word" only and not "doers," giving up all our thought and attention to rectifying our doctrinal differences in preference to every other thing.

Justification by faith is essential to salvation and justification comes in consequence of an intelligent belief in Jesus' sacrifice and an intelligent acceptance of that sacrifice. The head and the heart therefore run parallel with each other in this matter of receiving the "word of faith", and the act is manifested by outward confession in the hearing of others. "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation". The same combination of head and heart is involved in the step which follows justification, consecration of the believer to be "dead with Christ". It must be the impulse of the *heart* which leads one to exclaim "Lo, I come, to do thy will, O God" yet at the same time it is the reflective power of the *head* which "counts the cost" and decides that all things be well lost if by such a course of action one can "win Christ, and be found in Him".

THE GOODNESS AND SEVERITY OF GOD

God's severity consists in his insistence upon absolute righteousness, his refusal to approve sin in any sense or degree. The very first statement of Divine law is that death, destruction, is the penalty for transgression against his righteous laws. For many thousands of years the Lord has maintained this position, has refused to sanction sin. Such an unchangeable attitude at first seems severe, especially when we consider that we were born in sin and shapen in iniquity, infested by weaknesses and surrounded by evil influences. It seems severe on God's part to insist upon perfection, when all of life's experiences teach that it is impossible for fallen humanity to attain absolute righteousness in word and deed and thought. Indeed the Scriptures confirm our experiences, declaring, "*There is none righteous, no not one*" (Rom. 3.10).

The goodness of God is not seen in the severity, but wholly separated, it stands side by side with it. God's goodness, his generosity, his mercy, kindness, love, which are not manifested in the sentence and in the execution of its penalties, are manifested in the great gift of his love—the Lord Jesus and the Redeemer provided in him—a redemption coextensive with the call and with the condemnation. The Apostle expresses the matter pointedly in the words, "*In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him*" (1 John 4.9). God's love was not previously manifested; for over five thousand years only the severity, the justice of the Divine character was manifested, though a hint was given to Abraham and subsequently through the prophets that God had kind sentiments toward the fallen and tainted race, which in due time would bring blessings to all the families of the earth.

The period between the First Advent of our Lord and his Second Advent is in some respects a parenthesis in the Divine plan, during which the Church is called and developed. The redemption of the world and its reconciliation with God based upon Divine goodness, expressed in the death of the Redeemer, wait for its further expression to the world until the end of the Gospel age and the opening of the Millennial age—"the world to come". When the morning of that new day shall dawn, the goodness of God will be seen more distinctly than it is now by mankind. Indeed it may be said that the world as yet has seen little of the goodness of God; it

has merely seen his severity, executed against the human family throughout human history. A comparatively small proportion of humanity has ever heard of the grace of God in Christ, the "*only name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*". And even those who have heard to some extent have been measurably deceived by the great Adversary in respect to the nature of the penalty for sin and the fullness and wideness of the mercy extended to men in the person of the Redeemer.

In that new dispensation the facts will be made clear. The blessings then coming to the world—peace, righteous government, helpful influence, the restraint of evil, the knowledge of the Lord and understanding of his gracious arrangements and purposes—these will all be convincing proofs to mankind of God's sympathy and mercy in Christ. The Adversary who now deceives mankind will then be bound, that he should not deceive the nations any more, and the Word of God, which is in general a sealed book to the world, will then be opened and as a result the knowledge of the Lord will fill the whole earth as the waters cover the great deep.

Nevertheless, it is not to be understood that this triumph of God's mercy and goodness then displayed will in any wise imply a change of his character or of his attitude towards sin. God never changes: He is "*the same yesterday, today and forever*" (Heb. 13.8). When the matter is understood, this unchangeableness on God's part is a guarantee that the blessings to be bestowed under his arrangements will be everlasting, unending blessings.

The goodness and severity of God will be displayed side by side throughout the Millennial age to every creature. All will learn the lesson that God is kind, generous and full of blessing to all those who are in harmony with him and his principles of righteousness, but that He is and always will be like a consuming fire to those who will not come into accord with righteousness.

The redemption of the world by the sacrifice of our Lord entitled humanity to a re-awakening from death, to be granted an opportunity of full reconciliation to the Father. Not a reconciliation in sin, however, but a reconciliation in righteousness. It is manifest that no change takes place in the character of any during the time of death: the awakening will be to the same conditions of heart and mind that went down into death. The

awakened ones will, therefore, find themselves at first in the same attitude of rebellion against God and the principles of righteousness that they were in when they went into death. But there will be this difference, that when awakened under Kingdom conditions they will find their surroundings totally different from those of the present life; themselves the same, all things surrounding them will be changed. The powers of evil to tempt their fallen tendencies will be absent; temptations to selfishness, covetousness, seen in the dominion of the prince of this world, shall find no part in the dominion of the prince of light, in the world to come, in the new dispensation. Instead the awakened ones will find love and righteousness and kindness the laws in general force throughout the world.

And if their fallen tendencies still grasp after selfish things as before, they will steadily learn the lesson that under these changed arrangements selfishness will not be advantageous to them but disadvantageous, bringing to them shame and contempt. Gradually they will learn the rules of the Kingdom, the laws of righteousness based upon justice and love. Gradually they may come into accord with these if they learn the lessons of experience during that golden age under the great Teacher, the Christ, Head and body, and under the immediate supervision of the earthly ones appointed to be their instructors and helpers in the good way and their correctors in respect to their fall. Instead of the rule which now prevails in the Church, namely that "Who-soever will live godly will suffer persecution" they will find, instead, that whoever will live godly shall prosper and have increasing evidences of Divine favour. In that day the ungodly shall suffer "stripes", "corrections in righteousness", "judgments", a prompt and just recompense of reward for every good and every evil deed.

The world then will be entirely in the hands of Christ, in whom the Father has centred all his mercy and all his provisions of grace. Only those who come into accord with the Son, the glorified Christ, and continue in accord with the laws of the Millennial Kingdom, will be prepared by the close of the Millennial age to be delivered over directly to the Heavenly Father and the operation of his absolute law of justice. This is the period spoken of by the Apostle in I Cor. 15. 24-28 when Christ shall have put down all sin, all unrighteousness, all insubordination to God; when He shall have raised up as many of the redeemed human family as hear his voice, as obey him, raised them up to human perfection, to all that was lost in Adam.

Having traced the operation of God's plan towards the world, as it will be carried out dur-

ing the Millennial age, there remains the still more important matter of the operation of God's goodness and severity towards ourselves, towards the Church during the present time. Why the Lord should make a difference between his dealings with the Church in this Gospel Age and the world during the Millennial age can only be appreciated by those who accept the Scriptural declaration that during the present time God is making special selection of a special class, possessed of special characteristics and for a special service both now and hereafter. It is because of these special features that the Church has a different experience from that which the world will have by and by.

It would be useless for the Lord to offer the prize of joint-heirship in the Kingdom to anyone perfect in the flesh when there are none such—our Lord Jesus being the only one, and He because He was not of Adamic stock. God's provision, therefore, is that the justified by faith shall be counted perfect, counted righteous so long as their hearts, their wills, their best endeavours, are for righteousness. How simple and yet how sublime this arrangement, how it adapts itself to all the circumstances and conditions of the Lord's people! It is respecting this justification by faith, this "righteousness of God by faith", that the Apostle says, "*Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*", being justified freely from all things (Rom. 5.1).

The saints must be the foes of sin. Wherever sin is, they must wage a warfare against it, and see to it that in their hearts at least they are free from sin, that in their hearts they do not countenance sin but oppose it, that sin finds no harbouring place or sympathetic weakness in their hearts. This will make them radical as respects the words of their mouths, the conduct of life and the meditations of their hearts, that all of these shall be in absolute accord with the Divine Word and its spirit of righteousness, holiness, truth. Such as set this proper foundation of character before they begin to build love will find that they are making progress. Love that is founded upon injustice or wrong ideas of righteousness is delusive, is not the love which the Lord will require as the test of discipleship.

Many profess to be the Lord's people, profess to love him, profess the golden rule as their guide in life, and yet are blind to justice in many of the affairs of life. They exercise too much mercy in dealing with their own shortcomings and too little when examining the faults and weaknesses of others.

It is in vain to profess to be the Lord's people, profess to be the servants of righteousness and truth, and love these principles, if the conduct

clearly demonstrates love of unrighteousness. For such persons so to profess is to mock God by assuming that He cannot read the heart, and that what may be hidden to some extent from earthly beings is equally hidden from the Almighty with whom we have to do. He that doeth righteousness is not necessarily one who is perfect, but rather that does righteousness to the extent of his best ability and is trusting in the Redeemer's merit to compensate for unintentional shortcomings. He is righteous in God's sight; he is approved.

The Apostle specifies other unrighteous conduct wholly inconsistent with membership of the Church. These are defined as covetousness, revilings, extortioners, and so on. Those who have made any progress in the Christian way, are far from having sympathy with the gross evils; they may therefore have special need to examine themselves carefully in regard to these other more subtle evil qualities, deleterious to their interests as prospective heirs with Christ in the Kingdom. What is covetousness but selfishness—the desire to have, possess, enjoy something at the expense of another? What is idolatry but selfishness, the idolising of money or fame or

influence, or child or self or some other creature, exalted to receiving the honour due to the Almighty?

The Apostle in another epistle warns "*Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap; for he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting*" (Gal. 6. 7, 8). He is not addressing the world; it is the New Creation that is either sowing to the flesh or sowing to the Spirit, and that reaps either of the flesh or of the Spirit. We sow to the flesh every time we allow the fleshly, selfish, unjust, unrighteous-desires of the flesh to have sway in our hearts and lives, and each sowing makes more sure the end of that way, which is death. On the contrary, each sowing to the Spirit, each resistance to the desires of the flesh toward selfishness, and each exercise of the new mind, of the new will, in spiritual directions towards the things that are pure, the things that are noble, the things that are good, the things which are true, is a sowing to the Spirit, and which, persevered in, will ultimately bring us in accord with the Lord's gracious promises and arrangements—everlasting life and the Kingdom.

False accusation

"There are very few who are not at some time brought under the shadow of false accusation. The natural way to meet it is by denial and self-defense. But that is not the New Testament way. There is a better, surer, higher way. It is to give the false accusation a plain, simple, square denial, and then leave the life and the truth to do the rest. It is not my business to take care of my reputation; it is all I can do to take care of my character. If that is clean and pure and luminous, the light that is in me will shine on and out, and by and by will pierce the clouds and dispel them.

"Do not run after accusers; do not trouble yourself about false accusations. Only be sure to make them false; then leave the falsehood to die. Go on with your life work; and accept the position in which false accusation, and consequent scandal and reproach, place you, only as a new opportunity to bear witness to the truth and the life by your own manifest and glorious possession of them."

Dr. Lyman Abbott. 1914.

Dr. Lyman Abbott was minister of Plymouth Congregational Church, Brooklyn, U.S.A., succeeding the celebrated Henry Ward Beecher there in 1890. He was a leading exponent of the thesis known generally as "Conditional Immortality".

My Prayer

"Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths; lead me in thy truth and teach me. According to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O Lord. Mind not my weakness. Thou knowest *thy strength* is made perfect in my weakness. Don't mind my failures; make me like thyself, like thine own self, dear Lord, in *any* way, at any cost no matter whether I like it or not. Thou knowest best and I want thee to have thine own way in me; *not my will*, but *thine always*. Probably I shall not like the process; it will hurt; I may even feel discouraged and almost ready to draw back. I may be weary of the conflict and sigh for rest and cry for deliverance before the work is done. Never mind, dear Lord; finish the work thou hast begun, for thy Name's sake and for thine own glory; and stay not thine hand until thou seest clear and true and perfect thine own image and likeness in me. And to thee and to thee alone shall be the praise for ever. Amen."

(Benjamin Barton, U.S.A. d 1916)

Benjamin Barton was a well-known minister in the Bible student movement of late 19th century, renowned for his deeply spiritual character. He conducted preaching tours in the U.K. several times, the last occasion being in 1906.



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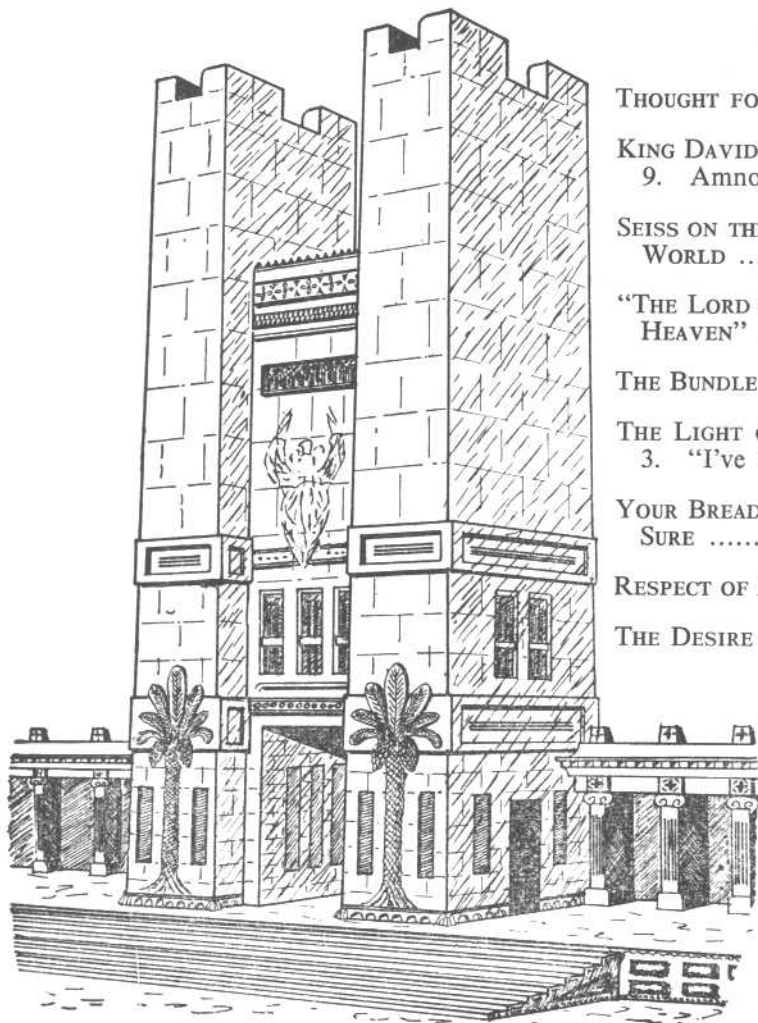
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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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

"Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth." (2 Pet. 1. 12).

While we are, in the words of the old hymn, "straining our eyes for the tarrying day" and the scenes around us are still shrouded in semi-darkness, we may perhaps be forgiven for failure to comprehend the full significance of the events and portents which our eyes behold. Throughout the present age the Watchers have, like Habakkuk of old, taken their stand on the tower and watched to see—significant words—what God would say unto them. And to what good effect that watching has been we are witnesses, if we hold a definite and clear-cut expectation of the manner of his appearance and his Kingdom. That expectation is none the less definite for the fact that as time goes on we find it necessary to modify our earlier immature conceptions of the manner in which God will work out his purpose.

That which in the dim light of early dawn seems to be a haystack turns out to be a house, and the seemingly grotesque animal becomes a shapely tree. So with our watching; we must expect it to show in greater and more accurate detail the "shape of things to come" as the light "shines more and more unto meridian day." (Prov. 4. 18).

"It is because of this failure to comprehend the gradually unfolding nature of God's Plans that many to-day are walking in darkness when they might be walking in the light—"

Those words are not original, and some will recognise the source from which they are quoted. To-day, a century after they were written, they are truer than ever. If only more of those who profess to hold and guide their lives by the "Present Truth" of Peter's Epistle had learned

the implications of his words better there would not be one-tenth of the doubt, the fear, the lack of confidence and the waxing cold of faith and love that modern times have seen amongst Christians. So many have accepted gladly and zealously the understanding of the Divine Plan which the nineteenth century produced but have failed to make increase with it. They have failed to live up to the opportunity and favour which was theirs. Like their prototypes, knowing not the time of their visitation, they have taken all that the favour of God held out to them and failed to make that progress in its light which would enable them in turn to contribute toward the further unfolding of the Plan of God.

So is it always. *"They that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut."* The work of service to which the Father has appointed us is so stupendous, demanding so high a standard of Christ-likeness and so great a depth of spiritual wisdom, that only those who have demonstrated their utter loyalty to Christ can hope to hear the final "Well done". Knowledge, of itself, will not bring one to this consummation; but knowledge rightly applied is an indispensable handmaiden to that spiritual development which is so essential; and without knowledge we shall be as those who, in the parable, were asleep when the Bridegroom came.

NOTICES

Conventions

Yeovil. Friday-Tuesday May 27-31. Sunday aft/eve Moose Hall, St. Michaels Avenue. Remaining sessions Hillgrove Avenue. Programmes and accommodation Mrs. P. Stracy, 3 Hillgrove Avenue, Yeovil, Som. BA20 2LP.

Blaby. Saturday/Sunday May 28-29. Blaby Social Centre. Programmes and accommodation Mr. P. Couling, 5 Styles Place, Yelvertoft, Northants.

Chesham. Saturday/Sunday June 18-19. Malt House, Elgiva Lane, Chesham. Programmes and accommodation Mr. F. Binns, 102 Broad Street, Chesham, Bucks., HP5 3ED.

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous King*

9. Amnon and Tamar 2 Sam. 13-14

Intrigue, rebellion, treachery, outrage, murder; this is the sad catalogue of happenings which was to fill David's life for the remaining years of his reign following the episode of Uriah. Almost every year brought a fresh calamity; David must have wished at times that he had never forsaken his simple life as a shepherd for the chequered career of a king. And yet, despite the dark shadows of that same chequered career, he had been the Lord's choice for the founder of a royal dynasty that is eventually to culminate in Jesus Christ as ruler over the Divine kingdom on earth, and the Lord never makes mistakes. Despite his evident weaknesses and failures, David's heart was right with the Lord and his loyalty never wavered. The Lord never had to say of David, as He did say of Saul "*It repenteth me that I have made Saul king over Israel*".

Less than a year after Nathan's condemnation of David, and the subsequent birth of Solomon, and the end of the war with Ammon, and David's settling down to a hoped-for peaceful life in Jerusalem, disaster struck. The tragic story is related in 2 Sam. 13. Amnon, eldest son of David and prospective heir to the throne, became violently infatuated with his half-sister Tamar, daughter of David by another wife. Amnon was just about twenty-one years of age and Tamar seventeen. His mother was Ahinoam of Jezreel, the third of David's wives and almost certainly a woman of Israel. Tamar's mother was Maacah, daughter of the King of Geshur, an independent people of Amorite extraction on the northern borders of Israel whom neither Joshua nor any subsequent leader had been able to subdue. In marrying Maacah, David had transgressed the Mosaic law. Now there was this incipient scandal threatening the serenity of the royal house. The story goes on to relate how Amnon inveigled Tamar into his house and, despite her resistance, violated her. In her distress the girl went to her own brother, Absalom, third son of David, and there found refuge. In the ordinary way such an outrage would be avenged by the shedding of blood, starting a murder feud which sometimes went on for generations, and Absalom as the injured girl's own brother was the one whom custom demanded should be the avenger. But at the moment he bided his time. The chronicler merely states "*Absalom spake unto Amnon, neither good nor bad; for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar*".

The chronicler also says "*when King David heard of all these things, he was very wroth*". Since Tamar was his daughter one would have expected a more decided reaction. The fact that there was not may well have been due to an inward realisation that his own transgression of two or three years earlier had rendered him of all men unfit to pronounce judgment on the offender. David must have been sick at heart as he pondered over the disorder into which his life seemed to be slipping; perhaps now he did enter into a deeper and more sincere repentance than he had known before. In his dilemma, maybe he bethought him that Absalom, as Tamar's natural guardian—always the system where a king or nobleman had a multiplicity of children by a number of wives—was apparently going to allow the matter to rest and therefore he himself could do so without further apprehension. If he did so conclude, then he was gravely mistaken, as subsequent events were to prove. For the present, however, he took no further action. Under the Mosaic law, of course, he should have had the offender, king's son or no king's son, put to death.

The Septuagint adds an extra phrase to the statement of David's wrath "*but he did not grieve the spirit of his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his first-born*". There may be something in this. David was at this time evidently expecting Amnon to succeed him as king, may even already have been grooming him for the kingship, and this might have been an additional justification in his mind for taking no action. But what he did not know was that the Lord had other ideas as to who should succeed him as king, and that in his infinite wisdom a man who would combine something of the qualities of the gentle Bath-sheba with those of the Bethlehem shepherd-boy was needful to lead Israel into the next stage of its national life.

Two years later occurred the second episode in the tragedy. Amnon had accomplished his crime with the unwitting connivance of the king, who had been deceived by a pretext invented by Amnon into sending Tamar to his house. Now David was to be deceived again, this time by Absalom.

Absalom, although only twenty years of age, had his own estate at Baal-hazor, eighteen miles north of Jerusalem. He was due there to superintend his annual sheep-shearing, which was

always made a kind of ritual and accompanied by feasting and celebration (Gen. 31.19 and 38. 13 are examples, in the lives of Jacob and Judah). He went to the king and requested the favour of his presence at the feast, knowing his father well enough to be certain he would refuse—the presence of the king would involve a numerous entourage of court notabilities and servants which could be an expensive matter for Absalom. As anticipated, David declined on those grounds. “Nay, my son”, he said “let us not all now go, lest we be chargeable to thee”. The further to disarm suspicion, Absalom pressed him further; he still declined but gave him his blessing.

Absalom now produced his second card. “If you will not go” he suggested “then let my brother Amnon go with us. Amnon as heir apparent would then represent his father at the feast. David demurred a bit; he obviously could not see why Amnon should go, but Absalom pressed him and eventually he consented. So Amnon received what amounted to a royal command to proceed with Absalom, accompanied by most of David’s other sons, to the feast at Baal-hazor.

And then Absalom’s servants, briefed beforehand by their master, fully loyal to him and doubtless equally indignant at the outrage perpetrated upon his sister, waited until the feast had progressed to the point where the wine was flowing freely, the guests not quite sure what was going on, and Amnon himself in a condition of semi-stupor, fell upon Amnon and assassinated him.

“Then all the king’s sons arose, and every man gat him up upon his mule, and fled”.

It would seem that in their semi-inebriated state they did not make very good progress, for news of the affair reached Jerusalem before they did. Probably some of their servants, having less opportunity for revelling and carousal, got there first and in their panic asserted that all David’s sons had been slain, to the consternation of David and his court. But the ensuing lamentation was quickly interrupted by David’s nephew Jonadab, a “man about court” who seems to have known more about the whole affair than would appear on the surface. He assured the king that Amnon was the only one slain and the rest would certainly come safely home. It had been Absalom’s intention, he explained, to kill Amnon from the very day Amnon had committed the offence. Sure enough, the party arrived at length, by now sufficiently sobered up to realise the enormity of what had happened, to add their quota to the general expressions of grief pervading the royal court.

In the meantime, Absalom had fled for refuge to his father-in-law, the King of Geshur, and

there he remained three years. David seems quickly to have got over the death of Amnon, judging by 2 Sam. 13.39, and began to fret at his third son’s continued absence. Later events show that he developed a greater affection for Absalom than any other of his grown-up sons, and now that Amnon was dead may well have begun to think of him as heir to the throne. Of the second son, Chileab, by David’s wife Abigail the Carmelitess, widow of Nabal, nothing whatever is known; it is possible that he died in infancy or early youth. What is obvious is that David now pinned his hopes on Absalom, yet could not see how he could allow him back into the realm without exacting some condign penalty for his act. It is very possible that others of his sons were putting pressure upon him; with Absalom permanently out of the way the succession would pass to one of them. There is some basis for thinking that of the first half-dozen sons, those born at Hebron during the first seven years of the reign, or earlier, Absalom was the only one of a non-Israelitish mother and there might well have been family hostility to him on that account. David evidently wanted to be reconciled to his exiled son but could not find the way.

That way was eventually found by another crafty politician at court, Joab, nephew of David and commander-in-chief of the army. For reasons which do not readily appear in the narrative, it does seem that Joab was more favourably disposed towards Absalom than to David’s other sons. He may have had in mind his own position in the framework of the kingdom after the death of David and was not averse to ingratiating himself with the man who would succeed the king so that any favour he might show Absalom in his time of distress might well be to his own benefit later on. At any rate, perceiving David’s dilemma and his longing for reconciliation with his son, and perhaps remembering how Nathan had gone to the king with a fictional tale of injustice in order to bring the king to a recognition of his own wrongdoing, Joab concocted a similar scheme. The story is in 2 Sam. 14. He procured a “wise woman”, probably a prophetess, from Tekoah in the highlands of Judah, and sent her to David with a plausible tale of woe and plea for the king’s intervention. As a prophetess she would have ready access to the royal presence. Being thus admitted, she made the customary obeisance and voiced the usual plea “Save, O king”, to which she got the usual answer “What aileth thee?” and the king composed himself to listen.

The story was simple. She was a widow woman left with two sons and a small farm, her only support. The two sons had quarrelled and in the

quarrel one of them had been accidentally killed. Now the family relatives were demanding that the guilty brother be handed over to them to be slain in revenge for the deed, and so, she said, there would be left to her dead husband no heir and no descendant; his property would be lost and his name blotted out from Israel, and she herself left destitute and alone.

The king was sympathetic; he was also not greatly interested. There were always men getting slain in Israel. He saw no harm in granting the old woman's request. "Go to thine house", he said "and I will give charge concerning thee".

She was not quite satisfied; there was a point to press. "My lord, O king", she responded "the iniquity be on me and on my father's house, and the king and his throne be guiltless" (vs. 9). What she meant was that the king, by thus agreeing to set aside the customary practice of vengeance against the murderer, could be accused of an injustice, a breach of the social code. She would take the blame, if the king would but protect her son. David did not seem to think the point a very serious one. "Whosoever saith ought unto thee", he replied, "bring him unto me, and he shall not touch thee any more".

If David thought the interview was over, he was mistaken. There was a more subtle thrust to come. "I pray thee", she said "let the king remember the Lord thy God, that thou wouldest not suffer the revengers of blood to destroy any more, lest they destroy my son". David was getting a little impatient; he could not see where all this was leading and he spoke somewhat hastily. "As the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth". He motioned with his hand to indicate that the interview was at an end.

The woman stood her ground. "Let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak one word unto my lord the king". Resignedly, David assented. "Say on".

The woman stood erect and looked the king straight in the face, "Why therefore hast thou planned such a thing against the people of God? For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, in that the king does not bring his banished one home again—For we must all die, and are as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Because God hath not taken away his life, he hath also devised means that his banished be not expelled from him".

There was a long silence. David realised there was more to the plea of this suppliant than he had thought. There was a reproof in the woman's words and a summons to act. He had pardoned the woman's mythical son for his crime and promised his protection. He had sworn to that by the Lord God of Israel. Now he stood con-

victed, out of his own mouth, of refusing to pardon his own son for the same crime. He was not afraid of the woman's relatives clamouring for the death of her errant son and had told her to bring them to him to be dealt with; yet he was afraid of his own family thirsting for vengeance upon their exiled half-brother. God had forgiven him for his own crime of the murder of Uriah; he had not forgiven Absalom for his murder of Amnon. And above all things, this woman had revealed to him something he had never realised before; God is not really a God of vengeance. He is a God who must and does exact retribution for wrongdoing but with that retribution devises means of giving the wrongdoer an opportunity of reconciliation. "God doth devise means that his banished be not expelled from him".

Therein lies one of the fundamental principles of the Divine Plan. Notwithstanding the grievous sin of man, God has provided that the man cannot be irretrievably lost whilst any hope or chance of repentance and reconciliation remains. Because of sin, man is banished from the Divine presence, but, God has devised means whereby the banished one can come back, if he will. And the Father stands ready to meet him; the parable of the Prodigal Son tells us that. Perhaps at this point in his life David began to see that there was a higher plane of understanding of God's character than that of a vengeful Deity intent only in the destruction of his enemies and the punishment of offenders against his laws. Perhaps he began to perceive that the One who would one day "rule upon the throne of the Lord with justice and judgment even for ever" would not, could not, partake of the conception of God he himself had nourished all his life but would be more as he himself had been at the beginning, a shepherd who would "carry the lambs in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young". He looked at the woman still standing silently before him, and his thoughts came back to the present.

"Tell me", he said gently, keen eyes searching the woman's face, "is not the hand of Joab with thee in all this?" She looked at him, realising that he had seen through her story, and admitted the fact. David nodded thoughtfully, and dismissed her with the assurance she sought. He sat and ruminated a little longer, then summoned an attendant.

"Command Joab that he attend upon me" he ordered.

The attendant bowed silently and withdrew. The king was still sitting, wrapped in thought, when his Commander-in-chief strode in. David looked at him speculatively.

"You know why I have sent for you?"

Joab bowed respectfully.

"Yes, my lord king".

"You have engineered this thing. You have shown me my fault". He paused a moment. "Go to Geshur and bring my son Absalom back to Jerusalem again".

Joab bowed again, a light of triumph in his eyes. "This day I know that I have found favour in your sight, my lord king". He turned to go;

he was arrested by an imperative gesture from David.

"Let him dwell in his own house in Jerusalem and let him not see my face".

Joab inclined his head slightly in token of mute assent and strode out of the throne room. David listened to his footsteps clattering over the courtyard and dying away in the distance. He remained a long time thus, alone with his thoughts.

And so Absalom came home again.

SEISS ON THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD

The following comment is from "Lectures on the Book of Revelation" by Dr. J. A. Seiss, c 1875.

* * *

This assumption of the rule of the world will likewise bring with it the great desideratum of the race. When Adam was in Eden God was king. In the days of Israel's greatest triumph it was the same. And until the original Theocracy is restored, and the powers of heaven again take the rulership and control of the nations, there is no peace, no right order for man. There is no earthly blessing like that of good, wise, and righteous government; but there is no such government outside of the Father and the Son. Some are better than others, but none are satisfactory. Men have experimented with power for 6000 years and yet there is no department in which there is more disability, corruption, and unsatisfactoriness than in the administrations of government. There is nothing of which all people so much complain, or have so much cause to complain, as of the manner in which their political affairs are managed and administered. Those who live on government patronage and plunder are enthusiastic enough in behalf of what they call their country, and consider it piety to eulogise the instrument which pampers their greed and passions; but the helpless multitude is left to sigh and cry in vain over the abominations that are done. The best governments man has ever tried have invariably disappointed their founders, and proved themselves too weak or too strong, too concentrated or too dissevered, and in one way or another have turned into instruments of injustice, ambition, selfishness, and affliction. The demonstration of the ages is, that "that which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered". So true is this that one has said, with a pathos that shows how deep the conviction was, "I know no safe depository of power among mortal men for the purposes of government. Tyranny and

oppression, in Church and State, under every form of government,—social, civil, ecclesiastical, monarchical, aristocratical, or democratic,—have, sooner or later, characterised the governments of the earth, and have done so from the beginning". Bad government is doubtless better than no government. In the nature of things we must have government of some sort. Because of the worse ills of anarchy we take the lesser afflictions of government in such forms as we can get it. But what right-thinking and right-feeling man is not outraged every day at the injustice, maladministration, perversion, and abominations that go along with every government of man? So it ever has been, and so it ever will be while "man's day" lasts.

"The kingdom is the Lord's", and till He comes and assumes it there will be disappointment, misrule, revolution, and incurable trouble in all human calculations and affairs. Nothing but the sway and reign of heaven can redeem this fallen world out of the pestilential morasses of its incompetent and oppressive governments. But there is an All-Ruler who will yet assume the kingdom, and give the race the reign of blessedness. "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust. All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence, and precious shall their blood be in his sight. He shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba; prayer also shall be made for him continually, and daily shall he be praised. His name shall endure for ever, and men shall be blessed in him. All nations shall him blessed." (Psa. 72. 6-15).

"THE LORD SHALL DESCEND FROM HEAVEN"

One of the most vivid passages of Scripture describing the Second Advent is that which enshrines Paul's words of comfort to the Thessalonian Christians who were fearful that their departed brethren might be forgotten when the Lord should come again. His words have been the inspiration of all succeeding Christian generations and they are a stimulus and ground of confidence to us today. The fact that some understand their background literally and others spiritually makes no difference to the comfort and incentive we all derive from them. The very fact that there *are* differences of thought on the meaning of the passage, however, renders it almost certain that no matter how sure one may be of the matter, a fresh approach to the question will be of interest.

The gist of the whole passage is that, at the time ordained, our Lord Jesus will descend from heaven, raise the "sleeping saints" from the dead, "change" the living ones, gather all to himself, "and" says the Apostle "so shall we ever be with the Lord". All who love the Lord desire a share in that sublime experience and all rejoice together in that hope.

Let the glorious beauty of the words rise before the mind as prelude to consideration of all that they involve.

"If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so" (we must believe) "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (precede — go before) them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4. 14-18).

This chapter has given rise to what is called the "doctrine of the rapture of the saints"—a belief that is centuries old, is held by many evangelical Christians, and is incorporated into the theology of several denominations. It is said, on the authority of these words, that one day yet to come, the Lord Jesus will suddenly and without warning appear in glory, like a lightning flash, cleaving the heavens in his meteoric descent, accompanied by loud shouts, archangel's

voice, and the piercing note of the Seventh Trumpet. At the same instant the graves will open and reveal the Christian saints of past ages, clothed in resurrection bodies, winging their upward flight to their Lord in the heavens. In that same moment the still-living Christians will experience the miraculous transformation of their bodies into conformity with the Lord's own physical frame—this belief demands that the Lord return visibly in human form—and join their resurrected comrades in joint ascent to a place of meeting in the atmosphere, shrouded from mortal sight by the all-enfolding clouds of heaven. The abrupt "catching away" of living men and women will inevitably cause disorganisation and catastrophe on earth—some evangelical tracts picture the results of Christian engineers being "caught away" from the footplates of express trains and so on—and this is hailed by some believers as a witness to the world that God is moving toward judgment and punishment for mankind's indifference to Christ and their rejection of him.

The two or three generations just past saw a saner and more dignified view of the passage find acceptance among more serious students of the Scriptures; there is now a tendency to swing back to the older view in part if not in whole and it is a pity that this is so. The old crudely literal view has little to commend it. All too often it is suggested—in all sincerity, be it conceded—that we should "take the Scripture to mean exactly what it says" and use that rather overdone catch-phrase as excuse for pinning the most fantastic of literal interpretations to plainly prophetic or poetic utterances. It certainly is true that we must take the Scripture to mean exactly what it says; it does not always follow that in our reading we understand what the Scripture is saying. One would hardly interpret in a literal sense the Scriptural statement that the earth is God's footstool!

We must associate with this passage the noteworthy words in I Cor. 15. 51-52 *"Behold, I shew you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."* In both passages there is a distinction between the "sleeping" and "living" saints. The former are "raised" to the glory of immortal spiritual nature, the latter are "changed" to the same.

"Exactly" say some "and Paul's words mean just what they say. Christ's first work when He comes will be to gather his elect from the graves of earth, and then the living will be changed and both caught up together to meet the Lord in the air."

And what is there in the graves of earth, it may be asked, that will come forth at Christ's bidding, to form the glorious spirit beings who are to be with him through all eternity?

In the old days men believed in the resurrection of the body and they could easily visualise such a happening. Do we now believe in the resurrection of the body? Is that a feature of the First Resurrection?

A century ago there appeared a book which, among many things that have since powerfully influenced Christian thought, contained a chapter entitled "Spiritual and human natures separate and distinct". In that chapter the writer defined more clearly than had ever been done before the essential difference that exists between creatures of earth and creatures of heaven. He stressed the fundamental truth of Paul's saying in I Cor. 15 "*flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God*". That fundamental principle has to be kept in mind when we come to consider Paul's Second Advent teaching. The First Resurrection is to spirit nature, having nothing whatever in common with the old body of flesh. That body was covenanted to destruction anyway; that is one of the terms of our consecration by which we become members of Christ's church. When the time comes that the Lord "descends from heaven with a shout" and the First Resurrection takes place, there is nothing in the graves of earth, nor the waters of the sea or the winds of heaven for that matter, to "come forth".

From whence, then, do the risen ones come?

"We know" says Paul (2 Cor. 5. 1-4) "*that if our earthly house . . . were dissolved, we have a building of God . . . eternal in the heavens. In this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven . . . that mortality might be swallowed up of life.*" Again, (I Cor. 15. 37-44) "*Thou sowest not that body that shall be . . . but God giveth it a body . . . to every seed his own body . . . There are celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial . . . so also is the resurrection of the dead . . . it is sown a natural (terrestrial) body; it is raised a spiritual (celestial) body . . . as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.*" It is clear that in the resurrection there is nothing contributed by earth toward the making of those glorious beings who are to live

and reign with Christ a thousand years; all is of heaven. The identity, the character, of the one who once lived and died, has been safe in God's keeping, and the new spiritual body is also from heaven. So Paul says in I Thess. 4.14 on the same subject "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him". The word rendered "bring" means to "lead with one's own self," to "attach to one's self as an attendant" and is used in 2 Tim. 4. 11 "Take Mark, and *bring him with thee,*" in Rom. 8. 14 "As many as are *led by the Spirit of God*" and one example in Josephus (*Ant.* 10. 9.6) when speaking of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., he says "The people and Johanan disobeyed the counsel of God, and removed into Egypt, *and carried Jeremiah and Baruch along with them.*" These words "and carried with them" are from the same Greek word as "bring with" in this text. The thought is that the "sleeping saints" are found in company with Jesus at the moment of his Advent. In other words, the time of his Advent, and the place of his Advent, is marked by the waking to conscious existence, in his presence, of his saints who by that time have already passed into the sleep of death. There is nothing for the world to see, for this resurrection is to spiritual nature, invisible to man. No indication of the momentous happening can be given on earth, for the creation of a celestial body by God, and the impress thereon of the identity of a saint who died long ages ago, is a matter that can be appreciated and known only in the celestial world. Wherever and however the First Resurrection takes place, those thus raised will be "seen" only by the citizens of Heaven.

The resurrected "sleeping saints", then, will not rise out of earthly graves, will not stand upon earth to be seen of men, and will not ascend into literal clouds to meet their Lord in literal fashion. The whole process of their resurrection is "beyond the Veil" and it is there that they awaken to meet their Lord.

What then means the statement that the Lord will descend from heaven with a shout and the dead in Christ will rise first? In attempting to answer that question let us consider with care that Paul and other Scripture writers frequently used "figures of speech" to convey a meaning perfectly well understood by their readers, just as we do ourselves. For example, we often say that an aged believer of our acquaintance has "passed beyond the Veil". Do we mean that there is a literal veil which has to be passed? We speak of our hope—as does James also—of receiving a crown of life if faithful. Do we expect a literal crown? Jesus promised He would one day drink new wine in the Kingdom with his disciples. Do

we expect to see spiritual beings drinking literal grape-juice? All these allusions are commonly used without further explanation and no one ever thinks of taking them literally. So when Paul declares that the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout He is clothing the truth that we imperfect human beings cannot comprehend in literal terms that we can understand.

We must be frank and confess that we do not know *how* our Lord returns at his Second Advent or from whence He comes; what we do know is that He *does* come to earth in his own time. We cannot understand the nature of the celestial world and we do not know where it is nor how one gets there. It is true that a hundred years ago Rev. Joseph Seiss suggested that heaven was on one of the stars of the Pleiades group and on that basis someone else calculated how long it would take the Lord Jesus to make the journey back to this earth at the appointed time, but all that does not show much advance on the ideas of the Sumerians soon after the Flood, who believed heaven to be situated fifteen days' journey across the sea from their own south country.

It might well be, then, that Paul means that the Lord will come from the celestial world to the terrestrial world; that a time comes, the time of the commencement of his Second Presence, which is to continue for a thousand years, when He transfers himself, from the spiritual creation, and the company of his Father and the heavenly angels, and all of which that creation consists, to this material creation, with its stars and suns and circling planets, and this earth with its inhabitants, the physical world of which He was a member for a short space two thousand years ago. That "descent from heaven" may be something more akin to the "coming in" of radio or television programme on a receiver tuned to receive it than a journey through space from star to earth, for all we may know; but then, we really do not know. He comes to us from the unknown, from "beyond the veil", and the moment He has come as it were within the time and space framework of this our world, the sleeping saints are with him, in fulness of life.

What then of the living ones who are to be changed? There is no doubt about *their* being on solid earth, on *terra firma*, at the moment of his Advent. Neither is there any doubt that whilst still in possession of human bodies, they cannot meet their Lord. They too can meet him and see him only as celestial beings, made like him; and that happy state can only be obtained by leaving the flesh behind. So Paul says that all such must be "changed".

Here again there are misconceptions inherited from older times. It used to be thought that the "change" consisted of some supernatural incorruptibility and glory imparted to the human body, which then would ascend into the clouds to meet the Lord, the believers retaining that "glorified" human body to all eternity. That, after all, was consistent enough when heaven itself was supposed to be built of solid gold and plate glass, and the eternal occupations of the redeemed restricted to the alternative of playing a harp or blowing a trumpet! We have a much wider view of the Divine purposes to-day; knowing also that flesh and blood cannot inherit that world we are compelled to look more closely into the nature of this change.

An important thing to notice here is that it does not imply exemption from death. One would hardly think it necessary to make this point, yet some do conclude that I Thess. 4 teaches that there will be some who will not die and that Paul in I Cor. 15 is plainly saying "we shall not all die". It must be realised that the attainment of the celestial world can only be through the gates of human death. After all, we have covenanted to be dead with Christ; not only to live the life of sacrifice that He lived, but go into death as He did that the human life be "poured out unto death" (Isa. 53.12). The fact that the moment of death of the "living ones left over" becomes the moment of resurrection makes no difference to the reality of that death. To those who "sleep in Jesus" the moment of awakening is but as "the twinkling of an eye" after the moment of death so there is no difference in the apparent experience of both "dead in Christ" and "we who remain" in that respect.

The Greek word for "change" in I Cor. 15 means to change one thing into another. Paul says that we shall not all sleep like the sleeping saints, but he does not say that we shall not die. Some at the end, instead of spending a term of years in the grave awaiting resurrection, will be resurrected at the moment of death. There will be no waiting time. The change is from an earthly body under earthly conditions to something entirely different, a spiritual body under spiritual conditions. The earthly body will be left behind. The spirit, the identity, call it what we will, will be clothed upon, in that moment, with its "house from heaven" and so meet the Lord.

It therefore follows that since no literal bodies are to be "caught up" at his Coming, the "clouds" into which they are taken need not be, and indeed cannot be, literal clouds. The idea of spirit beings ascending into literal clouds in order to be concealed from the gaze of the world

—which is the idea behind the reference, similar to the ascension on Olivet—is incongruous and absurd. The clouds, then, are the clouds in which the returning Lord comes at his Advent, clouds of judgment on the one hand and glory on the other. It is into these clouds that the resurrected Church is pictured as being taken. In other words, they join their Lord during the glory of his coming, and are with him before that glory is revealed to the world. The whole of I Thess 4 has to be fulfilled before the world knows anything about the Second Advent. That is evident from the fact that when Christ is made manifest to the world, the saints are to appear with him; that cannot take place until they have been gathered to him and it is I Thess. 4 which describes the gathering.

"To meet the Lord in the air." A strange word, the only occasion on which "air" figures in connection with the Advent. Of course Paul might only have meant that the meeting is to take place several miles above the earth's surface instead of on the ground itself—that part of the atmosphere sufficiently dense to call "air" only exists for ten miles or so above the ground so the limits would have to be fairly narrow—but that would seem a strange stipulation for spirit beings who are not subject to the geographical and physical limitations of humanity. He might have used the term in its Scripturally symbolic sense as meaning the powers of spiritual control, as in "the prince of the power of the air" of Eph. 2, 2. Or he might have used the word deliberately because to Greeks—and he was writing to the Thessalonians — it would immediately convey a thought that it does not so readily convey to us, albeit a thought that rounds off his teaching in a truly wonderful manner.

The word "air" is taken by us direct from the Greek and is used by us exclusively to denote the gaseous medium which we breathe and in which we live. The Greeks used the word to define something more than that. They used it to describe the mythological upper levels of the earth in which, they believed, there dwelt the gods and goddesses, and the spirits of departed great men, in conditions of unparalleled felicity. Only the tops of the highest mountains penetrated this higher plane of being and no mortal could attain it except through the gates of death. Only by the favour of the gods could man ever rise to those elevations. Just to illustrate what the word "air" meant to the Thessalonians, the following words uttered by the Greek philosopher Socrates shortly before his death, and recorded by Plato, are quoted—"this earth which we inhabit, and the whole region of our abode,

are all corrupted . . . but those upper regions of the earth are far more excellent than those which we inhabit . . . it is well worth hearing what kind of places those are in the upper earth, situated under the heavens, where some dwell about the air, as we do about the sea, and others reside in islands which the air flows round . . . In one word, what water and the sea are to us, the air is to them; but what air is to us, the ether is to the inhabitants of that pure earth. The seasons there are endued with such an excellent temperament, that the inhabitants are never molested with disease, . . . and surpass us in sight, hearing, and wisdom, as much as air excels water in purity. They have groves and temples of the gods, in which the gods dwell in reality, and they behold the gods, and associate with them . . ." (*"The Phaedo"*, Plato).

Now that is quite a fair description of the orthodox Christian view of heaven, a place up in the sky where the happy righteous live forever with God. When Paul told the Thessalonians that they would be taken to meet the Lord "in the air" that was what they immediately visualised in their minds; not a short ascent into the midst of a wet, clammy cloud mass a mile or so above the earth where visibility would be reduced to nil, but a swift transfer to the golden regions of the sky where the righteous dead lived in eternal felicity with those to whom they had given their lives' worship and service. Had the A.V. translators caught the true nature of the allusion they could more correctly have rendered the phrase "to meet the Lord in heaven" which would have made it more intelligible to us and brought it into textual harmony with other Scriptures.

That, at any rate, is the meaning. We shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the glory land beyond the veil, where sorrow and crying, sickness and pain, shall be no more. Whether the place of meeting is located ten miles above the earth's surface, where there is both literal air and literal clouds, or a thousand miles above, where there are neither, or whether that place of meeting in the spiritual world cannot be defined geographically at all, is of no consequence to us. We shall be with him, and we shall be like him, for we shall see him as He is. The gathering of the living and the dead saints together in union with the Lord the Head, in the radiance of immortal spiritual nature, unseen by and unknown to the world, will be glory far excelling. Nothing can be done in the further outworking of God's Plan until the "marriage of the Lamb" has taken place, and it is for that marriage that the Lord comes first, to gather his saints.

THE BUNDLE OF LIFE

An exposition

"A man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul; but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling." (1 Sam. 25. 29).

The "bundle of life"! Rather a strange phrase! What does it mean?

The story tells how Abigail, wife of the boorish Israelite Nabal, came with urgency to David—not yet king of Israel; only a free-booting chieftain of outlaws—to dissuade him from his purpose of revenge for Nabal's discourtesy and enmity. The gist of her plea was that since David was avowedly a man trusting in God he could well leave the question of vengeance to God rather than embroil his own hands in blood. David listened to her entreaty, accepted her advice and turned from his purpose. Eventually Nabal died from natural causes and later on Abigail became the wife of David.

This verse is the core of Abigail's assurance. *"The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God"*. Leeser has it *"the bond of life"* and the R.S.V. *"the bundle of the living in the care of God"*. This latter points more clearly to Abigail's meaning. The life of David was bound up in the purposes and therefore in the care and supervision of the Most High. The word "bundle" is *tseror*, which means something bound up or enclosed in a bag for safety. *"A bundle of myrrh is my beloved unto me"* sings the bride in Cant. 1. 13; an object of love and devotion to be clasped and held closely. Jacob's sons had "bundles" or "bags" of money in their sacks. The same word is translated "bag" on occasion. The goodman *"has taken a bag of money"* with him on his journey (Prov. 7. 20). The transgression of Job *"is sealed up in a bag"* (Job 14. 17), and God *"bindeth up the waters in the thick clouds"* (Job 26. 8). The "testimony" of God is said to be *"bound up"* among the disciples in Isa. 8. 16. From these and other occurrences it is plain that the meaning of "bundle of life" is that of a thing most precious to God which He is preserving carefully and holding close to himself.

Ignoring Saul, who was deposed for disobedience, David was the first of a long line of Israelite kings who *"sat upon the throne of the Lord"*. Taking no account of their personal failings and misdemeanours—David himself was far from an ideal character—they symbolised the

Divine rule of the Most High over the sons of men. God made a covenant, a formal compact, with David to the effect that of his seed would come the king that should fulfil the original promise made to Abraham, that all nations of the earth should ultimately be blessed. In a rudimentary kind of way this was a promise of the eventual establishment of a righteous rule among men and the banishing of evil—the kingdom of God upon earth, the reign of the Messiah. That is how Israel always understood the matter and how Christians familiar with the prophetic Scriptures normally understand the matter today. Speaking to a later generation through the prophet Isaiah God says *"Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David"* (Isa. 50. 3). The sure mercies are the things which fulfil the promise to David and the setting of the chapter shows that the time is that of the Messianic Kingdom, when Christ reigns as king. The life of David, therefore, was bound up in the purposes of God and under the protection of God in order that the promise might be fulfilled. How much Abigail knew of this, or whether, being at least a woman of faith, she was led by the Holy Spirit to speak thus, it is impossible to determine, but the truth of her declaration is evident to all who know anything about the Divine promise to Abraham through Jacob and David which culminated in Christ. St. Peter made this clear in the first Christian sermon to be preached. *"David . . . knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his loins . . . he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne . . . This Jesus hath God raised up . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2. 29-36). And in his second sermon he went on to speak of this same Christ coming again at the times of restitution of all things to bring to a climax the blessing of all nations, the basis of the original promise, which points clearly to the world-wide conversion of mankind under the Messianic kingdom. All this was involved in the preservation of the life of David, in *"the soul of my lord"* being *"bound in the bundle of the living in the care of God"*.

An important aspect of the character of God and the principles by which He governs is illustrated in this matter. Apart from his reverential faith in, and fierce loyalty to, his God,

David was not a particularly attractive individual. A dispassionate consideration of his recorded history shows much to be deplored in the story of his life. He was very much like all men, a mixture of good and bad. Yet God had bound up his life with himself that he might be preserved to better things and used in a significant manner in the outworking of the Divine Plan. That is true of all mankind. God created man with a purpose in view and will not lightly relinquish his hold on any man, until it is abundantly clear that the purpose can never be fulfilled, *purely on account of the man's own irrevocable opposition.* The sin of David in the matter of Uriah the Hittite was forgiven after he had sincerely repented even although that sin had to involve retribution first, in the death of the child David loved. His deeds of blood were forgiven after he had confessed his guilt and unworthiness and come to a better understanding of the ways of God, even though he suffered the irrevocable consequence in not being allowed to build the Temple, a project upon which he had set his heart. So it is with man. The life of every man is precious to God and is bound up in the bundle of the living in his care and it will be an obdurate and determined heart indeed that withstands to the end all that God brings to bear upon it of persuasion and encouragement to repentance. The Apostle Paul, writing to the Colossians, says of Christian believers who are *utterly and completely dedicated to their Lord and altogether surrendered to the transforming influence of the Holy Spirit that their "life is hid with Christ in God"* (Col. 3. 3). This is precisely the same idea which Abigail expressed when she told David that his soul was bound up in the bundle of the living in the care of God. The fundamental difference is that the believers whose lives are thus hidden with Christ in God have been reconciled to him by a living and vital faith in Christ and on that basis have given themselves in unreserved dedication and consecration of life to God for his service. They have entered, willingly, voluntarily, into their place in his purpose. All the remainder, those who have not yet come to that point of repentance and conversion, have not yet become thus reconciled, are still outside their place in God's purpose, but are definitely bound up in his bundle of life and will remain so until it has been demonstrated beyond all shadow of doubt that their rejection

of Christ and all for which He stands is final and irrevocable.

No man can say how many or how few of such there will be. We only know that nothing that defiles or is unclean will ever be permitted to enter the Holy City at the end (Rev. 21. 27), and that after the final work of God with mankind, whosoever is *"not found written in the Book of Life"* is *"cast into the lake of fire"* which *"is the second death"* (Rev. 20. 14-15). That latter imagery is based upon the fiery valley of Gehenna outside Jerusalem where the city refuse was burnt and thus signifies the utter destruction of all that is evil. That which is good remains eternally; that which is evil ceases to exist: and there is no escape from this Divine law.

But all the emphasis in the Bible is on the triumph of good. The soul of every man is preserved in the bundle of life in order that he may have every possible opportunity to free himself from the dominion of evil and enter into the *"glorious liberty of the children of God"* (Rom. 8. 21). The confidence of Abigail is justified in a sphere and on a scale that never entered her own mind; the instinct which told her God was guiding David and preserving him for a great purpose is the same which tells us in no uncertain terms that God is steadily bringing to pass in history the elements of an all embracing Plan having as its object the reconciliation to himself, and the ushering into an everlasting inheritance, of *"whosoever will"* from amongst mankind. *"The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come'. And let him that heareth say 'Come'. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"* (Rev. 22. 17). The Apostle Paul told the Athenians that *"In him we live and move and have our being"* (Acts 17. 28). That statement may very well be more, far more, than a figure of speech. We may yet find, when we pass into the *"glory that excelleth"*, where knowledge of things now hidden is possible to us, that in a very real and literal sense our life is indeed bound up in him and that without him we cannot have life. Such an understanding renders it much easier to understand why it is, in an equally literal fashion, that *"the wages of sin is death"*—the antithesis of life—*"but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

The Bible satisfies heart and mind on many a universal problem. It deals with the problem of life, the beginning of life, the origin of life and

the purpose of life. It deals with problems of suffering and pain, poverty and want, the reason of sin and death and all that comes with them.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

*A panorama of the
way of Christ*

3. "I've found a Friend"

"He that comes to Me I will never turn away"
(John 6. 37).

It is a great thing to have a friend we can be sure of at all times and in all circumstances. It is a hard thing to be turned away in a time of need from a once hospitable door. A sad thing to expect a welcome and find a frown, a tragic thing to be betrayed by trusted hands, to be left neglected, forlorn and forgotten by those to whom we have looked with affection. Such is the fickleness of human nature that men and women are often let down and cast aside in the time of their greatest need by those to whom they had the most right to look for shelter and support.

Surrounded by a sample of mixed humanity, Jesus gave his pledge of reliable friendship. This was He of whom it was written "The same, yesterday, today and forever". His pledge is as good today as it was then. In moments of perplexity and despair, at times of great crisis, when there is nowhere to go and none to rely on, there is always that One ready to listen to the faintest call for help. Unseen but ever ready, the power of the Spirit draws, enfolds and strengthens the weary, stimulates faith and courage, planting in the mind the mystic wisdom which overcomes the world, the flesh and all its hazards and weakness.

"There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother"; this is He who became man that He might experience the sorrows, the sufferings, the labours and the temptations of man. The Scriptures are full of invitation and promise. Here God is revealed as the Rock of strength, the Tower of man's defence. Jesus appears full of love and assurance, the sympathetic High-priest, with all the gifts of healing love. From that day to this, grateful saints have sung their songs of praise and way-worn pilgrims have given thanks for deliverance and victories, for every need abundantly supplied. If there are some who have no song to sing, no tale to tell, it is because they had doubts and not belief. It is because they have turned away offended, or lacked the courage to reach out across the thin dividing line between this world and God's world, to clasp the hand Divine. How much is missed, how much is lost in this life by the sceptic, the self-sufficient, the wavering, fluctuating "Ye of little faith." Yet a patient, unchanging love waits on, ready with the blessings which enrich life, adding no sorrow with them. "Come unto Me all you that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest",

was not spoken to a few or for a generation but to all people for all time. God draws fainting bewildered humanity to this haven of his love. When the urge and pressure of the Spirit is unresisted, Jesus receives, and the soul that finds its repose in the Everlasting Arms is never forsaken.

"He that believes on Me has everlasting life"
(John 6. 47). It is common for the cynical to refer to everlasting life as "pie in the sky when you die". Jesus, in offering life to those around him, said nothing about heaven. He was talking of everyday living, of the quality of life in the place where they were. Their ancestors had eaten the manna provided as daily bread in their wilderness wanderings but it had not kept them alive. Jesus said that unless they shared his life they had no life in them. Life and love are synonymous terms. They are not something you get "in the sky when you die", they are something we have or have not, here and now. Looking around him Jesus saw a weary, overburdened, confused gathering of people whose span of years was short. He offered the weary rest and the heavy-laden a lighter yoke. He offered the bread and water of life to a dying people, knowing himself to be the channel of that eternal energy which is the gift of God to those who believe on him and on Jesus Christ whom he sent into the world as an exact resemblance of himself. Life eternal is to know these two and these two are Love. It is their own definition of themselves. Life, light and love are so inextricably mingled together they cannot be separated. The Light of the world, the Bread of Life, the Love that passes knowledge, are the very substance and essence of God and His anointed Son. It is their very nature, and those who at their invitation believe and accept, share this nature; they become absorbed into the Light, the Love and the Life. He that loves, dwells in God. He shares a new life. A new energy throbs through his whole being. Even though the life of the flesh should cease, the treasure of life cannot be lost but must be renewed according to promise in a fairer and better form. All rests on belief, not on scientific theories, religious theologies or eastern mysticism. It is belief in Jesus Christ as the only Name, the only Way, the only source known in heaven or on earth or given by God through which abundant, age-lasting life can be obtained. Aside from this the only life known to man is short,

full of troubles and perplexities. The life of God has its own sustaining riches which compose those spiritual elements of wisdom, mercy, peace, purity, gentleness and all those moral virtues and principles which are diamond bright and indestructable. Without these, without faith, life lived in idle indulgence, for the pleasures of the moment, delighting in all that is exciting, avaricious and superficial can be even shorter than it is. It can only be a shallow, unsatisfactory existence which in moments of sanity fill its most ardent pursuers with discontent. To know the joys of loving and giving, to feel within the uplifting surge of energy, of confidence, of vision, of purpose, of peace and repose amid the world's noisy conflicts, is to have that life which Jesus offered freely to those who believed in his word and Person.

At the conclusion of this serious discourse on belief, life and the true work of the mind as opposed to those of ritual or the labour of the hands, many who had listened turned away. Sect-bound, ceremonial lovers, liking only the outward observances of faith and worship, it was too much for them that they should forsake all these and believe only in this teacher and his claims. They did not come again to hear his words of grace. They had loved their own darkness, their own confused ideas and the traditions of men rather than the light which shone on them or the life at which they had shrugged their shoulders in disdain. Despised and rejected, Jesus turned to that inner circle of his followers with the question, "*Will you also go away?*". It was not so much a test of loyalty to himself as the provision of an opportunity for the withdrawal of any of the chosen few from his company. Then Peter spoke up for the little band with the question "*To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*".

The incident is a mirror which reflects the varying attitudes of men and women towards the Christian faith throughout the twenty centuries of its history. Belief, conviction, is a personal matter. There is no doubt that intelligent people search for life, for enlightenment, for better conditions, for solutions to all human problems, for peace of mind and social security. They conduct through reading, religion, travel and debate, what is called the search for Truth but they will look anywhere but in the right direction. The "isms" of man are numerous, the formulas of faith many. The professedly Christian churches of the world, split and countersplit, divided in opinion, pay homage to human leaders, lip service to their differing styles of worship, eagerly boastful of their numbers and their great works. Jesus, with his gift of life and his work

of belief, his spirit of love and tolerance, of compassion and self-sacrifice, seem strangely absent from many gatherings together in his name, where everything is discussed but the name of Jesus is strangely absent. Multitudes have listened and turned away, refusing to buy, without money and without price, the water and wine of life. These are either content to live without hope, to idly speculate or to form their own personal creed which, when examined, has very little in it. All these shallow pools of thought evaporate in the burning drought of a cynical scepticism. Theirs is no satisfying fountain of living water to refresh the thirsty traveller, to send him on his pilgrim way, restored and confident. As Jesus said to the seekers about him, "You will not come to Me that you might have life". Anything, anywhere anyone but Christ, has been the attitude of those who have loved self and this world more than God. Those who have looked upon him with clear eyes, who have listened to his words with a true ear, have recognised in him a Saviour, a means of reconciliation with God. To be in tune with the Author of life is to live. Whatever of wisdom other men offered the race, no other man offered them life. No other man claimed to be the Son of God or the Redeemer of Israel or the Saviour of mankind, a claim acknowledged by heaven, by angels, by men and by the evil spirits he drove out from their secret places. They knew him as did Peter. "Thou hast the words of eternal life." "We believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." To whom shall we go for life? There is no other source, no other Name, no other authority. Without that steadfast anchor in him, the life-giving, life-keeping Son of God, life is a mere existence between the cradle and the grave. With him it is a pilgrimage of grace to the everlasting kingdom of God.

My time is not yet come. Your time is always ready" (John 7.6). The world is always ripe for mischief. There exist in it unruly elements who only require a hint to send them off on hasty feet to stir up trouble, to commit some deed of violence or destruction. Those who can refrain even from saying or doing that which is good because the time is not opportune, have mature wisdom as well as will power. The restraints of Jesus are often overlooked. In one to whom all power in heaven and earth had been entrusted He showed remarkable control of its use. He might have done spectacular deeds. He could have become a crowned monarch as the rightful heir of David's throne. He could have saved himself from the final agony of trial and death. He could have answered the jeers of the malicious priests, mocking him in their triumph. He could

have called legions of angels to his aid which would have confounded the Roman Pilate and all his centurions but he did none of these things. Had He been a man seeking his own glory he would have done so. He would have shown that generation something that would have shattered their pride and unbelief but his time had not yet come. The sick were healed, the blind had their eyes opened, deaf ears were unstopped, the dead were restored to life. Nature was stimulated or calmed at his word, the lame leaped, for joy, yet these convincing evidences were not enough for hearts frigid with pride or hot with envy. Because he had set a man on his feet on the sabbath day his enemies were ready at any hour to take his life. Day and night, at any moment evil lurks among men, ever ready to leap out bidden or unbidden upon some hideous errand. Goodness must choose its times, waiting with patience, wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove, gentle as a lamb yet bold as a lion as it pursues its way through the mazes of this perverse world. The times and methods of God are not according to human reasoning. There is always the element of surprise, the unexpected, as He works out his sovereign purpose. Jesus had come to further that purpose. He had to work according to the plan of God. He could not take his own way or follow his own ideas. A wrong word, a false move, even the right thing at the wrong time would have wrecked the work He came to accomplish. In all his ministry there was no rash action, no word that his foes could seize upon as false. Their efforts to trip him up ended in their own discomfort. When they wanted to accuse him they had to bribe false witnesses. His was a nature schooled and disciplined for the glory of God and the greatest service to humanity. In nothing did He seek his own interests. The priests in their mockery spoke truly "He saved others, himself he cannot save". Had he come down from the cross at their behest the race he came to save would have been doomed to extinction. His time had not yet come. They had their hour of evil victory. His hour was still to come.

Looking upon that example of meekness and strength, Christian pilgrims have wrapped the armour of faith more closely about them. They have gone forth upon their way girded in silence against the sneering taunts of ignorance, bearing with quiet dignity the contempt of lesser minds. The time has not yet come to abandon the cross or take the crown. It is still an evil world with all the advantages on the side of its pomps and vanities. When the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of Christ, his time will have fully come to rebuke and judge the nations.

*"Man of sorrows! What a name
For the Son of God who came*

*Ruined sinners to reclaim
Hallelujah! What a Saviour."*

Great store is set by all intelligent people upon education. At all times the scholar has commanded respect by the possession and use of knowledge denied to the less fortunate. Like everything else in this world, education has had its counterfeit. Wisdom has been perverted. Wheat and tares have grown together. There is a genuine education not always obtainable in the great temples of learning and a pseudo education covered in titles and letters which expresses itself in a strange jargon, lacking the clarity and sense which conveys instruction to its hearers. Shrewd observers have noted that expensive schooling does not always produce a scholar, anymore than a seat in church makes a Christian. Education is a sound use of knowledge acquired more often in the hard school of life. That 'experience is the best teacher' is more than a maxim. It is knowing how to think and to apply that thought to the business of living.

From childhood Jesus had manifested a lively, intelligent mind, disputing in the temple with the doctors of Divinity, astonishing them by his natural aptitude for their particular sphere of learning. Little is recorded of his early years except that He grew in wisdom and in favour with God and man. The favour and wisdom of God, expanding a mind especially open and receptive to the powerful stimulus of the Spirit of God, was the real education of the man of Nazareth. By such means He became the teacher who could sit in the temple, on the hillside or rocking gently in a boat at the water's edge, instructing his listeners as One having authority. All who heard him testified to the profound doctrine which He clothed in gracious words. Long used to the vain repetitions and the dried up discourses of a priesthood which had lost all enthusiasm, the oratory of Jesus came like a fresh wind from the hills. Like rain on parched land it fell on the hearts of his hearers, stirring to life the long dormant seeds of faith. The tendrils of hope and desire for life reached out towards a new beginning. "No man" they said "ever spoke like this man." He had something to say and he knew how to say it. Naturally his gifts aroused the animosity of those who did teach, who had been to the schools and had the diplomas of learning. His teaching exposed the weakness and error of theirs. They were beginning to see through the hypocrisy and shallowness of their leaders. His influence diminished theirs and his power undermined their authority. Hence the snobbish question. "How does this man know anything of books having never been to the schools?" "Is not this the carpenter's

son?". It was clearly then, as it has been since and is still, a case of class distinction, for "the common people heard him gladly". The modern world would measure him by the same attitude. "Who or what does He think he is? He has never been to the high schools, the colleges or universities. He is not a professor or a doctor. He has no letters after his name. He is a working man, fresh from a country joiner's shop."

Because darkness hates the light the humble people of God's choice, taught in the same school as Christ, by the same energies of the illuminating Spirit from on high, are generally opposed or looked upon with disdain. Their wisdom comes from the same source as their Master's. The wisdom which comes from above is glorified common sense. Applied to life it creates peace, justice, mercy and an atmosphere of affectionate goodwill; proof against all crooked dealing. Jesus founded a new order of scholars, men and women, chiefly from the lower walks of life, humble, unlettered, untitled but the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Without them society would be meaner than it is.

"Still to the lowly soul He does his love impart,

*And for his dwelling and his Throne,
chooses the pure in heart."*

"Out of him shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7.38). It seems an exaggerated statement that rivers of water could flow from one believing mind. The power of the Spirit of God is an unknown quantity. Men have discovered and harnessed the forces of Nature but the power of the Spirit of God tends to be overlooked by the pride and assurance of man in his own bright achievements. Christ not only offered life to "him that believeth on Me"; He offered the power of life, a force which would flow as a river, dispensing all a river's benefits to those along its banks. Water is a necessity of life. Without it all vegetation withers. The green, smiling land scapes with their great food producing tracts would speedily become deserts without the sparkling liquid flowing through their streams. For this reason water becomes the simple metaphor for life-giving, life-sustaining truth. The thing that men seek afar off disappoints them. They seek for solutions to the problems of man's life on earth but they cannot find them. They believe in the variety of doctrines politic, social and philosophic, put forward by some of its best

thinkers, only to find their beliefs shattered. Disillusioned, they do not know what to think or where to turn or whom to believe, stubbornly blind to those words of Jesus who held out the solutions but was rejected and is still rejected. Only the odd one here and there throughout the centuries have believed in him with the whole heart and followed him, faithful unto death. The few who have been counted fools for his sake have yet, during their own lifetime, exercised a stimulating influence upon some others by their words of wisdom and their deeds of love. They have been like wells of water who have refreshed many other thirsty souls with their knowledge and confidence.

Without knowledge mankind cannot find the way to the peace and happiness which all nations at heart desire. But it must be true knowledge allied to wisdom flowing from God through his appointed channels. Christ, the Apostles and Prophets, were the channels of living water flowing through the earth, inviting men and women to drink of the waters of salvation and live. Those who had merely existed with the shadow in a thirsty and weary land became alive, full of assurance and a source of help to the needy. This full force and power of life and knowledge has not yet been released into a world too concerned with the forces of its own destruction. The forces of evil cannot exist on the same planet with the glory of God. *"As I live, saith the Lord, the earth shall be filled with my glory."* *"I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh."* When that time comes the old sources and streams with their muddy waters of ignorance, superstition, fear, guesswork, intolerance and ancient traditions will have been swept out, flushed away on the full tide of new rivers. The old silted up channels will not survive to serve a new society thirsting for God's truth. The lies, the shame, the deceits of false living and reasoning will go down before the force of that clear water of life, which will flow from under the throne of the Universe to revitalise a chastened race.

"Then the streams of living waters, springing from eternal love

Will supply earth's sons and daughters, and all fear of want remove.

Who need faint while such a river, ever flows their thirst to assuage.

Grace which like the Lord, the Giver, ever flows from age to age.

Surely it takes years of Christian experience and overcoming to be able to say from the heart that "All things come of Thee". There is no second cause to the true child of God, but rather the daily faith that every experience is ordered of the Father because He sees that it works out for our highest good, now and hereafter. But the

difficulty is sometimes properly to value an experience and so the Lord is patiently teaching us in the hope that we will soon be able joyfully to accept his providences in our life and gladly embrace them, knowing that they will work out the peaceable fruits of righteousness in us.

YOUR BREAD & WATER SHALL BE SURE

The thirty-third chapter of Isaiah was called forth at a time when outward circumstances were very similar to the condition of Europe to-day. Isaiah's people, Israel, dwelt in shuddering fear of their greatest scourge, the hosts of Assyria under the leadership of Sennacherib. A gifted leader to his own people and one who did much for their benefit in the building of cities and vast irrigation works, he was nevertheless a ruthless and merciless conqueror to those whom he counted his enemies or fit subjects for plunder. The eighteenth and nineteenth chapters of Second Kings and thirty-sixth and thirty-seventh chapters of Isaiah describe in detail his Palestine campaigns, and now in the time when this thirty-third chapter opens the children of Israel, having unwisely entered into a treaty with Egypt upon which they had relied for protection, were awaiting in terror the coming of their dreaded foe.

But Isaiah is not at this moment concerned with the possible fortunes of war. In point of fact the story ended happily for Israel, for after desolating the Judean countryside and setting his armies to besiege Jerusalem, Sennacherib suffered that mysterious destruction recorded in 2 Kings 19 which wiped out the invading host in one night and delivered Israel from the oppressor.

The theme upon which Isaiah is dwelling in the chapter now under consideration is the attitude to be adopted by those who had put their trust in God, who had not "gone down to Egypt for help" (Isa. 31. 1) nor relied upon carnal weapons and the arm of flesh to be their protection, but had looked up to the God of Heaven who promised that while they trusted him He would ever be their defence.

So in verse 14 Isaiah cries a challenge. "*The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites (Heb. chaneph—profane). Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?*" A heart-searching question indeed, for who, seeing the rapid sweep of the devouring Assyrian host across their fair land, could hope to abide in peace when all their world was being swept away and consumed before their very eyes? Isaiah answers his own question. "*He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood and shutting his eyes from seeing evil.*" These are

they who, though caught up in the tide of battle and perchance suffering as would all men, are yet enabled to rise above the tribulations of the moment because they have embraced the standards of another world and put their trust in One Who is more powerful than all this world's armies. Therefore it is that although still subject to the trials and tribulations of the flesh, these are promised that they "*shall dwell on high. His place of defence shall be the strongholds of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.*"

Precious promise, the inheritance of all who in every age have put their trust in their God when wrath of man had raged against them. The Apostle Paul tells us that we are "seated with Christ in the heavenlies". Constant is the exhortation to "look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Cor. 4. 17-18). "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psa. 91. 1). In that hallowed sanctum of the Rock of Ages shall he find sustenance, the bread of life and the water of life indeed. "Seek ye *first* the Kingdom of God" said Jesus "and all these things shall be added unto you." At a time when the advent of abnormal conditions of life amongst us threatens in so many cases the loss of a normal livelihood, good it is to remember the Divine promise "Bread shall be given you. Your water shall be sure".

Now comes a word of assurance. In the midst of this troubled time let the believer but trust in his God and rest secure in that confidence, and (verse 17) "*Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off.*" Critical scholars render the latter phrase "the land of far distances". Who is there amongst us whose heart does not thrill at the prospect of even now, by faith, seeing our King in his beauty; "the chiefest among ten thousand, the one altogether lovely"? (Cant. 5. 10, 16), and gazing entranced at the glorious vision of the land of to-morrow, a good land, a spacious land, one stretching into all eternity, truly "the land of far distances?" It is only when the thoughts are turned to the eternal promises of God and the heart relies fully upon him that this glorious prospect of future Ages, both for the Church and the world, can be seen stretching into the illimitable future. Why focus our eyes and thoughts upon the black clouds of trouble to

the exclusion of that fair land which awaits all men on the other side?

Now in verse 18 the prophet turns for a moment from his lofty station and brings his thoughts back to the present. *"Thine heart shall meditate terror"* he says, or more correctly *"Thine heart shall muse on the past terrors"*. Most translators agree that this is the true sense of the Hebrew. The believer in God, after having firmly established his faith in the unseen things and in the promises of God, looks around him as it were, and asks *"Where is the scribe? Where is the receiver? Where is he that counteth the towers?"* The "scribe" was an Assyrian official accompanying the conquering armies whose duty it was to decide the nature and amount of tribute to be paid by each conquered village or community. The "receiver" (more properly "weigher") was a companion official who received the tribute as it was paid, whilst in the "counter of towers" the reference is to a military officer who surveyed the countryside as hostilities proceeded and laid plans for the capture of villages and the siege of walled towns. Still in the land, still executing their dread work, but for the faithful child of God they are shorn of their terrors. Fresh from the vision of Divine overruling power he looks around and asks "where are they? What power have these man-made forces in face of the protecting care of my God?". Clear from heaven the answer comes, as in Leeser's vivid rendering of verse 19 *"The barbarous people shall thou not see any more, the people of a speech too obscure to be understood, of a stammering tongue, without meaning."* To the Hebrews the Assyrians were barbarians, a people notorious for their ruthlessness and cruelty, men of a foreign and unintelligible speech. But here they were in the land of Israel, ravaging its gardens and vineyards and destroying its villages and towns. How then could it be said "the barbarous people shalt thou not see any more?" What use uttering such words when the sad fact was only too obvious to those who looked on things around them. Ah, therein lay the answer. "We look" says Paul, "not on the things which are seen, but on the things which are not seen." So with us, if in the midst of our troubles and perplexities we fix our gaze upon the unseen things of the Spirit, and our hopes upon the promises of God, the glorious vision of "things to come" will blot out the fear and terror of present distresses from our minds, leaving us in calm and undisturbed possession of that peace which passeth all understanding, that peace which converts the wildest storm into the calm of a placid lake, which takes full account of all that the wrath of man can do and finds it of no

account in comparison with the overruling power of God. That is why Isaiah, in a fine flight of prophetic vision, exhorted his fellows to turn away from the contemplation of present troubles. *"Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities; thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down. Not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken."* Here is a picture of the New Jerusalem, the city of God which shall indeed fulfil the meaning of the archaic name. *Urusalim*, the City of Peace. The old Tabernacle in the wilderness was often taken down and moved from place to place. In very truth the children of Israel had here no abiding place, and no continuing city. Time and oft their enemies destroyed and defiled their sanctuaries and in all its forty-odd centuries of history that city set in the tops of the Judean hills has never been a city of peace. Yet the time is to come when both literally and spiritually Jerusalem shall speak peace to the nations, and many people shall go up unto its walls to learn of the law of the Lord (Isa. 2. 3). A tabernacle that is at last a permanent dwelling place for the Lord God of Hosts; a sanctuary whose posts and cords shall not be removed any more for ever. *"But there"* cries the prophet exultantly (vs. 21) *"the glorious Lord shall be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby."* It is said that the 46th and 48th Psalms were composed at this time of national stress, and how fitly they mirrored the situation is proven by the constant appeal to those same Psalms when, as at the present time, the storm clouds of trouble loom more darkly and threateningly than is usual. But there is one great difference between the rivers of the city of God and those streams which Isaiah had in mind. "No galley with oars", "gallant ship shall not pass." What is the meaning of such seemingly out of place allusions?

The prophet was thinking of the rivers and canals (mistranslated "streams") which were in that day such a feature of their enemy's country. Mesopotamia is to-day largely a desert—but that is only because the gigantic irrigation system which had been constructed and maintained from earliest times was destroyed and laid waste in the early centuries of this Christian era. The land is flat, and the two great rivers—Tigris and Euphrates—bring down great quantities of water which at certain seasons of the year overflow the banks and turn the whole countryside into a vast inland sea. At other times the rivers are shrunken and the land is dried and parched by the heat

of a tropical sun. In the days of Sennacherib these flood waters were controlled by a marvelous system of canals, dams and reservoirs which stored the water and made it available all the year round, in consequence of which the entire land was covered with wheat fields and fruit trees—almost a Paradise on earth. To dwellers in the mountainous country of Judah such a land of “broad rivers and canals” was a most fitting example of the earthly prosperity promised to the faithful of God, and hence the force of the promise that the Lord himself should be to them a “place of broad rivers and canals”.

Now with Assyria in the height of her glory and power it was inevitable that the two great rivers should play their part in the conduct of military operations. Through the peaceful countryside ever and anon the war-vessels of the Assyrians came ploughing their way along the waters—galleys rowed by slaves or larger ships with sails. The expression “gallant ship” is from a Hebrew word which is applied in the Scriptures to war-vessels rather than merchant ships, being used in this connection in Num. 24, Ezek. 30. 9 and Dan. 11. 30, in each of which cases war vessels are referred to. It was almost at the time when Isaiah penned these words that Sennacherib, desiring to consolidate his power to the south of his dominions, built a great war fleet at Nineveh, sailed down the River Tigris to a point where it flowed near the canal system of the Euphrates, along the great Babylonian canals into the Euphrates and down that river to the Persian Gulf, from whence he successfully attacked the Elamites and eventually returned to Nineveh. The news of these naval operations would reach the ears of the Israelites and cause them to reflect that whilst vessels of war sailed the rivers of Babylon those smiling fields and sparkling waters could know no true peace. Hence the force of the promise which declared that no warships or galleys would ever sail on the rivers of the city of God. To us in this day comes the same cheering reflection. The instruments of the wrath of man will perish with the downfall of man’s power—they will find no place in the coming kingdom of righteousness.

“For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us.”

There is the answer of supreme faith. We are the servants of the Most High God, the “high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity” (Isa. 57. 15). We have devoted ourselves and our lives to his glad service. We are his ambassadors, his representatives to a world in which we move as aliens; for it is true that “here have we no continuing city” (Heb. 13. 14). Surely then we can have confidence that whatever betides us is known to him and in fullest harmony with his Will. When the three Hebrew men were threatened with the fiery furnace they made this stirring reply to the Babylonian monarch “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us . . . But if not, (if He does not so deliver) be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan. 3. 17-18). The young man with Elisha was terrified at the apparent certainty of death at the hands of the Syrian armies, but when Elisha prayed and the young man’s eyes were opened he beheld the hosts of the Lord—horsemen of fire and chariots of fire—encompassing them in the mountains round about. So it is with us. The invisible legions of God are fully able to divert from us all the dangers and distresses which it is not his will should come our way, and as for the rest, as for those disasters and trials which *are* permitted to come, shall we not say with Job, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him” (Job 13. 15).

Let our consideration of this eloquent passage in Isaiah’s prophecy be a source of strength and comfort in the coming days. Though darkness encompass the land and fears be on every side, though there be the terror that flieth by night and the arrow that flieth by day, the pestilence walking in darkness and destruction wasting at noonday (Psa. 91. 5-6) let it always be true of us that “I have made the Lord my refuge, the Most High my habitation” and so doing, we shall not be greatly moved.

Who hath despised the day of small things? While the pride of man boasts itself in multitudes and in abundance, it is the small things which God selects to fulfil His purposes. It was but a little oil in a cruse, yet it failed not; a handful of meal in a barrel, yet it wasted not. It was a little cloud arising out of the sea, the size of a

man’s hand, that prepared Elijah for the abundance of rain his ear of faith had anticipated. Upon Mount Horeb, God spoke, not in the mighty wind, nor the earthquake, nor the fire, but in a still, small voice. For it is “not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of hosts”.

RESPECT OF PERSONS

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

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

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

In verses 2 and 3 James calls the attention of the brethren to what was taking place in their midst. He presents a suppositious case which the context shows may well have been founded on fact. "*If there come into your assembly*" (margin "*Synagogue*") *a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment, and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, sit thou here in a good place, and say to the poor, stand thou there or sit here under my footstool, are ye not then partial in yourselves and become judges of evil thoughts?*" It is worthy of note in passing that this is the only place in the New Testament where the word "Synagogue" is applied to a Christian church. James is writing to Jewish Christians who had been accustomed to meeting in the Synagogue and had carried the name with them into their Christian fellowship. The word "Synagogue" means "assembly", while the Christian equivalent, namely, "the church" or "ecclesia", means "called out assembly". The distinction is quite significant, as the synagogue or assembly was associated with the natural Seed, whilst the church or called out assembly is associated with the spiritually called out Seed.

The two different characters which James pictures coming into their assembly were evidently visitors, just as we have "strangers" dropping into our meetings. One is rich and the other poor, and for no other reason than the

mere circumstances of outward dress the one is treated with great respect and the other with scant courtesy. What would be the motives behind such conduct? Would it be that the former was at once regarded as an asset to the meeting and the other perhaps a liability? How would we feel in similar circumstances? While none of us would go the length of showing such respect of persons as James pictures here, is it not true that we all have to fight against the almost innate tendency to defer to wealth and worldly position?

In verses 1, 4 and 5 James mentions three considerations which should help to keep us free from the evil of respect of persons. Verse 1. "*My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.*" The New Testament speaks of faith sometimes as a principle like hope and love. It also speaks of faith as the whole system of belief centring in Christ, as when we are exhorted to contend earnestly for the faith. Thus we can have faith in *the* faith. The brethren to whom James was writing had come out of the Jewish faith, centring in Moses, into the faith of Christ. This faith was wholly incompatible with respect of persons. Had Jesus been born in the palace of kings, consorted with the rich and the great of this world, and died in honour and esteem of all men, then there might be some room for respect of persons. James was the brother of the Lord, there is good reason to believe, and none knew better than he the lowly life of the Son of God. Following the birth in the stable of the overcrowded inn there was the humble peasant's home at Nazareth. Following the long years of patient toil in the carpenter's shop there were the three and a half years of the Lord's ministry. From the very beginning of this ministry, so far as the great and rich and wise were concerned, He was despised and rejected. It was the common people who heard him gladly. Publicans and sinners were drawn to him; even his apostles were ignorant and unlearned men. And yet so far from being disappointed Jesus had prayed "*I thank thee O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes*".

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

the Lord of glory.

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

In Verse 4 we have another helpful consideration. "*Are ye not then partial in yourselves*" if you are guilty of such respect of persons "*and are become judges of evil thoughts?*" Weymouth's translation makes this verse clearer. It reads "Is it not plain that in your hearts you have little faith seeing that you have become judges full of wrong thoughts?" It is a very serious thing to sit in judgment upon anyone, for "with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged", our Lord declares. If our judgment of others is just and based upon right principles and tempered with mercy it reflects credit on ourselves. If, however, we who are being trained to be the judges of the world are so deficient in discernment that we base our judgment on externals such as differences associated with the possession or otherwise of material things we condemn ourselves as unfit for the position. It indicates that we cannot judge properly because we ourselves do not have the proper sense of true values. As Weymouth says "In our hearts we have little faith". In one of the morning five-minute talks some little time ago the speaker said that we were living in a world of make believe, almost like Alice in Wonderland. The most valueless things fetched the highest prices and the most valuable and precious things were least esteemed and cost the least. Things like worldly fame, power, prestige, riches, learning, were all eagerly sought for and the highest prices paid even to the spending of life itself in their attainment. On the other hand the things that God highly esteems, such as love, peace, kindness, goodness, self control, faithfulness were lightly valued. Surely the representatives of the Heavenly Kingdom should demonstrate what the true values are in this world of make believe.

In Verse 5 James gives us the third consideration why we should beware of respect of persons. "*Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love him?*" James feels this danger of respect of persons to be so great that he asks them to "hearken" or "listen" to him further in the matter. He calls them "his beloved brethren" to assure them that he has a deep concern for their spiritual welfare. In this he reminds us of what we may already have noted in the epistles of Paul, Peter and John. "Hearken my beloved brethren hath not God chosen the

poor of this world?" It is not a matter of chance or accident that it is the poor who are attracted to your meetings. This is the result of God's choice in the matter. This principle was expressed by Mary even before Jesus was born. "*He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart. He hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away.*" No flesh may glory in God's presence; meekness and humility are essential in those whom He causes to approach unto himself. It is not, however, that not *any* great or rich or noble are called, but not *many*. There are a few, but only a few, and the reason for this is illustrated in the case of the rich young ruler; he went away sadly for he had great possessions, and when he had gone Jesus said "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." In this as in so many other things we see God's compensating grace. He is no respecter of persons choosing the poor simply because they are poor. But it is amongst the common people that there exists those conditions which are most fitted for the development of the essential qualities of faith, meekness and humility. If we are very tempted to feel envious of those better off than ourselves let us remember that "God has chosen" the poor of this world to be his heirs and there can be no greater honour than this.

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

Continuing, James says "*Hath not God chosen the poor of this world. rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him*". Paul says the heir, when a child, differs nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all. This is the position with regard to God's heirs. We are waiting for our coming of age, our adoption, as it is put in Romans 8. So great is our inheritance that it embraces *all things*, as Paul declares "All things are yours, whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Respect of persons arising from existing social inequalities affects us sometimes by inducing in us a feeling of inferiority when in contact with others whose dress, or house, or education or social position is much superior to our own. If we could only realise a fraction of what it means to be heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ how paltry and insignificant these differences would appear to be!

Besides being rich in *faith* the poor must also

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

"Be content with such things as ye have"—(Heb. 13.5).

Contentment is a virtue in danger of extinction in this restless age. The material world is glutted with things. Science, progress and civilisation have produced, for the use and pleasure of man, commodities which have become the badges of pride, the insignia of social position.

Man's needs are few but his wants are many. No sooner is one thing obtained than the markets offer some new object which catches the eye and that also must be added to the accumulated possessions; displayed with pride often to the discomfort or envy of neighbours who feel inferior without this latest gadget or piece of luxury.

Few dare be poor, out of fashion, gadgetless in an age of affluence, of bright outward show and scientific progress. Things may bring a fleeting pleasure, a temporary satisfaction, a glow of pride to their owners but they do not bring that serenity of mind which is above the fret and strain of the competitive life endeavouring to keep up appearance or aiming to amass more and more goods and money.

Poets and philosophers in every age have cherished the ideal of the simple life, with few possessions and few cares. Freedom from worry and anxiety, leisure to loiter and enjoy, to savour the beauty of Nature, of noble living and lofty thought are the real luxuries of life, prized by a discerning few.

"*I swear 'tis better*", wrote Shakespeare, "*to be lowly born and range with humble livers in content, than to be perked up in a glistening grief and wear a golden sorrow*".

To be contented with little is sometimes difficult, with much almost impossible. They are the happiest who find their joys outside of things.

"*Nature's calls are few; in this the art of living lies, to want no more than may suffice and make that little do.*"

*My Lord how full of sweet content
My years of pilgrimage are spent
Where'ere I dwell, I dwell with Thee
In heaven, in earth, or on the sea.*

"*And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come*" (Hag. 2.7).

THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS

These words of the prophet Haggai were spoken to encourage Israel to rebuild the Temple, having now returned from the land of captivity. The prophecy is so worded that the casual reader might consider that the consequent rebuilding of the Temple was the fulfilment and end of the prophecy, but because the writer to the Hebrews quotes part of these words (Heb. 12. 26) and speaks of them as being still future, there must be a further fulfilment and so it is necessary to look farther than Israel's local history for fulfilment; the wording speaks of the shaking (and therefore, removal, adds Paul) of the heavens, the earth, the sea, the dry land and ALL the nations. This is the day of God's judgment on the nations, the oft declared time of trouble on the whole world. But, as is often the case with the prophets, the words of calamity are immediately followed by tidings of joy—the desire of all nations shall come. The manifestation of Divine dealings—judgment followed by grace—is the main theme of the Bible so far as man is concerned. Good if all forthtellers of judgment would likewise speak of the ensuing grace!

What is this "desire of all nations" that follows the world-shaking? Various answers can be made to the question and each have its element of truth. It is conceivable that the desires of men and nations alter as the pages of history bring new visions and new needs to view. The Reformation brought a desire to be free of Papal machination and oppression; and according to the slogan of the French Revolution, mankind in those days wanted "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity". These desires were but partly realised, possibly because the shaking of those days was more of man than of the Lord. Some will say that man's desire today is for peace. This is true enough, if peace is merely abstention from war. But not yet do they desire that peace which accrues from harmony with their Creator. That will be their desire after He has made wars to cease and the judgments of the Lord are in the earth. As they learn righteousness then they will desire true peace. These desires are all subsidiary to man's eternal desire for life. This desire, like the others, will only be attained by Divine intervention. God intervenes by shaking all nations, and then gives to man his desires, for it is by opening his hand that He satisfies the desire of every living thing.

But when national peace is achieved by the quelling of oppressors in the time of trouble, the restriction of Satan, and the establishment of the Kingdom by One who will take the kingdom and possess it for ever, then surely man's desire will change. National peace will give way to the desire for personal peace. Peace of body, of mind, of heart, or in one word—LIFE! And they will find that the one who gave them rest from war and strife will give them life. "Obey and live" will be the universal rule.

When man is enjoying the gifts of life then surely another desire will come into his heart. He will want to know more of him who made peace and life possible—and we instantly think of the Messiah, who will be the desire of all nations. Rotherham's translation speaks of "delight of all nations". Do the Scriptures so portray our Lord? Once He had no beauty that they should desire him, but now all beauties that man can imagine are his. The word "beauty" is not full enough to describe the One who will be the desire of all nations.

The prophet Isaiah in ch. 9. v. 6-7 shows how He is man's desire and cause of adoration. See how in these words man's many desires are accomplished in one Person!

WONDERFUL. A happening is wonderful when it causes man to wonder how it occurred, or is miraculous, or because it transcends man's own imaginings. A thing is wonderful when it is the only one of its kind, The idea in the Hebrew is "singular". Using the word in this true sense it can be said that He stands alone and above all others. The fifth chapter of Revelation shows him to be wonderful because He is exceptional, and the chapter closes with universal adoration of this desire of all nations. He alone could die, the just for the unjust, and He alone can extricate man from his troubles. When the Revelator looked to see the Lion of Judah who had prevailed to open the book he saw the Lamb—which is certainly singular and wonderful. The Strong One is found to be him who dies as the Lamb.

COUNSELLOR. Man has had many counsellors who dispense advice, but are incapable of dispensing the real need. This "desire of man" is a counsellor in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge coupled with the power of an endless life. One only can combine this work of prophet and priest.

THE MIGHTY GOD. He does not supplant God the Father. Here the word is "elohim", used of one wielding power. The word mighty is "gibbor"; it also has the sense of power and is rendered "champion". It refers to the One who is properly known as man's powerful champion. The modern counterpart of this combination is "dictator"—and some think this is the present desire of nations.

THE EVERLASTING FATHER. One of man's many desires, life, is met by him who has abolished death and brought life to light through the Gospel.

THE PRINCE OF PEACE. It has been well said that man now desires peace, but not the Prince of Peace. True; but when man enjoys that peace which will arise from the righteous rule of the Prince (Isa. 32. 17), they will then desire to know of him who has so blessed them.

The next verse of the prophet Isaiah (ch. 9.7)

details some of the glories of that righteous kingdom. Once established, this desire, the kingdom, will never end. It is dominated by the throne of David. David's throne was at Jerusalem. There will thus be a visible world centre for man to desire and delight in. And so, in this One Person and work man's best desires are all met.

Are these the final desires of nations? Will they not desire one thing more? Surely by the time the kingdom has settled down to rule, the whole earth is at rest and is quiet, one more desire will arise in the hearts of men. They will surely desire to honour the Father even as they honour the Son, for (says Isa. 9.7) it is the zeal of the Lord of Hosts that has made this great kingdom possible. Nothing would ever have been fulfilled unless God himself had planned it all. Man's final desire will be to "know thee, the holy true God" and thus have the full blessing of eternal life (John 17. 2-3). And he will be quite ready for the day, at the end of the reign of Christ, that the kingdom is delivered up to the Father, that God may be all in all.

AFFLICTION'S GOOD

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

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

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

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

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

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



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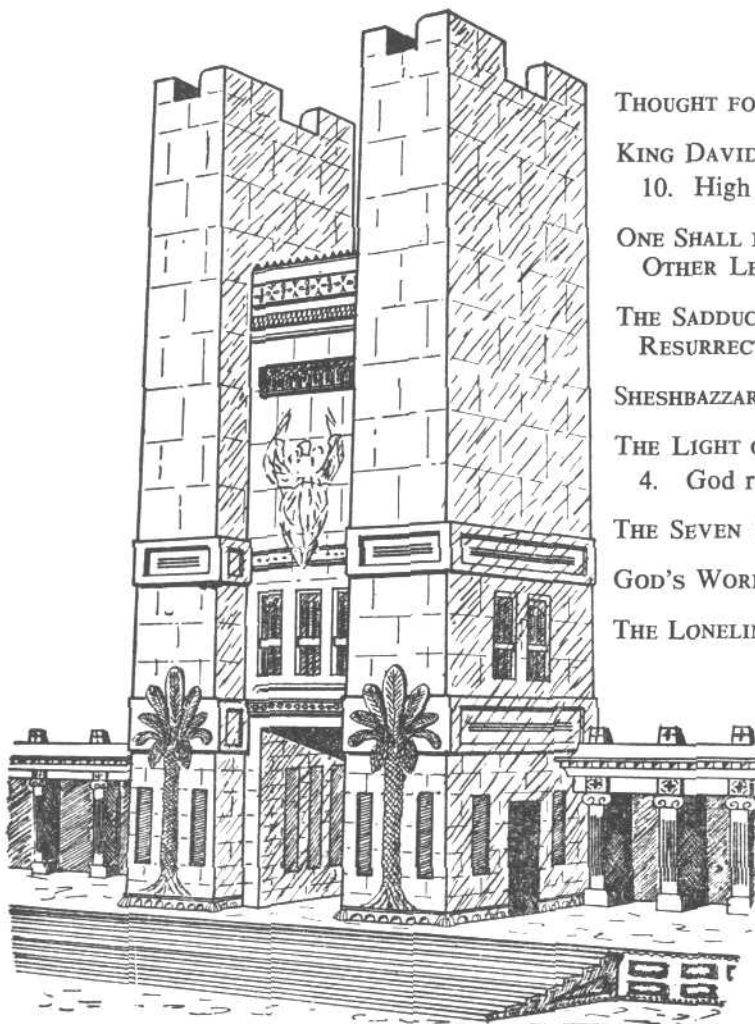
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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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

"Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. 1. 13).

Throughout the ages the progress and development of Christianity has been marred by doctrinal strife. Intolerance, discord and persecution has stained many a fair page of the Church's history with its indelible markings. Men and women whose loyalty to the cause of Christ was beyond question have nevertheless so utterly failed to grasp the essence of Christian teaching that they have soured their lives and blemished their good works with the evil fruits of religious controversy. And realising, as one must do, that the seed of these things lies in individual conscientiousness and zeal for the Truth it is a matter for wonder that greater thought has not been and is not being given to the essential place of theological teaching in the Christian life. That it is an important—perhaps the most potent—of the external forces shaping and influencing our development cannot be denied. That it is of all aspects of our fellowship together the one most productive of misunderstanding, division, and the waxing cold of that love which constitutes the evidence that we have passed from death into life, is unhappily only too true. That we in this day have been blessed with an insight into the deep things of God far exceeding the portion of past generations is so tacitly accepted that the position is never questioned. Yet current thought still tends to gravitate to the extremes; we are told on the one hand that salvation comes by reason of an intellectual appreciation of true theology, and by means of which faith remains unshaken in the evil day; upon the other hand that doctrinal understanding is of such relatively little importance that nothing more than a mental acceptance of Jesus Christ, coupled with a life of good works, is asked of those who would follow in the steps of the Master.

Somewhere between these extremes the truth must lie, and it is with sober and reverent minds that we should enquire, first as individuals, and then in communal discussion, if we are to occupy our rightful place as ambassadors for Christ to this generation. The Apostle Paul, writing to his son-in-the-faith Timothy, leaves us in no doubt as to his own outlook on the matter. *"If anyone... will not give his mind to wholesome precepts—I mean those of our Lord Jesus Christ—and to good religious teaching, I call him a pompous ignoramus. He is morbidly keen on mere verbal questions and quibbles, which give rise to jealousy, quarrelling, slander, base suspicions, and endless wrangles; all typical of men who have let their reasoning powers become atrophied and have lost grip of the truth."* (1 Tim. 6. 3-5 N.E.B.). That is all too often where the doctrinal enthusiast finishes—the doctrinal enthusiast, that is, who finds no place for the other side of the Christian way. That other side is defined by St. Paul in this same passage *"Pursue justice, piety, fidelity, love, fortitude and gentleness. Run the great race of faith and lay hold of eternal life. For to this you were called... Turn a deaf ear to empty and worldly chatter, and the contradictions of so-called 'knowledge', for many who lay claim to it have shot wide of the faith."*

Gone from us

Bro. L. Allen (*Ilford*)
 Bro. W. Batcheller (*Raynes Park*)
 Sis. E. Cross (*Blaby*)
 Sis. V. Beaven (*Melksham*)
 Bro. L. F. Shephard (*Cardiff*)

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

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous King*

10. High Treason

Two years had passed since Absalom returned from Geshur. He was now reconciled to David and so far as the king was concerned the past was forgotten. At Joab's instigation, Absalom had appeared before the king, received full forgiveness and allowed to resume his former place at court. It is almost certain that David looked upon Absalom as the one to follow him as king. Solomon would be about eight years of age but it is not likely that David was at this time thinking of him as his successor. The original promise retained to him by Nathan (2. Sam. 7. 12-15) was that one of his sons would be the one to build the Temple after his own death without stipulation which, and it was only towards the close of his reign that Solomon's name became coupled with the promise. So at the moment it would seem that David was resting content in the feeling that the succession was assured in the person of Absalom, but that he himself, at fifty-eight years of age, could look forward to a reasonable term of years of peace and tranquillity as king over the nation before his time should come. But there was to be no peace and tranquillity for David.

Absalom, at twenty-seven years of age, was not taking kindly to the idea of waiting perhaps another twenty years before succeeding to the throne. His history to date shows him to be headstrong, assertive and ruthless. He was only half Israelite. His Amoritish blood through his mother had evidently infused something of the warlike qualities of the invincible Geshurites into his nature and he was thirsting for action. Maybe David had looked speculatively at the young boy, Solomon, son of his beloved Bathsheba, and Absalom had intercepted the glance. He had already disposed of one rival for the throne, Amnon; he was not going to risk the appearance of another as this lad grew up to maturity. And so once again there was scheming and plotting in the political sphere of David's kingdom.

The conspiracy was carefully planned and very circumspect at the first. Absalom first of all surrounded himself with a retinue of chariots and men, calculated to impress the people with his importance and splendour. He probably spent some time driving around Jerusalem and the adjacent countryside until the people became thoroughly accustomed to him and knew him better than any other of the king's sons. Then he formed the habit of stationing himself by the

outer entrance to the royal court at the times appointed for litigants and complainants to seek audience of the king for the redress of their wrongs, and intercept them, as they passed in, to ascertain the nature of their troubles. Irrespective of the apparent justice or otherwise of the man's case, Absalom would say sympathetically "*See, thy matters are good and right, but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee*" then, lifting up his eyes to heaven, would remark piously "*O that I were made judge in Israel, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice*". Thus did he foster the impression that he was much more concerned with the welfare of the populace than was his father, and in consequence, says the historian, "*Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel*."

It might well be that there was some substance in Absalom's claim. David could well have been losing interest in the day-to-day affairs of his people, and the administration of justice in petty affairs becoming increasingly neglected or delegated to negligent minor officials. David was always more a man of war than a man of peace and his almost continual pre-occupation with military affairs, added to his own domestic troubles, might have led him to relegate other matters to the background. The eventual outcome of this particular series of events shows that he had lost much of the earlier enthusiastic allegiance of the people. Absalom may well have judged rightly that this was the time to act and so he commenced by ingratiating himself with the people at large.

So passed four years during which Absalom insinuated himself into the hearts of Israel (2 Sam. 7). The A.V. says "forty years" but this is a palpable error; forty years from this point would have set the event in the middle of the reign of Solomon. The Syriac, Arabic and Josephus all give four but the Septuagint has forty so the error must be of very old standing in the Hebrew manuscripts. It is likely that the original text was *arba*, four, a singular noun, and that by mistake a copyist changed this to the plural form, *arbaim*, which means forty. Most modern translations now give four. It would seem that Absalom was in no hurry; he intended the groundwork to be well and truly laid. David, apparently, was quite unsuspecting, and feeling that his reconciliation with his son had cleared the way for the future, with no more wars in

prospect, he probably congratulated himself that life would hereon be serene and peaceful.

At the end of the four years Absalom made his bid. He first went to his father with a plausible tale of a vow he had made while exiled in Geshur to the effect that if the Lord brought him back to Jerusalem he would serve the Lord and would ratify his vow in Hebron, sacred as the burial place of Abraham and the patriarchs, and where the kingdom of David was first instituted. Now he wanted permission to go to Hebron and there make formal acknowledgment of his conversion before the Lord.

David was, apparently, pleased. It would seem that Absalom had not heretofore made any profession of allegiance to the God of Israel; his alien descent was probably partly accountable for this but there does seem to have been some lack on David's part in the early training of his sons. But he now assented, very readily, and Absalom went out from his presence well satisfied with progress so far. David was blissfully unaware that he was being grossly deceived for the second time by his turbulent son.

The conspiracy had been well organised. Whilst Absalom was on his way to Hebron twenty miles away, messengers were speeding to the northern ten tribes telling them to accept and declare Absalom as king in place of his father, so soon as they heard the trumpets sound. It is plain that he had supporters posted in every part of the country waiting. Directly he arrived in Hebron the trumpeters there sounded their trumpets and the peal was taken up by one and another until it reached the most northerly bounds of the kingdom. The bulk of support for Absalom was clearly among the ten tribes, previously supporters of Saul. The cleavage between the ten tribes and the two, Judah and Benjamin, which became a reality at the death of Solomon, fifty years later, was already in evidence now during the latter part of David's reign. His hold on the people was not so strong as is often supposed. Now a considerable proportion of the population was prepared to follow Absalom; *"the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom"* (ch. 15. 12.).

Too late, David found out what was going on and realised that he had lost the allegiance of his people. It must have been a bitter moment. All that he had suffered and endured and achieved since his youth was gone as it were in a moment. In the past his enemies had been aliens of other races and he had gone out against them with the sword, and with the sword he had conquered them and slain them. Now his enemy was his own son; he could not lift his sword against his own son. Absalom, he knew, would soon be

coming to Jerusalem to assert his rulership, and the people in large measure were behind him. There was only one course open if he was to avoid open conflict—an ignominious flight out of the country without delay, thus leaving the field clear for the usurper.

This part of the narrative, the pitiful journey of David with his principal officers of State, his palace retinue and a considerable body of loyal warriors, across Jordan and sixty miles on to Mahanaim in Gilead, where he would be out of the immediate reach of his rebellious son, is strangely out of accord with the known martial character and strategic skill of Israel's most famous warrior king. The story as told in 2 Sam. 15, 16 and 17 has all the signs of panic in the face of an overpowering threat, an anxious desire to get away from the enemy at any cost irrespective of the consequences for those left behind. This is the first occasion in David's reign when he is depicted retreating before the enemy. The contrast is so great that one is compelled to look below the surface of the account to discern the underlying motive. It could not be cowardice; it could not be lack of confidence in his own ability to hold his own and gain the victory if it came to a fight; David's whole past history militates against that conclusion. David's flight to Mahanaim must have been dictated by some other vital consideration.

Did his mind, at this crisis in his career, go back to the early days of his flight from Saul, and his rigid refusal to accept the opportunities he had to encompass Saul's death, insisting that the Lord would give him the kingdom in his own due time? Did he feel that the battle was not his, but the Lord's, and he would do well to remove himself out of the land in peace and wait for the Lord to intervene in his own way? As he left the city behind him on his way to the Jordan he did say to Zadok the priest (ch. 16. 25). *"If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord he will bring me again, and show me both it (the city) and his habitation"*. It does look as though David left the city, not through fear, but in faith that the Lord would direct the issue and shape his future. It might well be that David was now accepting these successive disasters in his life as just retribution for his crime of the past and was saying, as did Job many years before him, *"It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good"*. He must have reflected, grimly, as he entered the little town of Mahanaim in Gilead, where he and his were to find refuge, that this was the place where Saul's son Ish-bosheth had set up court to keep out of the reach of David some thirty years before. Now it was David who was the fugitive, awaiting his Lord's good pleasure.

In the meantime Absalom had entered Jerusalem and declared himself king, accompanied by Ahithophel the Gilonite. On the surface this seems strange. Ahithophel was David's Chief counsellor, a sort of "Prime Minister" to the nation, high in office and highly esteemed. One would have thought that he, like all the other Ministers of State, would have accompanied David into exile, but here, without explanation, he is revealed as siding with Absalom. A comparison of various scattered texts in Samuel and Chronicles yields the clue. Ahithophel was the grandfather of Bath-sheba. His son, Eliam, her father, was one of the stalwarts who had endured the wilderness hardships with David, as had Uriah, in the days of Saul's enmity. It looks very much as though Ahithophel ended his friendship with David over the affair with his granddaughter and espoused the cause of Absalom. As the narrative unfolds it is clear that he intended the death of David. It is indicated in ch. 16.23 that his advice, both in the days of David and now of Absalom was so highly regarded that it was "as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God" and Absalom was probably congratulating himself upon obtaining such a useful adherent to his cause.

There was another apparent convert, Hushai the Archite, another close friend of David, who suddenly appeared at Jerusalem, professing allegiance. "God save the king; God save the king" he exclaimed as he came before him. Absalom was more than a little suspicious of this one; he had not the same excuse for breaking with David as had Ahithophel, and he too had been high in honour and a close adviser of the king. "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" he queried. "Why wentest thou not with thy friend?" "Nay" responded Hushai "whom the Lord, and all Israel choose, him will I serve. As I have served in thy father's presence, so will I be in thy presence". Absalom was satisfied; he would not have been so satisfied had he known that Hushai was professing allegiance in order to acquire details of Absalom's intentions and movements so that he could pass them on to David.

So far, so good. Absalom was in possession of the palace at Jerusalem and surrounded by an appreciable company of supporters. But an element of uncertainty seems to have pervaded the assembly. He, and they, were not quite sure what to do next. The would-be king was dubious as to his next move. He appealed to Ahithophel for advice, and that worthy, an experienced politician thirsting for personal revenge, knew just what the first move ought to be so that an irreparable breach between Absalom and his father might be created. He knew that in his

flight, David had left behind his ten concubines to "keep the house", and here they were in the palace. "Go in to thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house, and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father; then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong". So they erected an open pavilion on the roof of the palace in the sight of all Israel, and David, when he heard of the deed, must have remembered the prediction of Nathan in ch. 12. 11 and realised that the judgments of the Lord were not finished yet.

But this was only part of Ahithophel's revenge. He now had the ear of Absalom and outlined the scheme he had formulated to give himself the satisfaction of slaying David. "Let me choose and take twelve thousand men" he suggested "and I will pursue after David tonight and come upon him when he is weary and weak. I will smite the king only and bring back all the people who are with him so that your kingship may be established without loss of any other life". What fiendish plot he had devised to get access to David and assassinate him before anyone could interfere no one knows, but he evidently felt he could do it and so satisfy his personal enmity over the matter of Bath-sheba.

The plot won general approval, but Absalom was still irresolute. The plan seemed too simple to be workable. He knew his father; he was not at all sure that it would succeed. "Call Hushai the Archite" he ordered "and let us hear what he saith".

So Hushai came in and listened impassively while the plan was outlined. He pretended to be thinking deeply, while all present waited in silence. At last, with a friendly glance at Ahithophel, he spoke. "The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time". What he meant by the last few words was that while Ahithophel's advice was normally wise and beyond reproach, in this particular instance his judgment was at fault; he had not given due weight to several important considerations. "You know your father and his men" he said to Absalom "that they are mighty in battle, and furious at being exiled out of their land. As soon as there is a conflict some of your men will be slain and immediately the word will go round that there is a slaughter among the men that follow Absalom, and with the people's knowledge of your father's prowess there will be a weakening of their loyalty to you". He paused and looked round the circle of faces, listening intently. He resumed "My advice is that you do not act precipitately, but that you gather together all the fighting men in Israel, from Dan to Beer-sheba, an invincible host, and that you then

lead the army in your own person. So you will overwhelm him and his followers by sheer force of numbers, and of him and all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one".

Hushai looked around him again and saw in the eyes of his hearers what he wanted to see and expected to see. He knew that the supporters of Absalom were mainly from the ten tribes of the north; those who had accompanied David in his flight were principally of his own tribe, Judah. These men surrounding Absalom were not at all keen upon an outcome which would bring men of Judah back to Jerusalem to compete for places of favour around the new king's person. Much better to adopt Hushai's suggestion of eliminating them and ending the Judean influence in the royal court. The antipathy even then existing between the Ten Tribes and the Two rendered the idea of a massive showdown an appealing one. Hushai's plan was vociferously endorsed by Absalom and his supporters as the better of the two, and Hushai turned aside that no one might perceive the gleam of triumph in his eyes. He knew, none better, that there could be only one end to a battle led on one side by the hardened campaigner, David, and on the other by an untried fledgling like Absalom.

Ahithophel knew that also. The narrative (ch. 17.23) says that when he saw that his advice was not to be followed, he saddled his ass, went home to his own town, put his affairs in order, and hanged himself. He was not going to be there when David returned in triumph. His ploy had failed, and he knew it.

Hushai left the palace so soon as he could without arousing suspicion, for there was much to be done. David and his company had not yet crossed the Jordan on their way to Mahanaim. For the present they were safe while Absalom sent to collect all the fighting men of Israel; that much had been attained by Hushai in effecting the acceptance of his suggestion, but David now had to be advised of progress. Hushai went to Zadok and Abiathar, the twin High Priests, who, themselves loyal to David, had remained in the city under cover of discharging their sacred office. They passed the message to their young sons, and they in turn set out to find David and tell him the outcome of Hushai's work and what to expect from Absalom. By the following morning David and his forces were across Jordan and well on the way to Mahanaim, which they must have reached after two or three days' journeying; upon arrival he immediately began to dispense his men for the ensuing battle. It would seem that his apparent former willingness to leave the outcome in the Lord's hands had rather quickly evaporated when faced with his

enemies; quite likely his commander-in-chief Joab pressed him into it. Joab knew only one language, the language of armed combat, and as a man of Judah himself—he was David's nephew—he was not going to allow men of Israel to gain the ascendancy.

Absalom and his army crossed Jordan into Gilead and before long battle was joined. The issue was not long in doubt. David's hardened veterans made short work of their northern countrymen and it was not long before the latter were in full flight. David had foreseen the outcome and he had ordered Joab and his other leaders to take care that Absalom himself should come to no harm. Despite his son's treason and designs against his own life, he still loved him and was in the mood to forgive him all that he had done. But Absalom, riding a mule in frantic flight to get away, was caught in some way by his head, or perhaps by his luxurious long hair, in the boughs of a great tree in the forest, and hung there, unable to free himself. Joab, apprised of the fact, and in crass defiance of the king's wishes, took some of his men and killed Absalom as he hung there helpless. He had no intention of risking David's soft-heartedness paving the way for perhaps a second rebellion of this nature and what he did was probably dictated by self-interest as much as anything else. Absalom had appointed Joab's cousin Amasa to command the army in his place and he was not going to risk the loss of that position when all was over.

It now remained to acquaint David with the result of the battle and of the death of his son. David had remained at Mahanaim with one section of the forces to defend the city; Joab and his men were in the plains of Gilead near Jordan twenty miles away. Two runners were sent to convey the news. The first gave his message "*Blessed be the Lord thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord, the King*". David received the welcome news with equanimity but with one overpowering anxiety. He leaned forward. "*Is the young man Absalom safe?*" The runner gave an evasive reply; he knew not how to tell the King the truth, and then the second runner arrived. "*Tidings, my lord the King, for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee*". With increasing apprehension came the question again "*Is the young man Absalom safe?*" The runner looked round at the circle of strained faces, then again at the King, and replied in a lower tone of voice "*The enemies of my lord the King, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is*".

And at those words the King broke down. Rising from his seat, he made his way blindly through the throng towards his own room and as he went they heard his voice rising high in

lamentation "O my son, Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom. Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

To be continued.

ONE SHALL BE TAKEN AND THE OTHER LEFT

A Second Advent theme

"In that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken and the other left . . . and they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together" (Luke 17. 34-37).

Many whose knowledge of the Divine character and Plan has by no means equalled their zeal for God and righteousness have dwelt, fervently and almost gloatingly, upon the implication of those words. Suddenly, without warning, without previous notice, the "elect" will be snatched away to heaven from amidst the unrighteous, and the celestial doors will be closed for ever! Too late then for repentance; nothing left but outer darkness, weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, for those who have spurned the day of grace and have found themselves "left". The logical implication of this belief has been well worked out; tracts are still to be met with describing the chaos that will ensue at that dramatic moment when every Christian engine-driver is whisked in a flash from the footplate of his express; every Christian sea-captain from the bridge of his ocean-liner; every Christian car-owner from the wheel of his car—most of these themes were worked out before the days of air travel and this type of tract is not always up to date, but doubtless the same principle would be held to apply to Christian pilots of passenger airplanes. It is not a conception that offers any honour or glory to God, but then so many of the ideas of the nineteenth century relating to the Second Advent are like that, and we who hold—or ought to hold—a far more enlightened and rational view of the manner of and method of our Lord's coming must needs take care that we do not retrogress to anything like that view ourselves. The tendency is amongst us, a tendency characteristic of every Christian reform movement a generation or so after the death of the reformer who gave it its first inspiration and impetus. The waves of understanding come farther up the beach than ever they have done before, but there follows a backwash that oft-times undermines much of the effect of the good work that has been done. This is one of the

occasions when we do well to remember our Lord's words of reproof "Ye know not what spirit ye are of; the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them".

There is no doubt, of course, that the text *does* speak of some gaining a prize that the others lose. The point to be considered is, what is that prize and who are they that gain it? And what are the consequences upon those who fail to gain, those who are "left"?

It is clear that this is one of the happenings associated with the Second Advent. These words of Jesus appear in the catalogue of signs and evidences and events given by him in answer to the disciples' questions "*When shall these things be, and what shall be the signal of thy presence, and of the culmination of the Age?*" As such we find the words in Luke 17. 34-37 and Matt. 24. 28, 40-41. They do not appear in quite the same connection in the two accounts and have to be disentangled from other sayings, but it is comparatively easy to discern the connection in which the words were used and to pass on from that to a consideration of their import.

The Second Advent includes a number of different phases and aspects, each displaying characteristics of its own, but all, when fitted into proper sequence, having place in the *Parousia* or presence of the Son of Man. The *Parousia* is the period which endures from the moment of his coming into our world of time and space to gather his own, to the end of the Millennium when all things in heaven and earth have become subject unto him, and He delivers up the restored Kingdom to God the Father, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15. 28). These passages in Matthew and Luke about the one being taken and the other being left are associated with that phase of the Second Coming which is likened to the days of Noah. We need therefore to note the analogy very carefully; the similitude was not chosen by our Lord lightly but because it is capable of giving us valuable teaching.

"As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man" said Jesus (Luke 17. 26). Likewise, also, He went on, as it was in the days of Lot. The likeness is in the suddenness and unexpectedness of the catastrophe *after* due warning had been given and

generally unheeded and *after*—this is important—the few who *did* heed had taken advantage of the offer of salvation provided and had been saved. Noah and his family entered the Ark before the catastrophe and were saved. The rest of the world were left behind and perished. Lot and his daughters fled to the mountains before the disaster that overtook the Cities of the Plain and were saved. Their unbelieving fellow citizens were left behind, and perished. *“Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed”* (Luke 17. 30). The word for “revealed” there is *apokaluptetai*, meaning an open and evident manifestation. That one word gives us an indication of the time lapse in this matter. The “days of Noah” figure indicates a period in the Lord’s presence when He is already within the time and space framework of the material creation, already in the spiritual “heavens” of this earth, waiting to execute judgment but staying his hand the while his faithful ones are heeding the call to get ready for entrance into the Ark, or to flee to the mountains, to use either the Deluge or the Sodom picture as the case may be, and the preaching of imminent judgment is going out to the world, but there is no outward evidence that can appeal to human senses to support that preaching. Nothing to see; nothing to hear; only faith to believe. When the catastrophe does happen, when the Deluge does come to sweep them all away, the Son of Man is openly revealed in his *apokalupsis*—plainly evident, but this is after the “taken” ones have been taken; from the very nature of the case it must be that the time when some are taken and others left is before the final catastrophe—they are taken away from the “wrath to come”.

This “days of Noah” phase, then, is the first period of the Second Presence, the period during which our Lord, having left the immediate presence of his Father, has entered the “heavens” or spiritual environment of this earth. Invisible to men and perhaps to evil angels also, He proceeds with the preliminaries to the great work of his Kingdom. The only evidence, even to his own disciples, the “Watchers”, of this fact is the provision of “meat in due season”, Truth now due for the household of faith. *That* is something which we can appreciate and take to ourselves as the first gift of our returned Lord; that was the promise of Luke 12. 37 and if we are as near the end of the Age as we think we are, and as the political events of to-day appear to indicate, there is not likely to be a greater or even an equal repetition of the feast of Truth that was experienced in the latter half of the nineteenth century. We are still living in the “days of Noah” period, but verging rapidly upon the catastrophe which brings that period to an end

and replaces it with the outwardly manifest evidence of the Second Coming. But by that time all who are to be “taken” will have been taken, and all who are to be “left” will have been left.

Now the “taking” must of itself be unnoticeable to the world. The sudden disappearance from the earth of all true Christians, even though they be a “little flock”, in the manner beloved of the evangelistic tracts previously referred to would most assuredly attract notice and elicit comment. After all, it would only require three or four Christian engine-drivers to disappear simultaneously from their footplates, leaving no trace, in England, and the same in America, and the same in Australia, to set the newspaper reporters busy. Someone would be bound to produce one of the prophetic tracts and the whole matter would at least become a nine days wonder. That would be outward evidence, and the whole principle of the first phase of the Second Advent, the “days of Noah” period, is that there is no outward evidence capable of appealing to the natural man; none whatever. The “taking”, therefore, must be of such a nature that it conforms fully with the ordinary course of events in the world and presents no outward phenomena which is at all unusual.

At this point it ought perhaps to be suggested for consideration that the interpretation sometimes put upon this passage, that those “taken” are “drawn out” from their former Christian association to a purer earthly fellowship where they may enjoy a more accurate understanding of the Divine Plan preparatory to their ultimate change to heavenly conditions, and those “left” are the ones who decline so to “come out”, does not really fill the requirements of the teaching. Noah and his sons were not invited to settle in a peaceful farmstead in some secluded part of the earth while the rest of their fellows were left to languish in the wicked world; neither was Lot with his daughters called to a Bible study in some quiet house in Sodom while the sons of Belial were left to roam the streets in peace. In both cases the called and responsive ones were taken right out of their respective worlds to a place of safety and in both cases God then proceeded to destroy those worlds. And in both cases, too, the few whose faith had saved them became the means of starting their respective worlds anew with fresh life—even though the story of Lot’s daughters does not square with modern ethical standards the fact remains that righteous Lot, like righteous Noah, became the father of a new community of human beings who re-peopled the territory whose former inhabitants had died under Divine judgment. The reality is true to the picture; the “taken” ones

come forth when the judgment is over to be the instruments used in bringing new life to the world.

Now that privilege is enjoyed only by those who become "joint-heirs with Christ", associated with him for the conversion and hence giving of life to the world. The "taking" can be nothing else than the "change" of individual believers from mortality to immortality, the death of the human body and resurrection to spiritual conditions. If this is to be a process attracting no special notice in the world of men, as it must be if the "days of Noah" aspect of the Second Coming is to be preserved, it follows that the "taking" will be, not *en masse*, at one point of time, as held by so many evangelical Christians, but gradually, here and there, in ones and twos, just as death seems to come "naturally" to all men in all the forms and for all the reasons that death does come.

That agrees well with Scriptural teaching, embodied in parables such as the goodman of the house, the faithful and evil servants (Matt. 24) the talents (Matt. 25) the man taking a far journey (Mark 13) as well as the epistles to the Corinthians and Thessalonians, that our Lord returns silently, like a thief, first of all to gather his Church—of whom the dead in Christ are to rise first and then the living are to follow—and *afterwards* to be revealed to the world *with* his Church for the world's salvation. At some time during this "days of Noah" phase, there is a period, how long or how short we do not know, during which the sleeping ones are raised to be with him in the spiritual "heavens", — referred to by Paul in 1 Thess. 4. 17 as the "air"—and his remaining faithful disciples go to join them at the moment of death. "*We shall not all sleep*" he told the Corinthians "*but we shall all be changed . . . for the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*" All that is the first work of the Second Advent; it has to be completed before the catastrophe can come; and until the catastrophe has come there can be no outward evidence of the Lord's presence that can be appreciated by the world.

The disciples did not understand very perfectly. "*One shall be taken, and the other left!*" "Where, Lord?" they asked. Where were the faithful to be taken? They had expected to stay right where they were, throughout the judgment. The wicked would perish, the scribes and the Pharisees and the priests, but they themselves would remain, and after the holocaust they would sit on twelve thrones reigning as kings over a restored and righteous earth. This talk of being taken away to some unknown region frightened them. "Where shall we be taken, Lord?"

One can imagine the ready sympathy of Jesus with them in their perplexity. How could they be expected to understand? "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. When he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth." How could He speak to them of their destined heavenly home? How could he explain to them that the Kingdom of their dreams and hopes was going to be vaster and grander by far than anything they had ever imagined. But He must give them the best possible answer; and He did give them the best possible answer, one which satisfied their question. "*And he said unto them 'Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.'*"

There is not much doubt that it was a contemporary proverb that He had quoted to them. The structure of the phrase, the nature of its subject, and its total irrelevance to the matter under discussion ought to satisfy us that such was the case. He quoted a common proverb as answer in the way that we often do exactly the same thing in modern daily life. "Where the carcase is, there will the vultures be gathered together." It was probably a proverb they had often heard and often used.

The birds referred to were vultures, carrion birds, flocking always to any place where a piece of dead flesh offered a meal, and not leaving until every vestige of death was gone and the ground was sweet and clean again. People do not think of that; they shrug their shoulders and say "Ugh; vultures; beastly creatures, feeding on decay and death; how can such a symbol ever picture anything that is of God and his life?" But God made the vultures! Suppose God had never made any vultures. What would become of the dead bodies then? They would lie in the hot sun and breed disease and pestilence, and still more death, and so continuing death. In England a generation ago the man who collected the house refuse was known as the "dustman" and disesteemed as a socially undesirable although necessary member of society. To-day he rides on a smart electrically propelled vehicle, wears a uniform as often as not, and insists upon being called a "cleansing operative". The vultures of Palestine were cleansing operatives; in them death was swallowed up in life, and their gathering together was an indication to the observer that, for that occasion and in that place at least, they were abolishing death and bringing life to light.

Did Jesus mean to convey all that? He certainly meant the disciples to know that just as the vultures would be found gathered together around that which was the subject of their hearts

desire, gathered from all quarters to the feast, so would the faithful "taken" ones find themselves gathered together in just that place, in just that company, and for just that purpose, which was their dearest desire. Where or how, what matter? They would be satisfied when they awakened in his likeness. That must have been the primary answer to their question. "Where, Lord?" "Just where you want to be, gathered together around the work which is the purpose and aim of your lives, your calling, your destiny."

Perhaps, in after days, pondering over these things, a deeper thought may have come to them. For vultures are not the only created beings who are said to eat flesh. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6. 54-55). "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John 6.51.) That was not living flesh; until the Saviour had shed his blood upon the Cross, and given his life a Ransom for all, there was no flesh of which either Church or world could partake. It is out of that partaking that new life comes for all mankind. Those who *now* partake of his flesh become his ministers to bear his life to the citizens of a new and cleansed world in which death finds no place. It is not an analogy that we ought to press too far; but we should realise as we think upon these things that Jesus himself did not shrink from the horror and indignity and shamefulness of the death that He died in order to provide that flesh which is given for the life of the world. "A body hast thou prepared me" He said to his Father; that body had to be utterly consumed before life could begin to flow to a dying world. In the Tabernacle types the outward manner of that consuming was the burning, outside the Camp, of the hoofs and hide and suchlike parts of the bullock of sacrifice, a stench in the nostrils and a defiling thing to those who beheld, but to God, as represented in the offering of the vital organs on the altar in the Court, an offering of sweet savour, acceptable

to him. Perhaps, then, as understanding deepened in later days, the disciples did realise that just as the vultures were ordained by God to rid the earth of death and death-dealing influences, so they, gathered together with one accord just like those vultures, would be used of God to rid the world of men of death and death-dealing influences. That is to be the destiny of the "taken" ones when in the Lord's due time their whole company is complete beyond the Veil.

In Matthew's account the remark about the vultures appears to be misplaced. It comes at verse 28 immediately after Jesus' statement that his *parousia* is to be as the lightning, or bright radiance coming from the east, and it is difficult to see what connection the two expressions can have with each other. Jesus could certainly have used the words twice in his talk, but the fact that in Luke's account they are given as the answer to a question which is itself recorded perhaps justifies us in thinking that Luke has the more accurate record here, and that verse 28 in Matt. 24 should come after verse 41, and thus put the two accounts in harmony.

Quietly, then, unobtrusively, the world in general knowing nothing about it, the returned Lord is gathering his faithful ones, taking them to himself—as one by one they finish their earthly course. Just what are the conditions of that gathering to him "in the air" we do not know, for it relates to spiritual things of which we cannot be made cognisant whilst in the flesh, but it may very well be a condition similar to that in which our Lord remained during the time between his resurrection and ascension. What we do know, and the knowledge should give us ground for intense joy, is that those thus "taken" are gathered together and remain gathered together for the purpose of cleansing the world of all evil and of all death and of all that is associated with death. It is for that the world is waiting; for that the whole creation is groaning and travailing in pain together, waiting, although they realise it not, for the manifestation of the sons of God.

"And all men shall fear. and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of his doing." (Psalm 64, 9).

Here is a text which will find its fulfilment when the thousand year reign of Christ has begun to bring forth its fruits of knowledge and blessing for all nations. It is God's design that all men shall come to a knowledge of the Truth (1 Tim. 2. 4) and having done so to face for themselves the issue of life or death. The

Psalmist speaks of that time when He has made wars to cease to the end of the earth, (Psa. 46. 9) has put down injustice and oppression and every evil thing, and shown men just what can be made of a world that is organised and governed along lines of love and righteousness. Surely the majority of men then will "wisely consider of his doing" and choose the way of life, that they might live.

THE SADDUCEES AND THE RESURRECTION

A consideration of Luke 20 27-40

"Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife." (Luke 20. 33).

The Sadducees, who were the materialist philosophers of Jesus' day, did not believe in a resurrection to a future life and had no use for Jesus' teaching of a coming Messianic Kingdom in which "all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth". (John 5. 28). They despised the simple faith of women like Martha who knew that her dead brother Lazarus would "rise again in the resurrection at the last day." (John 11. 24). And they thought they had found a weak point in the argument, to put Jesus in a quandary. So they came to him with their conundrum.

The question was based on the old Mosaic law which sought to prevent any family inheritance passing to another line in consequence of there being no male heir in the particular family. Moses had provided that in the event of a man dying without leaving a son to inherit his estate, his widow was not free to re-marry whom she pleased, neither was she at liberty to remain single. It was the obligation and duty of the dead man's nearest brother to take the widow as his wife. The first-born son of that union was then to be accounted, from the legal standpoint, not the son of his true father, but the son of the dead man, and that first-born became heir to the dead man's property, taking his family name and behaving in all ways as if he were in reality his son. By means of this custom it was hoped to keep every family inheritance in the line of the family to which it had originally belonged. Whether the custom was ever carried out in its fulness or whether it was even really practicable in later times when Israel grew into a great nation is not material to the point now at issue. Suffice it, thought these Sadducees, that here is something which cannot possibly fit into this fantastic teaching about men and women being resurrected from the dead to live on earth again.

Thus it was that Jesus listened patiently whilst they unfolded their story. There were seven brothers, good Israelites all and zealous for the laws of their fathers. The eldest was married but unfortunately he died without leaving an heir. The second son, obedient to the Law, married the widow with the intention of raising up seed to his brother. Most regrettably, he died also, without having achieved his object. The

third brother was no less zealous in his devotion to the Law, and without delay he married the already twice widowed woman. His good intentions were cut short by his own untimely demise and the unfortunate wife was passed on in turn to brothers four, five, six and seven, all of whom died in turn without son or heir. It is perhaps not surprising to learn that after this series of matrimonial disasters, the woman died also, leaving seven inheritances without owners.

Incidentally the story as framed by these Sadducees is a bitter commentary on the contempt in which women were held in the days of the First Advent. These men saw nothing distasteful in the idea of this unfortunate wife being passed on from man to man seven times repeated. The point of their question would have been equally well made had there been only two husbands involved, but they had to make it seven. The woman in the story was viewed merely as a means of producing the desired heir to the inheritance and apart from that received no consideration at all. It is important to bear that fact in mind when considering this incident.

With sly malice therefore the fateful question was brought into the open. The seven men and the woman have all been raised from the dead and stand upon earth again, alive and virile. *"Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife!"*

It is only when one considers for a moment the nature of the Mosaic laws regarding marriage that one realises just how diabolically clever was that question. It was not merely a matter of deciding which of the seven was the legal husband of the woman. The laws of Deut. 25 forbid any woman to return to her first husband after having been married to a second; to do so was "an abomination to the Lord". On that showing it would be necessary in the resurrection for this woman to remain the wife of the seventh husband. But the laws of Lev. 18 branded as criminal any man who stood in husbandly relationship to his brother's wife during the brother's lifetime; and with the first brother now alive again and present before them there could be no doubt that his was the first legal marriage and therefore all the other six brothers were lawbreakers and also "abomination to the Lord". To whichever brother the Lord awarded the wife, therefore, He would be recommending the breaking of one or another of the Mosaic laws on

the subject and making one or more of the persons in the story into transgressors. To those legalistic minds there was no way out of the impasse; there could be no such thing as a resurrection without compelling someone or other to break the laws of Moses.

In addition to that already sufficiently condemning fact, there was also the question of the inheritances. With the seven brothers all back on earth, to whom would each property belong? The wife would have become the legal custodian of all seven estates after the death of the seventh brother, and until the birth of her first son—the son which was never born, for the Sadducees took care that in the story she died childless. But suppose in this new resurrected life she did bear a son to whichever husband secured the award of her as wife? Under the Law that son would become heir of all seven inheritances, whilst the seven original owners were standing by, morally if not legally each still entitled to his own property. There must have been a certain amount of rubbing of hands together as these learned men waited for Jesus to unravel this legal tangle.

His was a simple answer, and for all its unexpectedness it was incontrovertible. *“Those deemed worthy to obtain that age, and that resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; for they can die no more, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection”*. (Luke 20. 35-36 Diaglott). There was a world of meaning in those few simple words of Jesus, and most of it does not occur to our Western minds until we relate the answer to the question, and the background of the question.

Jesus was not referring to people of the world generally in his reply, and He was not referring to the institution of marriage as such. He was talking about the specific problem raised by these Sadducees, the relation of the Mosaic Law on re-marriage of widows to the resurrection and mankind's future in the Millennial Age. The word “marry” in this text is one that refers to the action of a man *taking a woman to be his wife*, and is not used in this form to describe a woman entering into marriage. Likewise the word rendered “given in marriage” is one that refers to the *giving of a woman to a man*, as by a relative who thus formally hands her over much as a modern bride's father will “give away” his daughter at the ceremony, or as Ruth the Moabitess was given to Boaz to be his wife that he might raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. Both terms are consistent with the conclusion that Jesus was telling the Sadducees that in the future age men would not take

women in marriage for the purpose laid down in the Mosaic Law, neither would women be given in marriage for that purpose, *because men will die no more*, like the angels. Quite obviously in a world where there is no death the question of raising up an heir to a dead man's inheritance will not arise. Likewise the puzzle of deciding who will be the rightful heir to the inheritances is very simply resolved when it is realised, as Jesus made those men realise, that all men in the Millennial Age are sons or children of God, being children no longer of Adam by lineal descent, but children of God by virtue of the resurrection. Rights to inheritances which are dependent on lineal descent will no longer have any validity in a world where there is no such thing as lineal descent, and so here again the Sadducees' unspoken question fell to the ground.

In few words, Jesus answered the question, not by setting aside the law of Moses nor yet by nullifying its prohibitions, but by showing that the conditions which brought the Mosaic Law into being will no longer apply. The re-marriage of widows to their brothers-in-law for the preservation of inheritances was an arrangement that owed its existence to the fact that death was in the world. Jesus showed that since in the next Age there will be no death the problem will never arise.

The expression applied to those who have been “accounted worthy to obtain that Age” to the effect that “neither *can* they die any more” is liable to provoke queries when it is remembered that if any man should give himself over to deliberate and incorrigible sin, in that day, he can and will assuredly die. It seems evident that Jesus is referring to the completed work of the Age, and the fulness of resurrected life which is the portion of those who are adjudged righteous at the end of the Age, when He uses the phrase “accounted worthy to obtain that Age and that resurrection”. There is no question of worthiness in the first awakening from the sleep of death at the beginning of the Millennial Age. “All that are in their graves” said Jesus, and *all* it must be without reference to worthiness or to unworthiness. And in such case it is literally true that those who pass into the Ages of Glory, perfect and righteous, *cannot* die. It will be no more possible for a righteous man to die than for an unrighteous man to live. That is the Divine decree. God made man to live, and all the time that any man in those ages of eternity lives in harmony with righteousness he can do nothing else but live. Eternal life is as much a concomitant of righteousness as is eternal death of sin.

The A.V. text says that such are “equal to the

angels" which is manifestly incorrect. Man, even perfect man, is inferior to, and not equal to, the angels. Says the Psalmist "*What is man, that thou art mindful of him . . . Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels . . . thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thine hands*". (Psa. 8. 4-6). The correct rendering of the text is as in the Diaglott—they can die no more because they are *like* angels, in the fact that they are perfect and sinless.

Jesus left quite untouched the wider question of the relationship of the sexes in the future Age. This text is sometimes taken as basis for the assertion that human beings will be sexless in that Age, neither man nor woman, but combining the qualities of both. There is really no evidence that Jesus intended to convey any such idea. The indications are in fact to the contrary. It is hardly likely that so revolutionary and unnatural a teaching would have won from some of the listening scribes the admiring admission "Master, thou hast well said". The question which inspired this glimpse of the future was not answered by saying there would no longer be men and women, but that there would no longer be death, and that disposed of the matter for good. There is also the fact that Jesus told them they ought to have known the answer to the question from the Scriptures: "*Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, or the power of God*". Behind all the complicated legislation of Moses, which in the future Age is to be swept away, there lay the original Divine institution of marriage inherent in the original Divine ideal for mankind, and that is certainly not going to be swept away. The first chapter of Genesis gives us the culminating point to which Divine creation had attained prior to the entry of sin. God created man "*in his own image, in the likeness of God created he him; male and female created*

he them . . . and God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good". In the expanded account of man's creation which we have in the second chapter of Genesis the statement is plainly made that it was not good for man to be alone and therefore God ordained a companion for him. That was before sin entered, when there was at the very least the possibility that man might develop his inheritance as God had instructed him without ever yielding to sin. There is no reason for thinking that the dual principle which pervades nearly all Nature and certainly the whole of the higher orders of life, and was extended to man at his creation, is going to be changed, or that perfect humanity at the end of God's creative work is fundamentally any different to perfect humanity at the beginning of that work. The Scripture does not discourse in detail on the conditions of human existence after the consummation of the Divine Plan and the final defeat of evil; we can only reason from the general principles of God's creation, but so far as this particular aspect of the subject is concerned we are on fundamentally more secure ground in the first two chapters of Genesis than we would be by taking the narrative of Luke 20 out of its context and applying it to something which was not in question and was not being discussed.

This incident is a striking example of the folly of men who thought they could prove the fundamental unsoundness of Jesus' teaching. "*Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures*". How often is the same thing repeated in our day! Men criticise and deride the message of the Kingdom because they neither understand nor want to understand its principles. Happy are we if, like Jesus, we can base our message and our faith upon the unassailable Word of God, which "*liveth and abideth for ever*".

From earliest times men and nations have dreamed of and looked for the "Coming One." Nearly every race under heaven has amongst its most cherished traditions the story of One Who came from above to do good, and departed with a promise that upon his return the utmost desire of every man would be fulfilled and the woes of humanity should be no more. Whether in the "Coming One" men saw Tammuz or Adonis of ancient Sumeria or Greece, or in more recent time Hiawatha and Quetzacoatl of the New World, there has always been a deep longing in men's hearts for that Deliverer Who shall come to save them from themselves. Behind such traditions there is a common origin, the story of

how to man, fallen from perfection, a wilful violator of Divine Law and consequently condemned to reap the penalty of that violation—death—came a ray of hope in the promise of God that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head (Genesis 3. 15). God was one day to undo the effects of that evil which man had brought upon himself, and as men multiplied and spread abroad over the face of the earth that promise was carried with them and evolved into a thousand fantastic mythologies all having the same basis of fact. One day "He that shall come" shall descend from the heavens to the salvation of man. (selected)

SHESHBAZZAR

The leader of the Jews who returned to Judea from Babylon at the instigation of Cyrus, King of Persia in 536 BC is stated many times in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah to have been Zerubbabel, mentioned also in 1 Chronicles 3 and by Luke and Matthew as a link in the royal line from David to Christ. In two instances, however, Ezra 1. 8-11 and 5. 14-16, the leader is said to have been one Sheshbazzar, named nowhere else in the Bible. It is sometimes asked: who was this Sheshbazzar?

Most commentators content themselves with saying this was another name for Zerubbabel. Occasionally it is suggested that he was Shenazar, listed as fourth son of Jehoiachin in 1 Chron. 3. appointed to the duty because he was of the royal line (the International Critical Commentary makes this suggestion); that he died soon after reaching Judea and was replaced by Zerubbabel. There is no foundation whatever for this hypothesis and some very good arguments against it.

The narrative in Ezra makes clear that Zerubbabel was appointed by Cyrus to lead the Return and superintend the building of the Temple. Haggai and Zechariah confirm this. What is said of Sheshbazzar in Ezra 1 and 5 is also said of Zerubbabel throughout Ezra. There is no doubt that both names refer to the same person.

The explanation is that Sheshbazzar was the Persian name of Zerubbabel, which was his native name. It appears to be the Persian Shishba-utsur, which means "resplendent before the king". He was evidently known to and enjoyed the confidence of Cyrus to have been appointed to this important office. His native name Zerubbabel, Zeru-ba-babel, means "stranger in Babylon" and would have been conferred by his father, Pedaiah of the godly line of Nathan.

There are several reasons militating against Shenazar being Sheshbazzar and the first leader of the Return. In the first place he was never, as was Zerubbabel, "prince of Judah", i.e. recognised as the one in whom the royal title resided. It is known that Jehoiachin had five sons born to him in Babylon of whom Shenazar was one, but the Divine edict was that none of his natural sons should ever succeed to the kingly title. After Jehoiachin the kingly line in him came to an end. Salathiel, reputed father of Zerubbabel and reputed son of Jehoiachin, was born of the line of Nathan, Solomon's younger brother, by Levirate marriage and so both Salathiel and Zerubbabel, and their descendants, although the legal "princes of Judah" owed their blood descent from Nathan. Shenazar is not mentioned in any of the genealogies as in the royal line and cannot thus be admitted.

He would also have been too old. Jehoiachin's five true sons, including Shenazar, were born before 592 BC, the year in which Babylonian records referring to them are dated. He was probably born about 594 and this would make him 58 years old at the Return under Cyrus, and 74 at the Temple building under Darius, altogether too old for so arduous a responsibility. Zerubbabel could not have been born before about 563, and so would be 23 years old at the Return and 39 in the 2nd year of Darius which accords much more with the relevant narratives. It is possible that in Ezra 1 and 5, Ezra is quoting from official Persian documents in which the Persian name of Zerubbabel was used; in the rest of the narrative he uses the Hebrew name, much as in the Book of Daniel that prophet's Babylonian name Beltshazzar—Balit-sarru-utsur—"Beltis defend the king" (Beltis was the goddess also known as Ishtar and, to the Greeks, Venus) is used in some places and his native name Daniel in others.

"None will be coerced into everlasting life. None who despise the Divine gift of life will be compelled to accept it and live on into all eternity tortured by an existence which they resent and an environment into which they will not fit. The Lord Who gave is also the Lord Who will take away if the gift of life, joy and happiness is not esteemed or desired. No shadow of injustice or even hardship is inflicted upon one who, called into being by the will and power of the Universal

Creator, and finding this creation, its laws and its principles, its obligations and its responsibilities, so distasteful that he will not voluntarily assume his rightful position as a citizen of creation, loses the life of which he cannot make rightful use. The Divine power that gave him life and existence withdraws that life, and existence ceases as though he had never been."

(From "The Golden Future.")

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

A panorama of the way of Christ

4. God resisteth the proud.

Every man went to his own house (John 7.53).

The rulers of Israel had been in furtive conclave, plotting together how they might get rid of Jesus. His teaching and his influence among the people were so effective they would have taken him for their leader and made him their king. This was too much for that select minority who saw a threat to their own power and personal prestige.

Among that gathering were men of many temperaments. Not all of them held the same views or showed the same spirit. Nicodemus, who had gone secretly by night to learn more of the doctrine of Christ, pleaded for a fair deal or trial for the teacher his brother priests hated and feared. His plea was looked upon with suspicion. The scholars among them had already been searching the sacred writings, looking for the forecast of a prophet from Galilee. They could find none, for Jesus was much more than a prophet. The chief priests at the time of his birth had searched the Scriptures at Herod's command, giving Bethlehem as the place from which should come not a prophet but a Governor who should rule Israel. As Herod feared for his throne and was prepared to keep it at the cost of the lives of many innocent children, so were the priests ready to sacrifice an innocent man to retain their own personal authority. The voice of one timid man asking for a just trial by which he must have been acquitted was easily silenced. Their own officers had refused to arrest the teacher whose words of life had stirred them into admiration, stating that "Never man spake like this man". They, too, fell under suspicion. No agreement was reached. Frustrated, afraid, admiring, half convinced, the meeting broke up and every man went his way to his own house, taking their mixed attitudes with them. No wonder Simeon, the aged servant of God, had said to Mary while he held the infant Jesus in his arms, "*This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel*".

Jesus forces people to think, to come to certain conclusions, to make certain decisions for good or ill. It is either yea or nay. Either He is accepted or rejected, loved and followed or hated and despised. The indifferent do not count and the timid are usually too late to do much more than send a wreath, to speak fine words when death has closed the ears which might have been cheered in life and gladdened by them. Foreknowing the wavering minds of men and the

proud hearts who love the best seats, God had sent his kingly Son in lowly garb, to be a stumbling stone to those who could not or would not believe on him. As forecast, they either bruised themselves upon that stone or were crushed by it, while those who believed were exalted in heart and mind. To them He was precious. History and human nature do not change. Neither does God. The call to accept the rule of the Prince of Peace has been answered by blood and violence. The few who have followed are a little flock who have found a Shepherd. Each one has gone to his own house.

*Each heart will seek and love its own
My goal is Christ, and Christ alone.*

Jesus, during his lifetime on earth, never regarded this world as his world. When questioned by Pilate as to his kingship, he replied, "My kingdom is not of this world". The opening words of his ministry were, "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel". From many references of this sort to another world the inference has been drawn that believers of the gospel would at death be mysteriously transferred from an earthly to a heavenly dwelling place. Yet the earth was made for man and man for the earth. What Jesus offered men was life, under the varying metaphors easily understood as synonyms for life. The Biblical aspect of the world is that of society, of various systems existing on the earth among mankind in general. It informs us that the first world, whatever its size, perished at the great deluge of Noah, a disaster which imprinted itself indelibly upon the minds of all succeeding generations. The world system or order of society they produced, which has continued on into this terrible Twentieth century, has contained all the faults of the old world. It is variously described as evil, dark, crooked and astray in the judgment of him who created the earth to last forever. Looking upon that world with all the evidences of men's hate and sin and bitter envyings about him, He dissociated himself with its system and spirit. Justice, mercy, peace truth and all the beauty and tenderness of God-like love were the elements of his world. He lived in an atmosphere of sanity and life, far removed from the world of the poor lunatic among the tombs, from the vast charnel house hungry for its daily tally of the dead, from which He rescued a few youthful victims to assuage for awhile the grief of their distracted families.

As he travelled and preached and taught among these sick and dying crowds, pouring out his energies and power in works of healing, conscious of the doubts of his own race, of the hatred of his enemies, of the determined plotting of the priests, the spotless Lamb of God could say with deep feeling "I am not of *this* world". His ways, his teaching, his whole life was as distinctly different as that of a visitor from another world. What had He, the Lord of Life, in common with this lost and dying race of men, whose words were abusive, whose spirit was so alien to the spirit of God? Jesus quenched their boasting by identifying their true sire as that father of lies who in the beginning had deceived and murdered the glory of Eden.

He wore the flesh of natural man, He walked and spoke and ate and drank as other men, was tempted and tried as other men through every avenue of his natural senses, but there the resemblance ended. Rebuking the fiery ardour of his disciples He declared the difference. "*I am not come to destroy. I am come that they might have life; that they might have it more abundantly.*" The great of this world were waited upon, served by scores of bondservants, but the life-giving Lord proved that He came not to be served but to serve others. Knowing who and what He was and whither He went, He performed the task of a slave for his disciples. The world of which He was not, which knew him not, but which God loved, was saved from annihilation by that mighty giving heart which broke in sorrow on the cross. His world, God's world, the kingdom of God, is yet to come on the earth when the proud systems of this world have bitten the dust. Their lease is running out, and soon,

"Jesus shall reign where'er the sun does his successive journeys run,

*His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
till moons shall wax and wane no more."*

The Truth shall make you free" (Jno. 8, 32). Perhaps none appreciate or understand freedom so much as those who have not got it. To be restricted, to be denied all the natural rights of individual liberty, is, to an intelligent mind, the bitterest and most galling of bondages. The birds of the air, the beasts of the woods and the cattle of the fields rejoice in their freedom to roam, to fend for themselves and to live their own lives. Behind bars or cooped within a cage, the spirit may submit but the eye dims and the joy of life fades into listless indifference. Martyrs, offered the choice of stake or life-imprisonment by their tormenters, have chosen the stake rather than the terrible, long drawn out anguish of restraint, of loss of freedom to live and move and have their being beneath the changing skies

and among the living, breathing things of God's creation. For freedom men have willingly given their lives, fighting for the fundamental right of the liberty of individuals and of nations. Today the mixed peoples of the earth clamour for freedom. It is the universal cry of man everywhere. Every sort of bondage once accepted is now felt and resented. The shackles of mankind are being shaken in every city. Forged long ago by hard circumstances, riveted by time and custom, an enlightened people now struggles to be free.

In the days of Jesus the Jewish race was in bonds to Rome. It chafed their proud spirit and roused their animosity when the arrogant conquerors interfered with their internal affairs or slew their rebellious without pity. Freedom to them meant freedom from Rome. Any man who could deliver them from that hated subjection they would have looked on immediately as a Saviour, a Deliverer, a Liberator. Hopefully, they had looked to Jesus, the worker of miracles, whom his forerunner had proclaimed as He of whom all the prophets had spoken. But Jesus spoke to them of a freedom spiritually discerned, a freedom of little interest to the natural fighting man. It was a freedom not of this world, a state of liberty for the sons of peace who would become the children of God. Freedom from sin and death, freedom from ignorance, superstition and fear, freedom from the bondage of sect and creed, from self and selfish aims, was a fine philosophy but it had little appeal for a people ready to take up arms against an aggressive conqueror. They rejected his teaching, and Christ, foreknowing its fate, wept over their holy city of Jerusalem. They took up arms against the iron might of Rome, were defeated and scattered to the four winds, their city a ruin, their temple reduced to smoking rubble.

For twenty centuries the civilised nations have pursued the same path. Suspicious, intolerant, grasping, ambitious, they have marched upon each other, destroying and being destroyed. Freedom is the offspring of truth, not of violence, yet the poets have described Truth as "forever on the scaffold, error on the throne". Truth is not popular, neither was Jesus who claimed to be the Truth. "And now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth." Had Israel, had the leaders and peoples of mankind, been set free from the greater bondage of their own weak nature and all the attendant vices of evil, the tragedies which have overtaken them could not have occurred. The universal practice of the golden rule would have trodden out the baleful fires of pride and fear. Where God is loved with knowledge and sincerity, where neighbours are cherished and respected, no man's hand would

be raised against his brother. Love is truth and truth is love, the only power to set men free from all their strife.

*"He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free
To take away transgression; to rule in equity."*

"The night comes when no man can work" (Jno. 9. 4). Jesus expressed his love for men by his works. In a practical manner He gave sight to a man blind from his birth, while his disciples stood around speculating on the cause of the disease. He was less concerned with how or why than that his God-given power should be used in healing. It was a visible demonstration of the compassion of God on the sufferings of mankind. His was the will and the power to send relief to encourage men to turn from self and the evil ways of the world, to look unto him and be reconciled and live. Knowing his time was short, the Lord of Life would not allow himself to be hindered in his work by intricate discussion. It has been a common fault with scholars and students to cavil and argue, to discuss and debate and dissect a subject, even the very Word itself, until they have talked themselves out of face.

Trained as he had been by the wisdom of God and his work at the carpenter's bench, Jesus turned his knowledge and power to good account. He had the physician's sure touch and thoughtful care for his patient. This work he had done also on the Sabbath day, an act which created a division of opinion among upholders of the law. While the blind received his sight, and the disciples speculated, and the lawyers, having eyes, saw not, and blindly argued, Jesus went on with the work He had to do, healing, teaching and preaching, until cruel hearts nailed his healing hands to a cross. When the sun veiled its glory and darkness lay over the land, his work was finished.

There has come for all God's workers a night time when toil is over and the busy hands are folded in rest. One short life-time is little enough in which to follow the Master's example, "to work the works of God", not always the great works of a full preaching career. Missionary zeal without love is but sounding brass. The works of God are mercy, justice, self-denial, belief, faith, the good fight, the warfare of the pilgrim soul passing through this worldly vale on the narrow road to the eternal bourne in his very presence.

For the religious world also there comes the night when all work in the earth is finished. The voice of the prophet is stilled and the ears of the world become deaf to all but worldly attractions. The end of its systems cannot come without that great falling away from the faith to formalism,

from belief to unbelief in the records of God's Book, and in the plain claims of Christianity's Founder. Jesus said to the blind Pharisees, "*for judgment am I come into this world, that they which see might not see*". His words tested them. They stumbled and fell over their own cold formality. Their sectarianism blinded and bound them fast. The light of the world departed and the dark night of their dispersion closed down a great age of history.

Dark nights close all ages before a new day dawns with hopes of better things. As the lights go out and the daylight fades which once illuminated the high ideals of men and made bright their faith, there is no further scope for work. All the calls have been made, the invitations given, the deeds done, the lives dedicated and yielded, the Gospel preached in all the world for a witness. If there are works yet to be done let them be done quickly, carefully, with speed and dispatch, without the time-wasting trifling with words, for "*the night comes when no man can work*".

*Work till the last beam fadeth
Fadeth to shine no more
Work while the night is darkening
When man's work, is o'er.*

"If this man were not of God he could do nothing" (Jno. 9. 33). The logic of this statement lies in its simple brevity. There was no record in history of any man born blind receiving his sight by any means known to man. The simple operation and instructions of Jesus had performed the miracle, a demonstration of knowledge and power over the accident of birth which had kept a man shut up in darkness. He came seeing, to the astonishment of his neighbours and the annoyance of the strict observers of the law. Jesus' work of healing on the Sabbath day created the usual division of opinion. The mercy, the compassion, the God-given power was lost on the law-worshipping sect whose observance of the letter was fast strangling their faith and freezing to death the warmth of their humanity. It was the man who was blind who saw more than just the blessed daylight. His words were barbed and they found their mark in the cold characters of those proud disciples of Moses, who grudged him the gift of his sight on the Sabbath day. Taunting them for having so much anxious curiosity about the methods of the man who had healed him, he proceeded to mock their own blindness in that they could not recognise such a man by this one credential of doing what no man had ever done before. Then he flung at them the final proof which they of all men should not have needed; they, the teachers, were being taught, not by a greater

than themselves but by one who had recently been a blind beggar.

Stung by the truth of his common sense and all the discomfiture of having the tables turned on them, they cast him out of the synagogue. When Jesus heard that he had been expelled He went to look for him. On finding him He asked, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" The spirited defence of the man before his superiors had revealed his true metal. The seeing eyes of the man looked into the face of the Lord and worshipped him. They were both outside the camp, the Lord and his new follower. Both had been labelled sinners by the self-righteous men inside. Jesus drew a sharp distinction between the physically blind who see with the penetrating eye of faith and the spiritually blind who have their natural sight but cannot discern the things of God. To make right appear wrong and wrong appear right is one of the worst of sins. It is a deliberate denial of reason, truth and justice, a folly the cautious have been wary of committing lest they be found fighting against God.

What is not of God sooner or later comes to an inglorious end. No human power can successfully contest the power and will of God. Pharaoh's magicians withstood Moses and the

plagues increased in intensity. Then they admitted themselves beaten with the words, "*This is the finger of God*". Hardness of heart is the common ailment not of the ignorant but of the lettered. Jesus thanked God that the great truths had been hidden from the scholars but revealed to the childlike in heart, because it seemed good in the sight of God. He did not go into the high places of the earth to seek sons among the noble and the illustrious, the lettered and the proud. The artificial atmosphere of wealth and learning was not his training ground for saints. In the byways He found the humble, rich in faith and to them He gave sight, wisdom, healing and the promise of life, the power to become children of the Most High.

Man achieves what is possible. God does the impossible. Jesus demonstrated this truth. The blind man understood, looked on his healer and believed, while the seeing scribes were blinded by their own prejudices.

*"Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind
Sight, riches, healing of the mind
Yea all I need in Thee to find
O Lamb of God, I come."*

To be continued

Autobiography of the Bible

"I am the oldest book in existence, having outlived the storms of thirty centuries. Men have endeavoured to banish me from the face of the earth; they have hidden, torn and burnt me, and have done to death tens of thousands of my faithful witnesses. No other book has been more bitterly hated; no other book has been more dearly cherished; no other book has been so misrepresented and misunderstood; but to-day, while so many of my foes slumber in death, I still live on.

"It is not for me to speak of the conflicting creeds laid to my charge, but on behalf of the one true purpose of my reverend Author I appeal to reason. Look at the stately trees of the forest, the living green of the meadows bespangled by a thousand lovely flowers, the singing birds that delight themselves amid the beauties of nature, the blue dome of heaven, illumined by the sun, moon and stars that space out a universe too immense for man to fathom; and know that the Creator of these things has a wise and loving purpose equally great and beau-

tiful on behalf of man.

"There is revealed within my covers a plan so broad and a design so deep as to be beyond the power of human origin. My story centres around the Redeemer, who by the grace of God tasted death for every man. Based upon his atoning sacrifice all the dead will be raised, and the whole earth made glorious with life and happiness everywhere, without a trace of sorrow, pain or death.

"My message has blessed every follower of Jesus. It has inspired them with hope, encouraged them to zeal, comforted them in sorrow, strengthened them in faith till they have laid down their all in death, awaiting their grand reward. Like the crystal springs from the mountain side which flow on and on to refresh the luxuriant verdure on the plain below, so in the glad day now dawning, the waters of truth will impart its life-giving blessings to the willing and obedient of mankind, who will forever with one accord, praise, love and adore my Author."

(selected)

THE SEVEN CHURCHES

*A theme from
Revelation*

The second and third chapters of Revelation constitute a distant and unique section of sacred literature which in God's appointed time was intended to disclose an understanding of many hidden aspects of the Divine Plan. It has been customary to call the contents of these chapters "epistles";—such indeed they are, but they are not so much messages from a distant and absent Lord, as words of comfort or censure from an abiding Presence Who, prior to his departure from the earth had said "Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the Age". Beneath his searching eye the whole Church passes all her days; from his warning and comforting voice her way is foretold; and from the beginning she learns from his lips those things He approves or disapproves. They enshrine Jesus' own words, and are the last which we have directly from him. They are, perhaps, the only unabridged records of his sayings in the Church's possession. The Gospel records are scanty, fragmentary; condensed statements, extracts from lengthier discourses; but here we have all, whole and entire, that was spoken by him to the entranced Seer on Patmos. They are most impressively introduced; for He who spoke was gloriously appalled, and walked amid the candlesticks superintending and supervising the flow of the oil and the glow of the light. That He is the Glorious One Who once walked the earth, is attested by his solemn assurance "I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore".

Seven times the Lord entreats the Churches to hear what He has to say. By this token we know to whom the Epistles were addressed, and for whom they contained the Saviour's final instructions. Future ages may discern greater depths in the hidden symbolisms than have yet been seen, but enough has been understood for the Church to know that her journey is across a lonely wilderness way, leaving behind her "her own people and her father's house" in order to share the Throne with him as the "Bride of God's anointed Lamb".

The Churches to which they were addressed were literal, historical Churches, existing at the time John wrote, but at the same time representative and comprehensive of all Churches of all nations and at all times—a complete sample of the whole Body of Christ, both in character and career. As with the Churches so with the Epistles. They were immediately descriptive of actual

conditions, and prophetic of future days. They were messages to these respective Churches, to stir them up to hold fast to what was right, and amend what was wrong. And thus they stand for messages to all other Churches at any time who stand before him in like condition. Inasmuch as conditions were described in one or other of the seven Churches which have been found to exist during various stages of the Church's general career, so those seven Churches become representative and inclusive of the entire Church, and their words of censure or comfort become messages of grave moment to later Church experience of the like kind.

Thus, these seven Epistles set forth the attendant Lord's judgment of the entire Church, as He foresaw and foreknew it from the beginning. They give a graphic picture of her history, as seen by Divine foresight and as students of her pathway see it from these latter days. In a broad generalisation we can see seven distinct stages of her decline, from the warm zealous days at the beginning, before first love had lost its glow, until she is just lukewarm and poor and blind. Again, the Epistles show us the conditions into which the Church of God could divide itself. There could be Laodicean Christians in the Ephesus period, and Ephesian Christians in the Laodicean period. The whole range of Epistles show us the main classifications which could exist side by side, at any stage of her journey. Always some few have kept their first love, while by their sides some were lukewarm, others dead—with only a name. Both in cross section and in historical rotation, the seven Churches have been there, and to meet that state the seven Epistles have always been appropriate as a source of censure or comfort for those who name the Holy Name.

Each Epistle is set out in seven distinct parts, First, an address. (Ephesus, Smyrna etc.); second, a reference to some one or more of the sublime attributes of the illustrious Speaker; third, an assertion of his complete knowledge of the condition, duties, and actions of the persons addressed; fourth, a description of the state of such Church, with praise and promise for some, censure and admonition for others; fifth, an allusion to his Coming, and its effects upon those addressed; sixth, an admonitory command for all to hear what He was saying; and seventh, a special promise to the faithful, overcoming saints. In the last four the order of these seven parts is varied

from the first three, the call to "hear" being put after the promise to the overcomers; but in each Epistle these seven parts may be readily distinguished, showing that there is a completeness and fulness about the whole which will not permit of their significance being confined to the few particular congregations to which they were originally addressed. They were intended for the whole Church in all nations, in all its varied states, fervent or frigid; in peace or persecution; in exaltation or abasement, in all its days or years, from its inception till its journey is done.

The seven churches, then, represent seven phases or periods in the Church's history, reaching from the days of the Apostles until the Lord shall have gathered the last living members of his Church to himself. Their chief characteristics may be found partly in the names of the churches selected and partly in their contents. First there is the Ephesian period—a time when love to Christ was warm and fervent, and service was zealous and whole-hearted. This dates back to Apostolic times, in which days defection began by the cooling love of many, of false profession in others, and of the place-seeking which later developed into clericalism. Then followed a Smyrna (Myrrh, bitter) period of martyrdom, and of faithfulness unto death, but characterised with developments in the establishment of classes and castes within the Church, using Jewish institutions of priesthood and laity as the model, and also in the establishment of the synagogue of Satan to corrupt the simplicity of the Gospel.

Next, the Pergamos period, in which true faith more and more disappeared from view, and clericalism formed itself into a system of orders, from Metropolitans and Bishops down to the lowlier officers who waited upon them. Here the Church became united with the world, and "Babylon" began to rear itself aloft. Then the Thyatira period—the age of splendour and pomp for the priesthood, when the Church (such as she was) usurped the place of Christ, and sought to change times and seasons, and set up her own elaborate ceremonies in place of the simple institutions of Baptism and Memorial Supper. It was the era of the suppression of Truth, of the consigning of the martyrs of Jesus to the dungeon, the stake and the sword, reaching down almost to the days of Luther and the Reformation.

After that the Sardis period, in which some faithful souls "received and heard", leading to separation and a return to the simple truths of Christ—a period when many got free from the doctrine of Balaam and from the teachings of Jezebel; a period of a few worthy names, but marked with deadness and lethargy, the fine

enthusiasm of Worms and Geneva spending itself within the lifetime of the Reformers, followed by stagnant spiritual lethargy until Wesley came and brought in the Reformation a second time.

Then came the Philadelphia period—a time of spiritual awakening and of Bible study and Bible distribution; a time marked by closer adherence to the written word and more fraternity and fellowship between the various sections of Christians. Last of all, the Laodicean period—a time of lukewarmness, when faith had all but evaporated, and conviction was spent, and the Churches knew not how much they had lost, nor knew how near they were to the end of the course, nor realised that the Master stood knocking and awaiting the opening of the door. These seven stages, while shading off and lapping into each successor, stand clearly marked at their peaks. There could be no doubt that Smyrna had given place to Pergamos, for exaltation displaced suffering. Thus each period after Ephesus had a waxing and a waning stage as it lapped upon its predecessor and successor. While however each period had its outstanding characteristic, yet everything that marks any one of these periods marks, in smaller degree, every other period. It is mainly the predominance of one element at a time which distinguishes one era from the others. The characteristics of all seven periods co-exist in every period, only that in one this feature is predominant and in the other, another feature. The creeds, the ceremonialism, have carried through from when the Ephesus defection began, with each feature predominant in turn.

Perhaps we may carry the classification one stage further, and say that the seven Churches could represent seven varieties of Christian people, for every professor of Christianity in his true religious qualities is either an Ephesian, a Smyranean, a Pergamite, a Thyatiran, a Sardian, a Philadelphian, or a Laodicean Christian. It is out of these seven that the Church of Christ has been composed and they have thus existed throughout.

The seven Churches may be found in every general congregation; from the warm glow of Ephesus to the chilling lukewarmness of Laodicea. Thus these Epistles give a directness of application to each and to all who call upon his Name. They will tell us what the Lord's judgment upon us really is, and whether we are worthy of his care.

In every period, in every assembly, the Lord Jesus has walked among his Churches, with eyes of living fire; and these Epistles show us his

opinion of what He sees, of what he loves and of what He hates.

God grant us more of the eyesalve of Truth

to see ourselves as Jesus sees us, so that we may renew to him our first Love, and walk with him in white from day to day.

GOD'S WORKMANSHIP

Our Heavenly Father is the great master workman of all ages and we can trace his wonderful handiwork (1) in his creation (2) in his purposes (3) in his people.

It is this third aspect that is specially precious, and we marvel and rejoice with the Apostle as he writes to the brethren at Ephesus and to those in every place and every century "*For we are his (God's) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*" (Eph. 2. 10). The Bible commences with the account of God's great creative works. Even today, as the greed of man ravages and pollutes the earth, one can still marvel at the grandeur and beauty of what He has created and say with the Psalmist "*O Lord, how wonderful are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches*" (Psa. 104. 24). How difficult it would be to imagine that the beauty of mountain and of stream, of tree and of flower, of bird song and the fragrance of evening, are the product of chance and evolution. How much more reasonable to see in the wonder of creation, as the Psalmist did, the hand of a wise and beneficent Creator. "*The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge*" (Psa. 19. 1, 2).

The Apostle John, taking minds back to those far-off days, further tells that the *Logos*, the Word, was the Father's great agent in creation, and that all his grand designs centre in and devolve upon Christ Jesus our Lord. As it is with his eternal purposes, so also with his peculiar people; these are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Paul's ministry was "to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3.9). The centrality of Christ in all the Father's plans is well shown as we read on—God created all things in Christ Jesus "to the intent that by means of the church might be made known the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3. 10. 11).

And how is this mystery of his much diversified wisdom to be made known to all mankind?

In the same epistle, the Apostle explains firstly that God's calling and preparation of the Church was "to demonstrate for all time to come, the abundant riches of his grace in the love He showed us in Christ Jesus" and secondly, that those to be so used to pass on the message of his so great love were chosen by God to be "his in Christ before the world was made".

Down through the ages the hand of God has been busy—firstly in his great creative acts, again in the carrying forward of his plans and purposes by various means in different ages, and in the present calling out of the people for his name—God's workmanship—his new creation—created in Christ Jesus unto good works.

Concerning God's first creative works read Gen. 1. 31. "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was good". Nor will man's wickedness be permitted ultimately to mar his handiwork. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, He says "Thus saith the Lord that created the heavens: God himself that formed the earth and made it: he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited—I am Jehovah, and there is none else" (Isa. 45. 18). Here we have God's seal and signature, his assurance that his handiwork will not be futile but glorious. To this grand climax of all ages all his purposes inexorably point. James, reporting the words of the Apostle Peter in the well known passage in Acts 15, sums up in just a few words the whole panorama of God's plan to bless all nations; "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name (his workmanship), and to this agree the words of the prophets: After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up; that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things" (Acts 15. 14-17). Now note; "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world".

All of God's works are according to a great eternal purpose, or as one translator puts it, a plan of the ages. Where do God's people come into his great works programme? Does he who

formed the worlds, who creates and sustains all things, need you and me? Surely not! But in his manifold wisdom we were chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world. To what end?—that we should be “holy and without blame before him in love” (Eph. 1.4).

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” What does it mean to be his workmanship? The only other use in the New Testament of precisely the same word refers to the things of the physical creation, which themselves point to God’s character. Even as our Heavenly Father, out of what was without form and void, made the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, so out of frail human creatures, He is able by his mighty power, to create (anew) vessels meet for his use. This, the Apostle Paul tells us, is that same mighty power that He wrought in Christ when He raised him from the dead and set him on high. This life-giving power, life in all its fulness, and our experience as believers, is well pictured in the symbol of baptism; “that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6.4). “For if the spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8.11).

It is, then, by his Holy Spirit, by which we have been begotten into God’s family, that He is working in us. Surely this requires full submission, so that the precious task of making, out of shapeless clay as it were, vessels beautiful and fitted for his service, may go ahead. For it is God’s will that we finally conform to the image, the likeness, of his Son.

What a lot more work needs yet to be done in us; how slowly the pattern is emerging! But we can take comfort from the Apostle’s assuring words “Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a work in you will perform it (complete) until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1.6). And “faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5.24). Our heavenly Father will not half-finish the work and, wearying of the task, abandon it. He who has begun the work of grace in our hearts will not weary, but will finish the work in due time to his own glory and to our eternal blessing, if we are only willing.

The two sides of the transaction are well set out in Phil. 2. 12-13. “Wherefore, my beloved, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”.

How does He work in us? Surely by the experiences and lessons of life as we daily learn to love and trust and obey him. Often, we are poor learners and so at times we need the chastenings which He permits us to have. But it is in love, like a merciful father, that He allows the fiery trials, and though these are not in themselves enjoyable at the time, yet they produce valuable fruit in righteousness if we receive these experiences as from his hand.

Our Heavenly Father works in us also by our fellowship with his people, for each has the privilege, under his hand, of building one another up in faith, of bearing one another up in prayer, of comforting one another in distress. He works in us too by his Spirit illuminating the sacred page, and so speaking to our hearts. Here is needed the spirit of lowly teachableness, so that He may freely work in us to will and do his pleasure. What is his pleasure, his purpose? Firstly, according to Eph. 1.4.5 “that we should be holy and without blame before him in love”; it is to this end that He has chosen us, cleansed us, and given us the privilege of sonship through Christ Jesus. Secondly, according to Col. 1.10 “that we might walk worthy of the Lord, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”; it is for this purpose that He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the Kingdom of his dear Son. And thirdly, according to our Lord’s own words in Luke 12.32 “fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”. It is for his eternal purpose to bless all mankind that He has called us, and is even now working his preparatory work in us, as we yield to him.

All God’s works are perfect, and his special workmanship, the Church of this Gospel age, will be no exception, but will be “a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5. 27). So elsewhere the Church is pictured as a spotless bride, fully made ready for her loving bridegroom. Redeemed and cleansed in the precious blood of Christ, fashioned and moulded by the Father’s hand, God’s peculiar people will be finally fitted for the great work, with Christ, of blessing and restoring all mankind.

One writer has well said “*As some ignorantly misjudge the skill and wisdom of a great architect and builder by his unfinished work, so many now misjudge God by his unfinished work. But by and by, when the rough scaffolding of evil which has been permitted for man’s discipline, and which shall be finally overruled for his good, has been removed, and the rubble cleared away, God’s finished work will universally declare his*

infinite wisdom and power, and his plans will be seen to be in harmony with his glorious character”.

Meantime, the final shaping and perfecting of his people goes on, and you and I must daily be submissive to his will so that He may continue to work in us. His pleasure for all of us is that we should be holy and blameless before him in love, that we should continue to grow in grace, knowledge and good works, and in the ages to come should show forth his praises to the blessing of all mankind. Development of this character likeness of his Son is the work God desires

to do in your life and mine; this work He will surely complete in us when all the lessons and experiences of life needful for our growth in grace and understanding are fulfilled.

With the Apostle, let us pray that *“our God will count us worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power”*. Let us praise him for the privilege that is ours in this age alone to be *“his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”*.

(*“Peoples Paper”*, Melbourne)

THE LONELINESS OF JESUS

*A glimpse of
our Lord*

Almost the first concern evinced by our Lord on entering upon His public ministry was for companionship. He gathered round Him selected companions, *“that they might be with Him”* (Mark 3. 14). His choice was made mainly from the working classes, men of action, men who toiled for a living with their hands, men who had no resources apart from what they could earn, men who had looked life in the face and knew its hardest facts.

He had little interest in rich men as such, nor in the complexities that riches bring. He desired simplicity, *“plain living and high thinking”*, but, above all, He sought fellowship, for His life was lonely. Human relationships had been discarded; *“My brother, my sister and my mother,”* said He, *“are they who shall do the will of My Father in Heaven”* (Mark 3. 35). Apart from such, He had no intimates in life. How lonely is a life without a soul with whom one may converse in loving intimacy; such human loneliness was Jesus’ lot. Did He find fellowship in those He called about Him; did they fill His need, understand Him, and sympathise? Were they not, on the contrary, self-centred, self-occupied and self-concerned?

Hear them as the storm raged about them on the Lake of Galilee: *“Carest Thou not that we perish?”* Listen to Peter, as with astonishing self-complacency he remarked: *“Behold, we have forsaken all and followed Thee. What shall we have therefore?”* (Matt. 19. 27). Was there ever such a speech made to One Who had left the glory of Heaven for the sake of sinful men? Toward the end of his ministry, after more than three years of intercourse, precept and holy

example, what must He have felt as He came upon them quarrelling among themselves who should be the greatest? No; He had no “brother, sister or mother” fellowship; to the last he walked a lonely path. How often we read: *“He was alone upon the land”* (Mark 6. 47); *“Jesus was left alone”* (John 8. 9); *“He departed into a mountain Himself alone”* (John 6. 15). Not that the disciples meant to withhold from their Lord the fellowship He so much desired. Indeed when many went back and walked no more with him, the twelve refused to go away, and He gladly recognised this. *“Ye are they that have continued with me in my temptations,”* He said. They continued with him, but, oh, how self-occupied even in that companionship!

At length they set off on that last sad journey to Jerusalem. The end was in his view, though not in their’s. Must He face this alone? Tenderly He opened the subject to them as they went together. Surely this would draw out their loving sympathy, so He told them what was about to happen, that *“He must suffer many things, and be killed, and be raised again the third day”* (Matt. 16. 21), but He was met by a rebuke; they refused to believe the news. It was so utterly opposed to all their hopes. Was such a calamity to end their cherished visions of a glorious Messianic reign in which they were to share? Impossible; it would not be! So our Lord was left alone to his thoughts and sorrows, and they walked with him wholly out of fellowship with what so moved His heart.

With infinite patience later on He tried again (Matt. 17. 22-23). He unfolded the coming betrayal and the dreadful killing, and then the rising again. They listened in silence, and deep

depression fell upon them all; "*they were exceedingly sorry*"—sorry that, after all, the calamity must come, that it must be accepted as inevitable, that their prospects were an illusion, and hope was gone. They did not understand; they were so taken up with themselves that they did not enter into what it meant to him.

Again a third time (Matt. 20. 17), Jesus took them apart in the way and told it all again, adding this time the mocking and scourging, as though appealing to their hearts for sympathy. Did they extend it to him? They had had time to think and talk together, and a new aspect of the matter dawned on them. All was not so dark; He would rise again; the Kingdom would come after all. They had not followed him in vain, and while He dwelt on the betrayal, the mocking, the scourging and the death, their self-centred hearts were occupied with their place in the Kingdom that would follow! At such a time as this, two of them actually came forward with a request for first place. Jesus continued his path to the valley of the shadow alone, with no human heart to sympathise or understand or share His sorrows.

"Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come," said He to them on the last evening of his earthly life, "*that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone,*" "And yet," He added, "*I am not alone because the Father is with me*" (John 16. 32). One heart fully understood and cared and sympathised with the Saviour, and one heart alone—the Father's.

When the three who were nearest to him went with him to the garden they failed him even there. They could not watch one hour. He withdrew himself—He was alone.

Thus the Lord sought fellowship with his own who were in the world—his own whom He loved to the end; the uttermost, yet whose response was so meagre, and whose love so cold. Such was his experience then; what is it now? Jesus still seeks the fellowship of his people; we who are called unto the fellowship of Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1. 9). Does He receive the fellowship He seeks, or do we fail to give it to him? Is our contact with him after all mainly selfish? Do we seek him only for what we can get ourselves, pardon, protection, help, guidance? Is our need our first concern, or is our real objective that of Paul, "*that I may know him and the fellowship of his sufferings*"? Are we prone to forget that our Lord seeks something from us, that, apart from us, He is still alone in relation to men, and that He longs for our co-operation in his plans and purposes, even to the extent of our suffering on behalf of others, as He set us an example? Like the disciples of old, we can be so taken up with ourselves, even though, like them, we have left all to follow him, that his thoughts and purposes and yearning desires take a minor place, and *our* needs and hopes fill all our thoughts, and even our prayers. We are so selfish in our spiritual outlook that even our most holy things are sometimes tinged with it. How often it is we seek our own, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's (Phil. 2. 21), and the Lord looks to us often in vain for that understanding, sympathy and fellowship with him in his world plans, in comparison with which our little personal concerns, hopes and fears are insignificant indeed.

May He forgive us, and teach us how to enter into a life of real communion with him in the days that yet remain to us.

TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, THE PLANTING OF THE LORD (Isa. 6. 3).

A carpenter interested in the Plan of the Ages has pointed out that there is represented in a piece of oak, beauty, strength, durability and usefulness. On the end there can be found white streaks or lines. These are called "medullary rays" or rays of light. They are really small tubes which carry the sap from under the bark to the heart of the tree, and, as the annual rings are laid on in fluid form, which alternately dries and contracts and thus each compresses the heart, or centre of the tree harder and harder. Thus, the centre is the BEST and not liable to be attacked by grubs. He suggested that the brethren do all they can to keep in the centre,

out of harm's way, and at the same time be nourished and enriched by the sources of strength and beauty. Whenever one of these little tubes is cut it forms one of those light splashes on the face of the wood. He pointed out the development of the oak; 100 years growing to maturity, 100 years standing at the perfect mark and 100 years to deteriorate, 300 years in all, but if cut down in its prime and allowed to lie out in the open for 10 years (perfect number) exposed to storms, wind, etc., it would develop into a timber which would last and be useful and beautiful and strong for thousands of years.

(selected)



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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

It is said that Beethoven, when he had completed one of his grand musical compositions, was accustomed to test it on an old harpsichord, lest a more perfect instrument might flatter it or hide its defects. Many are unwilling to put the results of their labours to any such test as this, preferring to be deceived and deceive others with outward appearances. With human character it may be observed that those traits that most entitle us to the love and esteem of men, and which honour us most in the sight of God, are not always revealed on notable occasions and by extraordinary events, but manifest themselves in the quiet course of every-day life. This is the old harpsichord that tries character on its real merits. It is one thing to appear in the midst of popular favour and worldly success, and another to carry a noble, generous and magnanimous spirit amid the worries and anxieties and trials that spring up along the path hour by hour and day by day. Ruskin has truly said that "*greatness is the aggregation of minuteness*". It is the sum of little things well done that constitutes, as a whole, a really useful and noble life. It is not those who wait in idleness for some chance opportunity to distinguish themselves and do the world a great service who are likely to be the benefactors of the race, but rather those who proceed earnestly about their daily duties "doing with their might what their hands find to do". There are but few to whom it is given to discover new continents, to do an act that frees a race from bondage, to utter thoughts that stir the heart of mankind, but it is given to each and to all to pass each day of life so well, so nobly, so truly, so faithfully, so near to God, that all life is lifted up, and all the world made better by such living and doing.

BOOK REVIEWS

Pyramidology, Vols 1-4. The appearance on page 103 of this issue of a note on Isa. 19. 19-20 relating to the Great Pyramid of Egypt renders it apt to remind old readers and advise new readers of the continued availability of Dr. Adam Rutherford's comprehensive works on this subject. The four volumes of "Pyramidology", comprising in all some 1500 pages with copious plates, diagrams and tables, constitute a complete dossier of information on the history, scientific features, and Christian symbolism of the Pyramid as deduced and seen by a great many investigators and writers from early BC centuries to the present day. Quite apart from the deductions as to Biblical matters presented, the books contain a wealth of statistical information on geophysical and astronomical facts brought completely into line with the up-to-date state of these sciences and this forms a useful source of reference for serious students.

Each volume is complete in itself, dealing with a particular aspect of the subject, as follows:

Book 1: The Science and Christian Message of the Great Pyramid.

Book 2: The Glory of Christ as revealed by the Great Pyramid.

Book 3: Bible Chronology and Archaeology of the Great Pyramid.

Book 4: The History of the Great Pyramid.

A more detailed outline of contents can be obtained from the publishers on request, address as below.

Single volumes or the entire set are available, at prices, post free, Book 1, £9; Book 2, £10.50; Book 3, £15.50; Book 4, £13.50: some slightly defective copies (contents not affected) are available at £2 per volume less than the above prices.

Send all orders and correspondence to: Institute of Pyramidology, 29 Station Road, Harpenden, Herts., AL5 4XB England. (Note: NOT from BFU Hounslow).

Gone from us

— ❖ —

Sis. F. Burge (Coventry)

Bro. A. Gayton (Nuneaton)

Bro. R. Grice (Ruddington)

— ❖ —

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

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous King*

11. Declining Days

Joab the commander-in-chief strode out of the conference tent where his officers and the officials of David's court had been sitting in conclave and began to make his way with purposeful steps towards the house in which David had shut himself up to bemoan the death of his favourite son, Absalom. The warriors of Judah, standing and sitting about in groups, watched him go in silence. There was an air of gloom and despondency throughout the camp. Joab glanced morosely at some of them as he walked past. These men had followed David loyally into exile and had fought like tigers to defend him from his rebellious son Absalom and the hosts of Israel. They had won the day; the northern tribes' forces were defeated and dispersed, Absalom their leader was dead, and the threat to David's kingship removed. The king could go back to Jerusalem and resume his reign, and everything would be as it was before. The disgrace of their ignominious flight from the capital would be wiped out by the triumph and glory of their return. They would bring back their king with rejoicing to place him once again upon the throne of the Lord. But now, most unaccountably, all this rosy anticipation had vanished. So far from setting himself at the head of his victorious warriors to lead a triumphal march to Jerusalem, he was sitting in a darkened room away from them all weeping and lamenting his lost son. They could hear his voice now, penetrating the closed door, "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son". They looked at each other as men ashamed and uncertain, and watched their leader as he strode up to the door, opened it and went in.

David looked up, cold hostility in his eyes as he recognised his visitor. He made to speak, but Joab waved him peremptorily to silence. "This day" declared the old soldier bluntly "you have put to shame all your loyal servants who have saved your life. You love your enemies and hate your friends. You have shown this day that you have no regard for the loyalty and bravery of either princes or people, for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well". He looked down at the recumbent figure of the man he had served so loyally though unscrupulously, contempt showing in his face. "*Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants; for I swear by the Lord, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this*

night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now".

There seems little doubt that from this time, about six years from the end of his reign, David was losing his hold over the nation. More than forty years had passed since the young women of Israel had eulogised his victorious return from battle with dances and song "*Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands*". The virile, handsome youth they had idolised had become a remote and somewhat embittered old man, indulgent towards his close friends but distant from the mass of his people. There are indications too, that at this period of his life his physical powers were failing; in both Chaps. 18 and 21 of 2. Sam. there are instances where the men of Israel dissuaded him from going into battle with them on this score. Ch. 21. 15-17 alludes to an incident when David in battle with the Philistines, would have been killed had not his nephew Abishai come to his aid and rescued him, after which David went out to battle no more. Joab's warning therefore was no empty threat; David must be made to realise that his hold on the throne was by no means so secure as he imagined, and the sooner he took active control of the situation the better.

So David bestirred himself and appeared once more at the head of his supporters. They were still at Mahanaim, three days' journey from Jerusalem, and even although Absalom was dead anything could be happening there while the king was missing. Joab realised that even if David did not see the danger, he must get the king back to Jerusalem and firmly in control before the pro-Israel and anti-Judah influences in the nation had found another figure among David's remaining sons to set up as king. So preparations for the return went on apace.

Perhaps he need not have worried. There is some ambiguity about the precise order of events at this time as related in 2 Sam. 19, but it does seem that with the death of Absalom there was considerable uncertainty and perhaps some apprehension among the northern tribes as to the next move. They were painfully aware that they, not Judah, had espoused the rebellion of Absalom and now he was dead and the rebellion had failed. What kind of treatment could they expect when David returned in triumph, as return he must? Perhaps the wisest course would be to take the initiative in bringing him back! "Absalom,

whom we anointed king, is dead", they said. "David saved us out of the hand of the Philistines in times gone by. Why speak ye not a word of bringing the King back?" There must have been ambassadors sent to David at Mahanaim, to sound out his attitude, for the next we hear in 2 Sam. 19 is David's demand of the men of Judah back at Jerusalem for an explanation of their tardiness in welcoming him back and so giving the advantage to the northern tribes. "Why are ye the last to welcome back the king?" So the situation developed into an undignified scramble to be the first at Jordan to welcome the king back and to escort him to Jerusalem, a contest which was won by the men of Judah, who had the advantage of being nearer the scene to start with, but a contest which only served further to embitter relations between the Ten Tribes and the Two, leading eventually to the separation at the death of Solomon some forty-five years later.

A casual allusion in 2. Sam. 19. 13 throws a flood of light upon the political manoeuvrings of the time and not particularly to David's credit either. He sent a message to the men of Judah still at Jerusalem appointing Amasa, son of his sister Abigail and therefore cousin to Joab, to be commander-in-chief of the armed forces in the place of Joab. Amasa had espoused the cause of Absalom and was, therefore, one of the rebels; in thus condoning his disloyalty and appointing him to this high office David was probably attempting to placate the pro-Absalom faction and encourage their future loyalty to him. It is also probably the case that he was trying by this means to get rid of Joab, whom he must have suspected, if he did not have positive knowledge, of being responsible for Absalom's death—as indeed he was, as the account in 2 Sam. 18 records. He speedily found out that his judgment was at fault again; Joab was not the kind of man to take such an insult lying down and the upshot in the long run was more trouble for David.

Almost immediately the trouble came. A fierce controversy arose between the "men of Israel" and the "men of Judah"—probably the leaders and notables of the various tribes—over the action of Judah in bringing back and re-installing David as king without giving opportunity for the participation of the ten northern tribes. Here was the old rivalry springing up again in full force. According to 2 Sam. 20, the lead in this latest insurrection was taken by one Sheba, a Benjamite, a member of Saul's own tribe. He raised the standard of revolt. "We have no part in David" he cried "neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel." And the upshot was that Israel followed Sheba and Judah remained loyal to David. Once again the kingdom was divided.

David acted. He summoned Amasa, his new commander-in-chief, and instructed him to assemble the warriors of Judah and present himself with them within three days. It looks as though he was preparing for a full-scale punitive expedition. Amasa disappeared to execute his commission and the three days passed. There was no sign of Amasa or his men.

David was getting edgy. He summoned Abishai, Joab's younger brother, hitherto not in the forefront of affairs but evidently of some note in the army, instructing him to go in pursuit of Sheba before he could entrench himself in the strongholds of northern Israel. His quarrel with Joab evidently prohibited him from summoning that worthy, even although he was the most experienced tactician of them all. Somehow or other, by the time Abishai had reached Gibeon a few miles north of Jerusalem, he found himself teaming up with Amasa and his men, Amasa apparently having gone into action without the formality of reporting to David first as the latter had instructed.

Now another factor came in to complicate the situation. Joab, that hardened and utterly ruthless old campaigner, although out of office and in disgrace, turned up with his own men and attached himself to the pursuers. It is evident that each of these mutually jealous and competing army leaders held a loyalty of their own men superior even to the loyalty of those men to David. Joab's men were still following him and now in this latest tussle with the northern tribes it was Joab they looked to as their leader—and he knew it. So three of David's chief men, each with his own band of adherents, joined in pursuit of the rebel Sheba.

But Joab had another score to settle first. He must have followed the whole process very closely and knew just when to introduce himself into the picture. Chap. 20 tells the story. Joab caught up with Amasa at a point in the pursuit when it seems they were temporarily separated from the rest. He greeted his cousin in a friendly voice and with a sword in his left hand hidden behind his back. Amasa responded to the greeting; taken for a moment off his guard, he was suddenly transfixed by Joab's sword and fell to the ground a dying man. First, Abner; then, Absalom; now, Amasa. Joab allowed no man to stand in the way of his ambition, and the fact that his latest victim was his own cousin and David's nephew made no difference.

So Amasa died, but the pursuit continued, by common consent under the leadership of Joab. No better guarantee of success could be given. It was not long before Joab had got Sheba at bay in a walled town in the extreme north of the country and with his usual thoroughness he pro-

ceeded to lay siege and batter down the walls in order to capture his quarry. Responding to an appeal from a "wise woman", a prophetess, he promised to spare the city if Sheba was given up, whereby the citizens promptly cut off Sheba's head and threw it to Joab over the wall. So the insurrection collapsed and Joab returned in triumph to Jerusalem and to David.

What David thought about all this is not recorded. Right at the beginning of his reign, at the time of the murder of Abner, he had complained that the sons of Zeruiah—Joab, Abishai and Asahel, sons of David's sister Zeruiah—were "too hard" for him, and he, although king, was weak in their presence. They seem to have been a turbulent family whose one redeeming feature was their utter loyalty to David himself. It looks as though at this time, following the death of Amasa, David resigned himself to the inevitable and allowed Joab to resume command of the army. There was probably no one else immediately available for the position, and with Joab's reputation, no volunteers.

Once again, with all enemies apparently defeated, David took his place on the throne of the Lord at Jerusalem. It was a rather insecure throne. He must have been conscious that he had lost the allegiance of the major part of Israel; it was probably upon the fighting men of his own clan, of Judah, that he had to rely in the main. Much of the glory and euphoria of the early part of his reign had passed away. For the first time there had emerged among the people of the Lord a division into two classes, the rich and the poor. Under Saul they had been a pastoral people where opportunities for the accumulation of wealth did not exist. Under David, largely in consequence of his alliance with Hiram king of Tyre and his people, they had been introduced to the refinements and luxuries of what we would today call the industrialised society. Merchants and manufacturers flourished; ornate buildings were erected, then filled with luxurious embellishments. Men left, or were enticed from their farms to work for other men who employed them on these grandiloquent schemes. A new era was opened which Solomon brought to its peak of magnificence. The words of the Lord to Samuel when Israel first asked for a king had become fearfully true "*He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint captains over thousands, and over fifties, and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be perfumers, and cooks, and bakers. And he will take your fields, and your*

vineyards, and your oliveyards, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants and your maidservants and your goodliest young men, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep; and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you . . ." (I Sam. 9. 11-13). All of this, and more, was realised by Israel under the rule of David and the kings who succeeded him, just as it has been realised by men of many nations in all the generations since. And so there was discontent throughout the land.

Then came famine. It is a little difficult to determine the precise sequence of the remaining events in David's life as narrated in 2 Sam. 21-24. It is fairly obvious that 22 and 23 are interpolations from an earlier stage of his life, but in any case they add nothing to the story, only repetitions of some of his Psalms and lists of the names of the mighty men of his early life in the wilderness. It does seem though that the famine came soon after the successful crushing of the rebellion of Sheba. It might well be that Nature was not altogether to blame. Since about the thirteenth year of David's reign, something like a period of twenty years, the nation had been practically continuously engaged in war and conflict, either with external foes like the Ammonites or Philistines, or the internal rebellions of Absalom and Sheba. Only about seven years out of that twenty were free from war. In those circumstances it would not be surprising if the land was progressively neglected, with many of the menfolk away fighting, so that at last it refused to yield its crops and famine resulted. Chap. 21 opens at a point where the famine had lasted three years and the people were reduced to desperate straits and David went to the Lord to find out what was wrong and what could be done about it.

The Lord's reply, according to the narrator, was short and to the point. The famine had come from his hand as reprisal for Saul's slaughter of the Gibeonites half a century previously. The Gibeonites were one of the native peoples encountered by Joshua when he invaded the land. In order to avoid the fate of the other conquered tribes they secured a treaty of toleration by Joshua by means of a trick (Joshua 9) whereby they were guaranteed safety and life; so they remained in the midst of Israel into the days of the kings. This "slaughter of the Gibeonites" is nowhere referred to in the Old Testament and nothing is known of what Saul did or his motive; it is surmised that in his early zeal for the purity of Israel he tried to exterminate

them in order to cleanse the land. If so, he failed, for here in David's time there were still the descendants of the Gibeonites in Gibeon. David sent for them and asked them what he should do to pacify them and satisfy the Lord so that the famine could be lifted. Their reply was that David should hand over seven of Saul's male descendants for them to "hang up", which meant impalement or crucifixion, "before the Lord in Gibeah". David selected the five sons of Merab the eldest daughter of Saul (2 Sam. 21.8 says "Michal", the younger, one of David's wives, but this is an obvious scribal error for Merab, who was the one married to Adriel) and two sons of Saul by his concubine Rizpah, and handed them over apparently without compunction to suffer this appalling fate. "And after that" says the narrator in 2 Sam. 21 "God was intreated for the land".

To imagine that the Lord would in fact devise such fiendish treatment of inoffensive men for a crime half a century old must denote a very limited view of the Divine character. We may be sure that, whoever originated the answer to David's question, it was not the Lord. There is more below the surface of this story than appears above.

The narrative says that David "enquired of the Lord". (Ch. 21.1). Though king, he could not go to the Lord direct; he must enquire through the High Priest who would then ascertain the Divine reply by means of the mysterious (and still little understood) "Urim and Thummin". There were two High Priests at the time. Zadok of the line of Eleazar was at Gibeah where the Tabernacle stood with the Brazen Altar; Abiathar of the line of Ithamar was at Jerusalem ministering before the Ark of the Covenant in

the "tent" which David had erected for it. David would obviously go to Abiathar whose office it was to enquire before the Ark. And Abiathar himself had a grudge against Saul. When a young lad Saul had sent warriors to slay his father Ahimelech, the serving High Priest, his sons and the entire priesthood, Abiathar alone escaping. Is it possible that Abiathar seized this opportunity to have his revenge on the house of the man who had all but extirpated his own father's house? It would seem a lot more feasible to pin the responsibility for this savage deed on the creature rather than the Creator.

So the condemned men went to their fate and hung on stakes "before the Lord", i.e. in honour of the Lord, probably in front of the Tabernacle which was at Gibeah. It is not likely that the Lord felt honoured. More likely He pitied his people for their hardness of heart and failure to understand his ways. He must have looked with greater tenderness upon the unhappy Rizpah, who sat by those stakes day and night for six months, from the beginning of harvest to the time of the winter rains, keeping the vultures and carrion beasts away from the bodies. When David heard about that he did at least have the decency to have the remains taken away and given decent burial. Only after that was done is it said that God was "intreated for the land". The famine continued throughout that six months, which looks as though God did not acknowledge or accept the sacrifice after all. It may be then that it was the woman Rizpah, and not David, who ended the famine. Perhaps He did for her what He would not do for the man of blood.

To be continued.

Precepts of Men

The Pharisees rejected Jesus because He taught men that God's plans or grace were wider than they had believed them to be. The Gentiles, the outcasts, the whole world of humanity, was included in them. The Pharisees believed that the Jews, and especially their own sect, had a monopoly of the grace of God. It is strange how this old spirit of human nature comes out in our day. Many in the Church seem to be just as averse to any view of the gospel which widens its scope beyond the narrow lines in which they have conceived it. The idea that there can be

any blessing in it for the countless masses of the dead who passed out of life before Christ came, or who have since died with no knowledge of him, is something they cannot admit. Nor have they an ear for any interpretations of Scripture which do not pass current in their sect, or which bring within the scope of God's love and blessing those whom they have always regarded as outside of his covenant. Men love to think that they belong to that favoured class who have a monopoly of both the truth and the grace of God.

(C. T. Russell)

A SIGN AND WITNESS IN THE LAND OF EGYPT

A characteristic of the Hebrew prophets is their flair for taking the political events and shortcomings of their own people of their own time as basis for a distant foreview of the events and failures of the "time of the end", the era of the close of this Age and the introduction of the Millennium. The prophet commences by denouncing the people of his own generation for their sins and predicts imminent Divine judgment, and then sweeps over the intervening centuries of human history to reveal the same things happening at the end of the Age, presenting the distant picture in terms of the things happening in his own day, and concludes by delineating the intervention of the Lord in his Kingdom taking action to put things right to overthrow the dominion of evil and establish everlasting righteousness.

Such a picture is afforded by the 19th chapter of Isaiah. An exposition of this chapter appearing in the last two issues of 1982 showed how the political situation existing between Israel and Egypt in his own day was a foreview in miniature of what is to happen at the end of the Age. The five cities speaking the language of Canaan, the edifice that is to be a sign and a witness, the promised highway connecting Assyria with Egypt, all were spiritualised to afford a picture of the final condition of the world in the day of Christ's reign over the nations, when the only language will be that of righteousness, the only altar-offerings those made to the Lord, the only witness that to the reconciling power of the Gospel, and the only road open to men that "highway of holiness" which men must tread if they are eventually to "stand before God in Zion". This is a poetic picture based upon the political events of the time, woven into a vision of the future that shall be when the evil things that darken the beginning of the story are dissipated by the beneficent work of the "Sun of Righteousness".

But this does not exhaust the purport of Isa. 19. There is a physical reality behind Isaiah's exalted language which gave inspiration to his words. "In that day" he says "shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord, and it shall be for a sign and witness unto the Lord of Hosts in the land of Egypt" (vss 19-20). That which gave the prophet inspiration for his twin themes of offering and witness, an altar and a memorial monument, actually existed there in the land as a single edifice, in a

quite remarkable fashion at both the centre and the border. Isaiah must have known of it although he almost certainly never set eyes upon it—the building known to-day as the Great Pyramid.

In its physical existence that building is a sign and witness to the Divine Plan just so surely as Isaiah's poetic vision looked at Egypt in her then present degradation and her future elevation to the state of the sons of God. Its Descending Passage pictures the descent of mankind into sin, with its inevitable end, death. Its Ascending Passages picture the ascent of man by reason of the Gospel into those aspects of the eternal state which God is providing both for the Church and the world. In the scientific features built into its structure there is revealed the foreknowledge of God, and in its endurance through the ages—for it is the oldest building upon earth, possessing an age of nearly five thousand years—it betokens the preserving power of God. And in that latter vital factor there is enshrined a great truth.

Long ago two great buildings were erected by the sons of men. The erection of the first is described in the 11th chapter of Genesis. To-day it is popularly known by the name of Tower of Babel. According to the ancient historians it was—in later years at least—some three hundred feet square at its base and six hundred feet high, the highest building ever erected until this 20th century. Constructed throughout of burnt brick, it was richly ornamented on its outside with carvings and bright colours. Although so huge though, there was a fundamental weakness in its structure, for through almost all the three thousand years that it stood, nearly all the successive monarchs of the land it adorned record labour and money spent on its repair and renovation. To-day no vestige of *E-temenanki*, the great Tower of Babylon, "the house of the foundation of heaven and earth", as they called it, remains, save a few yards of brick wall about four feet high. That tower stood as a concrete symbol of man's defiance of God and rejection of God; to-day there is nothing of it remaining.

The second, an even greater building erected several centuries later, is the Great Pyramid. The one was in Sumer, the other in Egypt, the two great civilisations of the ancient world. Of this second building the ancient Egyptians declared that its plans were revealed from heaven. Arabic writers of the Middle Ages said that it enshrines data on arithmetic, geometry, and astronomical facts, as well as a chronicle of time

past and future. So far as facts regarding the three sciences are concerned modern scientific research has established beyond doubt the accuracy of the Arabs' observation. Whoever designed the physical features of the Pyramid was cognisant of, and embodied in it, the precise values of many geophysical and astronomical quantities some of which were not discovered by or known to man until the last two centuries. The very unit of measurement used in its construction has been shown to equal the one ten-millionth part of the earth's radius, a more scientific unit than even the metre of the metric system. A notable body of men, scientists, astronomers and archaeologists of the 19th and 20th centuries, have certified the verity of this position without being able to suggest how early man could have had either the knowledge or ability to express such matters in stone. Some of these facts, such as the distance of the earth from the sun, were certainly known to the Sumerians of early times, but others, such as the true size of the earth, could not possibly have been known by them unless, as asserted by the ancients, the design came from heaven.

Such an idea is usually scoffed at in our modern sophisticated times but it is not so incredible as some think. It is significant that at just about the time of the Pyramid's erection, in a different part of the world, the kingships of the first political realms were, according to Sumerian tradition, "let down from heaven". There is increasing ground nowadays for concluding that in the early days just after the Flood and for several centuries thereafter there was a state of devotion to God with no competing pagan gods in human society which could well indicate a condition of communion between God and man which has no parallel to-day.

It would appear that Robert Menzies of Edinburgh in 1865 was the first to attach a Christian Messianic significance to the passages and chambers of the Great Pyramid and from his and

other subsequent students' works a comprehensive system of symbolism has been developed which has the merit of corresponding in close detail with the Plan of salvation presented in the Scriptures. From this there has developed endeavours to foretell the precise dates of future prophesied events such as that of the Second Advent. The fact that some of these expectations have failed of fulfilment no more denies the authenticity of the Pyramid than have the failures of many similar attempts in the realm of Bible chronology in times past discredited the Bible. In both cases it only demonstrates that some of the conclusions drawn from available data were incorrectly applied.

So the "Bible in stone" remains, a concrete reality which cannot be explained away. The fitness of the spiritual symbolism cannot be denied; the accuracy of the embodied scientific data cannot be and is not disputed; no rational ground exists for deciding that men of that time had acquired such knowledge by their own efforts. The only logical conclusion is that the same All-High One who gave Noah the instructions for building the Ark, and Moses the detailed plans for building the Tabernacle in the wilderness, did in between these two revelations give some person or persons unknown the intricate design for building this structure which has aptly been called "a miracle in stone".

The Apostle Peter tells us, referring to the truths of the Christian faith, that we have not been following "cleverly devised myths". Here is the confirmation; those same truths, built into imperishable stone so long ago, remain to our day, in very fact a visible representation of the "Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever".

* * *

For readers interested in following up in greater detail this subject the item under "Book Reviews" on the inside front cover of this issue will be of interest.

No Christian is or can be faultless before the Lord. Blameless, all may and ought to be. The child that does its needlework faithfully is commended, though not a stitch is perfect. The child is blameless, but the work is not faultless. The Christian who lives up to his light and ability is blameless, but in God's sight faulty. He is not always conscious of his defects, his eyes are not as sharp as God's; his best efforts are like the needlework of the little girl, well done for her, but so defective in fact that every stitch must be removed and done again by a more skilful and

experienced hand. Saints sometimes judge themselves perfect because they are not conscious of sin. They may be innocent, but surely not perfect. With more light and culture they would discern defects. Others of more experience observe them now, but they see them not, because not sufficiently educated or advanced in wisdom. Jesus keeps his trusting sheep blameless, and step by step leads them up to higher things, until finally He gives them his likeness in glory.
(Selected)

“ALL THEIR LIFETIME SUBJECT TO BONDAGE”

The following study on Heb. 2.15 is prompted by the short note on this text in the May/June 1982 issue, and calls attention to a number of textual considerations which would seem to justify an entirely different view of its meaning. It is presented here as a contribution to the proper understanding of this text.

* * *

The question is posed “Who are these (the “them who” in Hebrews 2.15) thus said to be subject to bondage?”—“Do they constitute some particular section of the redeemed who for some reason are thus singled out?”. The answer is given that those thus delivered from bondage are all the remainder of mankind, apart from those who are “born again” in Christ. In the benevolent Millennial age these are the ones who will be freed from bondage to sin, and therefore to the Devil, and who are free then to accept or reject the terms on which eternal life will be granted.

But it should not be inferred that this is how the author of the Epistle to Hebrews would reply to the question if it were put to him. The issue is beclouded by the deceptive correctness of much of what is stated, i.e. that the trial for all mankind who are not under judgment in the Gospel age will be under the benevolent conditions of the Millennial reign of Jesus and his church. However correct that understanding may be, it is not what the author of the letter to Hebrews is stating in 2.15 and he cannot be understood as implying that the “them” is all the remainder of humanity who are not of the Gospel age church class.

In the first place, the author of “Hebrews” does not have the Gentiles in mind at all. A critical reading makes it obvious that he has only the Hebrews in mind, as Farrar points out in his “*Early Days of Christianity*” page 167. The Gentile nations are not so much as mentioned, and the author writes as though there was no such thing as a pagan in the world. He is concerned only to correct those Hebrews who have accepted Jesus and yet have gone back to the Mosaic Law arrangements or who were thought to be in danger of so doing, and he is writing from the standpoint of the “world to come” of which he is speaking in 2.5. To him, the old Law Covenant has passed away, the New Covenant has begun. He sees no intervening Gospel age, and to him the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise is the hope he refers to at the end of chapter 6, where Jesus is the Christian Jews’

Forerunner, already entered into that within the veil. In this respect he is revealed as not being Paul in the light of what is *his* indisputable letter to the Galatians. The writer of the first two chapters of that epistle, and particularly chapter 1 verse 12, could hardly be the same person as the writer of Hebrews 2.3.

In chapter 2 he is saying that although Jesus is marked out in Psalm 8 to have all things put in subjection to him, this has not yet happened, and that others will be associated with him as brethren (2.11) as proved by Psalm 22.22 and Isaiah 8. 17-18. For this purpose, it says in verse 14 He shared their flesh and blood nature, so that He could become subject to death and destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil. It is deceptively true that the ultimate consequence of this will be to deliver all mankind from what we refer to as the bondage of sin and death, just as the former article states, but this is not what the author of Hebrews is wanting his readers to understand, and not only is far from the point which he is wishing to bring home to the apostatising Hebrews, but is outside the scope of the wording of the verse and the succeeding verses.

What is always and consistently overlooked is that what the author of Hebrews is saying about “them” in 2.15 is that on account of their *fear* of death they are all their lifetime subject to bondage, and the scope for misinterpretation lies in the absence of a clear and specific statement to identify what bondage is meant. The world of mankind are not said by the author to be in bondage to sin, and therefore to the Devil, as the former article states. The ones he is writing about, i.e. the “them”, are said to be in FEAR of death, and because of this, they are all their lifetime subject to bondage. What the bondage is, is not specified.

It cannot be truthfully asserted that all the rest of mankind are in fear of death all their lifetime, and such a statement cannot be the result of any verifiable facts at all. It is merely a thought in the mind of someone who, fearing death himself or herself, *supposes* that all other humans equally fear it. The *fact*, however, which is *verifiable* from the behaviour of other humans is that NOT all are in bondage to anything by fear of death. There always have been a proportion of courageous and fearless humans who never exhibit any fear of death, and certainly could not be said to fear death all their lifetime

from the cradle to the grave and as a result of this are subject to some sort of bondage.

Another matter which is usually accepted without question is the introduction of the word "all" which slips unnoticed into the mind when considering this text. It appears to originate in the Revised Version, and is quite without authority. The original Greek is not "all them" or "all those ones", but a *very much narrower section*—"AS MANY AS". *This form of words confines the ones concerned to those already referred to and identified—the "children" of verse 13, brethren of Jesus.* This form of words, as used in Mark 3.10, completely negatives the idea that it could be the whole world. The term "AS MANY AS" makes it clear that *there are some who do not come into the category at all.* That is to say, AS MANY AS implies that there is a remainder from those previously identified ones, who are *not* all their lifetime in fear of death. It is helpful to point out that this remainder, plus the "AS MANY AS" ones, constitute in total the originally identified class—the "children" brethren of Jesus. Therefore, not only are the "AS MANY AS" section not all the world, but inescapable logic shows that *none* is of the world.

There is still another aspect of this matter which is always overlooked by any who fail to do the necessary research into this word "them", and that is that even if fear of Adamic death were to be upon all, this verse is referring to a fear of death which is only upon *some*—upon the "AS MANY AS" of the previously identified ones. Clearly, the author is implying that the remainder are not in fear of the death he has in mind. The question has to be answered—why not? And the reply must be that there is another type of death for the "children"—the brethren of Jesus *taken from the Hebrew nation.* To fear *this* death would have prevented Paul from writing Galatians 2.19 and caused him to be once again in the bondage referred to in verse 4 of that chapter, and at the end of chapter 4.

This bondage (and not the bondage of all to death, sin and the Devil referred to in the former article) is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, notably the analogies in Romans 7 where Paul says that the Jews (the "I" of verse 9) were alive outside (before) the Law, but when the Law came it showed that they were dead in God's sight, convicted of sin. To leave the Law was essential if they were to become alive to Christ, and *that* involved being dead to the Law. To fear *this* death would leave them under the bondage of the Law. The point is brought out further in Romans chapter 8.15, the Weymouth translation of which reads "You have not *for the second*

time acquired the consciousness of being slaves—a consciousness which fills you with terror". Thus were the Roman Jews described as children of God.

Thus Hebrews 2.15 shows that fear of being dead to the Law of Moses and becoming alive to Christ, would make it certain that they remain in the bondage of the Law. The author of Hebrews was suspicious that they had gone back to men priests and animal sacrifices, and he goes on in verses 16-18 to show how Jesus enables them to get free from the Law. The expression "took on him" in verse 16 is usually misunderstood to mean that Jesus did not acquire the nature of angels (spirit beings) but that He became a Jew, a human of the line of Abraham. Young shows that the words "took on him" translate the Greek *epi* (upon) *lambano* (accept, attain, bring, call to, catch, come on, have, hold, obtain, receive, take unto, take away, take up, take upon). Strong shows the word as *epilambanomai* meaning to seize for help, injury, attainment or any other purpose. Perhaps the best way of making the meaning clear is to use Weymouth's translation:

"For assuredly it is not to angels that He is continually reaching a helping hand, but it is to the descendants of Abraham."

which shows the "them" are the children of verse 14.

The "helping hand" was and is the delivery (setting free) from the bondage of the Law—by his keeping it, which no one else could—Galatians 3.13 and 4.4-5. Hebrews 2.18 then says in effect "Thus He is able to succour these ones being tested."

When it is realised that the call to become part of the Christ is a call to sacrifice, it could well be noted that fear of being dead to the Law, on the part of the Jew, is exactly the same as being afraid to complete the sacrifice when this text is applied to the Christian calling to the Gentile in the Gospel age.

In amplification of the statement earlier concerning the origin of the word "all" in the Revised Version, it is curious that the school of translators who follow the Westcott and Hort recension, with the exception of Rotherham, i.e. at least Weymouth, 20th Century and the Kingdom Interlineary all insert the word, even though it is not in the Westcott and Hort original. Wilson does not insert it and the Griesbach recension agrees with the Westcott and Hort in not showing it. Darby inserts the word "all" in his translation and does not even give a footnote about its absence in the older manuscripts. The Variorum and Tischendorf, both showing only differences with the Authorised version, for that

reason presumably, do not mention the matter.

A careful consideration of the implications which follow from the acceptance that the bondage is not to sin, death or the Devil, but to the

Mosaic Law should convince that it is correct to interpret Hebrews 2.15, when applied to the Christian in the Gospel age, as fear of completing the engagement to sacrifice.

THAT GLORIOUS HOPE

*An encouragement
to steadfastness*

These words were written by William Andrews a little over a century ago. They show how some Christian men at that time were already anticipating the clear knowledge that came with the later years of the century and demonstrate the truth of the Scripture which declares that the path of the just is as a shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The understanding of the Christian's hope as seen by William Andrews could hardly be better expressed to-day, except that we now see the fulfilment of some of the things to which he then looked forward.

* * *

"And as the hope of the sleeping saints is the resurrection, so the hope of the living is to be clothed upon in the translation, when mortality shall be swallowed up of life . . . *'We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.'* This is the hope of our calling—the living hope unto which we are begotten by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead—the hope of life, not of death. And if the faithful who sleep in Jesus, sheltered from the storms, and freed from the pollutions of this evil world, think it long till their Lord appears . . . how earnestly should we stretch forth the head to catch the sound of his approaching footsteps—we, to whom the battle is fierce, and the burden heavy, and the strain of sin deep in the soul. Oh, how has the Church ceased to war against death, yielding herself in passive hopelessness to its usurped dominion, and accounting its rest her chief reward, instead of pressing forward to that 'manifestation of the sons of God', in the glory of the resurrection, for which even the earnest expectation of the creation waits!

"And not for our own sakes alone nor for the sake alone of the sleeping saints should we long for the return of our Lord and Saviour; but that the earth, now groaning and travailing in pain, may be delivered from the curse. For the prom-

ise that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head includes in its large reach of blessings the redemption of man's inheritance by the casting out of him who usurped it, and the purging away of all the evil with which his slimy presence has defiled and infected it. The earth was made for the revealing of God's glory, through the possession and enjoyment of its manifold treasures, free from all curse, by man standing in his allegiance to his Maker; and though the purpose was frustrated by the fall of the first Adam, it shall be accomplished in the second, who will cause the Father's will to be done forevermore. He has already in his own person triumphed over the seductions of the serpent, and proved himself against all temptation the obedient Son, worthy to take up the forfeited sceptre of man's dominion, and rule in righteousness for God; and He now waits only for the completion of the company of joint heirs that shall rule with him, to come forth to redeem and purify and bless his purchased inheritance. They are right who are looking for righteousness and peace to fill the earth, and make glad the obedient nations; but they are wrong who look for it before the Man who is the heir shall come forth to make it his own eternal dwelling place. He was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, to pay the price of the redemption; and then crowned with glory and honour and invested with the right of dominion over all the works of God's hand; *'but now we see not yet all things put under him'*; and his next step shall be his actual and visible government of the creation. It is an idle dream which now possesses so many that the Church is to bring in the Kingdom in the absence of the King. There is not one word for it in all the Scriptures. It contradicts the exhortations for continual watchfulness for him—not for death, but for him who is the conqueror of death—which imply the possibility of his coming in any generation, and therefore the certainty of his coming before the long, fixed period of the Millennium, which is the time for rest, not for watching. It is inconsistent with the

foretold humiliation and sorrow of the Church during the whole of this dispensation in which she is to walk in his footsteps, and be perfected by the fellowship of his sufferings; it robs her of the blessed hope by which alone she can be purified, and toward which the Apostles ever struggled to lead her—the hope of being like him and seeing him as He is; and it entangles her in world schemes and alliances, and so eats out all faith in the heavenly citizenship. The nations are to be blessed; and the earth, unto the uttermost parts of it, to see the salvation of God, but it shall be when the time comes that the saints possess the kingdom (Dan. 7. 22); which is not during the Bridegroom's absence, for then the Church is the desolate widow called to fasting and mourning, and the word to her ever is, *'Be patient unto the coming of the Lord'*. The last temptation by which Jesus was assailed when He was led up into the wilderness is now spreading its cunning seductions all around us, and we are looking to gain the kingdoms of the

world, and the glory of them, before the time that the Father shall give them to his Son.

"The one great hope for the whole creation, towards which, blindly and unconsciously, if not with intelligent desire, all are reaching forward, is the 'marriage of the Lamb'. It is the hope of the Bride who shall then be one with the Lord in all his glory, and power, and fulness of blessing. It is the hope of the nations, who shall then know the blessedness of righteous rule. It is the hope of the sore-burthened earth, which longs to be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. And it is the hope of the Lord himself, whose heart yearns over his Church, purchased with his own blood, but still lying in the desolateness of death, or amidst the defilements of this evil world, and whose word of promise is, *'Surely I come quickly'*. Let our hearts be broken through our sympathy with the burdens and sorrows of all, and let us utter in his ear continually the cry that shall hasten the common deliverance."

FAR-REACHING VISION

This quotation is from the writings of Dr. G. Campbell-Morgan, the noted Free Church minister.

* * *

"If you take away from me the doctrine of the Second Advent of Christ which is to be a crisis in human history as definite as the first Coming, I am the most pessimistic of men. If you tell me that the work of the missionary is to convert the world by preaching, I am hopeless indeed.

"But when I realise that the work of missions is to evangelise the world by the preaching of the Gospel for a witness, and that beyond the Advent there will be a new age in which human history will be perfected, then I wait with patience for the crisis which is to come, and serve, as God helps me, in order to hasten that coming, the coming of our Lord himself (Matt. 24. 14).

"May God deliver us from taking so great, so stupendous and sublime and far-reaching a vision of the wisdom which transcends our finite theory, in order to formulate a doctrine that God has chosen a few people to be saved and left the rest to be damned forever. That is an unwarranted deduction.

"The plan of the Church existed in the mind of God from eternity. He predestinated the Church that it should be conformed to the image of his Son. Paul peered into the deep things, the infinite mysteries, until somewhere back in the past ages he saw in the mind of God the Son of

his love, the arch-type of all perfection, and he declared that He predestinated men and women that they should be conformed to that likeness.

"The Church then is not an experiment in human history. It is part of the plan of God. It is the conception, the Plan of God from eternity (Rom. 8.28; 6, 17, 18).

"Finally, the Church is eternal in yet another sense. The Consummation is eternal, for the Church is to serve the purpose of God in the coming ages. Through the Church in its union with Jesus Christ there will be revealed to the ages to come *"the exceeding riches of his grace"* and there will be unveiled before the angels the *"Manifold wisdom of God"*.

"This is the first note of the central preaching of the letter to the Ephesians. The Church of God is eternal. Its conception in the past eternity was the plan of God. Its construction in time is the power of God. Its consummation in the coming ages will be for the fulfilment of the purposes of God.

"Are we of this Church? If we are then we were in the heart and mind and plan of God in the ages gone; we are to fulfil the purpose of God in the ages to come; and the plan of the past and the purpose of the future are linked by the power of the present; for plan, power and purpose are alike eternal."

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

A panorama of the way of Christ

5. Shepherd of the Sheep

"He that enters not by the door into the sheepfold but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." (John 10.1).

The lawful entry into any building is by the door. Anyone seen climbing in some other way is immediately suspected as an intruder, up to no good. Jesus portrayed himself as the Good Shepherd caring for his sheep. From the pastoral life around He could draw abundant illustrations by which to teach natural men heavenly faith and truth.

Those who heard and followed him were his sheep with all the sheep's need of care and protection. Only at night were they folded to protect them from thieves and wild beasts who prowl under cover of darkness for purposes of destruction. Such marauders would not be likely to come boldly up to the front door and seek admittance. If a large sheepfold had a porter he would answer to none but the shepherd. The sheep themselves only knew and responded to the man who led them by day, finding pasturage for them, running water, and shade from the heat. They relied upon him to protect them from perils known and unknown. In him they found peace and safety. A good shepherd never betrayed his trust or forsook his flock.

Jesus went one further. He said with emphasis *"I am the door of the sheep"*. It was the custom where sheep were valuable for the shepherd to rest with his flock. Lying down in the doorway he became the door, guarding its entrance with his life. None could get in or out without his knowledge. This picture presents two aspects important to the Christian faith, the keeping power of the shepherd, his readiness to lay down his life for those in his care, and the cunning necessary for any intruder to get into the fold any other way.

Of the believers who heard the voice of Jesus and followed him, recognising the tones of love and authority, he said, *"They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father who gave them to me is greater than all; no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."* The true and only door into the love of God is Jesus Christ. Peace with him and eternal life is the Divine sheepfold where "Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch upon his own". The safety of such folded sheep, contentedly hidden with God in Christ, is expressed repeatedly throughout the Word of God as 'great peace' the 'peace of God', the peace Christ left to all his sheep.

Whatever is valuable in this world or closely guarded presents a challenge to certain perverted natures. To get in, to gain possession or even to destroy, becomes a fixed idea. During the Christian era men have tried unlawful entry into the fold of God. By some other means than salvation through Jesus Christ they have tried to steal away men's hearts or lead the sheep of Christ away from safety into false places where there is neither sustaining food, water nor shelter. The true sheep who know his voice have resisted both tyranny and seduction.

It is not in the power of legislation, of science, of great religious systems, of political doctrines or learned philosophers, or eastern mystics, to grant life to any human being. God alone is the giver of life and He gives it through Christ and no other. Jesus claimed repeatedly and under many metaphors to give men life. Of his believing sheep He said *"I give unto them eternal life"*.

*"There is no love like the love of Jesus
Never to fade or fall
Till into the fold of the peace of God
He has gathered us all."*

"The Master is come and calleth for thee" (John 11.28). There is a poetic beauty about these words. The relation of this whole incident is like the painting of a masterpiece. Nothing is lacking of human emotion. Drama and pathos play their part on the domestic stage of a country home. Every character is drawn with an observant and unbiased pen. The friend of Jesus is sick. His devoted sisters, believing in the love and power of Jesus to heal, send him the news, never doubting that he will come. But Jesus did not come. He stayed where he was, purposely delaying his visit until Lazarus was beyond human aid. Four days after the burial he arrived, to be met outside the village by the practical and reproachful Martha, who softened her words with the sincerity of her belief in him. "I know that even now whatever you will ask of God, God will give it thee." Jesus warmed to the tenacity of this member of a much loved family, speaking to her the words which have thrilled, comforted and inspired with hope and courage thousands of bereaved hearts. "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Never before had such words been spoken in the ears of the living. Scarcely comprehending his meaning, Martha turned away and went home where she had left Mary sitting still in the house,

brooding over the sorrow and the pain of death, meditating sadly over the inscrutable ways of the Son of God, whose power had opened the eyes of the blind and healed so many sick, yet had allowed her brother, whom He loved, to die. A few words whispered privately by Martha energised the drooping, gentle Mary into immediate action. She arose at once, going with all speed to him who had requested her presence. So well is the picture drawn it is possible to overhear the low, beautiful words which brought joy and relief to the grieving heart.

He had not neglected or forgotten them. He was there, the kingly teacher at whose feet she had sat drinking in the wonderful words of life spoken to none other, unrecorded words, yet so convincing that they sent her to his feet with the heart-broken cry, "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died." The same words from Martha had moved him to declare his power over life and death. Mary's anguished cry and the tears of those who had followed her, moved him to tears. Knowing what he was about to do, the sorrows of mankind touched the heart of Christ with overwhelming compassion. Revealing the power and the ultimate purpose of God, He showed also the pity of God for human sorrow and helplessness.

Alone and silent in some desolating experience, schooling the spirit to submission, baffled by the unfathomable ways of a Divine love which appears neglectful and aloof, how intensely joyous it would be to hear the same poetically, lovely words whispered in a despondent ear. "The Master is come and calleth for thee." How swiftly the feet would take their flight to his all-powerful loving presence. "Be swift my soul to answer him, be jubilant my feet." Although the thin veil of the flesh divides time from eternity, by the word of his promise, "Lo I am with you always", He still calls the sorrowing to his side, still stimulates the flagging spirit by the miracle of his grace, to rise and pursue the onward path with renewed vigour. Life, the very life of God in Christ, is still infused into the beating heart of the faithful. The day will dawn which crowns all other days, when the call of the Master sounds clear, strong and imperative. As steel rushes to the magnet so will his saints be gathered, drawn, brought together from the four corners of earth and time, to be forever with him. In a moment of time, in the twinkling of an eye, they shall see him as he is and be like him.

"Face to face, O blissful moment, Face to face to see and know,

What rejoicing in his presence, when are banished grief and pain,

When the crooked ways are straightened and the dark things all are plain."

"If we let him alone, all men will believe on him" (John 18. 48). Here we stumble upon a little-acknowledged human longing for life, love and true leadership, and the base means employed to deprive the race of these benefits. Whatever the reasons given by the council for their determination to put Jesus to death after his greatest display of invested power, self-preservation was their prime motive. Fear for the loss of their own top positions of wealth, prestige and authority, drove them to eliminate the one man who could have liberated their race and freed the world from the foot of tyrants. As he rode into Jerusalem triumphantly a week later to the glad Hosannas of the crowds who hailed him 'King of Israel, coming in the name of the Lord,' the Pharisees expressed their fear and dismay. "Perceive how you prevail nothing? Behold the world is gone after him." Any student of history cannot fail to note the methods by which the bulk of the human race have been kept in servitude and ignorance by a privileged minority, or to observe how every step forward towards decency and dignity has been fought for inch by inch against ruthless aggression and crafty deception. The thoughtful cannot fail to be moved by the sight and sound of restless multitudes, either past or present, who have cried out for security, for sufficient food and suitable homes, for the rights of human creatures to enjoy their fair share of the good earth and its products in peace. Jesus had expounded his formula for all these things, to which the people had eagerly listened. Moreover he had plainly shown his power over Nature, over life and death. He had stilled the storm and fed the hungry, healed the sick and raised the dead. Of no other man could it be said, as He had said to the messengers of John the Baptist, who had asked from his dungeon "Art thou he that should come or do we look for another?", "Go your way and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached."

He was the great emancipator of the people, setting free whoever would believe on him. All forms of servitude of the mind and flesh were broken. He ruled, not by tyranny but by justice, gentleness and love. The people who cried Hosannas on the road to Jerusalem recognised in him a wise and benevolent king, a leader to be trusted. Through the centuries the restless, confused masses of the peoples have looked to human leaders to improve their lot, often to meet with disappointment. Even the son of the glorious Solomon had threatened to beat the burdened people of his day when they complained of the heavy yoke put upon them. "I will

add to your yoke. I will chastise you with scorpions instead of whips." Pharaoh of Egypt had likewise increased both labour and chastisement to every appeal of Moses to set the people free. When in the end he was driven to let them go, he and his rulers soon regretted it and pursued after them that they might drag them back to the old drudgery. It is a conspiracy old as the race to bind men body and soul, to keep in subjection by ignorance, superstition, fear, sorrow, labour, sickness and death, the race of man. The forces of evil have constantly opposed the forces of good. Agencies have always been at work to block the path, to blind the eyes of those who long for life. Darkness has hated the light, finding ready tools and willing minds among the warped, the selfish and the ignorant, to thwart by any means the universal happiness of mankind, to throw any obstacle in the way of their knowledge and worship of the living God. Like many before and since, the men who plotted the death of Jesus were ready to stamp out life and light to maintain their own place in society. That the blind should see, or the sick be healed, or the dead raised, or the poor receive good news of the kingdom of God, was of no account. They care for none of these things. Yet the days will come when this same Jesus will take up his great power and reign over the earth. The desire of all nations shall come because "He comes to break oppression, to set the captives free, to take away transgression and rule in equity".

"I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." (John 12. 32). Jesus knew He would be crucified. He knew the priests would demand his death. They had no legal power to carry out the sentence, and the Roman form of execution was the cross. The shadow of the cross has lain across the world ever since; the symbol of human cruelty, of martyrdom, of suffering and self-sacrifice. It has become the pinnacle of the world, glittering from its tallest spires, or standing ruggedly in mountain snows. The faultless Son of God who poured out his life without stint in a healing, teaching ministry, was nailed to the wooden beams of the cross by the sin of man. Willingly or unwillingly a good cross-section of mankind were participants in that evil deed. Jesus could have saved himself but he went willingly to a foreknown end. God could have saved him but for three dark hours He forsook him. "He made him to be sin who knew no sin."

God's purpose was to redeem Israel and save the world. The way He chose and the submission of Jesus to its shame and pain are a mysterious dispensation of a far-sighted wisdom and astounding love which leaves the beholder dumb with silence. Before that cross it is presumption either to question the ways of God or doubt the

identity of its victim. That cross is a stake, fixed into the centre of history, driven into the heart of mankind, until every knee shall bow and every tongue confess the exalted name of their Saviour and their King. The lifting up of the cross on Calvary's hill has forced large sections of mankind to look up to that guiltless sufferer, recognising dimly that in some way his life and death are strangely bound up with theirs. If this turning point in history is only vaguely comprehended, "seen through a glass darkly", it is always there with its mystic attraction, its drawing power, putting question and answer into the minds of the unresisting. When Israel rebelled in their wilderness wanderings they were bitten by snakes. For their cure Moses lifted up a shining serpent of brass upon a pole. When they looked at this fiery symbol they were healed. The incident was prophetic, a living picture illustrating greater events. The sins and revolts of man against God are many. It pleases the conceit of modern society to call these offences by some other name, but it does not make their bite any the less deadly. The sick and the plagued may look in a thousand directions finding palliatives but no cure. "All we like sheep have gone astray. We have erred every one from his ways and there is no health in us" is not an idle chant. It is an easily recognisable fact.

The old evangelists who wrote "There is life in a look at the Crucified One," and "Look to Jesus, look and live," were not fanatical enthusiasts for a new religious sect. They spoke the language of the Scriptures, a language unknown to many, forgotten by some and needing re-statement to all. It is the gospel, the good news, that by the cross of Christ man may become reconciled to God, so gaining peace and hope of everlasting life. There is neither merit nor charm in the wood of the cross, even if it were obtainable. It is the love and self-sacrifice of the living load it bore unto his death, that bought the peace and life of man, "that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life".

"In the cross of Christ I glory, Towering o'er the wrecks of time,

All the light of sacred story, Gathers round its head sublime."

"While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of the light" (John 12. 36). Light is the life-blood of Nature. It is that indefinable element which gives energy and colour to every living thing. Deprived of light the growths of a perpetual dungeon become diseased and deformed. There is little use for the eye in the dark. Those who walk in the dark without a light, walk in danger. They do not know where they are going or what perils await their unwary feet. It is in the dark hours of

night that most troubles strike. It is when weary and off guard that disaster finds its easiest victims. The works and the faces which cannot bear the light of day set out on their rounds under cover of the darkness.

To any visitor coming from a world of wholesome peace, sanity, soundness and beauty, this planet must seem like a whirling mad-house. Its teeming cities full of raucous sounds, of squalid slums and hideous crimes, its highways and byways an endless rush of wheels, killing and maiming the inhabitants by the thousand, its green country slowly despoiled by forests of steel and concrete, by towers and chimneys belching smoke and flame, by the tiers of boxes reared for human habitation, the whole plentifully dotted with the ever present provision for the sick and the dead. However well lighted the modern world may be, or however blue it may look to man on the moon, its aspect in the eyes of its Creator is dark.

It was dark when He sent his son into the world to be its light. Because men's deeds were evil they preferred the darkness and hated the light. Light silently rebukes darkness. It shows up a multitude of deficiencies for which the dark provides an ample cloak. The greater fear of faulty natures is not of doing wrong but of being found out, of being shown up or seen through. As Shakespeare shrewdly observed, "Conscience doth make cowards of us all".

The nature of God is light. It is not only an incandescent glory of Being, but a radiant glowing energy of pure beauty, named Holiness, a state which is wholly opposed to evil and to darkness. The Ruler of the Universe dwells in a light which cannot be approached by mortal man. Jesus brought some of this eternal light to earth, its radiant purity suitably clothed in the flesh of man, its energy given off in waves of healing power. Some believed and worshipped; others believed and trembled. Doubt was that rare phenomenon which disturbed those who

had been given the greatest cause for trust.

That light and love and life are a triple alliance, the three strands of one powerful cord, none who read the Bible intelligently can fail to overlook. To have one is to have the other. To have the other is to have all; to walk through a dark world with the light of the glory of God before and behind, on the right hand and on the left. Israel in the wilderness had as guardian the pillar of fire. They had the shining face of Moses, veiled after his forty days in the mountain with the Giver of the Law. They had the radiant glory of the Shekinah between the cherubim, the glory which filled the temple and the lambent tongues of Pentecostal fire, all the outward evidences of the invisible Supreme Being. They all walked by sight, living and vivid testimonies to those who walk by faith. By many means and through many men God had spoken to the world, more especially to the nation of Israel, made and separated to prove to other peoples the power of a living God in contrast to the gods of wood and brass and clay who were all wind and confusion. In those days when Jesus walked among them, the light to Jew and Gentile alike, opening the eyes of the blind to new ways and larger avenues of life, his power and preaching and personality only half discerned, He yet shone as the light of God among men, which none of the noxious vapours of darkness have ever been able to extinguish. Those who have believed and followed the Light of the life of Christ have themselves become lights in the world's darkness, the exponents of an indestructible ideal which will in due time conquer all darkness, filling the earth with the glory of the light of God as the waters cover the sea.

*"Walk in the light! and thou shalt own
Thy darkness passed away,
Because that Light hath on thee shone
In which is perfect day."*

To be concluded

Prayer

Just as the sharpening of scythes in harvest time does not mean lost time and energy, so also time spent in prayer is not lost as respects the affairs of life. Unquestionably the happiest men and women in the world are those who pray, and pray regularly; who bow the knee as did Daniel. Unquestionably the moments thus taken from earthly affairs are well spent and bring more than commensurate blessings upon the worshipper and all with which he has to do. Unquestionably it is impossible to live a consecrated life in neglect of prayer. What would

Daniel have been without his praying time? How would his faith in God have persisted in that heathen land? How would his loyalty to principle have maintained itself in the midst of corruption had it not been for his communion with his maker? To the Christian this privilege is still further enhanced by a realisation that "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous," in whose all-prevailing name we may approach with courage the throne of heavenly grace, and obtain mercy and find grace to help in every time of need (Heb. 4. 16).

(Selected)

MANY MANSIONS

"In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you" (Jno. 14. 2).

If there are so many mansions in the Father's house, why did our Lord find it necessary to go away and prepare a place for his disciples, that where He is, there we may be also? Were none of these mansions good enough?

In Divine creation there are many homes suitable for living beings, many stations of existence, both spiritual and material. Look up into the starry heavens; behold the magnificent array of stars, some of them attended by planets like our own. Here in this great universe there are untold myriads of possible abiding places for living creatures. Sir James Jeans, speaking before the Royal Institution in November, 1942, and giving the very latest considered conclusions of astronomers on this subject, said *"the chance of a star, in a nebulous state, having given birth to planets before attaining to the sun state is considerable. A fair proportion of the stars must then, be accompanied by planets. Of these a substantial fraction are likely to be in a physical state not very different from that of our own earth, and so capable of maintaining life like our terrestrial life; it is possible that such life is far more abundant in space than we used to think"*. Bible students may not agree readily to the last sentence; it is more likely that these other planets are being prepared for future races of men made in God's likeness, when the drama of sin and death has been enacted once for all upon this earth. But it does seem that many "mansions" in the skies, existing from of old, "or ever the earth was", have been and are being prepared for the further purposes of God. Nevertheless, none of these terrestrial mansions can ever be a fitting home for the glorified Christ company. Made like unto their Lord, clothed upon with spiritual bodies even as He, possessed of powers and attributes far above the human, there must of necessity be, somewhere, a home prepared for them which is of like quality.

What, then, of the spiritual world, of which our visible universe is but a material counterpart? Long before the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters and commanded light to be; long before the particles of which sun, and moon, and stars are made, had begun to come together, God Most High reigned upon the throne of his holiness. The Son, the *Logos*, rejoiced "always before him" (Prov. 8. 30), and ten thousand times ten thousand glorious cele-

tial beings lived their lives and carried out their varied occupations and vocations in sinless purity before him. That world of theirs, impossible for our human brains to imagine or visualise, must have a more glorious counterpart to everything that gives us pleasure or sustains life here on earth. Those angels do always behold the face of the Father (Matt. 18. 10). Could it not be, then, that among those heavenly hosts and in the order of things in which they live, and move, and have their being, there may be found that superbly glorious home to which the King will lead his Bride when the day of union shall have come?

Perhaps not. Perhaps there is something more planned by the Almighty Creator which is only then to be revealed. Perhaps there is an exercise of creative power leading to another creation which is to be for the Church alone, as high above the angelic world as that world is above our present terrestrial world.

All these planes of being, with their varied homes and worlds, belong to the Old Creation—that creation which commenced when the Most High, in the solitude and silence before Time began, through his Son created the spiritual world, and varied forms of spiritual beings to fill that world, then brought into existence a material universe, making man in his own mental and moral image and likeness, in form of flesh adapted to the earth upon which he was to live. All this constitutes the Old Creation, the First Creation, the one brought into existence by God through the instrumentality of his beloved Son, *"by whom also He made the worlds"*.

This creation, with all its mansions, is, or will be when sin is banished, complete in itself. The New Testament speaks of the subsequent coming into existence of a New Creation—something the like of which has never been seen or known before, either upon earth or in heaven. Spiritual beings—yes, but on a higher plane than spiritual beings have ever been constituted before. The Divine Son is the Head of this New Creation. His followers who are called to follow in his steps are promised that, if faithful, they too shall share in the glories of that New Creation, if they have become dead in Christ and have been buried with him in his baptism and have risen again to walk in newness of life with him. They are not yet clothed upon with the "body", the outward organism in which the new spiritual life and identity finds itself at home, and through

which it can be manifested in its own surroundings and to its fellows, but, nevertheless, they are a "New Creation". *"If any man be in Christ, there is a New Creation. Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"* (2 Cor. 5. 17).

So it is not surprising that this New Creation, endowed with immortality, the gift of God, should need a new kind of home of a nature that the Old Creation had never needed and never seen. Yes, many mansions there have been in the Father's house, but none just suitable for immortal beings. The Bridegroom must needs go away and prepare a place exceeding the most glorious spiritual condition previously known, just as the spiritual we do know exceeds in glory the earthly.

If this be so, what joy must fill the heart of the Heavenly Bridegroom as He comes to call his Bride to her new home. With what deep satisfaction must He then contemplate the imminence of the day when He shall *"see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied"* (Isa. 53. 11). The new home ready; angels in heaven eager to witness the great event; the Heavenly Father awaiting the presentation of the Bride before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; what wonder that it is said that the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, and that his beloved shall be "caught up" to meet him in the air, so to be ever with him. Who knows the wonders of that marriage feast, when the wisdom of all the ages, and deepest confidence respecting the work of the future, shall be imparted to those to whom it is given to sit around that festal board.

Here it is that the picture of the Bride must merge into that of the anointed and glorified Christ company. From that wedding feast these will come forth, radiant souls possessed by an all-embracing and overpowering love for their Lord and their Leader, the Head of their house. That home is to be their headquarters, their homeland, from which they will go forth to carry out the wonderful works which are to be their portion to all eternity.

The wedding feast is limited in time. The world of men will be passing through the severest phase of the world's final trouble while those wonderful scenes are being enacted in heaven. The Church will have gone from earth; all will have

been taken to be with their Lord, to be presented to the Father, to become accustomed to their new environment and their new powers, and to receive their final instruction for their first great work, the Millennial conversion of men upon earth. But they may not linger around the festal board, for the cry of sinsick humanity resounds to the heavens, and the whole creation, groaning and travailing in pain together, *"waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God"* (Rom. 8. 19-22).

So the cavalcade sets out. The Lord who had come to earth for his saints, and taken them to himself, now comes to the world with his saints, and there is no man who knows it not. We do not know, we cannot say, what coming and going there may be between that place which is our home, prepared for that purpose by our Lord, and this place which for a thousand years is the scene of our labours. It "doth not yet appear what we shall be", and our deepest thinking can only furnish us with a shadow of the reality.

Perhaps, though, we can visualise, dimly, at the end of the thousand years, another great gathering in the spacious halls of that "prepared place". The work with mankind is over. Evil has spread its wings and flown far away; never again will its shadow darken God's fair realm. Sin is no more; all the earth is at rest, it breaks forth into singing. Listening angels have heard the sublime words, echoing from high Heaven: *"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"*. The cherubim which for long ages have stood on guard with the flaming sword, keeping the way of the Tree of Life, now wing their flight back to the Throne of God, their long vigil over. The sons of God who wondered, and shouted for joy, when the foundations of the earth were laid (Job 38. 7) are shouting again for joy to behold this triumphant conclusion to the eternal purpose of God. And away up in that highest home of all the Lord Jesus Christ and his Church commune together. The further plans of God are spread out to view; works of creation mighty beyond imagination, designs for the enrichment of God's glory and superabundant happiness for creatures yet to be born, happy service and unceasing joy in each other's fellowship and in the presence and companionship of our glorious Lord, age after age without end, to all eternity.

The whole substance of religion is faith, hope and charity, by the practice of which we become united to the will of God: All beside is indiffer-

ent and to be used as a means that we may arrive at our end and be swallowed up therein by faith and charity.

MELCHIZEDEK KING OF SALEM

Light on an ancient story

The identity of Melchizedek, King of Salem (Gen. 14. 18-24), has been for long a subject of casual speculation, and the very brevity of Scriptural allusion to this personage has afforded opportunity for more than one flight of fancy. The statement in Hebrews 7. 3 that he was "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life," has led some Christian writers to identify him with the Son of God himself, spending a period of time upon earth in garb of human flesh many centuries before He was born of Mary. Jewish tradition, a little more rationally, declared that he was Shem the son of Noah. Some of the Early Fathers — and some later commentators too—tried to establish a case for the mysterious priest-king to whom Abraham paid tithes after the defeat of Chedorlaomer being Enoch returned to earth after his death.

All these speculations have been dissolved by research, which in recent years has so illuminated the Old Testament that the mystery has been stripped from the personality of this man, so wonderfully honoured in being made a type of that everlasting priesthood which is characteristic of our Lord's Millennial glory. Were it not for this inspired usage of the little scrap of history recorded in Genesis 14, Melchizedek would have been as unknown to Christians as is another occupant of the same exalted office half a millennium afterwards. How many can recall, without recourse to Bible or Concordance, what the Scripture has to say about Adonizedek, King of Jerusalem? Yet there is more said about this latter king than Melchizedek himself.

The story opens at the time when the armies of the east invaded Canaan, taking Lot among their prisoners, and Abraham, following and defeating them, returned in triumph from Northern Canaan along the Jordan valley on his way back to Hebron. He came, says the narrative, to Salem. The full ancient native name was Uru-Salim, the city of peace. That name transliterated into English gives us the familiar Jerusalem. No one knows just how old is the Holy City of our faith—it was already in existence when recorded history began.

"And Melchizedek King of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he was the priest of the Most High God. And he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be the Most High God, which hath delivered thine

enemies into thine hand. And he (Abraham) gave him tithes of all" (Gen. 14. 18-20).

That is all that the Scriptures tell us about this mystic personage, yet how full of detail the brief statement! It is worthy of note that this verse is the first place in the Bible where the word "priest" is mentioned. In all the history of the days before Abraham there is no mention of a priest; here is presented a kingly priest—a priest upon his throne. Note also that Abraham acknowledged the authority of this man, superior to himself, for he rendered him tithes of his spoils of war. Thirdly, this man, although not of the chosen family which had been called out of Ur of the Chaldees to become a great nation, the people of God, nevertheless acknowledged the same God as did Abraham. This is the more noteworthy when, upon reflection, it is realised that Melchizedek reigned as king over a land which was about to be promised to Abraham himself, and the kingship of Melchizedek must perforce one day come to an end.

Abraham, having rendered his obeisance and his tithes, went on his way to his home at Hebron, and thereafter Melchizedek disappears from history except for one solitary allusion in Psalm 110. 4: "*The Lord hath sworn and will not repent: Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek!*" This text speaks not of a suffering Christ—not of the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief, led as a lamb to the slaughter (Isa. 53. 7). This hundred and tenth Psalm speaks of a victorious King, a triumphant Priest, one ruling in the midst of his enemies, and bringing all into subjection to his sway that He might become to them a dispenser of Divine favour. He is a Royal Priest having all power both to rule men and heal them, and so accomplish all God's good purposes for them. That is why the Psalmist's mind went back to a royal priesthood which existed centuries before that of Aaron, one which served not with "*offering and burnt offerings and offerings for sin*" (Heb. 10. 8), picturing only sacrifice and reconciliation begun, but a priesthood that dispensed bread and wine, ruling in kingly majesty and symbolising blessing to men and reconciliation completed. That is why the Psalmist, with rare inspiration, declared in rapturous words: "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." How appropriate the name! "*Melchi*"—a king. "*Zedek*"—righteousness. A king of righteousness ruling over the City of Peace, an apt picture of our King and his earthly Kingdom!

Until quite recent years nothing whatever was known about this mysterious Royal Priesthood of Abraham's day, apart from the scanty references in the Scriptures. Christian teachers believed that Abraham lived an alien in a totally strange and idolatrous heathen land. That the worship of God could exist anywhere apart from Abraham and the chosen seed was hardly suspected, much less believed, and the incident of Chedorlaomer and Melchizedek was regarded by many as a fable, having no basis of fact in genuine history.

To-day all that is changed. Discoveries made within the last half century have definitely established that in the times of Abraham, of Jacob and of Joshua there was a system of belief and worship in Canaan which acknowledged and served the "Most High God", a system corrupted with crudities of belief with which Abraham and his children were never encumbered, but nevertheless constituting an intelligent worship of One God as distinct from the idolatrous superstitions of the peoples around. It seems reasonable to believe that others beside Abram had some understanding of the primitive faith of Noah and Shem, and, whilst Abram was a child in Ur of the Chaldees, there must have been other men in other lands, sprung from the common stock, who carried with them some tolerably clear knowledge of the God of Shem, of Noah, of Enoch, and the faith of past times. Abraham was selected to advance the true knowledge of God in orderly development through that nation which should spring from his loins, but when he came into Canaan he found already a holy city, a priesthood, and a worship which he would readily recognise as being in honour of God Most High, and to the High Priest of that faith he made due acknowledgment.

From the day of Abraham a veil is drawn across the Holy City and its affairs, and Jerusalem is mentioned no more until, many centuries later, Joshua led the hosts of Israel across Jordan into the promised land. As the warriors swarmed up the roads from Jericho they found a king in Jerusalem—and it came to pass when Adonizedek, King of Jerusalem, had heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it (Joshua 10. 1), that Adonizedek sent the other kings of Southern Canaan a summons to combine for united defence. Here was a man of evident authority among the petty kings of Canaan. His name—reminiscent of his illustrious predecessor—*Adonizedek*, "Lord of righteousness." He comes on the stage only to disappear as quickly, for after the historic encounter related at length in Joshua 10 he was captured with his confederates and put to death.

From the Bible alone there would be little beyond the similarity of name to justify the

thought that here in the days of Joshua the priest-kings were still ruling and exercising the duties of their exalted office, but the voice of the monuments has in these days made itself heard, and shown that in the days of Joshua, as in those of Abraham, the Most High God was still worshipped in Jerusalem. In the year 1929 a notable discovery was made at Ras Shamra, on the sea-coast of Syria. A large number of inscribed tablets came to light, proving, by various evidences, to have been written about the time of the Exodus, and throwing an entirely new light upon the religious beliefs and ceremonials of Canaan at that time. A vast amount of information has been obtained from these tablets, all tending to show that whilst the Children of Israel were marching through the wilderness of Sinai on the way to the land of promise, the worship of the "Most High God" was widely prevalent in Canaan, with a distinctive ceremonial, one that contained many features reminiscent of the later ritual. Side by side with that gross idolatry and worship of many gods against which Israel was warned by Moses there existed also a form of worship which approached very near to that of the Israelites. It may well be that Melchizedek and Adonizedek were but two representatives of a long line of priestly kings who reigned in Jerusalem and kept the faith of the Most High alive through all those years.

These "Ras Shamra tablets" also illumined and explained another archæological enigma. In 1877 a peasant woman at Tel-el-Amarna in Egypt had stumbled upon one of the most important discoveries of the nineteenth century, a large number of tablets which were found to be the "Foreign Office" correspondence of the Egyptian government during the time when Joshua and the hosts of Israel were invading Canaan and subduing the Canaanites. These tablets, which were not completely and accurately deciphered until 1915, reveal that during the period of the Exodus Canaan was a land in nominal subjection to Egypt, each of its towns having a local ruler or an Egyptian governor, whose jurisdiction extended to the country around him, these governors rendering their allegiance to the Pharaoh of Egypt. In short, Canaan was an Egyptian province. Now among all these letters from the various petty kings of Canaan there are many written by one Abdi-Khiba, King of Jerusalem, who constantly claims that he holds his position not by permission of the Egyptian power, like the other kings about him, but by decree of the Most High. From these letters, and from the frequent mention of his name in documents written by other Canaanite dignitaries, it is known that Abdi-Khiba ruled Jerusalem in his own right in much the same

fashion as did Melchizedek centuries previously. This king's constant lament to the Egyptian Pharaoh is that the "Khabiri" were threatening his city and country and that unless help soon came, the invaders would overrun the land. Who these "Khabiri" were was long a matter of mystery but in recent years it has been generally agreed that they were the invading Israelites under Joshua, in process of subduing the land. Abdi-Khiba's letters break off abruptly, still pleading for the help that never came, and the sequel to the story is recorded in another of the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, a despatch from one Suyardata, an Egyptian official sent to Canaan to report upon the political condition of the province, in which he reported the news of the capture of Abdi-Khiba and the fall of his city at the hands of the "Khabiri"—the Israelites.

There seems little doubt that Abdi-Khiba was the last of the Melchizedek line of priest-kings. There is a possibility that Adoni-zedek was the same individual mentioned in the tablets as Abdi-Khiba, but it is more likely that when Adoni-zedek was slain by Joshua, Abdi-Khiba succeeded him as priest-king of Jerusalem, ruling whilst the Israelites were actually engaged in conquering the land and being finally captured by them and slain as recorded in the Tel-el-Amarna letters.

So ended the Melchizedek priesthood, a line of royal priests reigning in Jerusalem for an unknown period before the time of Abraham to the time of Joshua. Canaan and Syria had been populated from the "land of Shinar" many centuries before Abraham entered it. Abraham was descended from Shem through his son Arphaxad but Shem had other sons also and there are evidences that many of the people of Canaan were their descendants. Several centuries before Abraham the only God known to the Sumerians and Akkadians, from whom Abraham came, was the Most High God of Heaven. Some of these immigrants would have brought that knowledge and worship with them and preserved it in the midst of a land rapidly being given over to idolatry. A little later on Abraham found Abimelech, king of Gerar, worshipping the Most High, and likewise Pharaoh of Egypt when at last Abraham went there. The story of Melchizedek is therefore perfectly credible. For more than half a millennium the faith and worship of God Most High was kept alive in a land where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in succession were strangers and pilgrims—and then in the fulness of time the developing Plan of God demanded a new revelation of his Will. A hardy and virile people, sons of the desert, came in with the

enthusiasm and confidence engendered by their Covenant with God, and before them the old primitive Canaanitish worship waxed old and vanished away.

Quite evidently the fall of Jerusalem recorded by Suyardata was not followed up by the Israelites, for in Joshua 18. 28, the city is mentioned by a new name, "*Jebusi*"—the city of the Jebusites. The old proud name—the city of peace—had vanished with the fall of its priest-kings, and not until the time of David, four centuries later, was its name restored. I Chron. 11. 4-7 tells of the final capture of the city and of David making it his capital, restoring to it the original name by which it has ever since been known. There is an appropriateness in this, for David was a prototype of that greater Melchizedek who shall come in glory and power, and upon a greater throne than that of David, to rule as King and Priest in the New Jerusalem.

"Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually" says the writer to the Hebrews (Heb. 7. 3). These are the words which have mystified so many. How could this man Melchizedek be without parents, having no beginning nor ending, unless he be identified with God himself? The careful student will perceive, however, that the whole reference in Hebrews to this personage is symbolic or typical. The writer is calling to mind one little episode, that related in Genesis 14, and views it as an isolated picture upon which he can build his type. Melchizedek steps on to the stage, and steps off. Of what went before or of what came after, we are in ignorance; but while he stood there in the King's Dale, his holy city of Salem in the background, Abraham and his followers before him rendering willing tribute, and as he ministered bread and wine and raised his hands in blessing, he typified One who in the power of an endless life, abiding a priest continually, is abundantly able to save those who come unto God by him. Abraham and his followers pictured all mankind, bowing the knee in glad and willing submission to their new king. The King's Dale; surely that foreshadows Paradise restored, the glorified earth where the willing and obedient shall rejoice in the glory of God's grace, Salem in the background pictures the New Jerusalem in its descent from heaven to earth, and that venerable figure bearing bread and wine, clad in garments betokening at once royal glory and priestly dignity, the Lord Jesus Christ, no longer a High Priest after the order of Aaron—that is all in the past, in his day of humiliation

—but a Royal Priest whose priesthood shall never end. *"They truly,"* says the same writer again, speaking now of the Aaronic priests, *"were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death."* The priesthood of Aaron was a dying priesthood, and it could picture only sacrifice and suffering, things which one day must pass away for ever. They could never rightfully picture the everlasting

glory of Christ. *"But this man,"* triumphantly now, *"because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood."* The glory of this wonderful type will be fully revealed when Christ, the Prophet, Priest and King, accompanied by his glorified Church, comes forth to meet mankind, bearing bread and wine, and in the beautiful surroundings of the King's Dale gives them his blessing—the blessing of the Most High God.

EPISTLES OF JESUS

*A theme from
Revelation*

It is notable how markedly the course of Church history agrees with the outline spoken by our Lord from his position among the Golden Candlesticks. Whatever defections or privations befell the church of God throughout the whole Gospel Age, this much is true, and markedly foreshown in the Seven Epistles sent to the Churches. God is never without his witnesses upon the earth (Rev. 2 & 3). With all the waning love and false apostles and the Nicolaitan practices of Ephesus, there were some who could not bear those who were evil, and who endured, laboured and suffered for the name of Jesus, and whose faithfulness is to be rewarded with the joys of Paradise. With all the poverty, tribulation and reproach associated with Smyrna, and the falsity of the members of the synagogue of Satan by whom they were afflicted, there were some rich in grace, faithful to the last, and destined to wear the crown of life. In spite of Satan's throne in Pergamos, and of adulterous alliances, and of those who built up their power by evil, usurping practices, there were those who held fast to the Saviour's name, and kept the faith steadfast unto death, who are to be rewarded by feasting on the hidden manna—immortality—and by sharing the friendship represented in the white cloven stone, upon which would be written, in token of eternal friendship, the new Name of their beloved Lord. Even in Thyatira, where Jezebel held her voluptuous court, where evil reached its vilest depths, there was a remnant which kept clear of Satan's defilements and brought forth works of charity and faith and patience, slowly and painfully, and at terrible cost. To these will be given the early light of the Morning Star, and they, in contrast to their present subjection and humiliation, shall yet rule the nations in company with their beloved Lord and Head.

The deadness of Sardis was not so all-pervading and complete but that a few names

were left who had not defiled their garments, who had received the truth and taught it, and lived it, and who are yet to walk with Christ in the white garments of absolute righteousness, and have their names confessed in heaven. Though but a handful in the midst of many who were false in Philadelphia were to be found, there still was a band of earnest brothers on whom the doors cannot be shut, even though expelled from Satan's synagogue, and before whom they of Satan's synagogue shall yet be humbled, and who will be kept out of the hour of trial. This saintly few shall become pillars in God's temple, and be adorned with the name and character of God and of the New Jerusalem, and of their beloved Lord himself. For the love they bore to their brethren, and their Lord, they will enter into the glorious circle of the Divine family forever. Even among the sickening lukewarmness, pride, boasting and emptiness of Laodicea, there are some chastened and purified saints whom Jesus loves, who hear his voice, who open unto him, who sup with him, and who shall find a place with him on his glorious eternal Throne. Blessed are this favoured few, who, learning of his Presence, enter into the morning meal, and share with him in the glorious light of the opening day, their hearts the while glowing hot with joy and zeal and conviction that now the long journey is all but ended, and soon they will enter into the joys of their Lord.

If, then, these seven Epistles describe the history of the Church of God, the fact stands out with noonday clearness that God has had his saints, his living witnesses, in every stage of that journey. In spite of the dark pictures which surround these bright oases, God has not left himself without witness. He has had his true people who at no time kissed their hands, nor bowed the knee to the reigning idolators of the time. Vile as were those times, there was a little of the pure-red gold in it, just as there was an Enoch

and a Noah in the generation before the flood, and a Lot even in filthy Sodom itself. Amid all Christendom's failures there have always been some standing out against them. The pure ideal, gendered by such truth as they had, never failed to produce some approximate realisation of itself. Dreary and dark as both the prophetic and historic delineation must appear, there is still some golden tinge to the clouds, some strip of verdure to the pathway. Ever and anon in the distant scene, examples of faith, purity, love, heroism, devotion and obedience are never lost to view, the loveliest often being found in the darkest hours, and where they would be least expected. By way of compensation, in nearly every instance, when darkness and death descended in one place, light and life rose victorious in another. To quote from the pen of one who had great insight into these things, "contemporary with the waning of piety in Antioch, was its waxing in Milan. When the Churches of Alexandria and Carthage were sinking in the decrepitude of formalism, the Churches of Gaul were battling the vices of imperial civilisation, and the rudeness and disorder of barbarism. The era of the early growth of Rome's impious pretensions was the era of Ireland's light and life, holiness and beauty. While Mahomet was God's avenger on Syria and Egypt, the monks of Iona were studying their Bibles, and Scotch missionaries were crossing the Anglo-Saxon border and entering the heart of Germany. As Gregory IV was encouraging the sons of the Emperor Lewis in parricidal wars, Claude was preaching the truth in Turin, and adorning it with a holy life. When the pontifical court at Avignon was disgracing the name of religion by luxury and vice, pious men were writing books, and preaching sermons, and practising godly virtue in Teutonic cities. When the night of superstition and despotism was getting blacker than ever in France, the morning star of the Reformation rose in England. When the Italian fields were covered with rotten stubble, Bohemia was whitening to the harvest". And so, in all the ages, there has never failed some blessed off-set to the ever downward tendency. Nor will it ever be, in the darkest days of Christendom's apostasy, that there will be none to stand up for God and his pure truth, or that his true people shall fail from the earth, till their day is done.

But now, what were the things which made this slender martyr band so dear to the heart of the Lord, as He looked down upon them from his place amongst the Candlesticks. We shall find his words in these Epistles full of deep evangelical Truth, an important gauge for comparing the relative value of several things each of which is essential to our Christian life and standing.

First, note how Christ's true people are characterised by unswerving and uncompromising devotion to their profession (Heb. 3.1). Having taken Jesus as their Lord and Master they have no obedience to any but him. For him they labour, and for him they endure. For him they stand out against all that is evil in practice or in doctrine, having no fellowship with pseudo-apostles or apostate teachers. Though charged with charity to all they have no toleration for anybody or anything save that which meets his approval. Because He hates evil, they hate it too; because He requires his ministers to be faithful, so do they try those who claim to be the apostles and teachers. In all things they stand to the truth, as having received it from him, as a charge to defend with life and limb.

Next note that there are the poor, the reproached, the sorely tried, and the persecuted-unto-death. The mass of them were of the martyr band—living martyr lives, if not dying martyr deaths. Often in mountain caves or desert wastes they lived in poverty rather than dwell in the palaces of sin—always living unto him who had called them. But though poor, despised and afflicted, they cheerfully bore whatever He appointed, and kept his word of patient endurance.

The saints of Ephesus did bear for the Saviour's name, and fainted not. Those of Smyrna were faithful unto death. Those of Pergamos held fast Jesus' name and did not deny the faith of Christ, standing firm in the truth under the very sword of the executioner. Those of Thyatira and Philadelphia were commended for their endurance amid falsity and suffering. The Lord laid great stress upon all these things, and held them dear to his heart. Faithful service, loyal defence of the truth; patience; longsuffering; diligence;—in these He found great delight, and upon them bestowed his praise and blessing. All these are marks of true saintship and sonship, and for these He had words of approval. But there was one thing greater than all else. It was of less moment to try false apostles or boast of a flawless creed, or of correct theories, or even of sound doctrine, if there was no exhibition of "first love". Soundness of doctrine is important—He commended them for that—but soundness of doctrine is not enough. The most orthodox church in this list, Sardis, was dead in this respect. There must be faith—a true faith—based upon an appreciative, intelligent understanding of Truth; but it must be a faith energised by love, and love must labour with patience and hope and tenderness even towards the erring and the slow-to-learn. There are such things as "dead works"—works dissociated from true

love; There is a bigoted steadfastness in doctrine—doctrine for doctrine's sake. All this was seen in Ephesus but the "one thing needful" was a return to that first uprush of love to God and love to the brethren. All knowledge, all faith, all mastery of tongues, all self-abasing service cannot make up for the lack of "first love". Not even a keen penetration into truth and falsities, or a correctness of judgment and statement of holy things, or a zealous severance from erroneous or irresolute teachings, can compensate for the lack of that warm and pure impulse which the Lord desires to see, as the one thing above all others, in its pristine fulness. Inasmuch as the whole catalogue of things which He hates comes from the lack or loss of this grace, so in reverse manner the growth of all that He loves springs from the root of this first love. Every good and desirable thing in faith, in service, in doctrine,

takes its "quality" from this satisfying love.

Such love centres in himself, and in a loving Father, and knows no source of pleasure or contentment apart from them. That is the major key-note of these as well as of all Apostolic Epistles, but in these we have the words—the last words—of the Master himself, telling his Church as she set out over the dark journey of this Gospel Age those things which were dear to his heart, and for which, with his penetrating eyes of flame, He was looking. The last remnant of the martyr band is living in the earth today, and to them He says "I counsel ye to buy of me gold tried in the fire . . . anoint thine eye with eyesalve that thou mayest see . . . As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten". Still the same things as before; but now, in the days of his Presence, of greater urgency because the time is short.

The natural man lives to be ministered unto—he lays his imposts upon others. He buys slaves that they may fan him to sleep, bring him the jewelled cup, dance before him, and die in the arena for his sport. Into such a world there came a King, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister". The rough winds fanned his sleep; He drank of the mountain brook and made not the water wine for himself; would not use his power to stay his own hunger, but had compassion on the multitude. He called them He had bought with a great price no more servants but friends. He entered the bloody arena alone, and, dying, broke all chains and brought life and immortality to light.

This blessed law of Christ, the Law of Love, should rule in all who have taken by consecration the name of Christ. Its hallowed influence should radiate from us, not only among the brethren, but also out upon the world, as a powerful witness to the effect of the grace of God in the heart. Thus we shall demonstrate to them that the love of God received into a life brings peace and harmony and happiness; that it makes noble, devoted, faithful husbands; more kind, loyal and tender wives; more obedient, loving children; more kind, good neighbours; and that it pours "oil on the troubled waters" of all our experiences, bringing blessing wherever it reaches.

The name of Cyrus is always associated with the famous "Decree" in which he gave authority for the return of the exiles and the restoration of the Temple at Jerusalem. Taken in conjunction with Isaiah's prophetic words of two centuries earlier in which Cyrus was mentioned as the Lord's anointed for the restoration of Judah (Isa. 45. 1), it has been generally assumed that Cyrus the monotheist had a special partiality for the Jewish religion as against the polytheism of the Babylonians whom he had conquered. The record of his Decree, preserved in Ezra 1. 2 seems by its phraseology to betoken a special faith in the God of Israel. "*The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him, and let him go up . . .*"

Cyrus, issued at about the same time. This one appears, not in the Bible, but on inscriptions discovered in the ruins of Ur of the Chaldees, a city that was sacred to Sin, the Moon-god of the Babylonians. "*Sin, the illuminator of heaven and earth, with his favourite sign delivered into my hands the four quarters of the world, and I returned the gods to their shrines. The great gods have delivered all the lands into my hands; the land I have caused to dwell in a peaceful habitation.*" The sentiments are almost identical, except that here Cyrus credits the gods, especially the Moon-god, with having given him all the kingdoms of the earth, whereas in the Decree to Israel he gives the credit to Israel's God. It would seem that Cyrus was, in fact, more of a diplomat than was formerly thought; he evidently intended being polite to all the gods in order that he might at least run no risk of unwittingly slighting whichever one of them proved in the end to be the true God.

But compare, with that, another decree of



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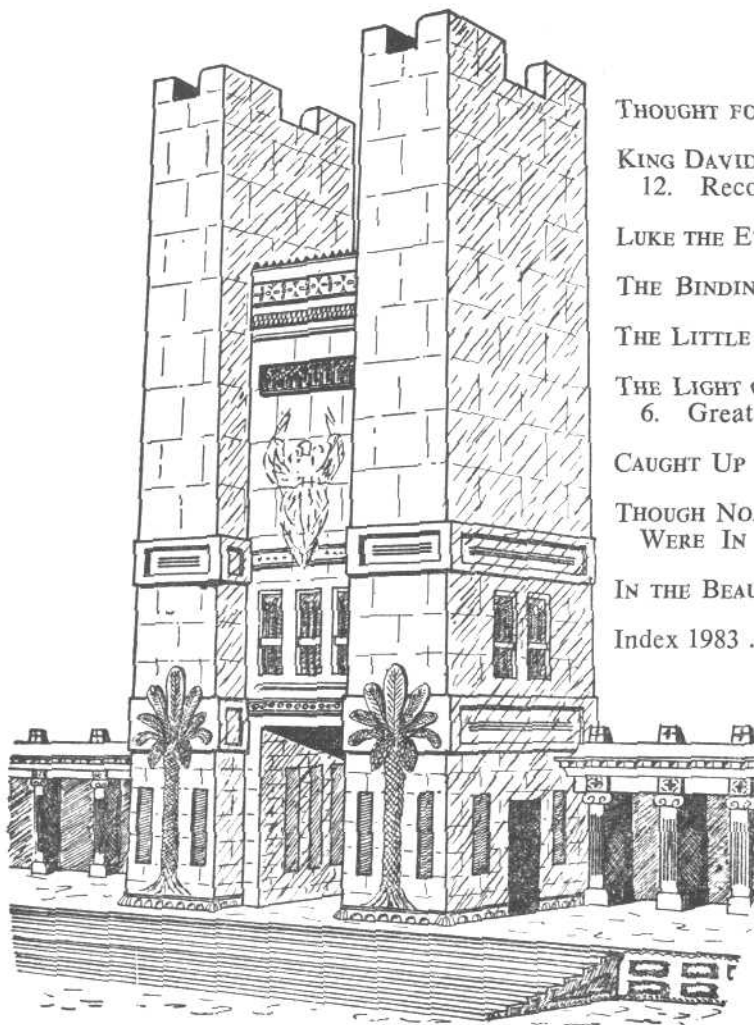
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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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 work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (Isa. 32.17).

There is no peace in the world to-day. Even the U.N. peacekeeping forces are armed with guns and armoured vehicles and find themselves the targets of both sides of the contending forces. Even if the great Powers settled their differences and began to live amicably together, there are many lesser powers thirsting for war and conquest. Almost a century of League of Nations and United Nations has failed to achieve peace. How certain it is that the mutual rivalries and jealousies and greed of the nations, great and small, is greater by far than their desire for peace. How clear that, left to man's own efforts, peace on earth will never be achieved.

Yet it will come. *"As truly as I live, saith the Lord, the whole earth shall be filled with my glory."* A time has to come in human history when God intervenes to command the attention and allegiance of men. A world empire there must be in which men are brought face to face with the realities of life and for a season have their war-like and anti-social impulses restrained whilst they are required to learn the laws by which alone man must live. Men of God of olden time knew of this and foresaw such an era and described it in words that will never die. Christians to-day look for it and some perceive in the present well-nigh hopeless state of human affairs the long foretold signs which herald the imminent dawn of that day, the Age in which the Kingdom of Christ rules supreme amongst men, and the vision of Isaiah quoted above becomes reality.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Revised Authorised Version of the Bible. 1219 pp, embossed cloth, gold blocked, India paper, 8½ x 5½ x 1½. Samuel Bagster Ltd., 3 Beggarwood Lane, Basingstoke, Hants, RG23 7LP. £7.25 including postage (£6.25 to readers of the BSM mentioning the fact when ordering). £5.96 from booksellers.

This very handsome volume is not a new or revised translation; it preserves the traditional text of the A.V. but replaces all the archaic and mediæval English words by their modern equivalents, thus rendering the text much more easily readable. For Christians who revere the A.V. and are not greatly impressed with the spate of modern translations to which we have been treated in recent years—and there are many such, especially among the elderly—this book should be a real help. The type face is large and clear, and the text is displayed appropriately to the subject, e.g. poetic portions as in the Psalms are set out as is poetry, New Testament quotations from the O.T. are inset in italics and inverted commas, and while the customary chapter and verse numbering is retained the subject matter is sub-divided into sections with sub-headings to bring out the sense and facilitate following the subject. Altogether the general layout shows many advantages over the traditional A.V. text. There are no marginal references but a few footnotes giving occasional alternative renderings.

As to the changes which constitute the reason for this publication, the old "thee" and "thine" etc. has given place to "you", "yours" and so on. Such obsolete words as "sith" in Ezek. 35.6 becomes "since". One or two examples of the manner in which obsolete words have been modernised are as follows:

Gen. 2.7 "Soul" becomes "being".

Exod. 35.32 "Curious works" becomes "artistic works".

Deut. 22.19 "Amerce him" becomes "fine him".

Job 22.30 "He shall deliver the island of the innocent" becomes "He shall even deliver one who is not innocent."

Matt. 4.24 "Divers diseases" becomes "various diseases".

I Thess. 4.15 "Prevent" becomes "precede".

2 Thess. 2.6 "Letteth" becomes "restrain".

Jas. 1.21 "Superfluity of naughtiness" becomes "overflowing wickedness".

Altogether a useful book for those who like to keep the diction of the Authorised Version.

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous King*

12. Reconciliation

The sands were running out fast. Only about three years remained for Israel's most famous king. He had achieved tolerable security from external enemies for his people and could bequeath a safe and reasonably prosperous kingdom to his successor. But there were enemies within the nation and he knew that after his death the destined ruler, his young son, Solomon, still less than twenty years of age, would need all his wisdom and sagacity to maintain his kingship. All that came out in his final charge to Solomon when he felt the shades of death closing round him.

In the meantime the old flair for organising the affairs of the nation asserted itself. His military prowess was spent; no longer did he possess the physical strength to go out at the head of his armies to battle; in any case there were no longer any enemies to fight. Israel had earned from the surrounding nations that healthy respect for her fighting qualities which never left her afterwards—and remains to this day in this modern world. David had time to think of other matters and other ambitions having to do with the internal affairs of Israel, and more importantly, its religious condition before God.

Perhaps this is why he determined to take a census of the nation. 2 Sam. 24 and 1 Chron. 21 both tell how he ordered Joab to institute and conduct a comprehensive numbering of the people. He wanted to know just how many subjects he had and Joab was to investigate and report.

Joab was appalled. *"The Lord thy God make his people an hundred times so many more as they be, but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? Why then doth my lord require this thing? Why wilt thou be a cause of trespass to Israel?"*

There was always a prejudice in ancient times against the counting of peoples. It was partially based upon the superstitious idea that if the powers of darkness knew just how many people were involved in men's opposition to them their strategy could be better directed to obtaining the victory. There was also the feeling that if the Lord was fighting for them their number was of no consequence, and therefore to take a census of this nature implied a lack of faith and would bring Divine censure upon them. So Joab made his protest.

David took no notice. Joab was told to obey and summarily dismissed from the king's pres-

ence to commence the discharge of his commission. I Chronicles says that it was Satan who moved David to undertake this census whereas 2 Samuel declares that *"the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah"*. The probable explanation of this apparent contradiction is that the word rendered "Satan" in 1 Chron. 21.1 means "an adversary" (the Hebrew word for "adversary" is "satan") and unless the context specifically demands the application of the term to the malevolent evil spirit popularly known as Satan, the term adversary should be used. I Chron. 21.1 should read *"An adversary stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel"*. The combined import of the two passages then would be that some person unknown instigated the thought in David's mind to do this thing.

It certainly was not the Lord. It is quite illogical to think that if this action was displeasing to the Lord, and merited and received Divine retribution in consequence, it would have been suggested and inspired by the Lord in the first place. The action was inspired by man, and the next question is, what was its purpose? Whatever the purpose, it was something which elicited Divine disapproval.

"The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel" (2 Sam. 24.1) Note, not against David at this juncture, but against the nation generally. This can mean only one thing, that the nation was passing through one of its periodic times of apostasy, and consequently under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant was due for chastisement. If the occasion of the census became the means of chastisement, so be it. The Lord uses all kinds of agents to execute his purpose.

But why should the Lord be displeased at David's action in this matter. Says 1 Chron. 21.7. *"God was displeased with this thing"*. There is nothing immoral in counting heads, no prohibition in the Mosaic Law; in fact God commanded both Moses and Joshua on two notable occasions to do this very thing. The element of evil must, therefore, have been not in the action itself but in the motive which inspired the action.

Why did David, after nearly forty years of kingship, suddenly develop or had instilled into him this sudden passion for ascertaining the number of his people. He had never indicated any such desire before? What element was present in his reign at this time which was not there before?

One activity, and that a most noteworthy activity, did come to its culminating point at this period of David's reign. That activity was the collection together of the materials and the preparation for the erection of the magnificent Temple which he had planned but which the Lord told him would be built, not by him, but by his son Solomon, for he had been a man of blood, and that great Temple was to be a house of peace. The rather confused and disjointed narrative in 1 Chron. 22 to 28 gives an account of David's actions at this time. It would almost seem as if he sensed his approaching demise and was anxious to leave everything in order and readiness before his decease. There was a great coming and going between the land of Israel and that of Tyre, from which had to be obtained many cedars of Lebanon, floated down the coast from Tyre to Joppa and then hauled forty miles up the mountains to Jerusalem; a great deal of quarrying of limestone from the Judean hills and its shaping by masons into large stone blocks; the casting and fabrication of gold and silver and copper into the ornamentation and furnishings of the building, and a great deal besides. All this required men, teams of labourers and foresters and hauliers and craftsmen toiling in the forests and quarries and manufactories, to give substance to this creation of David's ambition, to be the crowning glory of his reign. Those chapters in Chronicles, written long after the events they record, tell of the gathering of thousands of workers together for the performance of all kinds of tasks and the appointment over them of controllers, supervisors, taskmasters, to see that the work ordained was duly and expeditiously executed. When one thinks of the glory of David and Solomon's achievement in that magnificent Temple, rated by the ancients as one of the seven wonders of the world, one is apt not to realise the cost of it all in terms of toil and sweat and human suffering and death. *"There are workmen with thee in abundance"* said David to his son, and the meticulous manner in which the various categories of workers is catalogued, down to those who were deputed to *"do the work of the ground for tillage"*, the growers of crops and fruits and keepers of herds and beasts of burden, apparently to feed and serve the hosts of manual workers engaged in this great project, all seem to indicate that David conceived and put into execution a comprehensive project for the regimentation and virtual harnessing of the entire nation for the completion of his great project.

Was it for that purpose he ordered the census, that he might ascertain the extent of his manpower resources, that the work might be planned accordingly, that every man in Israel might be assigned his place and directed to work therein?

That at least could suggest a logical reason for David's otherwise rather incomprehensible action in sending Joab and his men to number all Israel and bring the results back to him.

Suppose then that this was the reason; why should the Lord be "displeased with this thing" to the extent that He sent a pestilence upon Israel? Was not the Temple to be for his honour and was not the purpose that He might be magnified among all nations. Surely all this lavish display of earthly wealth and untiring human effort to his honour could be nothing but pleasing to him?

Perhaps not; perhaps the Lord looked beyond and underneath all this frenzied and much-proclaimed activity, and saw that all was not right, either with David or with his people "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool" He said much later on to Isaiah, "Where is the house that ye build unto me, and where is the place of my rest?". All these things his own hand had made at the beginning, and He derived no particular joy from this great edifice, however magnificent, unless it was a spontaneous expression of the love and devotion and loyalty of his chosen people, and that, the narrative clearly implies, it was not. A lot is said in Chronicles about the willingness of the leaders of the nation giving of their wealth to assist in the compilation of the treasure of which the Temple was built; nothing about the lower orders who had to undertake the hard work. The implication is that they were just drafted into the service at the king's behest and that was that. When Moses built the Tabernacle in the Wilderness the Lord's instruction was that each man and woman of Israel was to bring "of his own voluntary will" that which he or she could contribute to the achievement of that work. The people then were fired with an enthusiasm for, and a loyalty to, God and it was that spirit which the Lord honoured and accepted. Things were not the same in the days of David. The king was intent upon a lasting monument to the glory of his reign which to him was synonymous with the glory of God, but there is no guarantee that the Lord also saw it that way. The notables and politicians and leaders of the nation comprised a rabble of plotters and counter-plotters each ever on the alert to advance his personal interests and ambitions at whatever cost in injustice and suffering to others, even to the extent of murder. The people in general, despite David's own unflinching loyalty to his God and his example, were themselves retrogressing back into the idolatry from which Samuel had rescued them half a century before. We know that from the succinct statement in 2 Sam. 24.11 *"And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel"*. Those words,

used so many times in Old Testament history, always mean the same thing. The people had apostasised from the Lord, repudiated the Covenant, and turned again to idols. So the penalty of the broken Covenant had to come upon them as it had done so many times before. How could the Lord God of Israel receive and bless the offering of such a Temple to his glory at a time when the hearts of his people were so far from him?

Twenty-five years earlier David had conceived this scheme of a magnificent Temple to the Lord to supersede the existing Tabernacle constructed by Moses (2 Sam. 7; 1 Chron. 17). On that occasion God had sent the prophet Nathan to tell him, in short, that He did not want such a house and that He was quite content to dwell with his people within the curtains of the Tabernacle. What was more important, Nathan went on to tell David, was that the Lord himself would build David a house, a royal dynasty which would culminate in the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of all the earth, in the Millennial Day of man's redemption, ruling as a greater David to all eternity. That, to the Lord, was a much more important thing than the erection of a literal building upon earth which must inevitably with the passage of time wax old and vanish away, as in fact it did at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers less than four centuries later. Now at the end of his reign David had revived the idea, doubtless believing that the Lord's promises regarding the glory of his successor Solomon whilst he maintained Israel's loyalty to God would incline him this time to accept the proposition and the offering.

So the pestilence which the Lord allowed to come upon Israel might well be regarded as a joint judgment upon David for his ambition and upon the people for their idolatry. It did at least have the effect of causing David to do what he ought to have done at the first, come before the Lord in humility and with sacrificial offering to ask the Lord's blessing and guidance on his project.

David, busy with his planning, the result of Joab's census before him, received a visitor, the prophet Gad. Gad was an old man by now; he had adventured with David since the early days when Saul was king and been with him in the dark days of David's exile in the wilderness. He was probably one of the very few men privileged to "speak his mind" to the king. (It is thought that Gad was the author of the narrative now appearing as I Sam. Chap. 25 to 2 Sam. Chap. 9.) Now he appeared in the royal presence with a message from the Lord.

The message, as usual, was uncompromising. David had sinned; he must accept the consequences. He had the choice of three options. Three years' famine, three months' invasion of the land by hostile enemies, or three days' pestilence decimating the people. Gad faced his sovereign with two curt words; "*Choose ye*".

"*I have sinned*" said David dejectedly, "*I have done very foolishly. Let me now fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man*". The country had just survived three years of famine; he did not want any more of that. He was in no mood, even had he been physically capable, to lead his armies out against an invading host. He chose the three days' pestilence; that would soon be over and the loss of life probably least of the three alternatives. "*So the Lord sent pestilence upon Israel... and there died of the people about seventy thousand men*" (2 Sam. 24. 15).

One might query the justice of the Lord in inflicting death by pestilence upon seventy thousand Israelites as retribution for David's fault. It might not have been that way at all. It might well be that what the Lord did do was to restrain famine and invasion which was already poised to strike and allowed the onset of a pestilence which was on the way anyway. If all related factors are taken into account the position was that because Israel generally was in a state of apostasy (2 Sam. 24.1) all these things were due to come, irrespective of David's particular fault at this moment. Was the moral behind this happening the fact that had Israel been righteous and David without fault, none of these things would have smitten Israel. What the Lord did do was to accept David's plea and allow only the lightest of the three natural disasters to fall upon the people as a kind of combined retribution for their own apostasy and the irreligiousness of David, and to restrain the other two.

David's repentance was sincere, and David's repentance was accepted. The prophet Gad came again to him and told him to erect an altar at the spot where the pestilence was stayed, on the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite. There he offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and made his peace with God. There, perhaps, at last, his soul was cleansed from all his arrogance and pride, his ruthlessness and blood-guiltiness, leaving only the man of God who fifty years earlier had been described as a "man after God's own heart". Here the sterling faith and tenacious loyalty of the shepherd lad who faced the unbelieving Philistine with one small stone taken from the brook came to the top, and he was once again God's man, a fitting type of the One who is one day to take his place on the throne of David, ruling for ever and ever.

It must have been so, for that piece of land on the top of Mount Moriah where David built his altar and made his reverent offerings to the Lord became hallowed for all time when Solomon not many years later built there the great Temple which had been David's own ambition to build but which he had been forbidden so to do. That spot was to be famed ever after as the meeting-place between God and Israel throughout the period of the Kings, a symbol of the Divine presence with his people, thus revered through the centuries to our own time. But it is entered in the annals of Heaven also as the place where at last the oft-times wayward and errant man whom God, who never makes a mistake, had chosen at the first, became fully and finally reconciled to the One who had never really let

him go, and so for the few remaining years of his life, entered into an "afterward of peace".

In that, David is a true symbol of the course of mankind, chosen and decreed by God to be capable of great things, finding his destiny through dark and devious ways of stumbling and error, of selfishness and heedlessness, of outright violation of the laws of God, emerging at the end into the sunlight of the "glorious liberty of the children of God". David was shown then, as men will be shown at the end of God's dealing with them, when stripped of all the pollution and defilements of encircling sin, to be pure gold, resplendent in the Divine likeness.

So, at last, David found peace.

To be concluded.

Luke the Evangelist

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Luke wrote the most beautiful book in the world. He was a brilliant writer and his gospel is of high literary value. He had great freedom and ability in the use of the Greek language, yet the style is simple and pure. There is a charm and earnestness in his anecdotes which appeals to the youngest reader; yet there is exactness of detail which holds the interest of the careful student.

In the third Gospel we have the setting of Christ's life in the Roman world, and historical data is given which links our Lord's life with the society in which he lived. Most of the information which we have of the birth and early years of Jesus are in Luke's record. He it is also who depicts our Master in the home and family life of his day. The religious trend of the first century was to keep women and children in a place of inferiority and it is mainly Luke who showed that Jesus ignored the fashion. He emphasises the place of the gentle and simple things in the purpose of God. All this gives evidence of Luke's wide sympathies, which extend still further when consideration is given to the parables and miracles which are peculiar to his record.

He was interested in the poor and despised, and our Lord's appearance in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4) is an appropriate opening for his ministry. But for Luke's pen we should not have had the great illustrations of compassion given in our Lord's parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. He too retold the striking contrasts between Pharisee and publican praying in the Temple, and the real life study of Simon and the "sinful woman"; Luke recognised the evil of racial and class distinction in the parable of the "rich fool" and writes of Jesus' tolerance towards the Samaritans.

As a medical doctor he would be intimately acquainted with human suffering, and his method of recording miracles of healing reflect his knowledge and his sympathy. This is apparent in his description of "a man full of leprosy" in Luke 5. 12. In writing of the woman in the crowd who touched the hem of his garment (Luke 8. 46) he uses a more professional term for the word "virtue" than does Mark although this is not clear from the English version. His reference to Peter's mother-in-law as having a "great fever" is similarly the distinguishing mark of a physician. His delicate and restrained treatment of our Lord's experience in Gethsemane is masterly and again a singularly professional reference to the "drops of blood" (Luke 22. 44). The word "Wholesome" adopted by Paul in his later epistles is peculiar to Luke's Gospel among the evangelists, (found in Luke 5. 31; 7. 10; 15. 2).

However he was not only a scientist and historian; he had great interest in the devotional aspect of the Christian life, and he has been called the first Christian hymnologist. The remarkable poems of Mary in the Magnificat, and of Zachariah at the birth of John the Baptist are a tribute to Luke's diligence. The third Gospel provides us with the greatest insight into our Lord's prayer life, recording some of his prayers and teaching upon the subject. Several of these were at critical points in his ministry, for example when He spent all night in prayer prior to selecting the disciples. In narrating the Transfiguration on the mount, Luke alone informs us that Jesus was praying. Finally, on the cross, the prayer of forgiveness (not spurious as some have supposed) was a precious reflection of our Saviour preserved only by Luke.

THE BINDING OF SATAN

"And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the abyss, and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that ancient serpent, which is the devil, Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, and after that he must be loosed a little season" (Rev. 20, 1-3).

The vision of the conflict between good and evil in the Book of Revelation comes at length to a time when a mighty angel is seen descending from heaven with a great chain in his hands; he takes forcible hold of the great red dragon which alone survives of the enemies of righteousness, binds him with the chain, casts him into the abyss, and seals the entrance with the sign of Divine authority that the nations should be deceived no more throughout the thousand years—the Millennium. Ardent longing for that day has led many to watch earnestly the signs of the times, and the question "Is Satan now bound? Is he in process of being bound? Is he yet to be bound?" are common.

The literal personality of the Devil is not always accepted nowadays; many feel that the Scripture references to Satan and Satanic power can be well understood as allusions to the presence and influence of evil in an abstract sense over humanity. There is no doubt, however, that the New Testament writers believed in Satan as a powerful celestial being in a state of open rebellion against God, directly responsible for the introduction of evil into the world and its promotion and development throughout human history. Origen in the 2nd century claimed that not only all mankind, but eventually the Devil himself, will succumb to the drawing power of Christ and so become reconciled and attain eternal life, but on the other hand at least three of the inspired writers—John, Isaiah and Ezekiel—foresee the extinction of the personal Satan with the passing of evil from Divine creation and any exposition of Revelation 20 can only be on the basis that a personal being is referred to, and he is, and will be until his end, incorrigibly and persistently evil.

This 20th chapter of Revelation pictures the work of the Millennial Age, when the Lord Christ is the acknowledged ruler of this earth and all its peoples are to be made fully conversant with the Divine standards of life and enjoy the opportunity to make their momentous choice, for good or evil, for life or death. The decision

is to be a personal one, and none will be able to say that powers of evil from outside have hindered or thwarted their desire to be converted and find reconciliation with God. In that Age a man will die only for his own sin, only because, with full knowledge and ability to choose and practice that which is right in God's sight, he nevertheless elects to remain evil for the love of it. Hence this picture in these few verses, drawn to delineate the suppression of the power of external evil so that it can no longer adversely influence or affect men against their will. In that Age it is to be true that *"they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain"* (Isa. 65.25). In order to accomplish that end it is obvious that the Devil must be deprived of power to instil evil and sin into the hearts and actions of men, and this preliminary to the work of the Millennial Age logically introduces this 20th chapter.

What is this binding? Quite evidently, it is closely connected with the restraint of evil which is a feature of the Millennial Age. Rev. 20.1 indicates clearly that its fulfilment is at the beginning of that Age. This does not necessarily mean, though, that the binding takes place simultaneously with the commencement of the Second Advent. The dragon of Rev. 20 is the last enemy of righteousness to be dealt with after the other great enemies, the "Beast" and the "False Prophet" have been cast into the Lake of Fire. Now, since Rev. 19, dealing with the warfare between the Rider on the White Horse and these two enemies, is evidently a phase of the Advent, the binding of the Dragon, coming next in order, would seem to belong to a later phase of that Advent. This binding also coincides with the commencement of the reign of the saints, and since that reign does not commence until the saints have been "changed" and the marriage of the Lamb completed, and the Lord must first come "for" his saints before the marriage feast and his subsequent revelation to the world "with" his saints, it would seem clear that the "binding of Satan" is to occur after all these things at the time of the establishment of Christ's kingdom in power in the earth. That time has not yet come.

The background is this world at that time during the course of the Second Advent when the Lord Christ, having already resurrected his Church to be associated with him in his Millennial work, has destroyed those factors in society which have stood in opposition to his assumption of power. Included in these forces are those

institutions of men which are in themselves evil and have oppressed the sons of men. Under symbols of the "beast", the "false prophet", the "kings of the earth", in chapter 19, these are pictured as drawn up in battle array to contend with the Rider on the White Horse from heaven—the Lord Christ in martial guise—and they all are defeated and destroyed, their destruction being symbolised by the fiery lake. Only the dragon remains, and this 20th chapter identifies this dragon of Revelation with the serpent of Eden and Satan the destroyer, so completing the identification. The lesser evil powers having been dealt with, and the time having come for the resurrection of the dead to experience the call to conversion and life of the new Age, it remains to deal with Satan so that the last hindering influence is removed. Hence the angel descending from heaven with a great chain in his hand is another representation of our Lord at his Second Advent, specifically as respects that aspect which has to do with the restraint of the Evil One.

From that time onward, the practice of evil will be restrained. *"Nothing shall hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain"* (Isa. 11.9). Men will not be prevented from thinking evil thoughts or harbouring evil designs; some will yield *"feigned obedience"* (Psa. 18.14 marg); but the power to inflict evil or harm, physical, mental or moral, upon another will be lost. We do not know how. Divine power will be exercised here in a fashion of which we have little, if any, conception to-day. But it will be true that although a man may formulate an intention to do evil to another, he will find himself physically or mentally unable to put that intention into effect. That restraint will operate throughout the Millennial Age.

This "binding of Satan", that he should *"deceive the nations no more"*, presupposes that he has possessed and exercised the power to deceive men and instil evil thoughts and influences into their minds during the present and past spans of human history and this supposition is confirmed by our Lord's reference to him as the "prince of this world" and Paul's "the god of this world". (Jno. 14:30; 2 Cor. 4:4). It is this power and freedom which will be taken from Satan throughout the whole period of the Millennium and this constitutes his "binding". His personal freedom of movement, so to speak, may not be limited any more than will be the personal freedom of evilly disposed men on earth during that Age, but he will be powerless to reach men's minds in any way.

A glance at daily events should make it clear that the binding of Satan has not yet taken place and is not yet even in progress. The powers of evil have greater control to-day in earth's affairs

than they have ever had, except, perhaps, in the early days at the period of the Deluge. Many of the devices and acts of certain classes of men are characterised by a cold-blooded ferocity and disregard for human suffering which can quite literally be said to be Devil-inspired. The fearful experiences through which so many of earth's peoples must pass are evidences that the archangel of evil is still the god of this world, and that his subjects still render him service. It is sometimes suggested that these facts are the result of Satan's struggles to resist his binding and are evidences therefore that his binding is actually in progress. This reasoning is built upon a human conception of the binding as though the Most High finds it necessary to wage war and use the heavenly equivalent of physical force to achieve his end of rendering Satan powerless. Nothing of the sort. God is always master of the situation, and when in his wisdom the time comes for Satan to be bound and his influence restrained, one word from the Almighty and it will be done. It will not require battalions of angels drawn up in martial array, archangels in command of detachments and some spiritual equivalent of carnal weapons, with which to wage an invisible conflict with the hosts of Satan in the fashion in which men wage war to-day. God is omnipotent. *"He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast"* (Psa. 33.9). His ends are achieved by means of orderly development, and He permits the continuance of evil to a pre-determined limit for a wise purpose, yet when his time has come to act against evil and evil-doers, none can resist his will. So Divine power will operate from heaven to end, in one moment of time, every scrap of influence Satan has over man and spirit.

One may begin to wonder at this point just what is the attitude of Satan himself to all this. How does he regard this already well-publicised picture of his approaching doom? After a very successful career of crime, what, if any, preparation is he likely to make to resist any threat to the continuance of his present activities? What, if any, resistance can he offer to the omnipotent power of God? Is there any likelihood that Origen was right after all, and that eventually the Devil will abandon his evil ways and embrace righteousness? In the face of the positive statements of Scripture above referred to this would not seem likely. What perhaps is more probable is that in fact Satan, a fallen being separated from God by millenniums of sin, does not really believe in his heart that the threatened fate will ever materialise. The position is much the same with many of mankind. Men today, in general, do not really believe in God. They have lost their knowledge of him, and with that any vital belief

in his power or interest in them. "If there is a God, He either does not care or has no power to put right things that are wrong in this world!" That sentiment fairly expresses the considered judgment of the natural man who has been separated from God by sin from the beginning. Yet in that beginning man knew God, walked with God, talked with God; that is clear from the Genesis story. The difference has been effected by sin. It is reasonable to think that the same principle can hold good in the case of Satan. He also had the privilege of knowing God, walking with him, talking with him, and appreciating his power. He embraced sin, and since nothing that is of sin can stand in the Divine Presence, he too from that moment must have been banished, separated from God just as truly as was Adam. Would it be surprising, therefore, if Satan, blinded by his own sin, concludes that after all this time God is evidently unable to complete his designs, and that sin can continue indefinitely on its apparently successful course?

If this hypothesis be well founded, the great enemy of man will continue busily with his plans, waging war against all that is holy and true and lovely upon earth, unbelieving until the hour has struck. In the heyday of his dominion, attendant angels carrying out his dark orders, the cry of his suffering prisoners going up to heaven, his power will vanish as one snaps off the electric light. Suddenly he will find himself bereft of power, of influence, of servants, of an empire—alone. Too late, he will realise that the omnipotence of God has waited for this moment, and that his long course of rebellion against his Creator, with all its terrible consequences for mankind, has ended.

Can one picture that lonely spirit through all the thousand years of earth's jubilee? Free to roam through the vast spaces of God's creation, free to observe, to meditate, to scheme, but powerless to affect or influence in any way the mind or the heart of the weakest or humblest of God's creatures. Seeing all, hearing all, unable to interfere, the seal of Divine authority marks him out and sets him apart like Cain, an outcast, an exile, one upon whom is the judgment of God. He may translate himself out of our material universe into that spiritual sphere which is beyond the scope of human sense or understanding, and wander through the celestial land as alone and remote from the presence of God as when he presided over earth's destinies. He may come back into our world of time and space to find the thousand years of restitution still in progress, but wherever he goes and whatever he does, Satan will be bound, altogether unable to interfere further in the plans of God for his creation.

Strangely, this is not the end. One might expect that, having destroyed the power of Satan in the world and established a rule of righteousness in which evil finds no place, God would ensure that there will be no revival of sin, by executing the penalty of sin — death — upon this arch-rebel against him. But no; he is bound, restrained, impotent to do evil, for the thousand years, but he lives still. God has not taken away his life. Further, at the end of the Millennium he is to be loosed again, set free to resume his evil work among men, if then he will. Of this "loosing" it is necessary to speak guardedly, for the statement appears in only one text of Scripture, Rev. 20.7, and the words are vague and obscure. (*A following article in this issue treats of this text in greater detail*; Ed.) A little thought, however, seems to indicate that this final "loosing" is logical and in harmony with the general principles of the Divine Plan. All of mankind are to have such an opportunity to decide for good or evil after they have witnessed and experienced, during that last thousand years, the benefits of universal adherence to the righteous laws of God and full loyalty to him. The "spirits in prison", those rebellious angels who "*fell from their high estate*" in the days before the Flood (Jude 6; I Pet. 2.4; Gen. 6), and have since that day been under a form of restraint witnessing the evil that has come upon the world, will in that Age have the same opportunity as men to repent, and convert, and be reconciled to God (I Cor. 6.3). Is it not logical and in keeping with the known character of God, who is "*not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Pet. 3.9), that Satan himself should at least be treated similarly, and have the same opportunity after seeing for himself the results of the Messianic reign of righteousness? Is this "loosing" in fact an opportunity for him to demonstrate whether, after all that he has seen, he may yet, at the eleventh hour, repent of his evil deeds? If he should so repent, it must be that, despite his evil deeds, God would receive him.

There are, though, three prophetic Scriptures which seem to indicate that the die is already cast, that the opportunity will not be taken. Here is concerned the revealed foreknowledge of God, which is something that we as human beings cannot hope to understand and into which we may not intrude. John in Rev. 20. 10, after the episode of the "loosing", says that "*the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire*" which in vs. 14 is defined as the "second death". This is destruction, eternal death, the wages of sin. This is stated as an event that is certainly going to happen. Then Ezekiel in chap. 28 describes one under the cognomen of the "king of Tyre" who had been in Eden as a "protective

cherub", created perfect and sinless by God, lapsed into rebellion and sin, and receives Divine condemnation. "I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth . . . and never shalt thou be any more". Isaiah in chap. 14, under guise of a Divine declaration addressed to the "king of Babylon", speaks of Lucifer, son of the morning, the morning star, who aspired to be equal with the Most High and to rule all creation jointly with him but in the process "made the world as a wilderness" and in consequence will be brought down to the lowest hell, the place from which there is no return. (A significant point justifying the application of these two passages to a supernatural being rather than to the kings of Tyre and Babylon is that although the kings of some peoples such as the Romans and Egyptians did identify their kings with their gods, neither the kings of Babylon nor of Tyre ever did this; they always insisted they were the "servants" of their respective gods; the language and allusions in both passages are impossible of application to human beings.) If these three passages are to be taken as meaning what they say, the implication is that the Lord already knows that the case is hopeless, and has revealed this knowledge "to his servants the prophets".

A celebrated Anglican minister, Dr. Paterson Smyth, of the early years of this century, an advocate of Future Probation, laid down the maxim that it is possible for a man, continuously sinning against light, and knowing that he is sinning, to destroy his own capacity for repentance. After that there is nothing God can do, because the man is spiritually dead; there is nothing left upon which God can work. The man has

committed spiritual suicide. His incorrigible antagonism to righteousness has led him to renounce the possible life which can only subsist when righteousness is accepted as the way of life. If there is anything at all in this, it illustrates how God, who knows the hearts of all his creatures, can look upon this one and know that despite the opportunity which may yet be given, he will not repent, and so sentence has to be passed. So the decree can already have gone forth, before the days of John, before the days of Ezekiel, before the days of Isaiah, to be recorded on the pages of the Book just as it is already recorded in the annals of Heaven. We do not know.

Perhaps even then, at the end of the Millennium, Satan does not really believe that "the wages of sin is death". Blinded by his own sin, obsessed with his desire to rule at least over men as God rules over all creation, fortified in his evil ways by the forbearance of God through the ages and apparent inability or unwillingness even then to inflict the final penalty of death, perhaps there is nothing left but an irrevocable determination to fight against God. Once, a long time ago, in the beginning, he deceived Eve, saying "ye shall not surely die". Can it be that at the end he even deceives himself? If that should in fact be the case, in face of all that he knows of the goodness and love of God, there can be only one possible end. There is a terrible finality in those words spoken through the prophet Ezekiel "I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth . . . and never shalt thou be any more".

THE LITTLE SEASON

A study in the
Book of Revelation

"And when the thousand years are expired Satan shall be loosed from his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations . . ." (Rev. 20. 7).

Of all revealed prophecy of things to come, this event, at the end of the Millennial Age, is farthest away in time, and its outlines are vague and shadowy. The suppression of the powers of evil during the Millennium is a fundamental feature of the Age and follows on the fact that a righteous and all-powerful Administration has taken control of the world. The evangelical work of that Administration will have the effect of bringing all men, without exception, face to face with the vital issues of eternal life or death, and before it closes every living being will have made the crucial choice, for God or Satan, for good or evil, for life or death. It is within the

framework of this choice, at the end, that this rather obscure passage in Revelation has its place. It would seem on the basis of this vision that at this climax there is to be a last attempt by the forces of evil to regain the allegiance of any who may at heart still be in sympathy with sin. It is not an opportunity that will last long; it is not an effort that is going to be crowned with success. Swift and inexorable, the immutable laws of God will move to judgment.

But is this "loosing of Satan" in harmony with the revealed character of God? Having done so much to remove evil from the hearts of men and teach them of his ways, where is the logic of letting the author of all evil loose upon mankind again? For answer we must go back to the beginning. God created our first parents crea-

tures of free-will and with the knowledge that all they had of life and intelligence and ability they owed to him. But they had freedom of choice that their allegiance might be voluntary and not of compulsion, and under the deception of the Adversary they exercised their freedom of choice and chose wrongly. The situation will be exactly the same, except that all men will then have the benefit of experience and practical demonstration, and if any give way to the Evil One it will be in the face of full knowledge. Before men pass into everlasting life, and the next stage of their continuing experience of God, it must be demonstrated that their allegiance is sincere and of freewill even in the face of opportunity to take the opposite path. There is another factor, too, which is indicated in this passage. This will be no passive abandonment of men to the seductive influence of the Adversary with no corresponding force on the other side. The forces of righteousness will do battle with the forces of evil for every human soul, and it will be a hard thing for any man to resist the appeal of God.

The account says that Satan will *"go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle; the number of whom is as the sand of the sea"* (vs. 8). This has been interpreted to suggest that the great majority of earth's millions will join the rebels, as though they were the sand of the seashore for multitude compared with a relatively few righteous. This is not consistent with the Divine Plan. If, after this thousand years' reign, which is ordained by God for the reconciliation to himself of "whosoever will", so that his original purpose in creating mankind on the earth might go into effect, the vast majority of men fall again into sin at the first temptation, then we can only conclude that the whole creative purpose of God has been a failure. If only a minority of earth's inhabitants eventually attain eternal life then the glowing rhapsodies of the prophets were, to say the least of it, exaggeration, and the coming of Jesus to earth by no means such "good tidings of great joy to all people" as the angels claimed. This is not the case. Everything that is revealed concerning the Plan of God stresses the transcendent truth that it is going to be a glorious success. So far from it being a hard thing to enter into eternal life, as was supposed in mediæval times, it is in fact going to be a very hard thing to keep out of it. The interpretation is based upon a misunderstanding of the reference to "Gog and Magog".

The expression "Gog and Magog" was a term used in Jewish literature to define the most remote and primitive peoples of the earth, as distinct from their immediate neighbours, Egypt,

Syria, Assyria, Babylon, and so on. It had its origin in the days of Ezekiel's boyhood when Israel and her neighbour nations were suddenly and without warning assailed by a savage onslaught of barbarous people from the north, of whose very existence they had previously been hardly aware. These invaders ravaged and looted for some thirty years before being driven back to the coasts of the Black Sea, from whence they had come, but Israel never forgot their visitation. It provided Ezekiel in later life with the background for his memorable description of the trouble with which this present Age is to end. The term became a synonym for ruthlessness and savagery, but basically it was a general expression for peoples from the far corners of the earth. The idea of a final attack upon the citadel of God's holiness at the end of the Messianic reign by such peoples from the farthest parts of the earth, referred to as Gog and Magog, was a very general one at the time of the First Advent. It is not easy to decide just when or how the belief came into being or how much it owed in the first place to Ezekiel's prophecy, but certain it is that John was not the only seer who spoke and wrote in such terms. Thus the "Sibylline Oracles", written roughly at the same time as Revelation, says that the Messianic Kingdom will be closed by an attack of all the nations upon Jerusalem and their destruction by the intervention of God. The "Apocalypse of Elijah" and the "4th Book of Ezra", among other apocryphal works of times very close to the First Advent, repeat this belief. It has to be remembered that the Jews at the First Advent had no knowledge of the coming Christian Age and the two Advents. To them the first coming of Messiah was to be the final and see the establishment of his Kingdom, so logically they placed the onslaught of these distant peoples prophesied by Ezekiel as occurring at that time. John took this popular belief and spiritualised it to show that at the end of the Millennium, a thousand years after the literal invasion of Gog and Magog at the end of the present Age, there would be a similar rebellion against the Millennial Kingdom by peoples from the "four corners of the earth". Satan is to seek his dupes, not merely among the faithful ones at the very centre of God's Kingdom, not among the relative few in the "beloved city", at headquarters, so to speak, but among all the millions of redeemed humanity spread abroad upon the face of the earth who themselves are as the sand of the sea for multitude.

It seems incredible that after the object lesson men will have had from the righteous rule of the Messianic Age anyone should be found ready to follow the paths of evil. The upsurge of sin described in this passage, the condemnation of

the unfit in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats in Matt. 25, the prohibition against the unclean and immoral entering the Holy City in Rev. 21. 27 and the *Millennial descriptions of Psalms 66* alluding to the "*feigned obedience*" of some whose hearts remain obdurate against the appeal of the Gospel, appear to shew that when all that can be done has been done, some remain whose *opposition to truth and goodness is never overcome*. There may be factors in this matter which we do not, even now, fully understand, but the vision of John certainly pictures this final rebellion of evil against good, and its consequences in the withdrawal of life from those who have thus demonstrated their irrevocable allegiance to evil for its own sake.

It is important to observe that those who thus take the side of the rebels do so with their eyes open. The basic meaning of the word rendered "deceive" in Rev. 20 is to lead astray or in wrong paths, to wander. Those who take their places in the ranks of the Prince of Darkness do so not because they do not know, but because they do not believe. This involves the question as to the hopes and aims of the apostates. They will have seen the wondrous works of God manifest throughout the thousand years and had abundant opportunity to realise the extent of his power no less than his inherent goodness. What kind of deception is it by means of which the Devil, loosed from his prison, is able to convince them that *sin and sinful men have yet the opportunity and power to regain control over the now righteous world of mankind, and restore to their own advantage the old bad days of sin and death?* It must obviously be a subtle temptation, buttressed by convincing and apparently logical arguments. Even in these present days men do not embark on a desperate venture unless they have reason to hope for success, and the rebellion of that final day will be in face of a much more united and powerful world than any revolutionary has had to face in past history. Even the most hardened of the rebels will have to admit that they are up against what the world today calls a "tough proposition"! Death will have been unknown for a thousand years. Disease and sickness will have been long since eliminated. The earth will have become fair and fertile, fear and anxiety for the future long since banished, men living happily together as one great family. The days of sin and death will seem very far away—as far away as the time of William the Conqueror is to us. The knowledge of the Lord is abroad in the earth "as the waters cover the sea", and the human race, at least the vast majority, will have become fully reconciled to God through Christ and are living their lives in full communion with him.

But some, it may be, there are, here and there, who do not seem to share in the general happiness. They will always have been marked out by their tardiness in *co-operating with others for the general welfare*. They give outward and nominal assent to the laws of the Kingdom but it is easy to see that they resent them and are not at heart lovers of the Lord Jesus. They are still unreconciled to God and there can be no disguising the fact. But they have never been able to inflict evil on others nor to injure the earth. Whatever may be their inmost thoughts and desires, they have had to conform to the general rules of conduct which have been binding upon all men in the Millennial world. Nevertheless, they are misfits in a world which is solidly set for righteousness and harmony with God. And this is a condition—if in fact there are any at the end who have thus proved impervious to the Divine appeal—which cannot be permitted to endure. God's creation is a creation of order in which no element of disorder can continue indefinitely, and sin is disorder in creation. And a consideration which does not often come readily to the mind is that a heaven for the righteous in which the unrighteous is compelled to live everlastingly will become hell to the unrighteous, an environment with which he has no sympathy and into which he cannot fit. Such an everlasting life would become unendurable so that the apparently harsh sentence "*the wages of sin is death*" in fact becomes mercy.

Now a change becomes evident. The thousand years is at an end and there must be a certain amount of interested discussion as to precisely what happens next. The reign of Christ over the nations is to close; that much is known, and mankind is to be completely self-governing. Clearly those whose hearts are set in them to do evil must look forward to the prospect with more than academic interest. And when, for the first time for a thousand years, the Evil One finds himself able to whisper his suggestions into the ears of those who will listen, what is likely to be the nature of his deception?

Could it conceivably be the old one that was so effective at the start, back there in Eden? "*Ye shall be as gods—ye shall not surely die!*" For a thousand years there has been no death. Men have, in that time, become godlike in form and physique, and in mental powers. But suppose the claim is made in some quarters that this is not due to the work of an unseen God or the evangelistic endeavours of a great band of enthusiastic missionaries calling to repentance and acceptance of Christ, but is the natural and inevitable and long-expected consequence of human evolution? Despite so many outward

arguments to the contrary in our own day, the learned among men continue doggedly to proclaim the onward and upward development of our race from near-barbarism to the acme of perfection. More than one research centre is even now actively pursuing investigations into the nature of life and death from the purely physical aspect with a view to ascertaining how death can be postponed or even abolished. Suppose the cry is raised that this is what has happened, that at last man has attained by means of his own efforts that state of development in which the ills of the flesh and the onset of death together with the social evils of the past can be shrugged off and man look forward to an eternal evolutionary paradise? Past history has shown that there is no limit to what man will reason and believe in the attempt to explain God away. There is no blindness so complete as the blindness of unbelief. Can it be, so the argument might run, that this is the cause of man's obvious freedom from disease and his thousand-year life? Can it be—is it possible—that even if God does exist, He is unable after all to cause any to whom He has once given life to go into death, that the ancient dogma of the immortality of the soul was right after all? And if it is that rebellion against God does not really bring death in its train, then surely, given sufficient determination and ruthlessness, God could be defied indefinitely? *"Ye shall not surely die!"* At this late stage in the history of humanity, so many millenniums after man's creation, with so long a history of evil, it is still true that not one intelligent creature has as yet suffered the penalty of sin—eternal death. Here at the end of the Millennium every human being and every angelic being, good or evil, who has known conscious existence, is alive still. The law that eternal death is the wages of sin has still to be demonstrated in actual fact. Is it not at least possible that the great delusion which will test humanity and search out the sinful at heart, at the end of the Millennial Age, will be just that; *"Suppose Satan is right after all! Suppose God is unable to inflict eternal death! He has not yet done so, to anyone! There is no evidence, as yet, that He can do so! And, if that be so, then we, refusing loyalty to God, can still be as gods! We shall not surely die!"*?

Once such a thought took root in the minds of the unregenerate there would soon be an attempt to convert it into action. *"We can do as we like and God cannot interfere; we shall live for ever."* The challenge is thrown down before the Divine representatives in the earth and it is a challenge that cannot be ignored, for the whole fulfilment of the Divine purpose in creating man depends upon the outcome. In the Revelation

passage the story is told in symbol. *"And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and encircled the camp of the holy ones, and the beloved city; and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them"* (vs. 9). The word rendered "camp" means a walled military encampment or barracks, or an army drawn up in array. In Acts 21 to 23 it is translated "castle" in reference to the Tower of Antonia, the Roman garrison in Jerusalem, built at the north-west corner of the Temple area so that a watch could be kept upon activities within the Temple. The "beloved city" is, of course, Jerusalem the Holy. In the symbolic imagery of Revelation this allusion might well refer to the celestial ruling entity, the Church, the "camp of the holy ones", the place from which ruling authority proceeds, and the earthly representatives of Christ, the "heroes of faith" of Heb. 11 administering the affairs of the world from their centre in the "beloved city". Thus the rebels challenge Divine authority and rule. This is not a literal investment of a literal city with physical weapons; the symbolic nature of Revelation rules that out in any case. This is a determined attempt to defy the authority of God and those who represent him in the world and seduce the righteous of mankind from their faith and allegiance.

There is no indication that they make any converts. It is hardly to be expected that they would. The day of probation has ended; all men are well in a position to make up their minds for good or evil, and all men will have made up their minds. Those who have not been influenced by the specious arguments of the arch-rebel are not likely to take much notice of his followers. The dividing line will therefore be clear and definite. To quote Elijah at Mount Carmel, *"If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him"*. It can be taken that the incorrigibly corrupt at heart will stand revealed in their true colours over this matter but no one else will be misled or in any way hurt. And at this point, when it is demonstrated beyond all question that nothing can ever turn these men from evil and make them sons of God, the time comes when God must turn sorrowfully away and leave them to the consequences of their choice. John saw fire coming down from heaven to devour them—fit symbol of that everlasting destruction which is the only possible end of anything and everything in which evil and sin resides and cannot be eradicated.

Do the words of Peter in 2 Peter 2 give a hint as to what might be expected? That chapter alludes to the false prophets of past ages and the descent of Divine judgment upon them, detailing the nature of their sins, and draws an analogy with the corresponding seducers of—it has gen-

erally been thought — the Gospel Age. The thought may well be correct, but even so Peter's language is strong, almost too strong if his allusion is only to false teachers among Christians during this Age. Did he have in mind also the seducers of the Millennial Age and was his language deliberately chosen to define their position too? He certainly alludes to a similar class of evildoers in each of earth's former ages; the fallen angels in the Antediluvian Age, the men of Sodom and Balaam the prophet of Aram in the Patriarchal Age, and the false prophets of Israel in the Jewish Age. Of all these he speaks in general terms describing their uncleanness and immorality, but above all of the fact that they are, first, unbelievers (vs. 1); second, hypocrites, seeking to deceive the righteous (vs. 3); third, presumptuous, standing up against the powers of heaven (vs. 10); fourth—and this is important—themselves deceived by reason of their unbelief, so that they fail to understand the power against which they fight (vs. 12). The chapter is replete with strong expressions denoting judgment upon these rebels. *"The Lord knoweth how . . . to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished"* (vs. 9). *"As natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed . . . shall utterly perish in their own corruption"* (vs. 12). *"To whom the mist of*

darkness is reserved for ever" (vs. 17). There is much in this striking chapter that fits very well the position of those who sally forth at the end of the Millennium to deceive the righteous.

Unbelief—hypocrisy—presumption—blindness to the invincibility of righteousness. These are the characteristics of those who side with the Evil One in this the last challenge to God's goodness. But they will have forgotten one thing. Perhaps they never really believed it. Paul knew, and he imparted his knowledge to the men of Athens. *"In him we live, and move, and have our being."* (Acts 17. 28). In God's hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind (Job 12. 10). In a manner beyond our comprehension He has but to withdraw his Spirit, and life ceases.

That is how the end will come. In the very moment of the proud boast, of the scornful and final rejection of all that the Heavenly Father has done for them, He has but to *"gather to himself his spirit and his breath"* (Job 34. 14). The arrogant words, dying on the lips; the proud glance, fading out of the eyes; the suddenly nerveless body, slumping helplessly to the ground; all will give mute but eloquent testimony to the burning truth of the Divine word *"the soul that sinneth, it shall die"*. (Ezek. 18. 4).

Burden Bearers

"As the years pass, and our relations with men multiply, and we look more searchingly behind the fair outsides of life, as our faith grows more settled and calm, trials are apt to accumulate upon us. Of those whom we love, some pass away from us, and some fall into lingering sicknesses; some disappoint the fond hopes we had cherished of them, and others suffer much that is good and admirable in them to be blighted by a secret vice, or propensity, which threatens to be their ruin; cares of business and domestic cares throng in upon us; our health declines, perhaps, or we grow conscious that the spring and elasticity of earlier days are gone, and that all tasks are harder to us, and all burdens heavier to be borne. There are times when one feels as though his heart were turned into a kind of hospital, with a sick-bed for this friend, and another for that, until the whole night is taken up with cares and solitudes and the strain becomes well-nigh intolerable. If this be our experience—as at times it is the experience of most kindly and Christian men and women—yet why should we complain? This, like every other trial, is Christ's gift to us; it is part of the reward He bestows on them that are his. We have served

him in easier tasks; and now He honours us by asking us to serve him in a task that is harder. We have met the common tests; and now He applies a still severer test, *that, being tried to the full, we may also be blessed to the full*. When we thank him for having called us into his service, and say that for aught we have done for him we will ask no reward save that we may serve him still and better, do we mean what we say? Very well, then; in giving us harder tasks, and trials more severe and searching, He is but taking us at our word, and giving us the very reward we have asked. Rather than complain, therefore, that life grows heavier to us, we will remember him who had room in his heart for every man that breathed, and grace for as many as were sick, and strength for as many as were weak, and comfort for all who mourned. We crave to be like him, do we not? And we can become like him who learned obedience and was made perfect by the things which He suffered, only by partaking of similar experiences, by bearing our trials, and whatever they may be, with a patient and cheerful heart."

(The "Herald of Christ's Kingdom")

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

*A panorama of the
way of Christ*

6. Greater Love than this

"Jesus, knowing that he was come from God, and went to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, took a towel and girded himself" (John 13.3-4).

This act of humble service which Jesus performed for his disciples is part of the general picture of his abnegation, his complete surrender to the service of God and man. We read that "He emptied himself of his glory". "He made himself of no reputation." He was among men as one who serves. He glorified the life of service, made great the common task, bestowing honour upon givers and making the meek the inheritors of the earth. It was a complete reversal of the system of mankind where the strongest took all and the simple, unassuming poor remained poor. The great were waited on by a retinue of slaves who were looked upon as an inferior breed of the human race. Those who had riches usually gained more. Few would have stooped from their social heights to mingle with the unsuccessful, or to serve with their own hands the infirm or the unfortunate. But Jesus, fully aware of his high estate, rose from the upper table and girded himself after the fashion of the lowest slave for the performance of a very humble service. Whatever theologians wring from this incident or read into it of Christian doctrine, to the lay mind it presents the lovely picture of a King meekly laying aside his majesty to wash the dusty feet of twelve very ordinary men. If Judas had not yet gone out Jesus washed the feet which were to carry him on his treacherous errand.

The intolerance of religious leaders thirsting for power has stained the pages of history red with the blood of the martyrs, but the great Founder of the true Church humbly washed the feet of his chosen few with affectionate care, washing and wiping the feet of his known betrayer, without rancour or reproach. "Did e'er such love and sorrow meet?" asks a great hymn, to which the observer of human nature must reply—"Never!". The most earnest and sincere of his pilgrims are often seen to fall far short of the magnanimity of the Master. They are, when true to self, conscious that they fail to live up to that sublime selflessness which was the essence of the Lord's life and teaching. He said and he did. His deeds matched his words and they live forever as the supreme example of human conduct, the ideal, the standard, the yardstick to which men and women may aspire and by which God measures his saints. There can be no competition about who is greatest or best or clever-

est in any circle since the greatest of all stooped to perform the lowliest task. None of those men who knew his worth had thought to do the same thing for him. Not because they would have thought the task beneath them; they had not yet learned to be considerate and act for others. They did not think of it. It did not occur to them. The lesson was new, to be learned slowly with the passing years and in memory of that upper room. The feet of Jesus had already been anointed with the costly spikenard by the hands of a devoted woman, an office and a gift reserved for kings.

It is the will of God that his chosen children shall be like his Son. Jesus is the elder brother of all his pilgrims who have plodded on to the eternal city. Entry there will not be by any verbal examination of creeds and doctrines. The loving heart is the entrance ticket to eternity. Love is the only passport into the portals of Life. The keepers of the last and greatest commandment, "that ye love one another as I have loved you" will be those who receive the crown.

*"O for a heart more like my God, From
imperfection free;*

*A heart conformed unto thy Word, And
pleasing, Lord, to thee;*

*A heart in every thought renewed, And full
of love Divine,*

Perfect and right, and pure and good,

A copy, Lord, of thine."

"If you know these things, happy are you if you do them" (John 13.17).

"If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14.15). Knowledge unapplied, if it is good knowledge, is knowledge wasted. If a man knew the secrets of wealth and remained poor, or of health and remained sick, or of happiness and remained miserable, or of wisdom and remained ignorant, he would rightly be called foolish, a dog-in-the-manger type, neither enjoying the good things himself nor sharing them with others. All the wise and wonderful words of Jesus are just so much useless treasure unless rightly applied to life. One may become a scholar, able to recite the Bible from end to end, quoting chapter and verse with formidable accuracy, or a student, dividing, applying, dissecting and extracting from its history and incidents an astonishing range of types, codes and forecasts, but if the spirit of God and the love of Christ as contained in the life-giving utterances are not expressed in word and deed, that knowledge is nothing but dead letters.

Many a seeking soul has had its yearnings after God and the love of God quenched by an endless stream of high-sounding rhetoric. Dogmas have wrecked more barques than they have saved and the strait-jackets of sect and creed have crippled and disillusioned many a feeble faith fleeing for sanctuary to the great Rock of Ages. Love is the secret and source of all great happiness. *"Love that is not narrow, is not small, is not for one or two but for them all."*

Hatred drives people mad. Envy, ambition, greed and selfishness fill the world with strife and mad deeds. Love is the best preserver of sanity, health and beauty. The commandments of God and of Christ are not beyond the abilities of man. Love of God ensures safety. It keeps the feet from the pitfalls of idolatry. Whatever the object of worship, its feet are clay, sooner or later cracking to reveal the temporary nature of its satisfaction. The unchanging One requires of man, *mercy, justice and humility. The presumptuous are never happy. Those who accept the blessings of life as God's gifts, being thankful, are joyously happy, with the carefree happiness of good children in a world of wonders. To love your neighbour as yourself is not a harsh command. A friendly soul is a happy soul. If neighbours remain aloof the loss is theirs. The fountain of love can shed its perpetual dews without loss to itself. To love as Christ loved, to serve as He served, to give as He gave, to empty out self as He emptied himself of his glory, is to know peace, riches and contentment of a quality unknown to the pursuers of worldly success and prosperity. It is possible to be poor and blessed, to be rich and wretched. Poverty and superb happiness do not always go hand in hand. Christ never laid it down that to be good the pilgrim must be poor. To be poor in spirit is different to being poor in pence. Poverty and pride may hang together, where the better endowed, linked to Christian gentleness and generosity, will be led to give again all that he has as a faithful steward of God's goods.*

The happiness of life does not depend on what a man has, or who he is, but what he is, on how his whole nature responds to the commandments of God and to the world around him. Most especially does Christian happiness depend on carrying out the commands of Christ, not through fear or self interest but from the earnest desire to please him who set so glorious an example before the minds of men, and from a glorious conviction that these commandments are the finest laws ever issued to any world. *In them is the very breath of life, and in the doing of them is great joy.*

"But what to those who find? ah this, nor tongue nor pen can show,

The love of Jesus, what it is, none but his loved ones know.

Jesus our only joy be thou, as thou our prize wilt be,

In thee be all our glory now, and through eternity."

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you" (John 14.27). Jesus owned nothing except the clothes he wore. These, the Roman soldiers who crucified him took as their lawful gratuity for the awful service they had rendered to the priests who had thrust him into the hands of Roman power for such an end. He had therefore nothing to give to those who had left all to follow him. Fancy has given to the world the legend of the Holy Grail and of the seamless Robe, redeemed and taken to the Isle of Patmos by the aged John, in which he wrapped himself in the days of his exile and the Revelation of Jesus Christ, whom he saw amid the seven candlesticks, clothed and girdled in a similar one-piece garment. But the peace of Christ was no legend. It was a legacy, which like the anointing oil on the head of the High Priest has run down to the hem of his garments, touching and blessing the "feet members" at the end of the Age with its royal unction. The calm, the serenity, the tranquillity of that peace is a state of heart and mind which cannot be described by a dictionary. It is "not as the world giveth", therefore the world can neither know it nor define it. Peace as the world desires it is freedom from war, from hostility, tumults and quarrels. Freedom from social, political and national disturbance is something the governments of men are forever seeking and forever losing. When the cry goes up of Peace! tumult breaks out in some quarter of the globe. Humanity sits on the side of a volcano, never knowing from day to day when the rumbling monster will blow up, involving them all in its ruin. Peace of any kind is hard to obtain and keep. *Domestic peace is a brittle thing. Whenever two or three are gathered together a division of opinion, a tug of wills, a clash of personalities creates the inevitable disturbance. The earth resounds to the crash and roar of the machine, to the noisy tumult of the streets, to the shouts and yells of the discontented, rolling and swaying like the waves of the restless ocean.*

Truly the world cannot give peace. It cannot get peace. It has never known peace, nor will it know peace until the Prince of Peace commands silence and the angry billows of the nations fall before his omnipotent Will. A tiny bird is known to build a swinging nest over a roaring cataract and to flit in and out with the most cheerful alacrity. This jewel of Nature is a fit picture of the Christian pilgrim who lives above the roar

and turbulence of the world with a cheerful composure of mind, an undisturbed freedom from agitation, because both are in complete harmony with the laws of their Maker. There is no questioning of how, why or whither; no revolt against the law written within. Only a joyous living, a complete trust, an assured confidence a calm repose, an unsurpassed tranquillity, a serenity of heart and mind which cannot be shaken. Though the earth be moved, these remain unmoved, confident in the power controlling the stormy elements of earth, knowing that in his own way and time He will bring peace and order from the moral chaos of mankind.

Peace! Great Peace! The Peace of God! The Peace of Christ! The great gift has been to the few who have treasured it, lived with it and died with its sunset glow upon their calm faces. The world loses its peace; the ambassadors of peace weep over their failure to create peace between divided nations. But for this peace, 'My Peace,' the Christian counts the world well lost.

"Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging round?

On Jesus' bosom nought but calm is found.

Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown?

Jesus we know, and He is on the throne."

"I am the true vine, my Father is the husbandman," (John 15:1). When Jesus wished to give an illustration of the harmony and co-operation between God, himself and his chosen, he turned readily to Nature. In the parable of the vine He taught a living truth which cannot be misunderstood. A branch draws all its sap and sustenance from the tree of which it is an essential part. Cut off from the tree a branch soon withers and dies, its use and beauty gone. A tree shorn of branches is a maimed and pathetic sight. Both trunk and branches combine a symmetrical beauty of shape and colour. When laden with fruit the vine with its luxurious clusters and handsome leaves is an arresting and desirable plant. No fruit-bearing tree is so severely pruned. When trimmed by expert hands its growth and produce are phenomenal. So Jesus described himself as the main stem, rooted in time and eternity, out of whose life should grow branches, climbing and spreading throughout the world for twenty centuries, under the personal supervision of God the great Husbandman. Nourishment, care and pruning were to be the Divine work of the Father, seeking fruit from the branches and waiting patiently for it.

The illustration disposes of the theory that God and Jesus are one person. "I am the true

vine, my Father is the Husbandman." As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, neither can the vine prune itself. Without expert training it runs wild. Any fruit it produces is scarcely worth gathering. The Christian in Christ has the very nature of Christ running through his being as the sap of the tree supplies the branches with life and the power to produce fruit. Under the watchful eye of Divine providence the branches are shaped, trimmed and trained, all excess growth cut away, so that they appear as so many strands of one harmonious whole. When fruit appears the rich pendant clusters complete the picture in the natural tree. In the true vine Christian lives are trimmed and trained by the varied experiences of life. The pliable, talented mind, capable of producing good results, may be more hardly dealt with than the lesser branches, too frail to support the weight of heavier clusters. Talents, temperament, ability to imbibe knowledge, to survive circumstances, amid the rough assaults of doubt and discouragement, are all indications of a good fruit bearing branch which will produce those rich fruits of character which will be found to the glory of God. The ignorant jeer at character but it is by character that God transforms and reforms the world. If a good branch is pruned and a barren branch is cut off for destruction, the purpose and decision is that of the chief Gardener. The fruit God desires of his creatures is love, Christ-like love, selfless, disinterested love. If by means of the True Vine He produces this characteristic in rich, fruitful clusters, it is by this means He intends to restore mankind to that ideal state of harmony with himself and with each other.

In God's kingdom on the earth He intends to make for all nations "a feast of fat things, of wines on the lees well refined". Wine is the juice of the grape and this wine is without sediment or impurity, a choice vintage, a life-giving liquid. "He will have all men to be saved and brought to a knowledge of the truth." Truth is Christ, love, life, God's way of bringing mankind to a knowledge of himself, away from sin, violence, fear, superstition, sickness and death, into a new, clean, healthy atmosphere of knowing the living God as He truly is and rejoicing in him. The true Church, the saints of God, the branches of the True Vine, are the first-fruits, developed to pour their sparkling blessings on a weary world. To be such a branch is the rare honour of the ages, given to few. Fruit is the slow produce of a lifetime. It is neither works nor scholarship, though these may go into its making. It is the richness of God-like love. Its source is neither in sect nor system but in Christ. "Abide in Me and I in you. Without Me you can do nothing."

*"I am Thine O Lord, I have heard thy voice,
And it told thy love to me;
But I long to rise in the arms of faith
And be closer drawn to thee."*

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15: 13). The heroic self-sacrifice of one man to save the life of another is regarded as the highest form of valour. Life is the most valuable possession of every human being. When this is freely risked and given that others may live it constitutes the finest and most fearless of actions. It demonstrates a concern for others, greater than any concern for self. It is the principle of altruism pursued to its utmost end. Not all heroic giving meets the public eye. The many noble who have perished that others may live, whose memory is preserved in history, in sculpture and tablet and medal, in the halls of fame and in the hearts of those who loved them, are not the sum total of those who have laid down their lives that others might live. There is a less spectacular giving of life which wins little of the world's applause. Because it lacks the one splendid deed, the one generous throwing away of self, it passes unnoticed in the general throng of living. Yet how many men and women could testify to their own daily laying down of life, to an endless chain of common tasks, to a constant shouldering of work, burdens and responsibilities, each demanding their daily mead of courage and patience, that other lives may run in a smoother channel. Whether life be given in one magnificent act or in years of daily offering, it is life given, life poured out that other lives may live, and live more abundantly. The prime theme of the teaching of Jesus was service and salvation. He came to minister, to serve others, to salvage human

life from the wreckage of sin and death, to seek, and to save the lost life and inheritance of man. He was a doer of his own word, for He poured out his soul unto death, completing the last giving away of himself by going voluntarily to the Cross, enduring its agony and despising its shame.

It was not an act of heroism which won the applause of the crowd. The priests jeered, the Roman soldiers gambled indifferently beneath the cross, the ignorant despised and reviled him, women wept, his friends stood afar off, and the average citizens were dumb with sorrow and foreboding. The man who had healed their sick, blessed their children, raised their dead, spoken kind words to weary hearts, suffered death as a criminal, yet no greater hero ever died for man than He who paid the penalty for sin, between two thieves. It was love's last action. Clearly seeing the final end of his course, the alienation, the slander, the jeers, the ignominy, the torture of slow death, He yet continued unwaveringly on his way, willing to suffer wrong, refusing to seek deliverance or to assert his just claims. After nearly two thousand years his example has inspired many but his giving still remains without parallel in human experience.

Greater love than this no man has ever shown. He laid down his life for his friends, his chosen, his believers. Even his enemies will yet see him with clear eyes, bow before the King of Love and taste the overspill of his generosity.

*"When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride."*

THE END.

Affliction

"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you" (1 Peter 5: 10, RSV).

As we view the lives of God's people we have known, we can see that their way leads through "the way of the wilderness." It means, very often, a lonely life, even when surrounded by others. But, after all, our Lord Jesus, though often surrounded by thousands, was lonely and misunderstood even by his closest of friends. His life here on earth was a wilderness experience. But the wilderness experience has so very often been the lot of the most faithful of God's children. It may well be ours as well.

Moses, Elijah and John the Baptist were well acquainted with the wilderness journey which

meant hardship, suffering and loneliness—but a nearness to God.

Today, there are those of God's saints who lie in hospital beds, nursing homes, or alone and forgotten in their homes. These are passing through the wilderness, learning more intimately the meaning of these words "*Nearer, my God, to thee*".

Who knows if tomorrow you will enter the road that leads into the wilderness. If it be so, then remember, you are not alone. Even if all your earthly friends abandon you, yet there is One who will be by your side. How comforting is the assurance of that most beloved of Psalms "*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me.*"

May our prayer be, "Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on."

"Berean News".

CAUGHT UP

A word study on a
Second Advent theme

"We which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4.17).

The words "caught up" occupy a central position in this passage, and because of their place in Second Advent doctrine they seem to warrant more than usually close consideration. Throughout the Age, Christians have expected and looked for the promised coming of the Lord to take them to be with him, and since for the major part of that time Heaven was held to be a place "above the bright blue sky" as the old hymn has it, "caught up" was an immediately appealing word and very expressive of the process of resurrection to glory as normally visualised.

The word here rendered "caught up" (*harpazo*) appears about sixteen times in the New Testament and also in the Septuagint and Apocrypha; it is a common Greek word and is used throughout classical Greek literature. Its basic meaning as defined by Thayer is to seize, to snatch away, to carry off by force, to claim for one's self. The idea of unexpectedness or suddenness is inherent. It does not of itself contain the idea of direction; this has to be determined by the subject to which it refers, and in fact the expression "to be snatched away" is probably a more accurate equivalent than "to be caught up". Several translators (Rotherham, Young, Diaglott, Way) do render it "caught away" instead of "caught up" in this particular text.

The usage of the word is best shown by classifying the instances in which it appears. From this it seems clear that a sudden or forcible removal or carrying away is intended. Thus (with the A.V. rendering of "*harpazo*" in italics):—

John 10.12. "The wolf *catcheth* them".

Matt. 13.19. "The wicked one *catcheth away* that which was sown".

Gen. 37.33 (LXX) "A wild beast has *carried off* Joseph".

Jud. 21.21 (LXX) "*Catch* you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh."

John 10.29. "No man is able to *pluck* them out of my Fathers hand."

Jude 23. "Some save with fear, *pulling* them out of the fire."

2 Sam. 23.21 (LXX) "Benaiah *plucked* the spear out of the Egyptian's hand".

Matt. 11.12. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent *take it by force*".

John 6.15. "Jesus perceived that they would *take him by force*, to make him a king".

Acts 23.10. "The chief captain commanded the soldiers . . . to *take him by force* from among them".

Luke 8.29. "For oftimes it (the unclean spirit) had *caught him*".

Acts 6.12. "They came upon him and *caught him*".

Acts 19.29. "And having *caught* Gaius and Aristarchus they rushed into the theatre".

Acts 27.15. "There arose a tempestuous wind, and when the ship was *caught*, we let her drive".

Ezek. 22.25 (LXX) "A roaring lion, *ravenging* the prey".

Matt. 7.15. "Inwardly they are *ravening* wolves".

Luke 18.11. "I am . . . not as other men are, *extortioners*".

1 Cor. 6.10. "Neither revilers, nor *extortioners*, shall inherit the kingdom of God".

These instances illustrate the customary usage of the word. In all cases the idea of a forcible seizure and taking away is contained; the subject of the seizure has no power to resist. In most of them there is no limitation of time involved; the seizure is unexpected and sudden but the duration of the process is dependent upon the nature of the case. In Jud. 21.21 for example, where the men of Benjamin hid themselves in the vineyards in order to capture wives for themselves of the unsuspecting girls of Shiloh the operation was necessarily swift, all over in a minute. In John 6.15 the proposed taking of Jesus by force to make him a king would have been a more lengthy process. The use of the word for "extortioners" in Luke 18.11 implies a duration lasting the lifetime of the extortioner, or at least so long as he practised his oppression. As a rule, however, the word does seem to imply that once the action of snatching away has been performed, the process is completed.

On this basis four more references have to do with subjects closely akin to the occurrence in the text under discussion. In Acts 8. 39. after Philip the evangelist, journeying near Gaza, had baptised the Ethiopian eunuch, "the Spirit of the Lord *caught away* Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more . . . but Philip was found at Azotus". Read literally, this implies that Philip disappeared from the eunuch's sight and pres-

ence and was instantaneously transferred to a place twenty miles away. There is a marked similarity between this incident, the Old Testament story of the translation of Elijah, and the reference in Hebrews to the translation of Enoch. Each is depicted as having been taken away by the power of the Holy Spirit of God, and the observers saw them no more. A symbolic reference in Rev. 12.5 tells of the ascent to heaven of the "man-child"; "her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne". The explanation of this allusion belongs to the realm of interpretation but although the narrative in Rev. 12 is a symbolic picture and not to be understood literally the essence of it is that the "man-child" went "up" to "heaven"; "caught up" then becomes the logically correct rendering of the word. The remaining two instances occur in St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians where he describes the occasion on which, whether in the body or out of the body, he knew not, he was "caught up" into Paradise, the third heaven, and heard "unutterable things which it is not possible for a man to relate" (2 Cor. 12.2-4). Now this passage is the closest parallel we have to the words of I. Thess. 4, 17; one caught away into heaven, probably in vision, but hearing and seeing heavenly things. The impression left upon the Apostle's mind was obviously that of an instantaneous change from the scenes of earth to those of heaven, and the question of locomotion, of "going there", a secondary consideration. It might well be that this experience determined the words he employed later on when in 1 Cor. 15 he described the transition of believers from earthly to heavenly life as a "change"—"in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye". His letter to the Thessalonians was written some seven or eight years after his "catching away" into the "third heaven" so that here again his use of "harpazo" might well have been chosen with that memory in mind.

The conclusion to be drawn, then, is that the Scriptural usage of the word "harpazo" does not necessarily mean an upward ascent of the subject, in this case the living believer, into the air and clouds. What it does demand in Thessalonians is an abrupt and instantaneous transfer from human to spiritual, from terrestrial to celestial, from corruptible to incorruptible, from mortal to immortal. The believer who at one moment is upon the earth in full possession of his five

terrestrial senses suddenly finds himself in another world, the celestial, "clothed upon" with his celestial body, the "house from heaven", of 2 Cor. 5. 1-4, in possession of new senses adapted to that world, his old terrestrial body having been left behind to mingle its constituent atoms with the atoms of the earth from which it was originally derived—"earth to earth, dust to dust". In the biological sense that is death, the death of the human, even although because the "change" is instantaneous there is no consciousness of an interruption of life.

This is the "First Resurrection". The Apostle John in 1 John 3.2 tells us that "we know not what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is". That statement fixes the place of meeting and recognition as in the celestial sphere—for never whilst in the flesh can we see Jesus "as he is", neither whilst in the flesh can it ever be said that "we shall be like him". This is an important element in the understanding of this subject; there can be no question of the human body "ascending" into a heaven located somewhere in interstellar space and reached by a process of travelling outwards from earth, for nothing of the terrestrial can find any place in the celestial. The human frame has served its purpose for the believer's sojourn on this earth; it is discarded and left behind at the First Resurrection when, to use the Psalmist's words in Psa. 17.15, he awakes "with thy likeness". With a scope of sense-perception and range of powers far transcending anything we have known on earth, or has ever been associated with human nature, his life is finding expression through a new and essentially different body.

The A.V. translators were logical enough, in their day, to translate "harpazo" "caught up" in 1 Thess. 4.17. Whatever our understanding of the spiritual world we naturally and instinctively think of it as "up there". Because in this our day we have a much clearer perception of the difference between human and spiritual natures, between the terrestrial and celestial orders of existence, it is well if we remember that what St. Paul was describing to the Thessalonians, in language they could be expected to understand, and within the scope of their own range of knowledge, was the "change" that must come when, at last, we enter into the experience of the First Resurrection.

Light enters the smallest opening accessible to it. It searches out the recesses that would otherwise remain dismal and dark, thus penetrating the gloom. It is a fact disclosed by science that it lays hold of the lurking germs

of disease whether in the home or in the human system. Of him who came as the world's light, such is his ministry. Instead of sin fastening upon him it could not even stand in his presence.

THOUGH NOAH, DANIEL, JOB, WERE IN IT

"Though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job, were in it" (the land of Israel) "they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God" (Ezek. 19.14).

A strange phrase! Why should these particular three, of all Israel's famous heroes, be selected as such sterling examples of righteousness that they should be saved when all others perish?

The background behind the allusion is the inevitable judgment about to fall upon Israel. These words were spoken to the prophet at some time during the five years immediately preceding the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the destruction of the Temple and the commencement of the captivity in Babylon. The apostasy of the people of Judah was complete; there was no repentance and no hope. The blow must fall, the monarchy of David's line must come to an end and the "Times of the Gentiles" commence. No more would Israel be the "holy nation" representing God in the world until "He come whose right it is", our Lord Jesus Christ at his Second Advent. And to stress the finality of this sentence, to underline the irrevocable decree of the Lord, He said that even if Noah, Daniel and Job stood before him at that moment to plead their cause He would not, could not, grant their plea.

Perhaps these three were chosen because they each had, in their own days, been the means of deliverance of others. Noah was an upright and faithful man who, it is said, "walked with God". Noah in his faithfulness was the means of salvation for his sons and their wives when all others perished. But now, says the Lord, if Noah stood before me with Israel in this state he would not even deliver sons and daughters (vs. 18) so far gone was the rot in Israel. Job was a man selected by God in his day as the supreme example of uprightness and loyalty, and because of that at the last obtained the Divine forgiveness of his three friends for their woeful misunderstanding of the Divine character. But if Job had stood before God now to plead for Israel there would have been no forgiveness, for there was nothing at all in their characters—not even the plea of partial ignorance which Job's friends might have advanced—to provide a basis for forgiveness. So far gone was the rot in Israel. And if Daniel himself, who was alive at the time and away in Babylon when these words were spoken, came back to Jerusalem to plead the cause of Israel, the answer would still be the same. Daniel would have been anything between

fourteen and nineteen years in Babylon at this time; his uprightness and loyalty had enabled him to interpret the dream of the great image and so become the means of salvation of his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah besides himself from the wrath of the king. But Daniel would not find anyone in Jerusalem to share his faith and so be saved; too far gone was the rot in Israel.

This seems to be the point. In all past judgments upon Israel there were some redeeming features, some elements of good amongst the general bad, something which justified the Lord in raising his hand and giving Israel another chance. This time there was nothing, nothing at all upon which the Lord could work. The historical part of the Book of Jeremiah shows how hopelessly apostate the people had become. Even after the crowning tragedy of the destroyed Temple and deportation to Babylon, the miserable remnant of Judah which made its way into Egypt under Ishmael resolutely refused to abandon their worship of idol gods and so they too, at the end, suffered when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt twenty years later and reduced that land to subjection. Though such great men as Noah, Daniel and Job should stand before the Lord and plead for Israel, there was nothing the Lord could do. Without repentance there can be no salvation.

So it is with this modern world. Selfishness, injustice and lawlessness is becoming increasingly rampant in almost every nation upon earth. The laws of God and the ways of God and the words of God are more and more flouted and ignored. Society is fast following the examples of Sodom and of ancient Rome, and will meet the same end. There can be nothing now but a clean sweep and a fresh start, and the signs of that are already on the horizon. The Millennial sovereignty of our Lord over the earth, ruling with benevolent but firm hand, will replace earth's powers and authorities by his own rule of peace and righteousness. That work is already in progress; the disintegrating forces amongst men are the evidences. "As it was in the days of Lot" (Sodom) "so shall it be in the days of the Son of Man". As in the days of Sodom, and in the days of Noah, the Divine agents were behind the scenes preparing the natural forces which burst forth at the preordained moments to bring those worlds to an end, so now our returned Lord is working silently behind the scenes, overruling, diverting, restraining, aiding,

all those factors operating in the world of men which will bring them together at the climatic moment, the moment referred to in the Book of Revelation by the words "He gathered them together into a place called Armageddon".

And in that breathless moment the "kingdoms

of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever". Then, at last, will all men perceive the revelation of the Lord from heaven and realise that, even as He promised, He has come again to the world in the power and glory of his kingdom.

IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS

Some considerations regarding worship

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and the spirit of God dwelleth in you . . . for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." (1 Cor. 3. 16, 17).

In these words the Apostle states very plainly that the temple of God in this Christian dispensation is not one 'made with hands' but one composed of "living stones", with whom and in whom God dwells.

The place where Christians meet for devotion, to study the Word of God or hear it expounded, is often spoken of as "the House of God", as though He in a particular sense dwells there. For this reason it is sometimes claimed that our meeting-places should be so furnished and decorated as to give them the atmosphere of quietness and dignity usually associated with "the House of God". Whilst all would agree that the places where we meet should be suitably furnished and decorated it is certainly a great mistake to think that any amount of "sacred" furnishing and decoration of these could add any beauty and dignity to the *real* house or temple of God, or to his true worship.

The spirit of God moves powerfully where his people assemble in true reverence, regardless of their material surroundings. His house is not a building, however beautifully that building may be furnished. He dwells *in them*. In the words of the wellknown hymn, "Such ever bring thee where they come, And going, take thee to their home". Wherever the Lord's people meet to study his Word in sincerity, as they perceive the glory and majesty of their God and the wonders of his grace, their material surroundings are of little concern to them. Their one desire is to know him better, to serve him more perfectly, and to bring forth *fruit* in their lives which shall be to his glory (John 15. 8; Gal. 5. 22, 23). This *fruit* is the beauty that the Lord desires to see to-day in his temple of "living stones".

Paul says, "We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the

Majesty in the heavens. A minister of the *sanctuary* and of the *true tabernacle*, which the Lord pitched, and not man" (Heb. 8. 1, 2). The Lord Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, *there am I* in the midst of them" (Matt. 18. 20). He also said, "Ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father . . . the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4. 20-24). The prophet Isaiah tells us, "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit" (Isaiah 57. 15). No mountain, city or building, marks the particular place for the worship of God, but "In every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10. 35). The worship and devotion of such consists of a life of full, joyous, consecration to God, and He dwells with them. They are his temple and precious in his sight. As such, we "have boldness to enter into the holiest" (not made with hands—Heb. 9. 24) "by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, and having a High Priest over the House of God" we draw near to God in full assurance of faith (Heb. 10. 19-22). If we love the Lord Jesus and keep his commandments, his sure promise is that we shall be loved by the Father and by him, and they will make their abode with us (John 15. 21, 23). Where the Father and the Lord Jesus dwell, there is the true temple—the Sanctuary of God.

The early Christians in time of bitter persecution did not have or need specially furnished buildings in which to worship God. We know that they served and worshipped him even when hiding in the catacombs. Faithful ones of the past worshipped and served God whilst they wandered about "in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, tormented . . . in deserts, in mountains and in caves of the earth" (Heb. 11. 36-39). When Jacob cried out, "This is none

other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven", he had nothing like the cathedrals and churches of Christendom in mind. He was a fugitive, fleeing from Esau his brother, who had threatened to slay him. Coming to a certain place he had tarried all night because the sun was set. There, *in the open, with stones for his pillow*, he had lain down to sleep. While he slept he dreamed of a ladder set up on earth, reaching to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. He heard the voice of the Lord, the God of Abraham and Isaac, confirming to him the promises made to his fathers. Awakened from his sleep he said, "Surely the LORD is in this place . . . this is none other than the house of God". (Gen. 28. 10-17). God was in that place with Jacob because he was heir to the promises concerning the "land" and the "seed". There He gave Jacob the assurance, "I will not leave thee".

As "the children of the promise" and "heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 4. 28; 3. 29), we have the same assurance from the Lord. His presence is with us, not because we have some "holy" building in which to worship him, but because we like Jacob are "heirs of the promise" (Heb. 6. 17). We are living stones, built up as a spiritual house, a people to *show forth* his praises. When Jesus said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will build it again . . . He spake of the temple of his body" (John 2. 19-22). Paul says, "The temple of God is holy, which

temple ye are" (1 Cor. 3. 17). Peter says, "As He which hath called you is holy, so *be ye holy* in all manner of conversation (in all manner of behaviour"—*Rotherham*). "Know ye not that *your body* is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price therefore *glorify God in your body*" (1 Cor. 6. 19, 20).

When the Apostle advises us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but to exhort one another, and so much the more as we see the day approaching (Heb. 10. 19-25), he makes no mention of the need of a building furnished in some particular way, in fact he clearly shows in his Epistle that the earthly Tabernacle, beautiful building though it may have been, was but a figure of the *true* Tabernacle, serving its purpose in the Jewish Age. As Christians we enter into the spiritual things which were foreshadowed in that earthly Tabernacle and its arrangements. God has "raised us up and seated us in the heavenlies in Christ" (Eph. 2. 4-6, *Rotherham*).

If we have an appreciation of such a living, vital, spiritual, relationship to our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, the hall in which we are privileged to meet together will add little, if anything, to our blessing.

*"Father, where'er thy people meet,
There they behold Thy mercy seat,
Where'er they seek thee thou art found,
And every place is hallowed ground."*

Comment on Micah 6, 8

"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly, with thy God" (Micah 6. 8).

This is a plain and definite injunction to each one of us for ourselves, and not merely a commission to go and tell someone else what they are to do. Three things God required of his people Israel, and those three things He also requires from us; and more so as we live in a day when it is possible to live closer to God and to have a greater appreciation of the things of God. There is more light, and therefore more is required of us. We should do justly, love mercy and live in quiet fellowship with our God. In each one of these rules of guidance in our lives is enshrined our duty and service to our Father, to our brethren, and to all mankind. We should give proper attention to the claims of all three, as did Jesus when He was on earth,—going about doing good and speaking to all who would listen.

To do justly where God is concerned is to obey his invitation to give our hearts to him, realising all that He has done for us—"to obey is better than sacrifice." The next duty with regard to doing justly is toward our fellow believers. If we have that peace which comes from a whole-hearted surrender to God we cannot continue to live in an individual way, for there is a work for us to do in ministering and building up the other members of the Body of Christ in the most holy faith. We are to love mercy, which means we are to be kind and love our brethren in Christ and also those who have not yet come into this favoured position. Our training now is to fit us to be kind and merciful in the future and we should manifest in fair degree the laws of the coming Kingdom *now* and show kindness to all with whom we come in contact. We are learning to walk in quiet fellowship with God—to set our affections on things above, to cultivate the fruits of the Spirit and to put off all those things which are not in accord with the Spirit of Christ.

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