



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Vol. 61, No. 1 JANUARY/FEBRUARY, 1984

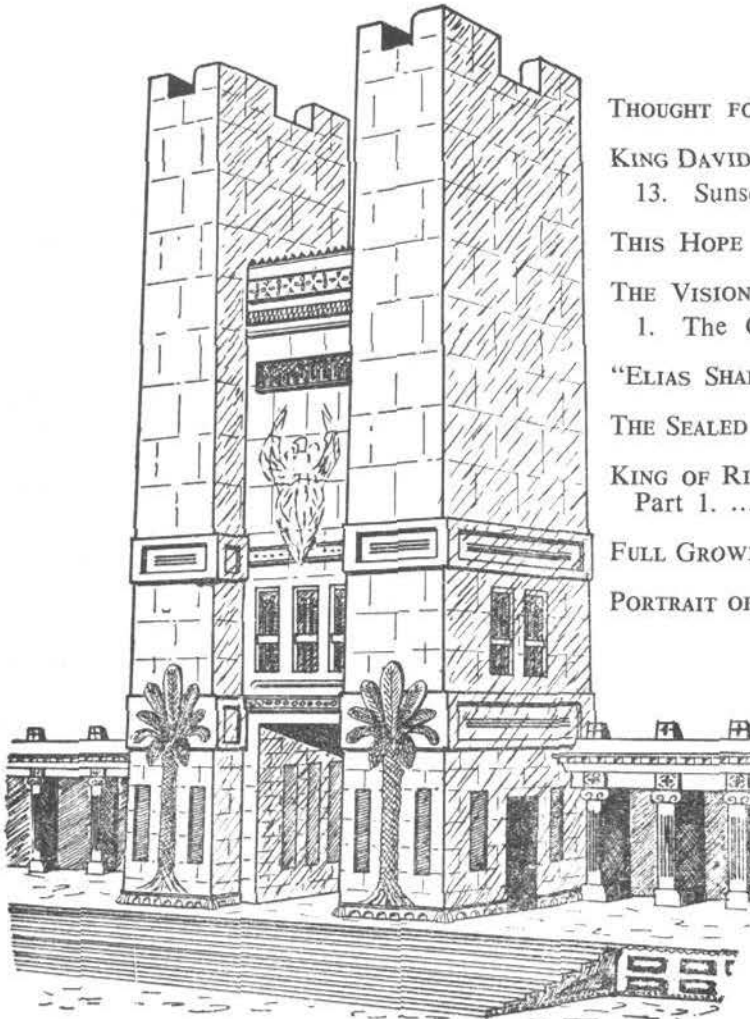
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

Published January 1st

Next issue March 1st

CONTENTS

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	2
KING DAVID OF ISRAEL	
13. Sunset	3
THIS HOPE WE HAVE	6
THE VISION OF JOEL	
1. The Coming of the Locusts	9
"ELIAS SHALL FIRST COME"	12
THE SEALED BOOK	14
KING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS	
Part 1.	17
FULL GROWN — MATURE — PERFECT	20
PORTRAIT OF ST. LUKE	23



*This Journal is sent free
of charge to all who are
genuinely interested, on
request renewable annually
and is supported by the
voluntary gifts of its readers*

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

Published by
Bible Fellowship Union
11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow
Middlesex, England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, maintaining the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and the validity of their miraculous and prophetic content viewed in the light of modern under-

standing. It stands for the pre-millennial Advent of our Lord and the consequent conversion of the world. It is supported entirely by the voluntary gifts of its readers and all such gifts are sincerely appreciated.

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow, Middlesex, England.
 Secretary & Treasurer: B. G. DUMONT (Hounslow) Editorial & Publishing: A. O. HUDSON (Milborne Port)
 Circulation Control: D. WALTON (Sherborne)

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

Something like a thousand million years ago—so the geologists say—the seas of the world swarmed with myriads of little creatures called trilobites. They were almost the only recognisable living animals in the seas; the land was, as yet, quite barren of life. They were lords of creation; no higher form of terrestrial life existed. Lowly as they were, each one was, to borrow a few words from Psalm 139, “fearfully and wonderfully made”. Microscopic examination of their fossils has shown that their eyes, in some species, had as many as six thousand facets, enabling them to catch every ray of light and see in almost all directions at once. They lived on a few very simple species of grass-like seaweed, for as yet the oceans had none of the submarine plants that they possess today. Sun and moon had just begun to pierce through the vapour-laden atmosphere of the earth; the rocks and mountains were as yet hardly cool from the fierce heat of earlier ages when all was volcanic fire and raging tempest; but those little trilobites, the first of living creatures, swarmed and multiplied in the seas as age succeeded age, until they gave way to higher and more vigorous forms of life and were seen no more.

“And God said ‘Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life’... and God blessed them, saying, ‘be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas’...” (Gen. 1. 20-23). No one knows where the first trilobites came from; there are no earlier simpler forms of such creatures in the fossil remains, no original rudimentary eye from which those marvellous organs of vision with their six thousand separate sections could have been developed. In one age there is no life at all, no evidence that there had ever been any, so that geologists have called it *Azoic*, “lifeless”; then suddenly the seas are full of these marvel-

lously complex little creatures—one thousand six hundred and seventy-seven distinct varieties of trilobites have been identified—and the world is full of sentient life. A sudden appearance like that bespeaks the active intervention of an intelligent Creator, and that is just what the Genesis story implies. God spake, and life came into being.

Why did God go to work in this fashion? Why all these strange and grotesque creatures that appeared, inhabited and dominated the earth in their day, and then passed out of sight to make way for others? Was this strange and infinitely protracted sequence necessary before God could make man; for man did not appear on the scene until the end of this long procession of varied forms of life? Dr. Eisely in his book “*The Firmament of Time*” coins a very apt expression relative to man’s coming; “*that strange world into which we have been born—we, compounded of dust and the light of a star*”. The Genesis story tells how God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. Compounded of dust and that light which is the life of Divinity! Man, the goal towards which all Nature, at the behest of Nature’s God, has been working since the days of those trilobites! But the story does not end there. Another of Dr. Eisely’s telling phrases is that “*life, unlike lifeless matter, has a point of origin and then travels in a totally unique fashion continuously in the time dimension.*” That is a testimony to the credibility of the Christian conviction that men are made for a mighty purpose and this life is but the primary stage in the development of that purpose. As the trilobites were, compared with what man now is, so is man now, compared with what he shall be in the life of the future.

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous King*

13. Sunset

He was only seventy years of age, but he was an old man. The vigour of earlier days had departed; the fires of youth had burned themselves out, and it was time to depart. The great king of Israel was secluded in his palace and more or less confined to his bed, dependent upon the ministrations of others. He must have known that the end was near; perhaps he thought of his predecessor Saul, meeting his end on the field of battle, and was content that he, unlike Saul, was leaving his kingdom powerful and independent, secure from enemies. The Lord had promised him that his seed would reign on his throne after him for just so many generations as they remained loyal to their God and in any case at the end of time there would arise one of his descendants who would reign over Israel in peace and righteousness to all eternity. With that he was content. In some unknown way he must have known that he himself would be there to witness that wonderful climax to all God's ways with his people, and in a dim and obscure fashion glimpsed something of the Messianic hope which was to blossom into full flower in the days of the prophets still some two or three centuries later. So he rested, content in faith that God would certainly order the course of his people after he himself had gone into the grave.

But there was yet to be more trouble for David. He was not to be permitted to enjoy even the last years of his life in peace. The plots and intrigues which were always being devised in and around his court were as active as ever. Now they began to centre around the question as to who should be king after him, and the contestants, sensing the obviously imminent death of the king, began sparring for position.

Adonijah, fourth son of David, by his fourth wife Haggith during the stormy days at Hebron, was the expectant heir to the throne. He was the eldest surviving son and in the ordinary way would have succeeded his father. Amnon, David's firstborn, had been murdered. Chileab, his secondborn by his wife Abigail the Carmelitess, must have died young, for he is never mentioned again in the narratives. Absalom, the next, had also been murdered. There were fifteen more sons, by various wives, beside other sons by concubines, so that there could be a certain amount of competition should David die suddenly. Adonijah, now about thirty-six years of age, sizing up the situation with a practised eye, decided it was about time to act.

The story is in the first chapter of 2 Kings. Following Absalom's example twelve years previously, he began to be seen in public riding in a convoy of chariots and footmen in order to ingratiate himself with the people. This was a subtle move to insinuate the thought in men's minds that the old king was no longer able to lead them in battle and direct the affairs of the nation, and here was an up and coming young man, virile and energetic, ready and willing to assume the burden. There must have been many in Israel who were beginning to concern themselves with the fate of the nation when the king came to his end, and here was, Adonijah hoped, an answer appealing to them and acceptable to their hopes. David himself, confined to his palace, could be expected to have no idea what was afoot.

By this time Solomon was nineteen years of age and it was an open secret that David favoured him for the succession. There is no doubt that Bath-Sheba was David's favourite wife and this would be one reason for David's preference. There is also the fact that, according to David, the Lord had told him that Solomon was to ascend the throne after him. It is not possible to ascertain from the narrative just when he received this revelation, but it does seem from related circumstances that it must have been during the last four or five years of his reign, and coincided more or less with the time that he began to gather together the materials for the Temple which he knew, by the Lord's decree, was to be built, not by him, but by Solomon. Adonijah must have known all this and decided to risk everything in the attempt to gain control of the throne before his father issued the decree appointing his successor.

His first overt move was an astute one. He won over to his side that crafty old politician Joab. Joab had been a fiercely loyal supporter of David for more than forty years, right from the days of the wilderness when Saul was still king, and had served David loyally, unscrupulously and ruthlessly. But his every action was dictated by his intention to keep himself at the top. It looks very much as if Joab was conscious that the king was not going to last much longer and he had better look to his own future. The mild and peaceable Solomon was not likely to be much to the old soldier's liking and it is possible that he decided his interests were best served by allying himself with Adonijah right at the outset and becoming

the power behind the throne with Adonijah just as he had with David. With Joab on his side Adonijah could depend on the support of the army.

His next recruit was Abiathar the priest. Here again was a man who had been with David from the days of the wilderness. David had saved him from the vengeance of Saul when his father and brothers had been slain and he had been with David ever since. There is a fairly obvious reason for his defection to Adonijah. Abiathar, of the line of Ithamar, second son of Aaron, under Divine interdict since the days of Eli more than a century previously, was at present officiating as High Priest before the Ark of the Covenant at Jerusalem. But there was also a rival High Priest in the person of Zadok, of the legal line of Eleazar, son of Aaron, officiating at the Tabernacle of Moses which still stood at Gibeon, although without the Ark. (Why David installed the Ark of the Covenant at Jerusalem instead of restoring it to its rightful place in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle has never been explained). Both men knew perfectly well that when the new Temple for which David had now accumulated the material was erected and dedicated, the Ark of the Covenant would go into that Temple and there would be only one High Priest. One of them had to lose out. Abiathar, like Joab, probably reasoned that it was time to desert the old king and become well accepted by the new one. Adonijah probably congratulated himself in having the nation's principal political and military leader, and its principal ecclesiastical leader, both on his side. So Adonijah organised a great feast, to which he invited the king's remaining sons, except Solomon, and such of the nobility of Judah as he felt would be sympathetic to his cause, during which his assumption of kingship could be announced and Joab's soldiers go out immediately to quell any resistance and set the new king firmly on the throne. It was what in our day is called a coup. By the time the common people heard about it the thing would be as good as done and resistance hopeless.

Of course the news was leaked. That sturdy and uncompromising champion of the Lord, Nathan the prophet, got to hear of the plot. Adonijah had taken care not to invite him to the feast; neither had he invited Zadok the High Priest at Gibeon, nor yet another noteworthy army general, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. All of these were noted for their loyalty to David, and so were many of David's "mighty men", those who had adventured with him in the days of his exile in the wilderness and had been his staunch supporters ever since. And before long

Nathan was taking action on his own account. He knew that the will of the Lord was that Solomon should be king and it was about time all Israel was apprised of the fact. Although there is no hint of it in the narrative, Nathan probably had perceived the reverence for God and his ways which later years would reveal was latent in Solomon's character and was determined that he should be king rather than the more or less irreligious Adonijah. It is rather a remarkable fact that of all David's nineteen sons the two whose names are recorded as making their mark on history are Solomon the wise and most magnificent king of Israel, and his younger brother Nathan, (not the prophet of that name), whose descendants Joseph and Mary a thousand years later were to become the reputed father and true mother of Jesus, the Son of David.

Queen Bath-sheba, sitting quietly in her apartments at the palace, received a visitor. Nathan the prophet was announced. She received him graciously and waited for him to reveal the object of his visit. He told her of the plot, and the danger which threatened both her and her son Solomon if it succeeded. "*Adonijah doth reign*" he said bluntly "*and our lord David knoweth it not*". He knew that David, old and feeble, would need definite arousing to the seriousness of the situation if he was to be persuaded to take positive action. So he unfolded his scheme to Bath-sheba. She was to go to the king and ask if it was true that he had appointed Adonijah king despite his promise to her that Solomon should reign. While she was still with the king Nathan himself would come in asking how it was that the king had authorised the proclamation of Adonijah as king without advising either he himself, or Zadok the High Priest, or Benaiah, and they all had been excluded from the ceremonies. "*Is this thing done by my lord the king, and thou hast not shewed it unto thy servant, who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?*"

David was roused to action. He called his three trusty supporters, Nathan, Zadok and Benaiah, before him and instructed them to proceed immediately to the formal induction of his son Solomon as king. They were to set him upon the king's own mule and present him to the populace of Jerusalem in a public place. There Nathan and Zadok were ceremoniously to anoint him king in the name of the Lord, and Benaiah's men sound their trumpets and raise the cry "*God save King Solomon*". As the shout rose on the air, the spectators, seeing which way things were going, responded with considerable vigour "*God save King Solomon*". "*And all the people came*

up after him, and the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them". It would appear that the proclamation that Solomon was to be their new king met with general approbation; this young lad was perhaps more popular with the general public than was his older and probably more supercilious half-brother.

The noise of the rejoicing penetrated the banquetting chamber as the feast neared its close. By this time most of the guests were most likely in a condition where noises of any sort hardly registered. It was Joab who first noticed it. That hard-bitten old soldier would certainly be able to carry his liquor better than these men-about-court and his instinct told him there was trouble afoot. "Wherefore is this noise of the city being in an uproar?" he queried, and rose from his seat to investigate. Before he could do so, there was an interruption. Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest entered hurriedly and in an obvious state of agitation, which Adonijah evidently failed to perceive. The nature of his words gives some clue to his condition at the moment. "Come in" he cried "for thou art a valiant man, and bringest good tidings". Jonathan's reply soon sobered the would-be king. "Verily our lord King David hath made Solomon king... and Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king in Gihon, and they are come up from thence rejoicing, so that the city rang again. This is the noise that ye have heard. And also Solomon sitteth on the throne of the kingdom".

There was a deathly silence. Everyone was quite sober now. Men looked at each other, and saw their own thoughts reflected in each other's eyes. They looked at Adonijah, ashen-faced. They looked at Joab; for once that old campaigner was at a loss for words. They looked again at each other. They had staked their future on Adonijah, and Adonijah had lost.

"And all the guests that were with Adonijah were afraid, and rose up, and went every man his way".

The rebellion had collapsed almost before it had begun. What happened next to Joab and Abiathar is not recorded, but they too must have abandoned Adonijah, for the next incident in the narrative is the flight of Adonijah to the Tent in Jerusalem sheltering the Ark of the Covenant, with the altar before it, normally presided over by Abiathar as priest. Here, clutching the altar, he could claim sanctuary. Blood must not be shed on the altar of the Lord. But Solomon showed himself a wise and humane king at the outset. "If he show himself a worthy man" he said "there shall not a hair of him fall

to the earth; but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die". So the rebel came into the presence of Solomon and did obeisance, and was dismissed to his house. Although not mentioned, it is evident that the same leniency was extended to the other arch-rebels, Joab and Abiathar.

It must have been at this time that David had his long talks with Solomon and made the detailed arrangements for the erection of the Temple which are recorded in 1 Chron. Chaps. 22 to 27. If the account is to be believed he was now enormously wealthy. According to 1 Chron. 22.14 he had given out of his own resources a hundred thousand talents of gold and a million talents of silver. In today's terms that would have been three thousand tons of gold and thirty thousand of silver, well-nigh incredible figures. At today's prices the value of such a hoard would be so astronomical as to be meaningless. The 29th chapter gives another set of figures which imply that the ruling notabilities of the nation contributed 150 tons of gold, 300 of silver, over 500 of copper and 3,000 of iron. The figures may have been exaggerated by the chronicler but even so they do serve to indicate the enormous wealth of the Davidic kingdom. Such riches could only have been accumulated by trade and the spoils of war but even so is an almost incredible achievement in the forty year reign of David.

What were the old man's thoughts, as he lay quietly pondering the events of the past in which he had taken so prominent a place, and those of the future which he would never see. The great dream of his life, the magnificent Temple for the God of Israel, for which he had assiduously prepared, would be built one day but his eyes would not see it. His mind harked back to the days of his youth when he served Saul; he saw in vision the menacing figure of Goliath the Philistine and felt again the thrill of faith, that God would give him the victory over Israel's enemy. His memory traced the early conflicts when he led Israel's forces to battle and returned victorious with the praises of the young women in his ears "Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands". He would not slay any more ten thousands, he reflected; yet he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had established Israel secure among her neighbours, a nation to be treated with respect. He thought of the times he had failed God and fallen from his own high standard of rectitude, and of the reproofs and judgments that had come from the Lord in consequence; he felt the comfort of knowing that at the last he had fully repented of his baser deeds and becomes reconciled to his God and that whatever the future beyond the grave held

for him, it could only be well. He recalled the promise God had made to him that of his seed, One should come at the end of days to reign upon his throne over all the earth, dispensing mercy and righteousness toward all men everywhere, a rule and a world that would never end, a kingdom of Messiah which should be the desire of all nations. The Lord had been very patient and very good to him; he could safely trust himself now to the hands of God.....

King Solomon came with hasty steps into the bedchamber in response to an urgent summons. He bent over the bed and looked into the face of his father. David gazed at him straightly in the eyes; his voice, though low, was clear and

direct. Level and composed, it had the ring of confidence.

"I go the way of all the earth. Be thou strong therefore and show thyself a man. Keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself". Long and earnestly he talked, until the sun faded from the sky and the shades of evening began to gather.....

"Thus David the son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches and honour. And Solomon his son reigned in his stead". THE END

THIS HOPE WE HAVE

"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus Christ the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." (Heb. 4. 14).

What is probably the most significant event of the First Advent occurred when the risen Lord ascended visibly in his disciples' presence on the Mount of Olives until a cloud received him out of their sight. On the cross Jesus was temporarily overcome by the powers of evil; He yielded up his spirit to God and died, the just for the unjust. His ascension forty days later was, on the contrary, an outward manifestation of his triumph over the powers of evil. Death now no more had dominion over him. (Rom. 6. 9). Momentous as was the happening when at the first He emptied himself of his heavenly glory and took a bondman's form for the suffering of death (Phil. 2. 7-8) of even greater moment was his return to that heavenly glory having all power in heaven and earth for the elimination of evil and the establishment of everlasting righteousness.

This is the vision which inspired the writer to the Hebrews when he spoke of the solid foundation upon which the Christian faith is established *"The hope set before us"* he calls it *"which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil, whether the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek."* (Heb. 6. 19-20). This reference to Melchisedek is full of meaning. It speaks, not of sacrifice and death, but of Divine blessing and life. Melchisedek was a priest and a king, combining both offices in

his one person in those far-off-days when Abraham was a sojourner in Canaan. He comes on the scene only very briefly, at the time the invaders of Canaan had taken Abraham's brother-in-law Lot captive with all his possessions, and Abraham went after them with his followers to rescue the prisoners. It was as Abraham returned in triumph that as recounted in the narrative in Gen. 14, Melchisedek King of Salem brought forth bread and wine and blessed Abraham, and, says the chronicler, *"He was the priest of the Most High God"*. No more is said about him or of the mysterious order of priesthood of which he was the then head or of the equality mysterious people over whom he ruled. It was left to the writer of Hebrews two millenniums later to take hold of this incident and weave it into the fabric of his argument. *"Consider how great this man was"* he invites *"unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils."* The great point about Melchisedek is that he *"abideth a priest continuously"*. The fact that neither his birth nor his death, his predecessors or successors, are recorded in Scripture enabled the later writer to make him a type or illustration of the eternal priesthood of Christ after his ascension. There was no sacrifice, no making atonement for sin, associated with the priestly office of Melchisedek; only the dispensing of gifts and blessings, the exercise of a royal benevolence. In this it differed from the order of Aaron, which existed only for the making satisfaction for sin. In another respect it differed also. The Aaronic priesthood was a dying priesthood; the High Priest in any one generation must needs give place to another in the course of time. *"They truly were*

many priests because they were not suffered to continued by reason of death. But this, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood". The High Priest Aaron, and his successors, each in his own day, in the execution of their duties, pictured Jesus in his earthly life, a life of sacrifice, making atonement for the sins of the world. The word atonement means to cover, to obliterate, and when the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on the Propitiatory in the Most Holy place of the Tabernacle or the Temple, he was in symbol blotting out the peoples' sins in the sight of God. But there was a further element in the ritual before the people were free from the weight of their sins. After the offering of the blood the High Priest must emerge again and take his place in full view of all the people, raise his hands and invoke the Divine blessing upon them. Only when that point was reached could it be said that the offering had done its work. Only then could each man of Israel feel that he stood in a cleansed position before God.

So it is in the reality. Speaking of this very ritual of the high priest entering into the holy place every year with the blood of the offerings, he goes on to say "and as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (the "men" here are the successive High Priests who died symbolically in the ceremony, for the slain beast was a substitution and in symbol it was the Priest who offered himself to God, and it was after this offering that the judgment of God in the acceptance of the offering was manifested in the re-appearance of the Priest to bless the people) "so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and to them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." (Heb. 9. 27-28). Here is an exact correspondence. Christ offered himself into death just as did the Priest in the old ritual; Christ must re-appear, this time without sin (the word means sin-offering, for Christ does not offer himself a second time for sin) but definitely for the blessing of those for whom the offering has been made—the whole world of man. This is where the order of Melchisedek comes in. The priesthood of Aaron pictures the work of Christ at his First Advent and until his resurrection; that of Melchisedek pictures his position and work after his resurrection and ascension and at his Second Advent. "Unto them that look for him." That is the age-old hope of the Church, waiting for the promised return of the Lord Jesus Christ to complete the war against evil and fulfil the whole purpose of God.

This is why the Apostle Paul exhorted his pupil Titus to "live soberly, righteously and godly

in this present age, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2. 12). The duty of the Christian is to administer the obligations of the Christian faith both in inward sanctification and outward witness during this intervening time between the First and Second Advents in continual expectation of the promised Return, not looking for that Return as the end of all things for mankind, but rather as an occasion for a new effusion of blessing upon mankind. If the Second Advent brought nothing but the catastrophic ending of all save the "elect" it could hardly be appropriately described as a "blessed hope" and a "glorious appearing". In point of fact that aspect of the Lord's return which has to do with judgment passed upon evil things is referred to a fewer number of times than that which depicts it as an occasion of blessing and rejoicing, of light and life. No philosophy of the work of the Second Advent is complete which does not include a place for the evangelisation of the world, for multitudes to come to the feet of the Saviour, for the opportunity of salvation to "whosoever will" untrammelled by the deceptions of Satan and the hampering effects of abounding evil. The Messianic kingdom must run its course, and the nations walk in its light—even those of old time like the men of Tyre and Sidon, and Sodom and Gomorrah, who are to find the retributive judgments of that Kingdom "more tolerable" than will the Pharisees of our Lord's own day. (Matt. 11. 22; Mark 6. 11)—before the Last Assize is held. Nothing less is demanded by the selection of Melchisedek as a type of Christ in his work of glory—a dispenser of Divine favour and a king ruling in righteousness.

This present world is but a stage in man's progress, a stage in which sin and the results of sin mar the Divine image in man and hamper his attainment of the Divine purposes. But the image will be restored and the purpose served. It may well be that the exercise of the free will which God has implanted in man and without which he would not be man may lead some at the end to refuse their intended place in God's creation, to refuse the gift of life upon the only terms on which God can bestow it. It must be, nevertheless that at least the vast majority of earth's millions will, as the Divine purpose works itself out through one age after another, attain at last a heart appreciation of the goodness of God, and in whole hearted submission to the Lord Jesus Christ come, as Isaiah of old said the ransomed of the Lord would come, to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, while sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isa. 35. 10).

Of course the story does not stop even there. Through all the infinite ages, ages without end, development and progress will go on. Heaven is not a static condition and there is no finality in the things said and done in that place. There will always be some new thing to learn, always some greater thing to do, always some higher pinnacle of achievement to surmount. "*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit*" (1. Cor. 2. 9). Spiritually, by faith, we know that these things are so although we cannot visualise them and for the present with that we must be content.

So the angel's words to those few disciples standing on the Mount of Olives after their Lord had ascended before their very eyes were words of confidence and assurance. "*This same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven*" (Acts 1. 11). The English expression "in like manner" fails by far to express the real force of the heavenly message. It was not that He was to return in similar clothing with similar appearance, descending in bodily form to stand on the solid earth just as He had ascended from it. The expression is derived from

a word denoting the regular and consistent course of the sun round the earth within a fixed channel or pathway in which it must certainly appear at its due time. It is as though the angels had said "as surely as you have seen him go into heaven so surely will He follow his fixed course and come again." "As surely as the sun sets in the west tonight, so surely will it rise in the east tomorrow." It was that expression of certitude which sent the disciples back to Jerusalem with great joy and instilled into their minds and hearts a faith and fortitude which remained with them all their days. The Lord whom they served had finished with sacrifice and offering; He had passed into the heavens to receive a new and supremely exalted office, and one day He would certainly return to take his own to himself and bring the sons of men all those blessings which an infinitely wise and supremely loving God had prepared for them. Small wonder that the brightest hope of the Christian Church lies in the future, that discouragements and disappointments and failures of the present are as nothing compared to the glorious triumphs of the time when, at last, "*at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" (Phil. 2. 10-11).

NOTE ON JOHN 21.5

"Children, have ye any meat" is the Authorised Version's way of recording the question addressed by the waiting Lord, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, to the unsuccessful toil-weary fishermen after their night's fruitless work. While it is fairly obvious that Jesus was asking if they had caught any fish, He does not use the word usually equivalent to "fish" (*Ichthys*) but an entirely different and unrelated word (*Prospagion*). This word has caused the translators and commentators no end of trouble, as reference to the various translations will show. We append a few of these translation to show the line of thought the various versions give.

"Children have ye aught to eat."

"My children, have you anything to eat."

"Children . . . have you any food there."

"Children, have you any food."

"Children, perhaps you have nothing to eat."

"Lads, have you any meat."

"Lads, have you got anything."

"Lads, have ye caught anything to eat."

"Little children, have ye any viands."

Obviously all the translators are referring to the fish they thought to have been in the net—and while Jesus is also referring to fish, He did not put his question that way. He used a word which does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament, which really means "to eat with or alongside".

The force of this word was brought out very vividly to an Englishman, resident in an official capacity in Palestine, during a journey from Tiberias to Jerusalem. He was well acquainted with the Arabic version of the New Testament and knew the Greek "*Prospagion*" had been translated by the Arabic "*Idiam*", which, he had been led to believe, was more a classical word than a word of current usage. He had to stand in a crowded bus for about half the journey, but at Nablus—the nearest to Shechen, the Sychar of Jesus' day (John 4. 5)—a seat next to a Palestinian Jew become vacant.

Availing himself of this seat, he heard the Jew ask one of several boys who came round the bus offering food for sale, for two small loaves. On the top of each loaf was a "*kufta*" (or rissole) evidently intended to be eaten with the loaf. The Jew did not want the "*kufta*" and demanded the loaves without them. Indignantly the boy refused to accede to his demand, blurting out with considerable vexation, "What, sell my loaves without their '*Idiam*'?—never!"

The Englishman was greatly interested in the little episode. Here he had the key to the word which Jesus used. "*Prospagion*" meant "something to eat with the bread", to make the bread go down—exactly as we to-day would eat butter, cheese, jam, and even meat and fish to help the bread along its way.

THE VISION OF JOEL

*Exposition of the
Book of Joel*

1. The coming of the Locusts

Joel lived about eight hundred years before Christ, probably in the early part of the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah. He was a southerner, a Judean, and all his prophecy is cast against the background of Judea. He was a countryman, too, not a city-dweller, as is evidenced by the wealth of allusions to country life in the three chapters of his short prophecy. Vinedressers and husbandmen pass across the stage; vines and fig trees, pomegranates, palms and orange trees stand erect in the background against a landscape of cornfields and pasture lands. This was the world that Joel knew, in this framework he set his prophecy, and from it he took his allusions and symbols.

Joel was very nearly the first of the prophets. Amos and Jonah lived just a little later and Hosea perhaps twenty years earlier. But Hosea was not one of the men who saw in vision the glory of the coming Kingdom; he was more concerned with the sins of Israel of his own day, and so Joel was the first of that long line of seers, ending with Malachi, who saw in vision something of the glories to come and recorded what they saw in never-to-be-forgotten words. Malachi lived five hundred years later than Joel. During all that time the voice of prophecy was hardly ever silent, and when at last, with the death of Malachi, the Holy Spirit ceased to speak with the authority that was the peculiar characteristic of these Hebrew prophets the foundation had been well and truly laid for all that men in after times were to learn concerning God's good plans for the last conflict with evil and the setting up of his Kingdom on earth.

Isaiah, who began his lifetime of prophecy and statemanship something like sixty years after Joel, must have owed much to the earlier prophet. Isaiah's prophecy contains much that is found in embryo form in Joel. Isaiah's doctrine of the "remnant", that was carried forward into the New Testament and furnished Paul the Apostle with one of his greatest themes, has its origin in Joel. The restoration of the earth in the "times of restitution of all things" so wonderfully described by Isaiah, is first hinted at in Joel. And the eloquent descriptions of Armageddon, the day of God's rising up to judge the evil things of the earth, and his establishing a Kingdom of everlasting righteousness, the constant theme of prophetic Scripture from Isaiah to Revelation, have their commencement too in Joel. This obscure countryman, notable neither for wealth

or rank or talent, unused to city ways and the society of the learned and cultured, a man of the people and a man of the soil, was the first to be blessed by the Most High with visions of the Last Days. And because this short prophecy is thus the fountain-head of all subsequent revelation concerning the Time of the End it is of surpassing interest to all who would discern the "shape of things to come".

Characteristically, we know nothing of Joel's antecedents, only that he was the son of Pethuel, and no one knows of whom came Pethuel, of what tribe he was, or where he lived. The message was all-important, and Joel's own identity of no importance. He just announces, briefly, "*The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel*" and then plunges into his message. That it was a message from the heart none can doubt; the words are burning, white-hot, given forth with urgency and fire. One has the impression of a youthful zealot like John the Baptist, crying his message with such intensity that the people were compelled in spite of themselves to stop and listen. "*Hear this, ye old men*" he cries "*and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?*" An arresting opening to the message, that he had something to tell them that had not been known in past generations; a new thing in the land, to which they must give earnest heed, a thing unheard of by the wise men of times gone past.

"*Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.*" A master of psychology, this Joel. He has not yet broached the subject of his message, nor even given any hint as to its nature. Many of the prophets announced their God-given authority in their opening breath and plunged into their message with the next. Not so Joel; he means to get the interest of his hearers first. And how subtle the appeal to their knowledge of the Mosaic Law! It was an obligation in Israel that Divine Truth be passed on from generation to generation by the teaching of the young. Had not Moses commanded them, saying "take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen,—but teach them thy sons, and thy son's sons" (Deut. 4. 9). In much later times the people were taught to sing the noble strains of the 78th Psalm "*he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he*

commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" What a wonderful conception of the eternal truth of God, handed down from generation to generation, preserving alive the healthful influence of a strong religious faith within the nation; and what a condemnation upon our own times when this Divine injunction has been all but universally ignored, with the dire results manifest to-day on every hand among the young!

But now the listeners are waiting to hear what the prophet has to tell them. Is it a message only for them, or does its scope take in sweeps of time and space outside the limits of their own lives and homes, extending into all the earth and even to the end of the world? From the first few words, tremendous though they may be, it would seem not, for they appear to relate to nothing more world-shaking than the imminence of a great plague of locusts in Judea, and that, although always a grievous calamity, hardly needed the intervention of a prophet of God.

"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." The Hebrew words refer to four varieties of the many different species of locust, the *gazam*, the *arbeth*, the *yelek* and the *chasil*, the first being distinguished for its voracity, from whence it was called the "biter", the second for its swarming multitudes, the third for its propensity for licking up and consuming all in its path, by reason of which it was called the "licker", and the fourth for plain unadulterated destructiveness. One might almost think that here is a covert reference to God's "four sore judgments". It is surprising how often the number four is associated with Divine judgment in the Scriptures. Not only are there the well-known four horsemen of Revelation, and the four winds of Revelation 7, but there are also the four horns of Zechariah 1. 18 and the four beasts of Daniel 7. In these latter two instances, at least, the symbols describe agencies which are like Joel's locusts in that their mission is to execute judgment upon Israel, and yet, again like that dread visitation that appeared before Joel's eyes, will one day be turned back and permit the favour of God to come upon a chastened people. That truth is brought forth very plainly in Ezekiel 14. 21-22. *"Thus saith the Lord God; How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon*

Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast? Yet, behold, therein shall be left a remnant"

The opening verse of the prophecy, therefore, gives a picture of the utter desolation of the land by a great plague of locusts. It was a vivid picture and a very familiar one to the people of Joel's day. Many travellers in Eastern lands have written descriptions of the terrible havoc caused by the millions of flying insects; no better symbol of devastation and ruin could be selected. This 4th verse of chapter 1 implies that the plague has come and gone and now the land is utterly ruined; the following verses describe the lament that goes up from all quarters, from the people and the priests, the merrymakers and the workers merging into a national cry of distress rising up to God; but there is as yet no evidence of repentance. Chapter 1 closes with a people *bowed down in trouble but not as yet prepared to come to God in repentance that He might heal them.*

It is difficult to decide whether in this 1st chapter Joel is referring to a literal plague of locusts or to a great calamity that is about to fall upon his nation and of which the locusts are a symbol. Probably the latter is the right interpretation. There would hardly seem to be necessity for employing a prophet of God to foretell a natural visitation which was a fairly common sight and occurred every few years anyway; it is more likely that this is the beginning of Joel's developing prophetic sense, that sense which by the time he reached his third chapter had stretched out into the far distant future and shown him *Armageddon itself* — "multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision". But there is no hint in this first chapter of his seeing so far; the visitation to which he refers here must be one that was already very near, to be fulfilled on his own people in consequence of their own apostasy. It is a reasonable conclusion that under the figure of the locusts Joel was seeing the series of invasions under Shalmaneser and Sennacherib that resulted in the carrying away captive of the "Ten Tribes" and a goodly number also of the people of Judah, and later on, under Nebuchadnezzar, who completed the devastation of the land. It is significant that just as Joel saw four species of locusts, each eating up what its predecessors had left (vs. 4) until nothing remained, so the Scriptures speak of four great military conquerors who came, one after the other, into the land of Israel and Judah, and left nothing. Shalmaneser V of Assyria (2 Ki. 18.9) came first, about sixty years after Joel prophesied. He was followed by Sargon II (Isa. 20.1) who actually

captured Samaria. Next came the famous Sennacherib whose host was destroyed outside Jerusalem (Isa. 36 and 37) but who nevertheless did subdue the ten-tribe kingdom and take many captive. Finally, a century later, came Nebuchadnezzar, who took the remaining people of Judah away to Babylon. The four waves of locusts had done their work and this part of Joel's prophecy was thus fulfilled.

It is the consciousness of this imminent catastrophe that gives the prophet's message its initial urgency. "Awake, ye drunkards, and weep" he cries (vs. 5) "howl, all ye drinkers of wine, . . . it is cut off from your mouth. For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion . . . he hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree . . ." His first call is to the pleasure-seeking multitude, the heedless ones that had forsaken their covenant with God and turned to the interests and distractions of the moment. In the midst of their revelry destruction had come; the ruthless Assyrian soldiers would break into their houses and bring to an end their pleasant feasts. Isaiah saw something of a very similar nature when he proclaimed "Woe . . . to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower . . . Behold the Lord hath a mighty and strong one (the Assyrians) which as a tempest of hail, a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth . . ." (Isa. 28. 1-2). It is impossible not to perceive the analogy with conditions in the world in our own day, when men are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3. 4), and to realise that judgment, inevitably, must come, just as it did a century or so after the days of Joel. Is there not in our own times a repetition of the days immediately before Israel's final disaster, when "the Lord God of their fathers

sent to them by his messengers, rising up be times, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy." (2 Chron. 36. 15-16).

The completeness of the catastrophe is shown by the reference to vine and fig tree. The vine was a symbol of the people of Israel (see Isa. 5. 7 and Jer. 2. 21 "the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel"; "I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed") and the fig tree a symbol of the same (Jer. 24); and they both alike are wasted. Small wonder that the prophet calls for a lament; the voice of the bridegroom and the bride has been stilled, the holy and glorious nation has been humbled to the dust, and even Joel has not as yet seen what is to be the outcome. He can do nought else but call to sorrow and mourning and wait upon God to know what He will do. The Lamentations of Jeremiah, written to express the grief of the nation at the same calamity, had its seed also in this prophecy of Joel, calling to mourning and lamentation nearly two hundred years before the event. (To be continued)

Next month's instalment treats the remainder of chapter 1. Joel still sees no further into the future, but he is led to take one great step forward. He raises the lamentation from a cry of hopeless self-pity to a cry to God. There is still no hint of repentance—that comes in chapter 2—but his call to the nation to bring their troubles to God was itself a stage in the developing understanding of the Divine Plans which led him at last to see, and describe, the last great day when God will deliver all men from their thralldom to sin and death.

The Brightness of his Glory

From whence did the writer to the Hebrews obtain his description of Jesus the Son in Heb. 1. 3 "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person"? Nothing like it occurs in the Old Testament. A very similar phrase is found in the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon, one of the books of the Apocrypha. In a passage devoted to the praise of Wisdom personified (Wis. 7. 26) we are told that Wisdom is "the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness". This evident application of "Wisdom" of pre-Christian literature to the person of our Lord is an additional justification for the suggestion that "Wisdom" in the eighth

chapter of Proverbs is in fact descriptive of the office of the Son prior to his coming to earth. "Wisdom" and the "Word" or "Logos" was "made flesh" when Jesus came to earth as man, as St. John explains in the first chapter of his Gospel. Proverbs 8 tells of his existence with the Father "or ever the earth was" and the apocryphal Book of Wisdom, although not of the inspired books of Scripture, supports Proverbs 8. Hebrews sets the seal by likening our resurrected Lord, set down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, to that Wisdom which is the brightness of his glory and the image of his person, using the language of Israel's sacred writings of olden time.

“ELIAS MUST FIRST COME”

“And his disciples asked him, saying, why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?” (Matt. 17.10).

The question alluded to the fixed belief of the Jews that before the Last Day, when Messiah would appear to reward the righteous and punish the sinners, the prophet Elijah (Elias in Greek) would return from the dead to convert the people to God so that their eternal future would be assured. Some of those disciples had just witnessed the vision of the Transfiguration, when Jesus appeared radiant in an other-worldly glory accompanied by two others whom they knew to be Moses and Elijah. They thought the time had come, and then the vision faded, and Jesus was an ordinary man again like themselves, and talking of approaching death. All of this was hard to understand against their traditionary beliefs of the glory of the Messiah and they sought enlightenment.

The expectation was based on the words of the prophet Malachi uttered four centuries previously. *“I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4. 5-6).* The Septuagint has it the “great and glorious day of the Lord”, “the heart of the father to his son, and a man to his neighbour” which is probably much nearer to the original. “Curse” should be rendered “destruction” (Heb. *cherem*). The implication is that Elijah, the renowned prophet who once converted the whole nation from Baal-idolatry to true allegiance to the God of Israel, would at the end of time appear to extend the opportunity to all Israel once more and if successful so avert the judgment which would otherwise inevitably come.

Jesus told them in reply that in fact Elias had already come, that the nation failed to recognise him and had rejected him. *“Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist” (Matt. 17.13).* Upon an earlier occasion He had said the same thing to them; speaking of John, He said *“All the prophets and the law prophesied until John, and if ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come” (Matt. 11. 13-14).* In saying that, He propounded a deep and mystic truth.

The essence of Malachi’s prophecy was that the Advent of Messiah was to be preceded by a

Herald, who would appear to proclaim his imminent coming and call all to be ready to receive him (Mal. 3. 1-4). The result of the work of this Herald would be the division of the people into those who believed and so were ready to receive the Messiah when He appeared, and those who did not. The one became the Lord’s special treasure and escaped the judgement; the others would enter into judgment. Finally the believing ones were to return to the scene of judgment and in association with him conduct the work of discerning (judging) *“between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not” (Mal. 3.18).* The sending of Elijah in chap. 4. is a reiteration of chap. 3. introducing Elijah as the representative figure of the Herald when the time comes for him to appear.

Israel in the pre-Christian centuries, and at the time of the First Advent, took the allusion to Elijah quite literally and in fact there was no reason then why they should not. There was no conception then of a spiritual calling to a state of celestial union with Christ, that which is the destiny of the Christian church. Their entire understanding was limited to one Advent, the coming of Messiah in power and glory, and they, the Jews, to be the sole recipients of the favours and blessings flowing from his reign. Today the position is different. It is realised that there are two Advents, not one, and two salvations, an earthly and a heavenly, not one. Not until the Second Advent does our Lord appear in glory and power, and the “jewels” whom according to Malachi 3 will be gathered together as the Lord’s treasure will comprise two classes, an earthly and a heavenly, the converted and purified from among Israel on earth, and the glorified Christian Church of this Age in heaven. The prophecy of Malachi must therefore have a dual fulfilment.

It is this development of understanding which demonstrates that this fulfilment cannot relate to the historical Elijah, dead and buried nearly three thousand years ago. No man, not even Elijah, can be raised from the dead until the Lord has appeared with his Church at his Second Advent. Our Lord must of necessity be the first to rise from the dead, and his Church, to whom alone is reserved participation in what is called the First Resurrection, must come next (Rev. 20.5) *“As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive, but every man in his own order, Christ the first fruits, afterwards they that are Christ’s at his presence. (1 Cor. 15. 21-22).*

Whoever and whatever fulfilled or will fulfil the prophecy of the Herald which uses Elijah as a figure, it cannot be Elijah himself.

Jesus confirmed this and pointed the way to the true understanding of the matter when He made that remark "If ye will receive it (the work of John the Baptist and his exposition of the Law and prophets which preceded him) *this is Elias which was for to come*". "He shall go before him" said the angel of John "in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1. 17). All this makes it plain that at both the First and Second Advents there is a Herald of the imminence of the coming of Christ, that some at least would believe and be ready to receive him when He should have come; Elijah was the figure used to represent those successive Heralds.

All these New Testament references are conclusive that the appearance and preaching of John the Baptist was that Herald at the First Advent. His mission commenced six months before the appearance of Jesus at Jordan which signalled the commencement in turn of his own mission. "There standeth One among you whom ye know not" John had proclaimed and true it was that Jesus had come into the world and in the main the world knew him not. But some did receive him, and to them He gave power that they might become sons of God. (John 1. 11-12). So was the work of the Herald fulfilled; the people went out to him from all Israel and heard his proclamation of the imminent Advent of the Coming One. "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand; repent ye and believe"; that was the burden of his message. A few did believe, and they were the ones who recognised and accepted Christ when He appeared shortly afterwards. True to Malachi's prophecy, the Lord gathered some jewels and the rest entered into judgment, the destruction that came upon the nation at the hands of the Romans forty years after the Crucifixion.

There now has to be considered the second and corresponding fulfilment at the time of the Second Advent. This is by far the greater and more momentous fulfilment for whereas that at the time of John concerned only one nation, Israel, and the end of their national existence, this concerns the whole world of mankind and the end of this Age and of this present evil world—something much greater than the preaching of one man is involved here and true to this the chronicles of the immediate past show that the Herald's proclamation at this end of the Age has been the work of many men. A pronounced

characteristic of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries among Christian leaders was the growing and widespread conviction that the Second Advent is imminent and as the period progressed so understanding of the true nature and purpose of that Advent clarified. Previous centuries had produced men who looked for and preached the certainty of the Advent but usually put the event in the yet more or less distant future, a matter of several centuries or more. In the early 1800's for the first time it was brought into the expectant lives of the then living generations and although there were and are still disappointed expectations in this field, the conviction has never died and the "watchers" have continually watched.

This expectation was spear-headed in the early 1800's chiefly by the Adventist movement headed by the Baptist minister William Miller in America and the Albury and Powerscourt annual conferences sponsored by a number of eminent ministers in England. There was emphasis upon the "signs of the times", the decline of Papal power in world political affairs, which was seen as a fulfilment of Bible prophecy, and a great reliance upon the prophetic chronology of the Bible, all of which evoked world-wide interest in the expectation of an imminent Advent. Not unnaturally, there were disappointments and the failure of some expectations. But the proclamation continued and as the century progressed the nature and purpose of the Advent began to be more clearly discerned. Already at the Albury Park conferences of 1826-30 there was advanced the thesis that there would be two stages to the Advent, a first in which the Lord would come to gather his Church, in the First Resurrection, unperceived to mortal eyes, and a later stage, in which He would appear in a universally perceived manifestation with his Church for the Last Judgment. By the third quarter of the century the connection of the Advent with the Millennium and the Millennial reign of Christ over the earth was more clearly seen and the old idea of a twenty-four hour Day of Judgment was vanishing in face of this development of understanding, which saw in this Millennial reign of Christ the time of final probation, a thousand-year long Day of Judgment during which the eternal issues of righteousness and sin, of life and death, were to be wrought out for each individual.

Much of this evangelical fervour has died away during this present century. No longer is the Second Advent preached from established Church pulpits as it was a hundred years ago. Perhaps the last significant development was the formation in England by a number of influential Free

Church leaders of the Advent Testimony and Preparation movement in 1917. Both that and other older movements are today shadows of their former selves. And that must provoke the question; was it all a delusion and is the Advent still as far off as ever? The answer to that lies recorded in history. John the Baptist, the Elias of the First Advent, ended his mission in death whilst the later mission of the One he heralded was only just beginning to make its mark in the Jewish world. *"He must increase, but I must decrease"*, he said of Jesus. So it is today. The proclamation has been made to the modern world and its voice is now relatively silent. Like its earlier forerunner, it is decreasing. But the evidence of the presence of the One it has heralded is increasingly clear in the signs of the times about us. The Nineteenth century was the time of anticipation, the Twentieth the time of observation, of those events in the world of man which our Lord himself said would denote the arrival of the "days of the Son of Man". The failure of earth's politicians to maintain peace and law and order in a rapidly disintegrating world order, the emergence of Israel after twenty-five centuries as a sovereign self-governing state, preparatory to its conversion to God as the theocratic "Holy Nation" predicted in the Scriptures, the increasing inability of man to halt world pollution in the one hand and the nuclear threat on the other, both of which if unchecked spell the extinction of the human race, the rapidly increasing over-population of the world, all indicate that the appearance of our Lord from

Heaven to take control and restore order and justice to a hopeless world, and bring new life to a dying race, must be at the doors. And if this be so, then it logically follows that this present century is that preliminary period, prior to the outward manifestation, during which our Lord has commenced the work of his Second Advent in both gathering his Church to himself in the spiritual world "beyond the veil", and so guiding and overruling the many contending forces among men which are rushing this present order to destruction so that they all converge together in the climax when He manifests himself to all men and takes control.

This then is the greater fulfilment of the prediction that Elias must first come, to proclaim the coming of the world's Saviour. The proclamation has been made, and it is finished. This day is the day of reality.

The work of the Advent has begun, quietly, unobtrusively, behind the scenes, and the day of its full outward manifestation cannot be far distant. The world waits for one thing, the completion of the earthly course of the last members of Christ's church. So soon as that august company has been gathered to its celestial home, the stage is clear for "his glorious appearing" and his Millennial reign. Says St. Paul *"the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God"* (Rom. 8.19). In the words of the statesman-prophet Isaiah long ages ago *"the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together"*.

THE SEALED BOOK

*A theme from
Revelation chap. 4*

After the Lord had completed his messages to the Seven Churches (Rev. 2 & 3) the method of making his further revelations changed. From Chapter 4 onwards further disclosures were made by a series of impressions, having an effect on the mind of John similar to the modern cinema picture upon the eye. There was no literal enactment of the scenes, nor audible utterance of sound, such as others not "in the Spirit" could see or hear; but in the exalted state of John's receptive mind they were so real and actual that John doubted not that Jesus had sent his angel (Chap. 1. 1.22; 8.16) to communicate these things to him, as an expression of dispensational verities, to be recorded for the benefit and information of his and later Christian generations. Interspersed with these scenes were spoken words, sometimes by the angel, some by Jesus, at times

addressed personally to John, at others, for his recording.

The Christian Church has accepted the visions and the utterances of this book as authoritative, and as binding as any other inspired portion of Holy Writ. Few have doubted or questioned its validity or authorship. Hence these scenic-pictures rank with all prophetic and Apostolic utterance as an expression of the Divine Will and intention, every part of which will have its appropriate fulfilment in its own due time and manner.

At the commencement of this scenic-display, John records one of the most arresting and remarkable pictures of the whole series. It is the key to all that follows.

"After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven; and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with

me; which said, Come up thither and I will show thee things which must be hereafter" (Rev. 4. 1, 2).

John saw himself pass through that opened door-way. Entered within, he saw a magnificent spectacle. At the moment of entry, a THRONE of an extraordinary nature—the most conspicuous object of the scene—was being "set". An unnamed Being sat upon it. Around it was an arched rainbow of emerald hue. In close proximity, as though a part of its frame, yet free enough to fall prostrate, were four living creatures, with different facial forms, which John calls "Zoa" but are mistranslated "beasts" in the A.V.

The "surround" of the Throne, as well as its base and foundation, was as of transparent crystalline glass, deeply refractive like the sea. In this foreground were seven torches (lamps) throwing up their tongues of living fire. Around it were twenty-four lesser thrones (mistranslated "seats") on which twenty-four venerable beings, called elders, were sitting wearing golden crowns, and faultless white raiment. John heard the four "Zoa" and the four and twenty "Elders" praising the centrally Enthroned Being for his mighty creative works.

After noting these things, John's attention was attracted to a seven-sealed scroll in the right hand of the One on that central throne. While thus noting this Scroll, a mighty Angel in an adjacent position proclaims with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" (Chap. 5.2). There seemed to be no response. Challenging heaven and earth, and all created things, it seemed to John as though no one was sufficiently worthy to accept the invitation.

"And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth was able to open the book, neither to look thereon" (v. 3).

Because no one was able to take the book John wept bitterly. But while the fountain of tears flowed, a voice from one of the "Elder" thrones sought to comfort him, telling him that a "Worthy One" had been found who not only could but would take the Scroll and break the seals.

"Weep not; behold the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof" (v.5). Checking the tears, John looks up again at the scene, to find now; *"in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth"* (v.6).

The "Lion of the tribe of Judah" stood there, like a "Lamb as it had been slain"; but it was a most extraordinary Lamb. It had seven horns and seven eyes in its head. It advanced to that august Throne and took from the right hand of the Occupant the little Scroll about which the mighty challenge had been uttered. Thereupon there broke forth a mighty chorus of praise and rejoicing which, beginning with the four beasts and the twenty-four Elders, spread to the ten thousand times ten thousand angels surrounding the thrones, and from them passed to heaven and earth's remotest bounds, till every tongue took up the anthem and called forth, *"Blessing and honour and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever"* (v.13). This amazing investiture and acclamation ended, the four "beasts" uttered a loud "Amen", while the twenty-four Elders fell down in reverent worship of the "Ancient of Days" who liveth for ever and ever.

Leaving the consideration of the remainder of this amazing symbolism for the time being, the question will be asked, Why did the taking of the little book by the Lion-Lamb make all this stir and difference to the otherwise hopeless situation? Unmistakably the passing of the little book is the all-interesting centre of that sublime scene!

John knew right well what that scene, with its supreme Judge, and assessor-witnesses and the sealed Scroll, implied. A similar court had held jurisdiction many times in Israel. Connected with his ancient land and people, John knew that Assembly as the "Court of Redemption for Alienated Inheritances". The sealed Scroll, lying in the hands of the Judge was like a legal document containing the title-deeds of a surrendered "lot" in Israel. The day of its redemption had come, and the court had gathered, with its judge and jury, to sanction and legalise the transfer, to the redeemer, of the purchased inheritance. Upon the price of redemption being forthcoming, the judge passed over to the "redeemer" the sealed Scroll, which he then proceeded to break and render void.

At this point it will be necessary to define what is meant by "Redemption". Usually when this word is used by Christian teachers, it carries their mind back to the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and to some spiritual blessing, now experienced, flowing out from that blessed sacrifice. Very few see anything more in it than the laying down of the Master's life. There is much more in the word "Redemption" in its Hebrew usage. The word comes to us and takes its significance from certain laws and customs which made it impossible to alienate estates beyond a

certain time. No matter why a man may have been compelled to dispose of his "lot"—(his inheritance in the land)—or whoever may have taken possession of it meanwhile, it returned to its owner, or his heirs, in the year of Jubilee, unpurchased. All debts were cancelled, and all land and slaves went out free. In addition to this Jubilee release, another enactment gave the disponent of an estate the right of redemption, or failing himself, the next-of-kin could redeem it (Deut. 5. 5-10).

An illustration of this is found in the book of Ruth. Elimelech and Naomi, fallen on straitened times, had sold their lot in Israel and removed into Moab. Elimelech died in Moab, and so did Naomi's two sons. Naomi, accompanied by a daughter-in-law, Ruth, returned to Israel, and found home and shelter near her kinsman Boaz. A nearer kinsman than Boaz existed, to whom the first right of redemption fell. By another statute, however, he who redeemed the land, must take also the childless wife of a deceased owner, and raise up seed to his kinsman, that his inheritance be not blotted out in Israel. The nearer kinsman refused to take Ruth to wife, and passed on his prior right to the second-of-kin Boaz. The token of this surrendered right was to pluck from the foot a shoe, and bestow it upon the redeemer. This Naomi's kinsman did to Boaz.

Boaz had bought, as Naomi's kinsman, in her stead, and with her consent, the inheritance of Elimelech and his sons, which had been "deeded" away, (and incidentally the wife also of one of the heirs). In the disposing of an inheritance two scrolls were prepared, both identically worded. One was left open, to be read at any time, by any interested party. The other was sealed by the purchaser's own signet, and then duly signed and attested on the outside by his witnesses. A sealed, witnessed scroll was always the evidence of an alienated inheritance, and gave its possessor the right to occupy and harvest the "lot" until the Jubilee, or some specified earlier day of redemption.

Illustrating the use of the two scrolls there is the case of Jeremiah purchasing the field of his kinsman in Anathoth (see Jer. 32.6-12). After weighing out the silver, Jeremiah *"took the evidences of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open"* (verse 11).

When any person (whether the original proprietor or another acquiring his right) was found legally competent and willing to "take" and destroy the "sealed" scroll, thus redeeming the alienated inheritance, he was called in Hebrew, "the GOEL" or Redeemer. The inheritance, thus redeemed, became for a time, his own, and

he might then proceed to eject and disposes any other person found on the "lot", himself claiming and taking its harvest for himself.

This redemption procedure, culled from types and shadows given to Israel, is the basis of this sublime picture revealed to John within that Heavenly door—and this process of redemption, carried through by the near kinsman, the Lion of the tribe of Judah—is both the key and the subject matter of the whole remainder of the Book of Revelation. It is, in fact, the grand culmination of the whole Plan of God.

Briefly told, the story is this. Adam sinned, and brought ruin to his hopes and expectations. Because God foreknew that a satisfactory Saviour would, in due time, be found, He allowed Adam's race to perpetuate itself under sin. From among this provisionally ransomed race God made choice of Abraham and his seed to be the channel of his mercy to all flesh. To the earthly children of Abraham, God offered, if faithful while He trained and equipped them, to make them a kingdom of priests and an holy nation (Exod. 19.5-6) because all the earth was his—i.e. coming within his purposes. By means of his righteous laws which He gave them, and the promises of attaining life ultimately, God purposed to make Israel the channel through which He would reach out to gather the outcast nations of the world. Israelites were to invite other peoples into her commonwealth to wait, like Israel, until the real sacrifice for sins should be offered. But Israel failed miserably. She fell to other gods and forgot her own.

From Sinai on, she should have been God's Kingdom, the first and chief nation among men. God's offer was to make her "a kingdom—a priestly kingdom—and a holy nation". That inheritance, entered upon at Sinai, was forfeited by her sin. Not only that, Israel sold herself to "sin"—for nought (Isa. 52.3) so she was, additionally, a slave. God's purpose regarding the nations was halted temporarily by Israel's perversion and fall.

The story of Revelation is thus two-fold. It reaches out to all the families of the earth, and gives them all as children of Adam the benefit of his ransom price. But it must be as previously planned. It must come through Israel. Her Kinsman redeemed her inheritance for her, and proposes to restore to her the despised and forfeited "lot" for which she was chosen by the Almighty God of Abraham (Gen. 17.1). Meantime God gave to the Gentiles the place of supreme authority in the earth during the season of Israel's rejection, i.e. during the Times of the Gentiles. The story of this book (which is the kernel and capstone of all revelation) tells of the steps taken

by the Kinsman Redeemer, first, to eject and dispossess, the alien Gentile; then the restoration to Israel of her unique place as God's chosen channel; and then through her the final in gathering of all the worthy ones of the nations into his everlasting Kingdom. That explains the use of so much Hebrew thought and idiom in this wonderful book. It is the redemption charter of Israel.

The Christian Church of God has her own unique place in this programme. She does not need to appropriate Israel's place or promises. Her inheritance, more glorious than others, has never been forfeited—she is joint-heir of an inheritance won for himself and her by the Lamb of God—the reward of his faithfulness unto death.

A KING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

*A short study in the
Millennial Visions of Isaiah*

Part 1.

Isaiah, the statesman-prophet, lived in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah and Manasseh, five successive kings of Judah; his prophetic ministry covered a term of more than sixty years. A priest by descent and legal right, he was a close student of the political developments of his day and a constant adviser to the royal court—especially to Ahaz and Hezekiah. The first thirty-five chapters of his prophecy record his utterances during the first thirty years or so of his ministry, up to the early years of Hezekiah. They comprise prophetic glimpses of the order of things in the Millennial Age set against the background of the evils of his own day. His understanding of the virtues and vices of kings, priests and peoples, and the principles upon which God will act to accomplish his purposes with them, fitted him very specially to be the prophet of the Millennial Age. More than anything else, therefore, his prophecies enshrine in symbol the principles that will govern that Age.

* * *

The theme of Isaiah's message in chapters 30 and 32 is kingship. This resolute, upstanding man of God had much experience of kings; he spent his life more or less in and out of the royal presence in the palace at Jerusalem, and he was by no means without knowledge of the kings of nations round about. Judah at this time was a flourishing state; its boundaries were extended almost as far as they had been in the days of Solomon, its armies were a power not to be ignored, and it was able to play off its two powerful neighbours, Assyria and Egypt, the one against the other in the best diplomatic tradition. A new power, Babylon, was coming into prominence—rather, an ancient power that had been eclipsed by Assyria for several centuries and was now coming into its own again—and Judah was flirting with that power too. Isaiah, the farsighted and astute statesman, warned the kings of Judah, one after another, of the risks they ran, but his warnings were very usually ignored and during his own life-time the nation came

perilously near to disaster, being saved only by Divine intervention in the destruction of Sennacherib's host; and a century or so after his death it did suffer the inevitable consequence of its political mistakes and was taken captive into Babylon.

But Isaiah also knew of another king, one who would, in time to come, reign in righteousness and bring peace and prosperity to the people. He knew that it would not be in his own time; like Abraham of old, he had to look forward into the then far distant future, but look forward he did, and, again like Abraham, he "rejoiced to see" that day, "and was glad". So, when the prophetic power was strong upon him, he thought first upon the kings he knew in his own experience, their weaknesses and their folly, and warned his hearers of the ruin that must surely come; then as the vision of the present dissolved into that of the future his mind took a great bound forward into the coming Age, and he told of the better King who would accomplish all the good for humanity that kings ought to accomplish now, but which the kings that men set up, or suffer to take the dominion, have never and will never accomplish.

The thirtieth chapter opens with a message of condemnation upon Israel for seeking alliance with Egypt instead of trusting in the Lord their God for protection from the menace of Assyria. "Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me . . . that walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt." "Woe to them that go down into Egypt for help . . . but they look not to the Holy One of Israel" (ch. 30. 1-2. ch. 31. 1). Israel had been delivered from this same Egypt seven centuries previously; now of their own volition they were becoming entangled with its fortunes again.

Not for nothing has Egypt been accepted as a symbol of the world. Many a time since the days of Isaiah have those who should have trusted in

God chosen instead to entangle themselves with worldly policies and methods and alliances; the result has always been what it was to Israel in that far-off day—disastrous. Now in our own day the same determination is manifest in the world's counsels and councils. "There is no God" is in all their thoughts" is a true quotation when applied to the great men of the earth to-day. It is not so much that they do not believe in the existence of God; many of them are quite sincere in the profession of some orthodox form of the Christian faith. But they are persuaded that salvation can only come by the strong right arm of human power—reasoning and agreement, if possible, and if that fails, then by force. Under no circumstances will they risk either the "loss of face" or the—to them—appearance of weakness involved in casting their dependence upon God. Israel was like that too, here in this thirtieth chapter of Isaiah, and onward until faced with a crisis, when Egypt had manifestly failed to deliver, and Sennacherib's army stood before the gates of Jerusalem . . .

But that great deliverance was still future. Here Isaiah is pronouncing Divine judgment upon this unbelieving generation and its king. "Go, write it before them . . . in a book, that it may be for the time to come . . . that this a rebellious people . . . that will not hear the word of the Lord" (vs. 8-9). From that he goes on to declare the utter destruction that will inevitably come, and that did in fact come in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. Even in this extreme the Father again appeals to his erring children (vs. 15). "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, 'In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength'; and Isaiah adds, sadly but sternly, "and ye would not. But ye said 'No; for we will flee upon horses . . .'. So he passes sentence; they shall indeed flee, and be broken, and be scattered, until none be left in the land.

Now although this is the pass to which Judah's kings have brought their subjects, and the people have been willing to have it so, God is by no means prepared to let matters rest there. True, the people must endure the judgment they have brought upon themselves. The weakness of Egypt will be made manifest; the Assyrian power in their own day, and the Babylonian power in their children's day, must stalk through the land, burning, destroying and slaying, but God has a plan that extends beyond all this, and will yet reach out for their deliverance. So, at this point, Isaiah begins to see into the future. What he beholds is dim and shadowy at first, and he speaks only in general terms; later on in the thirty-second chapter, he perceives more distinctly and

speaks more clearly. But even now he apprehends the promise of deliverance. The Lord will wait "that he may gracious unto you . . . for the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; thou shalt weep no more; he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it he shall answer thee" (vs. 18-19).

Here again the one unalterable, indispensable principle is reiterated. The people have entered into the bitterness and retribution for their fault; they have spurned the word of the Lord and rejected his prophet, and have reaped the consequences. But there is to be another opportunity for them; for God is a God of a second chance and a third chance and as many chances as may be necessary to teach his wandering ones their lesson, always provided that the proffered further chance is based upon some real possibility, some reasonable hope, that it will bring the wanderer somewhere nearer to God. So, once again, Israel may return and be delivered, if they believe, and trust no longer in Egypt. "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry"; there must be the cry of faith and repentance before He can hear, and hearing, answer with his graciousness.

From that time forward, says Isaiah, peace and security will return. ". . . the increase of the earth . . . shall be fat and plenteous; in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures" (vs. 23). The images of gold and silver will be cast away and the curse of idolatry lifted from the land (vs. 22). The true and sincere worship of God and absolute trust in him will go hand in hand with a restored and luxuriant earth that will meet man's every need.

There will be discipline. In this coming golden age, man, who is still imperfect and weak, will need strict parental care and training before he can be trusted with full liberty in life. The old depraved tastes and desires will shout to have their way and they must be restrained. The old impulses of selfishness and greed, mayhap even of hate and strife, will struggle for expression; and they must not be allowed to have free rein. There will be swift and certain retribution for every attempt to do evil. All of these disabilities will still afflict humanity, albeit in diminishing degree as the Age proceeds in its work of reconciliation, but there will be teachers at work, teachers who are no longer despised and rejected, but standing before men in the full light of day. "Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction" as He must do, even in the day of light and gladness, cries Isaiah (vs. 20) "yet shall not thy teachers be removed

into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers; and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it' when ye turn to the right hand or to the left". That is the distinguishing characteristic of the Millennial Age; the presence of experienced and qualified teachers ever on the alert to perceive the slightest deviation from the path of true rectitude and uprightness, and to guide the traveller with unerring wisdom into the ways of peace.

Who are these teachers? They are, first, the faithful consecrated Christian disciples of this present Age, of this period between Pentecost and now, and, second, the "Ancient Worthies", faithful men of previous ages, before Pentecost. Both companies alike, by reason of their past lives' experiences with man and his sinfulness, and of God and his power in their own lives, will be able to turn men from the power of sin to serve the living God. These will be the sure teachers of mankind "in that day".

Thus it is that in the words of verse 26, the "light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people...". In Scripture symbolism the sun is often put to represent the light of the Gospel, and the moon that of the Law of Sinai, which preceded the Gospel and yet is only truly illuminated by the Gospel. So, in that day, the light of those teachers who were of the days of the Law, and the light of these teachers who are of the days of the Gospel, will together shine resplendently "as the light of seven days" upon men being healed. If it is true that the history of mankind on earth can be said to cover seven days, seven prophetic periods of time, and if it is true—as we know it is true—that each of those historic "days" will contribute its share of "teachers", either earthly or heavenly teachers, to the work of the Millennial Day, then surely it may be said with truth, that the light of the moon and the sun will then be as the light of seven days; the accumulated wisdom and experience of the seven ages of human history will be laid under tribute in the teaching and training of all men in the Millennial Age.

These few fragments are fugitive glimpses of Millennial conditions, stray gleams of light, shooting as it were across the dark background of Isaiah's present message of reproof and condemnation; the full glory of his vision has yet to come. There is a further message to be given first, a further aspect of the judgment that must precede the blessing. Israel's chastisement has been foreseen and described, and that of man-

kind in general under the figure of Israel, and there is no concealment of the fact that the judgment is directly in consequence of unfaithfulness and unbelief. But what of the agent of judgment, the scourge of God ready to his hand for the purpose? What of the Assyrians who were so ready to ravage Judah and to carry out the Divine work of retribution? Are they themselves without guilt, and has the Lord no account to settle with them? By no means are they without guilt; and a very heavy account the Lord does have to settle with them. Even though they have, unwittingly, played a part in the execution of the Divine purpose, their own personal responsibility for the evil they have done remains; they did not undertake the invasion and ravaging of Judah from any consciousness of effecting God's purpose or any desire to do him service. They entered the land completely and entirely from motives of greed and hate and lust and every other vicious attribute. They too were alien from God and fighting against him, and they too must enter into judgment, before in their turn they can stand before the Great White Throne and hear the terms of life, and turn to find those same teachers waiting to teach them also. So Isaiah has a word for the Assyrians, a word of fierce denunciation and ruthless determination. In reading that message let us not forget that those Assyrians pictured the forces of this world in this, the end of the old Age, that fight against the incoming Kingdom of Christ, that indeed stand as it were between us and the Kingdom. Every institution, every organised power, whether financial, political or religious, that sets itself up as instead of God, and leaves God out of its counsels, and suppresses the things of God in its domain, is of those to whom the prophet addresses these words; and the judgment is certain, and the end thereof sure.

"The name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with his anger... His lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire; and his breath as an overflowing stream... and the Lord shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall show the lighting down of his arm... with the flame of a devouring fire, and tempest, and hailstones. For through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down..." (vs. 27-33).

Here it is that the prophet's understanding widens immeasurably and his field of vision takes in the broad sweep of colour that is the Millennial Age. The strife and confusion and shouting, the darkness and tempest and earthquake, of that Armageddon which marks the time of judgment humanity has brought upon itself at the end of the present Age dissolves and metamor-

phoses into the radiant glory of a great Throne set up upon earth, and the resplendent figure of a King, a king such as earth has never before known. Here it is that Isaiah embarks upon a detailed description of the kingship of the Millennial Age, of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. Raising his eyes to drink their full of the replendent scene, he cries out in tones of exultation. "Behold," he cries, "Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment" (ch. 32. 1). The King is Jesus Christ, returned to earth in the glory of his Second Advent, in the exercise of that power which He could have wielded at his First Advent, but refused so to do because only in being "led as a lamb to the slaughter" and giving "his soul an offering for sin" (Isa. 53) could He establish the transcendent truth that the only one who can be trusted with absolute power over mankind is the One Who has demonstrated his willingness to share the sufferings and the death that is the lot of all mankind. But now the time of suffering and death is past and the King comes forth in glory and power and takes his place upon the throne of earth, an absolute monarch indeed, but a monarch to whom all men can give unqualified loyalty and obedience, for He is a King Who will reign in righteousness. So, in another place, Isaiah cries rapturously "It shall be said in that day, 'Lo, this is our God. We have waited for him, and He will save us'" (Isa. 25. 9). David, seeing the same thing, sang (Psa. 72) "He shall judge thy people with righteousness and the poor with judgment . . . in his day shall the righteous flourish . . . He shall spare the poor and needy . . . men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed".

Men have never known an absolutely righteous king and have no conception of the benefits such a monarch can bring to his people. It has been well said that "power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely" and power in the hand of fallible men, however well-intentioned, has very generally been abused to a greater or lesser extent. Some of the most ruthless men known to ancient as well as modern history have commenced their conquering careers with the best of motives and have ended them to the accompaniment of tears and curses from those who have suffered under them. In our own day men of the people have risen to positions of power, loudly proclaiming that they will administer freedom and equality for all men; too late, their hapless dupes have realised that the shackles of bondage have been riveted upon them more firmly than ever. Those rulers were sincere enough when they started out; the possession of power has been more than their integrity could withstand.

A king who will reign in righteousness, then, is a new thing to this world and the results of his reign will be new too. The first reaction of his people will be one of relief and growing confidence. A new hope will be born in the hearts of men, a hope that at last the long-desired but ever elusive peace and prosperity may indeed be within reach.

This is the theme of the remainder of the thirty-second chapter. Having passed from the reign of death and evil, and seen the last of earth's evil powers perish in Armageddon, the prophet is free to devote himself to a detailed picture of the benefits which the king who reigns in righteousness brings to his subjects.

(To be continued)

FULL-GROWN-MATURE-PERFECT *An Exhortation*

"Strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age." (Heb. 5. 14).

"Solid food belongs to them that are full-grown" so runs the R.V. and other versions on this text. Others translate it "them that are mature", or are of "adult" stature. Any of these words would stand, in this setting, as the equivalent of the Greek "teleios". In other settings it would be right to use the word "perfect". It is derived from the word "telos" which means "end", "consummation" or "conclusion". "Full-grown" or "mature" is a good word to stand over against the word "babes" in the context here, and to indicate that the growing process has reached its climax and consummation as Nature intended it. And to these "strong meat"

or "solid food" is the appropriate nutriment. The A.V. frequently renders the Greek "trophe" as meat—an indication of the general usage of the term in former Elizabethan days — but most modern translations use instead the word "food". "Trophe" denotes "nourishment, food",—(akin to "tropho" to rear, nourish, feed) says Vine in his "Expository Dictionary" hence does not of necessity mean animal flesh, though it would not exclude that if used in the wider general sense of food.

"Strong" meat or "solid" food, is food which can make hard, firm, or solid, (from *stereoo*—to make firm) and is a variant from the thought in our word "establish". "Strong meat" or "solid food" stands for an advanced form of teaching

or doctrine in contradistinction to the elementary matter alone suitable for babes. Those therefore for whom solid spiritual food is appropriate and necessary are the full-grown, the adult, the mature, the spiritually perfect, and these are they whose senses can be exercised to discern or discriminate between good and evil.

It is with the sense of being full-grown, mature or perfect that this present study is concerned. This is a theme on which good-intentioned men have stumbled grievously, especially those, jealous of the Mosaic Law, who claimed not to have sinned or stumbled over considerable periods of time. Imagining the Law of Christ (Gal. 6. 2) to be identical with the Law of Sinai, these have often come to think because they have not openly dishonoured their parents, nor killed a fellow-man, nor committed adultery, nor engaged in theft, nor borne false witness, nor coveted their neighbours goods, they are therefore without sin, and may claim a standing as perfect men in the sight of God. Now while there is a standing in God's sight, denoted by that term, and possible to men, it is an easy thing to fall into grievous error over it by pressing our own significance and definition into it, and erecting a standard of conduct thereby which we may claim to attain and fulfil.

Christian perfection or maturity is often defined as a state of sinlessness in moral things—a state of abstinence from doing forbidden things. But Christian perfection is more than that—it is much more than a mere negative attitude to evil and to evil things! It is one thing to hate evil—but that in itself is not enough. Of our Lord Jesus it is said He loved righteousness as well (Heb. 1. 9). It is on this side of the relationship—the really positive side of the basic principles—that the true nature of the Christian perfection is to be found. And for this standard of perfection our Lord Jesus is the one and only pattern. A man may not actually have killed or robbed his fellowmen, but if in his heart, at times of intense provocation, he may have felt that he could have done so, in the sight of Heaven the act has been performed. If at any time he has looked upon a woman to lust after her, the transgression is accounted to have been committed. The merely negative withholding from the deed is not sufficient to fulfil the Law of Christ — there must be a positive attitude manifested thereto, so that if the opportunity really came, the act would not take place.

Absolute perfection is not possible so long as we lack complete knowledge, for as our knowledge grows we constantly discover evil in the things which formerly we did, or allowed, without qualms or misgivings, and as we continue to

grow older, and to grow in grace, we shall yet come to see impropriety, or un-Christianlikeness in things which we do to-day, so that we can never say we have reached full and complete attainment in moral things. Paul knew right well that he had not apprehended that for which Christ had apprehended him, and if he, giant that he was, had reason to say that for himself, surely we of lesser stature must say the like things for ourselves.

Whether we confess them or not, our shortcomings in God's sight are none the less real and none the less censurable.

Yet on the other hand, in spite of our shortcomings and defects there is a state of perfection accredited to us in Christ Jesus our Lord but in each person, and each case, the term must be applied in accordance with its setting and with its context "*The man of God must be perfect*" said Paul to Timothy (2 Tim. 3. 17) but here it is the perfection of the workman with his tools. It implies the full kit of tools, and an efficiency and dexterity in using them. And the tool-kit here is holy Scripture; the dexterity the ability of the man of God in using it for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness. But the possession of the tool-kit and the dexterity in the use of each tool does not imply absolute sinlessness in the man of God himself. Again when Jesus bids us be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, He bids us use the same impartiality in the distribution of our bounty, so far as in us lies, which like God's, shows no distinction as between the just and the unjust, but distributes its rain upon all everywhere (Matt. 5.48).

When God called Abraham to walk before him and "be perfect" surely it did not mean that Abraham was to walk before God sinlessly. (Gen. 17.1). That was impossible for that patriarch to attempt, but to walk before God with a whole-hearted devotion was another thing, and was definitely possible. And that is what God seeks always, everywhere, according to ability. The standard is more a matter of "what we would if we could" than of actual explicit deed, though be it promptly said, the "what we would" of tomorrow must exceed the "what we would" of to-day. There must be growth to attain the "full-grown" estate.

If then God is graciously pleased to accept the "will" for the "deed" and it is our will to offer him the utmost devotion of our soul, that act of worship and surrender is the state of soul which God accounts as "perfection"—"perfection" at our present stage of growth. It indicates the attainment, assisted by the Holy Spirit of God, of the utmost of which our "new-man" is

capable to-day, and will help us to become assured that God will not look for more from us, till we have had time and training to grow up more nearly to full maturity.

Paul tells us in Eph. 4. 11-12 that God gave to the Church Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers for the purpose of the perfecting of the saints, which was to be a continuing procedure until each believer had attained through unity with his fellow-brethren, and a deepening knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect (*teleios*, mature) man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. All the service of this God-given ministry is intended to promote development and growth in each individual saint, as well as in all saints collectively, till the "full-grown" Christ-like condition is attained.

This growth and development manifests itself along four principal lines — of faith, of knowledge, of holiness, and of love—each part, though separate inter-linking itself with each other part to produce the ideal perfection of Christlikeness.

Paul writes to his Thessalonian friends assuring them that night and day he was praying intensely to see their face in order that he might help to "perfect that which is lacking in your faith" (1 Thess. 3. 10). They needed to be informed more fully concerning the purpose of God to enable them to grow up from the "milk" stage to that of the "solid food". In this acquisition of the necessary information their faith would attain perfection.

But any kind of information would not attain that end. Only that which set the Love of God, and the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord before them would be effective for their growth. To the Colossians Paul wrote "We . . . do not cease to pray and make request for you that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." Peter also adds his admonition to the saints to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Items of knowledge which do not enhance our knowledge of our Lord Jesus are not likely to increase in us a likeness to himself.

Increasing knowledge of the Son of God (Eph. 4.13) plus a maturing of faith, will then lead to the next step of perfecting holiness in the fear of God. "Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Cor. 7. 1). As the knowledge of the Lord Jesus is received by a deepening faith into a good and honest heart it will be to us as the reflecting mirror in which we behold

the glory of the Lord, and by means of which, as we gaze therein, we shall be changed (another picture of our growth) into the same image from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord. It is only as we come to "know him" (Phil. 3. 10) that this transforming work proceeds apace.

The crowning feature of this perfecting process is that of Christ-like love. John says "If we love one another God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us." (1 John 4. 12). "Perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John 4. 18) and this perfect love, says Paul "is the bond of perfectness"—the bond that binds and holds every grace together into a perfect Christ-like unity.

Grouping all these things together — faith, knowledge, holiness and love—John says "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect . . ." (1 John 4. 16-17).

Thus belief (faith) based on knowledge (of the right kind) leading us to dwell in God and to have God dwell in us (holiness) results in perfection of love, and this matured and full-grown love is the hall-mark of perfection in the sight of God. Of all such John says "whoso keepeth his word (after learning it) in him verily is the love of God perfected." (1 John 2. 5).

To this full grown maturity, perfection, both the Word of God in precept, and the indwelling Spirit of God in practice urge us on. It is no more thinkable that the Christian believer should desire to remain a babe, feeding only on "milk", than that a lad should lack desire to grow up to be a man. The inward "urge" which turns bud into flower, child into adult, should prompt the desire, and promote the activity in every Christian's "inner man" to attain maturity, and be thus able to absorb and assimilate "strong meat". Christian perfection is not a perfection of the flesh, but a maturing of the "New Creature" into the likeness of Christ Jesus the Lord. When believers come to understand that God's great desire for them is their sanctification, and that "Christ should be formed in them" and that this perfecting is the work of God who will both "will" and "work" in them according to his good pleasure, (if only they lie responsive in his hands) they will then realise that all that God asks of them is to present themselves a living sacrifice to him that they may prove—in actual experience—what is "that good and acceptable and perfect Will of God" concerning them. This will work perfection in them, and bring them up to the full stature of men in Christ Jesus. "Now he that hath wrought this self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."

A PORTRAIT OF ST. LUKE

Luke, the Evangelist, physician and historian, is said by tradition to have been a painter, and perhaps in the picturesque qualities of his writing we may trace the origin of this pious opinion. There is a legend that he painted the portrait of the Virgin, and certainly the greater part of the little we know of our Lord's mother is due to St. Luke, who preserved for us the Magnificat, and drew in words that poetic picture of the Nativity adorned with the Nunc Dimittis and the Benedictus which pictorial art has never ceased to reproduce. There is always a widespread desire to discover the personalities of great writers, and surely there is no one who has any feeling for Christianity but must regret our ignorance about the four Evangelists. Luke is the only one of whose character it is possible to form any definite idea. Even in his case we must rely mainly upon conjecture, for the modest chronicler of the Acts of the Apostles has purposely withdrawn himself from the gaze of his readers. He never tells us who he was, nor asks for our sympathy or our praise for the many hardships which he and Paul bore, and the many heroisms they displayed together. He never even betrays his presence except by the use of the pronoun "we". All we know for certain is that the "beloved physician" never failed his friend, but was alone with him when he made "ready to be offered". There is no direct evidence as to whether he was a Jew or a Greek, but many authorities adhere to the latter conclusion. Luke shows little sympathy with the Jews as a nation, and always paints them as hindering the work of the Church. On the other hand, he betrays some tolerance for the heathen religion around him, and a just and sympathetic comprehension of the attitude of the Roman Governors towards the new faith.

But whether he belonged to "the people" or "the nations", the historian was an artist—a man of great literary genius, whose heaven-instilled purpose, while it inspired his work, never for a moment obscured his artistic skill. The object of the book of the Acts is, as we read it, twofold. First, the author desires to draw a picture of the early Church while it was still but an offshoot of Judaism; and secondly, to describe the bursting of the Judaic bonds by the real hero of the book—Paul. Inspired by his wonderful—we are tempted to say his Greek—love of beauty and happiness, Luke begins with

an exquisite picture of the early Christian community. An ideal social life prevailed among the brethren. "*No man lacked anything*", for "*they had but one heart and one mind*". No one "*called anything his own, but they had all things in common*", and "*breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart*". We are told that "a great peace was upon them all", and that they possessed singular gifts of healing. Their increasing influence with the people disquieted the authorities, who, "doubting how far this would grow", summoned the apostles to appear before them and tried to bind them over to silence. Peter and John, however, replied to their accusers with light-hearted courage saying, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than to God, judge ye", and so far impressed the learned Gamaliel with their assurance that he begged his brethren to let them alone lest they themselves should be found fighting against God. When persecution threatened them Luke shows us the disciples assembling themselves together and praying that God, seeing their peril, would grant unto his servants that with all boldness they might speak his word by stretching out his hand to heal, that signs and wonders might be done by the might of his holy child. In the next picture which Luke puts before us the state of the Church is somewhat changed. The brotherhood has been greatly enlarged, and we trace some diminution in the early simplicity and joyousness. There arose, we are told, a murmuring among the Christian poor because some were bettered cared for than others;—evidently there is no longer community of goods. Certain men are chosen for the work of practical philanthropy, among them Stephen, who by giving offence to the orthodox Jews, becomes the first martyr. In presenting Stephen to his readers Luke departs a little from his ordinary method of character-drawing. Generally he adheres strictly to the dramatic method, and allows his characters to reveal themselves by their own words. But in the case of Stephen it is not so, and the world knows Stephen better by what Luke tells us than by the long discourse which is reported as his. We are convinced by his biographer rather than by his eloquence that "*he was full of faith and power*", and that his hearers "*were not able to resist the wisdom and power by which he spake*", so that "*all that sat*

in the council, looking steadfastly upon him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel". By the description of his actual martyrdom this impression of spiritual fascination is confirmed in the reader's mind and perhaps the picture of Stephen "looking into heaven", seeing the "glory of God"; and forgiving his enemies, while they, "cut to the heart, gnashed upon him with their teeth", is for mere beauty of depiction the finest passage in the Acts. This moment of tragedy is the one which Luke chooses as the one in which to present Paul. "The witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man whose name was Saul".

Once more the scene changes. Henceforward the reader's interest centres round Paul,—his conversion, his perils, his trials and his defences. As we read Paul's words as recorded by his friend it is impossible not to wonder to what extent they have been modified by passing through the medium of another mind. Was Luke's report always accurate? Verbal accuracy was surely impossible. It is out of the question. If a speech took some hours to deliver it is not possible to compress it into a short paragraph and maintain verbal accuracy. All the same, the short report may be a true one. A man may give in ten minutes an account of a speech he has heard in the House of Commons, and may convey truly both the subject matter of what was spoken, and also the manner and mental characteristics of the speaker, though he give up all attempts at a literal repetition of the sentences. Such a report could not be called imaginary, though it makes of necessity some tax upon the understanding and imagination of the reporter. The account would remain essentially true, and in this matter of essential truth, so far as Paul is concerned, every reader of the Bible who has the smallest grasp of character is in a position to verify Luke's account. Is the Paul whose adventures we follow in the Acts the same perfectly original character who reveals himself to us so unreservedly in his letters? Undoubtedly he is. No one could fail to recognise the great Apostle.

Nevertheless, every portrait reveals the painter to some degree, and in all Luke's sketches of character we see the same aversion to dogmatism, and the same fair attitude toward "those of the contrary part". He dwells particularly upon any sympathetic allusion to the classical standpoint made by the apostles, repeating with evident sympathy the words spoken by Paul suggesting the nearness of God toward those philosophers who had "felt after him"; and again,

when Paul prevents the populace from worshipping him, we catch a glimpse of Luke's artistic appreciation of the joyousness inherent in a point of view which, however erroneous, bore testimony to the goodness of God, "who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He left not himself without a witness in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

All through his book Luke shows the characteristics of a man of much education. He seems almost to share the High Priest's surprise at the eloquence and force of Peter and John, "seeing that they were unlearned and ignorant men", and he displays that distrust of the multitude so common in men of exceptional gifts exceptionally cultivated. Witness his allusions to "fellows of the baser sort", and his account of the mass meeting of the Ephesian silversmiths, where "some cried one thing and some another, for the more part knew not why they were come together". The sudden changes of mind observable in crowds strikes the historian's notice. He describes how the barbarians of the island on which Paul was shipwrecked, on seeing him bitten by a snake, concluded that he must be some murderer flying from justice whom vengeance had overtaken. "They looked that he should have swollen and fallen down dead suddenly; but after they had looked a great while and seen no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god." Again we see a trace of the same feeling in the almost satirical account of the behaviour of the Jewish rabble before Gallio, when with utter inconsequence they beat Sosthenes in the Judgment Hall because they could not be revenged on Paul, and we feel that Luke is not wholly out of sympathy with the supercilious Gallio, who looked on at what he considered a quarrel "about words and names and their law", and "cared for none of these things". To Gallio himself it can never have occurred that his name would be known two thousand years later solely in connection with a petty riot he hardly noticed, any more than it occurred to Festus how bitterly the course of history would satirise his contemptuous summing up of Christianity as a question of Jewish "superstition" and of "one Jesus, who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive". Man has a treacherous memory. It is hopeless to say what he may remember, or to gauge how much he will forget. Agrippa, Felix, Festus, Gallio would have been as dead men out of mind but for Luke's pencil. Luke showed wherein lies "the artist's vantage o'er the king."



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Vol. 61, No. 2

MARCH/APRIL, 1984

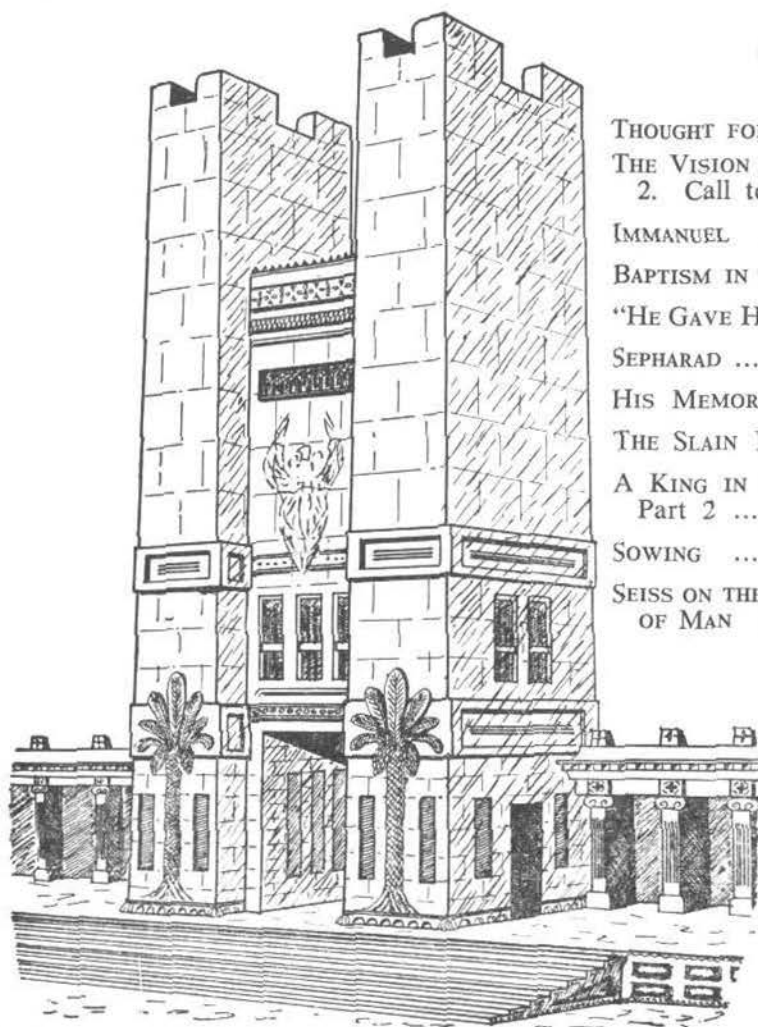
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

Published March 1st

Next issue May 1st

CONTENTS

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	26
THE VISION OF JOEL	
2. Call to Repentance	27
IMMANUEL	30
BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ...	31
"HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON" ..	35
SEPHARAD	37
HIS MEMORIAL	39
THE SLAIN LAMB	40
A KING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS	
Part 2	43
SOWING	45
SEISS ON THE DAYS OF THE SON OF MAN	48



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

*This Journal is sent free
of charge to all who are
genuinely interested, on
request renewable annually
and is supported by the
voluntary gifts of its readers*

Published by
Bible Fellowship Union
11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow
Middlesex, England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, maintaining the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and the validity of their miraculous and prophetic content viewed in the light of modern under-

standing. It stands for the pre-millennial Advent of our Lord and the consequent conversion of the world. It is supported entirely by the voluntary gifts of its readers and all such gifts are sincerely appreciated.

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow, Middlesex, England.
 Secretary & Treasurer: B. G. DUMONT (Hounslow)

Editorial & Publishing: A. O. HUDSON (Milborne Port)

Circulation Control: D. WALTON (Sherborne)

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"But without a parable spake he not unto them" (Mark 4.34).

It is not always realised as much as it might be that Biblical instruction is more often than not in the form of symbol and metaphor, each generation interpreting in accord with its own level of understanding. The Lord speaks to each of us in a language we can understand; not to every man in the same language. In response to the disciples' question upon one occasion, He told them that in the regeneration, the coming days of his kingdom upon earth, they would sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. None of us really believe that there are going to be literal thrones in heaven, nor yet that our mission then will be limited to the descendants of Jacob. We look beyond the symbol and see the reality. Paul declared to the Thessalonians that at his Second Advent the Lord would descend from heaven with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God. Commenting on this, someone recently suggested that the Advent would be a noisy one! These allusions are symbols of spiritual truths, of activities connected with the Advent, of things known to the "watchers" but not to anyone else. A celebrated minister, Dr. Herbert Lockyer, in his book *"The rapture of saints"* (1944) says in regard to this voice of the archangel, *"the accents of this majestic voice will not be detected by a deaf world"*. Despite the shout, the voice, the trumpet, he says, *"apart from his own, none will be aware of such a great event and Advent"*. Only later will others know. When the Hebrew prophets came to describe the wars and tumults which will characterise the "Last Days", even though in vision they may well have seen the tanks, the rocket-launchers, the guided missiles which are among the products of Twentieth Century civilisation, they had no means of defining them in words understandable in their

own day, so they expressed them in terms of horses, spears and bows and arrows, which men could understand. We read the same prophecies to-day but we do not expect to see the renaissance of spears and arrows in modern warfare—more the pity; it might be a little less harrowing. Isaiah the prophet used an apt simile when he said *"the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt"*. When Jesus described the outward signs which would denote the fact of his Advent He said there would be *"upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing them for fear"*. He must have been thinking of Isaiah. He certainly did not mean that men's hearts were failing just because the literal ocean was splashing up upon the literal beach; something much more fundamental than that. He pointed to a time when men would see the wicked and lawless and anarchistic elements of society dashing themselves against each other and against all men to the inevitable destruction of human society as it is at present constituted. This, said Jesus, is what we must look for, and when we see it, He said, *"look up, lift up your heads, for your deliverance draweth nigh"*.

NOTICES

Coming Conventions

YEOVIL, one-day, Sunday, May 6, Westfield School. Details Bro. H. Charlton, 14 Orchard Road, Milborne Port, Sherborne, Dorset.

YEOVIL, Sat.-Mon., May 26-28. Sunday at Moose Hall, St. Michaels Avenue. Other days venue to be announced. Details and accommodation Bro. R. Robinson, 26 Rands Meadow, Holwell-Hitchin, Herts., SG5 3SH.

CHESHAM, Sat.-Sun., June 9-10. Malt House, Elgiva Lane. Details and accommodation Bro. F. Binns, 102 Broad Street, Chesham, Bucks., HP5 3ED.

Memorial April 15. Other notices page 34.

THE VISION OF JOEL

Exposition of the
Book of Joel

2. Call to Repentance

"God commandeth all men everywhere to repent." (Acts. 17. 30). That challenging declaration was flung out to the world by Paul on Mars' Hill nearly a thousand years after Joel had spoken, but here in Joel's prophecy there is the seed of that later exhortation. In this first chapter the listeners to the prophet's impassioned words are being carefully led from the lower plane of dire lament at the troubles that are coming upon them to the higher one of repentance and dependence; repentance for the sin that has caused the trouble and dependence upon God for recovery from that trouble. In the first part of the chapter, up to verse 12, the lamentation is a purely self-centred one; there is no indication of any thought of appealing to God. In the latter part of the chapter the lament does move to a higher stage in that the cry of woe and despair is taken into the sanctuary of God and ascends up before him, even although there is still no hint of true repentance.

"Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth." This picture of the betrothed maiden who loses her affianced husband before the actual marriage has taken place might very well be a subtle allusion to Israel's loss of her God ("thy Maker is thine husband"; Isa. 54. 5) because of her unfaithfulness, before she had attained the full glory of her destiny. Israel had broken the covenant; that is why this trouble was coming upon her. That truth is further stressed in the succeeding verse (vs. 9) "*The meat offering and the drink offering is cut off from the house of the Lord.*" Suspension of the Temple offerings was the gravest and most heart-searing of all the afflictions that could come upon the nation. It meant that the covenant had fallen into non-observance, and all the gracious promises of God were null and void. No wonder that, as Joel said, "*the priests, the Lord's ministers, mourn*". The ecclesiastical dignitaries of every age have been quick to bemoan the breakdown of their institutions and organisations and ritual even although they may have tolerated for far too long the social evils and religious abuses which may have led to that breakdown, and the priests of Joel's day were no exception to the rule. Be it noted, however, that the prophet, even in the act of denouncing their unfaithfulness, acknowledges their Divine office; he still calls them "the Lord's ministers". Like Jesus in after days, maintaining that the scribes and Pharisees occupied Moses' seat,

although He reproved and denounced them, Joel honoured the Divine ordinance.

From the work of God which has broken down the prophet turns his bitter gaze to the work of man which also has failed him. "*The field is wasted, the land mourneth,*" he cries. "*The corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth. BE YE ASHAMED, O YE HUSBANDMEN; HOWL (cry woe) O YE VINEDRESSERS, for the wheat and for the barley.*" He puts the blame where it rightfully belongs; all men are jointly responsible for the catastrophe. Men of the world, husbandmen and vinedressers, have been neglectful of their duty to their God just so surely as have the priests, and the work of their hands has failed them just as that of the priests has failed. The disaster is universal; the vine, the fig, the pomegranate, the palm tree, the apple (this is really the orange), all the trees of the field are withered, says Joel in vs. 12, "*because joy is withered away from the sons of men.*" That last phrase is the climax of his first message to the people. Disaster, utter and complete, is come upon them and there is a great, nation-wide, universal cry of distress and woe rising upon the air. Like Jeremiah in later days, witnessing the final calamitous scenes of the whole series of troubles which Joel in his day was only beginning to foresee, they "beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light." "They beheld, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled." They "beheld, and lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by his fierce anger." (Jer. 4. 23-26). And so it was that Joel, in his masterly handling of this unfaithful people, showed them the utter ruin and desolation of all their world and their own impotence to remedy their undone condition, before he began to turn their minds to their true Healer and Saviour, God.

Is this one pointer to us for guidance in our own preaching to the world around? Do we tend to paint a rosy picture of the blessings God has in store for man before we have shown man how utterly he has ruined and destroyed the heritage God gave him at the first? Is it not right for us, as it evidently was with Joel, to lay proper stress at the first upon this fact, that man has proven unworthy of his privileges, unable to govern himself, and unfit to be allowed any longer to

desecrate God's creation with the abominations of his inventing. Truly to-day, as in the land of Judah at that far-off time, the vine, the fig, the pomegranate, the palm, the apple, all the trees of the forest, are destroyed; and joy is fled away from the hearts of men. Surely at this point we, like Joel, should begin to turn men's minds, not only to the golden days of promise, but first of all to the need of repentance.

"Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests . . . Lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God . . . Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord." (vs. 14). This is the first step toward Divine salvation, the gathering of the people, the elders, the priests, all together into the house of God to cry unto him. The power of corporate worship to elevate the spirit and inspire the heart is well known; consciousness of the Holy Spirit's presence in a prayer meeting of believers is an experience which many know; who knows what power for cleansing and reformation may not reside in the gathering together of a concourse of people, joined in the knowledge of a common distress or common danger, to cry unto God in their trouble and so be led to prayer for relief and deliverance. It was when Israel, apostate and captive as they were time after time in the days of the Judges, "turned unto the Lord, and cried unto him in their trouble" that He "heard them and delivered them out of their distress". Joel knew that, and his first impulse was to bring his people face to face with their God and bring them to that condition of heart in which God could bless them.

Verse 15 to the end seems almost to represent the prophet's impassioned appeal to the people gathered within the precincts of the Temple. The injunction of verse 14 has been heeded; the countrymen have left their vain watching of their blasted fields and dying herds, the pleasure-seekers their wine, the priests their conning over the dead law and their interminable discussions of legal points, and all have come together to hear the voice of the prophet. The ringing tones echo through the building and pierce into the ears of the people standing in the courts. "Alas; alas; alas; the day!"—so the Septuagint has it; woe, three times repeated. "The day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come." Later on in his message Joel has wonderful words of comfort and cheer for this people; he is going to paint at the last a gloriously sunlit picture of the time when God turns his face toward his people again, and pours out his Spirit upon all flesh. He will talk of new wine and milk in abundance, flowing waters and

fertile valleys, and conclude with the heart-cheering promise "the Lord dwelleth in Zion". But not yet! Here at the first his message is like the one that came to Ezekiel, one of "mourning, and lamentation, and woe". The Day of the Lord is at hand, and it is to be a day of destruction.

Now that is not that Day of the Lord with which we as Christian students are so familiar, the Day in which God brings this world into judgment and causes it to pass away with a great noise, and the elements to melt with fervent heat, that He might build in its place a new heavens and a new earth (2 Pet. 3. 10). It is not the day of which Isaiah speaks in his 34th chapter, the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion (Isa. 34. 8). It is not the day that Joel himself talks about in his second chapter (Joel 2. 31), that great and terrible day which is to be heralded by great wonders and signs in the heavens. The prophetic vision which came to Joel later on has not yet shone through to him; he still sees no farther forward than the next century or so; and the day of the Lord, as a destruction from the Almighty, which he announces to the gathered people in verse 15 of chapter 1 is the day of judgment, of tribulation, of disaster, which began with Shalmaneser of Assyria and ended with Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, a day that witnessed the downfall of both the Houses of Israel, the captivity of all their people, and the extinction of the Davidic line of kings, in obedience to the Divine decree "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more until he come whose right it is, and I will give it to him" (Ezek. 27. 27). For the moment, this is all that Joel sees, and this the burning message that he strives to impart to his listening people.

"Is not the meat (food) cut off before our eyes," he pleaded, "joy and gladness from the house of our God?" Mark how cleverly he allied the natural and the spiritual. How like the condition in our own land to-day! For these several generations past our people have been steadily drifting away from God; his house in every place is neglected and deserted; even our traditional regard and friendship for the "people of the Book", the ancient people of promise, has suffered measurable eclipse on account of modern political rearrangements and developments. That is what is happening to-day, and in that we have but a repetition of Joel's own experience. "The seed is rotten under their clods" he says "the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down, for the corn is withered" (vs. 17). All this, because Israel has left the Lord her God, renounced his covenant, and taken every man his own way. What a sermon for to-day could be

preached on these few verses; the language of the Holy Word so eloquent and so fitting to our present condition that it hardly needs expounding.

So Joel comes with a mighty sweep to that which was in his heart all the time. Perhaps by now he had got the people with him; perhaps it was as speaking for them, and on their behalf, that he, as it were, turns to the Almighty and pours out his heart before him, "*O Lord, to thee will I cry; for the fire hath devoured the pastures . . . the beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up . . .*"

There he stops. There is no entreaty, no supplication, no request that the threatened doom be averted. Perhaps already he sensed that the canker had eaten too deep, that it could only be burned out with fire. Perhaps he distrusted himself too much to make request for a specific deliverance. He confessed his people's sins and cried unto God, not for deliverance, not for comfort, but that God *might hear*. Did he realise that if but God would bend to earth and listen, there would be no further need for distress—for the Judge of all the earth would surely do right? Like Isaiah, in the days of Sennacherib, taking the haughty invader's insolent message into the Temple and laying it before the Lord, and thereupon going out to await the Lord's good pleasure, so did Joel turn the people's faces to God, call his attention to them, tell him of the sorry pass to which affairs on earth had come—and then quietly stand aside to await, in faith and confidence, the salvation of God.

If this book is a poem, this is the end of the first stanza. If it is a history, this is the end of

the first episode, the gathering in the Lord's house. If it is a prophecy—and it is surely that—this is the point at which Joel's vision ceased to be circumscribed by the time and space of his own day and his own people. Was it the intensity of his supplication that opened his heart and mind to greater things and showed him the re-enacting of these scenes on a grander and vaster scale in distant ages yet to be. Did thus his wondering eyes take in the dim and shadowy outlines of Armageddon itself? It would seem so, for the opening words of chapter 2 breathe a new spirit and a deeper intensity. In that chapter we are translated at once into a setting of deeper shadows and more intense colours, a movement much more rapid, hastening onward at increasing pace until it merges into the maelstrom of trouble with which the world shall end, and ending, find its destiny.

So chapter 1 of Joel's prophecy is a picture in miniature of the greater trouble. It had its fulfilment in Joel's own day and the times immediately following; but it served to quicken his mind and draw for him the outlines of things that must one day come to pass, and the Kingdom of peace that is to succeed that last trouble of all. And because that is so, the principles enshrined in this first chapter are applicable to the nations to-day as surely as they were applicable to Israel in the days of Joel.

* * *

It is in chapter 2, to be discussed next month that we are taken in great strides out of the day of Joel and brought into our own day, the focal point of prophecy, when the Lord rises up to fight for his people as when He fought in times of old.

APATHETIC CHRISTIANS

The rector of St. Edmund's, Salisbury, many years ago described "wheeled Christians". Said he "*they come to church for the first time in their perambulators, for the second time in their wedding car, and for the third and last occasion in a hearse. How much happier would people be if they came on their own two feet in between times*". True enough! We are reminded of the somewhat similar observation which first appeared in print many years ago under the caption "*Four kinds of Christians*". First there is the *tired* Christian. He is active enough in theory but the enthusiasm vanishes when there is work to be done. Then there is the *retired* Christian. He was a good worker once, but that was a long time ago. Next comes the *rubber tyred* Christian, all right if the way is straight and the road is smooth. Finally, the *flat tyred* Christian. He ran well until he suffered a puncture and since then he has never recovered his

wind.

On the other hand there is something to be said in the defence of people who find "going to Church" not the most inspiring of exercises. Rowntree and Laver, in their social survey "*English Life and Leisure*" mentioned the young girl they interviewed who had made an attempt to attend Church but had given it up. "It was all bobbing up and down and I couldn't find the place in the book." Somehow there is something pathetic in the thought of that lassie wrestling manfully with the Book of Common Prayer, casting covert glances the while at her neighbours in the endeavour to kneel, stand and sit in tolerable unison with them . . . At which point it is time for us to stop smiling and ask ourselves why is it that we fail so often to hold newcomers to our meetings. It is not the fault of the faith; it is not that we lack enthusiasm or desire; then what is it?

IMMANUEL

The word "Immanuel" occurs only twice, in Isa. 7.13 and 8.8. It is not really a name originally intended to be applicable to Jesus but is so applied by Matthew (1.23). The meaning of the word is actually "God is with us" and it has its basis in a term which indicates a coming together for communion or kinship. Hence the idea is that of kinship or communion with God. The background in Isa. Chap. 7 is the threat to Judah in the days of King Ahaz posed by a joint invasion of the northern kingdom of Israel with Syria. The ungodly Ahaz refused to ask the Lord for guidance and Isaiah thereupon told him that the Lord would nevertheless give him a sign. A young woman ("virgin" in vs. 14 is "*almah*", a young woman, whether married or not, not "*bethulah*" a virgin in the normal sense) was to bear a son who would hardly attain the power of speech before the threat to Ahaz was removed. That child's name was to be "Immanuel" in token of God's presence with and abiding care over his people. So far as the Old Testament goes that was all there was in it.

A little later Isaiah himself was to have a son with another symbolic name which was to denote a further exhibition of Divine power in the affairs of the Kingdom of Judah.

Matthew, however, in writing his Gospel, uses this incident as an illustration of the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus. After recounting the story of the angel's interview with Joseph, in which he was told that Mary, while still a virgin, would bear a son whose name was to be called "Jesus"—meaning "God is our Deliverer"—"for he shall save his people from their sins," Matthew comments "*all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us*" (Matt. 1.23). This type of allusion is characteristic of Matthew. He sees in these Old Testament prophecies illustrations of the matters with which he is dealing and quotes them as such without necessarily implying that the particular passage

in the O.T. is a definite prophecy of things to come. A perusal of Isa. 7 and 8 makes it abundantly clear that there is nothing there in the nature of a prophecy of distant future events. It is a purely historical narrative containing a sign given by the Lord relative to contemporary matters. But Matthew saw in the narrative a parallel. Just as God was intervening in human affairs in the days of Ahaz to save his people Israel from their enemies and ensure their deliverance, and the birth of this child was to those who would accept it the earnest of that intervention, so now, says Matthew, God is intervening again to save his people, and the birth of the Christ child was the earnest of that intervention. God is with us, again, he insists, for deliverance, just as He was in the days of Ahaz and Isaiah. In that sense he took the O.T. incident as a foreview picture of that which was to come but there is no reason for suggesting that the Isaiah incident was a case of a miraculous virgin birth as is sometimes claimed. The setting of that story demands only the birth of a particular child at that particular time in the normal way and the bestowment of a particular name. (It is sometimes suggested that the young woman here was Isaiah's own wife and Immanuel his own child although there is no evidence in the text either way).

It is true that Matthew employs the Greek "*parthenos*" which does mean a virgin but the N.T. text shows that he was quoting, not from the Hebrew O.T. but the Greek Septuagint, which was in common use in his day, and here the word "*parthemos*" is used in Isa. 7.13. A much more likely supposition is that the "young woman" of Isa. 7.13 was Ahaz' own wife and that "Immanuel" was in fact his own son Hezekiah who reigned after him. In such case local prophecy was fulfilled in the fact that the faith of good King Hezekiah was the means of Judah's deliverance when Sennacherib's Assyrian army laid siege to the city in after days, and the angel of the Lord went forth and decimated the Assyrian host. The meaning of the name "Hezekiah" is "Jehovah is my strength" and there are many cases in the O.T. where kings and sometimes others bore two names.

Are you a fruit-bearer in your Lord's vineyard? Are you seeking to make life one grand act of consecration to His glory? It is often those fruits that are unseen and unknown to man, ripening in seclusion, that He values

most; the quiet, lowly walk, the humble mind, the willing heart, the unselfish spirit, the unostentatious kindness—these are some of the 'fruits' which your heavenly Father loves, and by which He is glorified.

BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT A doctrinal Essay

The word baptism is of Greek origin and is carried forward into the English language and always applied to the religious life of Jews immediately prior to the Christian era or to those who embrace Christianity. That the word means to dip or immerse cannot be denied, though treatise have been laboriously compiled endeavouring to prove the word to mean "sprinkle" rather than "immerse". The fact, noted in the Bible, that John was baptising near to Salim because there was much water there is sufficient proof of the word's meaning. But while the word is from the Greek and is not to be found in the O.T. it is usual for commentators to imply that baptism for the remission of sins is hinted at in the Mosaic washings. The connection is, however, remote, for while water was used, immersion was not practised and the trespasser washed *himself* as part of the purification, whereas baptism is always performed by another. Further, there are other baptisms mentioned in Scripture which have no connection with water immersion. It is an essential part of the teaching of baptism that the candidate cannot immerse himself. And most Christians prefer to hold that baptism, whether of water or of the Holy Spirit, whether into the body of Christ or into death, is an act done for them. But though baptism is not found in the O.T., New Testament writers reason that two instances of baptism, as it were, are portrayed there—one in which the family of Noah was saved through water (though water was the destroying agent in the Flood and they were saved through being in the Ark), and where Israel, walled round with water and roofed by cloud at the Red Sea, were immersed into Moses. (1 Pet. 3. 20-21; 1 Cor. 10. 2).

It is probably advisable to approach this subject by copious reference to Scripture, and in that approach forget the thoughts of commentators. To do this we need a concise statement of the initiation of baptism; and so to commence our travel through an interesting and edifying tenet of Scripture we select Mark 1.5 "...and were all baptised of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins". Did the waters actually wash away their sins? Surely not! Did their confession of sins secure them forgiveness? Surely not! We should remember that at the time of John's mission the only means whereby sin can be absolved and its penalty remitted (the atoning death of Jesus Christ) had not been achieved, though it was near fulfilment and we may well believe that John's work was in anticipation of

coming redemption. The marginal rendering of one word in Mark 1. 4 will define the true work of John and make a link with the following atonement by Christ—"John did baptise in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance *unto* the remission of sins". Thus his work was unto, or toward, or with a view to, the coming deliverance.

It was proper that those Israelites who regarded John as a prophet sent from God should acknowledge his office by answering his call. They would remember, or had heard of, the remarkable circumstances of his birth—that he was born as a consequence of Divine intervention; and that as a sign to his priestly father of the surety of the fulfilment of the promise of a son, he became dumb until the child was born and named according to instructions. The miracles attending his birth were so well known that the people expected great things of him and said "What manner of child shall this be!" Clearly he was marked as a man of God before his birth; and when thirty years later he begins his short-lived mission, the question of the priests and Levites "Who art thou?" is not to ask his name but to find out his rank and authority. The cry of John in the wilderness calling to repentance and baptism caused the people to muse in their hearts, were he the Christ or not (Luke 3. 15). Upon his confession that he was not Christ, their thoughts turn to two other prophesied characters of the O.T.—Elias and "that prophet". But he affirms that he is not either of these. They knew of the promise of Messiah; they knew of the prophecy of the coming one like to Moses; and they knew that Elias must first come before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. If they could identify him they would satisfy themselves and those back in Jerusalem who had sent them to make enquiries. "Who art thou?" they say (John 1. 20-22). In answer, he tells them that he also is a prophesied O.T. character mentioned by the prophet Isaiah. Apparently they did not know of, or think of, this prophecy of the voice in the wilderness, the forerunner of Messiah. Here was a sign of the time. All were in expectation, and by comprehending his mission they would realise that Messiah was to come very, very soon. What an answer to those who had sent them! But the questions want further information—"Why baptisest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet" (John 1.25). They assume that only a prophet of very high rank would call Israel to baptism, thus instituting

something new to those Mosaic practices they were so trained in. But John does not answer why. They were always more concerned with "Why teacheth thou" than "What teacheth thou". It is clear from John's words that as the forerunner of Messiah he had come to prepare a people for the Lord. Such a people being baptised and acknowledging their sins (thus admitting they were not satisfied with the clearance from sins made under the ceremonial law) would be the very people fit to accept the coming Messiah. Such was one of the objects of his baptising mission.

But that is not the only reason why John proclaimed baptism. Among the many who came to be immersed was one whom John knew himself unfit to immerse. John knowing his baptism was unto remission of sins is surprised that Jesus should ask to be immersed, and felt rather that he himself should be baptised of Jesus; but he yields to our Lord's request. We might think that of all men He should not be immersed if baptism is for or unto remission of sins. We might think that if He were not immersed He would the more stand out as the sinless one and so be manifest to Israel. Be that as it may, John's instructions were that upon whom he should see the Spirit descending and remaining, he it was for whom he was seeking and thus he would be manifest to Israel. The descent of the Spirit and the voice from heaven saying "This is my beloved Son" sealed John's work and revealed the Son of God; and promptly next day he announces the Lamb of God, He Who would give true remission to those who by water baptism had confessed their sins.

In this connection we see a third reason why John came baptising—that He upon whom the descending Spirit remained would baptise with the Holy Spirit. In this verse 33 we have reference to baptism not connected with water, but still the word has the thought of immersion. In fact, the more one considers the allusions to baptism the less do they suggest sprinkling. Nothing more is then said by John about the Holy Spirit, and only by reference to other Scripture and incidents in the early days of Christianity shall we be able to see its meaning. However, it will quickly be seen that water immersion is momentary and that the other baptisms are each full of meaning and relate to the whole life of Christians. In fact, water baptism would have seemed fit to have fallen into disuse like the old sacrifices of the law, were it not that our Lord was immersed at the commencement of his ministry. Had our Lord not been immersed Christians would have thought baptism to have been exclusively Jewish and that they were not called upon to observe it. And here we must consider further

why Jesus was baptised in water. Later in his ministry (Luke 12. 50) He said He had a baptism to be baptised with and that He was straitened until it was accomplished, and shortly after He had asked the sons of Zebedee (Matt. 20. 22) if they were willing to drink of his cup and be baptised with the baptism that He was being baptised with; and by this He was plainly showing that baptism related to his immersion into the will of God, which for him meant baptism into death. And in this view of baptism we may reason that water baptism was an outward sign of the commencement of his great mission, and that his death on Calvary was the outward sign of its fulfilment. The sons of Zebedee would not at that time comprehend the full import of his question to them; (and maybe we do not today); but they said they were willing to be immersed with his baptism, and later they followed their Lord into death as faithful witnesses. The words of the apostle John in 1 John 5. 6 fittingly corroborate the thought that baptism in its fuller meaning referred to his whole life and death—*"This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth"*. John clearly has in mind the beginning and end of our Lord's mission, and to maintain the true meaning of our Lord's baptism repeats the words "not by water only, but by water and blood". And said he "It is the Spirit that beareth witness". Yes, the descending Spirit bore witness at his immersion and again bore witness that his baptism unto death fulfilled his mission by descending upon the waiting brethren at Pentecost. John further adds *"There are three that bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one"*. They agree in one eternal testimony to him Whose life on earth was summed up in one word, "baptism". Thus we may see, that Jesus' baptism in water was not for the remission of sins like other Israelites, but was a beautiful portrayal of his immersion into the will of God.

This being one of the meanings of baptism, no Christians who are willing to follow their Lord would object to water immersion for themselves, for the servant is not above his Lord: They may of course reason that water baptism as a means of cleansing from sin could be applicable to themselves but never applicable to their Lord. True enough, but we must ever remember that water immersion does not remove sin—in fact, it cannot. Every Christian knows that forgiveness of sins ensues as a gracious gift of God upon their belief in the name of his Son Jesus Christ. We may, of course, in a manner of speaking refer to washing away of sins, as in Acts 22. 16,

but we know in ourselves that the calling on the name of the Lord is the effectual means of cleansing, not the water immersion. So then, freeing our minds from all thoughts of remission of our sins by immersion, we can, as did our Lord, use water immersion as a symbol of our willingness to be immersed into the will of God. And what a fine portrayal there is, in the fact of total immersion! But having said that, we must remember that water immersion is only a symbol, and the real immersion into the will of God is far more important than the symbol. We say this because it is probably true that many Christians in time past faithfully did the will of God as they saw it, but had not been immersed in water, and we cannot think that their standing before God is jeopardised by their lack of knowledge or compliance. But for ourselves, if we see it as a symbol and remember that our Lord himself was immersed, we also should comply.

At this juncture we must return in our thoughts to the prophet John's words in John 1. 33. "*Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he that baptiseth with the Holy Spirit*". We have seen that these prophetic words began to be fulfilled when the Spirit bore witness by coming upon the waiting disciples at Pentecost. To these words of John should be linked the words of our Lord in Acts 1. 5 "*For John truly baptised with water; but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days hence*". Upon the phenomenal descent of the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter rises to explain to his Jewish brethren that this is also in fulfilment of the prophet Joel's words and concludes his remarks by urging them to be baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus whereupon they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This cannot be a repetition of John the Baptist's call, for John made no appeal in the name of the Lord Jesus. But now that Christ had been crucified and raised from the dead there was "none other name under heaven whereby we must be saved", and it was manifest that any appeal to Jews to return to harmony with God should come through him. In considering Acts 2. 38. it should not be assumed that water immersion is immediately followed by the gift of the Holy Spirit—in fact there is no evidence as to when these 3,000 souls received this gift. In Acts 8 we read of Samaritans being baptised (for the invitation was no longer exclusively Jewish) in the name of the Lord Jesus, and yet they did not receive the Holy Spirit until the arrival of the disciples from Jerusalem, who prayed for them and laid hands on them. Can we suppose that the Holy Spirit would have been withheld from any true Samaritan convert to

the faith, if the apostles had not intervened? It is difficult to assess the true position of Samaritans at that time. It seems that, beholding miracles and hearing the words of Philip, they believed and were baptised with speed and readiness—perhaps too readily, for baptism should not be hastily entered upon, and it appears that one of their number was not right before God. We leave them, as did Philip, who was called away by the Spirit to assist the eunuch of Candace, who with his inquiring mind and love of the Scriptures rings true. From the narrative (Acts 8. 36) we observe that the first mention of baptism comes from the eunuch himself. Upon requesting immersion they both go down into the water, clearly for total immersion. And here it should be remembered that verse 37 is not to be found in the three most dependable manuscripts. This may not seem of great moment, for the question supposedly made to the eunuch seems appropriate. Yet it is far better to think that the eunuch (as should all other candidates) asked for immersion rather than Philip asked him and required him to make a declaration of faith before he would immerse him. The responsibility for immersion is the candidate's and we should believe that any Christian asking for baptism has by that request declared his faith. (The responsibility in the companion ordinance—the Lord's supper—is the partaker's, who should examine himself—1 Cor. 11. 28).

Another enlightening event in the practice of baptism among Christians is revealed in Acts 10 and 11. The story is vividly detailed by the writer, and readers may well think it to be a turning-point in God's dealings with those outside the Jewish nation. We should read the narrative carefully for some are anxious to read into the story that Cornelius was, if not a proselyte of the temple, at least a proselyte of the gate, and therefore to assume that the entry of Gentiles into equal standing with Jews commenced under the apostleship of Paul rather than of Peter. The thrice repeated vision to Peter and his plain words on the subject leave no doubt in unbiassed minds that God was from then on dealing with Gentiles as never before. Particular notice must be made of some incidents in the story of Cornelius. First, that both Peter and he had visions, but whereas Cornelius complied with the angel's instructions immediately, Peter did not move in the matter until the vision had three times been given him. And we note that the devout Gentile is quick to respond to the heavenly call, but that the servant of God is slower to act, so ingrained in his Jewish mind are the traditions of Israel. But he acts at the request of the three men whom Cornelius sent, and still with the vision in his mind, goes back with his

men to Cæsarea. Cornelius is clearly expecting them, and on Peter's arrival falls down to worship him. It is to Peter's credit that he will not permit anyone, even a Gentile, to worship him because he is a servant of God — a principle which some who regard themselves as the successors of Peter have yet to learn. Peter hears the story of Cornelius' vision and could not withstand the clear leading of heaven, and so he preaches Christ to the assembled enquirers. While he speaks the Holy Spirit is poured out on the Gentiles, thus evincing God's blessing and acceptance of their devotion and belief. Here we should note that the Holy Spirit was given to these Gentiles before they were baptised in water. This undoubtedly proves that the Holy Spirit baptism is not dependent upon water baptism; and that water baptism is a symbol; and that the Gentile immersion was not in response to John's call to baptism for the remission of sins. On Peter's return to Jerusalem, the story having preceded him, some still having Jewish bias contended with him, but when Peter rehearsed the matter they held their peace, realising that by the gift of the Holy Spirit to Gentiles God had shown that they also were now acceptable with him. Peter saw, in all this, further fulfilment of our Lord's words (Acts 11. 16, Matt. 3. 11, Acts 1. 5).

We cannot leave the Acts of the Apostles without another reference to those early days. We read in Acts 18. 24-26 of a Jew mighty in the Scriptures, yet knowing only the baptism of John; and because the purpose of God had progressed beyond his knowledge two faithful brethren expounded unto him the way of the Lord more perfectly. Surely they showed to him that the way of approach to God had changed through the coming, death and resurrection of Christ. The very next verses in ch. 19 show the lack of knowledge among some disciples at Ephesus. Although it was perhaps seventeen years after Pentecost, they had not heard of the Holy Spirit and had been baptised with John's baptism. Briefly, the teaching of Paul's reply (v. 4) is that John's baptism is outdated by the coming of Christ. These Ephesians were then

baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus and received the Holy Spirit.

These striking references in the Acts show the change in baptism since John's days—the practice of water baptism does not cease, but its meaning alters; and also there is the newer baptism of the Holy Spirit fulfilling our Lord's promises.

Later, when Paul wrote to the brethren at Ephesus, no doubt he would think of these twelve brethren when he said (Eph. 4. 5) that there was *one* baptism. What baptism does Paul mean? It is unlikely that he means water immersion, for of that subject he says very little. Surely he means that as concerns the Church there is but one baptism, even as there is one *Body and one Spirit*. By holding to these we shall keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In an earlier epistle he explains the relationship of the one baptism to the one Body—that the one Spirit has baptised us, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, into the one Body of Christ. Thus we shall see in 1 Cor. 12. 13 and other associated words by Paul, such as Gal. 3. 27, Col. 2. 12, and Rom. 6. 3, the full development of the Bible teaching on baptism. The story begins with the immersing of Jews, who, confessing their sins, were preparing themselves for the first coming of Messiah, and it is retained in the Christian Church as a symbol of their willingness to be immersed into the will of God. And He who accepts this willingness of heart to do his will baptises them with the Holy Spirit. This shedding forth of the Holy Spirit is the means whereby He sets the members in the body, or, in other words, baptises them into the body of Christ. And He, noting those willing to be baptised with Christ's baptism, promises that if they are planted or immersed into his death they shall be in the likeness of his resurrection. These two are inseparable—he who is baptised into the body of Christ will also be baptised into his death. And in all these considerations we come to the full Bible meaning of the word baptism — that it means immersion in whatever province it is used by the inspired writers.

Notices (continued from page 26)

Memorial date. The date of the Memorial service this year is Sunday, April 15th.

An appeal. Something like thirty years ago saw the publication of a booklet "The Bible Song of Love" by E. Allbon. A sister would very much like to acquire two copies if available and would meet all expenses. If anyone can help please send them to Miss L. Smyth, 17 Knights Way, Alton, Hants, GU34 1PJ.

Gone from us



Bro. T. Ballantyne (*Glasgow*)

Sis. V. Newall (*London*)



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

"HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON"

Of all sacred Scripture, there is none more familiar nor more beloved than John 3.16. "*For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*"

Simply believe, we are told, and our faith in Jesus Christ will save us. Certainly no Christian will deny this, though some groups may point out and stress additional requirements. It is not the purpose here to discuss additional requirements, but rather to consider the FREE GIFT and how we are saved by faith. Perhaps the matter is so simple that it does not merit consideration. There are so many perplexing problems; should we not devote available time and energy to the more complex? Paradoxically the simplest problems are often the most difficult to understand. Comprehension of basic truths is usually essential to understanding of higher concepts. Thus it is impossible to master algebra or trigonometry until we understand addition and multiplication.

"*Believe and thou shalt be saved*". Believe what? Can faith in God the Father save us? How can the death of One save billions? If He saved us by his death, then why must we believe? Do we need to be saved? In his sinless state Adam had no need of a Saviour. Father Adam was in a heart and mind condition in which it was possible to live sinlessly. In fact, until the fatal transgression, he did live sinlessly. It may have been only months after he was created, or it might have been several years; we have no record, but he did live without sin. But when Adam disobeyed, an incomprehensible change came over him. From that moment on it was impossible to live sinlessly. He was lost; he was in a dying condition. His state, in so far as any effort on his part was concerned, was hopeless; he was condemned.

Why could not Adam, by will power, by works and effort, overcome his tendency to sin, live down his condition and come out from under condemnation? True, many leading denominations teach this very thing. We see the glory of God, they say, through the eye of faith, and through the wonders of creation. The goodness of it, the splendour, the selfless life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, draw us to emulation. Through an unparalleled example, they say, we are inspired to do our best, magnify our will power and effort, and in time come to live a nearly perfect life. Thus, many teach, we are saved. Likewise, non Christian faiths use the

same method—emulation of great historical leaders.

The true Christian faith, however, first recognises Adam's total inability to save himself through any effort or will power of his own. No matter how great, no man can save himself; no man can save his brother. In so far as the sacred record reveals, there is but one way out of Adam's dilemma, his condemnation. He has nothing with which to pay his debt. So God the Father, in his great love and mercy provided a way. "*He gave his only begotten Son*". "*From the foundation of the world, Jesus was the Lamb slain*" (Rev. 13.2). In short, Jesus took Adam's place. Jesus died instead of Adam, thus setting Adam free, thus paying the penalty in full. "*He gave himself a RANSOM for all*" (1 Tim. 2.6).

When Adam sinned, he carried the whole human race in his body in a representative sense. When he was condemned, the whole race was condemned, though still unborn. When a human reproductive cell divides off from the parent cell to start a new life, each cell is part of the original sinful, condemned organism. The new life is therefore under condemnation at the moment of conception. I Cor. 15.52 "*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive*". Rom. 5.12. "*wherefore as by one man sin entered the world and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*". Note especially that "all have sinned". All, that is, who live to see the light of day and reach any significant age. They sin because of an inherited nature. They cannot help sinning. There are no exceptions!

Rom. 5.12 is worthy of another close look. The expression "death passed upon all men" is significant. Death passes, not at age 21, or as a child, or even at birth. It is inherited! It passes at conception, at the union of male and female cells to form a new life. It is primarily the result of the sins of the individual. Witness the fact that many infants die prior to birth, before there is any possibility of personal sins, AND YET THEY DIE! True, all who do live, sin personally, which sin is added to the original sin, but each individual is fully, completely and hopelessly lost even before birth, had Christ not come.

Jesus is especially clear in his statements of this truth. John 3.18 "*He that believeth on him (Jesus) is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son*

of God". And again in 3.36 "He that believeth on the Son hath life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him". And John 3.3. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Believe and thou shalt be saved! We are now in a position to consider the question: believe in what? What must we believe in to be saved? Will believing in self and works save us? Will believing in the law, the prophets, the great religious leaders? Will believing in Jehovah God, without Christ, save us? First, we must recognise our inherited condemnation and our personal sinfulness. Then we must recognise that Jesus died to take our place. "He gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2.6), a redemptive price—the ransom. In connection with kidnappings, the term "ransom" is commonplace. It is the price paid for the one abducted. Jesus, in our place, himself served as the redemptive price, the ransom. "Even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20.28). "Who gave himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2.14).

That all humans, regardless of age, colour, education, abode on the earth, historical era or other factors, are condemned, and need a saviour, a ransom, is aptly proven by the following: 2 Cor. 4. 15 "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, THEN WERE ALL DEAD". Could anything be clearer? All were in God's sight dead, condemned to death. So Christ died for all. ALL! He gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. Heb. 2.9. "But we see Jesus, who is made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man". 1 Pet. 2.24. "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes we are healed". We must, then first realise that we are lost, that Christ redeemed us from all iniquity, gave himself a ransom for each of us personally, all of us. This then, is the faith that saves us! "Ye are not your own. Ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6.19). It is faith in the One who gave himself to save us—Jesus of Nazareth, the only begotten Son.

But did not our Heavenly Father give his Son as our ransom? Could not faith in the Father, apart from Jesus, save us also? Was not his sacrifice of love as great, his suffering as great, as that of Jesus? Did not He redeem us with the gift of his Son? Perhaps to our finite human

minds this would seem a reasonable assertion. However we have the unqualified statement found in Acts 4.12 to the contrary. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved". There is but one name given. Jesus Christ is the one who died for us—who took our place. He it was who paid our debt. His is the only name in which our faith can save us.

How can the death of one man pay the penalty for millions? No one has any approximation of the number of humans who have been conceived since Adam's creation. Some estimate it at twenty to forty thousand millions. Someone recently as much as seventy-seven thousand millions. How can One vicariously take the place of many millions? When Adam transgressed, he brought condemnation on the whole race, then within his body, though yet unformed though they numbered many millions. In the same way, when Jesus died and redeemed Adam, He redeemed the whole race along with Adam just as though they were yet unborn. "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive (1 Cor. 15.22). This does not mean that all will be saved; merely that all will come up out of their graves. "All that are in the grave shall hear his voice and shall come forth" (John 5.28).

"Therefore as through one trespass (Adamic), judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so through one act of righteousness, the FREE GIFT came upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom. 5.18 RV) In short, when Adam sinned, and the whole race with him, we personally died. When Jesus died in Adam's stead, He redeemed not only Adam but the whole race. He redeemed us personally.

Now where does faith enter in? If Christ saved us at Calvary nineteen hundred years ago why do we need to believe? How can faith save us? Perhaps a story from civil war days in the United States will cast light on this admittedly perplexing question.

In the Old South, on a plantation, there were many slaves. Among them was one we shall call Mose. Old Mose worked hard doing chores, tilling the fields, chopping cotton, and feeding stock. He had always wanted to be free but there was no way for him to be set free. As far as he knew he was condemned to slavery for life. But President Lincoln decided differently. He drew up and issued his now famous Emancipation Proclamation. Upon its formal publication, all slaves, everywhere, within the United States, were set free. There were no radios or TVs in those days. Newspapers were few. Mose could not read, so if the glad news were set in front of him he would still be in darkness. So Mose

toiled on and on. Week after weary week went by. There was no change in the old plantation. The crack of the slave drivers' whips could still be heard. Then one day, excitedly, a neighbour came over. He came with news. BIG NEWS! Breathlessly he told how President Lincoln had set the slaves free. They could pack their few belongings and go. Go north, go to town. Marry according to their own desires. They were FREE.

Mose could scarcely believe; it all seemed too good. But in time he did believe it. He comprehended the great truth. Raising his hands to heaven, and with a tear in his eye, he praised God! "I'M FREE! FREE!" And at that moment he was free! Mose had done nothing to earn his freedom. He could not. Lincoln did all that was necessary or possible. When Mose heard, and believed, then he was free.

So it is with us. Though Christ died for us nineteen hundred years ago, and paid our penalty, both for inherited sinfulness and our own transgressions and omissions, we must still hear and believe. He paid it all, but until we hear and believe we are free, we are still in our sins. The reason the Bible can truthfully state: "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved", is now discernible. Jesus died to save us. But only hearing and believing can make it effectual. Did Confucius die for us? Could he, himself a sinful man, have paid the full price? Could Mohammed? Could any but the sinless Son of God?

There is a popular teaching abroad today that

the doctrine of the ransom is outmoded, that it has been superseded by "more modern theories of the atonement". Unfortunately this is too true in some quarters. But not in God's word. In holy writ man is MORE IN NEED OF A SAVIOUR TODAY THAN EVER! More in need of a Redeemer! These are perilous times, of seducing spirits, of gross darkness. The Greek words *antilutron* — ransom, and *lutron* — also rendered ransom, unlike many Greek words, have but one meaning. And that is "Ransom", a redemptive price. In addition the word redeem, in its several forms, is used twenty times in the New Testament alone. To deny the ransom, that we were in need of redemption, that Christ redeemed us with his precious blood, is no less than to deny the Christian faith! True, it is but the first step in the process of atonement. But redemption is the very foundation of Christianity. Without it we are, without exception, in this age or any age, LOST. Hopeless, perishing in our sins.

Great as it is, the priceless gift, bringing salvation by faith in that gift, does not constitute all of the Gospel. Rather it is the stepping stone to the high and heavenly calling of God in Christ Jesus. To those who hear and heed goes the promise of sonship, participation in the Divine nature, heirship of God and joint heirship with Christ, to be seated with him in his throne, and to live and reign with him a thousand years. The saints will judge both men and angels. The mind of man is utterly unable to comprehend the glory and honour which God has in store for his own.

SEPHARAD

"The captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south" (Obad. 20).

This is one of the pen-pictures illustrating the time when the restoration of Israel becomes an accomplished fact, and, to follow on with verse 21 "Saviours shall come up on Mount Zion . . . and the kingdom shall be the Lord's". That happy time has not yet come, but there is a sense in which the prediction has had a limited fulfilment, and that was when the nation, taken captive to Assyria and Babylon, was freed by Cyrus the Persian to return to its own land and rebuild the city and Temple. The people were not really delivered and the kingdom did not really become the Lord's because they relapsed again into unbelief and godlessness, and when in the fulness of time Christ came to them they rejected him.

The essence of Obadiah's words here is that the "captivity of Jerusalem", denoting the people of the southern kingdom taken into exile, which had been located in the alien district of "Sepharad", would return to the "cities of the south", i.e. the towns and villages of the southern kingdom of Judah from which they had been taken. These must either have been those transported by Sennacherib in the days of Hezekiah, some 200,000 or so, or by Nebuchadnezzar in the closing days of the Judean monarchy. Most of the latter at least were settled in Babylon but some must have been dispersed over the country and Sepharad must therefore have been a city or district of Babylonia.

Nineteenth century and earlier speculation, with a sublime disregard for O.T. history, placed Sepharad in all sorts of out-of-the-way places. Thus the Targum of Jonathan, and the Syriac

Peshito, of early A.D. times, made it Spain, wherefrom comes the present-day nomenclature of Sephardim for Spanish Jews. The Latin Vulgate of the 4th century made it the Bosphorus coast, due to a mistake in translation by the Jewish instructors of Jerome, who translated the Hebrew into the Latin Vulgate. Other favourites were Sardis and Sparta. In more modern times the Bosphorus was restored to favour by the French orientalist Antoine De Sacy (1758-1838) who is rather unreliable anyway and of course all these rather misty speculations have to give way to the results of modern research.

Sepharad of Obad. 20 is now known to be the Sepharvaim of 2 Kings 17.24; 18, 34; 19, 13, and was one district from which the Assyrians transported some of its inhabitants to populate Samaria after the removal of the Ten Tribes, the people who afterwards became the Samaritans. The Hebrew word means "the two Sippars" and this was how the city was known to the Babylonians. The twin-city of Sippar was only properly excavated and identified during the present century although it was partially explored by Rassam in 1881. It lies on both sides of the Euphrates about thirty miles above Babylon at the junction of the Nahr Malcha, an artificial watercourse dating from ancient times connecting the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, with sluice-gates allowing water to flow in either direction at will for irrigation purposes. The section on the western side was called Sipparrannar, meaning Sippar of the moon-god; that on the eastern side Sippar utu, Sippar of the sun-god. These names go back to the days of Sumerian worship prior to the days of Abraham and in fact Sippar is listed in the old records of Abraham's time (the Sumerian "King-lists") as being one of the five cities which existed before the Flood. (Not much notice need be taken of this except as an indication of the city's antiquity). The "Sephar" of Gen. 10.30 is the same name and takes the existence of the city back at least to four or five centuries before Abraham

so that it must certainly have been one of the earliest centres of human habitation.

At a time roughly equivalent to that of Jacob the name of the western half was changed to Sippar-edinu, "Sippar of the fruitful plain"; the word "Sepharad" in Obadiah is almost certainly a Hebrew transliteration of this term.

Of greater interest perhaps is the fact that this was in all probability the place where Ezekiel was settled and where he prophesied. Ezek. 3.15 states that he was with the captive exiles of Tel-abib on the river Chehar. Tel-abib means hill of fruitfulness (modern city of Tel-Aviv is the same name) and could well have been a settlement associated with or adjacent to Sippar-edinu, "Sippar of the fruitful plain," situated as it was in one of the most fertile and fruitful regions of Babylonia. Chehar, which means the joining canal, has long been recognised to be the Nahr Malcha which joined Euphrates and Tigris. The Judean captives at Sepharad were probably those very Jews to whom Ezekiel prophesied at Tel-abib.

The city survived into mediæval times, then known as Sura, and was the seat of a famous Jewish academy of knowledge. It is not known whether Ezekiel ever returned to Judea; like Daniel, he was probably too old to make the journey when the Restoration took place, if in fact he survived so long. His last prophecy is dated twenty-five years before that event. Many of his compatriots at Tel-abib must have accompanied Ezra back to Jerusalem but many must have stayed, content with life in what was after all, a prosperous and relatively peaceful land even although pervaded by false religion. Some Jews did remain, and their descendants to many generations. But the city is gone, what is left of its houses and temples and streets buried under the sands of Iraq. The city which remains is Jerusalem the holy, rebuilt by the exiles who returned, destined to be destroyed time and again as history runs its course, but always rising again to declare its proud claim to be the Eternal City, the city of the great King.

The Great Way of Confucius

"When the Great Way prevails, the world is one Great Commonwealth. The virtuous and able are selected for office, good faith is cultivated, and harmony prevails. People regard not only their own parents as parents, and not only their own children as children. The old are able to enjoy their old age; the young are able to employ their talents; the adolescents are free to grow; helpless widows and widowers, lonely orphans, and the crippled and deformed are provided for. Men have occupations and women have homes. Wealth is not to be thrown away, nor is it to be kept as personal possession.

Labour is not to be wasted, nor is it to be employed for private gain. Selfish schemes cease to exist, and banditry and rebellion do not rise. All doors are open. This is the age of the Great Commonwealth."

These are the words of Confucius (551-478 B.C.), the Chinese philosopher whose teachings are professed as a religion by one-fifth of earth's population. They reveal his appreciation of the principles of the Millennial Kingdom and although, living before Christ, he never knew of God's provision for man, he will one day see his ideals in practice, and probably quickly pledge himself to Christ's service and become again a teacher of men.

HIS MEMORIAL

The Apostle's admonition to "keep the feast" comes with special solemnity at this time of 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 or participation with 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 preparatory to the morning of the Millennial Age.

Fourth—the great "feast of fat things" (Isa. 25.6) which follows 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; 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 rebound 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 standpoint 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 He 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 in 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 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 participation 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 true 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 prearranged 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 standpoint! 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 offerers to the new nature as a "new creature"* (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, surpass all human comprehension.

THE SLAIN LAMB

*A theme from the
Book of Revelation*

It must have occasioned John considerable surprise as he looked up in response to the elder's encouragement to see in the centre of the Assembly, a Lamb standing there. It could easily be presumed that after hearing the elder's words, he might have expected to see a "Lion Rampant", or some other heraldic symbol of victory move into the midst of the stately scene, and advance to take the book from the hand of him who sat on the central throne. But it was a Lamb which had come to stand there; and the Lamb had an appearance as though it had just been slain. In addition, it had other peculiarities which gave it a singular appearance—it had seven eyes and seven horns.

From this point onwards, in these Apocalyptic scenes, it is this singular Lamb which is the chief executant of all that transpires from the Divine side of things. He breaks the seven seals which bound the little book; he leads and feeds a great multitude which came out of great tribulation (Rev. 7.17); He is seen standing on Mount Zion with 144,000 associates (Rev. 14. 1-5); He leads the armies of God to battle against God's enemies (Rev. 17.14; 19. 11-21) He is seen as the Lord of the New Jerusalem, and enthroned with God in the Holy City as it comes to dwell with men. (Rev. 22.3). Thus the

prevailing of the Lion is continued and carried forward by the Lamb till the authority of God is established in the earth, and God becomes "All-in-all".

There is but little reference to this symbol of a Lamb in the New Testament other than in this book of Revelation. John the Baptist uses the term when pointing Jesus out to some of his disciples. "Behold the Lamb of God" said John on two successive days (John 1.29 & 36). And Peter tells his brethren they had been redeemed from their old manner of life by the precious blood of Christ AS OF a Lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1. 18-19). A further reference is made by Paul, though without using the term itself, when he says "For even Christ our Passover is slain for us, therefore let us keep the feast . . ." (1 Cor. 5. 7-9) Thus, though the use of this term had come into vogue, its use among the early Christians does not seem to have become very extensive. Among the many faithful sayings which passed from lip to lip in the little Christian communities, no one of them which has come down to us through New Testament sources, epitomises any teaching centreing around this figure of a Lamb. Nor is there much testimony regarding the Lamb in the Prophets. "*He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter*" says

Isaiah of God's suffering servant (Isa. 53.7)—that is, He was brought like a lamb would be brought to the slaughter-table. Isaiah does not say "He is a Lamb", but that his unresisting yielding to his persecutors was like that of a lamb in the arms of its offerer. To be like a 'lamb' does not mean that one is a lamb. It was left to his fore-runner to say, with definiteness and precision, that Jesus was the Lamb of God, and for Paul to supplement him by calling Christ Jesus our 'Passover' (Lamb) slain for us.

This latter Scripture (1 Cor. 5.7) is a valuable pointer which directs our minds to the Old Testament evidences which are required to show the origin of this title. In the annals of the Hebrew people there was one lamb, above all others, which was enshrined in their experience and history. Though for every day save one of each year, at least two lambs were sacrificed to God (one in the morning and the other in the evening) it was not the victim of this oft-repeated sacrifice which was so diligently remembered in song and story. It was the Lamb slain in Egypt to protect the Hebrew's first-born—the Passover Lamb—that was kept ever fresh in their memory. That was a Lamb of redemption and deliverance. That Lamb redeemed some of their number to God, for thenceforth all firstborns were claimed and appropriated by God; and the firstborns redeemed in the dead of night were the harbingers of the deliverance that came for all with morning light. That this is the right lamb to be taken as the root and origin of this title is suggested by the words of Rev. 15.3 where the name of Moses is coupled with the title of the Lamb, "*And they sing the song of Moses . . . and the song of the Lamb, saying . . .*" This is really a song of deliverance, extolling God for his mighty works upon his enemies, and is reminiscent of the song of Moses as the Israelites stood on the farther side of the Red Sea (Exod. 15) after their marvellous deliverance from Egyptian bondage. "*Thou, in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed . . . which thou hast purchased . . .*" (vv. 13, 16). In support of this David says "What one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel whom God went to redeem for a people to himself . . . which thou redeemest to thee from Egypt . . ." (2 Sam. 7.23).

That deliverance, and the Lamb's death that preceded it, is the source for much of the sublime imagery of Revelation. In both type and antitype redemption from the hands of the oppressor is the theme; and in both cases redemption is shown to be accomplished through the blood of a slain Lamb.

But this Apocalyptic Lamb was alive again after its death. It now stood in the midst of the illustrious throng, "as it had been slain". To find

a counterpart to this we must go back to the experience of Isaac on Mount Moriah. "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt-offering" asked the lad, "God will provide himself a lamb" (Gen. 22.7-8) And a male lamb was found at hand when the right time came. But before the provided lamb died, Isaac too had been slain, in his faithful father's intention. Isaac died, in a figure, and was also raised again. "*By faith Abraham . . . offered up Isaac . . . accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure*" (Heb. 11. 17 & 19).

The connecting point of this incident to our study is that both the lad and his father spoke of the appropriate animal for such a sacrifice as a lamb, and when God provided the animal to release Isaac from the altar, God provided a male lamb. Thus the lamb which God desired in sacrifice (Isaac himself) was accounted "as if he too had been slain" and raised again.

Thus these Old Testament evidences, so far as the lamb itself is concerned, tell the story of surrender and dedication to the Will of God—of its death and resurrection; but insofar as the purpose accomplished by the death of a lamb, it tells of redemption and deliverance of a people.

These are the thoughts enshrined in Hebrew song and story which helped to mould the conceptions and devotions of the most zealous in Israel. Thus Isaiah, one of the most spiritual prophets, saw another suffering servant of God go Isaac-like, as a lamb, to the slaughter. But to John on Patmos it was given to know that that Lamb came forth to victory and achievement.

A captive people came forth to nationhood in consequence of the slain Paschal Lamb—that same people will come forth again to nationhood, by reason of this better Lamb, slain, but alive again.

This is revealed in the remarkable endowment of this victorious Lamb. It had seven horns and seven eyes! Concerning the seven eyes one is reminded of the prophecy of Zechariah. Zechariah was sent to encourage Joshua and Zerubbabel to proceed with the re-building of the Temple after their return from Babylonian exile. Their enemies had prevented them engaging in this work, but the prophet's vision goes behind these human enemies and sees Satan acting as the accuser and opposer. Joshua (the High Priest, representative of the Priesthood) was dressed in filthy clothes, and Zerubbabel (the prince of Judah, representative of royalty) were needing encouragement to undertake a great task. To Joshua the Prophet said "Behold I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH, for behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua;

upon one stone shall be seven eyes; behold I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of Hosts (Chap. 3. 8 & 9).

To Zerubbabel the Prophet was commissioned to say, that as he had laid the foundation stones of the Temple, his hand should also finish it, and that though it was a day of small things in that the Temple he would erect would be poor and insignificant compared with the Temple Nebuchadnezzar destroyed, yet the Spirit and power of God would be with him in his work. On a particular headstone were to be "the seven eyes of the Lord which run to and fro throughout the whole world". This, of course, has deeper significance than as a mere message to Zerubbabel and Joshua, in the re-building of their "small" temple, but it would reveal to them that God was watching over them and their work, and that they would be prospered in their attempt, spite of all their enemies opposition. Success would be achieved "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain" (Zech. 4, 6 & 7). Thus the eyes of the Lord survey the scene wherein the omnipotent Spirit of God prepared to accomplish his work. God is building a great Temple, and in this Temple will be one Stone, which God will have graven and prepared, upon which will be "seven eyes" and that stone will be the headstone. For the purpose of this Revelation picture, that Stone has become "a Lamb, as it had been slain". That Stone had undergone its "graving" and was ready for its place. That Lamb was possessed of "All-seeing Eyes" to survey the whole scene wherein the Spirit of God was about to operate. It would "see" everything as these eyes of the Lord ran to and fro throughout the whole earth. That Lamb had seven "horns". From time immemorial a horn has been a symbol of power. Seven horns means that it has perfect or complete power—"All power in heaven and in earth". These seven eyes and seven horns represent "the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth".

A Christian Church

A Christian Church ought to be an exhibition of heaven upon earth—a manifestation of Christ below—a witness for God in the midst of the world so that the world looking at the Church may be able to say: "This is a specimen of what that which is called the Gospel can do; this is a model of what the Christian teaching can achieve." And so all with whom we come into contact in our intercourse in life will say: "That man does not say much about his Christian beliefs when transacting his business, but there prevails in all that he does an integrity, a single-

This phrase reminds us of Isaiah's description of the spiritual equipment of the "Branch" which will spring from Jesse's Root in Isa. 11.3 & 4, "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding; the spirit of counsel and of might; the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and shall make him to possess quick understanding in the fear of the Lord". Thus does inspired prophecy identify and describe in advance these "seven Spirits of God", the ability to "see" and "understand" everything. The "seven horns" show the fulness of executive power, backed by "the seven eyes", the fulness of spiritual understanding and discernment.

What a wonderful Redeemer was that which came forth to answer the challenging Angel's call "Who is worthy to open the book?". That great One for whom God framed his great Plan, big enough to compassionate a world in sin, the bringer of peace and righteousness to a war-worn earth. "Shiloh", the Prince of "Shalom"; the Root of Majesty from which sprang David's royal Throne; the Prince of all Princes of Judah's stock; the One only Being in heaven and earth able to answer the imperious Call, and when He came to view, He came as a Lamb to be slain!

The Seed of the Promise, like Isaac, and yet more truly so than Isaac, laid on the Altar by his Father, like Isaac, and yet more truly and actually so than Isaac; and raised from the dead, but not in figure as was Isaac. The real, true, all-worthy Lamb of God, prototype of all lambs slain by men, for men, since the world began, Majesty come down to bear a Cross. Royalty descended to be set at nought, but now Majesty and Royalty triumphant, for "the Lion of the Tribe of Juda hath prevailed to open the book, and . . . a Lamb, as it had been slain . . . came, and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the Throne".

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour and glory and blessing".

ness of eye, a simplicity of purpose, a faithfulness to his engagements, and a superiority to trial, that proves he must have some fountain of peace and comfort and joy that we have not; we will go and hear what he hears, learn the lessons he has learned, and taste, if it be possible, the happiness which we see in his character". Such a one becomes to mankind either the salt that silently keeps a society from corruption, or the light shining on the hilltop that illuminates the earth with a ray of the glory of heaven.

(*Forest Gate Bible Monthly.*)

A KING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

*A short study in the
Millennial Visions of Isaiah*

Part . 2

"By me kings reign, and princes decree justice" declares Wisdom, speaking as a person in Prov. 8. 15-16. "By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." That is the ideal but it does not appear in practice as yet, and will not until the king that shall reign in righteousness has commenced his beneficent rule. In the day to come Wisdom will be enthroned on high and there will no longer be the spectacle of earth's rulers hesitating and vacillating about their policies, sacrificing principle to expediency or quite openly and frankly using their positions to oppress their subjects and serve their own indulgence. Righteousness includes every right and uplifting quality, and a king who reigns in righteousness is a king who is guided in all his ways by unerring wisdom. So the King of the Millennial Age will be characterised by that wisdom from above which James says is pure, peaceable, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and hypocrisy.

"Princes shall rule in judgment." (vs. 1). This must without doubt refer to the "princes in all the earth" of Psa. 45, the "judges and counselors" of Isa. 1. 26. The writer to the Hebrews tells, in his eleventh chapter, of men who maintained their loyalty and faithfulness to God at different times in past history and were laid aside in death "not having received the promise" but yet were persuaded that God had "prepared for them a city". And so He has. In the day that Christ reigns as spiritual King from his exalted place in the heavens, these men of Old Testament days, these "Ancient Worthies" as they have been called, will be raised from the dead to assume the positions of administration upon earth for which their past lives' experiences have qualified them. Sterling characters such as Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, Daniel, Nehemiah — certainly Isaiah himself — besides others whose names have not been recorded and whose deeds are not known, will certainly be found in the forefront of affairs in that day. They will be men who can be trusted with the oversight of affairs upon earth because they, like the Lord Jesus Christ himself, have esteemed the service of God and of their fellow-men of greater worth than anything else that life can offer. Already well versed in the plans and purposes of God, and firm in their stand for the principles of Divine government, they will indeed be "princes" that "rule in judgment".

The manner in which these "princes" will take control of earth's affairs and begin to lead man-

kind into the ways of peace is somewhat problematical. It is evident that their raising from the dead must be some appreciable time before the revelation of their identity to the world at large; they all will quite obviously require some time to become adjusted to life as it is lived today and to acquire the necessary knowledge of the course of history between their original lives on earth—two, three or more millenniums ago—and the time of their awakening. It may well be that their obviously exceptional intellectual powers and their quick perception of humanity's troubles will speedily bring them to the forefront so that men are half ready to accept them as leaders when the tremendous manifestation of Divine intervention that is to mark the establishment of the Kingdom occurs. Suffice it then to realise that when they are revealed they will be men who can be trusted, princes who "rule in judgment".

"And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." (ch. 32.2).

Who is this "man"? Are we to understand a third factor in the ruling administration of the new Kingdom here introduced to notice, or in the alternative another aspect of the rulers already mentioned? There seems to be little doubt that the "king" of vs. 1 is here referred to. He is a king, but he is not like earth's usual kings, remote, unapproachable, surrounded by a panoply of royalty which separates him from the touch or gaze of the common multitude. He is, as it were, one of them, one who knows their condition and their needs, and can claim to have walked with them, borne their griefs and shared their sorrows besides carrying those same sorrows. He is a merciful and faithful king because he knows what his subjects must have for their true welfare and happiness and he intends to have it. And the first thing they need, he knows full well, is defence and protection. They have been so buffeted and tormented, persecuted and driven, by enemies of all kinds in life before, that now they need more than anything else a time of respite from trouble, a freedom from fear and apprehension, that they may begin to take fresh heart, and look up to the heavens, and listen to the voice that is to speak to them in words of wise guidance and vital instruction. So the first aspect of this kingly work of the Millennial Age is couched in terms indicative of covering and of protection. "A man

shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." The simile is taken from Palestinian scenery. The hot winds from the *midbar*, the southern desert lying between Judea and the Red Sea, laden with sand and dust, beat fiercely upon the unprotected traveller, so that, like Jonah at Nineveh in similar plight, he might well wish to die and not live. This king will be a protection from the incessant winds of adversity and give the traveller time to recover. He will defend from the rains and tempests of disaster. He will provide refreshment and sustenance, "rivers of water in a dry place," and He will be as the shadow of a great rock on a sun-baked plain, tempering the heat of midday with his presence.

One cannot help noticing the care with which these symbols are selected, as if Isaiah meant very definitely to indicate the protection that would be given, in that day, from the great plagues that do at this present time afflict humanity. His four symbols are wind, waters (the tempest), drought, and noon-day heat. Those four are symbolic in the Scriptures of great curses that afflict mankind—war (wind and tempest), famine (drought) and pestilence (heat). The fear of all these things will disappear completely when Christ is king and is in control; violence and want shall be no more. This man will be as an hiding place and men will realise as never before the meaning of the old saying "the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe".

Zechariah, much later on, saw this king in the glory of his symbolic manhood, this Son of David who is also David's Lord, and said of him (6. 12) "*Behold the Man whose name is the BRANCH*" (his very descent from David in the days of his flesh becomes a title of honour forevermore) "*and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord . . . and shall sit and rule upon his throne, and he shall be a priest upon his throne.*" There is some clear indication here that, in the Millennial Day, men will be constantly reminded that the glorious One Who is now their King was once of themselves, walking the earth with them, talking to them about their troubles and triumphs, their joys and sorrows, sympathising, counselling and helping . . .

"*And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly.*" (vs. 3-4). Here the work of the Millennium commences in earnest. The first necessity of the sin-blinded and sin-

weakened human race is education, instruction, and it must be given without any opposing influence being allowed to retard its work. The arch-enemy of mankind, Satan, will have been bound for the entire period, the "thousand years" of Rev. 20. 1, and there will no longer be blindness and deafness imposed from without. No more will it be said as it is said of this present day "the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them". (2 Cor. 4. 4). Leeser seems to appreciate this fact when in his translation he renders this passage "the eyes of those that see shall not be blinded again". They were blinded once, in the past, but now they shall see, and see more and more plainly as they make progress in the knowledge of the things of God that are manifest in that Day. "The heart also of the rash" says Leeser again "shall be attentive in order to know". There will be a thirst for knowledge and men will eagerly come to the fountain of wisdom that they might learn the way of life.

Now the prophet turns himself and surveys another class of men who will be in evidence in that day. Not all will come to the proffered way of life for not all will want to embrace the ways of righteousness. Some there will be who, at first at any rate, will want none and will have none of this new order of love and unselfishness, and who will endeavour to go back to the old ways of self and sin. They will be quite unable to harm their fellows, for nothing will be permitted to cause any kind of hindrance to those seeking the way of righteousness—"they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain"—but those whose hearts are fully set in them to do evil will succeed in doing a lot of damage to themselves and unless they do eventually repent and come to the fountain of life they must inevitably reap sin's penalty—death. But Isaiah is not seeing so far as that in this particular vision; in fact he seems to be viewing only the commencement of the Age, its first early years, and his words must be understood in that light. What he does say is illuminating enough. He says that there will still be vile (Heb. *nabbal*, brutish, worthless, sensual) persons and that they will still speak and work their villainy with the object of oppressing their fellow-creatures. But the "liberal"—noble, bountiful, is the meaning of the word—will have devised effectual counter-measures and in consequence the machinations of the vile will be of no effect.

The Septuagint gives what is perhaps the clearest rendering of this particular passage—at least the sense is more easily understandable in relation to the context—and when applied to

the operations of those who in the early days of the Kingdom attempt to oppose its work is very eloquent. *"For the fool shall speak foolish words, and his heart shall meditate vanities, and to perform lawless deeds, and to speak error against the Lord, to scatter hungry souls, and he will cause the thirsty souls to be empty. For the counsel of the wicked will devise iniquity, to destroy the poor with unjust words, and ruin the cause of the poor in judgment. But the godly have devised wise measures, and this counsel shall stand."* (vs. 6-8).

These are they who in another place are said to "yield feigned obedience". Outwardly obedient to the laws of the Kingdom, conforming to the general regulations which will be made for the conduct of daily life in general harmony with the principles of righteousness, they will nevertheless be seeking opportunity to work

their nefarious schemes to the detriment of others and most certainly will refrain from that service of helping others that is to be so characteristic a feature of Kingdom conditions. The parable of the sheep and goats makes mention of these same. These are they who, standing before the great white throne, are accused that, having the opportunity to do good to their fellows for whom Christ died, refused so to do, and the Christ the King tells them that in that failure they offend, not only against their fellows, but against him also. Refusing to accept in their own lives those principles by which alone human life on earth—or life on any plane of being—can be conducted harmoniously and to give glory to God, they are but as the wastage of God's creation and can have no part or lot in that edifice which He is building to stand for all eternity. *(To be concluded)*

SOWING A word of exhortation

"He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." (Eccl. 11. 4).

These words may be summed up as unnecessary caution. It describes the position of one who fears to act lest . . . ; something is holding him back; he notes the wind and postpones the sowing until a more favourable day; he beholds the clouds and defers the reaping. Several ways of applying the teaching come readily to the mind. We may think of one who knows somewhat of the purposes of God; he realises his great debt to God and Christ for the work of salvation unmerited and free. He feels that his gratitude for all should show itself in more than verbal thanks. He has come to that point which we refer to as Rom. 12. 1. He knows that the Christian way is no easy road; and he hesitates. Observing the winds, he fails to sow. In such a position of mind the winds may well increase and storm clouds gather. He may think within himself: "I must think this over more", but in reality he fears to "touch things which involve so much". Maybe he believes he is counting the cost; but in fact he is merely counting the debits and omitting the credits. He feels the winds and sees the gathering clouds, but has forgotten the sunshine. He is thinking of the risks, and the result of his supposed counting-the-cost is only miscalculation. (We cannot, in fact, count the cost, for much more is involved in the life of consecration than ever we supposed as we commenced the pathway. All will now agree that the cost as it works out in our lives is far different from what we supposed or expected). He is for-

getting the important fact that whereas there will be storms, the providences of God are greater than the storms. God has not promised that there will be no storm or wind, but He has promised abundant blessing. Whatever he thinks within his heart, he should yield himself to God and get on with the sowing. He will meet winds he never thought of; he will receive providences he would not have dreamed of when first he knew the Lord; and he will reap more than he anticipated. We recall that to Israel God promised fruitful fields so that they could safely sow and reap. He did not promise no storm or wind, but He promised bountiful crops, and the providences of God provided the increase.

One of our Lord's best known parables commences: *"A sower went forth to sow"*. Had our Lord observed the winds He would not have scattered the seed which was to yield one hundred and forty-four thousand. No sower of the word encountered more storms than He. Had He hesitated or counted the cost we should not be where we are today. Nor did He reason in the words of his own parable that some of the seed would fall by the wayside, and some among thorns. Nor did He regard that a cloud may prevent reaping. He got on with the sowing, no storms or clouds hindering him, and God gave the increase, for some fell on good ground and yielded a hundred-fold. He believed that the onus was on him to sow. Likewise the apostle Paul. What a great loss to the Church had he been deterred by the clouds of trouble! But what a crop because he sowed in all weathers and fields!

Recall Acts 20. 21-25. Paul observed the clouds with only a passing glance. He did not deceive himself into saying there would be no clouds, for he knew that bonds and afflictions awaited him. But no storms could prevent him testifying the gospel of the grace of God. Surely he was following the advice of Eccl. 11. 6. He went on sowing; he knew not "*whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good*". He did not suppose that both might be alike bad, for he knew God would give the increase. Is it morning now? Some say so; then sow thy seed. If you think it eventide, still sow.

We might ask: Is any sowing being done now, or are the labourers regarding the winds of contrary doctrine? Or are they regarding the clouds of trouble and neglecting the reaping? We have all heard the winds of doctrine that hold the sowers back. One wind says: "*It is reaping time; do not sow*". Another says: "*It is sowing time; reaping is over*". And still another says: "*It is reaping time, and sowing is to be deferred until the plough-share of trouble has prepared the ground afresh*". The labourer is disturbed in mind, and fails to sow. Like our Lord, like Paul, we must get on with the sowing. We do not know which will prosper, or whether both will alike be good, but we do believe that God will give the increase. And we are reaping crops of truth due to the faithful labourers of the past. Others have laboured, and we have entered into their labours.

There is another sowing to be done—not the scattering of good news, but sowing within the hearts of ourselves. It is called in the Bible sowing to the Spirit, and those disturbed by the winds which deny character-development will not sow. (Gal. 6. 7-9). What is sowing to the Spirit? Sowing to the flesh is following those practices which the flesh encourages; and "*the works of the flesh are manifest*". One sows in the mind and reaps in the actions; and if the flesh continues to practise thus, another harvest results—"*they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*". And so, sowing to the Spirit means sowing those graces which the Spirit prompts. Again the sowing is in the mind, and again there are two crops—fruitage in this life and then life everlasting. Keep on this sowing; "*be not weary in (this) well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not*". Remember, there are two crops from this sowing—the fruit of the Spirit now, and in the resurrection life everlasting. There was every encouragement to the Galatian brethren to be not weary in well-doing and disregard the winds and clouds. Similar reasoning is made by the apostle in Rom. 6. 19-23—the yielding of oneself to un-

cleanness leads to still further iniquity with death as result, and the yielding of our members to righteousness leads to holiness and the end everlasting life.

But in this sowing to the Spirit, what must we sow? The obvious answer (that we sow seed) must be stressed. Something with life in it! And seed is useless unless it be sowed. The seed is clearly the words of life which the Holy Spirit has given to us. Sow the word in hearts and heads—there will be fruitage. Don't leave the seed in the packet! Millions have Bibles, but leave the words unopened and unsown. In another way of reasoning we must sow that which we hope to reap. If we want a crop of turnips we sow turnip seed—no other seed will do. And so, if we desire the fruitage of love, joy, peace, etc., we must sow these graces, or no crop will result. Some may say: "We need more brotherly love"—and to them the answer is, *sow it*. But if we observe the clouds (irrespective of who caused the clouds) no sowing will be done, and we shall still be expecting more brotherly love from others, but have done nothing to encourage it. Sow these graces in our own hearts and scatter where we can—there will be a crop even now, and life everlasting awaits us.

Some have been to meetings where the subject for discussion was not to their liking; few joined in, and the meeting lacked warmth. Feeling uncomfortable, they have not sown the truth, and therefore have not reaped its fruitage. But unconsciously the seeds of discontent have been sown in their hearts, and no one has profited. Some have said: "I went to the meeting and did not get a crumb". To them the answer is: "If you had brought some bread all would have had a crumb".

Let us sow the seed of truth, for this seed is alive, and must therefore reach fruition. Sow it in our own hearts and sow it in the meeting. The onus is on us to sow. It must yield because it is alive. And then we shall be able to speak as did Paul: "*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase*". Speak the words of truth in the meeting, another will add further comments, and God will give the increase; and so will be found that true unity—"*He that planteth and he that watereth are one*".

We may pick grains of sand which look like seed, yet they will give no crop; but from life-bearing seed as small as mustard large plants will grow. And we are amazed that so much results from such small seed, and we realise that God has given the increase. The growth from seed to plant is ever a mystery to man, as our Lord said in Mark 4. 26-28. So, if we sow the seeds of truth in our own hearts it cannot fail to grow,

though we know not how. Then let us sow. (In the parable of the sower the grain was broadcast, not sown in selected ground. From which it may be reasoned that in the broadcasting of the gospel there is more hope of crop than in ground of our own choosing). Do not expect fruition immediately. "We cannot eat the fruit while the tree is in flower", said Disraeli. Patience will be needed, but there will be a crop, for it will follow the Divine rule—"first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear". It will need no super-gardening to make it grow, for the seed has life in it. The main act of character-development is seed-sowing—God will give the increase. Does not the Bible speak to us of growth, rather than building, as its picture of character-development? Building is the assembling of stones and wood ready cut; and differing buildings may be built with the very same material. No such difference results from growth of the same seed. If we each sow to the Spirit, we shall each reap the same crop, for character will grow, we know not how, and each will reap the same crop in the resurrection—life everlasting.

By the gift to each of the Church of the Holy Spirit, God himself begins the sowing. It is given to every man to profit withal. This gift we could not obtain by any other means; and it is the means by which we become members of the Body of Christ, for God sets the members everyone of them in the Body as it has pleased him. He then starts the life of character growth by his gift. *Let it grow!* "Be filled with the Spirit; quench not the Spirit"; and act so that the prayer will be answered. One of the functions of the Holy Spirit is to lead us into all truth; and thus it follows that we must go and dwell in those conditions where the sown seed may prosper. We must go where the words of life are to be found, for that is the seed. We must seek the fellowship of those who also have the seeds of truth; there, as it were, to exchange seeds or grains of truth; there to follow up the sown seed by watering. And, acting on the Bible paradox that he who would save his life shall lose it, we shall sow in our own hearts by giving away the seed to our fellows. He who gives it away keeps it, for, by dispensing, it becomes impressed upon his own heart, and so he keeps it. Do not hoard

it; do not leave the seed in the packet; give it away! Plant it; someone else will water it, and God will give the increase. We sow in fellowship; but some, regarding the winds, will think it cosier by the fire side, and will stay at home. Not sowing, they will not reap, except that by isolating themselves they sow dissatisfaction in their own hearts and will reap its crop. And some cautious ones may say: "I am not sure that if I sow there will be fruitage", or, "I will sow a little, and if it flourishes I will sow more". To such the words of 2 Cor. 9. 6 seem appropriate. We shall reap as we sow—if sparingly, so we shall reap; and if bountifully, so shall we reap. The onus is on us to sow; God will give the increase.

We sometimes regard the winds even in fellowship, saying to ourselves: "I will not bring up such and such a topic", but someone is the loser, for fellowship includes the free discussion of all Bible questions. And, on the basis that the best meetings are those where all contribute, remember the words of Paul: "That which every joint supplieth", for this will make increase of the body.

Recall the error of the Galatian brethren. According to Paul, they started to sow to the Spirit, but reverted to the bondage of the flesh. After receiving the gospel of grace, they were returning to "another" gospel. "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" Paul was disturbed by their change for their groundwork of justification was leaving them, and they were thinking of returning to the Law from which they had been freed in Christ. And how could they reap the fruitage of love, joy, etc., if they were sowing to the flesh? A little leaven was leavening the whole lump, for they were sowing the wrong seed. May it not be said of us: "Ye did run well, who did hinder". Hence the exhortation of Gal. 6. 7-9. "In due season we shall reap" does not mean that sometime, somehow, we shall reap, for the principle of growth is that fruition comes at its due season. In due season means the season when it is due. And in the season of God's appointing, "that day", we shall reap the eternal crop—if we faint not—if we regard not the winds.

Divine truth comes to us with all the authority of its Divine Author. With a gentle dignity consistent with its noble character it urges its claims upon the reason, the judgment and the conscience of men, and then leaves them as free moral agents, to accept or reject its claims. Its true messengers also come with the same moral

force of inherent worth, rather than with noisy demonstrations or "lying wonders," such as are used by the powers of darkness to attract idle curiosity into the snares of Satan. They come imbued with the spirit of the authoritative message they bear—the spirit of holiness and truth.

SEISS ON THE DAYS OF THE SON OF MAN

A noted preacher and writer on matters connected with the Second Advent and the Millennial reign of Christ was Dr. Joseph A. Seiss, a Lutheran minister of Philadelphia at the close of the 19th century. In his "Lectures on the Book of Revelation" he gives the following description of the time scale of the Advent and "Days of the Son of Man."

* * *

"When we speak of the day of the Lord, or the judgment period, many have the notion that it is but one day, or a very brief space of time. There is a popular misapprehension of what the day of the Lord means, and the length of the period which it covers. The mistake is in taking the day of the Lord, or the coming again of our Saviour, as if one particular moment of time, and one single event or scene were to be understood. What the Scriptures describe as the day of the Lord, and the second coming of Christ, is no more limited to a single event or moment of time than was the day of his first coming, which extended over more than thirty years, and embraced various stages and successive presentations. If we take the prophecies concerning the first advent, we find it impossible to apply them to any one day, year, or scene, in the evangelic history. Micah said that Christ should "come" out of Bethlehem (Ephratah), but Hosea said that he would come "out of Egypt". Malachi said that he should "suddenly come to his temple", and Zechariah that he would come to Zion "riding upon an ass, upon a colt the foal of an ass"; whilst, according to Isaiah, "the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali" were to see the "great light". All these presentations were his coming. He did come when he was born at Bethlehem; he did come out of Egypt; he did come when he announced himself at Nazareth; he did come as a great light among the people of Northern Galilee; he did come riding into Jerusalem on an ass; he did come suddenly to his temple when he twice drove out the money changers; and he came when he reappeared after his resurrection. Each one of these particular incidents is alike called his coming; but they were only so many separate presentations, at different dates, extending through a period of thirty-three years, all of which together are required to make up the first advent as a whole. And just as it was then, so it will be again. The second coming, like the first, is complex and distributive, extending through

a variety of successive and diverse scenes, stages, events, and manifestations, requiring as many, if not still more, years. Just what length of time will intervene between the first and sudden catching away of the watching and ready saints, and the final overthrow of Babylon and Antichrist, we may not be able precisely to determine; but I am fully persuaded that it will be a goodly number of years. Forty years at least, perhaps a whole jubilee period of fifty years, or even a full seventy years, answering to the period during which the judgment was upon Israel for its sins, are likely to be embraced in what the Scriptures call the day of the Lord, and the second coming and revelation of Jesus Christ."

* * *

Ed. note. It is interesting to notice how the foresight of Dr. Seiss has been justified by events. A hundred years later we still await the outward revelation of our Lord, with his resurrected Church, to all the world, yet Christian observers throughout this century have seen the progress of those events which Dr. Seiss, with his limited foreview of 1875, called in the language of Scripture symbolism "the overthrow of Babylon and Antichrist", necessarily aspects of the Advent prior to Christ's outward manifestation. Since his day the fast decreasing influence of institutional Christianity in political affairs, increasing secularisation of society, prevalence of lawlessness and anarchy, and now the nuclear threat and ecological world pollution, all fulfil to the letter the programme which he then foresaw. Neither was he the only one; the writings of his contemporary Pastor Charles Russell abound with the same outlook as to the Advent, elaborated in considerably greater detail, in addition to expectation that during the same period Israel would regain possession of the Holy Land as a sovereign State, preparatory to her acceptance of Christ as King at his open revelation. All this has become a reality in not much more than Dr. Seiss' expected seventy years as the period of the preliminary Presence prior to the outward revelation. His views of the "catching away" of the waiting saints can be better defined as an instantaneous "change" to the spiritual world at death but here he only followed the early idea of the Presence dating from the Albury Conferences of 1826-30 and associated with the names of men like Henry Drummond, Edward Irving, J. N. Darby and Joseph Wolff.



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Vol. 61, No. 3

MAY/JUNE, 1984

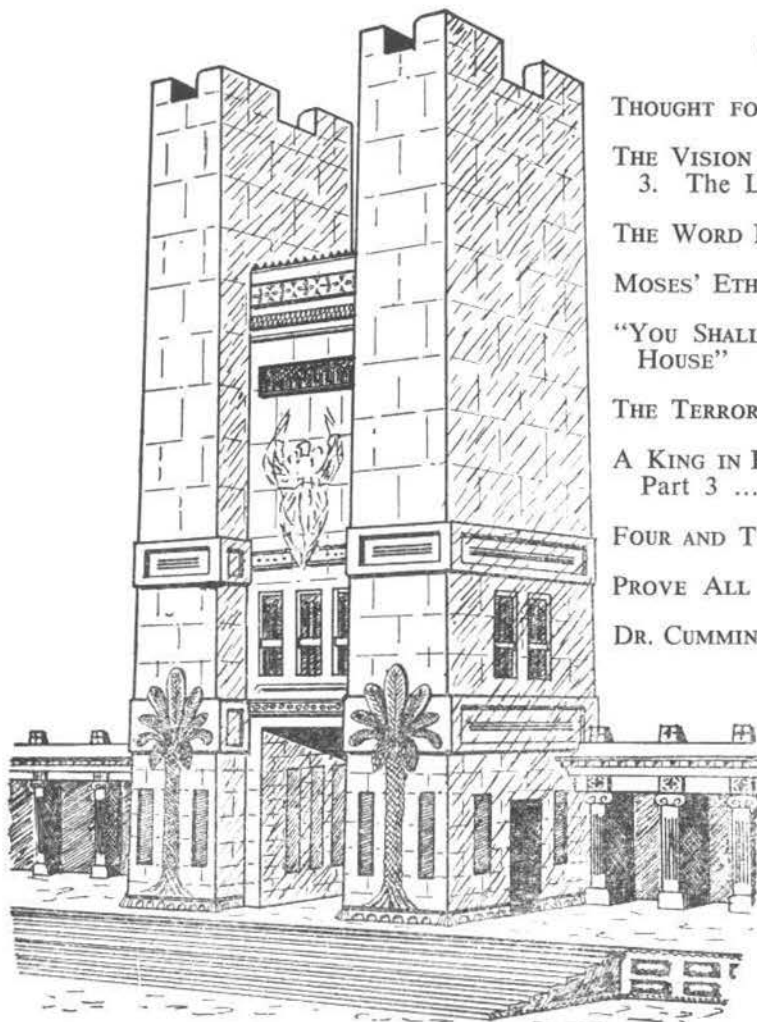
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

Published May 1st

Next issue July 1st

CONTENTS

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	50
THE VISION OF JOEL 3. The Lord's Great Army	51
THE WORD MADE FLESH	54
MOSES' ETHIOPIAN WIFE	59
"YOU SHALL NOT BUILD ME A HOUSE"	61
THE TERROR OF THE LORD	62
A KING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS Part 3	63
FOUR AND TWENTY ELDERS	67
PROVE ALL THINGS	69
DR. CUMMING ON THE MILLENNIUM ...	72



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

*This Journal is sent free
of charge to all who are
genuinely interested, on
request renewable annually
and is supported by the
voluntary gifts of its readers*

Published by
Bible Fellowship Union
11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow
Middlesex, England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, maintaining the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and the validity of their miraculous and prophetic content viewed in the light of modern under-

standing. It stands for the pre-millennial Advent of our Lord and the consequent conversion of the world. It is supported entirely by the voluntary gifts of its readers and all such gifts are sincerely appreciated.

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow, Middlesex, England.
 Secretary & Treasurer: B. G. DUMONT (Hounslow) Editorial & Publishing: A. O. HUDSON (Milborne Port)
 Circulation Control: D. WALTON (Sherborne)

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou wilt call, and I will answer thee; thou wilt have a desire to the work of thy hands" (Job. 14.14).

It is often asserted by contemporary theologians that the idea of a resurrection from the dead was unknown to the ancients; it first took shape in men's minds only a few centuries before Christ. The theologians are, as so often, mistaken in their assertion. Here is a case where faith in the resurrection is voiced so far back as nearly two thousand years before Christ; in fact it is inherent in the Divine promise to Abraham that one day future he would inherit the land in which he was a sojourner and in which he died. The fulfilment of that promise demanded a resurrection. The very basis of the twin faiths of Christianity and Judaism lies in the resurrection of the dead that they may eventually attain to everlasting life—life which transcends death. The faith of the old patriarch Job was well founded; he will one day hear the call and answer it. So will all men. *"All that are in their graves shall hear his voice"* said Jesus *"and come forth"*.

Gone from us

- ❖ —
- Sis. E. Abbott (Bury)
 - Sis. - Moston (Late Lymm)
 - Sis. M. Thomas (Shotton)
 - Sis. F. Tydeman (Late Arundel)
 - Sis. J. Walton (Atherstone)
 - Sis. G. Wilson (Peterborough)
- ❖ —

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

NOTICES

Coming Conventions

YEOVIL, one-day, Sunday, May 6, Westfield School. Details Bro. H. Charlton, 14 Orchard Road, Milborne Port, Sherborne, Dorset.

YEOVIL, Sat.-Mon., May 26-28. Sunday at Moose Hall, St. Michaels Avenue. Other days venue to be announced. Details and accommodation Bro. R. Robinson, 26 Rands Meadow, Holwell-Hitchin, Herts., SG5 3SH.

CHESHAM, Sat.-Sun., June 9-10. Malt House, Elgiva Lane. Details and accommodation Bro. F. Binns, 102 Broad Street, Chesham, Bucks., HP5 3ED.

An appeal. Something like thirty years ago saw the publication of a booklet "The Bible Song of Love" by E. Allbon. A sister would very much like to acquire two copies if available and would meet all expenses. If anyone can help please send them to Miss L. Smyth, 17 Knights Way, Alton, Hants, GU34 1PJ.

Acknowledgment of cheques. In a good many cases friends send their gifts toward the publication of the Monthly by bank cheque, in some cases stating that there is no need to acknowledge. This does represent a saving both in time and postage and such assurance is sincerely appreciated. In its absence we shall of course continue to send an acknowledgment; perhaps those thus sending would say if this is desired in their case. We would however repeat that in view of escalating postal costs we only send acknowledgment of gifts above £1.

Renewals. It is important to return the annual pink renewal slip when it appears in your copy of the Monthly; this is often the only guarantee we have that you are receiving the Monthly safely and still wish to have it. We do also appreciate the courtesy of your advice if you wish to terminate receiving it; we do not want copies to go to waste.

In this connection will overseas readers bear in mind that the transit time of some seven weeks means that unless the renewal slip is returned promptly there is danger that the next issue or issues may be on their way containing a yellow reminder. In the case of overseas readers these are sent four months after the pink renewal slip; even so it not infrequently happens that someone receiving a yellow reminder writes to say that they have returned the pink renewal slip with or without a gift, some weeks or months previously. The point is, of course, that they have passed each other in mid-Atlantic and there is nothing that can be done about this. To avoid this happening, please be prompt in advising your wishes.

THE VISION OF JOEL

3. The Lord's Great Army

*Exposition of the
Book of Joel
Ch. 2. 1-11*

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

(Joel 2.1).

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

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

And God turns! From that point the danger begins to lessen. *"Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people."* (vs. 18). He goes forth like a man of war and drives away the alien invader, returning then to his own people and beginning to bless them in basket and store. All that they have lost is restored to them, and they know at last that He is their God and is dwelling in their midst. And at that point the prophecy merges so definitely into the events of this Gospel Age Time of Trouble that there is no mistaking the application, for here is where we have the promise, quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost that God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh, and deliverance, absolute and complete, will be the portion of those who call upon the name of the Lord. Verses 21-32 of this chapter have never yet been fulfilled in the history of Israel; their realisation lies in the

future; and this is a guide to us in our interpretation of the entire chapter. At this point Joel saw, in vision, into this time in which we ourselves are now living.

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

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

What is this "day of the Lord" to which reference is so often made by the prophets? It is nearly always associated with judgment. It is the day of reckoning, of retribution, the time when the evil harvest of this world's sowing has to be reaped. There was a day of the Lord to come to Israel because of her waywardness just as there is a day of the Lord to come to all the world because of its wickedness. Here in Joel the especial application is to Israel; the time of judgment was about to come upon them and nothing could save them from its impact, although repentance and faith would bring them through it, saved "so as by fire". And it is a long day too: this "day of the Lord" began with the taking of the Ten Tribes, and then, a little later, the Two Tribes, into captivity, and it is to last for twenty-seven hundred years, until the time of "Jacob's

Trouble", yet future. It endures thus long because it can only end with Israel's repentance, and Israel has not yet repented. So it is that the exhortation in vs. 11-14 "Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart . . ." stands as an impassable barrier to the completion of the prophecy, until Israel's blindness is turned away as described by Paul in Rom. 11. 23-26. Well might Joel cry the urgency of his message and call for a trumpet in Zion, for the day of the Lord whose coming he pronounced as imminent was to commence little less than a century after his preaching.

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

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

and all these have played or will play their part in executing the Divine judgments upon that stiff-necked and wayward people that, marvelously, becomes God's own people of faith at the last.

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

This section, from vs. 4 to vs. 9, tells of the invasion, from the first sight of the coming enemy on the far distant hills to that dread moment when the defenders, pressed back into their last stronghold within the city, behold with fear the ruthless soldiers climbing in at their windows and battering down their doors. So has it been, and will be, in Israel's long history; the enemy has continually advanced more and more closely to their total destruction until in their last days it seems as though they are appointed to utter extinction and nothing can save them.

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

Now the invaders have reached the city walls. "They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not

break their ranks" (vs. 7). They have stormed the walls and forced their way into the city, and the desperate defenders have retreated to the shelter of their houses; but to no avail. Their relentless enemies follow hard upon their heels. "They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief" (vs. 9). This is the supreme crisis; the foe has besieged and taken the city and has appeared at the house doors to satiate his lust for pillage and ravage. Zechariah saw that same picture when he spoke (in Zech. 14) of the city being taken, and the houses rifled, and some going forth into captivity. In Zechariah the statement is made that at that crisis the Lord will go forth and deliver his people, but without indicating just why that deliverance comes about. Here in Joel the reason is stated; it is because the people, at last, repent and turn to the Lord their God in faith, and so He delivers. But let Joel tell the splendid story in his own unhurried way.

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

This is what the prophet sees in his vision, the utter disruption of all the normal course of nature in consequence of this calamity that has come upon the city and the people. This can be nothing else than a symbolic foreview of the Last Days, and so Joel must have understood the vision; no ordinary military invasion could justify the use of such extravagant language. Here, at

this point, perhaps, his prophecy passes definitely into the sphere of the times in which we live, the times of the last great trial of faith upon God's earthly people. Later in his prophecy (chap. 3. 16) he sees the issue more clearly and says "the heavens and the earth shall shake; but the Lord will be the hope of his people and the strength of the children of Israel." Isaiah saw something of the same thing when he said "I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger" (Isa. 13. 13) and again, more fiercely, "the earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage . . ." (Isa. 24. 19-20). This is the time that the Lord rises up to judge the earth—but first of all He judges his own people Israel. That is the explanation of the strange word in vs. 11, the word that refers to this savage concourse of barbarian invaders as the "Lord's great army" and their camp as "his camp". The only possible explanation is that He is using them as a means of judgment, his means of testing and purifying Israel. As with Pharaoh of old, He has called them that He might display his glory by them, and when they have served his purpose to that end, pass upon them, in their turn, the judgment they too have richly deserved. So Ezekiel, speaking of much the same thing, says "I will bring thee against my land, that the nations may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog before their eyes" (Ezek. 38. 16).

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

(To be continued)

Secret of Old Jerusalem

The past three years has seen the progress and culmination of an interesting archæological exploration on the sides of the Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) in the south of Jerusalem. For the first time a burial cave which has not been despoiled by past cave robbers has been discovered and yielded up a variety of interesting objects going back to O.T. times. Two tiny silver scrolls, opened and deciphered with considerable difficulty, contained prayers which included the Divine name Yahweh, the first time the Divine name has been found on any object emanating from Jerusalem. An interesting and rather important factor was the finding of definite evidence that Jerusalem continued to have at least

some inhabitants and was the scene of burials after its destruction and desolation by Nebuchadnezzar's armies at the time of the Babylonian Captivity. The O.T. histories do say that some of the poor of the land were left behind to be vinedressers and husbandmen (2 Kings 25.12; Jer. 37.10), although they add that following the almost immediate murder of Gedaliah, the governor appointed by the Babylonians, the remaining population fled into Egypt. It would seem though from these recent discoveries that a fraction of the people did remain to dwell in the ruined city and scratch out a living as best they could. If so, they might well have died out before the end of the Captivity.

THE WORD MADE FLESH

*Jesus in the
Gospel of John*

Of the four Gospels most will agree that John's Gospel stands out away and above all the rest. If Matthew shows Christ as King of Israel, Mark as true servant, Luke as true and perfect man, John shows him as Son of God, the spoken and written Words of God now made flesh to dwell here below. Clement of Alexandria, who lived about A.D.200, wrote "*St. John the last (of the evangelists) when he saw that the outward bodily facts had been set forth in the existing Gospels, impelled by his friends (and) divinely moved by the Spirit, made a spiritual Gospel*". Yes, He who was "the beginning of the creation of God" and "his Master Workman" (Prov. 8.30 R.V. and Var.) through whom all things were made, is here the Sent One of God, to show him forth in all his power and majesty and glory. How often do we feel, as we read this Gospel that we are on holy ground indeed.

Wherever we look in John's Gospel we see God, through and in Christ; our Lord himself said "*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father*" for "*I and my Father are one*". He was visible representation of the Invisible God, as Weymouth translates Col. 1.15. It is quite impossible to plumb the depths of this most marvellous Gospel; we can merely lift out a few salient points, like a speed boat skimming across the waters of a crystal sea, stopping here and there to observe some of the wonders of the deep which lie below the surface.

Romans 15.8 affirms that "*Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made unto the fathers*"; this truth is manifest in this Gospel. "*He came unto his own and his own received him not. But as many as received him to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them who believe on his Name*" which could include Gentiles "*that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy*" (vs. 9).

As the householder who had planted a vineyard, (Matt. 20) God had already sent his servants, the prophets, whom the husbandmen had maltreated, and here now was come the Son who He had sent, who also was yet to be cast out and slain.

We cannot get away from the fact that He came offering himself as the Redeemer and King of Israel. "*Behold the lamb of God*" proclaimed John the Baptist, the lamb slain from the foundation of the world; "*Behold your king*"

said Pilate to the Jews. Whilst there are many other aspects and lessons concerning personal and individual salvation which can be taken, the main thing is to show the developing plan and purpose of God in connection with Israel, the Words and acts of Jesus being both confirmation and extension of much that is written in the O.T. As the aged Simeon said "*This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel and for a sign which shall be spoken against*".

In Chap. 2 is recorded the marriage at Cana of Galilee, where Jesus turned the water into wine; verse 11 tells us it was his first miracle. Incidentally it is significant that John never uses the usual word for 'miracle' which is '*dunamis*' meaning the power to effect such a work, but always '*simeion*' meaning a sign, that is, by which it might be known that He was indeed the Christ. How often in Israel's history had they lived on signs, but, alas, they were not to understand them now.

This miracle or sign took place on the third day; by looking back into the written Word we read in Hosea 6.2 that in the 'third day' Israel will be raised up to "live in God's sight". John 20.31 states that all the signs were given "*that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name*". What a wonderful time that will be when Israel's blindness will be taken away, when the marriage of the Lamb will take place and the "purifying" of the Jews (v.6). Whilst here we are told that miracle manifested forth his glory, so in that day will He shine forth in all his glory, sitting in his throne of glory (Matt. 19.28).

This first sign, then, fraught with such significance, took place in Galilee; how important that is. Divinely over-ruled and directed, for after the temptations in the wilderness whence Jesus was led by the Spirit, He was again led of the Spirit into Galilee, and was there "glorified of all". One could linger over this name of "Galilee" for it was here, the territory of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, that Isaiah prophesied in Ch. 9. that the people should see a great light with the birth of the Divine Child. "*The people which sat in darkness saw great light and to them which dwelt in the land and shadow of death is light sprung up*". Galilee, which became the land of Benjamin, the light bearing tribe on return

from captivity, was that from which came all Christ's disciples except Judas.

How many sermons and addresses have been given on Chap. 3.16! "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son". But the 'whosoever believeth' of this verse cannot receive its wider fulfilment until that 'third day', the next Age. No wonder Jesus reproved Nicodemus for not understanding, when, as a teacher in Israel he should have known from Ezek. 36 and 37 of the Spirit to be poured out and a new heart to be given to Israel that they might be the channel of blessing to the world.

Take a look at the story of the woman of Samaria in Chap. 4. Who was she? No one knows. But in the light of this theme, who may she represent? One of those servants whom God sent before sending his Son gives the clue, (Ezek. 23.2). "There were two women, the daughters of one mother". Verse 4 tells their names; Aholah, who represents Samaria and Aholibah, Jerusalem, terms used in the prophets for the Northern House of Israel and the Southern House of Judah, respectively. God here says that "they were mine". And so they were—God's chosen people. But vs. 3 tells that they both committed whoredoms in Egypt and the rest of that chapter is God's terrible indictment of his people, both Israel and Judah. So in chap. 4 of this "spiritual" Gospel, read "in the spirit", is seen the Sent One of God, the Living Word confirming the written word and laying this sin at the door of Israel, the Northern House, whom God had divorced (Jer. 3.8). Hence this woman "hath no husband" (vs. 18). Of course it is true these things have to be spiritually discerned and as it says here in vs. 11 "the well is deep", nevertheless Daniel tells that "God reveals the deep and secret things" and for us "the spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God". Moreover, did it not all begin at Jacob's well? Oh, yes, that is true. But henceforth true worship is to be not "in this mountain nor yet in Jerusalem, but in spirit and in truth", a lesson not only Israel but the whole world has to learn. With such a message burning in her heart, this woman, who, it is suggested, represents Israel in dispersion, became a great missionary through whose testimony many more were to believe. So Jesus stayed in that place for two days, and as a day to the Lord is one thousand years does that not suggest the Gospel Age? Verily there is much living water of truth waiting here to be brought to the surface. As one apprehends from Moses and the prophets, the difference in God's plan and purposes for Israel, as opposed to Judah, more and more light will break forth from his Word. This is a principle which cannot be

emphasised too much and is truly manifest in this fourth chapter.

Unlike those Samaritans, we cannot tarry and must pass on and in the fifth chapter, read of the healing at the Pool of Bethesda. The invalid was a man who had had his 'infirmity' for thirty-eight years; Deut. 2.14 states that this was the exact period of Israel's wilderness wanderings, caused through unbelief, as with this man. "Wilt thou be made whole?" Jesus asks the man, and it was the Sabbath Day. So will it be with Israel on that antitypical Sabbath when "He will come the second time unto salvation". Although up to that time, like this man, quite impotent, then they too will hear his voice and rise up and walk. Significant too is it that this pool should be called Bethesda, meaning 'House of Mercy', for Jesus here attaches to the Sabbath the meaning of a time to exercise mercy and not sacrifice. Nevertheless, as He says in vs. 45-46, He does not accuse them. Moses does that (meaning the Law of course, in their conscience). "For had you believed Moses you would have believed me; for he wrote of me". Wonderful indeed are the claims he makes to Sonship in the remainder of this chapter and the power bestowed upon him by his Father.

Then follow two more signs or miracles, the only two of the eight in John's Gospel which are repeated elsewhere. Once again in the feeding of the five thousand we see reflected Israel's need and our Lord's ability to meet it, as it led to our Lord's great discourse on the bread of life, and his reference to Moses and the manna in the wilderness. The satisfaction Jesus was able to provide for the multitude from just five small barley loaves, which incidentally was the food of the poor, and two small fishes, is known well enough as well as the significant fact that there were twelve baskets of fragments left over. It is interesting to note that in Mark's account Jesus commanded the disciples to make all the people sit down in companies in ranks by hundreds and by fifties. This too shows the Israelitish connection when we read in Deut. 1.15 that Moses "took the chief of the tribes . . . and made them heads over the people, captains over hundreds and captains over fifties". The whole episode led to many sensing that Jesus was indeed that prophet of whom Moses had prophesied, so rather than they should take him to make him king, He departed into a mountain. Later, when the disciples found themselves in trouble on the sea, He gave the other sign by walking on the water. The interpretation which gives to this the meaning of Jesus appearing at his Second Advent at the end of the Age fits in well with this theme.

The great discourse on the Bread of life following the signs should have made it clear to the Jews that He was the Sent One of God. But they wanted another sign and reminded Jesus of the Manna in the wilderness which *they* thought Moses gave to them. Therefore, "What sign can you show that we might believe you?" they ask. They were blinded and could not see that the sign was already given, that Jesus himself was the true bread of God come down from Heaven.

After this Jesus went up to Jerusalem to the Feast of Tabernacles. Throughout this Gospel his attendance at Feasts and his words spoken there confirm him to be the Word made flesh and the Sent One of God. The Jews questioned among themselves whether He would go to the dispersed among the Gentiles and *teach* the Gentiles (vs. 35); what mixed feelings there must have been when on the last day of the feast (vs. 37) Jesus stood and cried "If any man thirst, let him come unto ME and drink". Lev. 23.26 shows that this was the eighth day, not the seventh. For seven days they had drawn water from the Pool of Siloam to commemorate the water which had sprung from the rock in the desert, but on this day no servile work was to be done, all was to be rejoicing. Truly the whole creation groans, waiting for the antitype of that day. Once again the chief priests and Pharisees raise opposition, focussing their attack on the fact that He came out of Galilee. "Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" they said. Then every man, we are told, went unto his own house. The Son of Man, who had nowhere to lay his head, spent the night on the mountain. The following morning the Jews again tempt him, bringing a woman taken in adultery, saying that she should be stoned according to the Law. Why did Jesus write on the ground?

The woman of Samaria, it was suggested, represented the Northern House of Israel. Here could be pictured Aholibah the other sister of Ezek. 23, representing Judah, for this took place in Jerusalem. A somewhat similar indictment of Judah in Jer. 17.13. states that their sin shall be "written in the earth". Here they had asked that the woman be judged by the Law, which only condemns. So Jesus turns it back on themselves as representing Judah. He applies the law of Numbers, Chap. 5 where the priest takes dust from the floor of the Tabernacle and mixes it with holy water as a jealousy offering for an unfaithful wife. Thus were those scribes and Pharisees convicted by their own conscience as Judah will yet be when they behold him whom they have rejected.

It is said that at this Feast of Tabernacles the city was brilliantly illuminated, especially around the Temple, in which great lamps, used only on these occasions, were lit. This no doubt provided the opportunity for our Lord to go on to speak of himself as the light of the world, the very antithesis of the darkness in which these Jews were walking. Clinging to their natural descent from Abraham they were ignorant of the spiritual implications of this as to conduct; rather they were doing the deeds of their father, the Devil, Jesus tells them, which led them to take up stones to stone him.

With such darkness manifested in Israel the sign in Chap. 9 of the blind man being healed by Jesus, the Sent One of God is truly significant, for by accepting him the whole nation could have had its blindness removed. Again, however, the anger of the Jews was roused and they cast out the previously blind man. One cannot help but marvel at the strength given to this man to testify as he did. "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" and "Herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes" he exclaimed. In a future day when Israel's blindness is taken away how great will be their testimony also to a wondering world. Until then they are as the Pharisees here who asked Jesus "Are we blind also?" and he replied "If you were blind you should have no sin; but now you see, therefore your sin remaineth" thus laying the emphasis on their sin of unbelief.

Our Lord went on to speak of the sheepfold, saying that He was both the door and the good shepherd (vss. 7 and 11), and any that entered not through him were thieves and robbers. Their minds were truly blinded to the false shepherds spoken of in Ezek. Chap. 34. Our Lord also spoke of having 'other' sheep in vs. 16, the word used meaning other of the same kind, which He said "are not of this fold". "Them also I must bring . . . and there shall be one flock" (a different word from fold). These are pictures of the scattered ten-tribed Israel, separate from Judah, represented here by the Pharisees, so that together they shall be one flock with one shepherd, as in Ezek. Chap. 34, particularly vs. 23 "I will set up one shepherd over them and he shall feed them, even my servant David".

So the great testimony goes on, coming to probably the greatest of all signs to Israel, the raising of Lazarus. "Lazarus is dead" Jesus says in vs. 14. Earlier in Chap. 4 Jesus had given another sign by the healing of the nobleman's son, who was "at the point of death". Thus was Israel when Jesus spoke for He had not then

been rejected. Here however He had already been rejected so Lazarus, representing Israel, dies. No hope now, apart from the Sent One of God exercising his power and authority to call Lazarus from the grave and to breathe his spirit into his dead body which had been there for "four days"—"four days";—does that not suggest the four thousand years from the birth of the nation—and thus fulfil Ezek. Chap. 37, 1-14. What a wonderful time that will be, as that chapter of Ezek. foretells. No wonder our Lord tells Martha that "If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God". In that future day the glory of the Lord will be seen returning to the antitypical Temple, as Ezekiel describes in his 43rd chapter, "with the voice of God", he says "like the noise of many waters; and the earth shined with his glory".

Towards the end of that 11th chapter Jesus is shown as the scapegoat for the nation, and, (vs. 52) "not for that nation only, but that He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad". Who were these people separate from the nation itself? Is this another reference to the Northern House of Israel, now scattered into many countries, as Josephus, Esdras and others tell us? Maybe there is some deep significance in the fact that vs. 53 tells that Jesus walked no more *openly* among the Jews, a term never applied in Scripture to the Northern House of Israel. Instead, He went into a "country near to the wilderness into a city called Ephraim" which is the name used so often when referring to the House of Israel as opposed to the House of Judah.

Chapter 12 carries the weight of the approaching climax, with Mary anointing the feet of Jesus with precious ointment, the fragrance of which filled the house, reminiscent of the Song of Solomon 1.12 "While the king sitteth at his table my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof" followed by our Lord's entry into Jerusalem in fulfilment of Zech. 9. Alas, the people's cry of "Hosanna, Blessed is the King of Israel" was soon to turn to "crucify him, crucify him". Nevertheless the people's acclaim led the Pharisees to exclaim "Behold the world has gone after him", a significant enough remark when followed by the arrival of the Greeks, causing Jesus to say "The hour is come". Up to now it had not come (see Chaps. 2-4; 7.6; 8.30 etc). But now the "corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die" to bring forth more fruit, that these Greeks and others of the world may be grafted into the Olive Tree of blessing previously reserved for Israel. Thereby too, was to come the judgment of this world, the casting out of its prince, and the eventual drawing of all men

back to God through his Christ (vss. 31, 32). For the present, though He had done so many miracles before them, they believed not on him (vss. 37-40), as Isaiah had prophesied; "He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts". In the words of Zech. 11 as the stave called 'Beauty' or 'graciousness' He had come to them and as the stave called 'Bands' or 'union' He would have effected reconciliation between the House of Israel and the House of Judah. Instead both staves were broken and him they took for the price of thirty pieces of silver, compensation for the death of a slave in Exod. 21, 32. Here the Word made flesh, the Sent One of God, his own beloved Son, had become the sacrificial lamb, delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Although He had finished the work the Father had given him to do and was therefore raised from the dead on the actual third day, as far as Israel as a nation is concerned He and they must await the expiry of the symbolic four days during which Lazarus remained in the grave, four thousand years from the beginnings of the nation, until He again comes forth, this time without sin unto salvation (Heb. 9.28) and the whole twelve tribed Israel begin to live again in his sight.

But what of the interim period? We may be sure Our Lord's cry from the cross "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" did not go unheeded. It led to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the ministry of the Acts period. God was certainly not mocking his people when He sent forth Peter with the message "Repent, that the time of refreshing may come . . ." but giving them a further opportunity of doing just that. This does throw light on the closing reference, the last of the eight signs which John records in Chap. 21, our Lord's appearance, after his resurrection, at the Sea of Galilee. Certain disciples, the morning after a night of ceaseless and rewarding toil in fishing, were suddenly confronted with a stranger who proved to be their risen Lord.

If, in the first sign at Cana in Galilee, our Lord manifested forth his glory, here He manifested *himself*, for the word "shewed" in verses 14 is the same, in the Greek, as, taking hold of the disciples' confession of failure He turned it into abundant success. Hitherto they had not recognised him, but now, "It is the Lord", says the disciple whom Jesus loved, and Peter is immediately galvanised into action, as the other disciples haul in their great catch in an *unbroken* net, not as in a previous miracle when the net broke, again not without significance. Now, looked at "in the spirit" does this not suggest what was to be a great future ingathering of believers to the

Gospel net, especially when at the end of that chapter our Lord calls Peter, to whom He had given the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, to "feed" his "sheep".

In this respect surely the number of fishes caught in the net—one hundred and fifty three—is fraught with significance. Every Greek letter has a numerical value; the total for "Sons of God" is 153. If this suggested interpretation is correct, then the Sons of God are made so only by the Gospel, as Paul declares in Rom. 10.26.

Referring to the words of Hosea the prophet to Israel, "Ye are Lo-Ammi, not my people", there he says they have now become "Sons of God"; not until the last one is gathered in can the marriage of the King's son take place.

No wonder that at the end of that passage in Romans Paul exclaims "O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out".

JEHOSHAPHAT'S SHIPS — A note on 2 Chron. 20. 36

An incident at Eilat (Elath), the southern-most extremity of Israel, twenty years ago, illustrates a casual word in 2 Kings 22. 48 and 2 Chron. 20. 36. Good king Jehoshaphat had built a fleet of ocean-going vessels, "ships of Tarshish", at Ezion-geber on the Red Sea, to go to Ophir for gold. But, says the chronicler, they never set sail because they were wrecked at Ezion-geber. Eliezer the prophet told Jehoshaphat that the calamity was a retribution from the Lord because he had allied the godless king Ahab to be associated with him in the project. Be that as it may, the ships were wrecked before they set out.

The Israelite port of Ezion-geber, used for Israel's overseas trade to Arabia, Africa and India from the days of King Solomon onward (1 Kings 9. 26, 2 Chron. 8. 17), stood within a few miles of the modern town and port of Eilat at the head of the Gulf of Akaba. Eilat is Israel's essential southern outlet to the world's sea-routes and just as important to modern Israel as was Ezion-geber to their forebears in the days of Solomon and Jehoshaphat. The "Jerusalem Post" in 1964 reported an unusually violent storm at Eilat sweeping in from the usually calm and

placid sea, with high winds and towering sixteen-foot waves smashing the harbour installations, capsizing a floating crane, and destroying the fleet of glass-bottomed boats which normally take tourists out to view the beauties of the seabed. The "Post" explained that Eilat is unprepared for this kind of storm; it is an extremely rare meteorological phenomenon which is caused by atmospheric conditions. The wind at Eilat usually blows consistently from the north, down a gigantic funnel formed by high mountain ranges on either side of the deep ravine which stretches from the Dead Sea down to Eilat. Should the northern part of Israel experience a sudden wave of cold air, however, and the barometric pressure fall to a lower figure than is subsisting at Eilat with its tropical climate, a great rush of air from the Gulf of Akaba surges northward, whipping up the sea into huge waves and creating tempestuous winds, with consequent damage to anything in its path.

This is evidently what happened at the time King Jehoshaphat's ill-fated expedition was about to set out from the same spot. The modern incident is an unwitting testimony to the reliability of the Biblical account.

Birkett on the Bible

The following words were spoken by a famous judge of the early 20th Century, Lord Justice (Sir Norman) Birkett, on the occasion of his addressing the boys of a public school in 1951

"Here is a mystery which seems past finding out—how it comes that certain simple words placed in a certain order can yet move the human heart beyond all expression, as they do.

"Open the Authorised Version of the Bible almost anywhere you like and you will find exactly what I mean."

The simplicity of the Gospel message is mirrored by the simplicity of the words in which it is conveyed to us. That is why the Bible has a

message for all, learned and unlearned alike. Books written to explain the Bible are often far more difficult to understand than the Book they profess to explain. And that is true of many sermons and addresses and expositions given from the pulpit and platform. In all our service and ministry let us seek for simplicity of expression, for that will appeal to the greatest number and effect the greatest good. If so able and eloquent a man as Sir Norman Birkett, who was one of the most famous barristers in this country, recommends simplicity of speech and writing as a desirable thing, and points to the Divine Word as an example, we surely do well to follow suit.

MOSES' ETHIOPIAN WIFE

"And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman" (Num. 12.1).

Every now and again someone asks how it could be that Moses, the champion of the Lord for the chosen people, could have married an Ethiopian who was therefore of the descendants of Ham, youngest son of Noah. There was strong objection in Israel to such marriages although the assumption is that Moses had thus married before he left Egypt, which then only raises the second question how he later came to marry Zipporah the Midianite when he apparently had left one wife back in Egypt.

The word "Ethiopian" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word "Cush" who in Gen. 10.8 is recorded as one of the sons of Ham. The Cushites became the people known to history as the Sumerians; eventually many of their tribes migrated, some down the eastern side of the Persian Gulf and into India, where they established the Indus civilisation which endured from about 2000 BC to 1500 BC, others down the western side and across Arabia and over the Red Sea into Africa where they became the people known to the Egyptians as Cush, living mainly in what is now the Sudan. Jewish legend has it that Moses when at the court of Pharaoh led an invading army into Cush and returned in triumph but there is probably no truth in that. "Ethiopia" in the A.V. is taken from old Anglo-Saxon versions which were based largely on the Greek Septuagint which used this word to translate the Hebrew "Cush", but to the Greeks the whole of the southern world from Africa to India was denoted by the word Ethiopia (English travellers as late as the 17th Century still used the name in that sense).

The Cushites were despised by the Egyptians, who called them "vile Cush" and lost no opportunity of waging war on them. It would have been social suicide for Moses to marry into that nation while still at the Egyptian court and most unlikely. Another factor is that by deduction from Scripture records, at that time in history a man was rarely below the age of fifty at marriage, and since Moses fled to Midian at age forty, his marriage whilst there and return forty years later with two sons is perfectly logical. There is no evidence aside from this questionable state-

ment in Num. 12.1 that he had been married before.

Zipporah, his Midianite wife (Exod. 2. 15-22) was a descendant of Abraham through his wife Keturah. She was therefore of Semitic race and there would be no valid objection on that score against the union. Midianites were scattered all over the lands south of Canaan and the tribal name of the Sinai Midianites was Cushan (referred to only once in the O.T. in Hab. 3.7 "*I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble*"). The almost certain explanation of Num. 12.1 is that by an early copyist's mistake Cushan was turned into Cush by the omission of the final N. The archaic Hebrew N in the days before Ezra was a very insignificant little "squiggle" and could easily have been missed.

On this basis the text tells us that Moses had married a Cushan Midianite, which is what Exodus 2 says anyway. The objection raised by Aaron and Miriam to the nationality of his wife was probably evoked by jealousy and fear that one of Moses' own sons by Zipporah would be appointed by him to succeed him as Israel's leader when the time came. They, and probably most of their fellows, would much prefer a full-blooded son of Israel. They need not have worried; when the time did come, the Lord brought forth his own choice for leader, the stalwart Joshua. This is one of the lessons we all find hard to learn, that the Lord is perfectly able to raise up his own instrument to carry on any section of his work when the torch begins to fall from failing hands. We need not plan and devise and agonise for the continuance of that which He has left in our charge for a space of time.

One has to realise that many of the women of the Old Testament history were not of Israel, although of Semitic race. Isaac married Rebecca who was of Nahor, brother to Abraham. Jacob married Rachel and Leah of the same stock. Salmon prince of Judah at the Entry to the Land married Rahab of Jericho whose name shows she was Semitic, either of Abraham through Esau, Ishmael or Keturah, or of Nahor. Tamar who carried on the Messianic line from Judah was not of Jacob but her name too reveals that she was Semitic. Ruth who married Boaz was a Moabite, from Lot the son of Haran another

brother of Abraham. There was no inconsistency therefore in the case of Moses.

There is sometimes encountered a type of theological application which likens Moses to Christ, his forty years in Midian between his departure from Egypt and his return thereto to the interval between Christ's First and Second Advents, and his marriage to Zipporah a picture of his selection of the "Bride of Christ", the church of this intervening Christian Age. Thus, it is said, Zipporah, being black, a Gentile negress, fitly pictures the Gentiles, originally sinful, therefore black, taken into association with Christ. All this is based upon the assertion in some Bible cyclopedias that the name "Cush" means black and that he was a black man and the ancestor of the African negroes.

Unfortunately for the theory, "Cush" does not mean black!

Whilst it is true that purely Hebrew names often have a meaning which can be elucidated by the construction of the word—thus Jesus in Greek is the Hebrew Joshua, or more properly Jehoshua, which means God is Saviour, the same practice cannot be applied to non-Hebrew names. There is no Hebrew word closely resembling Cush which means black. And Cush was given his name long before there were any Hebrews or any Hebrew language. He was certainly the ancestor of the Sumerians and that language is the oldest one that is now known, but the Sumerian word for black is "gig" — not very similar. No one knows what was the nature of the language spoken by Noah and his sons, only that later languages were derived from it. It is probably true that many of the black peoples of Africa are descended from Cush but their black colour developed after they had settled in Africa and not before. The various colours of men in

different climes are the result of long habitation under specialised conditions of climate and food, and probably other factors not yet completely understood. There is no reason for thinking that Noah had grandsons in a variety of colours. In fact there is evidence to the contrary. According to Gen. 10, Cush had a brother named Phut. The Phutites in later generations also crossed into Africa and colonised the north right across the continent to the Atlantic, in days when the present Sahara desert was a fertile well-watered country abounding in forests and animal life. Today there are cave-paintings still existing in that barren and uninhabited waste executed by, and depicting, those Phutites of four thousand years ago but they are not shown as black. They are painted with red and yellow skins; their descendants today are deep brown.

There is no means of determining the colour of the first men, nor yet that of Noah and his sons. The white races tend to think that they must have been white; but the Chinese insist quite as logically that they were yellow. We just do not know. What we do know is that God "*hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth*" (Acts 17.16) and that all men everywhere, of whatever colour, are able to propagate their own kind with each other but not with any other earthly creature. Perhaps the Lord, who is the supreme Artist in creation, sees some advantage in having men ultimately develop five outward colours, whilst still being men inside, just as He has ordained variety in the rest of his creation. But coming back to the main point, there is not much doubt that the only woman Moses married, the mother of his children, was the daughter of the Midianite chieftain who gave him hospitality during his term of exile and proved to be as much a reverential worshipper of the true God as was Moses himself.

Gemariah the son of Shaphan

Only a name in the 36th Chapter of Jeremiah. He was a scribe to King Jehoiakim just when the Babylonians were threatening the city and he figured in the political manoeuvrings of the time. They used to say that such personalities never had a real existence; the stories in which they figured in the O.T., were dreamed up by pious men of later centuries, on the basis of old traditions and legends, to invest Israel with a glorious history.

In this case at least, not any more. Last year's excavations in the City of David revealed a room

deep down below the present city which proved to be some sort of administrative centre in the palace of the Kings at the time of Jehoiakim, and there, among a great number of seals bearing the names of State officials, with which they sealed or "signed" papyrus documents, was one bearing the name of Gemariah the son of Shaphan, royal secretary. Gemariah either perished in the siege or ended his days a captive in Babylon; he left behind his personal signature seal to witness to us, two and a half millenniums later, that he really did live, that the Bible is true.

YOU SHALL NOT BUILD ME A HOUSE

1 Chronicles 17. 1-10

Imagine ourselves for a moment in David's shoes. He has been successfully established as King over Israel and has rebuilt Jerusalem as his capital city. A great Thanksgiving service is held, David himself offering the sacrifice to God. There is singing, music and dancing, and all Israel rejoices with him before the Lord. Finally it is time for David to go home.

Relaxing with his household, and blessing them with his account of the celebrations and the Lord's goodness, David becomes silent and thoughtful. He looks around him. The house itself is walled with fine cedar and richly furnished and decorated. His righteous heart is suddenly appalled. "Here am I dwelling in comfort and splendour", he thinks to himself, "while the Ark of God—the very symbol of his presence and blessing, lies in a tent!". Straightway his intention is to build his Lord and Redeemer a fitting house.

However, the Lord intervenes through the prophet Nathan. "Go and tell David my servant, 'Thus says the Lord, you shall not build a house for me to dwell in, for I have not dwelt in a house since the day that I brought up Israel to this day, but I have been from tent to tent and dwelling place to dwelling place'" (1 Chron. 7. 4-5).

God is saying to David that by his Spirit He has lived among the people since the day that He led them out of Egypt. "God is Spirit," observed our Lord Jesus "and they that worship him worship in Spirit and Truth" (John 4.24). The lesson that David was being taught, was that God was not to be considered in terms of bricks and stone or flesh and blood. He is to be understood in terms of Spirit and as one that inhabits a spiritual Temple. Paul expressed the same principle when he taught the Corinthian believers that "*flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable*" (1. Cor. 15.50). Years later, when Solomon was commissioned to build the Temple he acknowledged that, in reality, God could not abide in a stone dwelling place, for not even the Universe itself can contain him" (1 Kings 8.27).

The lesson that David learnt was a valuable one and very relevant to us today. God promises David that He would build a house—an enduring inheritance—for him. Herein lies the fundamental truth for us to appreciate, We can do NOTHING for God; He must do EVERYTHING for us. Religious zeal and enthusiasm have stirred the hearts of God's people down the

centuries to our present day. Like David we marvel at the Grace and Providence of God and desire earnestly to do something in return for him. But it is futile to think in this way. In Psalm 127.1. we read, "*Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it*". The lesson had been learnt!

Do we have big meetings? Does the power of praise and worship overwhelm us? Are we experiencing some mighty act of God among us? Have we returned, like David, to our everyday lives with a resolution to earnestly commit ourselves to the building up of the Church, God's temple? You and I know that we have.

Here then is the problem. We are saying, in effect, "Lord, let me show you what I can do for you", when in all humility, acknowledging the poverty of our human condition, we should exclaim, "Lord, show me what you want me to do!". The religious heart of man, inspired by God's majesty and goodness, desires to put himself at his disposal and so offer his resources to "extend the Kingdom". This is folly. The Temple of God in Spirit is not the fusion of bricks and mortar; it is not even the binding together of man to man in earnest church-building. The Temple of God is spiritual, it is invisible, a place in which we are joined, through faith, in the Spirit (Eph. 2. 19-22).

We cannot build for God. Instead, if we will permit it, He will build for us, in us, and with us. He will prepare us as living stones in the quarry of our earthly sojourn, and in due season, transport us to the place where we shall see that we have become the New Jerusalem that comes down out of Heaven from God. This will be the manifestation of his Kingdom (1 Cor. 15.50-53; 1 Thess. 4.15-17).

David's heart was right with God, but he misunderstood the response that He requires. He was motivated by love and gratitude as we so often are. Yet he had to learn that he, as a man, could offer nothing and do nothing of himself. God alone is the builder. He alone the executor of his plans. We are at most pliant instruments in his hands, clay upon the Potter's wheel.

"For our citizenship (true home) is in HEAVEN from which we eagerly await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who will transform our lowly body into conformity with his glorious body, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject ALL things unto himself" (Phil. 3. 20-21).

THE TERROR OF THE LORD

A much misunderstood text

"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5. 11). What is this "terror" of the Lord?

Any idea that the Lord endeavours to frighten men into conversion by fear of the consequences of refusal is out of the question. A conversion motivated by fear is not worth anything to God; He will have his creatures' loyalty and allegiance by love and gratitude or not at all. In this respect some of the oldtime revivalists who tried to scare men into repentance by lurid descriptions of the fate awaiting the unregenerate were, however sincerely, grievously in error. The text must be understood in relation to St. Paul's argument and in harmony with the known purpose and character of God.

The main theme of 2 Cor. 5 is that a spiritual body, adapted to the conditions of life in another world, a "house eternal in the heavens", is waiting for the believer after the termination of this life, and that this is an object of keenest anticipation to the Christian. Nevertheless we are content in this present life, labouring, whether absent from the Lord or present with him, to be acceptable in his sight, knowing that we must ultimately appear before the *Bema*, the place of judgment where our Lord will review the life's work of each believer and give his verdict. It is in the knowledge of the solemnity and majesty of that "Last Assize", says St. Paul, that we "persuade men"—conduct our missionary work.

The word "terror" in the text is *phobos* which is generally used for fear or terror in the N.T. According to Thayer the word has two main significations, (1) Fear, dread or terror in a subjective sense (2) Reverence or respect for rank, authority or dignity. It is easy to understand how the second meaning was derived from the first in an age when respect for authority normally had an element of fear associated. The extent to which this element has to be given weight in any given instance must depend upon the nature of the case. When St. Paul says "Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil" (Rom. 13. 3) the usage is terror or fear in its most

elemental sense. When on the other hand he says "Let the wife see that she reverence her husband" (Eph. 5. 33—"Reverence" here is *phobos*) the idea of respect is uppermost and that of fear entirely absent. Likewise 1 Pet. 2. 18 "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear" (i.e., with the respect due to their position). The injunction of Rom. 13.7 "Render to all their due, tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour" can only be understood as referring to the normal respect due to civil authority. In just the same fashion the numerous references to the "fear of God" in the N.T. have to be understood as referring to that respect and reverence which is due to God on account of his high authority.

The N.E.B. rendering of the passage in question is perhaps the most helpful. "We must all have our lives laid open before the tribunal of Christ, where each must receive what is due to him for his conduct in the body, good or bad. With this fear of the Lord before our eyes we address our appeal to men". It is to be noted that the softer word "fear" is substituted for "terror" in the N.E.B., the R.S.V., the R.V. and all modern translations. "Terror" came into the A.V. from the Geneva Bible which was the only one of the pre-A.V. versions to adopt the word—some say due to the influence of John Knox, who had much to do with that version. It is probably true that "terror" was adopted in view of the close relation of the text to St. Paul's words regarding the "judgment seat of Christ", at a time when the Last Judgment was looked upon as a day of foreboding and dread. The character of the Most High is better understood to-day; so far from being a stern and merciless despot He is in reality an all-wise Creator, who will by no means loose his hold of any one of his creatures whilst any hope remains that such can be persuaded to turn from sin and serve the living God. It was with this kind of "godly fear" in his mind that the Apostle Paul went about his business of "persuading men".

The discouragements and disappointments and disillusionments of this our day, in this our Christian walk, are so great and forceful that we need a power in our lives able to withstand their assaults. That power is our possession of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of faith and of hope, and, too, the Spirit of joy.

The law of God, by the hammer of affliction, or by the smiting of judgment, may break the heart; but our hearts may be bruised and shattered by calamity and yet remain as frigid as an iceberg. It is the work of grace that is just as powerful to break the heart as to heal it.

A KING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

*A short study in the
Millennial Visions of Isaiah*

Part 3.

The latter part of Isaiah's thirty-second chapter seems to be a pen-picture of one aspect of the transition from this age into the next, almost as though the prophet, after describing the general characteristics of the "reign of righteousness" as it is going to affect ordinary men, turns his eyes upon those who in this age have wielded authority and exercised power over those same ordinary folk and tells them in no unmeasured terms that the time of their luxurious indulgence is ended and that conditions will be very different in the Millennial Kingdom. His especial theme is the passing away of the works of man as exemplified in the cities and palaces and fortresses of this present order of things, and the coming into its own of that world of Nature, of mountains and valleys and fields and streams, which has been so cruelly despoiled by heedless and callous men but in that day is to become the environment in which redeemed mankind will live its life. "They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, and none shall make them afraid." (Micah 4. 4).

First of all, then, in this section of his thesis, Isaiah addresses the luxury-loving, indolent, wealthy women of Jerusalem. "Rise up, ye women that are at ease," he commands, and the scorn that is in his voice comes to us even in the printed words. "Hear my voice, ye careless daughters; give ear unto my speech. Many days and years ("days above a year" is the Hebrew, an idiom meaning "soon" "imminent") shall ye be troubled, ye careless women; for the vintage shall fail, the gathering shall not come." (Chap. 32., vs. 9-10). In every age the "idle rich" have lived upon the industry of the poor; the abundant harvests of the land have yielded their quota to the luxurious living of the propertied classes, many of whom have been content to take, and live on, their gains without contributing any kind of work or labour themselves. These "careless daughters" of Jerusalem were parasites of this kind. There was plenty of refinement and luxury in Jerusalem in Isaiah's day. The continued connection of Judah and Israel with the merchant nation of antiquity, the Phœnicians, whose capital city was Tyre, a connection that commenced in David's day with his friendship with Hiram, king of Tyre (1 Ki. 5. 1) was continued by Solomon (1 Ki. 5. 10-12) and later by Ahab the husband of Jezebel, daughter of the then king of Tyre, brought all of the world's products into Jewish homes. Dwellers in Jerusalem could obtain for themselves—if they had the

money—any and every article of ornament and luxury that the world afforded. The contrast between these plutocrats and the simple hard-working peasantry of the Judean highlands was very great, and Isaiah was not the only prophet who fearlessly denounced the indolence and the profligacy of the rich. That the judgment of God would one day come upon them he had no doubt. "There is a crying for wine in the streets; all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone. In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction." (Isa. 24. 11-12). Adroitly, he connects Jerusalem, the wicked city, with her daughters and the condemnation he pronounces is equally applicable to both. Jeremiah, too, is equally forthright. "I have likened the daughter of Zion" (Jerusalem), he says, "to a comely and delicate woman . . . Prepare ye war against her; arise, and let us go up . . . For thus hath the Lord of hosts said, 'Hew ye down trees, and cast a mount against Jerusalem: this is the city to be visited' (with judgment) 'she is wholly oppression in the midst of her.'" (Jer. 6. 1-6).

But Isaiah was seeing something more distant than the overthrow of Jerusalem that came in the days of Nebuchadnezzar; and the "idle rich" for whom his burning words of reproof were chiefly intended were those of this twentieth century A.D. rather than these of the eighth century B.C. Isaiah's prophecy here had already passed into the sphere of the Millennial Age and he had already described some of the conditions of that rule of righteousness inaugurated by the king who is to reign in righteousness. So the condemnation of verses 9 to 12 of Chapter 32 is a condemnation of the idle and heedless materialists of this present time, when all their works and all their possessions and all their buildings and cities are crumbling before their eyes. They shall lament, he declares in verse 12, for the cattle-clad hills, for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine. To-day we see that word fulfilled. "They that have" are lamenting as never before over the loss of their possessions and their privileges. Under this figure of a disintegrating city in which the buildings are falling down and Nature is moving in to cover the wreckage with quick growing undergrowth we have a vivid picture of the passing of twentieth century civilisation, and with that, the passing of the rule of man. "Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city; because the palaces shall be

forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left: the forts and towers shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks." (vs. 12-13). Those who live in the cities of England had good cause forty years ago to know how quickly the ragged ruins of man's making become invested with the green of weeds and flowers and shrubs; in a matter of three or four years the derelict sites of bombed buildings in the heart of London became hidden beneath a tangle of self-sown vegetation and on occasion quite sizeable trees. That is Nature's return to the places from which man has ousted her to put up their own erections, erections which have no life in themselves and as soon as they crumble under the weight of man's own evil forces must give place to the vigorous, irresistible tide of life that sweeps from the places of fields and trees. The thorns and briars come first, yes, but Isaiah goes on to show that after the thorns and briars come the fruitful fields and the quiet arts of agriculture, and then God's earth will be as He intended from the first. But all that comes later on in the chapter.

The judgment that is proclaimed, then, is one that comes upon the world at the time of Christ's taking his kingdom and commencing his reign. In symbolic imagery the cities are destroyed, their buildings broken down, the scenes of gaiety and debauchery in the "houses of joy" brought to an end. The palaces are forsaken—what a toppling of thrones and a losing of crowns there has been in these last days, the "Day of his Preparation!" The forts and towers shall be for dens of wild animals—what revelation of impotency of each military weapon is made almost as soon as it has been invented, counter-weapon matched against each new device of military science. The whole world system is crumbling, and the world is becoming a place where thorns and briars are spreading quickly over the ruins that man has made himself. Even in a literal sense these things are true of the world's cities and areas that men inhabit; how much more true it is in a symbolic or a spiritual sense of the world order that, as Peter says, is to pass away with a great noise! One of the finest passages in the whole of the Bible from a purely literary point of view is the one in which Isaiah's brother-prophet, Jeremiah, saw the same thing. "I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by his fierce anger." (Jer. 4. 23-26). "The

wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness" the Apostle tells us, and although this crowning disaster to the work of humankind and this irretrievable ruin of men's systems of life and of government is entirely due to man's fault and altogether to man's adoption of the rule of selfishness it is nevertheless quite correctly described as a manifestation of the wrath of God—that God who loves the sinner while He hates the sin, and is working silently, patiently, and effectively to eliminate the sin so that He can receive the repentant and chastened sinner back into reconciliation with himself and give to him his eternal inheritance.

This is where Isaiah moves on into that position also. Like the God he served, this farsighted prophet of good tidings had no mind to proclaim woe and disaster without declaring the sequel. The thorns and briars were to come up, the palaces and fortresses to become ruins, the city to be abandoned and darkness cover the whole scene of desolation, but only for a time—"until" . . .

Until what?

"Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest." (vs. 15).

This is a "key" Scripture. The pouring out of the Spirit from on high, on all flesh, is pre-eminently a sign of the inauguration of the Kingdom. The ruins of the Time of Trouble are to lie waste only until that glad day has dawned and then a breath of new life will come upon the world. Here is where the natural picture of the exuberant life of the countryside invading the ruined city and clothing its broken brickwork with Nature's endless variety of form and colour has its application. The Millennial Age is essentially an age of verdant fields and fruitful trees and sparkling streams, and so soon as Armageddon is past, the sprawling ruins of man's making will give place to the all-conquering beauties of Divine creation. The wilderness shall become a fruitful field and the old broken-down palaces and fortresses be seen no more. "Is it not yet a very little while," asks Isaiah again (29. 17, 18), "and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest? And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness."

This pouring out of the Spirit from on high, resulting in the vivifying of the very soil so that Nature herself responds, is probably literally as well as spiritually true. The power of the Holy Spirit will without doubt be exercised creatively as it was at the first in bringing the earth itself

to that degree of fruitfulness which will make it a fitting and adequate abode for the millions of redeemed humanity. That the Spirit does exert such power in the material creation is evidenced by the noble words of Psalm 104. 30, where, speaking of the living creatures of the earth, the animals and the birds and the fishes, the Psalmist says "thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created, and thou renewest the face of the earth". If that is true in this age of the earth's incompleteness, how much more in the day of its fulness!

Dr. Moffatt, in one of his rare flashes of insight, renders this passage in a very appealing manner. "Yet one day from the heights of heaven a spirit shall breathe into us, till the downs grow like an orchard, and the orchard like a forest." The whole picture is that of fruit-bearing trees rising up to take the places of the thorns and briars which at the first grew up over the ruins of the city, and then those fruitful trees growing so sturdy and luxuriant that they become as it were a veritable forest. This brings us very near to Ezekiel's vision of the trees of life growing on both sides of the river of life, and the constantly ripening fruit and evergreen leaves that are to be for the food and for the healing of the nations.

This is where righteousness is triumphant. "Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." (vs. 16-17). There is a contrast here. First there is the desolation of briars and thorns, the wreck of the old world, on which Divine judgment has come. Judgment is to remain on that wilderness. But that same wilderness is to give place to an orchard of fruit trees, a "fruitful field", and in that fruit-bearing grove, that is the symbol of the new world, righteousness is to remain. The severity of God's judgment remains on the "wilderness" until that wilderness is wholly swallowed up by the "fruitful field" which is to replace it. So, quite rapidly, the wreckage of the old world will be cleared up and the institutions of the Millennial Age take its place, institutions that are built on equity and inspired by righteousness. Here it is that Millennial blessings begin to come to mankind in consequence of the work of the glorified Church. This is the point at which the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of the Father, and the beneficent influence of the reign of Christ begins to make itself felt in the earth. "The work of righteousness shall be peace." This word "work" is "maaseh," meaning the act of doing something. The ministrations of the "kings

and priests" are here referred to; all that they do and all their activities are directed to the teaching and the education and the conversion to Christ of all mankind who can be induced to repentance. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Dan. 12. 3). The effect of their endeavours will be peace—peace on earth and peace in the hearts of men, a complete fulfilment of the angels' Bethlehem song. That is stressed in the rest of the verse. "The effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." Peace and security! They are the two great blessings for which mankind is constantly yearning. The avowed object of the "Welfare State" is to secure these two things for all its citizens but it does not succeed in producing either. Only the kingdom of Christ can do that. And, once secured, it will be for all eternity. "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." (Rev. 21. 4).

And now Isaiah looks out across the sunlit Millennial landscape and he sees a people, dwelling safely, and happy at last. The city has gone, utterly destroyed in that last time of human madness and Divine retribution, but "my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings and in quiet resting-places." (vs. 18). Says Moffatt again "my people shall have homes of peace, and rest in houses undisturbed." The promise elsewhere is that "they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree" (of the tree of life—Septuagint) "are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands" (Isa. 65. 21-22). The picture is one of complete and unalloyed contentment.

It does seem as if the prophet is at pains to indicate the forsaking of city life for something far more closely in tune with Nature as the normal way of life in the Millennial Age. Here in this thirty-second chapter he sees the city destroyed and no indication of its resurrection; the redeemed multitudes are cultivating the arts of husbandry in a purely rural and agricultural setting. Somehow that seems appropriate: God surely never meant men to live crowded together in massed blocks of dwellings far from the fields and streams and flowers and trees. The Millennial Age must surely include among its many benefits a mighty "back to the land" movement. Instead of less than ten per cent of the world's population working the land and growing

the food that every man must eat, as at present, all earth's citizens will most probably take their share in co-operating with Nature for the provision of all that is needful. The promise that every man will plant his own vine and fig-tree, and sit under them and himself eat the fruit of them, is most likely to have a truly literal fulfillment. The evils of modern industrial and commercial life have created the world's great cities; the end of that kind of life might well sound the death-knell of such creations and all the earth be made, as it was at the first, a garden.

Isaiah's story is nearly told. The Holy Spirit has but one further scene to show him, a scene that seems to be intended more particularly for those who, as faithful and devoted footstep followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, follow these visions with an eager desire to find their own position and duty clearly indicated. The prophet now sees a fierce storm of destroying hail coming down upon the earth, pattering upon the trees of the forest with a great noise, and finally crushing the ruined city, and such of its inhabitants as still remain, to the ground. At the same time—or, is it immediately the hailstorm has done its work, and ceased, and the sun is shining again—he beholds sowers, industriously scattering their seed in the water-sodden ground that has been softened by the storm waters, their oxen and asses treading the ground into soft mud in which the seed may quickly take root and germinate. *"When it shall hail, coming down on the forest, and the city shall be utterly abased (margin) blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass."* (vs. 19-20).

That was a familiar sight in Israel. So soon as the winter storms of hail and rain had temporarily water-logged and softened the ground the oxen and asses were quickly sent out to trample the soil, and the seed was quickly sown. What did the picture mean to Isaiah? It could only mean that the crushing hail of Divine judgment upon the city was in God's economy a means of preparing the soil for a new sowing, and that the sowers would be ready. In his zeal and joy at the prospect Isaiah pronounced a

blessing upon the sowers. But what does it mean in the reality? Nothing less than that in the outworking of the Divine plans, this tremendous judgment upon the nations which forms the prelude to the Millennial kingdom will itself be a means of preparing men's hearts for the ministry of the Word in the next Age, for that Millennial sowing that is to yield so glorious a harvest. And the sowers will be ready. They are waiting, even now, but the time for sowing is not yet. The ground has yet to be softened by the down-rushing hail, but so soon as that has been accomplished the word will go forth "blessed are ye that sow beside all waters".

The sowers will go forth. They will then have been gathered to be with their Lord and Head and be made like him, to see him as He is. They will have been presented faultless before the presence of the Father with exceeding joy. They will have participated in the marriage supper of the Lamb. Armed then with abundant power, enriched and fortified by their lives' experiences, by virtue of patient endurance having been made merciful and faithful and sympathetic "priests", they will come forth to commence the work of writing God's laws in the hearts of men, and converting them to turn from sin to serve the living God. That is the great object of the Millennial reign, to reconcile to God as many as will be reconciled, to save for his eternal kingdom on earth so many as will be saved, to fulfil, at last, the plan that started its slow but sure development so many thousands of years ago in Eden. Isaiah saw, plainly, the end of the story; he saw the "afterward of peace" which God has known all along He would achieve at last; it is a source of rare inspiration to us that he also was led to declare the blessedness of those who in this day and Age have been privileged beyond all measure in receiving the call to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. Having been thus called, justified, sanctified, glorified, they will come forth in the end of days to sow beside all waters, and long enjoy the ultimate fruitage of their works in the sight of God's human sons dwelling in quietness and assurance for ever.

Correction

The writer of the article "All their lifetime subject to bondage" appearing in the Sept./Oct. 1983 issue, has asked for the following correction to be made.

"An erroneous quotation was unfortunately made in the article "All their lifetime subject to bondage". The 4th paragraph of the article on page 105 should have commenced:

"In chapter 2 he is saying that although man 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 Jesus as brethren, as shown by Psalm 22.22 and Isa. 8. 17 18, with this object. For this purpose it says in verse 14 'He shared their flesh and blood nature' etc. . . ."

FOUR AND TWENTY ELDERS

The vision of Rev. 4 depicts a transcendent heavenly Throne around which is a circle of twenty-four subordinate thrones, on which sit twenty-four Elders. Without being specifically informed who they were, John identifies them readily enough and describes them by a term very familiar in Israel.

Who were these Elders? What was their office, and why twenty-four? The answer leads back into the sacred records of Israel, but first let it be noted that the Authorised Version says "*round about the Throne were four-and-twenty seats*" (Rev. 4.4). There is no just reason for making this distinction between the central Throne and the twenty-four, for the same Greek word (*thronos*) is used for the twenty-four as for the one. They may have been less in size, and lower in position, and less elaborate in design; but for all that they were thrones, and they who sat on them wore crowns. Hence, both crown and throne bore testimony to their kingliness. Additionally they held harps, and carried golden bowls full of incense.

The word (*phiaias*) translated "vials" is used in the Septuagint version of the Hebrew Scriptures for vessels belonging to the altar (Exod. 25. 23-29. 27.3. 37. 10-16). This shows that these Elders possessed priestly privileges, in that they offered the odours, or incense of saints, to the occupant of the central Throne. They had harps also, which reveals them as the leaders of worship—the sweet singers before God. Thus they are shown to possess the privileges of the Priesthood, with access to the Temple, and the right of entry into the Holy Place and the golden Altar.

The Scriptural basis for the official position of these Elders is laid down in their functioning in the court of Pharaoh, around the person of Joseph, the Hebrew Prime Minister. They were evidently the representatives at court of all the people of Israel. They accompanied Joseph and his brethren to the land of Canaan to bury Jacob (Gen. 50.9-13).

Israel evidently copied this institution from the Egyptians, for when Moses came under the Lord's commission to lead them forth from Egypt, God said to him, "... Go, and gather the Elders of Israel together and say unto them ..." (Exod. 3.16). "And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel" (Exod. 4.29). After the Lord had spoken the Words of the law from the top of

Sinai, Moses called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words (Exod. 19. 7). Again, when Moses had sprinkled the book of the Words and the people, seventy of the elders of the people went up into the mount, and saw there a representation of God (Exod. 24. 9-11). Here they are mentioned as a company, seventy strong. Also they are called nobles, and need to be distinguished from the princes, of whom there were but twelve (Num. 1.5-16). Further reference to this body of Elders is found throughout Israel's later history, and in every case denotes a body which had some measure of control in Israel — governors of cities and villages.

The origin of the Elders of the type seen in this Throne-scene goes back to the days of David, when he set in order the courses of the Priests in readiness for the new Temple that was to be erected in place of the tabernacle. A remarkable thing about this arrangement was that David received his instructions direct from God. Addressing Solomon, when abdicating in his favour, David said "*All this the Lord made me understand in writing, by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern*". (1 Chron. 28.19). Like Moses, who was commanded to make the Tabernacle according to the pattern shown to him in the holy mount, David was given a pattern of the Temple structures, with the orders of the Priesthood and Levites for its services. Hence, these instructions have the sanction of Divine Authority and inspiration; and were to be followed precisely and carefully. This was to be a copy of a heavenly original.

The only institution in Israel throughout its history which consisted of twenty-four sections was the Priestly constitution for the new Temple. The tribes, minus Levi, were twelve, and their princes twelve. It is thought that their secular Elders numbered seventy or seventy-two, and that this body gave rise, after the Captivity, to the Sanhedrin. The number twenty-four, therefore, excludes both the princes and secular under God's direction—sixteen courses for the sons of Eleazar and eight for the sons of Ithamar (the two surviving sons of Aaron) — twenty-four courses in all.

The singers were also ordained in twenty-four courses, with twelve in each course (1 Chron. 25. 8-31), two hundred and eighty-eight persons in all, to lead the praise and song in the Temple service. Over each course of Priests, Levites and Singers was placed a governor or elder (1 Chron.

24.4) as an Elder priest, subject to the supreme authority of the High Priest. This is the identical number seen in vision by Ezekiel within the inner court of the Lord's House, worshipping with their backs to the Temple of the Lord, and their faces to the east, committing abominations, (Ezekiel 8.15-18) and for which the glory of the Lord left its place in the Temple of Jerusalem (Chap. 10: 18), which was then given over to destruction.

In the Septuagint version the word for Elder is "*presbuteros*"—"chief men"; and was differentiated from '*presbutos*'—"old men". We still retain this term in our modern official title 'Alderman', which carries with it a special precedence over other members of our municipal councils. The word Elder does not therefore in itself indicate a priestly prince but its association with the number twenty-four most certainly does. This official class among the priests is referred to in Isa. 37.2 as Elders of the Priests, and in Jer. 19.1 as the Ancients of the Priests.

John saw this priestly constitution gathered in holy conclave—the full twenty-four Elders, each the head of his course, each representing his course. The priestly function is represented by the vials full of odours (bowls full of incense), the sweet singers by the harp and their song; but, in addition, over and above all other adornments is their royal crown—these are Kings as well as Priests. Accordingly these twenty-four crowned Priests are symbolic heads of the twenty-four courses, representing the thousands of this high and privileged class of Priests, Levites, and Singers.

Now as to this priestly class in its relationship to Israel. Under the Covenant, Israel was taken from among the nations to be God's first-born (Exod. 4.22-23). They were to be a kingdom of Priests through whom other nations were to be introduced to God. They were a called-out people, separated from among the nations of the world. But the priestly class was an additionally

separated class—an election within an election, and brought specially near to God, to approach him, and to serve their brethren in a special way. With the establishment of the Temple, this special class was divided into twenty-four courses, in order to foreshadow the Heavenly Priesthood, prepared to minister in the real Temple condition between God and restored Israel, and ultimately all men. The twenty-four Elders upon their twenty-four thrones, crowned with gold, and robed in white, represent all the true Priesthood, who will be accepted as kings and priests under Jesus, the great High Priest. They will be pure and holy, wearing white which is the "righteousness of the saints".

When the time came for the supersession of the Aaronic priesthood and the carnal sacrifices by the higher and better priesthood and sacrifices, the temporary arrangement which gave the privileges of the Priesthood to Levi, instead of the first-born, was withdrawn, and the system reverted to its original form. Henceforth, from among all the tribes of Israel, all who believed in Jesus as the Redeemer, and surrendered their lives to him in full consecration, were accepted as first-fruits, the first-borns, and became "*the Church of the First-born, whose names are written in Heaven*". This very term links them with the whole family (Heb. 12.22-24) and betokens also others to follow after.

This royal priesthood, constituted of the remnant from Israel, and of such from among the Gentiles who accept Jesus and consecrate their lives to him, is represented by the twenty-four Elders in this heavenly scene, not as individuals, but as a complete body, and are found awaiting the coming of the Kinsman-Redeemer to take the Scroll. They are to be the witnesses of the Redemption of the purchased possession, to support the verdict, and testify that it has transpired, and cause the glad tidings to pass to angels, to Israel, and to lead the Hallelujah chorus of the nations, to earth's remotest bounds.

Temptations

"Temptations never give us notice. Can we expect them to do so? The sailor does not expect to have notice of every gale of wind that blows upon him. The soldier in battle does not reckon to have notice of every bullet that is coming his way. By what apparatus could we be kept aware of every advance of the evil one? The very essence of temptation often lies in the suddenness of it. We are carried off our feet before we are aware. Yet we must not say, because of this "I cannot help it"; for we ought

to be all the more watchful, and live all the nearer to God in prayer. We are bound to stand against a sudden temptation, as much as a slower mode of attack. We must look to the Lord to be kept from the arrow which flieth by day and the pestilence which walketh in darkness. We are to cry to God for grace, that, let the gusts of temptation come how and when they may, we may always be found in Christ, resting in HIM, covered with his Divine power."

(C. H. Spurgeon)

PROVE ALL THINGS

"Prove all things: hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5.21). A wise suggestion says one, but not altogether practicable. I am a plain man with little education and many pressing cares which leave little time or vigour to grapple with theological questions, or to prove or disprove the dogmas which characterise various religious factions. It would require a life-time thus to prove all things. There are scores of sectarian creeds, with multiplied volumes of theology and theories each pushing its claim, and in these days new factions and theories are legion.

What is a plain man to do? I want the truth, but how shall I find it and prove it? I believe the Bible to be the Word of God given to us through his inspired apostles and prophets. I believe in God and have long trusted in the salvation provided through his beloved Son. But while I hold these doctrines and will not relinquish my interest in them, my Bible teaches me to expect an increase of light, especially in the last days of the Age, in which we are living. Daniel says that in the time of the end the wise shall understand, that knowledge shall be increased. I am looking for this promised increase of knowledge, for the light "shining more and more unto the perfect day", but how shall I prove which is advanced truth and which is error, against which the Apostle forewarns, saying, "In the last days perilous times shall come?". Is it possible for a plain, common sense Christian man, without any special learning, to comply with the Apostle's injunction and prove all things, and if so, how shall I go about it?

It is possible. If the desire for truth is paramount to every other desire, so that the enquirer will so bend his circumstances as to make opportunities for study and investigation of the truth, as it becomes due, he will find and rejoice in it. Although at a cursory glance the wide field of investigation appears formidable, there is a process by which the learned and the unlearned, if simple-hearted and sincere, may arrive at clear and positive convictions, and henceforth be able to give to every man that asketh a reason for the hope that is in him.

The infallible rule for measuring and proving all things is in the Bible. By its testimony every doctrine having any claim for attention must be measured. If any system presented finds its main support outside the Bible, it is at once labelled suspicious, even though it call in occasional

Scripture texts to support its theories. We well know that every pernicious doctrine has claimed Bible support by quoting passages and perverting them.

Bear in mind that the doctrine of the Lord and the apostles clearly accepted the account in Genesis—of man's creation in the likeness of God, pure and sinless, "very good"; of his fall into sin and the consequent penalty of death, entailed not only upon himself, but also upon all his posterity. Then it sets forth the remedy for sin and its consequences, showing that the death of Christ on Calvary is the appointed means for the world's redemption. To this fact all the Old Testament prophets testify.

This doctrine was first enunciated in the promise of deliverance given in Eden. It was foreshadowed in the sacrifices of Abel and of bulls and goats and rams that for centuries were offered on the typical altars of the typical tabernacle. It was foretold by the prophets who prophesied of the "Coming One" as the lamb for slaughter and foretold all the painful circumstances of his sacrificial death.

Then the accomplished fact was recorded by the Evangelists who were his disciples, the companions of his ministry, and eye-witnesses of his sufferings and death. This was the foundation upon which the whole structure of the apostles' doctrine was built up. Paul, the great builder of the Christian system, gathering his arguments from the law and the prophets and the notable events of the ministry and sacrifice of our Lord in his own day, wove the whole into a grand and logical system of faith, of which Christ crucified is the foundation stone, and Christ glorified, the hope of the world's restitution is the crowning feature. So confident is his faith in this Divinely attested truth that he adds "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other doctrine, let him be accursed": for he should know better in view of all the Divine testimony herein furnished.

This foundation doctrine, therefore, is the first measure by which we must test every system presented to us as worthy of our consideration. If it is not built squarely upon this foundation, it is unworthy of further investigation, whatever may be its claims; but if built upon this foundation, it is worthy of attention.

In applying this first test, the work of proving all things is simplified. We do not need to exam-

ine all the intricacies of the system. Simply looking at the foundation will decide the matter in many cases. If they are wrong here, further examination is necessary; they cannot be true, and however plausible they may appear, they can only be the efforts of "thieves and robbers" who attempt to show how to climb up some other way into the sheepfold. Bear in mind the fundamental principle of all sound reasoning, that the superstructure of any system can only be brought to the same level of credibility as the premise or foundation with which it starts, and upon which it is built. If, therefore, the foundation is wrong, the whole superstructure is erroneous, and every moment spent in studying the system, which one has thus already found to be erroneous, is time taken from the study of the truth, from putting on the armour of God, and is filling the mind with sophistries of the Adversary, instead of the sound logic of Divine truth, and thus preparing the way for the overthrow of faith instead of establishing it in sound doctrine.

By applying this rule one can determine what is of God and what of man. It may come even from the hands of an angel of light, a messenger of truth, a brother in Christ who has not discerned the sophistry of error. It may come clothed in the garments of light, with smooth and pious phrases about the wonderful love of God and the spirit of his word, and the glorious hope of the world; but all these are often merely cloaks to a doctrine which denies that man was created in the image of God, that he fell from that high estate, and that through that fall sentence came upon all men to condemnation. It can go further and deny the necessity of a Redeemer, or that Christ came for such purpose, claiming that Christ was the Saviour of the world merely by setting a good example for men to copy, and not by giving his life a ransom. It lauds this Saviour of the world, who saves by his good example only, and talks loudly of the wonderful love of God, while removing the firm support of his justice which the Scriptures declare could by no means clear the guilty, until the handwriting of the law, which was against us condemning us to death, was cancelled by "the precious blood of Christ" (Col. 2.14). In its zeal to magnify his love and make its theories look plausible, it runs to an excess which denies man's free agency. Thus it misrepresents the love of God as a weak and fickle element of the Divine character, falsifies the spirit of his Word and builds up a false and delusive hope for the world, a hope founded upon a supposed weakness of the Divine character.

The stones of faith-building may be received through whatsoever channels the Lord may be

pleased to send them. They must all have been quarried out of the Bible, but God may send one or another of his angels (ministers, servants) to point them out. He may be a very humble servant and one through whom one would least have expected the enlightenment of God's truth; but no matter if he be ever so insignificant in the estimation of men, remember that God hath chosen the things which in the world's estimation are foolish and weak to confound the things which the world counts mean and despises as unworthy of notice, to bring to nought the things that are (1 Cor. 1. 26-29).

Thus systematically built up, stone by stone, proved and carefully fitted together and founded on the solid Rock of Ages, faith will be a symmetrical, harmonious structure, strong, secure and beautiful, which the winds and the floods cannot damage or overturn. "*My sheep hear my voice,*" said the Master, "*and they follow me, and a stranger they will not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers*". (John 10. 1-5, 27). They shun the profane babblings of science, falsely so-called (2 Tim. 2. 16; 1 Tim. 6.20), and being close students of the Divine word, living very close to that fountain of truth and drinking deep of its spirit, they are prepared quickly to detect error, even though it lurk behind a very plausible semblance of truth. The Lord who puts forth his sheep and goeth before them, and calls them all by name, will not leave his obedient ones in doubt and fear, and they will ever beware of the thieves and robbers who attempt to climb into the fold in any other than the appointed way which God hath ordained.

A mistake which some do make, in view of conflicting ideas as to what is truth, is to discard human instrumentality and expect God's guidance through the Bible alone. Such forget that God gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ. We are exhorted to build one another up in the holy faith and to esteem the servants of God for their work's sake. Ever since the Church has existed, God has raised up from its midst, as special servants of the body, some who have special teaching ability. Blessed is that servant who at the Master's appearing is found giving the meat in due season to the household of faith (Matt. 24.26) and so blessed are they of the faithful household, who like the "noble Bereans" of old, search the Scriptures daily to see if these things be so, who prove all things, as the apostle exhorts, and hold fast that which is good.

Both in searching for truth, and in giving it to others, we need to take heed to these methods

and instrumentalities used for the edification of the Church. The New Testament Scriptures were not completed and compiled until after the close of the first century of the Christian era. In the days of the Reformation, while oral teaching was most largely used, the newly invented printing press came in for a large share of the work, in making generally available, not only the Bible, but stirring exhortations and teachings and various helps of brethren in the faith. In the present time by far the largest part of the work of dis-

seminating knowledge is through the medium of the press.

Thus, through humble instruments, who as the angels of God quickly and quietly do their work and disappear, God himself is honoured. The proud and unworthy ones esteem them not and will not hear their message, but those who hunger and thirst after truth and righteousness are filled. God bless his faithful messengers and all the elect who are being sealed through their ministrations.

The route of the Exodus

According to Exodus 13. 17, when the Israelites left Egypt to travel to the Promised Land, "God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt. But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea". The regular road from Egypt to Canaan lay along the sea-coast and was known as the "Way of the Philistines" because it ran through their land. It was a main trade route and had been so for centuries; it was along this road that the Midianite merchantmen had taken Joseph to sell him as a slave in Egypt, centuries before the Exodus. Why then did Moses lead his people by such a tortuous way through the mountains of Sinai, involving that fearful trek of forty years, when they might have travelled on the high road, by which the distance from Egypt to Canaan was only about two hundred miles—the distance from London to Manchester—and completed their journey in a few weeks? The answer is in this verse and in the records of history. God led them not that way "lest the people repent when they see war". During the half century before the Exodus the reigning Pharaoh (Thothmes III) made no less than seventeen warlike expeditions into Canaan. That high road was the almost continual scene of invading armies, marching and counter marching. Canaan, for many years a colonial possession of the Egyptian power, was in open rebellion. Israel, hidden away in the fastness of Sinai and Kadesh for forty years, was mercifully spared all that, and by the time they stood on the plains of Moab waiting to cross Jordan into the Land of Promise, both Canaanites and Egyptians were exhausted by long years of conflict, and in no degree disposed to resist this new and virile people coming in from the desert. That was the principal reason that Joshua and his hosts were able so easily to subdue the Canaanitish tribes and take possession of the land.

Note on Heb. 9.7

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." (Heb. 9. 7).

Sometimes quoted as though it referred to the inevitability of final judgment immediately after death, this text really has no connection with human death and the future life at all. The ninth chapter of Hebrews is contrasting the old Levitical sacrifices conducted in the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and later in the Temple of Solomon, with the reality, Christ and his sacrifice on man's behalf, toward which they pointed. The chapter shows that every detail of that ancient sacrificial ritual had its corresponding reality. The only difference was that in the type, the High Priest had to offer the sacrifice every year, year by year continually, whereas the Lord Jesus Christ offered himself once for all. It is clear from the ritual narrative in Lev. 9 and 16 that the High Priest in laying his hands on the sacrificial bullock was declaring in effect that its death on the altar represented his own death; after the blood of the sacrifice had been sprinkled in the Propitiatory in the Most Holy he came forth to the people, arrayed in his splendid priestly vestments, lifted up his hand and blessed the people. Verse 7 draws the analogy between all this and the reality in Christ. *"As it is appointed unto men* (the High Priests, successively in their generations) *once to die* (in the sacrifice of the animals offered), *but after this the judgment:* (Divine decree as to acceptance of the sacrifice and consequent freedom of the people from sin, manifested in the fire coming down from heaven to consume the burnt-offering). *So Christ was once offered* (like the bullock of sin-offering) *and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time* (like the High Priest coming out of the Tabernacle to bless the waiting people) *without sin unto salvation*". This "appearing the second time" is of course fulfilled in reality by the long-awaited Second Advent of Christ, for the blessing and salvation of the world.

Dr. Cumming on the Millennium

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

* * *

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

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

"And when I think of the time when He does come, I can scarcely realise that glorious Sabbath which will overspread the earth, that noble song which will be heard when the saints shall

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

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

No one has equalled Moses for law, nor David for poetry, nor Isaiah for vision, nor Peter for holy zeal, nor Apollos for fiery oratory, nor Paul for logic, nor John's statements of sanctified love. What a ridiculous statement that to study the

Bible "marks a step backwards in education"! God's Word is the very greatest of all books, and its Author the very greatest of all teachers. We do well to stay close to its pages. It is The Book.



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

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Vol. 61, No. 4

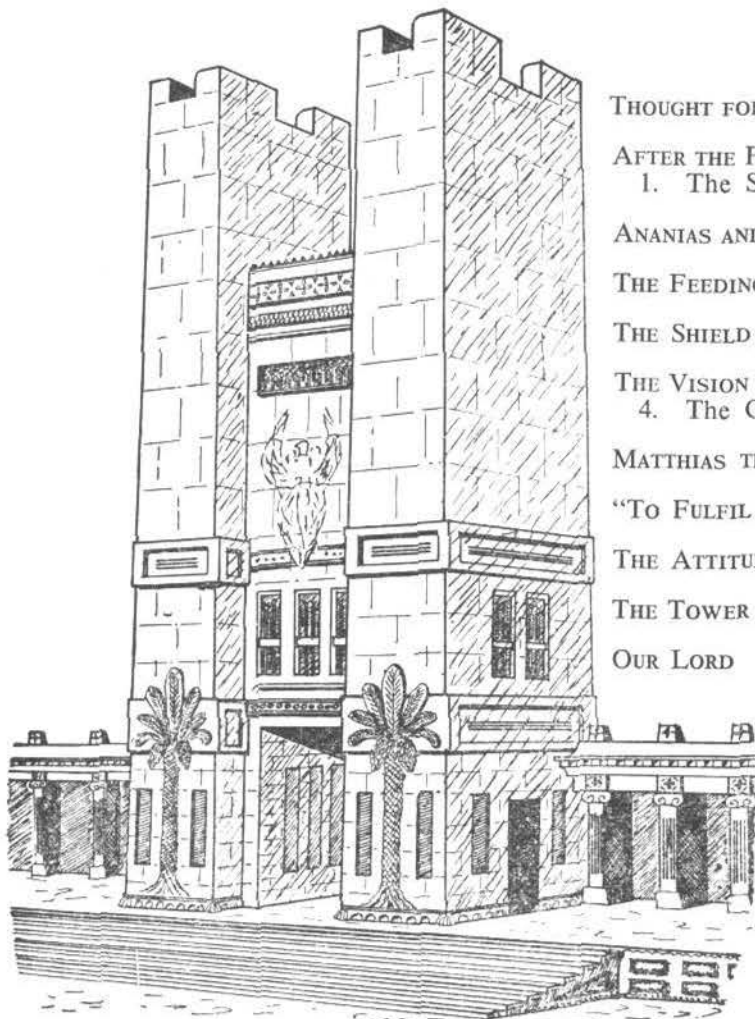
JULY/AUGUST, 1984

Published July 1st

Next issue September 1st

CONTENTS

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	74
AFTER THE FLOOD	
1. The Subsiding of the Waters	75
ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA	79
THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND	81
THE SHIELD OF FAITH	83
THE VISION OF JOEL	
4. The Cry of Faith	85
MATTHIAS THE APOSTLE	88
"TO FULFIL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS" ...	89
THE ATTITUDE OF STEPHEN	93
THE TOWER OF STRENGTH	94
OUR LORD	95



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

*This Journal is sent free
of charge to all who are
genuinely interested, on
request renewable annually
and is supported by the
voluntary gifts of its readers*

Published by
Bible Fellowship Union
11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow
Middlesex, England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, maintaining the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and the validity of their miraculous and prophetic content viewed in the light of modern under-

standing. It stands for the pre-millennial Advent of our Lord and the consequent conversion of the world. It is supported entirely by the voluntary gifts of its readers and all such gifts are sincerely appreciated.

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow, Middlesex, England.
 Secretary & Treasurer: B. G. DUMONT (Hounslow) Editorial & Publishing: A. O. HUDSON (Milborne Port)
 Circulation Control: D. WALTON (Sherborne)

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"Young men and maidens, old men and children . . . praise the name of the Lord" (Psa. 148.12-13).

It is a great thing to see a congregation of young and old worshipping and serving together. Not so common a sight as was the case two generations ago. So many other interests and pursuits, so powerful the modern drift away from religious faith and observance on the part of the young, that all too often one hears the plaint, especially in the smaller Christian communities, "we don't have many young ones in our midst nowadays; and we all are getting old." One may be led to wonder what is going wrong with the Christian faith and the appeal of the Gospel.

Actually, nothing at all. There is a factor which is all too often overlooked, one that has to do with the progress of the Divine purpose. We are living in an Age, since Pentecost, in which God has been calling out of the nations a Church, a consecrated and devoted body of believers whose later mission is to be associated with Christ in his Millennial kingdom upon earth in the work of evangelising and reconciling to God "whosoever will" (Rev. 22.17). This is the purpose of this present Age; the wholesale conversion of the world is reserved for the next. And this company of dedicated disciples of Christ must one day be completed and then the Christian work of this Age come to an end. If in fact, as the signs of the times so clearly indicate to many, we are now in the days of the Second Advent and consequent completion of the Church, is it so surprising that in many congregations the young are conspicuous only by their absence? They will come to the front all right, when the work of the next Age begins. There is in fact a wealth of enthusiastic and quite sincere Christian youth; their hearts and minds are not attuned to the deeper and more spiritual aspects of the faith but that is because they are not called

to the higher privilege of joint-heirship with Christ. There will be plenty for them to do a little later on, when the new Age is inaugurated. Like Isaiah of old, their spontaneous cry will be "Here am I, Lord, send me".

New series. This issue sees the commencement of a new series entitled "After the Flood", which deals with the history of the times between the Flood and Abraham. The Genesis account is tantalisingly brief. The stories of Noah's vineyard, the building of the Tower of Babel, and the spread of Noah's descendants over the Mediterranean world, are all that is recorded. Not much for the span of the twelve hundred years concerned! In the absence of other records of those times the Bible story has sometimes been dismissed as folklore, written up at a later date in Israel's history from old legends. To-day the aspect is changing. Archaeological discoveries are throwing an increasing flood of light upon those ancient days, both in the field of written records and the exploration of archaic remains and city and village sites. Modern developments in Iraq, particularly in the creation of vast irrigation schemes involving the submergence of many historical remains, have inspired an extensive programme of investigation while yet there is time. The five hundred or so years intervening between the time of Noah and the earliest records that have so far been discovered is being increasingly illuminated by this work; the purpose of this series is to bring together the present state of knowledge on the nature of that world in which the ancestors of Abraham lived, and particularly to demonstrate the reasonableness of the Biblical demand that the populations of all the countries asserted to be in existence in the times of Abraham and onwards were literally descended from the three sons of Noah within the period indicated by the Genesis narrative.

Gone from us



Sis. K. Hart (London)
 Sis. E. Jennings (London)
 Sis. D. Mulley (London)
 Bro. H. Poole (Lincoln)
 Bro. W. Scholefield (Late West Wickham)
 Bro. I. Webster (Glasgow)



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

AFTER THE FLOOD

1. The Subsiding of the Waters

A little group stood on steeply rising ground, looking down at the wide plain below. From where they stood, a thousand feet above sea level, they could see the far horizon forty miles away; in between, there stretched a desolate expanse of mud. No trees, no grass, no movement and no living thing; just mud. Behind them, higher up the mountain-side, the trees still grew, clothing the rocky crags with green verdure. Up there, they knew, the birds still sang and flitted to and fro between the branches. A rushing stream—the one which today men call the Changulak—tumbled down the gorge leading from the mountains and flowed placidly across the plain to lose itself in the distant marshes. Right on the horizon they could just discern the sunlight glinting on the waters of a mighty river. Hiddekel, it was called in the early days although now it is known by its modern name of Tigris—and they looked again across that wide expanse of mud and were silent.

The older man turned to his three younger companions. The four women, standing a little apart, listened. "My sons, the Most High God has delivered us from the evil world in which we were born and have lived our lives. He has broken the tyranny of those evil powers which have oppressed all men with so terrible an oppression and seduced them into sin so that every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil, and that continually. Year in, year out, we told them that the judgment of God must surely come if they did not repent, but they heeded not. They went on with their eating and drinking, their planting and building, their marrying and giving in marriage, until the Flood came and took them all away, and we only are left". His gaze wandered over the distant horizon. "And now, my sons, it is our mission to build a new world in this earth which has been swept clean by that judgment. Never more will you be oppressed by the powers of evil. They lie, with all their cities and all their works, under the sand and silt which this great Flood has carried in its wake to cover the world we knew. We shall see that world no more. The Most High has given us a new earth, a clean earth, an earth freed from evil, that you and your children may serve him in obedience and righteousness the days of your lives and become fathers of a race that will fulfil the wise and gracious purposes of our God". He looked again at the three young men and their wives, intently following his every word.

"See then that you keep his covenant and obey his laws, for He has promised that He will no more destroy the earth with a flood, neither will He again blot out all flesh as He has done. But if your children depart from his ways, then his judgments will come upon them by famine, and by pestilence, and by the beasts of the earth, for no man can escape his justice. Teach them therefore that they serve the Most High all their days, that they train their children likewise; so shall it be well with them and theirs".

One of the other men—the serious, thoughtful-looking one—looked out again across the barren plain.

"How shall we fare for food? Nothing will ever grow in this inhospitable waste? Out stores will last us a little longer, but after that . . .?" His eyes sought his father's face.

Noah looked at his eldest son affectionately. "The birds of the air and the winds of heaven will bring the seeds from the mountains. The green grass will spring forth and the trees will grow. It will not be this year and it will not be next; for many years to come we must find our homes in the mountains and eat that which the mountains bring forth. Here must your children be born and here grow to manhood. But the day will come when that wide plain will be golden with corn ready for harvest. There will your children's children build cities and learn the arts and crafts you knew in the world that has passed away. There will they worship God in spirit and in truth and serve him in sincerity." A shadow passed across his face. "Whether sin will invade again I do not know, for sin is subtle and the power of the Evil One is great". But the shadow passed and in his eyes there gleamed the vision of the prophet; he looked again at his eldest son. "But this I know, for this I have seen in the visions of the night." His gaze now was directed at the far horizon, beyond the distant shining river. "I see, beyond there, a city, and in that city a man of your seed, a man to whom God comes as he came to me, a man in whom the next great step in his mighty purpose is to be taken. As we, my sons" and now his gaze included them all "as we are called upon to step out in faith to a new world, knowing not whither we go, to carry forward the Divine purpose, so will he be called to leave behind the land in which he will be born and go out in faith to a land which God will show him, that through his seed all nations of the earth may be blessed. I know

not what the future holds of good or of evil", and again his eyes grew sombre, "but this I know, that it shall be well with them that fear God".

There was a long silence. At last the old man turned his back upon the plain below and faced the dark gorge leading up into the mountains. Up there, in the distance, lay a long, black shape, the great enclosed vessel in which the eight had taken refuge to escape the flood-waters. It lay now, deserted, where the mountains had entrapped it when the waters began to recede, mute witness to the faith of those who alone of all the world had heeded the signs of the times and obeyed their Lord's injunction to flee the judgment which had to come upon the corrupt and fast dying race. He took a step towards it. "Come with me; we must renew our promise of loyalty to the Most High, with offerings for his acceptance, that this day of deliverance be a day to remember as long as we shall live."

Silently, they followed, picking their way among the rugged rocks, climbing steadily upward until they reached the place where they would meet with God.

* * * *

Some such scene as that must certainly have been enacted in the day that Noah and his family emerged from the Ark to face a world devastated. It must have been a harrowing experience. Everything they knew in life had been swept away; even the landscape had changed. They could not have known whether they were near their former haunts or in a different part of the world altogether. If the deductions to be outlined hereafter are anywhere near the truth they were probably not too far away from their former home; perhaps within five hundred miles or so, but even so the aftermath of the Flood would have presented so different a scene that they might as well have been on another planet. It is usually assumed that the antediluvian world was more or less in the vicinity of present-day Iraq simply because that is the scene of the earliest recognisable peoples—those of Abraham's day—in the Book of Genesis. There is however a logical basis for the conclusion. The early chapters of Genesis bear internal evidence of having been committed to writing in Sumer not later than the Early Dynastic period, about six centuries before Abraham. The geographical indications appertaining to the Garden of Eden story are those appropriate to that period. It has already been shown ("*Garden of Eden*" BSM Mar/Apr. 1981) that the historian of those days visualised the site of Eden as an extension of their own plain of Shinar (Sumerian "Edinu") but lower down the river, halfway along what later became the Persian Gulf. On this basis the

antediluvian world could be conceived as extending over all the low-lying eastern half of Arabia as well as into the later plain of Shinar (Iraq) all of which could have been overrun by the Flood. But the whole of this one-time fertile parkland was now covered with thirty to sixty feet of sand, clay and gravel, and all the works of man were buried beneath for ever.

Of all the theories which have been advanced to explain the cause of the Flood, the one which best fits the Bible account, the Sumerian legends which come from the same sources as the Bible, and the geological evidences on site which still remain, is that the whole area of the Persian Gulf, from southern Arabia to northern Iraq, was swept by a *tsunami*, (more commonly called a tidal wave), of colossal proportions, coming in from the Indian Ocean, its originating force continuing so long that the water banked up in Iraq for five months before it began to recede. The immediate cause of such a tidal wave could have been, and probably was, the sudden descent upon earth at the poles of stupendous masses of water vapour and minute ice crystals which, according to many geologists from Leibnitz (1690) until the present day, had been thrown up in prehistoric igneous ages, circulated at high altitudes with gradually decreasing momentum, until gravity at length overcame that centrifugal force and they crashed on to the earth—just as modern orbiting satellites do today when they have run their course. The result would be a massive tidal wave originating at the poles and travelling across the ocean in every direction. The magnitude of a wave generated by such a happening cannot be estimated, but in the past two centuries waves started by submarine earthquakes or volcanic eruptions have travelled thousands of miles and flooded the land to depths of a hundred feet. The known record is one that devastated a section of north-eastern Siberia in the 18th century; the water was 210 feet high when it crashed over the coast. It can be calculated that waves of this nature, starting in the Antarctic regions and re-inforced for the Biblical forty days by the continuing descent of the "waters above the firmament" to which the Bible itself refers, could have sent a 100 foot wave up the Persian Gulf at 60 miles an hour, devastating the entire area over a terrain 600 miles wide, and bank up steadily in Iraq until the water was some 1000 to 1500 feet deep before it began to subside. Something like this might well have been the situation which faced Noah and his family in those stressful days.

Just as there have been theories as to the cause of the Flood, so through the ages there have been many claims made as to the identity of the mountain at which the Ark came to rest.

The most familiar one to western peoples is Ararat in north-eastern Turkey; this legend had its rise about the 13th century A.D. and was originated by the Armenian church in that area, but it rests upon no other basis and Ararat is certainly not the mountain. From the First Advent until then, and to the present as far as the Eastern churches and the Moslem faith are concerned, the claim is for Mount Judi, in southern Turkey, almost certainly a legend started by the captive Israelites of the Ten Tribes settled there by the Assyrians in the eighth century B.C. But both the Bible and Sumerian legend, which are both much nearer to the event, place it in or near the Sumerian plain in which the sons of Noah afterwards settled—a much more likely and logical location. Reasons have been given heretofore ("*Ararat and Aratta*", BSM May/June 1979) for identifying the mountain of the Ark with Mount Anaran (Lat. 33N. Long. 47E), east of Babylon, on the edge of the Zagros mountains bordering the plain. This was the "Mount of the East", sacred mountain of Sumerians and Babylonians, described in their ceremonial hymns of praise, its position indicated by the orientation of the temple-towers in their two sacred cities of Babylon and Nippur, both of which point directly to Anaran, and physically so situated as to be suited in every respect to be the place where the Ark was stranded by the subsiding waters. There is every probability that this is the mountain described by Sumerian legend; it is within the ancient land of Urartu (Biblical Ararat) as demanded by Genesis. Now at this end of the 20th century comes another line of testimony which may well assist in confirming that it was indeed in this area that Noah and his family first set foot on their new domain.

A flurry of archaeological research commencing in 1978, and still continuing, connected with the Iraq Government's River Diyala irrigation project, which will shortly create a great lake where early remains are known to lie, and in the vicinity of Mount Anaran, has revealed hitherto unexplored village sites so early that they could well be the first to be instituted after the Flood. Heretofore the earliest evidences of human habitation in the world have been conceded by the best authorities to be at Qalal Jarmo and Karim Shahir in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan, discovered and excavated by Braidwood and Howe in 1948-51. Now here on the mountain slopes between Anaran and the River Diyala there are similar villages, some of which are as old or older than Jarmo. When all that can be ascertained about these ancient sites has been published it may well be a reasonable conclusion that this is where life started again after the Flood.

So that since this series is intended to bring together in proper relation all that the Scriptures have to say—admittedly very little—about that obscure period between Noah and Abraham, and such historical records of the period the sands of Iraq have yielded up during this century, these present findings are of more than casual interest. Here, perhaps, are the remains of those first villages in which the sons of Noah and their children lived after the Flood.

The subsidence of the waters must have seemed a slow process. If Chap. 8.14 is to be taken literally it means that the occupants of the Ark remained inside for seven months watching the waters subside to the level of the plain. From their position, say a thousand feet up on the mountainside, the water's edge in the vicinity of Mount Anaran would then be at least thirty miles away, almost out of sight. Perhaps that is the meaning of the rather cryptic statement that on the first day of the first month the "*face of the ground was dry*" but that not until fifty-seven days later, on the twenty-seventh day of the second month, was the "*earth dried*" (Chap. 8. 13-14). At a constant rate of fall the water's edge on the first day of the first month would have been about ten or eleven miles from the stranded Ark, only halfway to the visible horizon. "*The face of the ground was dry*" in vs. 13 is "*panim adamah charab*" meaning that the surface of the fields was dried, which in such case could mean the immediate vicinity of the Ark. "*The earth was dried*" in vs. 14 is "*erets yabesh*", meaning that the earth or the land was destitute of water. Only when there was no visible sign of water over the land would Noah be sure that the Flood was gone; only then in obedience to the Lord's command did he come out.

There remained the mud. The water had gone, back to the ocean, but it had left behind a blanket of clay, sand and gravel much of which had been scooped up from the sea-bed—and salt! Not infrequently an extra high tied floods lowlying farmland bordering the seas of this country; the water drains away in a week or so but the salt it leaves behind renders the land unusable sometimes for a year or more. This Flood lasted over twelve months and must have rendered the land completely sterile for decades or even centuries before rain and the annual river floods leached out the salt and agriculture became again possible. Some of the salt has not gone even yet. The Iraq Government is at present trying to restore some of the ruined buildings of ancient Babylon to create a tourist attraction; one of the greatest handicaps that has been encountered is the saline condition of the soil on which the city was built, causing disintegra-

tion of the remaining ruins as soon as they are uncovered and exposed to the air. It was to be very many years before the children of Noah could descend into the plain and create their farms and pasture lands. In the meantime they must perforce remain in the mountains.

Reading Genesis 8 to 11 consecutively it is easy to assume that events followed each other in quick succession, that almost immediately after leaving the Ark the people came "from the east" (Gen. 11.1) into the Plain of Shinar and commenced their building operations. This could not possibly have been. Several centuries must have elapsed before the story of the Tower of Babel was enacted. Even after the Flood was ended and everything had returned to normal the head of the Persian Gulf was some three hundred miles north of its present position and formed an impassable barrier to Noah and his family up there in the mountains. Only in the course of time as the four great rivers, the Euphrates, Tigris, Kherkhah, and Batin (the Euphrates, Hiddekel, Pison and Gihon of the Eden story) brought down masses of silt to deposit every year over the plain did the land

build up and drive the waters back to where they are now. By Abraham's day, a thousand years after the Flood, the head of the Gulf had receded a hundred and fifty miles and Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham's home town, was a seaport. Today the sea has receded another hundred and fifty miles from Ur. In all this waste of water and marshland there could be no home for man. Noah had perforce to look elsewhere.

The signs are that he went north-westward along the fringe of the mountains. To this day their lower slopes are thickly forested, harbouring wide terraces rich in pasture, and in ancient times wild grain. Here are the remains of these ancient settlements which subsisted as centres of human life for at least four or five centuries and were only deserted when the plain was at last free of water and the cities known to us in the Bible story—Ur, Erech, Babylon, Nippur, Nineveh, Larsa, Sippar—began to be built. The story of those early years is not recorded in the Bible, but nowadays it is beginning to be possible to trace its outlines in what those early settlers left behind them, to be brought to light in this our day. *To be continued.*

AN OLD CLOCK SPEAKS

There is an old clock in Wimborne Minster, Dorset, which was constructed in the 14th century. It is an unusual clock in that it indicates the hours of the day and the day of the lunar month by means of a model sun and moon both moving round a central model earth. Despite its great age the clock is still working and still indicates the correct time.

When that clock was made, it was the universal belief that the earth was the centre of the universe and that the sun moved round the earth—once every day. That was why the clock was made in that fashion, with the sun travelling round the earth to mark the hours. The discoveries of Nicolas Copernicus, which demonstrated that the sun's apparent motion round the earth is only apparent, and that it is the earth's own rotation on its axis which causes the illusion, were yet two centuries future.

So the clock was designed, and functioned, on the basis of a false theory. Nevertheless it did give correct time, and does so to this day. Although its external trappings represented the elements of a wrong understanding of science, its internal mechanism was constructed in accordance with right principles, and therefore the clock has served its intended purpose through the centuries.

So it is with the Christian life which is lived in the light of an only partially correct understanding of the Divine Plan. We are so often told of the necessity of an accurate understanding

of doctrine. Almost every sect demands that its particular distinctive doctrines are necessary to real and full acceptance with God. That is not true. Repentance of sin, and justification by faith in the redemptive sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consecration of life to God on that basis, are the things which bring us into the condition of full acceptance with God. Doctrines have their place in shaping our characters and determining the course of our lives after that position has been attained, but the believer does not depend upon a full and accurate understanding of every Biblical doctrine before God can put him to useful service. To assert otherwise would be to deprive all of us of Divine approval, for with all our knowledge of the Divine mysteries we all still know only "in part". It is not until "that which is perfect is come" that we attain to fulness of knowledge in Christ. In the meantime, even if our knowledge of Bible teaching is like the front of the clock in Wimborne Minster, a bit behind the times, not so correctly represented as it might be, let us rejoice if our internal mechanism is sound, if we have been truly reconciled to God by the death of his Son. Let us rejoice if we have been buried with him by baptism into his death, and have risen to walk with him in newness of life. We can be sure that the rest will follow in the Lord's due time. For, after all, we have the assurance "He preserveth the paths of his saints" and if in perfect sincerity we have given ourselves to him then we know that He will do the rest.

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

*Examination
of the facts*

The story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chap. 5 has been seized upon by critics of the Christian ethic in order to disparage Christianity. What kind of a man was Peter, they ask, that he should strike this man and woman dead for what appears on the surface to be a minor case of deceit? Ananias and his wife had sold a piece of land with the avowed purpose of giving the entire proceeds to the Cause but in reality of keeping back part of those proceeds for themselves. Deceit, hypocrisy, yes, but not a crime justifying so extreme a punishment as death. In this modern day of ours it would not even be considered a crime, just an instance of "being smart". In the hurry thus to condemn the Apostle Peter the story itself is not considered with the attention it deserves.

First of all, the background. The Christian church had just commenced its development. The incident occurred not long after Pentecost, when, by means of the fervent preaching of the Apostles, a nucleus of three thousand people accepted the faith on the first day and came together in spontaneous fellowship. A few days later another five thousand were added. Repeated references to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the multitude implies that the general atmosphere was highly charged with emotion and excitement. Conviction that Jesus Christ had indeed risen from the dead and ascended to his Father in heaven, and would speedily come again to establish his Kingdom upon earth, was general, and the assemblies of the believers were characterised by intense enthusiasm and zeal for further evangelism. The Lord had commissioned them to preach the Gospel in all the world for a witness unto all nations before his return and the end of the Age, and they were setting about that commission in no uncertain fashion. To that end there was a wholesale selling of land, houses, and any other kind of valuable property, and presentation of the proceeds to the Apostles both for the prosecution of this evangelism and to meet the needs of the poor among their number. Loud were the hallelujahs and expressions of praise to God as each successive donor came forward to add his contribution to the total; in their sincerity and zeal no one thought of doing other than present the whole of the money received from the particular sale.

In such an atmosphere Ananias came forward. He had sold some land and here was the price received. Secretly, and with the connivance of

his wife Sapphira, he had retained part of the money for himself but the onlookers were not to know that; he allowed them to go on thinking that, like themselves, he had given the whole of the receipts to the cause. He stood before Peter, the money in his extended hand, basking in the approbation of the surrounding believers. Peter was not deceived. He knew the truth of the matter although how he knew it is not explained. It may be an example of knowledge imparted by reason of his attunement with the Holy Spirit—as we would say, inspiration—or it might have been his shrewd knowledge of human nature and something in Ananias' attitude which did not ring true. At any rate, he knew.

It is important to notice that Peter did not condemn or pass sentence on Ananias. His words define a clear statement of the offence, nothing more. "*Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land. Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God*". The printed record cannot reproduce the tone of the words or the demeanour of the speaker. They may have been spoken in indignation and anger; they may have been uttered in accents of infinite sadness. We just do not know. The consequences we do know. Ananias, smitten either by remorse or terror, fell to the ground and died immediately, to the consternation of the onlookers. Heart failure, obviously, but what caused it? There is no indication or evidence that Peter was responsible, no statement that he called upon miraculous power to strike the offender dead there and then. Neither is there any suggestion that Deity intervened in any way to bring about this unhappy man's death. There is no clue whatever to the cause, only the bald fact that upon hearing the Apostle's measured reproof Ananias fell down and breathed his last.

Here we should recall the highly emotional and excitable atmosphere prevailing at the moment. Ananias' mind must already have been in a state of strain, what with that and also the inward knowledge of his own deception. To that might well have been added one further factor. A believer in Christ and a son of Israel, he would have known the history of his people well. As he listened to Peter's declaration that he had attempted to deceive, not man, but God, did

there flash into his mind, from his knowledge of the past, the story of Achan? Achan, in the days of Israel's entry into the Land of Promise under Joshua, was guilty of exactly the same crime. Israel had been instructed that the spoil of the conquest was to be consecrated to God and offered to him; no man might keep any for himself. Achan coveted a wedge of gold, some silver, and a goodly Babylonish garment, and he kept back these items from the spoil he brought to the general offering, and hid them in his tent. The element of deceit rendered the offering unacceptable to God; disaster came upon Israel and men lost their lives in consequence. The sin of Achan came to light and he was put to death with all his family, and his possessions destroyed, in accordance with the custom of those days. Is it possible that Ananias, in one self-revealing moment, realised that he had defiled this present offering to God in the same fashion, and saw himself as worthy only of the same fate that befell Achan? He had tried to cheat God! That sudden realisation coming on top of the tenseness of the moment might well have been sufficient to induce the heart failure which caused his death.

Three hours later his wife came in. By then the dead man had been buried; the Judean summer forbade delay in such matters. There is a different element in Peter's words to Sapphira. They imply a knowledge of what was to come. *"How is it that ye have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out!"* It seems a cruel, almost savage, statement, but here again much depends upon the tone in which it was spoken. The same words uttered sadly, regretfully, slowly, could be those of a man sorely troubled and distressed over the whole matter and conscious only that this woman must in any case now be apprised of her husband's untimely death. It seems certain that Peter was given a fore-glimpse of the coming event; the same faculty of prevision which is evident in so many instances in Scriptural narrative was Peter's at this moment and he must have seen in his mind's eye what was going to happen in a few minutes. It need not be thought that he exercised miraculous power to cause Sapphira's death, only that he knew she was going to die—as she did. The extent to which Peter's words accentuated the shock she would have experienced anyway on hearing of her husband's death is not possible to estimate; she might well have realised that her own share in the plot had helped to cause the tragedy and that had she dissuaded him from the scheme he might yet be alive. The shock

which killed her might not have been altogether, or even in great part, due to Peter's words but to the realisation of her own guilt in the matter and its tragic outcome.

In line with the general level of understanding of the times the spectators would ascribe the happening to Divine intervention. The judgment of God had come upon this guilty pair. The whole thing created a profound impression and without doubt everyone connected with the infant Church took a little more care with their own personal life in the community. To what extent, if any, there was specific Divine judgment in the matter may be open to debate; one has to remember that Judas Iscariot likewise misappropriated funds entrusted to him without any immediate retribution. The narrative states the facts but does not attribute them to any kind of Divine intervention.

Did this lapse affect the eternal destiny of Ananias and Sapphira? There have always been some to insist that the couple are eternally lost; it is possible that the prominence given to their story in the Book of Acts highlights their case more than those of many others who have lapsed from their high standards in this or other ways. There is no reason for thinking that these two were other than perfectly sincere converts to the faith, overtaken by the temptation to win full plaudits from their fellows without meeting the corresponding obligation. The fault was one of greed; it was not flagrant immorality or deep-rooted hostility to righteousness or love of evil. They wanted God to have part of what they had but not all. Many Christians are like that today in things much more important than money. *"Some of self and some of thee"* runs the old hymn, and in a spiritual sense that is much the same thing as the withholding a portion which led to the premature deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. It does not seem very reasonable to think that the tremendous potentialities inherent in two intelligent creatures to whom God had given life should be vitiated and extinguished by what was, after all, not a very terrible crime, when there is no evidence at all that those two beings were already irrevocably committed to evil. And God has *"no pleasure in the death of him that dieth"* but would rather by far that he turn from his evil ways, and live. Perhaps the right view of this question is that stated by Canon R. H. Charles in his *"Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life"* when he says *"the idea that forgiveness is impossible in the next life has only to be stated in order to be rejected; for till absolute fixity of character is reached, repentance and forgiveness, being moral acts, must be possible under a perfectly moral Being"*.

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

The disciples were perplexed. Here they were, in the empty country on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, with five thousand men and a number of women and children who had spent the entire day listening to Jesus' preaching. Evening was coming on, and they had suggested He send the concourse away to the nearby coastal fishing villages to obtain food. He calmly replied. "There is no need. Give them food to eat here and now". They looked round them and then at each other, puzzled. There was no food in sight; they knew, too, that there was no food. They had not even brought any with them for their own simple needs and Jesus knew that perfectly well. They looked at him again. He was standing there with that well-known understanding light in his eyes and they sensed that, somehow, something new and rather wonderful was going to happen. But in the meantime there was this question of food for the multitude, and there was no food.

Philip protested a little "Two hundred pennyworth" (denarii) "of bread would not be enough for this multitude" he said. One denarius was a normal day's wages for a working-man. Such a man expects about twenty pounds or more for a day's work today. Four thousand pounds would be wealth unimaginable to this little band of peasants and fishermen. They looked at their Lord again. What could He be thinking of?

"What food have you got?" asked Jesus suddenly.

They all looked round rather helplessly. "There is a lad here" said Andrew "who has five barley loaves and two small fishes". He regarded the boy with his little store. "But what are they among so many" he concluded hopelessly.

Jesus turned to the boy. "Will you give them to me?" he asked him. The lad came forward rather shyly and handed them over, then stood looking to see what Jesus was going to do.

"Tell everybody to sit down!"

Glad of an excuse for activity, the twelve disciples separated and moved among the crowds, marshalling them into serried ranks and groups. Pandemonium was reduced to order; the hubbub ceased and there was a great silence. The twelve returned and stood before their Master. The boy who had given the loaves was still there.

Holding the fishes and the flat loaves in his hands, Jesus lifted his eyes to heaven. "We thank thee, O Father in heaven, for this bread which thou hast given for the service of man". Motioning his disciples to come closer, he began to

break the loaves in half and fill each man's *kophinos*, the little wicker basket normally used for carrying food when on a journey, dismissing each in turn to distribute his basketful among his section of the waiting crowd.

It was only when Philip came back for his second load that he realised Jesus was standing there breaking pieces of bread with no apparent diminution of those He held in his hand. The lad was standing there, open-mouthed. He stood for a moment, irresolute, a question framing itself on his lips, and then he met again that understanding look in the Master's eyes; he moved away to continue his mission, wondering.

So they came and went, and came and went, until at last all that vast concourse had eaten their fill, and because they were satisfied, and nightfall was at hand, they began to disperse, first in ones and twos, then in groups, until at last the entire field was deserted and only Jesus and his disciples were left. The lad who supplied the original loaves and fishes was gone too, gone with a story to tell that he never forgot to his dying day.

"Where are they all?"

"They have gone, Master!"

Jesus looked at twelve weary men, then at the field, littered now with scraps of bread.

"Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be wasted".

Silently, they obeyed. Presently they stood again before Jesus, each with his food satchel filled with scraps of bread and fish.

Jesus looked at them compassionately. "The labourer is worthy of his hire. You have food now sufficient for your evening meal".

* * * * *

That was how the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand must have appeared to the disciples. It must have made a profound impression, for it is recorded, in practically identical terms, by all four of the Gospel evangelists. It is the only one of Jesus' miracles which is recorded in all four Gospels. It is unlikely that the recipients were similarly impressed. The vast majority of them—perhaps all of them—could have had no idea of the miraculous origin of the food they were eating. All they knew was that men were coming round serving them with bread and fish; from whence it came they knew not and in the main they did not care. Here was a prophet who backed up his preaching with food for the body and very acceptable it was

too. In the upshot it is found that they were more interested in the food than the preaching.

Is the story literally true? Did Jesus really stand there creating bread and fish out of nothing? Of course it is literally true. Its veracity rests in the joint testimony of twelve reliable men who were there at the time and saw it happen. But it is a fallacy to talk about Jesus creating things out of nothing. Bread—and fish too—is composed of elements common in nature—carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, and an admixture of other basic atoms. There was plenty of all this in the vicinity of Jesus, and Divine power, which at the very beginning brought together sufficient of these same elements to produce the body of Adam, was abundantly able to do the same thing when a little bread was needed. The wheat grain in the farmer's field is produced from "nothing" in much the same way—solar energy, sunlight, acting upon the elements of the earth, builds up the ripened grain, no fraction of which was there at the start. Nature takes a year to do it; Jesus did it in a moment of time.

One criticism sometimes levelled at the veracity of the story is the assertion that it is told in two forms; in one case five thousand are fed and twelve baskets of scraps are taken, in the other case, four thousand are fed and seven baskets taken. This, say the critics, demonstrates the unreliability of the story. In point of fact, it only demonstrates the unreliability of the critics. The Gospels are clear that Jesus performed this type of miracle twice. The first time was just before the second Passover of his ministry, at the time of the death of John the Baptist, when He fed the five thousand. This one is recorded in Matt. 14. 13-21; Mark 6. 35-44; Luke 9. 10-17 and John 6. 5-13. The second occasion was some six months later at a different place when He fed the four thousand, recorded in Matt. 15. 32-38 and Mark 8. 1-8. The scene of the first incident was near Bethsaida-Julias on the north-eastern shore of the lake, and Jesus then crossed the lake to the other Bethsaida near Capernaum and the people were with him for one day only. That of the second was halfway down the eastern side of the lake and He afterwards crossed to Magdala near Tiberias and they were with him for three days. The distinction is verified by Jesus himself when in Matt. 16. 9-10. He referred to both incidents, thus removing all justification for confusing the two.

There is a more profound difference. The men of the later incident, the four thousand, glorified the God of Israel in consequence of the miracles that Jesus performed during those three days (Matt. 15. 31). There is no indication in the case of the five thousand that they manifested

any such reaction. True, they regarded the man who had done this thing as perhaps John the Baptist or as Elijah or as one of the other prophets of old, risen from the dead (Luke 9.19) but that was all. There was no glorifying God for this great thing. All the evidence is that the five thousand, unlike the four thousand, were more interested in the material blessings, the "loaves and fishes", than in the spiritual content of our Lord's ministry. This is best brought out in John's account (John 6). The day after the miracle, the people came back to the scene and found that Jesus and his disciples had gone. They—or at least some of them—took to the boats and crossed the lake to Capernaum, seeking Jesus (ch. 6.24). When Jesus saw them, He said "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were satisfied". In other words, the food He had given them meant much more to them than the wonder of the healing He had brought to their sick. So He went on "labour not for the food that perisheth, but for that food which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you". But they were not interested in that which was not perceptible to, and served, their natural senses. "What sign showest thou then" they asked "that we may see and believe thee? What dost thou work?". Their interest in Jesus was only to the extent that He would give them material blessings. "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert" they told him (ch. 6.31) as much as to say "God did that for them; what will you do for us?" to which the Lord replied "My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he cometh down from heaven, and giveth life to the world". But they were in no mood for this metaphysical talk of a spiritual bread which would give heavenly life; they only wanted to know what Jesus would give them here and now, and so impatiently they requested "Lord, evermore give us this bread", the literal bread of which they had tasted the day before. Here was a prophet with the power to give them bread without limit, and that was all they wanted of him.

Sadly, Jesus replied "I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I say unto you, that ye have seen me—and ye believe not". And when at last they perceived that there was going to be no more bread and no more fishes, they began to display their resentment. "Who is this man who says he is the bread which came down from heaven. Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?". There was no appreciation of the kingdom message of Jesus,

no longing for the one who would inaugurate the promised Messianic triumph of Israel and the Abrahamic blessing for all the families of the earth. No spiritual insight; no understanding of the might and majesty of Israel's God. All they wanted was a continuation of the loaves and fishes and anything that tried to lift their dull minds to a higher plane of thought was incomprehensible to them. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they queried contemptuously (ch. 6.52). Not even a prophet now; just "this man"!

It may be asked why the Lord troubled to perform so signal a miracle for the benefit of so undeserving a people. It must of necessity be that it highlights a principle of God's dealings with men. After all, their own ancestors were just as unbelieving yet God wrought great signs

and wonders on their behalf—the crossing of the Red Sea, the waters of Elim, the manna in the wilderness, the crossing of Jordan. Is it that in his infinite wisdom God "sendeth his rain upon the just and the unjust" (Matt. 5.45), that all may at last come to realise his patience and his mercy? It is probable that Jesus found many more followers among the four thousand than He did from the five thousand—yet in a day that will surely come those five thousand will again stand before the Son of Man and receive of his hands something of infinitely greater and more lasting worth than the loaves they mistakenly asked him for on that far-off occasion. They will, at the last, realise what He really meant by the bread of heaven which is for the life of the world, and will without much doubt joyfully and believingly take of that bread of which, if a man eat, he shall live for ever.

THE SHIELD OF FAITH

"Above all, taking the shield of faith, whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (Eph. 6.16).

It is seen in verse 11 that the whole armour is essential for protection of the Christian in the evil day, but the Apostle urges that above all the shield of faith must be taken. This is so because it is able to quench *all* fiery darts. It is the first arm of defence for all parts of the body; and is an extra defence for the already protected head (helmet) and heart (breastplate). The shield is worn on the arm of the warrior, and therefore could easily be laid aside, as it is not fastened to the person like the helmet or breastplate. The warrior could think within himself "there is no foe in sight to-day, and in any case I am protected by my other armour", and lay the shield aside and be taken by surprise.

The shield is for defence, not offence, but it quenches all the darts. Darts! Quite small things are liable to overthrow the warrior. The picture is not a short, sharp stand-up fight against a visible foe. (Sometimes one wishes it were so!) The possibility of defeat is not depicted as in battle, but in ambush.

The all-protecting shield is Faith. It is not Hope—hope concerns the future. It is not Love—love concerns our position before others. The picture is one of protection for ourselves, now. The shield is not Works—if it were works the Adversary would soon defeat us. He would not need to take us by surprise if that were the case. He would tell us that we were not performing

the true works, or that we were not doing enough works, or not doing them efficiently. What, then, are the darts?

Instead of darts, let us read it as "doubts"; for small darts, little doubts, may easily wear down the resistance of the soldier and cause him to give up the fray. The soldier might say to himself that he would be doing real fighting, real campaigning, rather than having to defend against these trivial things. If the Christian war were of this kind there would be numerous soldiers of the cross, but, because the weapon that may defeat them is so small, the Christian army is a small one.

The Psalmist says: "His truth shall be thy shield and buckler." What is the connection between faith as a shield and truth as a shield? The link between the two is seen in Paul's reasoning in Rom. 10. 15-17: "Lord, who hath believed our report? So, then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God". First the hearing of the word, and then faith in it. And in Hebrews he tells of those to whom the word preached did not profit, "not being mixed with faith in them that heard it". Faith, then, is useless except it be exercised in truth, and truth is profitless unless it be accepted in faith.

What are the doubts or darts against which the shield of faith is so complete protection? Our doubts are not those which disturb the agnostic mind, or such doctrines as the mortality of the soul, or resurrection, or those mentioned in Heb. 6. 1 and 2. The doubts which

assail the member of Christ are about those truths concerning the church which Paul is in this Ephesian epistle including in his description of the "hope of his calling". Paul is writing to a church which is well acquainted with the first principles of Christian doctrine, and he writes that they may better comprehend the glories which are reserved for the sons of God. These are the truths of which doubts dart at us. *The Adversary does not concern himself about the Church's beliefs, providing he can induce them to misunderstand or undervalue their standing in Christ.*

How does the dart come? Should you lay aside the shield of faith the Adversary will suggest to you that the riches of Ephesians are not written to you; or, that although you may believe them as promises to you, there is a very big "if" to remember (and he will give you chapter and verse for the "if"); or that the promises of Ephesians are overstatements, and that to get the Apostle's true idea one must reduce those promises to proper proportions; or that to assume that the promises of future glory are for you is unworthy ambition. So the dart flies at us if we forget or neglect the shield. The true Church's trial of faith is to ardently believe that the Ephesian glories are for them.

Read Eph. 1.7; *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace."* No dart assails us in this, for we believe that we have this free salvation. But when we read verses 4 and 5: *"According as He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him. Having, in love, pre-destinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will"*, our doubts may come. Do we believe verses 4 and 5 as truly as we believe verse 7? The truth that God foreknew his people, that we were chosen in him before we had done ill or good is so staggering that it is clearly beyond the mind of man to concoct; and what an answer to him who says that our standing in the body of Christ is largely a matter of works. No salvation-by-works mind ever dreamed of foreknowledge! But the Adversary will suggest that only pride will assume that we are chosen in him so long ago. And if you reply in the words of faith, "It is written," he may then say that the words may refer to so-and-so, but not you—you could not reach to that great height! And again the answer is "It is written." Is this great truth a shield? It is; many doubts are shattered by this.

Think also of Eph. 2. 1-3. Reading the words, we feel like writing our own names against these verses in the margin, because they so aptly describe what we know of ourselves. We would not dispute them; but when we read further to the end of the chapter doubts arise in our minds. The temple, the habitation of God, the citizenship, the equal standing we have even with Paul himself causes us to wonder. The doubt may say to us "You cannot raise yourself to that level, the Apostle's pen has run away with him, and to get the proper view you must reduce it to your own plane". The question is: Do we as heartily believe the standing we now have in Christ as the position we had in Adam? The defence against these doubts of mind is simply faith. We are asked to accept this wonderful grace of God. That is all. Therefore, take the shield of faith and quench the darts.

But, we may reason, surely we must do something to attain or merit this great grace. Be careful! That is also a dart! This "doing" is a well-tried and often successful device of the Adversary. He has always said to all the saints—"earn it, earn it". Thus, unbelief is one dart and works is another. (As though these heights of glory could ever be earned!) Let us realise that the acceptance of these promises and present standing in wholehearted faith is a far greater deed than all works.

How is the shield to be used to ward off the fiery dart? The princely leader of faith gives us, by example, the only right means of defence. The first recorded use by our Lord of the shield of faith was immediately after his baptism at the temptation. He used it by saying to the tempter "It is written"; and three times He so used it, and the devil left him. He saw that our Lord made no attempt to reason with him, or in any way to argue the pros and cons of the temptation, but relied solely upon what was already written in the Word of God. And, in our Lord's closing moments on the cross He is still found quoting Scripture to himself for his own defence. The written word is the only defence we have, and is also the only reply to Satan. Let us not attempt to fight the foe—all we need do is defend ourselves in faith, for there is an appointed day for his removal.

After the Apostle has detailed the armour in Eph. 6 he urges praying always for oneself and one's fellows. And surely the prayer should be "Lord increase our faith". That prayer answered will mean that we shall secure the victory that overcometh the world, *our faith*.

THE VISION OF JOEL

4. The Cry of Faith

*Exposition of the
Book of Joel
Ch. 2. 1-11*

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

This is a wonderful invitation—wonderful because God has at this very moment allowed the heathen executors of his judgment to come in amongst the holy people to ravage them. God could have kept them at arm's length, but no, He allowed them to come as it were into the city and right into the people's houses, and it is then, when all hope seems at an end, that He invites the afflicted ones to turn to him in sincerity and faith and He will deliver them. *"Who knoweth"* cries Joel *"if He will turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him?"* Evidently Joel himself was one of such who did know that God would so do, for in the preceding verse he has stated his conviction that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness. Jonah, half a century later, used precisely the same words, when remonstrating with God over his leniency with the Ninevites. "I knew," he says, "that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth thee of the evil. Wherefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life away from me; for it is better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4. 2.) Strange that one prophet should exhort his people to repentance because God is merciful, and another should reproach God for his mercy to people who had repented; but we are just as inconsistent in our own profession and our walk before God in many ways. Both prophets really sought the same end; they both wanted to see righteousness exalted and evil destroyed, and to both of them evil and the Assyrians were one and the same thing. And even so late as this present day men have not learned that evil is not banished from the earth by the mere destruction of one nation which has practised evil things.

So Joel's exhortation here was one to repentance in the face of threatened and imminent disaster. As the chapter is followed down to verses 20 and 22 and onward, it is seen that the exhortation must have been heeded, for here, at last, is the evidence of Divine deliverance, full and complete. The northern invaders are driven into the wilderness and destroyed, the land re-

covers from the ravages that it has suffered and brings forth its harvests once again, there is a great restitution of all that was lost, and, most wonderful of all, Israel is converted and turns to the Lord in sincerity (verse 27). And the question immediately springs to the mind—has this part of the prophecy had its fulfilment?

As the pages of history are scanned, the answer must be "No!". Never yet has there been a time in Israel's history when by any stretch of the imagination such things as these could be said to have been true. When at any time has it been that "I will no more make you a reproach among the nations" (2.19)? From Joel's time to our own day they have been a reproach and derision. From Joel's time to our own day they have been the spoil of the nations. And when was it true of any alien power that has ever invaded the Holy Land that God has revealed himself to their destruction, led them into the barren wilderness of the Dead Sea and made them a wonder and an astonishment in their end? When has God ever restored to Israel the years that the great ravaging powers have taken from them, restored to them all that they have lost, and given them to eat in plenty and be satisfied? And when, above all things, has it been true that Israel has known and acknowledged that God is dwelling in her midst, and has put her trust in him, and never again been ashamed (2.26)? The signs of such a wonderful national conversion have never been manifest; to-day they are more lacking than ever. The only logical interpretation of this passage is that it refers to a time yet to come, and when that fact is realised it is easy to see that these events are the immediate predecessors of the promised pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh spoken of in verses 28-32.

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

when the greatest invader of all time would be hammering at the portals of the Holy Land "to take a spoil and to take a prey".

It is significant that in verse 20 the phrase is "I will remove far off from you the northern army." Israel's enemies of Joel's own day—Assyrians, Scythians, Babylonians—came from the north, down the great highway that ran from Carchemish on the Euphrates, through the Plain of Esdraelon, the literal "Armageddon" of the Bible, down into Egypt. But after the Babylonians there were no more invaders from the north, until the Time of the End! Greeks and Romans came from the West; Persians and Saracens from the South; Mongols from the East; Arabs from the South; and in more recent days, Britain from the West. It is not until that mysterious King of Daniel 11, the "King of the North", comes upon the scene, that Israel is again afflicted by a "northern army". And that is still future, even though by all present political indications, it may be a very imminent event.

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

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

History records two stirring events of which that district was the scene. One is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Abraham, and the other the miraculous deliverance of Jehoshaphat and his people from the Moabites in consequence of their faith in God. Are these the pointers for us? Is this a hint that the destruction of the hosts of Gog and Magog will come about, not by the people of God defending themselves with earthly weapons, but in consequence of calm faith in God and his rising up to defend them? That seems to be the consistent testimony of Scripture. "At that time shall Michael stand up" says the revealing Angel to Daniel. This second chapter of Joel becomes eloquent in that case. The last great invasion, the last onslaught of the powers of evil against the regathered holy people and the Kingdom of which they are to be the nucleus, will be that in the face of which the people are in the attitude of heart depicted in verses 12-17 of chapter 2, a condition of repentance, of supplication, and of faith that God can, and will, deliver.

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

Now the prophecy passes on, beyond the great invasion, "Jacob's trouble", and the great deliverance, into those early years of the Kingdom when the Lord will "reign in Zion, and before his ancients, gloriously". "Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice—the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength" (verses 21-22). These verses are reminiscent of Isaiah's "Millennial" passages, and well they might be, for they refer to the beginning of that same blessed day. The Time of Trouble is over, the Kingdom has been set up, the presence of the King proclaimed to all and sundry, and the law of the Lord is going forth from Zion. Appropriately enough Joel sees all this in terms of the restored and renovated earth, and rightly so, for one of the first evidences of "restitution"

will be the greater fruitfulness of the earth itself, providing food for the soon-to-return multitudes of the dead. Hence comes verse 23. "Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God; for He hath given you the former rain moderately, and He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month." The Vulgate turns the first phrase "the former rain moderately" into "a teacher of righteousness", and on this basis some have found in this verse a prophecy of the coming of Jesus. In the century prior to the First Advent there was a movement, or "sect", among the Jews which looked for such a "teacher of righteousness" to precede the "Last Day" and the pouring out of the Spirit, and the expectation thus aroused did much to cause men to be "in expectation" as is stated in the Gospels. But it is not likely that Joel did prophesy thus; his picture is one of the fields and crops, and in this verse he is likening God's treatment of Israel at the End Time to the regular succession of the seasons. The first expression really means "rain in just measure," and the three "rains" after that, the three stages into which the agricultural year was divided. First, in October, came the "rain", the heavy downpour which softened the dry ground, and made ploughing and sowing possible. Then, from December to February, the "former rain", or as the Hebrews called it, "sprinkling rain", continuous light rain that encouraged steady growth. Lastly, in April and May, the "latter rain" that refreshed the ripening wheat and crops.

What a vivid picture of this trial and trouble upon Israel, and its outcome! First, the "heavy rain" of intense trouble that ploughed men's hearts and made possible the sowing of Divine seed; next, the "sprinkling rain" of Divine care and deliverance, and the early processes of Kingdom work calculated to bring Israel into conformity with the new laws and lead them to a condition of harmony with the Kingdom arrangements. Finally, the "latter rain" that finished the ripening work in their hearts and made them full citizens of the Millennial Kingdom. This is a finely-drawn picture of the providences of God descending upon men "like the gentle rain from heaven".

And the result? "The floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil" (verse 24). Millennial abundance is to follow immediately, and the cry go out to all the

nations "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters—come ye, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa. 55.1).

"And I will restore to you"—precious promise—"the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you" (verse 25). If this "great army" does in fact embrace all Israel's oppressors through the ages, there may be more than a coincidence in this selection of four out of the many species of locusts with which the country was so often afflicted. Moffatt gives the variants in clearest language—he renders "the lopping, the swarming, the leaping, the devouring locusts". The *gazam*, the "loppers", might very well picture the first great world power, Babylon, which "lopped" Israel from their land, and took them into captivity; the *arbeh*, the "swarmers" (cankerworm) could equally well picture the overspreading might of Persia, which, although it did restore Judea and Jerusalem, did so only as part of its campaign to subdue and cover all the nations of Western Asia. Quite appropriate is the application of *yelek*, the "leapers" (caterpillar) to Greece, the nation that is pictured in Daniel 8 as a tempestuous he-goat coming against the ram (Persia) with such fury as seemingly not even to touch the ground in his mad onward rush; and of course the epithet of "devourer" (the *chasil*, palmerworm) is very fitting of Rome, the fourth, and, in its derived successors, the greatest of Israel's oppressors. And God is going to restore to Israel all that these have devoured. No wonder that Peter at Pentecost associated this prophecy with the Times of Restitution of all things, spoken of by all the prophets from the beginning.

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

(To be continued)

Oh! wonderful economy of God! and oh! wonderful wisdom of God! to accomplish the overthrow of all evil things and evil men by the

power of his grace, by the power that enables men to endure fire and flame, scorn and reproach, in the faith of him.

MATTHIAS THE APOSTLE

An enquiry

To what extent was Matthias generally accepted as the twelfth Apostle in succession to Judas, after the latter's betrayal of Jesus? The outstanding position of St. Paul in later times has led to a very general feeling that he was the twelfth Apostle although there is no statement to that effect in the New Testament. He was certainly an Apostle, but conceivably of a different order, like Barnabas (Acts 14. 14) who is also called an Apostle. In any case St. Paul was virtually unknown to the Apostles—save Peter—or the Judean and Galilean churches for at least ten years after the Resurrection and it is unlikely that these believers would readily have accorded him the status of one of the Twelve unless and until they had become thoroughly familiar with him. The account in Acts 1. 15-26, relating how Matthias came to be selected as the successor to Judas immediately after the Ascension states plainly that he was accepted by the assembled church as such after prayer and the seeking of the Lord's will.

The question is sometimes raised as to the precise meaning of the phrase in Acts 2. 14 "*But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said . . .*" Does this imply that Peter was included in the eleven or that he stood up with eleven others? If the latter, it is clear that Matthias was present and shared in the bestowal of the Holy Spirit with its miraculous gifts. This, in turn, if correct, would seem to imply Divine acceptance of Matthias as one of the Twelve.

The answer to the question lies in the usage of the preposition "*sun*" (with). Parallel instances in the New Testament seem conclusive that the meaning here is that Peter stood up with *eleven others*; there were twelve in all.

As illustration, note the following examples, Acts 1. 14 "These all (apostles) continued . . . in prayer *with* the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus and *with* his brethren."

Acts 1. 21-22 "Wherefore of these men . . . must one be ordained to be a witness *with* us of his resurrection."

Acts 3. 8 "And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him *with* John."

Acts 3. 8 "And he, leaping up . . . entered *with* them into the temple."

Had the writer of Acts intended to convey that Peter was included in a total number of

eleven he would have used a different preposition meaning "among" as he did in fact use in numerous instances of which the following are examples.

Acts 1. 17 "He (Judas) was numbered *among* us."

Acts 4. 34 "Neither was there any *among* that lacked."

Acts 5. 12 "By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought *among* the people."

It is true that Matthias is never mentioned again in the New Testament. His later life and career are completely unrecorded. In this he is not alone. Neither are those of the apostles Andrew, Thomas, Bartholemew, James of Alpheus and Simon the Zealot. Absence of further reference is evidently no indication of Divine non-recognition. It is more probable that Matthias continued to be recognised as one of the Twelve in Judean and Galilean circles of the Early Church and spent his life, as did others, in faithful pastoral and missionary labours among the home Churches, whilst Paul and Barnabas, Apostles to the Gentiles, wrought mightily in mission fields far away from the original birthplace of the Church.

The word Apostle means one sent forth, or one despatched as an ambassador. The Twelve Apostles were so named by Jesus because they specially represented him and went forth to preach his message. After his Ascension it was felt that the members of the Twelve should all have been witnesses of his resurrection, a logical enough conclusion if they were to continue as his representatives and ambassadors. Matthias was evidently one of the many believers who had seen the Lord after his resurrection, and also had companied with him during his lifetime from the beginning of his ministry (Acts 1. 21-22). Paul could claim by reason of his experience on the Damascus road to be a witness to the Lord's resurrection but not to have companied with him during his life on earth. The Apostleship of Paul was exercised in a different sphere and it is possible that after all it was Matthias who completed the number of the Twelve, at least in the eyes of Jerusalem Christians. In any case the Twelve separated soon after Pentecost and were scattered over the Eastern world; they never functioned as an entity again.

"TO FULFIL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS" Some thoughts on baptism

John lifted up his eyes from the water in which he stood and beheld his cousin Jesus stepping into the stream to be baptised by him, and his whole being rebelled within him at the very thought. "I have need to be baptised of thee" he protested "and comest thou to me?" He knew, perhaps better than any other man, the spotless life of this One standing before him. Whether or no he had realised prior to this moment that the firstborn son of Mary was indeed the Messiah that he had been proclaiming for six months past, he knew well that of all men in Jewry this One least needed his baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Therefore he demurred, and in his idea of what was fitting would not lift his hand to baptise his cousin, until the quiet, compelling voice of Jesus broke down his resistance and induced compliance with the request. "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." (Matt. 3. 13-17). So Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, led the way and set the example in the performance of a ceremonial symbol which his disciples, with but few exceptions, have followed ever since.

What is the significance of this act which has occupied so prominent a place in Christian thought and practice through the centuries? Is it nothing more than a ritual cleansing, a sign that the believer has been purified and made acceptable in God's sight and accepted into his Church, or does it indicate some deeper and more far-reaching truth? The fact that the Apostles and the Early Church attached so much importance to the ceremony—no less than thirteen instances are recorded in the Book of Acts—surely justifies at the very least some serious consideration of this subject.

Jesus himself needed no "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins", which was the avowed purpose of John's baptism (Mark 1. 4). Neither did He dispute or deny John's implied assertion that He needed no baptism of that nature. Quietly, nevertheless, He insisted upon going through the ceremony. That it marked some very definite change in his life and work is shown very clearly in the fact that at this time He began his ministry, a ministry that culminated three and a half years later in his death on the cross.

The word translated "righteousness" in this text is used in the New Testament for "righteousness" ninety-four times. It is the word that

in a slightly different form is used for "justification", and its primary meaning is that of being right with God or doing the thing that is right with God. Wilson's "Emphatic Diaglott" translates "it is becoming us to establish every ordinance" and this may express something of the thought, although the true meaning is undoubtedly that of "filling full", or fulfilling, the thing that is right with God. In other words, this is an instance of "Lo, I come, to do thy will, O God". And in so coming to Jordan and sinking beneath the waters, then rising again and going forth into a new life, Jesus was assuredly doing something that had a significance far greater than that of mere cleansing, a significance that touches things of the future life and the next world, penetrating into Ages which as yet have not dawned. What He did must have been for his followers' sakes as well as his own, that they might understand the relation of this simple act to their own lives and standing before God, when in their turn they too came, as Jesus did when He was thirty years of age, to enter upon a life of consecration unto death for the salvation of the world.

It is usual to go back to the Old Testament for light on the rituals and the doctrines of the New Testament. In the case of baptism the Old Testament very nearly fails us, but not quite. There is no such thing as baptism in the Old Testament; the word is not mentioned and the children of Israel at no time in their history practised baptism. When John the Baptist waded into Jordan and commenced baptising repentant Jews for the remission of their sins he was instituting something entirely new. The idea of repentance was not new but this expressing of repentance by an outward act was. But John's baptism did have a basis and something of that basis is found in the Old Testament. The Law provided that those who came to the Lord with offerings and sacrifices must first be ceremonially clean by washing in water. The priest before being inducted into office was first washed in the great "Laver" in the Court of the Tabernacle. In that simple act and the consecration ceremony which succeeded it we have the principles upon which acceptance with God is achieved. *Cleansing—Anointing—Sacrifice*; that was the order of things in the duty of priests in Israel and the same order prevails among Christians now. Repentance and belief in Christ brings justification by faith. That is the first step. That is cleansing. That is the truth lying behind Paul's

word to the Ephesians when he declares that Christ gave himself for his followers, the Church, "that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word" (Eph. 5. 26) and his declaration to Titus that Jesus saves us "by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3. 5). The washing must come before the renewing.

That is only one aspect of the true baptism that lies behind the symbol, the ceremonial. The second aspect is that which follows the initial justification, and is best expressed in the words of Paul to the Romans (Rom. 6. 4-5) "we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death. . . ." Here is a theme that has nothing to do with cleansing but everything to do with the dedication of life to death that out of death there might come eternal life. It has to do with the going into death of the few, following the One Who first went into death alone, that out of that death all might be received into life. And that in turn harks back to a truth that was first enunciated in New Testament days by Peter on the Day of Pentecost itself, that this coming of man into eternal life is really a restoration of that which existed at the first. "Times of Restitution of all things" he calls the day when this new life is to be extended to all men, for there was a day at the very beginning when man, newly created by the hand of God, had eternal life within his grasp.

It is because the surviving records of those far-off days are so scanty that we are not able completely to trace this aspect of the doctrine of baptism back to its probable origin in the days of the promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3. 15). The Apostle Paul, whose knowledge of ancient lore was almost certainly far more profound than we to-day can easily realise, referred to something of this when he wrote in 1 Cor. 10. 2 of Israel, passing through the Red Sea, being "baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea". That was not a baptism of cleansing; it was a baptism of separation, of dedication to the purposes of God that they might be a chosen people, a Royal Priesthood, ultimately to become an instrument in God's hand for the reconciliation of fallen man to himself and the accomplishment of his purposes with them. To accomplish that end they must of necessity pass through the waters that separate between fallen man in a sinful world and the eternal life that can only be achieved in God's world.

Peter must have seen something of that when he likened Christian baptism to the historical incident of the Flood. In the days of the Ark, he says, a few were saved by water—were carried through the water and saved when all others perished — "the like figure whereunto baptism doth also now save us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ". (1 Pet. 3.21). He meant something very much akin to Paul's words about Israel's baptism in the Red Sea. Noah and his family were forever separated from an evil world, where sin reigned, by the waters of the Deluge, and they came forth into a new world which to them was a world of new and Divine life, a world where the Spirit of God could have full scope for the exercise of beneficent power and the righteous live according to the dictates of their own pious hearts with none to make them afraid. The fact that in after days the world relapsed again into evil does not spoil the picture of the new, renovated world into which Noah and his family entered when they emerged from the Ark, nor of the fact that we who by baptism are separated just as surely from a doomed and dying world come forth to a new order of things which is ultimately to become the "desire of all nations".

In ancient mythologies the present sinful world was considered to be separated from the original perfect and sinless world by water—a sea that was impassable to ordinary human beings and could only be crossed by the favour of the gods. What dim memory of some great historical fact is enshrined in that idea we shall probably never know, at least this side the Vail, but the vague outline of the belief remains and it has some bearing upon our subject. In the Babylonian story of the Flood the patriarch Noah, for his piety, was carried across the sea and given a dwelling-place among the gods. Only the pure in heart and righteous of life could hope thus to traverse the waters and enter into eternal life. The evil spirits could not cross them, but must forever remain with men in the world of sin (this is the belief that gave rise to the idea that the demons are unable to cross running water, a popular belief to which our Lord referred in Luke 11. 24 when he said that the unclean spirit, cast out of a man, "walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and finding none"). In order to symbolise this separation between the worlds of evil and good there was, in the great Temple of Marduk at Babylon, a huge basin or tank of water, known as the "apsu" or "sea", and a ceremony very similar to the later washing of the Levitical priests was conducted there. As showing the similarity of ideas it is interesting again to note that the great

Laver in Solomon's Temple is called in the Old Testament by this very name of "sea". (1 Kings 7. 23-44; 1 Chron. 4. 2-15). One of the oldest of Sumerian traditions tells how at the birth of Marduk, the god of Babylon, he was baptised in that "sea" and thereupon became the Redeemer of mankind. Sometimes those legends and mythologies have been dismissed as inventions of the Devil; what is far more likely is that they represent distorted memories of what were once, in dim antediluvian days, a tolerably clear understanding of the Divine purposes. It might well be that our first parents, during the centuries in which they lived and learned about God, were given some understanding that the promised Seed of whom God had spoken in the Garden must one day plunge beneath the waters of separation and of death that He might rise again in newness of life for the salvation of the world. There is some reason to believe that man's separation from Eden was brought about by the submersion of the Garden by the waters of the sea. That theme cannot be enlarged upon here, but if such should actually have been the case it becomes easier to understand why subsequent generations, as the world grew steadily older in sin and death, should look longingly back to that former golden age and wondrous garden from which the relentless sea had forever separated them, until the memory passed into a legend growing ever more dim with the passage of years. Logically, then, the only way back to the lost Paradise would be by a passage through the sea, and that in turn would lead to the realisation that the One Who was at the end to be man's Redeemer must himself pass through that sea, alone, and emerge triumphant on the other side.

There we have what may be the foundation of this second and so much more important aspect of baptism. We who are buried *with* Christ by baptism into his death are forever separated from the world and its aims and interests; we have elected to follow Christ whithersoever He may lead—and He leads into those symbolic waters and beneath those waters and then out of those waters into a new life. Like as Christ was raised from the dead, so we also rise to walk in newness of life. That new life is lived in this world, here and now, but because of that new life we are no longer of this world. We have become citizens of the perfect world, the Paradise of righteousness which lies beyond the waters, the Paradise to which all men will attain when at last the waters are done away—they in the earthly phase of that Paradise, and those who went through the waters in the spiritual, heavenly phase.

That then is the vision before us as we go down into the symbolic baptismal waters, when by the One Spirit we, individually, are baptised into the One Body (1 Cor. 12. 13). We, here, are still in the world of death and suffering and all manner of evil. Over there, on the other side of the water, there is the glorious world of the future, Eden restored, the River of Life and the Trees of Life, and the Holy City, New Jerusalem, waiting to come down from God to man. But Eden cannot be restored to man, much as man needs it and, maybe, longs for it, until Christ's consecrated followers have followed him into those waters and been planted together in the likeness of his death. Only then can they emerge also in the likeness of his resurrection (Rom. 6. 5). The world must wait until that has become an accomplished fact and the consecration of earthly life which is the real baptism has been consummated in actual death of the human frame and a glorious resurrection to spiritual being. "*We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*" (1 John 3. 2). Until then "the earnest expectation of the creation *waiteth* for the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. 8. 19). The measure of our desire to see evil brought to an end and all mankind ushered into everlasting happiness, and God's will done on earth as in heaven, will be revealed by the whole-heartedness with which we present our own selves in absolute dedication of self and consecration of life to our Heavenly Father, willingly accepting whatever in his providence is to be our experience in life, and seeking in every possible manner to be so fashioned and moulded by the all-powerful Holy Spirit of God that we shall ultimately become vessels fitted for his future purposes.

It is after consecration has become an established thing with us that we enter into the third aspect of baptism. The true baptism is not only cleansing; it is not only separation to holy things; it is also an entry into suffering. Suffering is an essential factor in the Divine Plan. We may not know—we do not know—just why that is so and just what redemptive or reformatory power is inherent in suffering, but the Scriptures show clearly that it is so. Our Lord's death on the Cross provided the Ransom for man, but his life of suffering was the offering for sin by means of which man will ultimately be reconciled to God. Both are necessary in the Divine Plan. And with those who are Christ's consecrated followers, seeking to become joint-heirs with him of the Kingdom and associated with him as his "Bride" in the glory of all future ages, the fact that they are dead to the world and are ready to lay down life itself for the Lord and the

Truth is not the only fruit of their lives that God can use for the salvation of mankind. He can, and will, also use the fruit of every act of sacrifice and every pang of suffering that there has been throughout those consecrated lives. We realise, and say, at times, that suffering and sacrifice plays an important part in the development of character. Perhaps we could never approach conformity to the Divine likeness without it. We do know that our Lord was made perfect through suffering, and the disciple is not greater than his Lord. Therefore our baptism is, beside a baptism of cleansing and a baptism of separation, a baptism of suffering. It was so with Jesus. *"I have a baptism to be baptised with"* He said *"and how am I straitened till it be accomplished."* (Luke 12. 50). When the mother of Zebedee's children, John and James, asked that her sons be given the chief places of honour in the Kingdom, Jesus asked them if they were able to be baptised with the baptism that He was baptised with. They assured him that they were able. What innocent confidence they had, knowing not what the future held for them of suffering and persecution and death! Jesus knew. *"Ye shall indeed be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with."* Perhaps he knew also that they would be faithful and come through triumphant at the end. In after days they must often have thought of their early joyous ignorance.

So it is with us. We enter the Narrow Way full of confidence—perhaps we think of our baptism principally as a cleansing; that it is also going to mean separation we see to some extent; that it will additionally involve suffering we see not at all. The revelation comes later, when we are becoming progressively stronger and more able to bear it. If then, when the trials of the way are more than usually oppressive, and affliction more than usually difficult to bear, the darkness seems to have overcome the light, and the things of this world to be overpowering the things of the Spirit, then is the time to remember that we who have entered the waters of baptism are half-way through to the glory land on the other side. We are in process of being buried with him by baptism into his death, and the process in its working out may be a painful one at times—but we shall rise again, and when we do rise again it will be in the likeness of his resurrection. *"I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."* (Psa. 17. 15).

Cleansing—separation—suffering; thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. How can we hold back longer from yielding "our reasonable service"? *"I beseech you, therefore, brethren"* pleads the great Apostle *"that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable*

unto God, your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds..." (Rom. 12. 1-2). Will we not answer his plea with a joyous assent and a willing coming to God in full surrender?

What of the symbol? What of the simple, eloquent ceremony in which the believer, heart full of love to his Lord, testifies before his brethren of the decision that has already been taken and the consecration of life that has already been made, it may have been, a considerable time ago, within the privacy of the heart and mind? Our Master surely knew that some great value lies in this joyful ritual, some great blessing for the one thus symbolising his or her consecration. The fact that He himself insisted upon leading the way for all his disciples in going down into the literal waters is surely evidence enough for that! So too, when about to leave them, He bade them go forth and teach all nations, baptising in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28. 19-20). The Book of Acts offers abundant testimony that the Apostles interpreted that instruction very literally and obeyed it very wholeheartedly, and the Church throughout all subsequent ages has done the same. Whatever may be our feelings as to the value and usefulness of ceremony and ritual, or whatever the reason that may tend to deter from the outward symbolic performance of a rite that testifies to the inward surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ that has already taken place, do not let us allow them to silence the gentle, compelling tones of the One we love and serve. *"Nevertheless suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."* He knows, better than we can ever hope to do, what source of strength, what stabilising and sustaining influence, the memory of that little ceremony may become to us in some dark or stressful experience of life that may still lie ahead of us, in the unknown future.

"See, here is water" said the Ethiopian eunuch after Philip had expounded the words of life and opened his eyes. *"What doth hinder me to be baptised?"*

"If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest."

"And he went on his way rejoicing!"

So may we, having understood and experienced the true baptism of consecration to God and burial into the death of Christ, follow that surrender with an outward testimony to our brethren—and to our Lord—in the fashion hallowed by Jesus himself, thus setting our feet firmly and straightly on the road that leads to the Kingdom, and going on our way... rejoicing!

THE ATTITUDE OF STEPHEN

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

"The tenor of the life decides the crisis of the moment."

In these days, when the Lord's dear ones are hourly in contact with a diseased world, and the danger of infection is truly great, it is refreshing and pleasant as well as pleasing to the Lord, to turn our minds to a contemplation of beautiful things, holy lives, Christ-like characters.

Amongst the anthology of such individuals in God's Word, the beloved Stephen surely has a place. Stephen was a man of well-balanced attributes. He had knowledge, and was sober with it; he had love for the Lord, and knew how to put it to practical service; he had faith, but not blind faith. He followed his Lord to the end, bearing erect the banner of Love, Meekness and Purity, and when his adversaries, by corrupting justice, resorted to brute force in a vain effort to nullify his holy influence, he quietly gave up his life as being quite secondary to his loving allegiance to the Master. And did his enemies show up favourably when all was done? Did they succeed in their aims, and was Stephen a hopeless failure in his? Think on the brief account of his experiences in Acts 6 and 7.

The early church chose seven men of their assembly to attend to the more temporal duties in their organisation, in order to relieve the apostles for their office of spiritual administration. Stephen was amongst those chosen; indeed, he heads the list, and is the only one mentioned with a commendation. It is stated that he was chosen as "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit." Compared with the Church, the other six could not have been lacking in faith and the Holy Spirit, yet Stephen is given honourable mention as being *full* of these things. From the record it is evident that he was in every way fitted to be an apostle, but he used his office as deacon to the great benefit of the Gospel. "The message of God extended, and in Jerusalem the number of disciples greatly increased; besides which very many of the priests were subdued to the faith. Stephen especially, full of active benevolence, produced great and wonderful evidence for the people" (Acts 6. 7-8, *Fenton*). Representatives of other sects from throughout the Eastern Mediterranean countries debated with him, but "were not able to withstand the intelligence and the spirit with which he spoke." As a

result of this, they bribed other men to accuse him of blasphemy.

This was one of the things that happened at Jesus' trial (Matt. 26. 60-61). And the same sort of thing is happening to his people today. We are daily being called upon to stand out from the activities of the misguided world, and make our position clear to men. One of the effects of standing, without compromise, firmly and faithfully for Christ's principles of love and gentleness, is that our light must inevitably shine, and as the light cannot dwell with darkness it is the object of great annoyance, jealousy and hatred with some types of men. This narrow-minded spirit begets prejudice; prejudice calls forth undue criticism; exaggerated reports of distorted facts reach other ears, and even trumped up charges are levelled at the individual Christian. This is, of course, extremely encouraging, for it is one of the indications that we are on the right road to our goal, for he who would live godly must expect to suffer persecution, and "happy are ye if ye suffer for righteousness' sake". But these experiences can be very wearying to the strongest of us, especially when they continue for some considerable time. We thank our loving Heavenly Father that his strength is made perfect in our weakness; that "*He knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are but dust.*" He, as it were, puts his hand upon us, tender and careful to us, yet strong in protection from our spiritual enemies, and, seeing it with the eye of faith we are enabled to feel peace within and reflect peace without, instead of returning enmity and strife to our accusers. To the council of the Sanhedrin, who had been intently watching Stephen during the bitter outburst of his antagonists, his face appeared as if it had been that of an angel.

*Blest be the man whose heart belongs to God;
Whose way is guided by his powerful Arm.
His lot is peace, and 'mid earth's seething strife
His heart is still, beneath God's tranquil calm,
And all is quiet within. A wondrous quiet—
A quiet from which God's thoughts can emanate.
A deep, deep quiet, bequeathed by God himself,
Which means a great deal more than worldly
wealth.*

*It means his mind is free to think of God—
To understand him and his careful Love.
It helps him fix his mind on things above,
And so he grows, alike to God's dear Son,
And with his help, the race to victory run.*

Stephen's reply to the council was uncompromising and clear. In it, we suggest, was a perfect example of full consecration to the Lord. He did not attempt to defend himself, but valued neither his life nor the opinion of men to let it hinder the passage of the Holy Spirit through him. He was *filled* with the Holy Spirit, and it

was reflected in the words he spoke.

As a thought to ponder on as we go our way, how much do we owe to Stephen for the great ministry of the Apostle Paul, who, as Saul of Tarsus, stood and witnessed his martyrdom, no doubt thinking hard the while.

The Tower of Strength

"God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea (Psa. 46. 1-2).

It is a comforting thing to find shelter in a storm. To be in some secure place, witnessing the fury of the elements, while conscious of being out of harm's way, is at once a sublime spectacle and a stirring experience. The great upheavals of Nature have a way of uprooting, overthrowing and removing old landmarks and familiar objects. When calm prevails the spectator is astonished at the change brought about in a few hours of havoc. The work of renovation and restoration is of prime importance, but no place looks the same again. New work brings change often for the better. Wise builders, with better ideas, never repeat the old mistakes.

If, in any of the creative epochs of the earth there had been any intelligent observers of those stupendous scenes, when continents rose from tumultuous oceans, dripping with warm silt and marine life, when one age with all its strange creatures perished that another of a finer order might take its place, the whole terrible process would have been regarded as a calamity. Yet steps like these, mighty and world shaking, prepared the planet for living man.

Since his advent, his social world has endured all the great changes of history. Peoples and nations have lived through shattering events. They have survived the storms and eruptions of war, revolution, plague and famine, apart from those tempests and shakings of the natural elements which make feeble, man's own efforts at destruction. Empires have fallen, old systems have been swept away, inevitably changing the views and progress of the survivors.

The tumult of the nations is like the roaring of the seas. Like the restless tide of many waters, it surges forward clamouring at the bulwarks of faith and idealism, assaulting the age old laws and constitutions which, like bastions, have long

withstood the relentless floods of anarchy and infidelity. When mountains of power are carried into such seas, when much that is old, treasured and venerated, begins to sink beneath a tide which cannot be turned, when everything that can be shaken is being shaken. It takes courage to witness such changes unmoved and wisdom of a rare kind to believe they are all for the best. It needs faith extraordinary to remain still, confidently expecting the great calm, and the new future of glorious reconstruction and progress, free from the old evils and errors of the past.

Throughout these dark, historical periods of mankind, there have been men and women who have found the eternal God their refuge. Because human tumult has been so prevalent and the sheltering Arm so sure, the Scriptures abound with examples, assurance and invitation. God never failed the faith of his people or forsook the heart that trusted him. Hidden, triumphant, unmoved, they saw and shared his victories.

"Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord" (Exod. 14.13). *"Trust ye in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength"* (Isa. 26.4).

"He shall cover thee with his feathers and under his wings shalt thou trust". (Psa. 9.4).

Outside of him there is no hiding place when forces are unleashed that are beyond human control. In all storms, whether social, domestic or personal, the Christian pilgrims in the world will flee to the rock tower of refuge and defence.

"I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God; in him will I trust". (Psa. 91.2).

From this blessed place of safety they who have a genuine faith endure, strengthened within and fortified without by the everlasting arms. Though all around be tumult, defiance, desolation and waste, "yet will we not fear". God is still the strong tower of his people.

*"My strong tower is He, to him will I flee.
In him confide, in him abide,
My Strong Tower is He!"*

The only way to enjoy life is to believe on the Son of God, and then to walk in fellowship with him. "He that hath the Son hath life; and

he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."
"The Lord doth put a difference."

OUR LORD

Where should one search for details of the life, rank and service of our Lord? By considering relevant prophecy supported by events and sayings culled from the Gospels a narrative, chiefly of his life on earth, can be made, but only meagre details of his pre-human and resurrection life can be found. The apostle Paul gives a very condensed record of the three spheres of life in which He appears. It is found in Phil. 2. 6-11; and although concise, it would require the pen of a very ready writer to excel the story in few words.

There Paul gives the rank and honour our Lord possessed before the world was; and then reveals in seven steps how his honour, his rank and even his life was expended for man, and then to complete the saga gives the seven items which describe the unending glory to which He has been raised by the exceeding greatness of the power of God. Here is seen perfection of self-abasement followed by perfection of exaltation, perfection of servitude succeeded by perfection of renown. Or, viewing the story in three phases instead of two sevens, we see life, death, and life again; or honour, humility, and honour again. A little quiet thinking concerning these steps will add meaning to the admonition of v. 5. Before we meditate further we may remember with gratitude and fear that while it is not given to the Church to descend to such death and surrender such honour, we may by the grace of God ascend to the throne solely because our Lord did descend and is now ascended far above all heavens.

In v. 6 Paul does not say "who, being God," though some think that is meant. Had that been intended the rest of the verse is meaningless, for none would aspire to be what they already were. Nor is it essential to read "a god," because the same apostle in his Colossian epistle says that our Lord's pre-human rank, his priority and headship in creation, his close association with the Almighty in subsequent creations, and his likeness to God himself constituted the Logos in the form of God. There are several renderings of the remainder of the verse, and they suggest that the translators were not satisfied with the A.V. and possibly not with their own versions. The Diaglott renders it "*did not meditate a usurpation to be like God*"—an appropriate version, for while the Christian believes that

aspiration to be equal with God would never enter the mind of the Logos, they also know that Lucifer did so aspire, and the faithful Logos saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven because of his wicked ambition.

During our Lord's life the Jews accused him of claiming equality with God because He said that God was his father. (John 5. 18-23). Their only reason for this opposition was because He had made a Messianic claim. The Lord does not discuss the point as to his claiming equality, but speaks of judgment deputed to the Son and of the honour due to the Son like to the Father himself. How wonderful is the union of the Father and the Son! If the A.V. could use the words "form of God" and "equal" of that union when the Son was the Logos, what word can describe that union now? It is extremely doubtful if that union can be described in one or many words in man's vocabulary.

The versions generally prefer the reading that "he emptied himself" to "make himself of no reputation" and properly so, because the Logos relinquished his rank rather than his character. Because man cannot comprehend life in higher realms we can only suppose how great was this surrender. We may read Prov. 8. 22 onwards and realise that He was giving up sight of his Father and the harmony and delights of spirit life enjoyed throughout many millenniums. We may read of the rank and power of Gabriel when speaking to Daniel and know the glory of the Logos to be greater. It is these and other splendours of which He emptied himself. Yes, the first step He made for us is beyond our comprehension. Later in the Philippian epistle we read of Paul counting as loss his many earthly advantages. The sacrifices are in no way comparable for though Paul may be commended he does it to acquire, whereas the Logos sacrifices that he may give.

There is more even than that, for the next step reveals that though in the form of God He takes upon himself the form of a servant. These words were written in days when slavery was an established custom, and readers would know that slaves had no rank. Truly, He had emptied himself! We recall that the key text of Mark's gospel points out the slave of slaves is He who gave his life a ransom for many; and further, He resigns his rank in the fairest realms and

becomes a slave in the realm of him who thought by robbery to be equal with God.

"*He was made in the likeness of men*" or, as Romans says, in the likeness of sinful flesh. The children of men being partakers of flesh and blood He likewise takes part of the same that through death He might "*destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*" This becoming a man is an essential fact of Scriptural doctrine, for on it hinges the whole truth of ransom-atonement.

"Found in fashion as a man." The Jews knew him as a teacher, and would argue his worth as a prophet, and wonder if He were Messiah. Pilate asked him if He were a king, but seeing him crowned with thorns and robed in purple said "Behold the man". Perhaps an unconscious tribute at the very hour He was to sacrifice his manhood. Whilst it is true that we do not comprehend the rank and life of the angelic hosts, it is also true that we do not as yet know what perfect manhood embodies. Yet, even the step of descending to manhood does not accomplish redemption. We might know more of this great sacrifice if we understood the full meaning of these words "form, likeness and fashion". For though synonyms they have shades of varied thought.

"*He humbled himself.*" Others tried to humiliate him by casting aspersions about his birth, by charging him with blasphemy, by attempting to entangle him in his talk; but He humbled *himself*. He could have brought about the confusion of his accusers, but because there were larger issues at stake than that of defence, He humbly accepted the leadings of God and despised the shame. Had the adversary succeeded in getting him to defend himself (one of the primary instincts of man) He would have been side-tracked from his mission.

"*Obedience unto death.*" It was not obedience *unto* death happened to come (for it would not have occurred unless He had sacrificed it) but *unto* death. It was by the grace of God that He should taste death for every man, and the way marked out for him required surrendering that which of all men He was most entitled to enjoy—life. He had obeyed the will of God in those spheres where obedience and life were interchangeable terms; but now an absolute change. Thus He *learned* obedience by the things which He suffered. By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous, and "*he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.*"

"*Even the death of the cross.*" This is the last step of descent; and one might ask, was it necessary for him to stoop so low? Was it necessary for him to become *sin* for us? Some do not

like to think of him as becoming *sin* for us, preferring to think He became a *sin-offering* for us. It can of course be proved that they are really one and the same in fact. Let us not diminish the wealth of his sacrifice by varying the inspired words, for the fact that himself took our infirmities and that He bore the *sin* of many is the very foundation of redemption. The words of Peter put it beyond debate and at the same time explain why it was death of the cross. Every word is emphatic—"who his *own* self bare our *sins* in his *own* body on the tree". There is no lower step to tread—there can be no lower! And no other could tread it! Hence the weeping of the Revelator because no one had prevailed to open the book, and then the new song because at last One was found worthy.

* * * *

Now the story changes from death to life, from humility to honour. Seven phrases show the exaltation; and the Revelator also gives seven—Worthy is the Lamb to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Our understanding of the steps of ascent, like the steps of descent, is limited, because it reaches to realms unknown to man; and though not understanding we can join in the chorus of praise, and look forward hopefully to that near time when we shall extol him perfectly. Every Christian involuntarily rejoices that not only was He raised from the dead, but also was exalted to such rank and glory; and we may be sure that the exaltation was to greater honour than He enjoyed when He was daily the Father's delight.

How can it be possible that He could have a greater name than before? If He was next to the Father long ago, and now is again there, how is it enhanced? Now his name is known in earth as well as in heaven, now it is true that every knee whether in heaven or in earth or down in the dust shall bow, for it is by his redemptive work that his name has become universally known. It is enhanced because outside the heavens his name will be known by so many as the stars of heaven for multitude.

Every knee shall acknowledge the name of JESUS (the word that means Saviour) for that of all his titles means everything to man. "Every tongue shall confess that Jesus has become Lord and Christ to the glory of God the Father." For it was the Father, the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God whose purpose is visible in all this redemptive work; it was He who started the work of redemption by giving his only begotten Son for us.



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Vol. 61, No. 5 SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER, 1984

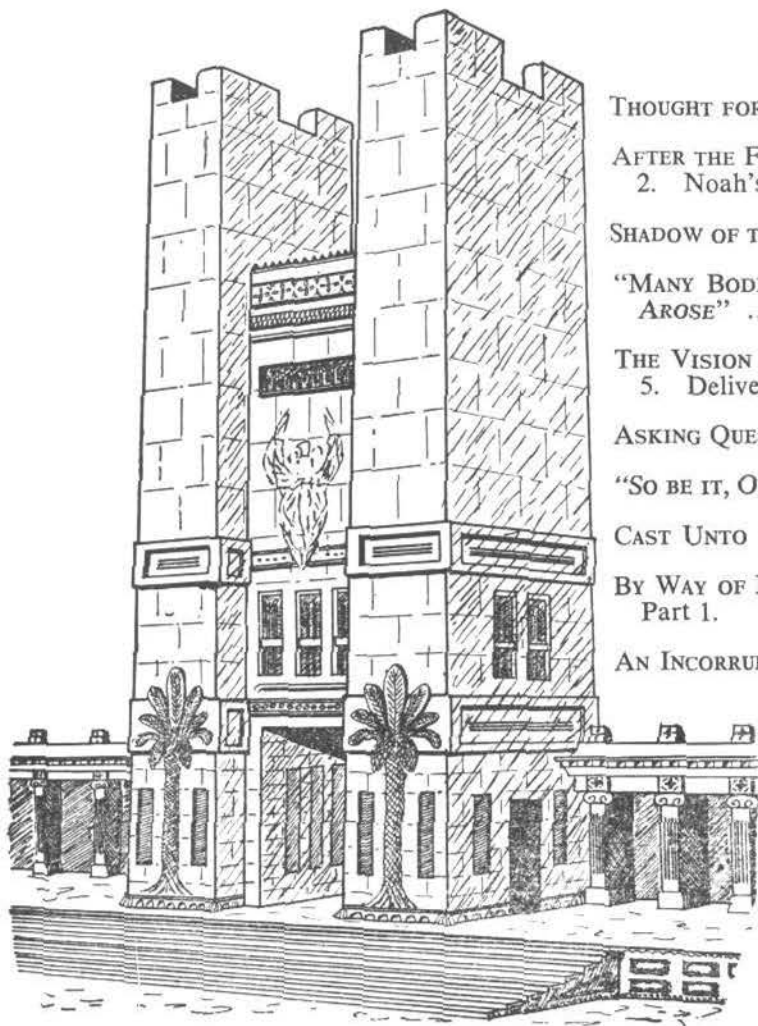
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

Published September 1st

Next issue November 1st

CONTENTS

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	98
AFTER THE FLOOD	
2. Noah's Vineyard	99
SHADOW OF THE CROSS	103
"MANY BODIES OF THE SAINTS AROSE"	105
THE VISION OF JOEL	
5. Deliverance in Zion	107
ASKING QUESTIONS	109
"SO BE IT, O LORD"	111
CAST UNTO THE POTTER	113
BY WAY OF REMEMBRANCE	115
Part 1.	
AN INCORRUPTIBLE CROWN	118



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

*This Journal is sent free
of charge to all who are
genuinely interested, on
request renewable annually
and is supported by the
voluntary gifts of its readers*

Published by
Bible Fellowship Union
11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow
Middlesex, England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, maintaining the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and the validity of their miraculous and prophetic content viewed in the light of modern under-

standing. It stands for the pre-millennial Advent of our Lord and the consequent conversion of the world. It is supported entirely by the voluntary gifts of its readers and all such gifts are sincerely appreciated.

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow, Middlesex, England.
 Secretary & Treasurer: B. G. DUMONT (Hounslow) Editorial & Publishing: A. O. HUDSON (Milborne Port)
 Circulation Control: D. WALTON (Sherborne)

Thought for the Month

"Bless the Lord, ye his angels, mighty in strength, that execute his word, hearkening to the voice of his word; bless the Lord, all ye his hosts, ye his ministers, that execute his will: bless the Lord, all his works in all the places of his dominion" (Psa. 103. 20-22).

A remarkable passage, that, affording a fascinating though brief glimpse of activity in a world beyond the reach of human senses. We may call it the spiritual world, the celestial world, or just by the familiar name "Heaven", but by whatever name we know it and in whatever form we visualise it we refer to an order of things, a real sphere of intelligence, a department of Divine creation, in which the Divine Will is carried out without opposition or question. The Church has prayed for centuries "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" and in that prayer testified her faith that there is a sphere of creation in which evil finds no place, in which all that is said and done is in full accord with the standards which the Most High has ordained for the orderly conduct of life in his Creation. It would seem that David was possessed of a rare depth of spiritual insight when he described that world as one of ceaseless activity, as he does in this Psalm. Angels, mighty in strength compared with we puny humans, hasting to carry the Divine word; hosts of ministers busy in the execution of his Will; all this denotes a world in which there is much to do and much being done, developments and progress and achievement on a scale perhaps undreamed of on our human scale of thinking. This is a world as real to its citizens as is ours to us, but a world much closer to that ultimate reality which is God. In man's world there is progress, of a sort, but there is also much

that is static and to a considerable degree there is retrogression. In that world, nothing is static and there is no retrogression. Everything goes forward; ever new fields to conquer and new peaks to scale. The famous astronomer Fred Hoyle remarked in his book *"The Nature of the Universe"* some thirty-five years ago *"It strikes me as very curious that the Christians have so little to say about how they propose eternity should be spent . . . What the Christians offer me is an eternity of frustration"*. Perhaps the criticism is justified; much of Christian evangelism centres around the process of getting ready for the after-life without any clear idea of the nature, and more importantly, the purpose, of that life. The poetic imagery of the Apocalypse, its harps, trumpets, white robes, golden floor and all, has for far too long been tacitly accepted a sufficiently accurate description and in this day and age it definitely is not sufficient. No wonder the active mind of a man like Prof. Hoyle recoils at the prospect of an eternity in which there is nothing left to discover or to do. But, of course, it is not going to be like that. The only view of God consistent with all that Twentieth Century knowledge, sacred and secular, has to tell us is one that depicts him ceaselessly creating, continually planning to enlarge his vast domain and to people it with fresh forms of life all willingly and happily engaged, like those angels and ministers of Psalm 103, in carrying out his Word and executing his Will. The fact that we see not yet men upon earth in that happy state is merely an indication that we are as yet in the babyhood stage; men will eventually attain maturity and be ushered into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

AFTER THE FLOOD

2. Noah's Vineyard

"And God said unto Noah and his sons . . . be ye fruitful, and multiply. Bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein" (Gen. 9. 1 & 7).

The implication of Gen. 9 is that the present human race is descended from the sons of Noah; all others on the whole of the planet were blotted out by the Flood. It can be argued—and it is often argued—that the expression in vs. 19 *"these are the three sons of Noah, and of them was the whole earth overspread"* need only mean that part of the earth with which the Bible historians were acquainted, and that other nations in other regions escaped the disaster. It is true that the Hebrew *"erets"*, the earth, can and does in its various occurrences refer sometimes to the planet as such and sometimes to the particular part of the earth under discussion without necessarily involving the whole. Gen. 7.21 makes a similar assertion that all animal life died that moved upon the earth, but this can certainly not be taken to refer to the entire earth for there are still many species of animals and birds peculiar to lands remote from south-western Asia, such as Australia, South America and certain tropical islands, of which all the evidence is that they have not migrated thither from that centre. A more definite fact, one that is implicit in the Scripture account, is that, contrary to popular belief, no carnivorous animals ("beasts of the earth" in Bible parlance) went into the Ark at all. The herbivorous and the domestic animals were those gathered in by Noah; the lions and tigers and suchlike wild animals were left to roam the mountains and in many cases to survive the Flood and perpetuate their own kind when it was all over (compare Gen. 7.14, 8.17 and 9. 10).

One thing is certain; the plains of south-western Asia were devastated by the Flood and no life there could have survived. If the Valian hypothesis as to the cause of the Flood is the correct explanation the same must have been true of many other parts of the earth's surface. There is also another consideration so far as the human race is concerned, alluded to by the geologist Hugh Miller in his *"Testimony of the Rocks"* (1857). Miller refers to the evidences of progressive physical degeneration in peoples migrating outward to wild inhospitable habitats from an initially civilised centre when bereft of cultural, religious or spiritual stimulus, that such peoples eventually die out and become extinct.

He points out that these were the conditions obtaining before the Flood and that in all probability the human race, after first spreading over the earth, had almost died out again by the time the Flood came, Jewish tradition, as exemplified in the *"Book of Jubilees"* (150 B.C.), certainly gives this same picture. It could well be, therefore, that God had intervened to preserve alive this small party out of what was by now a fast disappearing world population with which to make a fresh start in populating the earth. The unbridled sin of the antediluvians had all but brought the actual suicide of the human race.

On this basis, this treatise is intended to demonstrate the practicability of the Genesis thesis, that all the present nations of the world owe their origin to the three sons of Noah, and to relate the process of population growth to the span of time which appears to have elapsed from the day the little family emerged from the Ark to the beginning of recorded history so far as it can be deduced from the inscriptions and relics which have been recovered by archæologists from the vanished settlements of the oldest civilisation at present known, that of Sumer, and to carry that story onward until Abraham left the Sumerian city of Ur to find the land to which God had called him, and Bible history really begins.

So the story returns to that moment when that little group of eight people stood on the slopes of that mountain in southern Iraq looking over the wide expanse of mud-covered plain a thousand feet below them, and knew that they must now find themselves a place where they could live and build their homes and tend their flocks and grow their crops, and, most important of all, raise children who would follow them in the ways of the Lord and create a new society upon earth in which the evil of the past bad old days would find no place. What kind of a life did these early pioneers experience in reality?

First, what were the physical conditions. What is known, in this 20th century, of the nature of the world in general, five thousand years ago, and of southern Iraq and north-western Iran, where they found themselves, in particular?

It would appear that they were living at a time of much more favourable climatic conditions than the world has known since. The leading authority on ancient climatic conditions is C. E. P. Brooks, who, in his *"Climate through the Ages"* (1970) says that between 5500 and 3000 BC the earth experienced what he calls a warm

post-glacial optimum in which the seas and land were much warmer than now and there was no polar ice; the land was fertile and forest-clad up to the poles. At about 3000 BC there was a sudden and catastrophic change for the worse with abnormal volcanic activity leading over the next four centuries to increasing cold and the onset of Arctic ice. The interest in all this lies in the fact that the Biblical indicated date of about 3300 BC for the Flood would imply that for three centuries the sons of Noah enjoyed unusually favourable conditions for human life. S. F. Markham, in *"Climate and the energy of nations"* (1942), had already pointed out that the most virile civilisations have always flourished in those parts of the world where the normal temperature at the time encompassed the 70 degree (Fahrenheit) mark, and Brooks' work shows that this in fact was the case worldwide at the time in question. The implication of this is that by Divine overruling in the processes of Nature the world was in the best possible condition to facilitate the rapid increase of the human race.

In this connection there is an interesting point in Gen. 9.7. God told the sons of Noah to "be fruitful, and multiply. Bring forth ABUNDANTLY in the earth, and multiply therein". There is an emphasis here which is lacking in the similar injunction given to the first human pair in the story of Eden. The Lord merely told them (Gen. 1.28) to "be fruitful and multiply". It is almost as if, in this later stage of history, there was an urge to a more than usual rapid increase in the growth of world population, to subsist at least until the emergent race had become sufficiently numerous to gain a good start, so to speak, in repopulating the earth. There is some correspondence here with the position of the children of Israel in Egypt fifteen centuries later, when they also settled in the most fertile area in the land and increased so rapidly as to excite the alarm and resentment of the Egyptians (Exod. 1.7 & 12). Strangely enough, the same expression is used there: they "were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty, and the land was filled with them". In both cases it would seem there was an above normal and unprecedented rate of increase greatly assisted by the nature of the environment.

Nevertheless, it must have been a long time before there was any sizable human community. Gen. 10 records the names of sixteen sons, leaving it to be inferred that there were as many daughters. It is most unlikely though that there were no other children born to these three. Accepting the Scriptural statements that men at that time lived in the region of five or six hundred years it would seem that the period of

fatherhood and motherhood must have been considerably in excess of the normal equivalent today and that families therefore were correspondingly larger. (It has already been shown in *"The Longevity of the Ancients"*, (BSM Jan/Feb. 1976) that these apparently inordinately long lives recorded in Genesis are perfectly reasonable considered against relevant matters one of which is the effect of the climatic conditions then obtaining). It can well be that the compiler of chapter 10 of Genesis, (the famous "Table of Nations"), recorded only those names who were the ancestors of nations then known to exist. If on this basis the children of the immediate sons of Noah were born over a period of say two centuries out of the five or six centuries of the mother's life, with the parents taking longer to reach maturity than now, it could be a couple of centuries before the community numbered as much as ten thousand men, women and children. After that, matters would accelerate; in another century it could have been a quarter of a million. In modern times parents dying at around a century have left as many as 250 descendants of something like five generations, although the inference of such data as can be gleaned from Genesis is that successive generations then must have been in the region of at least fifty years apart. Modern parallels are probably of little use in forming an opinion. At any rate it is probable that the human population of the earth at the end of the first century did not exceed a few hundreds.

This implies a handful of village settlements. In all the excavations of primitive sites in the Iraq mountains the same general pattern is observed. As the community grows, sections "hive off" and start new ones a distance away. Primitive native races today do exactly the same thing. There is a need to secure more land for food crops and farming stock, the impulse to explore, to find new sources of foodstuffs. This last must have been important in the case of Noah and his family. Such food stocks as remained in the Ark after twelve months afloat would have been quickly exhausted, and until a food-growing regime was established they must have relied on what Nature provided. Providentially they were in the right locality for this. The Zagros mountains, which border the eastern side of Iraq, rise suddenly from the plain to twelve thousand feet or more, but at about a thousand feet there are wide terraces comprising grasslands and forest in which to this day there are abundant wild fruit trees such as figs, pomegranates, walnuts, almonds and vines (Ghirshman in *"Iran"*, 1954, is one authority for this, and the same is noted by Braidwood and Howe

in "*Prehistoric investigations in Iraqi; Kurdistan*", 1966). The latter asserts that the Kurdistan foothills are the original source of the earliest village farming in the world.

This is the area which has been receiving so much attention in recent years. Some of the earliest sites show that the inhabitants lived exclusively on wild fruits and grains, wild sheep, goats, pigs and so on. Agriculture and stock breeding had not yet developed. This is evidenced by the types of implements discovered. Then came the first signs of cultivation and sheep and cattle rearing. Applying this to the present subject, by the time Noah's grandsons had children of their own, the increasing number of mouths to feed must have necessitated something more systematic than a sporadic wandering from one place to another gathering the bounty of Nature, and so the nomadic style of life gave place to the settled agricultural one, and villages began to be more permanent, although as yet, judging by the remains, the houses were only built of sun-dried mud-brick and roofed with reeds and tree-trunks. Nevertheless all this could have occupied a couple of centuries by which time some of the varied families and communities would have pushed many miles from the original landing-place.

It is this transition from food-gathering to agricultural that seems to be referred to in the rather strange narrative in Gen. 9. 18-27. "*Noah began to be an husbandman and he planted a vineyard*". Vines grow plentifully in the Zagros mountains up to about three thousand feet altitude, and the gathering of wild grapes had probably been going on since the beginning. But now they were producing the cultivated variety and probably appreciably improving the strain in consequence. Noah, we are told, drank of the resultant wine, and was found by his youngest son Ham intoxicated and in a state of nudity in his tent. In consequence Noah uttered a curse against, not Ham, but Ham's son Canaan.

One might quite reasonably enquire why so apparently trivial an incident should share with the story of the Tower of Babel the distinction of being the only two important happenings in the twelve hundred years which elapsed between the Flood and Abraham. And why should Canaan, the son of Ham, be the recipient of Noah's curse when his father was the offending party? Read literally, as it stands in the Authorised Version, the story seems pointless and tasteless, having no conceivably useful purpose, and one is perhaps justified in wondering why it was there at all.

Commentators usually content themselves by suggesting that fermentation was unknown be-

fore the Flood and Noah did not know that the wine he had made would have an intoxicating effect; that in the East it is considered a serious misdemeanour to see one's father or ancestor in the nude; and that Canaan was cursed instead of Ham since the latter was one whom the Lord had saved in the Ark and thus to such extent had the Lord's favour, which seems a little hard on Canaan. All these are guesses without foundation and the commentators normally finish up with a little homily on the evils of strong drink which thus overcame even so godly a man as Noah, and pass on quickly to the next subject.

Nevertheless the story is there, and from the historian's point of view at least was recorded for a purpose. Something more fundamental than the apparent nature of the incident must lie beneath the surface and this needs to be elucidated. For this reason it falls to be examined in detail.

The expression "Noah began to be an husbandman" (*ish adamah*—man of the land) means that the time of subsisting on the wild products of the mountains was giving place to the arts of agriculture—the planned growing of food. It is absurd to suppose that Noah was ignorant of the art; he must have been familiar with it in pre-Flood days and in fact Gen. 5.29 implies that fact. The position was that Noah and his sons now applied themselves to work on the land, and probably stock-breeding as well, to provide for their rapidly growing families. The time might have been any time during the first century after leaving the Ark.

The vineyard had been planted and the vines yielded their first crop. What more natural than that there should be a family celebration to mark the event? This was, after all, a major step forward in the programme of re-settlement. A number of children had probably already been born and the prospects were looking distinctly rosy for this new world of their's. So the celebratory feast was planned.

As so often happens, things got a little out of hand. "*Look not on the wine when it is red*" said the Wise Man in Proverbs; "*at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder*" (Prov. 23. 31-32). That is what it did on this occasion. Noah, we are told, was "drunken". The word is *sachar*, which means literally "to be drunken to hilarity", and is used in Gen. 43.34 where Joseph's brothers "drank and were merry", and elsewhere of like import. It is in the highest degree unlikely that Noah was the only one in this condition, but being more than five hundred years older than the others, he may have been more seriously affected, to the extent that he was no longer conscious of what was going on.

The next step was that Ham walked into Noah's "tent" (probably his house—"ohel" means either tent or house) "and saw the nakedness of his father" (vs. 22). The key to the story lies in this expression. The Hebrew word for physical nudity is *erom*, as in the Garden of Eden story, with some twenty-four occurrences in the O.T. The word used here in Gen. 9, however, is not *erom*; it is *ervah*, which has a very different connotation. "*Ervah*" in its fifty-nine occurrences, always implies sexual relations with a woman. When, as in this case, the expression is "the nakedness of his father", the reference is to that father's wife, as in Lev. 18.8 "*the nakedness of thy father's wife thou shalt not uncover; it is thy father's nakedness*", and in vs. 16 "*thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife; it is thy brother's nakedness*". The verb rendered "saw" in this verse is *raah*, which has a wide range of meanings and is translated by many different words in the A.V. Gesenius defines it "to look at or to view with a purpose, especially to be pleased with the sight, as with objects of pleasure; to enjoy, or procure for oneself". In Eccl. 1.16 *raah* is rendered "my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge" and in ch. 2.1. "I said... therefore enjoy pleasure".

The implication is that Ham was guilty of incest with his mother following a general family partaking of wine to excess, and the birth of Canaan was the outcome. He might possibly have been somewhat inebriated and not fully conscious of the enormity of his action. Vs. 22 goes on to say that he "told his two brethren without" where "told" is *naged*, meaning to show, declare, confess, profess openly, to celebrate with praise. The use of this word could imply that Ham boasted of his deed to his two brothers. The consequent action of Shem and Japheth recorded in vs. 23 could be a "figure of speech" indicating that they did what they could to "cover up" or conceal from Noah the wrong done to him, perhaps in the hope that nothing more would be known about it. If so, the hope was frustrated by the eventual birth of Canaan, which would be when Noah found out about it (vs. 25). The Douay Bible at this point has it "Noah... when he had learned what his younger son had done to him, he said, Cursed be Canaan...".

If in fact this is how the matter went, it provides a reasonable explanation of the rather strange insistence in this chapter that Ham was the father of Canaan. No other names of the three patriarch's sons are so defined; the complete genealogy is left to the 10th chapter which is probably a much later document. Here Gen.

9.13 reads "*And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the Ark, were Shem, Ham and Japheth; and Ham is the father of Canaan*". Why pick out this one name from the four recorded sons of Ham, and the many sons of the other two, if there was not something special about the birth of Canaan? It is almost as if the historian, in recording the sons of Noah, was at pains to make it plain that Canaan was the son, not of Noah, but of Ham. There is also the fact that in vs. 25-27 Noah refers to Shem and Japheth as being Canaan's "brethren", (*achim*, normally used for brother or half-brother, as compared with *achben*, brother's son or nephew). On this showing, of course, Canaan would be half-brother to the other two through their common mother, although nephew through their own brother.

Assuming this to be the true explanation of the story, there is no possible means of assessing the degree of culpability of Noah's wife or even if she was to any degree a willing party. One has to remember that the laws of Moses which regulated such relationships, (as in Lev. 18) were still fifteen hundred years in the future. There is no doubt that the greater virility of the human race, so much nearer its commencement in the perfect first pair, detracted a great deal from the necessity existing in later times which led to those laws. Abraham and his brother Nahor, more than a thousand years later, married their nieces without any thought of impropriety. In this case, it was the violation of the primal law instituted in Eden, that a man should cleave to his own wife, "and they two shall be one flesh", which led to Noah's words of condemnation and judgment.

The fact that Noah was five hundred years old before any of his sons were born may give colour to the supposition that his wife was very much younger, perhaps even a second wife, so that she could be considered a relatively young woman at the time of this incident. Ham could have been as young as 100 and his mother 200, equivalent to 20 and 40 respectively in more modern times.

The birth of Canaan brought the affair into the open. It is popularly supposed that Noah uttered a curse upon Canaan and doomed him to perpetual slavery—which would have been quite unjust since on any showing the child was an innocent party. Closer inspection of vs. 25-27 shows that what Noah did do was voice a prophecy of things to come which were going to involve Canaan. It was not the displeasure of Noah which was at issue here; it was the displeasure of God. The Holy Spirit, through Noah, revealed something of what the future held for these men who were to be the progenitors of all who would later live upon the earth.

It was the Lord who cursed, and Noah only stated the fact as it was revealed to him.

The gist of the prophecy was that Canaan—in his descendants—was to occupy a position of servitude to his half-brothers, in their descendants. The people destined to spring from Japheth were to be “enlarged”, spread abroad in far distant lands, while those from Shem would have God dwelling among them. The true meaning of vs. 27 is “God shall dwell in the tents of Shem”. True to the prophecy, the Semitic division of mankind, stemming from Shem, represented now chiefly by Jews and Arabs, has long been recognised to be the most spiritually perceptive and receptive of the three great races, and has given the world its three great religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The sons of Japheth, the Aryans, have spread all over the world and dominate it. Those of Ham, at first the most intellectual and artistic, founders of the first civilisations, have progressively degenerated as

they migrated into the tropical and sub-tropical regions and to a great extent have been absorbed by Semitic peoples. The descendants of Canaan, a heterogeneous assembly of tribes collectively known as Canaanites, ceased to be a recognisable entity less than two thousand years after the birth of their forefather. Noah’s foreview of the future came to pass, even as he had said.

So ended the first century after the Flood with perhaps a hundred grandchildren of Noah and possibly two hundred great-grandchildren growing up in this new world, never having known the old world of sin and death. They probably stayed near the mountain and built their first dwellings on its slopes, having no urge to explore farther until increasing numbers would make more living space desirable. The time was yet far distant when their descendants would find it possible to enter the Plain of Shinar as narrated in Gen. 11 and begin to enjoy its luxurious fertility. *To be continued.*

SHADOW OF THE CROSS

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12. 32).

The shadow of the Cross has lain across the history of mankind since that mysterious forecast made in Eden of the bruising of the serpent. The stage was there set for the fight between the opposing forces of good and evil. Enmity, rivalry, animosity, antagonism, intolerance, deception, persecution, betrayal and suffering have dogged the footsteps of man from that day to this. However great the effort to stem the tide, the vulnerable heel of man has been stabbed with the fiery dart of wickedness. The best have had their weak spot in which they have been conscious of failure if not defeat.

The verdict of the past has been that all have gone astray at some time, like lost sheep in need of rescue. The present gives no reason to change that verdict. When to be good is considered dull: to do good, officious busy-bodying, when virtue is despised and sin extolled as sensational and exciting, it is plain that humanity has strayed from a safe road into the dangers of the wilderness.

It was in the wilderness that Moses lifted up a serpent of brass for the benefit of those who had been bitten by serpents, many of them fatally. Those who could and would look upon the brassy image set upon a pole recovered from the effects of the poisonous bite. Jesus referred to this incident as an advanced picture of his own lifting

up on the cross for the same purpose, to heal those suffering from the fiery bite of sin. *“Look to Jesus, look and live. There is life in a look at the crucified one”* is no fallacy of the hymn writers but a basic fact of man’s condition and need of salvation.

The drawing power of the Cross from the clay of Calvary until the Twentieth century has been strong: a magnetic pulling of men and women toward the ideals of the Christian life as exemplified by the man who was its chief victim. By its means people have been gathered out of every nation, kindred and tongue to become the first fruits of love, of life given, that through its generosity the straying and the smitten might be “ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven”, inspired with high hope of better things to come, of life abundant, flowing to all who believe in him.

“For God so loved the world that He gave.”

The gifts of God are everywhere apparent in the earth He created to be the home of man but his greatest gift is that of a Saviour. The Cross has become the outward symbol of faith. It stands on mountain slopes, on the pinnacles of churches, adorns the vestments of priests and is worn by some adherents of the various factions of the Christian religion as the badge of their belief. Gatherers of relics claim to be custodians of pieces of the true Cross but there is no merit in the Cross even if the original is still in existence. It is the man upon the Cross who holds the power to draw all men unto him.

"Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Isa. 45.22).

The human race, increasing in size, scattered abroad in every corner of the earth, needed then and still needs the offices of a just God and a Saviour, a bruiser of the monstrous head of evil by which they have been kept in various stages of subjection to cruelty, poverty, ignorance and death. In Jesus, God mounted a gigantic rescue operation. He came declaring himself *"the way, the truth and the life"*. "No healing, restoration or harmony with God except through him; no other name known under heaven by which men may be saved from the perils of sin.

Much theological ink has been spilt over Christian doctrine, causing divisions and rifts, the splintering of the faith into a thousand fragments, but theories fade before the facts. The world without God is a dark place. Knowledge of a more scientific sort has tended to eclipse salvation, to cloud the once bright vision of the Saviour's face, to dim assurance in the life-giving words that *"whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life"*. The Cross has lost its drawing power. All men have a tendency to look in other directions, seeking satisfaction in the treasures and pleasures of this world, amazed not by grace but by the wonders produced by a skilful, materialistic age which presents itself like the Laodicean, Rich, increased with goods and in need of nothing. Even where there is not a cold indifference to spiritual things and higher needs than bread and supermarkets, there is a luke-warm support, an outward lip service, a superficial knowledge, a greater concern for the crumbling places of worship than for the One to whom all worship is due.

When Jesus hung upon the Cross it is recorded that darkness lay over the whole land from the sixth to the ninth hour, prefiguring the darkness of the latter days of this age of which He spoke. The clouded sun, the failing moon, set for signs and symbols of life rejected, of law flouted and defied, of a reeling earth and a bewildered people, are not too strong figures of speech when

applied to the declining Twentieth century. Joel saw it as a time when *"darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the people"*. The Cross can scarcely be discerned and the figure of Christ grows dim before the oncoming clouds of world wide strife, of the struggle for power and supremacy, of the last throw for possession of the mind of man. In such an extremity the prophets saw the rescuing hand of God in operation, inflicting the devastating blow to the kingdoms of this world, setting in the midst of his enemies his king. Crowned, not with thorns, but with glory and honour, reigning not from a Cross but from a throne of judgment and justice, He takes up his great power and authority, to conquer sin and opposition, to bring light and life to a desperate situation, to save to the uttermost all who will come to his side. So startling will be the benefits of his reign in contrast to the fears, the falsity and the deprivations which have for so long existed, that men will weep for joy and relief as those snatched from shipwreck and death. Heads will be turned and hearts drawn toward their great Deliverer.

To those who count time by days and hours by seconds, the time from the Cross to the crown has been long. From the place of sacrifice to the place of power, where He will put down all evils which separate man from his Maker, has been a long period of strife, doubt and scepticism. Yet to him who sees the end from the beginning, from whom nothing is hid, it has been but a little while, an interval; the whole history of man written and enacted in less than the travelling time of light from some far-flung sun of less importance than the planet designed to be the meeting place of God and man formed in his own image.

The drawing of all men by all-conquering love will be a spectacular work, but it will be done. *"For God has highly exalted him and given him a name above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow; that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* Phil. 2:9-11.

More Light on the Exodus

There has always been a school of thought which shows that the route of the Exodus from Egypt was not the generally accepted one, through the centre of Sinai, past Mount Sinai, along the Gulf of Akaba and through Moab in the East of Jordan. The claim is that the Israelites followed the normal trade route alongside the Mediterranean Sea. That ignores the Scripture which states that God *"led them not out through the way of the land of the Philistines although*

that was near, for, God said, lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt, but God led the people about, through the way of the Red Sea" (Exod. 13.17). This trade route, the *"way of the Philistines"*, was the high road between Egypt and Canaan, always being traversed by Egyptian military forces, and obviously the most unfavourable route for the fleeing Israelites. Advocates of the northern route have either ignored this or been

unfamiliar with the Bible account. Now archaeological research during 1982 has yielded powerful evidence supporting the Bible narrative. In an endeavour to find out as much as possible about ancient remains before Israel finally evacuated Sinai and the Egyptian authorities moved in, an intensive programme of excavation and research in Northern Sinai was carried out by Israel's archaeologists. Work has been going on for some ten years and the results can now be evaluated. It has been established that from before the time of Abraham up to the time of King Solomon the northern part of the Sinai peninsula, the part traversed by the "Way of the Philistines", along which Abraham and Jacob and others journeyed to and from Egypt, was densely populated. Over a thousand ancient towns and villages have been identified, of which eighty existed along the "Way of the Philistines" at and about the time of the Exodus. A heavily fortified Egyptian military centre existed at one point on the road from which the area was administered and controlled. No wonder the Lord told them not to go that way!

It has long been known that this, at present,

arid desert was, in ancient times and certainly at the time of the Exodus, thickly forested and well endowed with pastureland. Its fertility and prosperity declined and disappeared with the decline of Egyptian power and control immediately following the Exodus. Egyptian sovereignty over Canaan and Syria gave way before the advancing power, successively, of the Mitannians and Hittites, then Assyria and Babylon; Sinai, as the "buffer territory" between the African and Asiatic powers, became desert. A couple of centuries after the Exodus Egypt abandoned all attempts to maintain a footing in Canaan and the way for the establishment of the powerful Israeli empire established by David and Solomon began to open.

One has to realise therefore that the circuitous route to the sparsely inhabited south taken by the Israelites under Moses was under the Lord's guidance planned so as to avoid contact with this populated and militarised area along the sea-coast. These modern discoveries certainly throw a flood of light upon that apparently casual remark in Exod. 13.17.

"MANY BODIES OF THE SAINTS AROSE"

*A note on
Matt. 27.53*

"The earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints which slept arose and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." Thus runs Matthew's account, and since no other Evangelist records the incident, it stands as a somewhat strange statement, difficult of comprehension. For long it was suspected that the passage was an interpolation on the part of some ancient copyist, but it has been traced back to the earliest manuscripts known and there seems to be no valid reason for doubting its authenticity. The phrase "and the graves were opened" is not found in the Sinaitic, and both Sinaitic and Vatican MSS omit "and went". It seems that Matthew has indeed recorded an actual happening and it is worth while to seek the true significance of the account.

The apparent sense of the passage is that at the time of the crucifixion many of the "holy ones"—saintly men—of Israel rose from their graves and were seen walking about Jerusalem. The unusual nature of such an occurrence has led some to offer alternative explanations. One suggestion is that the earthquake opened up many of the tombs—which were for the main part cut in the rocky sides of the Mount of

Olives—and that the bodies were exposed and some thrown into the city precincts. The suggestion hardly meets the sense of the account and appears to be little more than an attempt to offer an alternative. Another explanation is that the followers of Christ, at the time of his arrest, fled for hiding to the tombs, and only ventured forth after his resurrection. The known antipathy of every God-fearing Jew to the ceremonial uncleanness resulting from contact with tombs—especially at the time of the Passover—would make this supposition extremely improbable, and this hypothesis also does not fulfil the plain meaning of the words. Amazing as the statement may be, it seems as if there were in very fact certain ones raised from the dead at that time as one of the "signs" attendant upon the culmination of our Lord's life at Calvary.

Because the Lord Jesus Christ himself was to be the first one to be raised from the dead in the true "resurrection" sense ("*Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept*") it is clear that these who were thus brought back to the world of men were raised only for a short time and must ultimately have gone back into the grave, in like manner to Lazarus and others whom Jesus restored to earthly life during his ministry. This

is borne out by the word used for "arose"—*egeiro*—meaning to wake up or rise up, and is the word used in Matt. 24. 14, "There shall *arise* false Christs", John 7. 52, "Out of Galilee *arise* no prophet" and for the raising of Jairus' daughter and the widow of Nain's son. The word for "resurrection"—*anastasis*—is not used in such cases.

Another difficulty is the statement that these awakened ones did not come into the holy city until "after his resurrection" as though they lingered among the tombs for three days before showing themselves. Again it is noted that "anastasis" is not the word used in verse 53. A word employed nowhere else in the New Testament is employed—*egersis*—and the meaning of this word is that of a rising up or being set up. The Septuagint uses the same word in Psa. 139. 2, "Thou knowest my downsitting and mine *uprising*" while a further instance of its use in our Lord's day is found in Apocrypha, 1 Esdras 5. 62, "Singing songs of thanksgiving unto the Lord for the *rearing up* of the house of the Lord," speaking of the building of the Temple after the return from the Captivity. It is possible therefore that the reference in verse 53 is not to our Lord's resurrection at all but to his being "raised up" or "set up" on the cross, on Calvary. Certain it is that there is no indication in any of the New Testament stories of the Resurrection that dead men recently restored to life were appearing in Jerusalem. The whole tenor of the Resurrection story centres around the disciples' ignorance that anything unusual was transpiring until our Lord himself appeared to them in various guises.

There is nothing said as to what these awakened ones did after appearing in the streets, and no indication that they were seen again, or even that the rulers and Pharisees knew anything about them at all. We have but a single statement of an isolated incident the more mysterious because of its brevity. The darkness lasting three hours, from noon until three o'clock; then the earthquake, of itself not an uncommon thing in Jerusalem; then this mysterious appearance of saintly ones of old, risen as if in protest against the tragic deed then being consummated on Golgotha. The expression "seen of many" would at least indicate that there were sufficient witnesses to attest the reliability of the record, according to Jewish ideas, and these three words ought to be taken as sufficient authority for believing that the incident took place exactly as related.

Then it was all over. The earth ceased to tremble, the sun came out again, and those visitants from the past were seen no more. Perhaps their brief span of waking life lasted only be-

tween the time of the earthquake and that hour when Joseph of Arimathea came to Pilate and besought the body of Jesus. It may have been that they were after all not the ancient dead, but very recently deceased righteous men who came back into the city with their grave clothes and all the signs of death upon them, rendering the city itself ceremonially unclean by their presence at the very time of its most solemn feast, and so symbolising in the most expressive fashion possible the position of that city in the sight of God. If this be the true purpose of the occurrence, with what fearful foreboding must the witnesses have gazed upon—and perhaps recognised—these death-like messengers and maybe sensed something of the doom which even then was gathering around the city which had rejected and crucified the Prince of Life.

* * *

The apocryphal work known as the "Acts of Pilate" or "Gospel of Nicodemus", written neither by Pilate nor Nicodemus, but dating, it is thought, from about the Fourth Century, has a lot to say about this incident. According to this book, two men named Carinus and Lenthius, sons of the aged Simeon who held the babe Jesus in his arms in the Temple, and themselves already dead at the time of the Crucifixion, were recalled from Hades after witnessing Christ's descent into that region, to bear witness to the priests and scribes of the reality of Christ's triumph over death. Their mission ended, they returned to the realms of Death. The only value of the story is the testimony it bears to the acceptance of Matthew's account of the incident in Church tradition; evidently the early Church accepted the fact that some such thing had happened at the time of the Crucifixion and by the Fourth Century the story had become elaborated and invested with embellishments born of the doctrinal errors which by then had invaded the Church.

There will be a day when the Master will look upon us with eyes that pierce through to the naked soul and will say "I gave you a marvellous opportunity. I gave you an understanding of my message such as millions of earth's multitudes never received. I gave you a knowledge of my Truth such as many of my first disciples never had. I gave you the key to every problem which distressed mankind in your day, and I gave you the privilege of being heralds of my Kingdom. I gave you the opportunity which my followers in every century since Pentecost dreamed of and prayed for. What have you done with it?"

THE VISION OF JOEL

5. Deliverance in Zion

*Exposition of the
Book of Joel
Ch. 2. 1-11*

This article does not refer to the Church in the verse.

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

"Afterward"—after what? Plainly this pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh follows the deliverance of Israel and their wholehearted acceptance of God; it is, therefore, the Millennial outpouring that is referred to. Then why did Peter, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, claim the fulfilment of this prophecy in his own day? "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" he said (Acts 2. 16-21). The answer is that Peter believed the time of the Kingdom to be immediately at hand; and, what is of importance, none could justly say it was not at hand at that moment, for if Israel had accepted the message of the High Calling as a nation, and so entered into that for which their two thousand years of training had been preparing them, the work of the Gospel Age would have been ended in one generation and the Millennial Age been ushered in. Even although the foreknowledge of God perceived that Israel would not enter in, that only a remnant would believe, and that the call therefore must go to the Gentiles, with all the long extension of time which that entailed, it must needs be that Israel have the opportunity. And so Peter was right in applying the prophecy to his own day — until Israel had rejected the call. From then on, the prophecy was deferred, and is still, waiting for the full end of this Age to come.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This verse touches some important truths. There are at least three momentous words in it—"whosoever", "deliverance", and "remnant". But to understand their significance we must

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

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

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

and destroys all opposition to its rule.

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

will be Divine missionaries to all the earth, and their rulers, the resurrected "Ancient Worthies", princes in all the earth, requiring and receiving the obedience of all men.

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

(To be continued)

ASKING QUESTIONS

A thinking point

The habit of asking questions is one of the most valuable that one can acquire. A person who is always asking "How did this happen?" or "Why did he say that?" will never find life dull, and, what is more important, will be continually adding to his store of knowledge. This desire to get to the bottom of things has led to all the inventions of modern science. Probably the first man who invented the wheel saw some stones rolling down a slope, and asked himself some such questions as "Why does that particular stone keep on rolling when these others have stopped?" Such questions are at the back of all our knowledge.

We all know how children are always asking questions, awkward ones sometimes, like the pick-pocket's son who piped up loud and clear "Why did you put your hand into that gentleman's pocket, Father?". Children want to know: Jesus was no exception, for at the age of twelve He was found in the Temple asking questions of the priests. What questions we ask will depend on where our interests lie. Yet even in the things dearest to us, there is a danger when we stop asking questions. There is the risk of taking things for granted. Familiarity, it is said, breeds contempt, and this can apply to the words of Scripture, which may become so well known to us that we fail to get the best out of them. It is here that the art of asking questions can be of real value.

Questions are of help to others besides those who ask them. Consider how much of Jesus' teaching we should have lost if his disciples had

not always been saying "Master, explain this parable to us . . ." "When will this be? . . ." "Then who can be saved? . . ." The great thing about the disciples was that they were humble. They were not afraid to admit their ignorance, and as a result they became less ignorant. Those who were puzzled at Jesus' miracles and teaching, and said "What does this mean?" (Mk. 1:37), were far more likely to profit from his ministry than those who had a ready-made explanation—"He has a devil!"—and were ready out of their wisdom to pass judgment on him and his works. We have no need to be ashamed or afraid of asking questions, for we do not yet know fully as we are fully known. The time has not yet come when with the first disciples we need ask no questions (Jn. 16:23).

Not all questions are asked by those who seek knowledge: questions can also be used to pass it on to others. Often we are well aware of certain facts but have not realised what they imply, and then a question may help us. For example, in the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand, the disciples had helped distribute the food, and were astonished at the number it had fed. But the next moment they were worrying because they had forgotten to bring any bread with them, and Jesus used questions to remind them of the miracle he had just performed. "Don't you understand?" He asked. They had failed to realise that what He could do for others, He could do for them, and they had no cause for worrying about so small a matter. And then again, they had seen his miracles, had heard his

teaching, and yet they had not fully grasped who He was and what He was doing. So He asked them pointedly, "Who do you say that I am?" It was Peter who came out with the answer, but they were all strengthened by answering in their own minds. It was to Peter also that Jesus when He was risen put the question "Simon . . . do you love me?" It gave Peter the opportunity humbly to affirm his love: but Jesus' thrice repeated question was followed each time by the reminder that loving him means serving his flock. Jesus certainly knew that He was dear to Peter, yet He asked the question for Peter's sake.

There were others besides his disciples who asked Jesus questions. Questions such as "Is it lawful to pay taxes?", "What is the greatest commandment?", and the old chestnut concerning the wife of the seven brothers in the resurrection, were put in a very different spirit from that of the simple disciples. The questioners desired to catch this new teacher out, yet though their desire was to discredit Jesus, their questions did elicit answers of real value, and He came successfully through their examination, so that they asked him no more questions. In a way their conduct was very proper. Jesus set himself up as a teacher, and before accepting him they were justified in trying his worth with teasing problems. So with us; if we ever take it upon ourselves to examine a preacher or his doctrine, we should do so humbly: but there is nothing wrong with making the test.

It is in studying the Bible that the gift of asking questions is specially valuable. The one who before a Bible study reads through the passage to be considered, and comes prepared to ask about points he or she cannot understand, does as much to make the study profitable as those who "know all the answers". For a study is something in which all should share, and often the simplest points open up a whole field of discussion. On the other hand, the elders in a class might do well on occasion not to expound a passage at length, but to imitate their Master and ask such simple questions as will gently draw their brethren to a fuller understanding.

But it is always easy to ask the right questions. There is a limit to our knowledge, and to some questions we cannot know the answers. But yet many questions can often be answered by reference to other passages of Scriptures or to commentaries, or simply by reference to what is said in the next verse or the next chapter. The Bible

was not written in a vacuum, it was written by and for men in a particular time and place. Neither is it a collection of texts, for much of it is connected argument or narrative. Knowledge of customs, of history, of botany even, will help us first to understand what was written before we start looking for a lesson for ourselves.

It can be helpful both for public and for private study to ask certain questions methodically concerning any passage. First one might consider who wrote it and to whom, and what was the particular need which it met. Next it is often profitable to read through the passage as a whole, noting the divisions of thought, how it falls into paragraphs. Verse by verse study is good in its place, but it is probably better to pay attention to detail only after such questions as "What is the writer's message?", "How does this thought lead on to the next?", or "What inspired this remark, or this parable?" have been considered. Then is the time to pick through the passage, getting the meaning of difficult words and verses. Concordance references have two values, firstly in leading to other scriptures where the same topic occurs, and secondly because they help in the understanding of particular words. Finally, when the meaning and context of a scripture is grasped, one begins to wonder "Is there a lesson here for me? or for our class? What is the reason for this exhortation—do we really need to follow this course?", or "What place did this event have in God's purposes?", or "Surely in another scripture it says exactly the opposite?" These are but a few of the questions that one can ask. Of course, this is far from being the only method of study. Yet questions, whether asked in a simple desire for enlightenment or judiciously pointed to bring out a particular thought, can be of real help in bringing a passage to life.

Questions are the sign of a lively mind, of mental watchfulness. But it is not enough for our minds to be awake—our hearts too must be open, our consciences alive. At times we may be sleepy, or even perhaps lazy, in our attitude to life and the study of the Bible. This should not be, and asking questions is one way in which we may provoke one another to good works. But above all, through prayer we can draw upon God's spiritual storehouse; and if Bible study does not come easily, or if any man lacks wisdom, "let him ask God for it, who gives with open hand to all men without upbraiding; and it will be given him." —(James 1:5)

The Christian life is a life of self-sacrifice, of self-immolation, of self-consumption, if it is to be pleasing to God. This is what we have covenanted to do—this is our compact with God. The

lure of the easy chair, of sloth and lethargy is fatal to the spirit of sacrifice. It requires a white-hot glow in the heart to keep the sacrifice steadily consuming from day to day.

"SO BE IT, O LORD"

We use these words, "So be it," or "Amen," at the end of our prayers. They imply a willing acquiescence in whatever the Father has revealed to be his will, combining "Thy will be done" with "I delight to do thy will, O my God," and show not only acceptance of the Divine will, but a genuine desire for its accomplishment. The cynic has said that "Thy will be done" is most frequently found on tombstones, inferring that one resists to the bitter end, and then says "Thy will be done" when nothing more can be done about it. To the child of God, however, this expression must represent the theme of the entire life; it must be the opening bar of life's symphony as well as the end. The meaning of the words is beautifully expressed by the life of the prophet who uttered them. He was called upon to perform a task which was distasteful from the natural point of view. He was only a boy when first called upon to speak, "*Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child*" (Jer. 1. 6), yet this gentle boy had to rebuke a nation and pronounce God's judgment, and, what was even worse, tell the nation to submit to Babylon. That he shrank from the storm of bitterness this message aroused is shown by Jer. 20:9: "*Then said I, 'I will not make mention of him nor speak any more in his name.' But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.*" In spite of his own inclinations, however, he yielded to the Divine will, although it caused him great grief (see Jer. 8. 18, and Jer. 9. 1-2). He had no alternative but to announce the coming judgment, but there was a sob in his voice as he uttered it. Nothing was farther from his heart than to desire the evil day, yet he was so filled with the sense of Divine rectitude, so convinced of God's judgment, that he rose above his own inclinations, and said, "So be it, O Lord." This is the attitude which the child of God must bring to every circumstance of life. Although there may be times when the flesh shrinks, we must accept the Lord's will as inevitable, as did Eli when he said, "*It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.*"

We must learn to say "Amen" with cheerful, willing acquiescence to every circumstance and experience of life, to every revelation of the truth, to every aspect of Divine judgment.

Appropriating the words of his Leader (Heb.

10. 7), each child of God presents himself at baptism, and is counted dead to his own will and alive to the will of God, and it is here that, accepting the Divine will as revealed in the volume of the book, he says, "So be it, O Lord, may thy will be done in me." It is one thing to make this covenant of sacrifice, another thing to carry it out, but day by day the Lord is teaching us his will, and day by day He expects us to say "Amen."

Jeremiah went to Anathoth, and in chapter 12 we read how, overwhelmed on account of a plot against his life, he poured out his complaint to God. The Divine reply is given in verse 5: "*If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?*" Thus, the people of God turn to their Father in times of bitterness and trial, saying, "Why must we always be misunderstood and even hated?" The Divine reply is full of gentle rebuke: "Have you not covenanted to do my will; are you already tired?" Paul says: "Consider him, who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds". God allows us to be tested in a small way at first, and faith is gradually strengthened for the more severe tests of the way, so that we are enabled to say: "So be it, O Lord" at every step. The blessed result of character development can only be realised by these experiences if we can say, "Amen, O Lord".

Jeremiah was sent to the house of the Potter (Jer. 18. 1-6). Israel had not responded to the will of the great Potter, and they lost the high honour that might have been their's, but they will be made a vessel of less honour. If the design of the Heavenly Potter is to be outworked in our lives, every particle of the clay must say "Amen." It is true that if we mar God's gracious design for us He can, He may, make us again, but it will be a vessel of less honour than it would have been. Let us, then, say "Amen" to every moulding and shaping influence He brings into our lives.

Not only must we acquiesce in the experiences of life, but we must say "Amen" to each unfolding of truth. Does it seem strange that we must

say "Yes" to Divine truth—would it not still remain truth? Yes, but it would prevent us from receiving the blessings the truth would bring. Unless we are meek and teachable and ready to accept the Divine will and revelation, we shall almost certainly oppose the truth, and find we are contending against its Author. Whenever there is a great truth at work there is nearly always hatred and animosity. The Pharisees hated the One who taught the humble folks; those who love the things of the world hate the voice which says that these things must be given up if we would follow Christ. Our Father will not reveal his truth to the proud. Jesus said (Matt. 11. 25): *"I thank thee, Father, . . . because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."* Our Lord heartily approved of his Father's arrangements, for it seemed good in God's sight, and that is the attitude we must all bring to God's dealings; if it is good in God's sight we must say "Amen". If we cannot say "Amen" to the Divine methods we shall never say it to the truth itself. Even the sincere Nathanael questioned God's method, saying: *"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"*. Naaman asked: *"Are there not better rivers in Damascus than all the waters of Israel? Can I not wash in them and be clean?"*. He nearly missed the blessing because he did not like the method used. We must say "Amen" to the Divine method before we can say "Amen" to the message itself.

The attitude of the true Church of God is shown by John's exclamation: "Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus," in Revelation 22. 20. The glorified Christ announces the imminence of his coming, and the beloved Apostle says a double Amen—*"Amen, Even so, come, Lord Jesus."* Throughout the centuries the Church has looked forward earnestly for the return of the Lord. "How long, O Lord?" they have cried, and they have clung to the promise "If I go away I will come again". Only those who have made the fullest use of their privilege of communion with God can pray sincerely: "Even so, come Lord Jesus", for the coming of the Lord Jesus is a time of testing. Peter links the passing of the present order with the presence of the Lord, saying, *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up"* (2 Pet. 3. 10). If our roots are deep down in the things of this life, if the heavens and earth that

are now are our heavens and earth, we shall have great difficulty in saying: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus", If we are among those who love his appearing, we shall be able to say "Amen," but, if not, we may find ourselves saying: "Where is the fulfilment of his promise?" Peter says they are willingly ignorant; they do not desire the coming of the Lord. If we are satisfied with the things of this life we shall desire to push the time of the Lord's coming far away, but those who are oppressed and down-trodden can give a more heartfelt response. Our hearts must be fully in accord with his will, and we must be ready to depart.

To say "Amen" to Divine judgment calls for the greatest Christian development and trust in God, for real Christian maturity. The child of God has such a spirit of love that sometimes he finds it hard to acquiesce in the Divine judgments, yet he must do so (Rev. 16. 5, 7). It is the realisation of the justice of God that enables the Church to say "Amen" to his judgments. Systems and individuals which have done nothing but injure their fellows must be removed, for, *"The Lord preserveth all them that love him, but all the wicked will He destroy"* (Psa. 145. 20). This is not only a just sentence, but a merciful one, for every thing that would hurt or offend must be removed. If, however, the judgment of God seems to us to be harsh, let us make quite sure that we have not misunderstood; then turn to our Father and dare to trust him and in the strength of that trust say: "Amen, O Lord."

Another example of approval to Divine judgment is given in Rev. 1. 7: *"Behold He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him and they also which pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen"*. This refers to the revealing or *apokalupsis* of our Lord. At first the world sees only the clouds of trouble, and it is not until the trouble becomes worse that they will see the Son of Man in those clouds. All mankind who have opposed the Lord will wail because of him, and John says "Amen" because the sorrow and difficulty will produce a fruitage of repentance, so that they will be in a condition to receive the blessing of the Lord. As we look up into our Father's face let us realise that He *will* do nothing, He *can* do nothing, but what is in perfect accord with a love which far exceeds our tenderest, deepest conception of what love is. Then the *whispered* "Amen" will be heard no more, but there will be a new and confident tone in the voice of him who has come to trust God implicitly and say "Amen—so be it" to all his dealings.

CAST UNTO THE POTTER

*An examination of
a difficult text*

"Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for us to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in" (Matt. 27. 3-7).

This part of the story of our Lord's betrayal involves a reference to Old Testament prophecy and an apparent contradiction. The word for "temple" in this passage is "naos", the inner sanctuary, and the sense of the expression is that Judas hurled the money toward the Holy of Holies and rushed out of the Court. In this incident a lack of reverence and appreciation of the things of God is manifest in his character. The priests, true to their tradition, carefully gathered up the money, but with their scrupulous fidelity to the letter of the Law forbore to put it in the Temple treasury, "for", said they, "it is the price of blood". Taking counsel together, they decided to use it for the purchase of a piece of ground to be used as a cemetery for uncircumcised foreigners who for one reason or another had to be buried at the public expense. It is not to be expected that this purchase took place that same day; the attention of priests and people was absorbed in the seven days' feast then beginning. It may have been weeks afterward that this transaction was completed, being recorded here by Matthew to furnish the sequel to the story.

Peter, in Acts 1. 18, gives a different version, saying that it was Judas himself who "purchased a field with the reward of iniquity". The word here rendered "purchased" means "to acquire". Probably what Peter meant to convey was that, since the money was rightfully the property of Judas, he could be said to have acquired the field which was purchased by its means; but it profited him nothing, for by that time he was dead. Matthew's account reads as though Judas hanged himself immediately after leaving the priests, and this is consistent with his crazed state of mind as revealed by the story. The place of his death is nowhere indicated except by the

reference in Acts 1. 18, and it may be reasonably assumed that the place he selected was that same potter's field which was afterwards purchased by the priests as an unhallowed, unsanctified place, and therefore suitable for their purpose.

It is in connection with this incident that Matthew says (Matt. 27. 9): "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying: 'And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me'". None of the recorded sayings of Jeremiah contain any such prophecy. The book of Zechariah, chap. 11, does record a passage very similar to the words of Matthew, and yet with essential differences, and it is generally conceded that this is the passage to which Matthew refers. It is thought that a very early transcriber, perhaps the one who first copied Matthew's original gospel, made the mistake in names when copying the manuscript.

It is clear that Matthew is quoting from memory. The passage in Zechariah reads (Zech. 11. 12-13): "And I said unto them, 'If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear'. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, 'Cast it unto the potter, a goodly price that I was prised at of them'. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them unto the potter in the house of the Lord".

This needs consideration. Judas cast his money on the floor of the Temple, and this money was afterwards used to purchase the "potter's field" somewhere outside Jerusalem. Zechariah's prophecy pictures the shepherd of Israel receiving his wages, thirty pieces of silver, and, considering this amount an insult, flinging it "to the potter in the House of the Lord". The discrepancy is sufficient to warrant further examination.

These two verses are part of a long passage in Zech. 11 describing the ingratitude of the people to whom God was a shepherd. The time came at last when the shepherd refused to lead them any longer; "that that dieth, let it die". And Zechariah took his staff named "Beauty", and cut it asunder in token of the breaking of the covenant with Israel. Now at this point he asks for his wages. "If ye think good, give me my price, and if not, forbear"; and the people gave him for his price—thirty pieces of silver! This was a studied

insult. For the enduring watch care of the Shepherd of Israel they offered the price of a slave! Therefore, the Lord intervenes from heaven, taking this insult as unto himself, "Cast it unto the potter—this magnificent price at which I was assessed by them". This is the literal meaning of the phrase; the Lord speaking ironically of the sum given by Israel to their shepherd. "And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord".

The expression "cast it to the potter" is a difficult one. The house of the Lord did not accommodate potters; and there is no apparent reason for casting the money to such a personage even if he existed. In an effort to explain the passage it has been suggested that the reference is to the Temple treasure chest, which may well have been of earthenware or pottery; and alternatively that the reference may have been a rubbish heap in the vicinity of the Temple which would be well strewn with broken pottery. Neither suggestion is convincing. The most reasonable explanation is that advanced by an old commentator, who says that this expression "cast it to the potter" was a customary expression of contempt for that which was worthless, much as we would say in our day that a man has "gone to the dogs", meaning that he has become a worthless fellow. In such case the expression becomes full of meaning. Israel had shown their contempt for the ministrations of their shepherd by offering him the traditional prices of a slave; the Lord, in turn, orders Zechariah to show his contempt for this "magnificent price" by "casting it to the potter", and Zechariah heightens the force of the symbol by saying that he cast the money "to the potter" on the floor of the very house of God which Israel had so lightly

esteemed.

Here is the point of contact between prophecy and history; for Judas also cast thirty pieces of silver on the floor of the house of the Lord. From this basis we may be able to trace the process of reasoning in Matthew's mind which led him to connect the vision of Zechariah with the events he recorded.

Israel at the First Advent, like their forbears in Zechariah's day, had rejected the Good Shepherd, and contemptuously valued him, at the hands of their priests and of Judas, at thirty pieces of silver. That not only meant that they regarded him as of no more consequence than a slave; it also meant that they were prepared to take the responsibility of the death of Christ, for that thirty pieces of silver represented the compensation demanded by the law for the killing of a slave. All of this was duly noted in the Courts of Heaven. Then, by the agency of Judas' remorse, that "magnificent price" was cast back at that people, flung on the Temple floor, a lasting witness against them that they had rejected the Prince of Life.

It was this similarity which led Matthew to claim the fulfilment of the prophecy in the events of that night. What was done with the money afterwards in the matter of the purchase of the "potter's field" had nothing to do with the words of Zechariah. So far as God was concerned the matter was at an end when Judas flung the money back at the guilty priests. Within a few more hours the veil of the Temple had been rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the nation which had rejected the only way of salvation found its city and its Temple left unto it desolate.

A Note on Tithing

Q. *Is tithing of one's means, as commanded under the Mosaic Law, binding upon Christians?*

* * *

A. Tithing, as a compulsory system of giving to the Lord, was of course commanded to the people of Israel under the terms of the covenant made at Sinai which made them the people of the Lord. It is not commanded to Christians and for this there is a reason. The Lord wants the voluntary homage and service of his people and there is nothing that is commanded upon us; what we do, we do as of free will. If we do not wish to serve him of free will then He does not want our service at all. Now when He spoke to his disciples He asked them to give up everything to follow him. Putting this in the setting of our own day, this means that not just one-tenth, but

all that we have and are, is his to dispense according to his will. This means that we are stewards of what we possess and therefore it is no longer a question of giving one tenth and then feeling we have "paid our due" to him so to speak, but we give to him or in his service just according to our judgment of what He would have us to do. This may mean five per cent or it may mean twenty per cent of our money goes to Christian work, according to our own judgment and means, not a fixed ten per cent. If one feels that one tenth is what one would like to give, and one's means makes that possible, then that is what our Lord would have one do. The widow who cast in just two mites had our Lord's approval and that is how He looks at each of us.

BY WAY OF REMEMBRANCE

*A two-part consideration
of 2 Pet. 1.*

"This voice we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount" (2 Pet. 1.18).

How many of you have heard this voice? How many of you know him upon whom you have believed, and know his Truth, his creative purpose, the power of his mighty Spirit, and have so built that knowledge into the structure of your life that it will never leave you? Here in this chapter the Apostle Peter talks about being established in the present truth and so at the last experiencing an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. How many of you are so established and how many of you will remain established throughout life and so at the end participate in the glory of that abundant entrance? Have you so heard his voice that you can do naught else but leave all and follow him and his Truth to the end of time?

Peter was in no doubt about this. Like his brother—Apostle Paul, he knew him whom he had believed, and had confidence that his trust and faith was not misplaced. Like Paul too, he exhorted the brethren to whom he was writing to hold fast the form of sound words which he had committed to them, to remain always and for ever established in the truth. So in this first chapter of his second Epistle he is at pains to stress the necessity of building into one's structure of faith that positive knowledge of the Divine purpose in creation which alone can make us acceptable workers together with God, "scribes instructed unto the things of the Kingdom of Heaven" as Jesus called them.

In this chapter Peter combines in a very wonderful manner the life of faith and devotion, which is the basic requirement of those who come to Christ, with the life of learning and understanding and witness which is incumbent upon those who would be his ambassadors and evangelists at this critical time in the end of the Age. For, make no mistake about it, we who now live are living at the most crucial period in the history of man, the time which Jesus called "the days of the Son of Man", the initial phase of his Advent when the kingdoms of this world are in turmoil and the fabric of society is being torn apart, when the Lord himself is supervising the breaking down of the power of evil and the Evil One preparatory to taking his own great power, and, in company with his resurrected and glorified Church, will in the next stage of his Advent

be manifested to all the world for their salvation. For two thousand years the Lord's followers have prayed and waited for this day and sometimes been grievously disappointed that it has not come in their own time. Today there is no longer any doubt; the signs of the days of the Son of Man are all but completely fulfilled before our eyes and in our generations. When ye see these things begin to come to pass, said Jesus, then know that the time is at hand.

This is why Peter is so insistent in this chapter upon the necessity, first of being diligent to give heed, secondly to hold the things learned in constant remembrance, and thirdly to remain established in them. First of all comes instruction in these things from Peter himself, their Apostle and Mentor in the things of the Spirit. But one day Peter must come to the end of the way and they be left with only the remembrance of the things he had taught them and this is where they must continue in the remembrance of those things whilst their own life lasted and so demonstrate that they were indeed grounded and established in the present truth. But at his passing away they would not be left destitute, for there would be a voice from heaven which he and they had heard before, to be their constant guide in the Truth. Jesus spoke of that; I will send you the Holy Spirit, He said, and that Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth and show you things to come, and so you will be sustained throughout life. And thirdly there would be something that is of increasing importance the farther away the believers are from those early days and the nearer to these latter days of the end of the world. They, with us, have the "sure word" of prophecy, the written word, that which reveals an increasingly up-to-date understanding of the developing purpose of God as the end of the Age draws on. So there is in this chapter vital instruction for we who live at this end of the Age of equal or even greater moment than for those to whom it was first written at the beginning.

But first of all there must come something else. Peter knew full well that the acquisition of the knowledge of the Divine Plan must be preceded by sincere devotion and consecration of life to the Lord. Learning and knowledge must be the servants of faith and devotion and not the masters. Faith, says Peter in verse 5, must come first of all. "He that cometh to God must believe

that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him". "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith". But faith leads on to other characteristics, all of them of vital importance in the Christian life, and Peter goes on now to bring them forward, one after another. To your faith, he says, add fortitude. The Authorised Version says virtue, but the real meaning of the word is fortitude. Stability, firmness, determination, these are the qualities which must be brought to our aid right at the beginning of our Christian course. We are going to need them. "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God" said Jesus. The dictionary definition of fortitude is "mental strength to endure suffering or adversity with courage. Patient endurance". "He that shall endure to the end" said Jesus, "the same shall be saved". Right at the outset, and until the end, the Christian needs fortitude.

"To fortitude, add knowledge". Knowledge of what? Knowledge of the Lord, of his ways, of his teachings. Knowledge of his life, of his death, of his resurrection, of his coming again, and the purpose and outworking of all these things. Knowledge of our place in his purposes and his work, that we may be ready to serve and work with him in the right way at the right time. Positive knowledge is vital if we are not to be taken unawares at our Lord's Advent. "The excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it (Eccl. 7.12). Said the Wise Man of the Old Testament "Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsel and knowledge, that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that enquire of thee?" (Prov. 22.20-21). One is reminded of the words of the writer to the Hebrews when he said of some who had dropped back in this respect. "When, for the time (ye have known the truth) ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God" (Heb. 5. 12). There is an old jingle which is worth repeating in this connection:

"He who knows not, and knows not that he knows not, is a fool; shun him.

He who knows not, and knows that he knows not, is a child; teach him.

He who knows and knows not that he knows, is asleep; wake him.

He who knows, and knows that he knows, is a wise man; follow him".

But here lurks a danger. The conscious possession of knowledge can lead to pride in achievement. When it is knowledge of the purposes of

God and of the Word of God it can be spiritual pride and the whole benefit of the knowledge is lost. So Peter adds his third characteristic to be added to knowledge; self-control. The AV calls it temperance but that word has somewhat changed its meaning since the seventeenth century; our present term self-control best expresses the meaning. If we have knowledge, we must control its use for good; good to us and good to others. "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" All that we have learned has come from the Father through the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit and is given, as Paul said to Timothy, "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly instructed unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3.16-17). Unless the knowledge is used for the spiritual benefit and upbuilding of others it has failed in its intention and therefore discretion must be exercised in its use so that the other might be helped without being stumbled. Hence the need for self-control, to know when to speak and when to be silent. "Take heed to thyself, and unto the doctrine" was another of the admonitions to Timothy "for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4.16).

Peter has laid the basis. Faith, fortitude, knowledge, self-control. These are the practical characteristics for daily life. Now he proceeds to build upon these those other qualities which are necessary to the fully rounded out Christian life. To self-control, says Peter, add patience. Patience is going to be very necessary to one who intends to stay the course and come to a triumphant finish. Patience with all the disappointments and disillusionments that are sure to come, patience with brethren who fail to come up to the expected standard, patience when the time seems to be unduly delayed and expected events do not happen. There will be need for much patience in superabundant measure. So "let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (Jas. 1.4). "Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise" (Heb. 10.36). The patience of Job has become proverbial; let ours be no less so.

To patience add godliness, which in modern English means piety, reverence, the spirit of worship. In this there must be sincerity, utter sincerity allied with humility. There is a biting expression in the Book of Proverbs "There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up" (Prov. 30.13). John the Baptist looked at one such generation and called them a generation of vipers. With their eyes raised to heaven in mock piety and the fringe

check other translations & other texts with the same meaning.

of their garments raised from the ground to avoid defilement with the things of earth, they are in their arrogance an abomination in the sight of the Lord. Paul spoke scathingly of them as "having a form of piety, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away" (2 Tim. 3.5). The piety which must be added to our patience is that advocated to Timothy "we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all piety and honesty", "piety with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 2.2; 6.6). They who will render acceptable worship to the Father must "worship him in spirit and truth".

Finally, to these Christian graces Peter exhorts us to add love; love in its two manifestations, "brotherly kindness (*philadelphos*) which defines love as between members of a family or brethren, one Christian and another, so often expressed in the well-known term "the love of the brethren, and "charity" (*agape*) in its wider sense of love toward all men and between God and men. Here is the crown and flower of Christian achievement, to "love one another as I have loved you", to be ready to serve and spend on behalf of others, to "pour out life unto death" (Isa. 53.12) as did our Lord, that life may come to others who otherwise would never see life. God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth should not perish, but have everlasting life (Jno. 3.16). "Greater love hath no man than this," said Jesus "that a man should lay down his life for his friends" (Jno. 15.13). "Ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (Jno. 13.35). It is when this climax in the Christian life is reached that Peter can say, as he does say, "If these things be in you and abound, . . . ye shall never ~~fail~~ for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ".

There are four superlatives in the final verses of this preliminary exhortation. They are "abound" (vs. 3) "fruitful" (vs. 8) "diligence" (vs. 10) and "abundant entrance" (vs. 11). Three are superlatives of attainment and one is of action. "Diligence" occurs first in vs. 5. as the necessary pre-requisite and continuing force underlying all progress in the attainment of the successive qualities. "Giving all diligence, ADD to your faith, fortitude . . ." and so on. Now in vs. 10 it is a question of giving all diligence to make one's calling and election sure, on the basis of "doing all these things". "If these things be in you and abound", you will be "fruitful in the

knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (vs. 8). And the consequence of all this, at the end of the way, is the ministration of "an abundant entrance" into the heavenly kingdom.

This is the foundation, well and truly laid by the Apostle Peter in the hearts and lives of his converts. But life has to be lived, and this high standard maintained to the end, and Peter knew now, after thirty-five years preaching the gospel of the resurrected Christ, that his own time to go was drawing near. So he turns now to the things that he must say whilst yet he was with them, that they might be sustained after his passing.

"Wherefore I will not be negligent"—this is diligence expressed the other way round—"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" (vs. 13). "I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance" (vs. 15). Another important word comes to the front here; "remembrance". It is used three times in the course of four verses. It is not enough to receive the truth at the hands of a "father in the faith" as was Peter. Not enough to commence the work of building one Christian quality upon another, to create that Divine likeness which alone will render us acceptable to God at the last. All this must continue throughout life and the building must proceed in an orderly fashion, each brick laid upon its predecessor in line with the original plan and firmly seated upon the basic foundation which was laid at the first. So Peter exhorts them ever to keep in remembrance the basic truths they learned of him at the first and to build solidly thereon. "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things" said Paul again to Timothy "thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained" (1 Tim. 4.2). In this he only but repeated the promise of Jesus, who told his disciples upon the eve of his departure from the world "the Holy Spirit shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (Jno. 14.26). If we have been rightly taught in our early days, and if we have built rightly on that foundation, making onward progress in a constantly deepening and widening understanding of our Faith, then in after days we can only ignore or forget these things at our peril.

To be concluded.

"Oh God keep us from the arrogance that dares to judge either ourselves or others. We know not which is the most treasured of thy

vessels — the crudest earthenware — the finest porcelain—only that both are fashioned by Thee —loved by Thee—used by Thee."

AN INCORRUPTIBLE CROWN

*An encouragement
to endeavour*

"Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (Rev. 3. 11).

The possibility of losing the crown of life, even though that crown seem to be almost within one's grasp, is a very real one. Whenever the New Testament speaks of the award that awaits faithful disciples the conditional nature of that award is stressed. It is not the one who enters into a covenant with God, and is accepted by him in the High Calling, who is to receive an abundant entrance into the Kingdom, but the one who wins his Lord's approval by patient continuance in well-doing. He is the one who eventually receives the crown of life which the Lord has promised to them that love him. In the meantime, during the span of the life time, be it short or long, during which that consecration is being worked out, there is always the possibility of the promised crown being lost. Not that God is ever unfaithful or that He will change his mind or vary the terms of the offer. His unchangeable Plan ever stands and so far as He is concerned the acceptance of a disciple into the race for the prize is as good as saying that the prize is already won. What He has promised He is abundantly able to perform. The decision rests with us. If we continue, He abideth faithful; He cannot deny himself (2 Tim. 2. 13). But if we deny him, then He cannot do other than deny us, for He ever respects our free will and if we deliberately take ourselves out of his love and care by repudiating the terms of our covenant with him there is really nothing He can do about it—not in this present Age anyway.

The loss of a crown is rarely so simple a matter as this. The responsibility for the change of mind or loss of faith which involves such disaster is all too often to be laid at the door of others, and in the last analysis, the great Adversary of God and man, Satan himself. That is why the risen Christ in his message to the Church at Philadelphia, and through that message to all Christians everywhere, beseeches us earnestly *"Take heed that no man take thy crown"*. There are so many in this world who can, wittingly or unwittingly, become the means of robbing the unwary disciple of his promised crown. It is not that they win it or even desire it for themselves but their influence on the life can be such that they have taken the crown from the one who might otherwise have had it, and destroyed his hopes of joint-heirship with Jesus the Lord.

It is a very appropriate symbol of the Christian life, this metaphor used so much by the Apostle

Paul. It was taken from his knowledge of the Greek games of his day. All the early Christians were familiar with the games. They occupied as prominent a place in the life of the people as does organised sport in the world's social life to-day. In one respect they differed. The competitors were required to go into very strict training long before the day and encouraged to lay aside every other interest in order to be as fit as possible for the event; when then the great day came they were expected to manifest much more than usual physical prowess in order to gain the approval of the judges.

In the great national annual games of the Greeks—the Olympic games, recently revived in Western Europe, was one such event—preparations began ten months beforehand, and those chosen to compete in the actual contest were already known to be fit men and measurably prepared for the trials of strength and endurance they would be called upon to undergo. In like manner, we are told, no man can come to Jesus except the Father, who is overseeing the interests of his work in the world of this Age, draw him. Who does the Father draw? Quite obviously those whose hearts are already turned toward him to some extent or who are seen by him to possess those qualities and that disposition which will make them amenable to his leading and his instruction when once they have been brought face to face with Christ and have accepted him. Right at the outset we have to accept the fact that God, who knows every one of his creatures so well, is busy, through the medium of his Holy Spirit, ceaselessly working in the world, selecting those whose hearts are likely to be responsive and bringing them into touch with his truth. That is where the work of his ambassadors, his witnesses, comes in. They are agents of the Holy Spirit, sharing in this search for likely candidates for the great contest.

Now here is a candidate who has heard the call, and answered it, and has progressed through the successive stages of repentance, belief in and acceptance of Jesus and his redemptive death, justification through faith in him, and consecration of life to be dead with him. Not all who are led by the Spirit of Jesus, who are "drawn" of God, progress even to this point. Many are called, but not so many accept the call. Some there are, like the rich young ruler, who come within measurable distance of the High Calling and appreciate something of its glories, but turn away

at the last moment, unwilling to pay the price that is asked. But here is a candidate who has done all these things and has been entered for participation in the race. He is accepted by the Father as a member of the Church in the flesh—he has come “into Christ”—he has been buried with him by baptism into his death and has risen to walk with him in newness of life—old things have passed away and all things have become new, for he is now a “new creature in Christ Jesus”—and as he walks on to the course and crosses the starting line he squares his shoulders for the effort and hears the judges’ assuring admonition “*Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it*” (1 Thess. 5. 24). In his own zealous and hopeful condition of mind the prize is already his, for he fully intends to complete the course and win the crown.

Now there were two kinds of races to which allusion is made in the New Testament and the peculiarities of each should be kept in mind if we are to draw right conclusions. There was first of all the short foot races, in which a number of competitors ran to determine who could reach the finishing line first, and the first one to do so was acclaimed victor and crowned with the laurel or parsley wreath (the “crown” which is referred to in the New Testament). The other was the much longer course, usually of many miles in length, in which the object was to show how many of the competitors could summon sufficient endurance to run the whole distance. In this case each one who “finished the course” received a laurel wreath as victor; those who dropped out by the wayside through inability to finish the course were losers, and received no wreath.

The first, the short race, is the one mentioned in 1 Cor. 9. 24 “*Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain*”. Now this must not be interpreted to mean that of all who enter the race for the prize of the High Calling only one disciple will eventually win that prize; such a thought is an obvious absurdity. The Apostle’s meaning is that just as in a worldly race each competitor, knowing that the first past the tape will receive the prize, puts forth every possible deavour to run his best, hoping thus to outdistance his rivals, just so, says Paul, should the Christian run, putting forth every endeavour. As he says in another place “*this one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling in God in Christ Jesus*”. (Phil. 3. 14). “So run, that ye may obtain.” The other type of contest, an example of which was the well-known Marathon, in which all the contestants sought to

stay the course and all who did so received crowns, is a much closer analogy to the life of the Christian and this is the one alluded to by Paul in 2 Tim. 4. 8 when at the end of his life he looked back and said “*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day*”. He knew that he was close to death; he knew that he must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ and that decision would then be pronounced as to his worthiness or unworthiness of the crown of life, he knew that now, so late in his Christian life, so near to its end, the things that now lay in the past must determine the issue, and looking back over the way he had come he exulted in the knowledge that his faith had held firm, his integrity before God was inviolate, he had finished the course and come to the end of the way still trusting in Christ, and therefore without any doubt the wreath of victory was his even although its actual bestowal must wait for the end. Paul had once referred to the possibility of his becoming a castaway (1 Cor. 9. 27) and that knowledge was always with him through life as it must be with us; but now that he realised within himself the end was at hand, he rejoiced in the knowledge that he had finished the course without falling out by the wayside and so losing his crown, or giving heed to men who might seduce him from the course and so in that way rob him of his crown. “*Take heed, that no man take thy crown.*”

We are in the same position as Paul. While we are yet in the running of the race, still on the course, there is always the possibility of our turning aside and failing to finish. It is only when we arrive at its end that we can say as did Paul “*I have finished the course and now the crown is mine*”. We do well to remember that the judgment is given, not on account of the work which we have done or the knowledge which we have gained, but purely on account of our loyalty to our Lord, our faithfulness to our covenant, and our sincerity of purpose. Whilst we retain these things we are still on the course and must eventually reach its end and win the promised crown. But until then the snares and delusions of the world, the flesh and the Devil, the effects of disillusionment and discouragement and unbelief, will always be seeking to destroy our faith and draw us away from God and that means becoming unfit for his purposes, and unworthy of his Kingdom, and in the end involves the loss of the crown. It is only he that endureth to the end who is to be saved. “*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation*” (or proving) says the be-

loved James "for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of righteousness which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (Jas. 1. 12). Note well that the crown is bestowed *after* the man has been tried (tested, proven worthy) and the plain implication is that if he does not stand the proving and the trying process, then he loses the crown. Exhorting the elders of the Church to faithfulness in the discharge of their duties, Peter says (1 Pet. 5. 4) "When the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away". That is conditional upon faithfulness to their charge. And to seal all these words with his own approval, our Lord says to all his Church and each member thereof "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2. 10).

In the clear light of so many Scriptures how plain it is that our whole Christian calling is altogether and completely conditional, and that we have it within our own power to make or mar our future, to win or to lose the crown of life. To be sure, there is room in the "Church of the Firstborn" beyond the Vail for all who may be drawn of the Father, hear the call, accept same, and enter into the Narrow Way that leads to life. It is quite unthinkable and quite out of accord with the fundamental principles of the Divine Plan to consider that the Father would call any who remain faithful and yet could not at the end be awarded the prize for which they had run and which they have merited. Whatever may be the truth regarding any question of a predetermined limit to the number of the "Elect" or of God's foreknowledge regarding the number who will eventually be faithful, we must hold as an essential article of faith that all who are called, who enter, and are faithful, will receive the promise. There can be no shadow of doubt about that.

Upon the other hand, we should not interpret the Scriptures to teach that each one who

receives the call and is accepted by God as a member of the New Creation must inevitably progress the whole length of the course and receive the crown. That is equally a violation of fundamental Scriptural principle. So far as the Father is concerned, it could well be said that the entry into the race is as good as the end of the race, for having once accepted a human heart in his covenant the Lord guarantees that He, on his part, will abide faithful. His power will bring us through "more than conquerors" if we allow him. But this is an agreement between two parties both having free-will. God can guarantee his own part; He cannot guarantee ours. He abideth faithful and bestows upon us the inestimable blessing of his Holy Spirit to be a guide and a counsellor through life, but with that the issue rests with us. It is only if we abide faithful also that the end of the course can be attained. To what end God does or can see that end before we have reached it, and know the result of our race before that result is attained, is not really of consequence so far as we are concerned. What we do know and what the Scriptures constantly warn us against is the possibility of our falling away from the faith we have accepted, by so doing demonstrating our unworthiness for the purpose for which God is calling us, and so, inevitably, losing the crown which otherwise we might have had. "No man" said Jesus "putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God." He knew, only too well, the danger that would confront all his followers in after days, of setting out with high hopes, and then, for one reason or another rejecting the High Calling into which they had entered, and losing everything. The Father requires of us faith, belief, sincerity. These are the essential factors which will carry us safely through all the besetments of life and bring us at last into the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, at that right hand where there are pleasures forevermore.

In the Millennium

In the daily rush to workshop and office the teeming streets are full of faces anxious, careworn and bearing the marks of daily stress. For many men and women the gaining of a livelihood is a continual source of worry and apprehension. How different when the righteous administration of Messiah's Kingdom ensures to every man an adequate share of the necessities and luxuries of life; when daily occupations become a pleasure instead of drudgery; when the resources of science are harnessed to serve the

welfare of the race. The morning sun will shine down upon multitudes betaking themselves to daily tasks with the radiant happiness of unquestioned security and peace to inspire their minds and hands. Praise to God, the Creator and Giver of all good, will resound in the habitations of men and roll back from field and forest. Haste and hurry will be known no more; in calm leisure and with painstaking care men will pursue their chosen work, and in a world of universal brotherhood the call to labour for the good of all will meet with enthusiastic response.



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Vol. 61, No. 6 NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1984

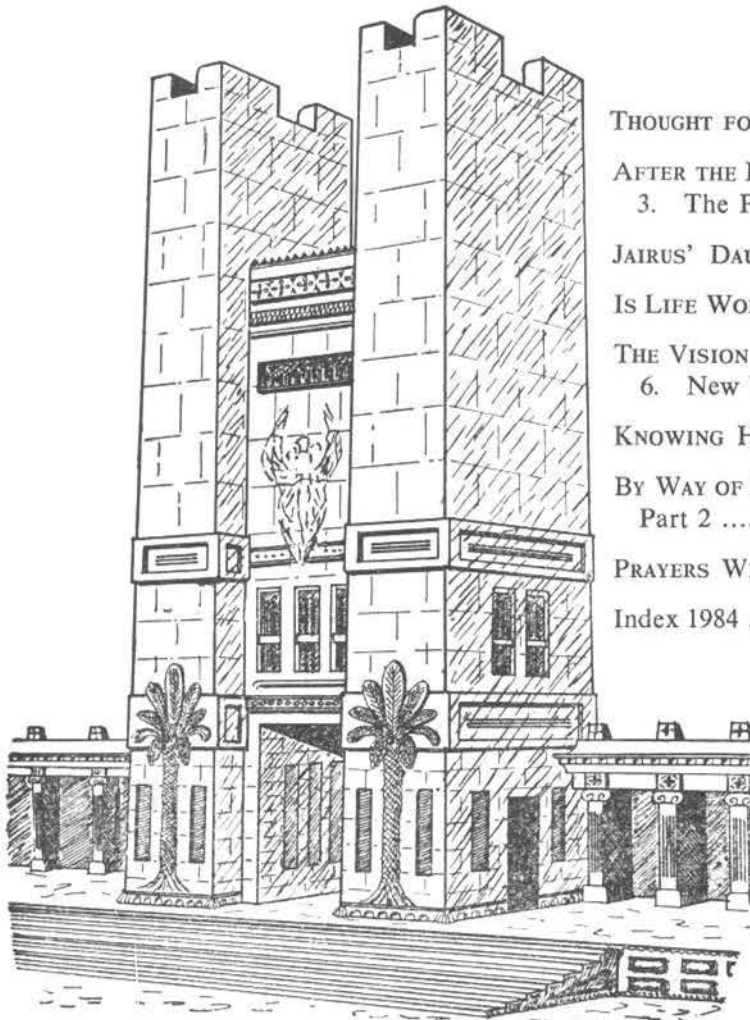
Published November 1st

Next issue January 1st

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

CONTENTS

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	122
AFTER THE FLOOD	
3. The Plain of Shinar	123
JAIRUS' DAUGHTER	127
IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?	130
THE VISION OF JOEL	
6. New Wine of the Kingdom ...	131
KNOWING HIM	135
BY WAY OF REMEMBRANCE	
Part 2	137
PRAYERS WITHOUT WORDS	141
Index 1984	144



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

*This Journal is sent free
of charge to all who are
genuinely interested, on
request renewable annually
and is supported by the
voluntary gifts of its readers*

Published by
Bible Fellowship Union
11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow
Middlesex, England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, maintaining the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and the validity of their miraculous and prophetic content viewed in the light of modern under-

standing. It stands for the pre-millennial Advent of our Lord and the consequent conversion of the world. It is supported entirely by the voluntary gifts of its readers and all such gifts are sincerely appreciated.

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow, Middlesex, England.
 Secretary & Treasurer: B. G. DUMONT (Hounslow) Editorial & Publishing: A. O. HUDSON (Milborne Port)
 Circulation Control: D. WALTON (Sherborne)

Thought for the Month

"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isa. 40.31). The end of the year is a peculiarly appropriate time to take stock of past achievements and failures and look forward to the future. The ancients used to burn an old tree at this time in symbol of the past which was dead and finished, and follow this by bringing in a young fir tree laden with gifts to typify the future with all its promise. New life springs out of old. This 40th chapter of Isaiah is full of such promise. Tell the world that its time of travail and trouble is at an end, cries the prophet. "She hath received of the Lord's hand an equitable portion for all her sins." The world has entered into judgment, a judgment merited by its own godless course. But now a voice cries from the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord. He comes in glory and power to make an end of sin and evil, and for the world's salvation. "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together!" "The Lord God will come with strong hand, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, and gently lead".

This is the young fir tree with its gifts. Only those who understand the Divine Plan see it as yet. The greater number of mankind have no faith and no hope and in the main that is because no one has told them. Isaiah in another place speaks of a people so pressed down by their troubles that they curse their king and their God; they look upward into the skies and they look downward into the earth, "and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness". And then he turns round and announces in vibrant tones, "the

people that sat in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined . . . for unto us a child is born, a son is given . . . and of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, to establish his kingdom with justice and judgment for ever" (Isa. 9).

That is the Millennial world of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, so soon to be established in succession to this fast decaying and disintegrating social order which is all that man has to show for the thousands of years he has been upon earth. That is the time when, to quote Isaiah again, men will cry out "This is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isa. 26.9). It is very nearly December 31st in the history of this Age of human rule without God; it will very soon be the dawn of January 1st and the onset of a new Age and new ruler of things which will meet every human need and aspiration. The signs of the times are conclusive; we are at the dawn of the long-promised era when "the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever".

Gone from us

— ❁ —

Bro. T. Lang (Londonderry)
 Sis. G. McCloy (West Wickham)

— ❁ —

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

AFTER THE FLOOD

3. The Plain of Shinar

Those first two centuries or so after the Flood were stressful times for the little family. The wide plains of Iraq, later to be called the Plain of Shinar, was at that time occupied in part by the northern extension of the sea and for the rest by salt-laden mud and marshland. Here was no home for man. From their position on the mountain terraces, a thousand feet above the plain, they could see that for many years yet they must remain in the mountains, building their dwellings of forest timber and subsisting on such wild berries and fruits, and the flesh of small wild animals, as the mountains would provide. Later on, as their children were born and their numbers increased, they would need to find land suitable for growing crops and keeping flocks and herds, to feed the increasing number of mouths. To the south of them the mountains closed in, dark and forbidding; to the north west they opened out into wide terraces, offering a mixture of grassland and forest, well watered by copious streams rushing down to the marshy plain below, as they still do today although that plain is now well drained and fertile. Here was the logical place for them to go and, it may well be, the recently discovered remains of prehistoric settlements are the remaining evidences of their sojourn for some two centuries before they could, using the language of Gen. 11.2. *"journey from the east, and find a plain in the land of Shinar, and dwell there"*.

The type of life they must have lived, these sons and grandsons and great-grandsons of Noah to perhaps the fourth generation, is well illustrated by the discoveries made by Braidwood and Howe in 1948/51 at Qalal Jarmo and Karim Shahir about eighty miles distant from the settlements above-mentioned, in the headwaters of the Diyala river system. The lowest levels show evidence that the villagers lived on wild wheat and barley, berries and fruits, and the flesh of wild sheep, goats and pigs. Then come the indications of agriculture and stock-breeding. Says Braidwood (*"Prehistoric investigations in Iraqi Kurdistan"*, 1966) *"The Kurdistan foothills are the original source of the earliest village farming in the world . . . This is a major landmark in human history"*. *"Nowhere else in the world were the wild wheats and barley, the wild sheep, goats, pigs, cattle and horses to be found together in a natural environment. This meant an entirely new way of life for all mankind"*. This was said, of

course, upon the popular assumption that mankind evolved from a long continued state of primitive savagery to the point where they began to cultivate plants and breed animals for themselves. The Genesis story contradicts this; the eight who survived the Flood were already civilised and knowledgeable and all the evidence is that they were brought out of the Ark and into the new earth by the providences of God in a locality where they could readily commence to apply the skills they already possessed, and after perhaps a relatively limited number of years begin to reap their own harvests and make use of their own flocks and herds.

Pottery at the first was unknown; domestic vessels were made of wood but even the earliest ones were perfectly round as if turned on a lathe. The finest specimen of a wooden egg cup ever known comes from a house which must date to the time of Noah's grandsons. Stone was worked to produce bowls and tools.

No village has been found to exceed twenty to twenty-five houses, but there are always six or seven rooms which would seem to indicate large families; this would be essential to the rapid increase of the race from three principal forebears. And this brings to the forefront a factor which has no parallel in subsequent times. Although children were born, and grew to maturity and in their turn brought forth more children, there was no death! For some three centuries at least no one died! The ages of the patriarchs recorded in Genesis show that the normal span of life for those born after the Flood was at the first some five hundred years, lessening then in steps to about two centuries a thousand years later. If this unusual length of life betokened a corresponding increase of the child-bearing period there would logically be a considerably accelerated growth in population. Even so, it must have been a comparatively long time before the community springing from three brothers and their wives attained any appreciable number. If the span of life of those three was, as Genesis indicates, between five and six hundred years, and their womenfolk similarly, the child-bearing period would be as much as two centuries, and if the children born reached marriageable maturity in something over fifty years of age, it would follow that at the end of two centuries there could be a population of some ten thousand or more living and no sign yet of any-

one dying. By this time men would have long since settled into a regime of agriculture and stock-raising and in consequence become organised into separate village communities each at the centre of an area of farmland which sufficed for their needs.

With the third century after the Flood there came a change. The population increase would be accelerating; there was still no death and the very genial climatic conditions would be conducive to a high birthrate. At least a quarter million could be expected by the end of the third century. The mountain slopes were proving inadequate; the many sites of prehistoric settlements in this area which have been discovered, ignoring those which have not, give testimony to the density of population which must have existed in those early times. It was time to find more living space.

Small detachments probably made their way up the river valleys leading into the Iranian mountains, finding isolated spots where they could settle. This might well have been the time that some of the known mountain sites such as Qalal Jarmo and the half-dozen villages surrounding it, and others like it farther southward in Iran, were established. Many of these show the primitive state of life which would be expected of the time concerned. Later on their descendants began to mine the copper and gold and precious stones which exist in the mountains and so became artisans and traders—but that lay several more centuries in the future. By far the greater proportion of the fast-growing community would look longingly at the spacious plain which lay to the west of their mountain home where once the waters of the Flood had extended but which now was in process of becoming fit for human habitation.

As they gazed across that plain from the mountains, a little above the latitude of the modern city of Baghdad, they would have seen, in the foreground, a wide stretch of water and salt marshland some forty miles wide, an apparently impassable barrier, a remnant of the waters of the Flood three centuries earlier. But their scouts would have been out, and they would have reported that on the other side of that sheet of water the land had dried, the salt marshes had leached out into fertile ground, and there the grass and wild grain was growing and the countryside was fit for habitation. They had but to trek around the northern end of the water and they could reach a plain which stretched for scores of miles to north and south and there they could find room for their villages and farms for generations to come. And so the great migration began.

It was not likely to have been a mass journey similar to the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt. Many of the older folk probably stayed where they were, preferring to keep to the mountain life to which they had been born and in which they had been brought up. The settlements which have been excavated in the Diyala river area bear witness to that; some of them were inhabited for a good many centuries after. Bands of pioneers would strike out, each finding a suitable place in which to settle, spreading ever farther outwards and onwards, so that as generation succeeded generation the plain became increasingly populated.

This is the event which is described in such brief and concise terms in Gen. 11.2. "*As they journeyed from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there*". They came from the east, and they spread over a fertile country some seventy miles wide by two hundred long, traversed through its middle by the famous river Euphrates, and from there their children went out to people every region of the earth.

It has long been held by archaeologists and anthropologists that the first inhabitants in the Iraq plains came from the east, from somewhere in the Iranian mountains. The story of the Flood, and Gen. 11.2, confirms their findings.

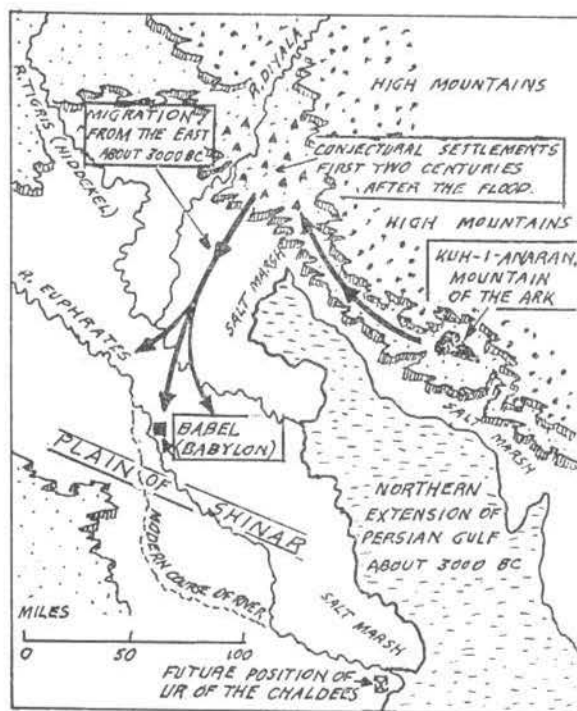
Of course it was not called Shinar at the time. The need for place names hardly existed. The word is the Sumerian term for the combined lands of Sumer and Akkad, the land of the Hamites and Semites, and did not come into use until the sons of Shem and sons of Ham had evolved into distinct nations many centuries later. A much later scribe — either the author or a copyist of Gen. 11, inserted the word to explain to his own generation—and to us—just where was situated the plain on which the people settled. Thanks to him, we now know that they had come into the country the capital and most famous city of which was one which figures repeatedly in the Bible—Babylon.

About this time the old patriarch Noah breathed his last. He had survived the Flood by three hundred and fifty years, living long enough to see his three sons grow into a company of a quarter million people. The impression given in Gen. 11 is that the community was living in a state of peace and harmony and one might be justified in thinking that he died happy in the thought that the world was being re-peopled by men and women who had regard for God and righteousness. He could have had no conception of the miseries that the re-entry of sin was to inflict upon the world in later days. Tradition

says that he was buried on the mountain on which the Ark had landed but there is not likely to be much truth in that. The more significant thing is that in all probability his was the first death to occur in this new post-Flood period. For more than three hundred years there had been no deaths; now it was to begin to intrude its power upon mankind again. In another hundred and fifty years his eldest son Shem was to follow him to the grave.

Just how literate were these people, back there three thousand years before Christ? No specimens of their writing, if they knew of writing, have survived. The earliest so far discovered dates from about four centuries later, when the cities began to be built and industry and trade began to flourish. But there must have been writing long before. E. J. Gelb in *"A study of writing"* (1965) says that the structure of the Sumerian cuneiform writing (on clay tablets) indicates a long period, perhaps five centuries, of development. The earliest script which is known, earlier than cuneiform, is called "pictographic", because the signs are obviously derived from pictures of objects, but no examples of the original picture-writing have ever been found. It is clear that other writing mediums were known before the use of clay tablets, because the Sumerian word for tablets has a prefix indicating wood or vegetable substance. There were—and still are—no trees on the Euphrates plain, and clay made into tablets and baked was the only possible writing material. The survival of words like *Gis-sar*, "to write", and *"Gis-gar"*, a building plan, (*"gis"* being the prefix for wood or trees) indicates that before the people came down into the plain there was such a thing as writing on wood. Mallowan in 1953, excavating on the site of ancient Ninevah, found wax-covered wood panels, bound with gold hinges in the form of a book, bearing traces of cuneiform texts. It has often been remarked that the story of the Flood as narrated in Genesis bears all the hall-marks of being written by an eye-witness. It is most unlikely that the antediluvian world should have endured more than two thousand years without men having invented writing — the persistent Jewish tradition is that Enoch was the man who did so and there is every likelihood that these pioneers who came into the plain of Shinar carried with them, written in the picture-writing script which no modern man has ever seen, the stories of their ancestors which we now have as the first nine chapters of Genesis.

The plain was fertile and well watered, more so than the mountain regions from which they had come, but it lacked a good many of the



Travels of Noah's descendants from the Ark to Babel.

adjuncts to daily life to which they had become accustomed in the mountains. Up there they could quarry stone — granite, sandstone, limestone, sometimes even marble — and they had learned to make stone bowls and vessels and door-sockets of fine quality. Some of these have been found where they were thrown away and buried, five thousand years ago. Down here in the plain there was none of that, only clay, and so they learned to make their utensils and ornaments of clay baked into pottery, tablets for writing, and bricks for building. That is why the narrative of the building of the great Tower in Gen. 11 says "*bricks had they for stone, and bitumen for mortar*". They were compelled to learn a new building and a new writing technique.

Neither had they any metal. It was only after the dispersion, when the peoples began to separate, that the mineral wealth of the mountains was discovered and men began to fabricate those works of art which, brought to light in this modern age, have excited the wonder and envy of the present-day world. Nothing like them has been made since. The skill of the ancient Sumerians has never been surpassed. The finest works of art in gold, silver and copper which have ever been known were produced by craftsmen only seven generations removed from Noah

and a couple of centuries after the dispersion from Babel. That scattering of the nations described in *Gen. 11* was a blessing in disguise for the developing human race; it sent them into widely separated regions in which they discovered all kinds of natural products which were going to prove necessary for the well-being of mankind as the human race increased. Without that dispersion they would have remained in the Stone Age much longer than they did.

So they occupied the length and breadth of the Plain of Shinar, these sons and daughters of Shem, Ham and Japheth to the fifth and sixth generations. They all were there; none had yet died, and the three old patriarchs, nowhere yet near the end of their days, must have looked with pride—and, too, with thankfulness to God—upon the thousands of great-great-great-grandsons and daughters to whom they had given the spark of life. It is difficult to visualise the nature of society at that time. Three men, survivors with their father of the great Flood which had ended the lives of all others, could look upon a quarter of a million people and reflect that by the providence of God they had given life to all these. They must have remembered the admonition given them by the Lord when they came out of the Ark into this cleansed new world “*be ye fruitful, and multiply. Bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein*” (*Gen. 9.7*). They looked now upon these teeming multitudes; they looked out across the smiling cornfields and the luxuriant groves of date-palms; they remembered the harder times spent in the mountains where they brought up their first children in an environment hardly yet ready to provide them with the food they needed, and they must have bent their heads and given thanks to God.

There is an old Sumerian story, of which the earliest copies now in existence were written about eighteen hundred years before Christ, which may reflect this change in the fortunes of the human community when they came into the Plain of Shinar, and, too, the beginning of the rivalry between the sons of Shem and the sons of Ham which probably lies behind the Tower of Babel story. The “*Epic of Emesh and Enten*” tells of the enmity of two brothers and its consequences, for which reason it is sometimes claimed by adherents of the “mythical” school that it was the original from which the *Genesis* account of Cain and Abel was derived. In fact this cannot be, for every element in the legend is as unlike the story of Cain and Abel as could be. It tells of a time when Enlil, the god of earth and heaven, found it necessary to produce fruit trees and grain to establish abundance in the land to meet the needs of his human creatures.

This at once looks like the time at present being considered, when the rapidly increasing human race moved into the Plain of Shinar to find living space and food. To this end Enlil appointed two men, Emesh and Enten, and assigned their duties. Emesh was to set up farmstead, stables and sheepfolds, multiply the produce of the farms, cover the earth with cornfields and orchards and bring the harvests into the granaries and storehouses. Enten was to go out into the plain and gather in the wild goats, sheep, asses and so on, make use of their fat and milk and their young as they were born, collect the fruit from the wild date-palms and vines and wild grain, and generally “live off the land”. In all of this it is not difficult to see the distinction between the settled farming and industrial way of life which was characteristic of the descendants of Ham, the Sumerians, and the nomadic, wandering from place to place, way of life which was the hallmark of the sons of Shem, the Semites. In the story the two brothers quarrelled and brought their pleas to Entil in his holy city of Nippur. Enlil pronounced in favour of Enten and commanded that his decree be observed. Emesh accepted the verdict, was reconciled to his brother and thereafter they lived and worked happily together.

If Emesh was a dimly remembered recollection of Ham and his descendants, who colonised the plain and remained there, and Enten likewise of Shem, who according to history very largely left the plain and migrated to the north, after the lapse of centuries returning in force to mingle with the native Hamites and form one nation, we have here what might well be a dim recollection of the separation which occurred at Babel. Centuries later the Semites—many of them—came back and fused with the Hamites who were still there so that there were two peoples living side by side; in later times the Semites were known as the Akkadians and the joint country as the land of Sumer and Akkad. The Semitic element was the most spiritually minded and had the higher conception of God. In the story Enlil favoured Enten, the nomad. In the Bible (*Gen. 9*) God pronounced his blessing upon Shem, the nomad. And that is how it came about that, a thousand years after Babel, Abraham the Semite and his forebears were found living in the Sumerian city of Ur of the Chaldees.

Thus, perhaps three centuries after the Flood and three thousand years before Christ, there occurred the first great crisis in the affairs of the new world, and the separation which sent the sons of men wandering in all directions to re-people the earth, the crisis which is recorded in *Gen. 11* as the building of the Tower of Babel.

To be continued.

JAIRUS' DAUGHTER

*A Dissertation on
Mark 5.22-43*

There was at least one leader of a synagogue who had faith in the saving power of Jesus. To what extent he accepted the fact of the Lord's Messiahship is not possible to discern, but at the very least he looked upon him as a teacher sent from God endowed with the power possessed by the prophets of old. One usually unnoticed word in vs. 35 reveals that. Whilst Jesus delayed his progress to the child's home in order to comfort the stricken woman whose faith in touching his garment resulted in her healing, some of the servants came to Jairus with the news that the child was dead and added "*Why troublest thou the Master any further?*". Their use of the term "Master" implies that Jairus must have manifested and imparted his faith to his servants so that the whole household were believers in Jesus and his mission, however inadequately or imperfectly they comprehended it. Orthodox Jews though they were, loyal to the laws of Moses, they had a belief in Jesus which set this household apart from most of their fellows, and Jesus knew that.

So Jairus came, and fell at Jesus' feet. "*My little daughter lieth at the point of death. I pray thee, come and lay thine hands upon her, that she may be healed, and she shall live*" (Mark 5. 23). This is the voice of faith; Jairus knew that Jesus could heal and his faith told him that Jesus would heal; He would by no means be unresponsive to his plea.

So Jesus set out to the house of Jairus, the anxious father doubtless urging him to accelerate his pace, "*and much people followed him and thronged him*". It is easy to visualise the scene; the crowds which had already witnessed his miracles following in his steps all agog to witness another.

But now there was this delay caused by the woman who, in Mark's rather scornful words, "*had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse*". Jairus must have watched the little interlude with increasing anxiety and impatience, anxious to get Jesus on the way again, an anxiety that was turned to hopeless anguish when the messengers arrived with the sad news. To heal the grievously sick was one thing; to raise the dead, quite another. For a moment Jairus, for all his faith, must have gone down into the depths.

But only for a moment. The voice of Jesus,

calm, assuring, fell upon his ears; "*Be not afraid; only believe*". One is perhaps justified in thinking that Jairus did believe, for they two went on together to the house. Only Peter, and James, and John, were with them; Jesus had sent the crowd away. What He was going to do now was for the family and the household only.

By the time He arrived at the house the professional mourners were in full cry. It was the custom among the higher classes of the people to enlist the services of these "professionals" to initiate and lead what amounted to an organised ritual expression of grief; anything less would be construed as an attitude of indifference and disrespect to the departed. So Jesus entered the house, "*and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly*" (vs. 38). He must have stood a moment, regarding them calmly, and then asked quietly "*Why make ye this ado, and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth!*".

And they laughed him to scorn. They, the professionals, ought to know a dead body when they saw one. What did this wandering prophet know about death? Let him go on with his healing of the sick and casting out of demons, services He could render to the living. After death, which ended all things, there was nothing even He could do. So they derided him and went back to the weeping and wailing for which they had been engaged.

But, all unknowingly, they were in the presence of One who had power over death, and could infuse new life into the mortal frame from which the spirit of life had departed. They could only weep and wail over the lifeless body; here was One who could restore life to it. "*I am the resurrection and the life*" He said on another occasion. "*He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. and whoso liveth and believeth on me shall never die*" (Jno. 11. 25-26). That can only become a reality when there is true belief in and acceptance of Christ and that involves the conscious giving and surrender of oneself to Christ. This child had not yet come to that point; neither was the life Jesus was about to give her the eternal life which is spoken about in that passage in John's Gospel. All that Jesus could and would do at this moment was to give back to the child the measure of Adamic life she had possessed and one day she must inevitably, like all her fellows, pass into the grave to await the time when "*all that are in*

their graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth" (Jno. 5.28), and share in that full and final opportunity to believe, and so enter into everlasting life. So this revival of the little daughter of Jairus was in no sense a resurrection; it was a resuscitation to the life she had formerly enjoyed.

Now Jesus turned, and with an imperative gesture silenced the wailing mourners and ushered them out of the house. There was a great quiet, a quiet in which He led the girl's parents into the room where she was lying, white and still. He looked down at her compassionately, the others waiting, wondering, hoping, fearing.

Moving forward, He took her by the hand, saying as He did so "Talitha cumi", which is an Aramaic expression meaning "Little girl, arise". It is said to be the expression normally used in that day for a mother to arouse her sleeping child in the morning. "Little girl, arise." "Straightway", says Mark, using his favourite word, she opened her eyes, sat up, and got to her feet. The faith of her father, tested to the extreme, was honoured at the last. One likes to think that this man—and perhaps the child also—were among those hundred and twenty disciples who gathered immediately after the Resurrection to form the nucleus of the Christian Church.

* * *

The precise nature of what was undoubtedly a miraculous act is worthy of some consideration. The word used for "sleepeth" in this account is one that in the New Testament is never used to indicate death; always to denote natural sleep. It is *katheuso*. The word which is used in the story of Lazarus—"Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; I go that I may awake him out of sleep" is *koimao*, which is often used as a synonym for death beside its normal meaning of sleep. Thus Acts 13.36 "David fell on sleep"; I Cor. 15.20 "Christ . . . the first fruits of them that slept"; I Thess. 4.14 "Them that sleep in Jesus" are all from *koimao*. It is this latter word which passed into Latin as *coemeterium*, from which we get our English word cemetery,—place of sleep. It may be debatable whether the Gospel story as it stands justifies the common impression that the girl was actually dead. Jesus himself said "the maid is not dead, but sleepeth". It could be that she was in some kind of trance or coma and that our Lord awakened her out of it and at the same time cured the disease or abnormality that had occasioned it. The friends and neighbours, convinced that the girl was dead, would obviously have concluded that she had

been raised again from the death state and would not have believed anything else. Hence Jesus cautioned them not to make the incident generally known, a caution they promptly rejected. Whatever be the truth of the matter, of course, it was equally a miracle.

Luke,—a physician—says (Luke 8.53-55) that "her spirit (*pneuma*—breath) came again" and records the expression "knowing that she was dead" (*apothnesko*—literal death). From this it could be argued that in fact the maid had died immediately before Jesus arrived and was in a condition analogous to modern cases which have died in the medical sense and have been revived by the "kiss of life" and similar methods.

This might very well be a correct reconstruction of the incident; it is impossible to be dogmatic, for the vagaries of successive copyings and translations from the original manuscript tend to blur and distort details from which closer accuracy could be attained. The chief point is the apparent stress placed by Jesus on the assurance "she is not dead (*apothnesko*) but sleepeth" (*katheudo*). This phrase is preserved in exactly the same wording in all three gospels, indicating that it was for some reason or other a well-remembered declaration. It is evident that Jesus intended something different from the parallel case of Lazarus, of whom He said "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth" (*koimaomai*, used either of sleep or of death in its aspect of a sleep because ended by a resurrection) but when his disciples took him literally "then said he to them plainly, Lazarus is dead" (*apothnesko*—Jno. 11. 11-14). He declared definitely that Lazarus was dead and equally definitely that the maid was not. Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days and corruption had set in (Jno. 11. 39). The miracle on that occasion involved the reconstruction or recreation of living organic matter in addition to infusing the spirit or breath of life—almost completely analogous to the *Genesis* account of the creation of Adam. In the case of the maid it would seem that whether trance, coma or "medical death" the practical effect was the same. It might have been a coma that would eventually have ended in death; it might be that, medically speaking, modern forms of artificial respiration would have restored her to consciousness anyway. In point of fact it was the power exercised by Jesus which caused the vital organs, presumably as yet undamaged, to resume their functions. It must be remembered that logically the disease, whatever it was, from which the child suffered to cause this result, was cured at the same time, so there can be no doubt that we have here to do with a miracle.

The expression "knowing that she was dead" has little weight either way. "Knowing" is *oidia*, from *eidon*, a derivative of *horao*, and means knowing only in the sense of perceiving or seeing for oneself. Positive and accurate knowledge is rather indicated by *ginosko*, which is a different word altogether. The bystanders "laughed him to scorn, perceiving that she was dead"—in face of what was to them the apparent fact, but their knowledge was based only on the outward appearance; Jesus did not himself endorse their impression and in fact in so many words contradicted it.

When all is said and done it remains that Jesus used two directly opposite expressions in respect of this girl and of Lazarus. Of one He said "She is not dead"; of the other "Lazarus is dead". Perhaps the real point lies in the shade of meaning inherent in the word here rendered "dead", a meaning which does not come out in English. *Apothnesko* is derived from roots which include the idea of complete cutting off or separation, of "dying out" of corruption or rotting away, as though it indicates death indeed with no possibility of recovery from the standpoint of human

knowledge. The dying out or rotting away of a wheat grain in the ground before giving rise to new life, and the state of a withered tree in which life has become extinct and the wood rots away, are instances in the New Testament where this word is employed. The condition of Lazarus in whom the dissolving processes had already begun was correctly described by the word; that of the child, whether in coma or true death, because the state was so recent and corruption had not begun, was not so described. Hence Jesus, mindful also, perhaps, of the grief of the parents, could justly use the softer word *katheudo*, sleep, knowing that at once He was going to raise her from that sleep, and so in the combination of the two incidents leave a demonstration for after times that whether the physical body remained intact or not, whether the mortal frame had or had not "returned to its earth", Divine power is equal to the occasion and can bring about restoration. The basis of the Christian faith is that the future life, the life of the ages, can come only by means of a resurrection from the dead. In these stories is enshrined the guarantee that Divine power can and will achieve that resurrection.

Note on John 14.2

"In my Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you." (John 14. 2).

The English translators adopted the word "Mansion" as the English form of a Latin word which was used to describe the rest-houses which the Romans of the First Century built at regular intervals along the great Roman roads to provide refreshment and a night's lodging for official and other travellers. It is well known that in our Lord's day the Roman roads ran in all directions throughout Europe and into Asia, diverging outwards from Rome. One such road connected Rome with London, and the famous Watling Street between Dover and London Bridge, thence onward through the Midlands to Chester, was the extremity of that road. In every part of the Empire, therefore, were these rest-houses or "*mansiones*". No matter how wild and inhospitable the country around, inside there was light and rest and security. So our Lord, endeavouring to comfort his despairing disciples, assured them that there were other "homes" in the Father's wide domain beside this earth, and that in leaving them He was only going to another "*mansion*" where He was to prepare a place for them, that where He was they might be also.

It has been discovered in recent years that two stars well known to astronomers are—like our own sun—possessed of planets circling round them. It is estimated by astronomers that a real likelihood exists of the starry heavens containing at this moment more than sixty-four million planets similar to the earth and equally capable of supporting life. (Forty years ago the estimate was half a million; that is how astronomical discovery is accelerating nowadays). It would not require a great stretch of imagination to think that our Lord, with his knowledge of this wonderful material universe, which He created as the Father's "right hand", could have had these potential homes for intelligent beings in mind when He spoke of "many mansions" in his Father's house. But if our understanding of spiritual things is well founded, none of these planets, glorious and beautiful as they might be, can be the future home of Christ's disciples, of we who have left all to follow him. He has gone to prepare a place for us that is not only higher than all earthly, material things, but is in the highest of all heavens, that we might behold the Father's face in righteousness, and be satisfied, when we awake, with his likeness.

IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?

A Question

The following reflection was penned seventy years ago by a then well-known minister.

* * *

'Is life worth living?' 'What a question! Who would die?' gladly youth replies, buoyant with hope, unfettered with care, the ruddy cheek glowing with health, the eye sparkling with pleasure. How sweet to be, to think, to move, to drink of joy on every hand. Oh, who could part with life? 'Is life worth living?' 'Tis youth again gives answer, but hope has fled. The pale face, emaciated form, and sunken eye betoken affliction's heavy hand, with days and nights of anguish and unrest. Oh what is life to me!—to be, and suffer. Life is a synonym of pain, and time means torture.

And what has life for you, O man of riper years, busy from early morn till close of day? Has labour aught of joy that one should care to live? Talk not to me of giving up to plan and do, gaining of knowledge, wealth, honour's wreath, and fame's fair title. 'Tis true, life has its trials, cares, its stormy days, but these are only fleeting shadows that serve to gild the intervening time with brighter splendour. But again answer comes from him who has reached the meridian of life in our day. Misfortune on the right hand and the left. Life to me means toil for naught. Affection has no sooner settled firm around earth's fairest blossoms than death puts an end to all our cherished hopes. Friends are gained but to be lost again. Honour is a bubble to burst by the first foul breath of jealousy. The cup of pleasure scarce is lifted to the lips till dashed to earth again. To judge the future by the past, what has life in store that I should crave it?

And what of life? 'Tis now the gray-haired veteran gives reply. The weight of years has bent the once proud form, furrowed the cheek and brow, and robbed the senses of their acuteness. Alone, and trembling on the verge of the grave, memory of younger days is all there is left of comfort. The days of the years of my pilgrimage have been few and dull of sorrow. The beacon lights of pleasure, wealth and glory are as fleeting as the moments we employ in their pursuit, as changeful as the firefly, and if secured are only vanity. Humanity's portion is, to be, to hope, to hover between its fruition and despair, and end in death, fitting finale of the fitful dream.

But Christian, what say you of life? It is our first and greatest blessing, the preface to eternity, the time in which true happiness may be forever gained. I look not for the present earthly joy, knowing full well that the afflictions, trials and temptations which abound are means by which God proves me, whether I will do his sovereign will. What virtue in obeying him if there are no desires of my own to disregard? How may I prove him to be the chief object of my affections and not be called upon to deny myself for his sake? Life affords the opportunity to battle for immortality, to struggle for an existence that shall prove eternal. They who use it for a baser purpose are void of understanding. The curse of God now rests upon the land. We need not think to find our heart's desires where such a blighting curse exists. But He has promised to remove all evil in his own good time, when, with his blessing here instead, happiness shall be ours. Rejoicing in his love so freely manifested in the gift of his only son, who even died to redeem us from our present sin-cursed state, gladly do I seek to follow him, scorning all that earth now has in store, and present my body a living sacrifice to God, a reasonable service. I am made conformable unto his death, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection. I rejoice in his self-denial, and partake of his sufferings, that I may share in his joy and glory. Glory to God in the highest, for the being and time by which I may work out so great a destiny. Whatever may be my portion now, I praise his name for life; for I look not at the things that are seen; they are temporal; but at the things that are not seen, which He has promised, for they are eternal. "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Those who live to make the most they possibly can of earthly objects through their present fleshly nature, are doomed to bitter disappointment. This life can prove a blessing only when lived for God.

(P. W. Pope)

THE VISION OF JOEL

6. New Wine of the Kingdom

*Exposition of the
Book of Joel
Ch. 3, 1-21*

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

The chapter has four sections. First of all, in verses 1-2, God asserts his intention of bringing to a head all the smouldering opposition to his ways on the part of the Gentile nations, in that day when He sets his hand the second time (Isa. 11. 11) to recover the remnant of his people from the four corners of the earth. "I will also gather all nations," He says, "and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land" (vs. 2). That word "plead" does not bear the meaning we usually attach to it in these modern days, that of imploring or beseeching. It means literally "to enter into judgment with" and is used to describe the Lord's calling the peoples to account before him. Thus we have Isa. 66. 16 "By fire and by sword will the Lord plead with all flesh", and Jer. 25. 31 "the Lord hath a controversy with the nations; He will plead with all flesh; He will give them that are wicked to the sword", and Ezek. 38. 22, "I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him . . . an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire and brimstone". This latter Scripture is referring to the fate of "Gog's host", another prophetic view of the same event that Joel is now describing, and this is the effect of the "pleading" to which the Lord refers in Joel 3. It is a judgment which comes upon the peoples whose deeds merit judg-

ment, and according to the inexorable laws of Divine creation, that judgment must surely come.

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

It is against this background that the prophet goes on to declare the sins for which the Gentile nations are being called to account. This is the second section of the chapter, from verse three to verse eight. The whole picture is that of a people taken captive and sold into slavery at the whim of its captors. They have done so carelessly, never dreaming of retribution. But God

has not been indifferent. He has taken note of all that has been done, and now through his prophet He says: "Because ye have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried into your temples my goodly pleasant things . . . BEHOLD, I will . . . return your recompence upon your own head; and I will sell YOUR sons and daughters . . ." (vs. 5-8). This is, of course, a symbolic statement. There could be no literal selling of Gentile slaves to the Sabeans, for that people no longer exists; they passed out of existence many centuries ago. And it would be difficult to find any place in the Divine Plan and its outworking for such an excursion into petty slave-trading on the part of the Most High. The picture is that of retribution, the operation of the Divine law "what a man soweth, that shall he reap". These Gentiles have ruled over the seed of Jacob, spoiled their goods, and occupied their land, for many centuries, unrighteously. But during all that time God has been planning for an earthly Servant Nation that is to rule on earth at the end—just as He has during this present Gospel Age been developing for himself a heavenly Servant Nation, chosen from amongst men, that shall rule them from the heavens at the end. And when the time comes for the law of the Lord to go forth out of Zion, it shall be that all men will find themselves brought under the righteous rule that is to be administered by the once despised slaves who were sold and scattered over the earth. "The sons of strangers shall build up thy walls", said Isaiah, "and their kings shall minister unto thee . . . for the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish . . ." (Isa. 60. 10-11). "In those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold out of all the languages of the nations . . . of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying 'We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you'". (Zech. 8. 23). It is a familiar story; the Scriptures are full of it from Isaiah onwards; perhaps the Gentiles to whom the message has been witnessed for so many long years have grown so accustomed to it that they do not believe that God will really rise up to judgment and break their power over this long-suffering people. They have been able to spoil them and harry them and destroy them unchecked for so many generations. If God cared at all He would have done something about it long ago; it is not likely that anything so drastic as these prophetic enthusiasts are talking about will happen now . . .

"PROCLAIM YE THIS AMONG THE GENTILES! PREPARE WAR, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up. Beat your ploughshares into

swords. and your pruning-hooks into spears: let the weak say 'I am strong'. Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye nations . . . come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: FOR THERE WILL I SIT TO JUDGE ALL THE NATIONS ROUND ABOUT". (vs. 9-12).

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

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

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

The Kidron valley, between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, is sometimes—but not in the Scriptures—called the "Valley of Jehoshaphat", and both Jewish and Moslem tradition has it that here is to take place the Last Judgment. But Joel was not thinking of the Kidron Valley—he was thinking rather of the Wilderness of Tekoa in Judea down toward the Dead Sea where there

had been a memorable deliverance of Israel in the days of King Jehoshaphat fifty years before Joel's own time. The armies of Moab and Ammon had invaded Israel; it seemed as though all were lost, but under the leadership of their God-fearing king the people placed their trust and faith in God for their defence and went out to meet the invaders, unarmed, with their priests leading the way, and singing the high praises of God. And God delivered them! The story is related in 2 Chron. 20, and it is one of the rare instances in which Israel did rise to the height of faith and reaped the reward of faith.

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

It is here that we are enabled rightly to place these happenings in the times and seasons of the Divine Plan. Verses 15-16 tell us that at this juncture, when the nations have gathered together and have been, as it were, "reaped" and "cast into the winepress", "the sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake; but the Lord will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel". These are the signs of the Second Advent, and of the establishment of the Kingdom in power; the gathering and the reaping lead up to this culmination. The incitement to war, the turning of all the arts of peace to purposes of conflict, the federating of weak nations into allegedly strong unions, the framing of treaties and agreements and pacts of mutual aid against real and fancied aggression, all this, carried to the extent to which it has been carried in recent years, constitutes a clear fulfilment of this prophecy and a definite indication of the imminence of that "darkening" of the sun and moon and "shaking" of the heavens which in Matt. 24 is given as the immediate herald of the manifestation of the returned Lord in glory to all mankind. That is a late stage in the succession of events which con-

stitutes his Advent; the gathering of the Church and its union with him "beyond the veil" takes place before this, and may well have occurred before the nations have completed their assembly in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. If, in fact, this "winepress" feature, when the Lord will "roar out of Zion", is to result in the immediate deliverance of his earthly people in the Holy Land and the almost immediate commencement of Millennial work, as verse 18 seems to indicate, then it must logically follow that the Church will have been gathered some time previously, and therefore before Armageddon is fought out around the land of Israel.

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

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

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

We are indebted to Ezekiel for the clearest view of this Millennial river. Out from the Sanctuary that symbolises the Divine Government on earth during that Age (Ezek. 47) he saw a stream emerge, waters that rapidly widened and deepened as they pursued their onward course, until they became a mighty river, too wide and too deep to pass over. They flowed down into the Dead Sea, and healed its barren waters, so that

fish could live; and upon the banks of that life-giving river grew every kind of tree whose fruit was good for food and whose leaves were potent for healing. Fitting symbol, this, of the life-giving influences that will flow out from the administration of the Lord Christ and his glorified Church "in that day". Small wonder that men will cry "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and He will save us, This is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." (Isa. 25. 9). To Ezekiel, the vision was as a restoration of man's lost Eden home; he saw once again the mystic river that watered the garden, and the Trees of Life in the midst of the garden, lost to mankind for so many weary centuries, now restored before his wondering eyes.

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

The "valley of Shittim", as the translators have it, is the "Valley of Acacias." (*Shittim* is the Hebrew word for acacia). The Valley of Acacias was the name given to the terraces on either side of the Jordan, for a considerable distance above its entrance into the Dead Sea, which in ancient times (and to some extent in modern times also) were thickly forested with acacias. There is a striking parallel with Zechariah's vision here, for he also sees the river of life issuing forth toward the "east country"—this same district—and thus finding its way by means of the Jordan into the Dead Sea. One

cannot help feeling that both prophets saw the same thing in vision, and described it each in his own words, and one wonders, is it possible that they did each enjoy a foresight of a literal stream that is to flow thus, "in that day"—without in any way deprecating the symbolic interpretation of the passage, which to us is in any case the more important?

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

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

The insistence that all this is "without money and without price" may quite reasonably be taken as an indication of the abundance of wine and milk that the living waters will have brought forth. It will become as common and free as the air we breathe, and the sunshine which warms us. That, at any rate, will be true of the wine and milk of the Millennial Age.

So the prophet turns his eyes away from the fair vision, and looks upon the Divine warfare against evil which has made that vision possible. "Egypt shall be a desolation" he cries, "and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the

violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land." What kind of Millennial Age is this, that witnesses prosperity and life on the one hand, and desolation and death on the other? Has God his favourites after all, and are Egypt and Edom to be punished eternally for their oft-times misguided and ignorant opposition to the children of Judah?

Certainly this verse cannot be literally fulfilled, for neither Egypt nor Edom now exist. (The Egyptians of our own day are, racially a different people altogether). Both nations went into oblivion many centuries ago. And there, of course, is the answer. In that day when Israel

shines forth resplendent, purified and converted, as God's earthly missionary nation, the Egypt and Edom who persecuted them in the days of their weakness, will not, as nations, be there. The nations that cried "let us cause them to cease from being a people on the face of the earth" have themselves ceased to exist as nations, but Israel, whom they oppressed, is enthroned forever. That is the Divine decree, and who shall say that it is not a just decree? "*Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed, FOR THE LORD DWELLETH IN ZION.*"

The End.

KNOWING HIM

The kernel or pivot of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God for the past two thousand years seems to be expressed in the statement of the Apostle in Phil. 3. 10, "*That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.*" It reveals the only way to attain the great salvation of God and the steps by which we progress to the blessedness of association with God and Christ Jesus.

The first point is "*that I may know him.*" Primarily to know him means to have an intellectual appreciation of God and his purposes and the relation of Christ Jesus our Lord to God in bringing about those purposes. Secondly "*the power of his resurrection*", the energising power of the Holy Spirit, must find access to our hearts and lives if that knowledge is to be fruitful in helping us to God. Thirdly "*the fellowship of his sufferings*", the possession of the Holy Spirit and its possession of us is bound to lead us along in fellowship of his suffering through opposition to the world, the flesh and the adversary. Fourth "*being made conformable to his death.*" The knowledge of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit and the fellowship of his suffering are the only means by which conformity to God's dear Son can be effected in us, by which we can enter his death. His was a sacrificial death, a poured out life, an offering on account of sin, and it is our privilege during this age to "follow in his steps." "If we suffer with him we shall live with him" so the Apostle says, "being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

Paul's longing desire was to know Christ Jesus in the truest sense and to the utmost degree.

That knowledge meant more to him than any other possession and in his quest for it he was prepared to sacrifice every other valued treasure. He declares in verse 7 "what things were gain to me these I counted loss." His material gains, humanly speaking, were weighty; he was "*of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee, in zeal a zealot, in righteousness according to the law blameless.*" He had increasing ambition, innumerable friends, exceptional talent and great treasures, yet "I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may win Christ and be found in him." The wholeheartedness of the apostle has been an outstanding example to every follower of the Lord and reveals the secret of success in the Christian life and walk. When we consider Paul's talents and advantages of social position, his ambition as a scholar and citizen of repute with a commission from the High Priest we are not surprised that he should be misinformed respecting Jesus of Nazareth and his followers and the false accusations filed against them should incite him to persecution, nor are we surprised that when arrested and rightfully informed and with eyes opened to the truth the same energies were directed to reverse his order of life and procedure. In his defence before King Agrippa he said "I verily thought that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, which I did and many of the saints I shut up in prison having received authority from the Chief Priest." After relating his conversion he added, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." What a happy and glori-

ous confession to make; from that time Paul expressed obedience to the Divine Will in every detail of his life. His devotion to God and service to others became the prevailing characteristics of his life; he was poured out as an oblation on behalf of the Church. It seems very evident that it was the hungering and thirsting to know him and his prompt obedience which opened the windows of Heaven and brought abundant blessings all through his ministry, even though it was filled with trials and difficulties from beginning to end, and he was able to say "for our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Such a life is like the High Priest's two hands full of sweet incense crumbled upon the golden altar with the smoke of sweet perfume ascending and penetrating beyond the second veil into the Most Holy—the Divine Presence.

To know him is very different from knowing of him; so many can say they know of Jesus but not so many are able to bear testimony to knowing him with close personal contact and association. To really know a person we must understand him, instinctively discern his wish and will, know his trend of thought, be acquainted with his ways, be conversant with his purposes, be accustomed to his tastes and choice and be able to express his judgment generally. To do this we must enjoy close acquaintance, spend time in his presence and share in joys and trials, activities and experiences. It is by these same means that we can enjoy close relationship and sweet knowledge of Christ. We have long since come to an understanding of God in a very real and definite sense; we know his mind, thoughts and purposes respecting ourselves and the world from his sacred word and we hope a unique and favoured position before God in the world to-day. Not only do we possess the Bible and freedom to use it but

we live in a time when the sacred secrets of the mysteries of God and his Kingdom are clearly and beautifully unfolded. The great fundamental truths are made so luminous that if our heart is attuned to know him it is not such a colossal task as others had in past days; such light has been shed on the ransom, resurrection, restitution, the last days, and the conditions obtaining in them, that we have wonderful knowledge and an accumulation of evidence for our guidance and instruction in knowing Christ; yet we have found that much of this can be appreciated without vital life in Christ. These things take their place and give increased responsibility to every one of us and it seems right to say that we cannot know Christ to any great extent nor be accepted of him without some measure of appreciation of these great and precious revealed truths concerning God's plans. To know him we need to be influenced by his word, to walk in his light and to be taught of him. Life that endures is nourished and built up by the Word of God. "The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are life." These will enable one to increase in the knowledge of God; not necessarily to understand all the intricate problems of human nature but to anticipate their solution in the purposes of God. In this we can rejoice and give praise and honour and glory to him. "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight." (Jer. 9. 23-24). "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17. 3).

METALLURGY AT THE EXODUS

According to Exod. 38. 24-31, the amount of precious metals contributed by the people of Israel for the construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness was surprisingly large. Translated into British measure, Moses found that he had nearly a ton of gold, two tons of copper, and three tons of silver. One wonders whence this down trodden nation of slaves acquired such wealth. Perhaps most of it came from the result of the Egyptians giving them whatsoever they asked for in their anxiety to get rid of these people whose God had inflicted such plagues upon them. It is probable that some at least of Israel were skilled metallurgists and perhaps had been employed in the manufacture of some of those priceless works of art which have been found in

Egyptian tombs, for the construction of the Tabernacle involved making copper castings for the posts of the enclosure and also the art of "plating" gold on to wood, an art at which the ancients were adept but the secret of which has been long since lost and even with modern technology has never been rediscovered. Qualified men have examined examples of the art four or five thousand years old but still cannot figure out how it was done. Bezaleel, the master craftsman employed by Moses to superintend the construction of the component parts of the Tabernacle, must have been a skilled metallurgist of no mean order. Perhaps when he returns from the dead in the days of the Millennial kingdom he will be able to show the wise men of our modern age a thing or two.

BY WAY OF REMEMBRANCE

*A two-part consideration
of 2 Pet. 1.*

Part 2. (Conclusion)

Faith, fortitude, knowledge, self-control, piety, love; all these are the essential characteristics of the mature Christian and all these are necessary to the one who would lay claim to the distinction of being "established in the Present Truth", to use Peter's expression in 2 Pet. 1.12. Last month's instalment dwelt upon the necessity of developing these virtues (2 Pet. 1.5-8) and now Peter turns to the logical outcome, the Christian life that is lived in an atmosphere of positive knowledge of the purpose and Plan of God. That is why Peter here brings up his other salient factor, the being "established in the present truth". Quite a number of Christian reform movements during the past three centuries, breaking away from the old traditions and creeds, have designated their own new conception of the Faith, "Present Truth". It is a correct description. In each case these reformers have advanced to another and higher level of Christian understanding than had formerly been attained, and so perceived the Divine purpose for mankind, and the place of Christian disciples of this present Age, more clearly than ever before. That level, to them, was "Present Truth", truth due for their guidance and instruction in their generation and lifetime. That was how Peter used the term. His converts had come from Judaism, the faith and understanding which had served Israel from the days of Moses fifteen hundred years previously. That faith was now out-of-date, superseded by the new gospel of Christ with its emphasis upon the call of the Church and putting aside the Mosaic Law. That, to them, was Present Truth, and Peter's insistence was that they should always hold this new understanding in remembrance and not retrogress to elements of the former faith of Judaism. Paul, in a fine turn of rhetoric, called them "weak and beggarly elements", when he wrote to warn the Galatians against this very thing, "After ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements wherunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" (Gal. 4.7).

So with us. If the faith which has given us an enhanced and loftier view of the Divine Plan in these latter days is indeed present truth to us in our day, "truth now due for the household of faith", as a one-time familiar expression had it, then, like Peter's converts in the First Century, we are in great need to hold these things in remembrance against the tendency to retrogress

to older beliefs of lesser stature which were the norm before the Present Truth of this day and Age came into being. As generation succeeds generation, and century succeeds century, it must be expected that Present Truth must advance into still higher levels of understanding; "*still new beauties do we see, and still increasing light*". It is not to be expected that the Spirit will lead us back to older traditional beliefs which we discarded in past times. That is why the Apostle uses the word "established". We are to be "established in the present truth". The word means to be steadfast, made firm, place firmly. When Paul said, at the end, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded" it was because he was established in the then Present Truth. He had built his life and his life's work around it, and it had not failed him, He knew, and therefore he was content. More than half a century ago a certain band of Christians, having reason to separate from their former affiliation, organised themselves under the title "Standfast Bible Students". Their former comrades with whom they had differed rather mockingly dubbed them the "Stuckfast Bible Students", but they were not stuck fast. They had taken their stand for the principles of what they held to be Present Truth; in that faith they lived and, by now probably, in that faith they have all died and been gathered to their Lord. So with us all; we can and should go forward to enhanced understanding of the Divine ways and the Divine programme as fast as and to the extent that it is revealed to us, but we must not, dare not, retrogress.

"*Believe in the Lord your God*" cried good King Jehoshaphat as he led his unarmed people out to meet the military might of the invader, confident that the Lord would deliver. "*So shall ye be established. Believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper*" (2 Chron. 20.20). And the Lord did deliver and Israel did prosper. But it was because they stood firmly on the basis of their faith, that they were the people of God and the Lord would not suffer them to be overthrown. So the Apostle Paul in the sixth chapter of Ephesians exhorts his readers to take the whole armour of God wherewith they will be able to stand in the evil day; the first item of that armour which he mentions is the body protection of truth. A clear understanding of truth; up-to-date truth, present truth, is the first essential to withstanding the inroads of doctrinal error and consequent mal-

apprehension of the Divine Plan which Paul here calls the "fiery darts of the evil one". Stand, having your loins girt about with truth.

Then there must be remembered our responsibility to those who will follow. We must be established in the present truth and hold in good remembrance the salient features of present truth because it is going to be our responsibility to pass these things on to those coming up behind. As we begin to lower the flaming torch because of failing strength it must be picked up and held aloft again by younger and more vigorous hands. "Other men laboured" said Jesus to his disciples "and ye are entered into their labours". The disciples stood in the certainty of the present truth of their day only because faithful men before them had laid the foundation upon which that present truth was built. So with us today; we have to pass on to others that which we ourselves received from our forebears, enhanced and enriched by the contribution we ourselves and our generation have made. The Psalmist saw this clearly and expressed it in words of rare insight: "*He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, that they should arise and declare them to their children*" (Psa. 78.5.6). Four generations through whom the truth descended but only because each generation was faithful to its mission. Are we in our day playing our part in this continuing witness?

We cannot do so unless we are certain of our ground. The hallmark of present truth is its certainty. "*We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen*" (Jno. 3.11). When Luke prefaced his gospel with the address to his hypothetical friend Theophilus, he did so "that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1.4). So now Peter declaims "*We have not followed cleverly devised myths, when we made known unto you the power and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. . . . and this voice which came from heaven WE HEARD*" (vs. 16-18). This was the conviction which sustained Peter and John against the threats of the Sanhedrin "we cannot but speak the things which we have SEEN and HEARD" (Acts 4. 20) and against that inflexibility their judges were silenced and impotent.

"Cleverly devised myths"; there are plenty such, specious arguments based on worn-out doctrines and out-of-date theologies, redolent of the traditions of the Dark Ages when the Bible

was more or less a closed book to the people in general. A myth is a legend handed down from generation to generation getting more and more distorted in the process. The Truth is its opposite, the voice of Jesus and the testimony of his Apostles becoming ever more clear and understandable with each succeeding generation. What we witness to, said Peter, is based on what we have seen and heard with our own eyes and ears. We, in our day, here at this end of the dying Age, do not see and hear Jesus in the flesh with our literal eyes and ears, but we do see and hear him by our spiritual insight and hearing by means of the ministry of his Holy Spirit, and that is none the less real to us. If we have become established in the present truth and our faith and hope and perception is fully grounded so that we have the same certainty that Peter had then we also can say "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard".

Thus we, as did Peter, can realise the power and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ (vs. 16). In his case that presence was manifested in his earthly life, at that time, when they companied with him and learned of him and proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom at his behest. That power was the energy and authority with which they delivered the message to those who would listen. Jesus "taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes". His words carried conviction because they stemmed from certainty. So it was, that, after the resurrection, "with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection" (Acts 4.33). And it was in the power and certainty of that conviction that the work of announcing the new Age then dawning, the Christian or Gospel Age, the time of the High Calling, was carried on by those early believers and resulted in the world-wide establishment of the Christian Church.

Now in our own day the same thing is happening but this time the presence of the Lord is not that of his First Advent as at the time of Peter but his Second. But once again his power and presence is manifested to those who, by the Spirit this time, can see and hear. Once again it is true that "we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard". Once again the message is the prelude to the dawn of a New Age—not the Age of the High Calling this time, but that of the Millennial reign and the calling to all men, who-soever will, to take of the water of life freely (Rev. 22.17). Our Lord gave a vivid prophetic parable of this late happening in his story of the man coming back from a far country to find his faithful servants watching and ready for his coming. Because of their alertness, he assumed the role of

a servant and came forth to serve them at the feast. Clearly a picture of a stage in the Church's experience whilst still in the flesh; in no sense will our glorious Lord, supreme over all things in heaven and earth, fill the role of a servant to his glorified Church in the heavens. Just as Peter and the others, by the power of the Holy Spirit, were made aware of the new truths of the Christian Gospel, a veritable feast of things "new and old" (Matt. 13.52) so at this end of the Age, in the dawn of the Second Advent, the "days of the Son of Man", the Lord comes to consult with his faithful ones to impart the same message that was given to Peter, things "old", but superadded to that, the "new" revelation of present truth regarding his return and the end of the rule of evil and his imminent manifestation to all the world and the establishment of his kingdom. All this constitutes the feast at which the Lord serves his own household and they, in turn, like Peter and the others, having thus "seen and heard", go out to blazon abroad the glad tidings of that imminent manifestation and kingdom.

Another picture of the same period is that narrated in Rev. 14 where a crowned king is seen approaching earth upon a bright cloud, having in his hand a golden sickle, with which He reaps the "harvest of the earth"—the harvest of this Gospel Age, the gathering and resurrection of the Church. Only after this process is completed and the Bride has been united with the Bridegroom (Rev. 19.7) will this Age progress to its consummation in the "winepress" of Rev. 14 and final battle between good and evil of Rev. 19. Then comes the revelation of Christ and his Church to all the world in the full establishment of the Millennial kingdom and the fulfilment of Paul's words in Rom. 8.19. "the earnest expectation of the creation WAITETH for the manifestation of the Sons of God"—the Church.

Peter's last legacy to the Church is nearly completed. He has but one more message to give, and this of greater moment to we who live now than it was to the believers of his own day. "*We have also a more sure word of prophecy, to which ye do well that ye take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts*" (vs. 19). "More sure"; again there is the ring of certainty, of conviction. The word of prophecy, of teaching, is the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever (1 Pet. 1.23). We, in this our day, do not have the memory as did those early believers, of seeing and hearing Jesus in the flesh. We cannot even claim to have talked with and learned from those who themselves had seen and heard Jesus in the flesh. We are twenty centuries away from

those times. But we do have something which those early believers never did have, the complete Scripture of those times. We have, not only the Old Testament which they did possess and know, but the New Testament which they never knew. And this, under the illumination and enlightenment given us by the Holy Spirit, is in very truth a light shining in a dark place, a lamp which illumines and marks out the way in which we shall go, and a source of instruction and inspiration to our minds. This, says Peter, is a sure and certain guide until the consummation of all things when our union with our Lord in the celestial realm is realised. Contrary to the rather unimaginative rendering in the AV, Peter does not say that the day star is to arise in our hearts. Properly rendered "*we do well that we take heed, in our hearts, to the sure word of prophecy, as unto a light shining until the day dawn and the day star arise*". (The Emphatic Diaglott renders this phrase best by putting part of it in parenthesis.) So we have two important words, "take heed" and "until". Here we are back in the realm of remembrance and certainty. We have the "more sure" Word of God as our guide and counsellor; we do well to take heed of that word continually whilst we are in this dark world as to a light illumining our way, UNTIL the day dawn and the day star arise. Here we are again in the realm of Second Advent. The "day dawn" is the first glimmering of light betokening the imminence of Millennial day, the Day of resurrection and enlightenment for which the whole world is waiting.

The arising of the day star, which is the sun, is that which Jesus spoke of in his memorable talk on the Mount of Olives in answer to his disciples' questions as to the signs of his Advent; "*as the astrape, the bright radiance, cometh from the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the presence of the Son of Man be*" (Matt. 24.27). Malachi spoke of the same; "*unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings*" (Mal. 4.2). We who are Christ's already discern the first radiance in the eastern sky betokening the rising of that Sun; we see the signs that its light will shortly be flooding the world and we wait with diligence for that revelation, but as yet the world in general sees and knows nothing and is ignorant of what portends. Only later, when the sun is above the horizon and its rays are chasing away the darkness, will men in general realise that, even as He promised, He has come. In the meantime we continue to have this sure word of prophecy, a sure guide to the things that are happening in these last days of this present world, and a clear

foreview of the glorious happenings that are to come next.

A little later on, in his third chapter, Peter warns of the doubters who challenge this sublime expectation. The time has been prolonged, over enthusiastic expectations have been unfulfilled, and doubts have begun to creep in. "Where is the evidence of his presence", they ask. "Since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as from the beginning of creation". They ignore the fact that there was a time once before when a few men of faith proclaimed the imminent end of a world that had become corrupt and condemned in the sight of God, and were met by unbelief and heedlessness. That world went on with its eating and drinking, its planting and building, its marrying and giving in marriage, UNTIL "the world that then was, being overflowed with water,

perished". The Flood came, and took them all away. So it will be again, said Jesus. As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. But just as after that cataclysm was over there was instituted a new and better world, so now. The day of the Lord will come, says Peter, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements of the earth shall disintegrate; all that is of evil and the power and dominion of evil shall pass away. "But we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness". And immediately following that inspiring promise comes the key word and climax to all that he has been saying in his first chapter "wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, BE DILIGENT".

NOTE ON ACTS 1.11

An article in Nov./Dec. 1972 ("The Assurance of the Ascension") commented upon the well-known words "This same Jesus which is gone from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven". It was therein pointed out that the term *hon tropon*, rendered in this text "in like manner" is normally rendered "even as" or "as-so" and that its basic idea is that of the regular duplication of similar events, of one following the other in automatic and assured sequence. It is derived from *trope*, a turning round or about, referring primarily to the regular and predictable motion and return of the heavenly bodies in their seasons, as the sun in its course along the ecliptic, or the planets in their orbits. In the circuit of the year the sun travels first to the north of the Equator, and then to the south, returning at the end to the position from which it started. (Hence our word "tropics" which comes from *trope*). Hence it came to mean an orderly way or succession, the certainly of an expected future event compared with the acknowledged certainty of a known past event of the same class. So in Acts 1.11 the reference "in like manner" is to the certainty of the promised return, not necessarily similarity of visible appearance. As surely as ye have seen him go, so surely will He return!

An interesting example of the use of this word in the Greek Apocrypha has been noticed. Wisdom 7. 17-19 reads, in part, "the operation of the elements, the alterations of the turning (*tropon*) (of the sun) and change of seasons: the circuits of years, and positions of stars". Here "tropon" is used in its strict astronomical sense, the regular and predictable course of the sun,

and this is the meaning, applied to our Lord's Second Advent, of its usage in Acts 1.11.

NOTE ON JOHN 8. 1-11

The incident of the woman taken in adultery is sometimes pointed out as of doubtful authority since it does not appear in the original texts. It is not found in any New Testament Greek manuscript prior to the sixth century. At the same time, the story itself is so clear-cut and detailed that it almost gives its own testimony as being the work of an eye-witness, perhaps recorded by one of the Apostles, and many scholars have decided on its acceptance on this ground alone. Eusebius, the great Church historian of the Fourth Century, mentions the story and quotes it from the writings of Papias, who lived possibly during the old age of John but certainly not long after Papias claims to have had much discourse with the four daughters of Philip the Evangelist (see Acts 21. 9) among others of the second generation of Christians. It seems fairly evident therefore that the story was, like a number of other fairly well-authenticated acts or sayings of Jesus, current among the early Christians but was either not incorporated in John's original Gospel or, if incorporated, was deleted at some subsequent early date. St. Augustine, the great theologian of the fourth century, maintained that it had been thus deleted for fear it might encourage laxity of morals. All the evidence therefore goes to show that although the passage is not to be found in any ancient manuscript now existing it is almost certainly a true record of an incident in the life of Jesus and may possibly have appeared in the originals of the Gospels.

PRAYERS WITHOUT WORDS

*Thoughts on
Rom. 8. 18-27*

It is as necessary for the Christian to pray as for a child to prattle to its parents. And it is as vitally important for the child of God to make known its wants as for the human child. In consequence of this need to communicate with his Father, the Christian is reminded that he may "pray without ceasing" and that while watching and working, he may take time off from service to go aside to pray.

But just as an observant mother will know, at times, what the unspoken desire of her child is (or will be) so there are occasions when our moods are of more moment than our words, for indeed as there may be words without prayer, so contrariwise there may be prayer without words and it is to the Christian's advantage that the Father of Love and Compassion understands more perfectly than any man or woman the unspoken (and sometimes unspeakable) desires of his child.

The devout Christian often prays most deeply when he does not speak at all. Occasions arise from time to time when he is far too full for words. Like the dull movings of deep waters "too full for sound or foam" the Christian's heart is deeply moved, and it is the very depths and fullness of these hidden tides which make his lips so hopelessly inadequate to utter all he feels. There is much truth and fitness in the poet's expressive words: —

*"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed,
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.
Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near."*

This inability to give utterance to the deep things of the spirit is not just the same thing as the handicap of a poor vocabulary. It is not akin to the difficulty of the tongue-tied or untaught son-of-the-soil or man-of-the-street. The lips of him who guides the plough or drives the loom, may fail to form his prayer because he has no range of words from which to choose. Education may have been too scant. Contrariwise the human metal may suffer from lack of refinability or be unable to take literary polish. Hence his lips may not frame a prayer because the equipment of the man is unequal to the task. Yet this ill-equipped soul may pray in its own

way. The down-cast eyes, the up-raised touching hands, the reverential pose, may say more than a host of words. But when personality is deep and emotional desire is strong, and the lips are trained ordinarily to express the rising or falling mood, it will be the deep swell of some more acute crisis that seals the lips, and bars the egress of the worded prayer.

These deep-felt motions may come late or early in the Christian life. Indeed, it may be in such a soul-storm that the Christian's religious life begins. Words may be few—or absent—because the issues are so great. There is a prayer where words are few, when penitence first stirs the sinful heart. Perhaps it needs the smiting hand upon the breast to emphasise the unuttered pathetic plea. Or in such a case, if lips do speak, seven words contain more prayer than reams of polished phrase. "God be merciful to me a sinner" is a prayer of fundamental depth. It comes from the deep places of an unregenerate but humbled heart, and mounts up to the high courts of Heaven. The God of all love and grace, the God of heaven and earth, bends down to hear that prayer, while angels of light rejoice together as the sinner's prayer mounts to their ears. Ten thousand words could say no more at such a time than ten mere syllables have said. It is not the ample articulation of the lips, but the inward chastening of the heart which best expresses the deep inner need. A groan, a sigh, a tear, has greater worth than all the verbiage of a lexicon.

Provision has been made by God to meet that need. A Saviour, and a sacrifice for sin, stand ready to move at its call. No cry, however short, can escape the human heart, for relief from sin that will go unheard, or unanswered. Thank God for the sinner's right to speed his penitential call right through to the courts of heaven, not because it is a galaxy of words, but because it is true prayer, and voices his intense needs. Most Christians may look back to that supreme moment at the penitential crisis of their lives, and call to mind the great relief when contact with the Lamb of God was made. No spate of words, but precious blood, gave solace in the deep distress.

The wordless prayer of which we write lies further on the Christian's path. It is the token of maturity and rich growth in grace. It tells of days and years of God's creative work, in tempering and refining the metal of the inner self. It

speaks of yearnings and desires, God-fostered, which reach up and out for holiness and truth. It shows developed sensitivity to the "Absolutes"—to utter sinfulness, and complete sinlessness. It has grown to hate the one, and love the other. Loathsome sin is now more loathsome still; and holiness has become an increasing delight.

What cause can seal the lips and tie the tongues of Christian so far grown in grace? Ought they not, in weal or woe to find cause enough to pray and praise with heart and voice? Why should the lips of saints at any time fail to voice forth their prayer or praise? It is the strong flow of the deeper tides within the heart that seals the lips. At times when the good gifts of God have been profuse, and ample store of grace has stirred the depths, the very volume of the gratitude may be too deep to find expression other than in the words "thank God, thank God, thank God". The repetition of the two short words may wing more praise to heaven than strings of loftier sounds. And God will know how much of gratitude is meant.

More frequently the deep tides flow when other causes operate. More often it is sin and sorrow which stirs the depths. We may have listened to creation's groans; we may have felt our lack of strength to ease or aid when suffering called, and this, re-acting back upon our own tense heart, has loosed wild notions and desires too deep for words.

This is the sphere the Apostle's words explore. Creation groans in travail to be set free. Creation is bound in chains of vanity—vain hopes, vain works and vain pursuits. The grace-grown Christian views the havoc of human sin where countless thousands mourn. He sees aggression down the years ride roughshod and unchecked, leaving behind it trails of blood and broken hearts. He sees the profit-snatcher take his filthy gains while starving children cry for bread. He sees the sanctity of wedlock and home dishonoured; he sees wealth squandered in gambling and drink; he sees the bloom of health fade as disease saps the strength. He sees the whole world treading its dead-end trails. He sees pompous little men rise up to power only to fall again. He sees men barter life for some small wealth, some little pedestal, some tawdry name, and as, for ages, fathers did, so children do to-day. The dictum of the ancient sage upon their dead-end pursuits was that it was vanity through and through. "*Vanity of vanities, it is all vanity.*" And vanity it is and was from morn till night, for rich and poor, while ages come and go.

No child of God can see the naked world and be unmoved. He knows the whole creation had

been committed to this vain life, by Divine intent. He knows creation groans in pain and anguish day and night, but never finds relief. He witnesses the frustration and futility of universal life, and knows that no man can emancipate himself, much less his kin. He knows relief will come some day—some better day—it is to-day that often weighs upon his heart! He knows that he and other sympathetic souls must stand idly by, and only watch as wild humanity grows wilder still. He hears their deep universal groan, and as they groan, he does the same. "Oh if only something could be done! If only men could hear and turn away from sin" he groans within himself. Men, without hope, groan and groan again—he cannot help but do the same, though hope lives in his breast. "... *not only they but ourselves also . . . groan within ourselves waiting for . . . redemption*" (Rom. 8. 23).

No man with the "Christ" spirit in his heart can hear this universal groan without groaning too. And when the spirit is of ample growth the groaning will be ample too. His growth in Christ will be the measure of his sympathy for a world chain-bound in sin. The pity for Jerusalem which swept the Master's heart was a like pity that will oft weep over a world, self-doomed to death. The Christian who is much grown like Jesus will be much touched, like him, with human woe.

It thus befalls that every convulsive pang this sad world feels sends sympathetic pain into the Christ-like heart, and wrings from it both sigh and groan. But the Christian sufferer is helped by hope—that blessed hope—that deliverance one day will come. Hope salves the chafed spirit and helps him wait with more patience for that better day. Expectation relieves the acute tension of the strain, but expectation is not redemption nor release. That which we long for has not come. It is as yet but a sure hope. At most, this hope brings hearts-ease to the aching heart, but leaves it still to groan. But we have other help at hand.

"Likewise the spirit ALSO helps" us in our lack of strength. It helps the Christian when his heart is over-wrought with sympathy and pain, too full for words or speech. It helps him when some acute spasm of world distress wrings from him sigh or groan. And when that sigh or groan escapes, He who has trod this path before, accepts it as a prayer. The Searching Eye will read the anguish of his soul, and understands the language of these unworded sighs. He knows the sorrows of the world more deeply than his followers do. He tasted their sorrows to the point of death in order to become a sympathetic High Priest. He came to earth to cause men to know

that God was sympathetic too. From the beginning of sin's awful reign God's sympathy for sinful men began to operate. The spirit of compassion was manifest to Mother Eve. This Spirit of compassion was the Spirit of the Oathbound Covenant. That same Spirit of the Covenant under-lay the gift, by God, of his dear Son. And it was the compassion expressed in that Covenant which took Jesus to his death. It is the self-same spirit of that Covenant, the desire to bless, that throbs in every Christian heart. This is the Holy Spirit of the Living God—it is the Spirit of his Christ. It dwelt without measure in our blessed Lord. It dwells in varying degree in every other child of God. It emanates from God—it enters into us. From this almighty fund of sympathy comes our help in time of need. It helps us when we hear the world's deep groans. It helps us when we see its sinful plight. It smooths for us the difficulty of "desiring to bless". It "helpeth our infirmities"—our "*asthenia*"—our lack of strength, our inability, when "work of hand" is unequal to "desire of heart". This weakness it is that makes us groan, and say with warmth, beneath our breath "If only I knew what to do—or how to help them in their sore distress." At such a time, in such a state, "*We know not what we should pray for as we ought.*" We yearn to bless, but we are too inexperienced to bless. We desire to bless, but we have no power with which to bless. The pent-up sigh, the unspoken groan tells what we would do, if hand and heart could work in step. And from its lofty throne above, the eye that searches every heart takes note of what it sees, and He who has the power to bless looks down and says, "yes, that child of mine desires to bless; he has in him the spirit of my purposes. He only needs to bide my time. I see at times the tension of his soul—I hear again the groaning of his heart. This spirit of compassion

is what I want to see. This anguish of soul endears him to my heart. It compensates for all his weaknesses."

Thus the falling tear, the aching heart, the stifled groan, what time he sees the world's distress, becomes a prayer of greater worth than ten thousand ostentatious words. The spirit of compassion thus evinced, wins the Divine acceptance for the child—it makes intercession for his saints in accordance with his Will.

The world around us is in dire distress today. Its sorrows deepen like a flood. The sluice gates of evil are unlocked. The universal groan goes up from all the earth, louder and deeper each passing day. "Who will break our bonds? Who will smash our chains? Who can set us free?"... What child of God can hear this cry and not feel his pulse-beat quicken, or his heart-strings quiver? What "hopeful" saint can see the "hopeless" mass, and not yearn for its release.

This is a day, beloved in the Lord, when growth in Christ-likeness may go on apace. The "Image of his Son" may be wrought within at speed. The circumstances are full ripe for the Spirit of God—the Spirit of his Covenant—to work deep and strong. Compassion for a sinful world can transform the wakeful heart. He who understands what is "on foot" may co-operate with God. The compassion of every soul should be white-hot, then the hammer of discipline and anvil of sorrow will do the rest. May God speed this work of Grace, for the day of Redemption draweth nigh.

When hearts are fraught with pain as humanity mourns, there may rise a prayer for God's Kingdom days to come, without the breathing of a word, and as we pray thus for God's Will to prevail, the depth of sigh or groan will be the measure of our transformation into the image of God's dear Son.

ENDURING REPROOF

There is perhaps no better test of a man's character than the way in which he bears himself under just reproof. Every man makes mistakes; every man commits faults; but not every man has the honesty and meekness to acknowledge his errors, and to welcome the criticisms which point them out to him. It is rarely difficult for us to find an excuse we are looking for. It is in fact always easier to spring to an angry defence of ourselves, than to calmly acknowledge the justice of another's righteous condemnation of some wrong action of ours; but to refuse to adopt this latter course, when we know we are in the wrong, is to reveal to our better consciousness,

and often to the consciousness of others, an essential defect.

That man is strong who dares to confess that he is weak; he is always tottering to a fall who needs to bolster up the weakness of his personality by all sorts of transparent shams. It is not in vain that Scripture says: "Reprove one that hath understanding and he will understand knowledge;" for one of the best evidences of the possession of that direct self-government which stands as the basis of moral strength and one of the best means of gaining it when it is lacking, is just this willingness to accept merited reproof, and to profit by it when accepted. (selected)

INDEX 1984

EXPOSITORY

<i>After the Flood</i>	
1. <i>Subsiding of the Waters</i>	75
2. <i>Noah's Vineyard</i>	99
3. <i>Plain of Shinar</i>	123
<i>Ananias and Sapphira</i>	79
<i>Baptism in the New Testament</i>	31
<i>Cast unto the Potter</i>	113
<i>Days of Son of Man, Seiss on</i>	48
<i>Elias must first come</i>	12
<i>Feeding of the Five Thousand</i>	81
<i>Four and Twenty Elders</i>	67
<i>He gave his only begotten Son</i>	35
<i>His Memorial</i>	39
<i>Immanuel</i>	30
<i>Jairus' daughter</i>	127
<i>King David of Israel</i>	
13. <i>Sunset</i>	3
<i>King in Righteousness</i>	
Part 1	17
" 2	43
" 3	63
<i>Luke, A portrait of</i>	23
"Many bodies of the saints arose"	105
<i>Matthias the Apostle</i>	88
<i>Millennium, Dr. Cumming on</i>	72
<i>Moses' Ethiopian wife</i>	59
<i>Noah's Vineyard</i>	99
<i>Sealed Book, The</i>	14
<i>Sepharad</i>	37
<i>Slain Lamb, The</i>	40
<i>Terror of the Lord, The</i>	62
<i>To fulfil all righteousness</i>	89
<i>Vision of Joel, The</i>	
1. <i>Coming of the Locusts</i>	9
2. <i>Call to Repentance</i>	27
3. <i>The Lord's Great Army</i>	51
4. <i>Cry of Faith</i>	85
5. <i>Deliverance in Zion</i>	107
6. <i>New Wine of the Kingdom</i>	131
<i>Word made Flesh, The</i>	54

HORTATORY

<i>Asking Questions</i>	109
<i>Attitude of Stephen, The</i>	93
<i>By Way of Remembrance</i>	115, 137
<i>Full Grown, Mature, Perfect</i>	21
<i>Incorruptible Crown, An</i>	118
"Is Life worth living?"	130
<i>Knowing Him</i>	135
<i>Our Lord</i>	95
<i>Prayers without words</i>	141
<i>Prove all things</i>	69
<i>Shadow of the Cross</i>	103
<i>Shield of Faith</i>	83
"So be it, O Lord"	111
<i>Sowing</i>	45
<i>This Hope we have</i>	6
<i>Thought for the Month</i>	2, 26, 50, 74, 98, 122
<i>Tower of Strength</i>	94
"You shall not build me a house"	61

MINOR ITEMS

<i>Apathetic Christians</i>	29
<i>Birkett on the Bible</i>	58
<i>Brightness of his glory</i>	11
<i>Christian Church, A</i>	42
<i>Confucius, The Great Way of</i>	38
<i>Divine Name in Jerusalem</i>	53
<i>Enduring Reproof</i>	143
<i>Exodus, More light on the</i>	104
<i>Exodus, Route of</i>	71
<i>Gemariah son of Shaphan</i>	60
<i>Jehoshaphat's ships</i>	58
<i>Metallurgy of the Exodus</i>	136
<i>Millennium, In the</i>	120
<i>Note on Jno. 8. 1-11</i>	140
" " Jno. 14. 2	129
" " Jno. 21. 5	8
" " Acts 1. 11	140
" " Heb. 9. 7	71
<i>Old Clock speaks, An</i>	78
<i>Secret of Old Jerusalem</i>	53
<i>Temptations</i>	68
<i>Tithing, A note on</i>	114
<i>Trilobites, The</i>	2

TEXTS EXPOUNDED

<i>Gen. 9.20-27</i>	99	<i>Matt. 27.3-7</i>	113
" 11.2	123	" 27.53	105
<i>Num. 12.1</i>	59	<i>Mark 4.34</i>	26
<i>I Kin. 1.</i>	3	" 5.22-43	127
<i>2 Kin. 22.48</i>	58	<i>Luke 9.12-17</i>	81
<i>I Chron. 17.1-10</i>	61	<i>Jno. 1.14</i>	54
<i>2 Chron. 20.36</i>	58	" 3.16	35
<i>Job 14.14</i>	50	" 8.1-11	140
<i>Psa. 46.1-2</i>	94	" 12.32	103
" 103.20-22	98	" 14.2	129
" 148.12-13	74	" 21.5	8
<i>Ecl. 11.4</i>	45	<i>Acts 1.11</i>	140
<i>Isa. 7.13</i>	30	" 1.15-26	88
" 30	17	" 5	79
" 32	17, 43, 63	<i>2 Cor. 5.11</i>	62
" 40	31	<i>Eph. 6.16</i>	83
<i>Jer. 36.10</i>	60	<i>Phil. 3.10</i>	135
<i>Joel 1.1-7</i>	11	<i>I Thess. 5.21</i>	69
" 1.9-20	27	<i>Heb. 1.3</i>	11
" 2.1-11	51	" 4.14	6
" 2.12-25	85	" 5.14	20
" 2.28-29	107	" 9.7	71
" 3.1-21	131	<i>2 Pet. 1</i>	115
<i>Obad. 20</i>	37	<i>Rev. 3.11</i>	118
<i>Matt. 3.13-17</i>	89	" 4	40, 67
" 17.10	12	" 4.1	14