



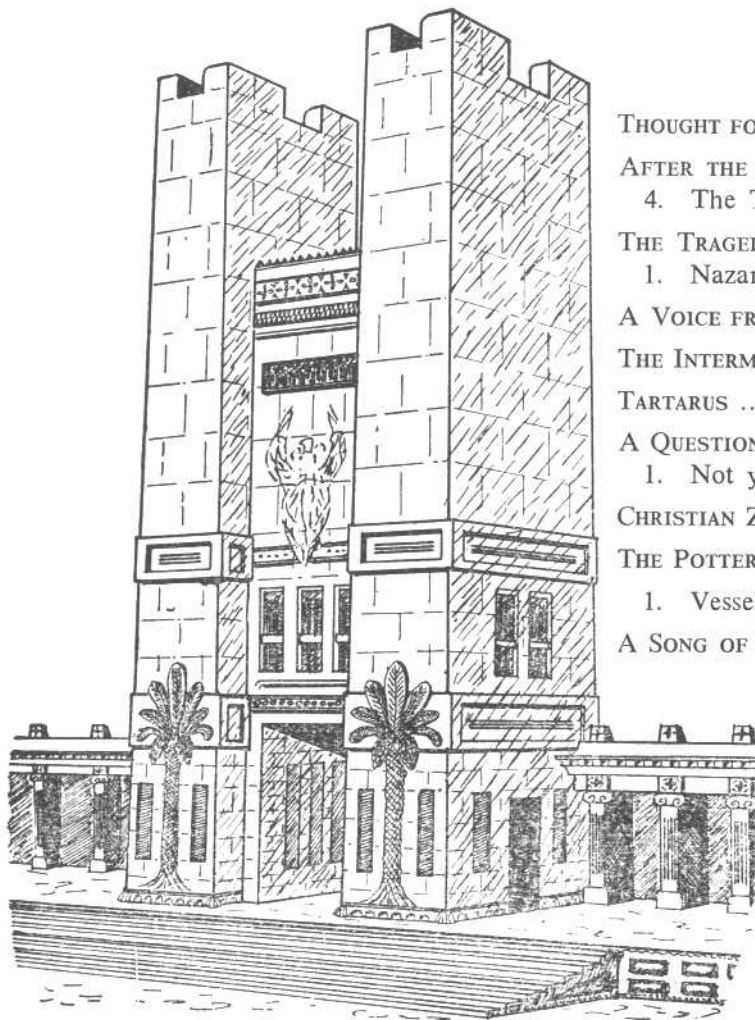
Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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

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

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## Thought for the Month

Dr. Billy Graham, whilst in Leningrad during the course of his 1984 campaign in the Soviet Union, was told by a Soviet official (according to the BBC news of 11th September) "we do not believe in the Kingdom of God, but if it comes we will be willing to enter it". That attitude, of course, is all that the Lord is going to require of a good many of all nations, not merely Russians, who have refused to believe at the present time for reasons quite satisfactory to themselves. The Lord does not hold past disbelief against a man when at the last he changes his mind and begins to listen to the voice that speaks from Heaven. There is so much in this present world to blind a man's eyes and close his ears and harden his heart, and that the Lord knows full well. The coming Age, when Christ is revealed for the blessing and instruction of mankind, will soon put that right. "In this mountain" (the Millennial kingdom) says Isaiah "shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things . . . and he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations" (ignorance and misunderstanding of the Divine purposes). "He will swallow up death in victory . . . and it shall be said in that day 'Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation'" (Isa. 25.6-9). That Russian official will not be the only one who will echo these sentiments when that time has come. We who are the Lord's disciples now have every cause to rejoice that this is to be the outcome, no matter how such people may have behaved towards us and our fellow-believers in the past. Sufficient that the lost has been found, the prodigal son has come home. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to

save that which was lost." If it is true—and our Saviour said that it is true—that "there is joy among the angels in heaven over one sinner that repenteth" we cannot—we dare not—do other than share in that joy. "This is our God; we have waited for him." They knew not that they were waiting for him; they had no idea that God was waiting for them, but—"this is what we wanted all the time, and we knew it not. Now we see, and know. Now we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

### NOTICES

**Back numbers of BSM.** Sets of back numbers from 1978 onwards are available on request, without charge, but we do ask for cost of postage, as follows:

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**"Jacobs Trouble".** This exposition of Ezek. 38/39, the prophetic description of the final assault of the "hosts of Gog and Magog" upon regathered converted Israel at the end of the Age, and Israel's deliverance at the hand of the Lord, is a quarto size booklet containing a mass of information on the relevant prophecies. First published in 1942 and again in revised form in 1968, copies are still available and will be sent free of charge on payment of postage, viz., £1 for 6 copies in UK or one dollar for 5 copies in USA or Canada.

### Gone from us



Bro. T. Robinson (Milborne Port)  
 Sis. M. Scott (Middleton-on-Sea)



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

## AFTER THE FLOOD

### 4. The Tower of Babel

*"And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there"* (Gen. 11.1-2).

This is the point at which the history of the "world that now is" really begins. In three centuries the population had grown to something like a quarter of a million people, and what had started as a group of families closely knit by the bonds of common relationship was taking on the aspect of a company of tribes rapidly developing divergent interests. For the moment, though, there was no disunity. They had found this fertile plain, so much better adapted to their needs than the mountain terraces upon which they had been born and lived for anything up to three centuries, and now by common consent they were on the move to a new home.

So far, no differences had arisen. They were all "of one language and one speech" says the narrative. That means they shared one common vocabulary of words and one pronunciation, almost certainly the language spoken by Noah and his sons when they entered the Ark. The human community was united; there was as yet little or no tendency to separate such as became inevitable later on when numbers increased. There was still no death; no one had died since the Flood. Likewise loyalty to the Lord was universal; there is evidence that it was to be quite a few centuries before men began to worship false gods and the dark shadow of godlessness fall across the race of mankind. It is probable that these people enjoyed what amounted to almost Edenic conditions with less evidence of the power and practice of sin than had ever been known since the beginning. The sun shone warmly down, the summer was almost perpetual, the land brought forth its increase, and death seemed something that belonged only to the old world that had passed away. The first two or three centuries after the Flood must have resembled in many respects the terrestrial conditions of the still future Millennial Age to be established when our Lord takes his great power and commences his promised reign over the nations.

There are legends of old which appear to relate to this period. A thousand years later Sumerian scribes began to write histories of the early days of their nation and in one epic they spoke of a "Golden Age" in which all peoples

dwelt happily together in a land where there were no wild animals, the ground brought forth abundantly, there was no war or strife, and the whole world gave praise to God. Then came war, and the harmony was shattered. In the "Pyramid Texts", a collection of records found in pyramids of the 5th and 6th Egyptian dynasties, dating to several centuries before the birth of Abraham, it is stated that at the first there was no death. One early Pharaoh was assured by his god that he had been born before death began to come upon men. The Persians had a similar legend about their early days. "In the reign of Yima the valiant, there was neither heat nor cold, neither old age or death, nor disease—" It could well be that this recollection of those first three centuries of harmonious living together remained in the folklore of the nations after the separation. Their dispersal over the world ended that, and when, a little later on, death began to make its appearance among the oldest of them it was almost like the end of an era.

So they "journeyed from the east". The word is expressive. "Journeyed" in this text means to pull up and move away, as the pulling up of tents when an encampment is being moved. Gesenius defines it as a verb of departure, a nomadic term for "breaking camp" and moving on. That was the position here, the abandonment of their mountain home for this much more desirable territory in the plain. It was probably over a term of years that the transfer took place, one village after another thrusting westward with their goods and chattels to take possession of unclaimed farmland in this rich alluvial well-watered plain where life could be easier and more pleasant.

The A.V. margin suggests a variant rendering "journeyed eastward", which has a precisely opposite meaning, that they came from the west. Geographically, that would be impossible; to the west lay what is now Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea, in the opposite direction altogether from the land of Ararat, which comprehended the Iranian mountains from which the settlers must perforce have come. Virtually every modern translation with the exception of Margolis and Leeser, maintain the accuracy of "from the east" and in fact the modern Hebrew Received Text has this; *mini-gedem*, where "min" is the preposition "from" or "out of". "Eastward" or "towards the east" would have been *el-gedem*, "towards", "to" or "for".

Modern research has confirmed this statement of Gen. 11.2. It is very generally agreed now by archæologists that the earliest inhabitants of the Euphrates plains came from the east, from a source somewhere in the mountains of Iran. Frankfort in *"Birth of civilisation in the Near East"* puts the source as the district marked by Tepe Khazineh near Susa, which is within a hundred miles of Anaran, where the Ark landed. Kramer in *"Sumerian Mythology"* speaks to the same effect; so does Seton Lloyd in *"Foundations in the Dust"*, and many other leading authorities. Genesis said it originally, nearly five thousand years ago.

So they settled and established themselves, creating villages surrounded by farmlands, growing their crops and keeping their flocks and herds, fishing in the shallow waters of the Gulf and its surrounding marshes. Their numbers continued to increase, but not so rapidly as hitherto; there were several reasons for this.

The basic one was that the climate was changing. The pleasantly warm and genial conditions of those first three centuries changed suddenly, and for the worse. Brooks has shown that at this time, about 3000 BC, there commenced a sudden period of abnormal volcanic activity all over the world which continued on and off for the next four hundred years. The effect was a steady climate deterioration to cold and wet conditions which of necessity had its repercussions on the emergent human race. The Paradise land they thought they had found began to change, as the years went by, to a land of floods and storms and incessant rain, and life became more difficult. It is significant that the three patriarchs living during this period whose life spans are recorded—Cainan, Sala and Heber—show a sudden reduction of length of life to 400 to 460 years as contrasted with their predecessors' 530 to 600 (See the Septuagint). Successive periods of further climatic degeneration in later centuries are matched by similar corresponding reductions in the span of life, and it is impossible not to see a connection between climate and life-span during those early years. Hence the period of fatherhood was proportionately shortened and the adverse climate must have played its part in hindering the rate of population increase.

There was still no death. Noah himself died about this time, three and a half centuries after the Flood, but his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, must have joined in the trek to Shinar, still hale and hearty. There was no war or violence, there may not have been any disease and it might well be that the only deaths were those due to accidents. Taking all these circumstances into consideration, it is possible that the

estimated quarter million who made the journey could have grown to seven millions in the next hundred years. In the emergence of this very considerable body of people spreading over the land and developing varied tastes and interests there reposed the seeds which blossomed into the situation described in the story of the Tower of Babel.

*"Come", they said "let us build a city and a tower whose top shall reach into the heavens, and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth".*

The motive has not always been properly understood. At a much later date a copyist or transcriber added his comment which forms vs. 9, *"therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound all the languages of the earth"*. The word rendered "confound" is the Hebrew *balbal*, which means mingling or confusion. It is really a pun upon the word Babel, and not a very good pun at that. It could not have been written at the time of the original story for there was no Hebrew language then nor yet for many centuries thereafter. But this set the stage for the later Jewish tradition, carried over into Christianity, that the Tower was built as an act of defiance against God. Josephus, improving upon the tradition, asserts that its builder was the Nimrod of Gen. 10, and this name was identified with the Hebrew *ni-marad*, a form of the verb *"marad"*, "to rebel", having the meaning "he was rebellious". On this somewhat flimsy foundation Nimrod was credited with being a rebel against God and leading the project of the Tower. There is nothing in the Genesis narrative to associate Nimrod with the building of the Tower although there is plenty in Sumerian legend. That will be considered later on. The likelihood is that the motive for building the Tower was a good and praiseworthy one, but it went wrong.

Nevertheless the project was contrary to the will of God. That is evident from the sequel; the Lord came down and frustrated it. The situation is not difficult to visualise. The Lord had instructed the three sons of Noah to be fruitful, and multiply, and bring forth abundantly in the earth. The fulfilment of that injunction implied a scattering over the face of the earth, to explore and discover its resources and use them for the common good. This idea of concentrating the whole human community in one given area, however praiseworthy it might have appeared to the originators, militated against the proper development of mankind. There are no minerals in the plain of Shinar, no metals and no useful stone or rocks. No forests, no soil of the kind that would grow many of the products men would come to need in future days, cotton, rubber, rice, maize,

fruit trees, timber bearing trees and much besides. The Sumerians lived on a staple diet of barley, pulse and dates, and little else. For men to exploit and put to good use the possibilities of this new post-Flood world they must scatter over the earth, and this they were refusing to do. So God came down to inspect the work they had undertaken.

Fifty miles south of the present city of Baghdad, on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, there is a level stretch of country which those settlers in that day found ideal for their purpose. Here they would build their Tower, and around it would rise a great city, the first city of this new earth. In that city they would concentrate all their activities and all their learning, and no matter how far away other men might ultimately penetrate, here would be the centre, and, perhaps, rulership. Here they would make themselves a name that should endure for ever. Nevertheless it is not to be inferred that their motives were altogether to be condemned. As is so often the case with the works of man, motives are often mixed, and the evidence in this case is that the building of the Tower of Babel was in considerable degree incited by a desire to retain and perpetuate the worship of God.

This fact is established by the names given by the builders to the Tower, the city, and the land in which they dwelt. It must be remembered that there was as yet no idolatry among mankind, no worship of false gods. That came later. At this time the God of Noah was still the One venerated. The people still counted themselves as faithful to him. It has to be realised that Shem, Ham and Japheth, were still alive and their influence must have counted for much. These people would have known the story of the Flood and of the mountain where the Ark came to rest; some of them might well have made the hundred miles journey from the mountainous area where they had been born to see the place for themselves and view the remains of the Ark in which their fathers had been saved—there is nothing unlikely in that. That mountain became sacred to them and their descendants into future distant ages. It was never forgotten; it became a central feature in their myths and legends. And all the evidence is that the Tower of Babel had a direct connection with that mountain.

A distinguishing feature of all Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian cities, from their beginnings to their final end, was the "ziggurat". This was the original Sumerian name and this is the name by which these erections—or their remains—are known today. The ziggurat was a pyramid built in stages, or steps, each stage smaller than the one below so that a concourse ran round the building at each stage. Stairways ascending the

sides of each stage gave ultimate access to the level platform at the top, where was always erected a temple facing towards the east. The entire structure was solid, built of brick, usually sun-dried brick in the interior and furnace-baked brick on the outside. The ziggurat was the focus of religious ceremonies and worship, in latter days of the idol gods of the land. It also provided a useful means of astronomical observations; but its primary purpose was religious.

The Tower of Babel was a ziggurat. Its remains are still there today and it is known to have been, in its heyday, one of the greatest and most magnificent of such buildings. According to Strabo, the Greek geographer of our Lord's day, it was six hundred feet high and its base platform was six hundred feet square. That is not to say it was that size when first built. Strabo and Herodotus both described it as it stood in the days of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar; it was common practice though for later kings to enlarge the ziggurats they inherited from earlier generations and archaeologists have found evidence of this in cities other than Babylon. One present-day such, Seton Lloyd in "*Foundations in the Dust*" (1955) says that the ziggurat of Babylon was about 250 feet high originally.

Now the word "ziggurat" in the Sumerian language means "mountain peak". The ziggurat in each city was built as an artificial mountain peak to remind the people of the Mountain of the Ark from which their ancestors had come. In later times, knowledge of the location of that mountain was forgotten and lost, only that in a general sort of way it was "in the east", for which reason they called it "the Mount of the East". So, in the main, they built their ziggurats with the front side facing north-east because that was the direction from which their ancestors had come when "journeying from the east" (see map in Nov./Dec. issue). But two noteworthy ziggurats are exceptions. One is this one at Babylon; the other was built not so very long afterwards by the Sumerians, after the dispersal, at their new holy city of Nippur, sixty miles south of Babylon. Both of these face directly to Anaran, the mountain of the Ark, so that a bearing taken from each intersects on the mountain itself. In no more convincing manner could these early settlers have demonstrated their regard for the salvation that came to their fathers at the hand of God on that mountain.

They called their Tower E-temen-anki, which means "the house (or temple) of the foundation of heaven and earth". By that they seem to have referred to what was, to them, a very real "new heavens and a new earth" founded or laid down by the Lord after the Flood had swept away the

old heavens and earth. "The world that then was", says Peter in 1 Pet. 3. "being overflowed with water, perished. The world that now is, is reserved to judgment; and we, according to his promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness". They perhaps thought that the new heavens and earth was here already, not realising that sin was shortly to enter their society again and create what Peter again calls "this present evil world".

The city they called by a name which meant "the Gate of God". It is noteworthy that the word is in the singular, not the plural, so supporting the evidence that as yet there was only one God known. In later times, when languages had differentiated, the sons of Shem, the Semites, from whom Abraham and Israel came, knew it as Bab-il, and the sons of Ham, the Sumerians, as Ka-dingir-ra, but both names mean the same, the Gate of God. At a symposium at Baghdad in 1979 organised by the Iraq government Department of Antiquities, dealing in part with the history of Babylon, it was stated that the original name was Bab-ila, given by a people before there was any distinction between Semites and Sumerians, whom the speaker named "proto-Euphrateans". This definition exactly fits these people who commenced to build the Tower before the races separated.

Another name given to the city in association with Bab-il was Tin-tir-ki which means "the place of the forest (or trees) of life". Does this mean that those settlers believed that in this new world of theirs the way to the Tree of Life (in Genesis it is composite, grove, or group of trees, of life) barred from man since the expulsion from Eden, was to be opened again to them? If so, and this an indication of their failure to realise that sin had not yet been finally overcome and, like Israel at Sinai twenty-six centuries later, they thought they could keep the perfect law of God, not realising that no man can do that without a Redeemer, it becomes easier to see why the Lord had to put a stop to this project without delay.

Finally, the early name of the country. They called it Shumer, the Semitic equivalent being Shumeru, from which we have the modern English Sumer for the land and Sumerians for the people. Langdon in his "Sumerian Grammar" says the meaning is "Place of the faithful lord". There is a note of reverence in this name; they apparently dedicated this new land of theirs to God and named it after him.

At a point of time which was probably about two centuries after the episode of the Tower two successive rulers of the country bore archaic names which Jacobsen in "The Sumerian King Lists" (1966) has interpreted as bearing the meanings "reign of righteousness" and "God listens with gladness". Here again, it seems there is a note of reverence for one God; even then, five hundred years after the Flood, the shadow of idolatry had not yet fallen upon the human race.

But the Lord had to act. The presumption of men, however well-meaning, had to be halted and the Divine injunction to fill the earth obeyed. "The people is one". He said "they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them from thence upon the face of all the earth; and they left off to build the city" (vss. 6-8).

It need not be thought that there was some kind of instantaneous bestowment of various languages at this moment. What is more likely is that differences of ideas, of wishes, of policies, of methods of working, arose among this great concourse of people which first hindered and frustrated the work and then brought it to a halt. It would be strange were it otherwise. There were by now far too many people to ensure unanimity. The obvious and natural result was that the grandiloquent scheme was abandoned and the various communities began to drift away and re-establish themselves in new surroundings with those of like mind. That separation in itself sparked off the development of variant languages, a process which has continued as men spread over the world.

Later on, the project was resumed by those who remained in the land. The Tower was built, and stood for more than two thousand years. The city was built, and became one of the greatest and most magnificent cities the world has ever known. But they are all gone now and the site is a rubble of broken bricks, desolate and barren. It started out to point the way to the true God of creation, but it quickly became the haven of false gods, and the Lord abandoned it to its fate. And the sons of men spread outwards to populate the waiting earth.

To be continued.

## THE TRAGEDY OF SAMSON

*The story of  
a great failure*

### 1. Nazarite unto God

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

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

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

So it came about that Manoah and his wife, quiet God-fearing Israelites of the tribe of Dan, pursued their uneventful lives in Zorah in humble faith that God would protect them from all enemies and give them prosperity all the time they honoured him and obeyed his covenant. They had one great sorrow; no son crowned their union, no one to carry on their line and inherit their lot in the land. It seemed hard to understand, almost as though God had not kept his part of the covenant, for the covenant promised the blessing of children among other gifts.

Strange to understand and hard to accept, until the day that Manoah's wife met the angel in the fields.

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

That last promise must have brought joy to the hearts of this pious couple. Deliverance was what every true Israelite desired. It is a safe deduction that the immediate past had been a time of national apostasy, for the fact that they were now subject to the Philistines instead of vice versa is a direct indication that they had failed to keep

the covenant which, if kept, promised them immunity from such things. The barrenness of Manoah's wife is another evidence pointing to the same thing, for this also, on national scale, was another result of failure to keep the covenant. The promise of a child, therefore, one who would only so much as begin to deliver Israel, was a Divine intimation that in some way Israel had shown signs of repentance, so that God, as ever, was quick to respond with the promised deliverance.

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

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

God; they were told too what that purpose was. "He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines".

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

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

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

## One Solitary Life

He was born in an obscure village. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty. He then became an itinerant preacher. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a house. He didn't go to college. He had no credentials but himself. He was only thirty-three when the public turned against him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to

a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his clothing, the only property he had on earth. He was laid in a borrowed grave. Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, have not affected the life of man on this earth as much as that ONE SOLITARY LIFE. (Author unknown)

## A VOICE FROM THE PAST

*Searching among old records on another matter, there came to light this acceptance of his charge by a prospective Pastor. The time was more than seventy years ago—in April 1911 to be precise—and the place was the London Tabernacle, formerly known as Whitefield's Old Tabernacle, after the 18th century evangelist, but now owned by a congregation of a thousand brethren conducting a vigorous witness in the Metropolis. The speaker was Charles T. Russell, who had been invited to the pastorate of this congregation, and these are his words. They present a fitting exhortation to any body of Christians viewing their faith seriously and zealously. As such they would seem fitting to any similar set of circumstances to-day.*

\* \* \*

“Seeking to follow the leadings of Divine providence, I have time and again come to London in response to the invitation of this London Tabernacle congregation. As I mingle with you from time to time I have learned to love you deeply for your Christian character and your devotion to the Master. On several occasions I have co-operated with you in presenting to the public the glorious message of Divine love, which has also warmed and cheered your hearts and mine. Not only so, but I have learned to love many characteristics of the British people. I have found a considerable proportion of them deeply reverential, and many of them evidencing a hunger and thirst for righteousness, truth, and an honesty in their examination of the Word of God. This is what has time and again brought me from active fields in the United States and Canada, to speak forth the message of God's love in your midst—to tell the British people afresh the message of the angels on the plains of Bethlehem, “Fear not, behold we bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people”.

“At this juncture came your cordial and unanimous invitation that I should serve you as pastor of this congregation, even though, as you expressed it, you knew well that you could not expect me to give you all of my time, yet wished that I might give you as much of it as possible, that I might visit you as frequently as possible, and stay as long as I could.

“I pray for this congregation the Lord's rich blessing. May He guide you into all truth as you seek to follow the leadings of his word and of his providences. Remember his injunction through the word of the Apostle, giving heed to

the words of man, whomsoever it may be, only in proportion as they shall demonstrate that they speak as the oracles of God in harmony with the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make wise unto salvation. I exhort you to humility of mind and heart, that we remember the Apostle's words, “Humble yourselves, therefore, brethren, under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time”. I exhort you that you search the Scriptures as true Bereans, that ye may know therefrom the foundation of the faith, and the superstructure once delivered to the saints. I exhort you to remember the Apostle's words, that “with the heart man believeth, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation”, and that this evidently signifies that our professions toward the Lord are not to be merely with the lips, but from the heart, and that faith and obedience of our hearts be not kept secret from the brethren but declared, as the prophet has said, “I will declare thy salvation; in the midst of the congregation will I sing praise unto thee”. I exhort you in the words of the Apostle that you forget not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, and so much the more as ye see the day drawing on—the glorious day of Messiah in which the blessing is to be given to the world of mankind through the glorious Church. I exhort you in the language of the Apostle that prayers and exhortations and study of the Scriptures, that ye may build one another up in the most holy faith, until we all—with all of God's faithful ones from Pentecost until now—shall come to the stature of a perfect man, the Lord's anointed, Jesus the head, the Church his Body. I exhort you to love as brethren, and be kindly affectionate one toward another, forgiving one another, if any have a complaint against a brother, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us. Remember the Lord's injunction, “Love one another as I have loved you”, and St. Paul's exposition of this, “We ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren”. I exhort you to stir up whatever gifts and talents you possess, realising, as the Master's parable shows, that you are his servants, and the servants of his truth. Your time and influence and opportunities in life and your talents are his. Your faithfulness or unfaithfulness will be determined by the way in which you use these in the service of the Lord, the truth, and the brethren.

“I remind you of the words of the Lord Jesus, exhorting us that we should let our light so shine

that men might see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven. These good works, these evidences of the grace of God in our hearts and lives, should be manifested in our homes to those who are dearest to us by earthly ties. They should be manifested in our business dealings, in the shop, in the market, on the street; everywhere we should show forth the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light. I remind you that we are to copy our God and be like unto our Father in Heaven. I remind you that we have found through his word that He is indeed a true God of mercy and of loving kindness, and that we, correspondingly, should be merciful and kind to all with whom we have to do, if we would be acceptable ambassadors and representatives of him and of our Redeemer. I pray God that from this day onward

his gracious blessing may rest upon this house and upon all worshipping here, as it may be a place to his praise in this great metropolis, that it may witness to the true Gospel and to the Holy Spirit of the Father and of the Son, and that this congregation, as God's representatives, may shine as lights in the world, so that thither may be attracted the spirit-hungry and thirsty, weary burdened, who are waiting for the great salvation which began to be spoken by our Lord and was confirmed unto those who heard him. You have already assured me of your love, and that I am remembered daily in your prayers at the throne of grace. I am strengthened and encouraged thereby. I wish now to assure you of my love and that I will daily remember you at the throne of grace, that the Lord may cement more and more our mutual love with that of his."

### A burdensome stone

*"In that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people; all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces . . . saith the Lord" (Zech. 12.3).*

"A rock too heavy for any people to remove" is how the NEB puts it, and very aptly too. One of the paradoxes of modern politics is how this little country, only the size of Wales, with a population of only four million, is able to defy and frustrate all the political machinations of all the world's great powers and stand ready to defend itself against all comers. Truly Jerusalem is an obstruction proving too heavy for anyone to deal with. The International Institute for Strategic Studies pointed out two years ago that Israel is now the fourth strongest military power in the world, coming next to Soviet Russia, the United States and China. But Israel has to spend much more per head of population on defence than any other country, it is stated.

But it will be of no avail. Israel has trusted in the arm of flesh before, and it has always failed them. The only times that they were truly delivered from their enemies was when they eschewed man-made weapons, and put their faith in God. Then He delivered. Thus it was in the days of Samuel and the Philistines, Hezekiah and Sennacherib, Jehoshaphat and the Edomites. All they had to do was "stand still and see the salvation of God". In the last great day of Israel's final trial, when all the world takes concerted action against her, an action pictured in Ezekiel's prophetic vision as the assault of the hosts of Gog and Magog, it is because they dwell defenceless

and in faith "*in the land of unwalled villages*" having no bars or gates, that the Lord comes forth to deliver. And the marvellous thing about that deliverance is that the enemies themselves, though frustrated in their intent to ravage the land, themselves become objects of Divine compassion and mercy. For when the attempted coup has failed, and Israel stands inviolate and serene in the presence of her Lord manifested from heaven, the Divine mandate is that of those thus delivered there shall missionaries and evangelists be sent to all those nations which warred against Israel, to the extremities of the earth, "*to the isles afar off, that have not heard my name; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles*" (Isa. 68.19).

There is a regrettable tendency to stress over-much the darker side of the Lord's judgments on the nations in this end of the Age to the partial or total ignoring of the sunlight which lies beyond. Sometimes certain great Powers, or one particular great Power, is singled out for special severity of judgment as though other nations are almost lily-white by contrast; from the Divine point of view it is not so. The whole of the world's powers, great or small, constitute the kingdoms of this world, all destined to yield willing assent to the dominion of our Lord Jesus Christ when He takes his power to reign. That is why the missionaries are to be sent out. Says Isaiah "*Out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem*" (Isa. 2.2). But only after they have thrown all their military armaments into the sea and trust in the Lord for their defence.

## THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

*A doctrinal  
exegesis*

One of the very indeterminate areas of Christian belief surrounds what is usually called the "intermediate state", the condition between the moment of death and the Last Judgment, which is equated with the Second Advent. The assertion is often made that there is an element of uncertainty here in the writings of St. Paul, that in some cases he talks as if he expected to be consciously present with Christ at the moment of death and in others at the time of the Lord's coming at the end of this world-age. Some of Jesus' varied sayings can also be subject to the same misunderstanding and behind this lies what the Old Testament has to say concerning the place of the dead.

St. Paul has five major allusions to this matter, to wit, I Cor. 15:49-52, 2 Cor. 5:1-8, Phil. 1:22-24, I Thess. 4:13-18, and 2 Tim. 4:6-8. Of these five allusions, three clearly defer the union of the believer with Christ and the attainment of heavenly glory to the time of the Advent and Judgment at the end of this Age. The other two—at least as rendered in the Authorised Version—need more thought.

Writing to the Corinthians about the resurrection and kindred matters (I. Cor. 15), Paul declares in vs. 51 that "*we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for . . . the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*". Here he clearly differentiates between those who have died before the Advent and those who are living at the time of the Advent. The former are in a condition analogous to sleep, and they are raised from the dead to meet the Lord at his Advent. The latter do not "sleep", but are "changed" (Gk *allasso*, to change from one state to another) instantaneously. The awakened dead are also thus "changed" from earthly, human, terrestrial life to heavenly, spiritual, celestial, life, and so shall be "ever with the Lord".

In harmony with this are his words to the Thessalonians (I Thess. 4). His purpose here, in vs. 13, is to combat a misapprehension, at a time when the return of the Lord was expected in that generation, that believers who died before the Return would fail to be included in the company of the saved when Christ should appear. His great point is that all who die in Christ will share in the resurrection at his Coming; again he uses the simile of sleep. "*I would not have you ignorant*

*concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not . . . for those who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord will not go before those who are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven . . . and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up"* (Gk *harpazo*, to be taken up from one place and put down in another) "*together with them, to meet the Lord*". Again there is the difference between the dead and the living at the time of the Advent, with the implication that only at this time are the dead of all generations brought into conscious relationship with the Lord.

To this agree Paul's own expectation regarding himself, voiced at the close of his life, when his understanding was crystallised and fixed. (I Tim. 4). "*I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 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 shall give me at that day, and to all them that love his appearing*". This is plainly that he expected his meeting with his Lord to be, not at his death, but at his resurrection at the end of the Age, the Advent.

Less clear is his message to the Philippians (Phil. 1). In vs. 20 his fervent desire is for Christ to be glorified in him, whether by life or by death. "*I am in a strait betwixt two*" he says "*having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you*". The adoption of "depart" in this text gives the impression of a departing from this life and an arrival in the next, but in fact the word "*analuo*" means to be loosed or set free from restraining bonds. It was used as a Greek nautical term indicating the casting loose of a ship from her moorings preparatory to commencing a voyage. Jesus used the word in Luke 13:12 when He said "*Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity*". Paul's wish here was to be loosed from the cares and sufferings and trammels of this life and so eventually be with Christ, but no indication that he expected the two events to be simultaneous.

In like fashion he assures the Corinthians (2 Cor. 5) that they need not fear the dissolving of this earthly body as the end of all things; there is a heavenly body created by God waiting for

them in the heavens. In this passage there is no note of time. The whole point is that there is a future life and a future resurrection body, and since he goes on to relate all this to our appearing before the judgment seat (tribunal) of Christ, which is necessarily at his Second Advent, there is no disharmony between this and Paul's other statements.

Coming now to the doctrine of Jesus himself, perhaps the most revealing testimony is enshrined in his words recorded in John 5:28-29 "*the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth*". This is at the time of the General Resurrection, which is that of the Second Advent, for the passage goes on to separate the risen ones between those who rise to a resurrection of life—eternal life—and those who come forth to a resurrection of judgment (the meaning of the mediæval English "damnation"). The implication is that the dead who thus "hear his voice" are unconscious of the lapse of time during the interim. It is surely logical to think that if the dead are in possession of their sensory faculties during the time prior to the "Last Day" they will not have to wait until then to "hear his voice". The conception here is the same as that endorsed by St. Paul; the time of resurrection is at the time of the Second Advent, and at that time all men, of however remote a past age, will awaken to stand in his presence and hear his voice.

Confirmation of this is found in the story of the raising of Lazarus, recounted in John 11. "*Thy brother shall rise again*" said Jesus to Martha. "*I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the Last Day*" she responded. This was the sturdy belief of Judaism; the faithful were laid aside in death to await the last Day, and then they would live again. Jesus endorsed her words and added to them. "*He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die*". To the believer the death state is interrupted and terminated by resurrection to life, and thereafter life is everlasting, never again to be interrupted by death.

An important consideration here is that none can attain conscious life after death before Christ himself has passed through the successive gates of death and resurrection. A careful consideration of I Cor. 15 shows clearly Paul's insistence that the first in history to rise from the dead must be Christ, "the firstfruits". He must lead the way. After that, says Paul, they (those who "sleep in Jesus") who are Christ's at his Presence, his Advent; the reference is to his Church, the faithful of this present Age. Then, going back to vs. 22, all who have died in Adam; all to be made

alive in Christ. This is at the commencement of the Millennium, the time of final opportunity to accept Christ as Lord and so enter into the inheritance which God has prepared for those who will willingly come into a state of union with him.

One New Testament incident seems at first sight to be out of harmony with this general presentation. To the repentant and dying thief who asked to be remembered when Jesus should enter into his Kingdom, the Lord said, as rendered in the English Authorised Version, "*Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in Paradise*" (Luke 23:43). The position of the comma has distorted the sense. Punctuation was added to the Bible only in the Fifteenth century A.D. and has no value on points of Scripture interpretation. The true sense here is evidenced by a similar passage in Acts 20:26 "I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men". Properly rendered, Luke 23:43 should read "I say unto thee this day, thou shalt be with me in Paradise". Judaistic theology at the time envisaged two places or states for the dead; the wicked went to Hades and the righteous to Paradise, both to await resurrection. Our Lord's words were an assurance to the dying thief that his belief and repentance was accepted, and that when the Lord should enter his Kingdom, whether sooner or later, the thief would have a place. His plea was granted.

Greek philosophical reasonings respecting the immortality of the soul, deriving from speculation as to the relationship of the soul of man to the Greek gods, with its corollary of continuation of consciousness after death in a state either of felicity or misery, had permeated Judaism for several centuries before Christ appeared, mainly among the upper classes, to whom Greek thought and culture was esteemed a sign of superior status. The people generally, as illustrated in the story of Martha, still held to the earlier Judaistic faith which looked on death as a sleep, to be terminated by the resurrection at the Last Day; numerous Old Testament scriptures testify to this fact. "*I shall be satisfied, when I awake, in thy likeness*" said David (Psa. 17:15). "*Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*" records the prophet Daniel in Dan. 12:2, referring to the "standing up of Michael" which is an apocalyptic vision of the assumption of power by Christ at the time of his Millennial reign. Said Solomon the wise, "*There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest*" (Eccl. 9:10), and David, again, defines the position very clearly when he says of the fate of mortal man, "*His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth;*

in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psa. 146.4). It has been fashionable for a long time now to deride those men of ancient times as having only a very immature and incomplete understanding of the ways of God and the mysteries of life, but the assumption is quite unfounded. More and more is it becoming evident that the ancients possessed a knowledge and understanding of Divine things and the Divine purpose which approaches nearer to the truth the farther one goes back in time. The logical conclusion is that men started at the beginning with an accurate knowledge of the Divine mysteries which became obscured and distorted and overlaid by earthborn pagan philosophies as the years and the centuries passed by. The Old Testament view of the nature of the death state will yet prove to excel all the later and modern philosophies of men.

Christian theology has tended to follow Judaistic and so the Greek philosophies have become embedded in confessions of faith. There is need now for the formulation of a better definition of the relation between death and resurrection than mediæval theology could ever allow. In some way or other the nature of Time has to be brought into it. The idea that the human personality has passed into oblivion at death, even though there be the promise of a resurrection at some future time, is repugnant to many minds and there is difficulty in visualising how a life thus terminated can be restored. That feeling fails to take into account the all-pervading power of God. "The dust shall return to earth as it was" Solomon tells us "and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Eccl. 12.7). There is something in the personality of every intelligent creature, made in the image and likeness of God, to whom God has given life, which God does not allow to be lost. The human, terrestrial body may and does decay and its elements scatter to the four winds, but there is something which is in the Lord's keeping which will eventually be enshrined in a new body adapted to the new environment in which that individual finds himself, and life, sense perception and memory will return and will be taken up at the point broken by death. St. Paul in 2 Cor. 5 elaborates this theme in respect to the members of Christ's Church, who lay aside their earthly bodies and are "clothed upon" with their new, celestial bodies adapted to the celestial world. But many of them, says Paul, will "sleep" first, and be awakened at the Advent of the Lord when

He comes to assume his rulership of mankind.

The term "sleep" is perhaps a human analogy, and the best analogy which can be offered, to define a condition which has no counterpart in human knowledge or experience and so cannot be adequately described. Is Time the same thing in the world of the dead as in that of the living? We read in our modern space fiction of travellers in Time, going backwards or forward in history; students of Einstein talk of space explorers travelling at the speed of light who return to earth after two years exploration to find that several centuries have elapsed on earth. Ordinary men and women usually fail to comprehend such theories and perhaps can be pardoned for dismissing them as arrant nonsense, but the fact that such conditions can be conceived and seriously argued by scientific men at least shows that there are some things in God's creation which we as ordinary human beings just do not understand. If in fact there is a sense in which time stands still in the death state it become easier to understand how the transition from this life to the next is, as St. Paul says it is, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye", even though years or centuries may have elapsed between death and resurrection. The individual is not conscious of any lapse of time between the two events; only the flicker of an eyelid interposes between the life that now is and the life to come.

In such case, there is no "intermediate state"; there is only death to the terrestrial followed by resurrection to that future state which in the purposes of the Almighty is the destiny for the individual concerned. That destiny may be heavenly or it may be earthly, but somewhere, in some sphere of life, there will be a place for every one who has ever known conscious life—if willing and ready to fill it. None will be left outside God's creation provided they willingly and whole-heartedly eschew sin and evil and come into full union with the Father through the Son. It will always be true that only in the Son can there be life, continuing, everlasting life in a creation from which all that is of sin has been banished. Perhaps that far-seeing man of the eighth century B.C., Isaiah of the clear vision, was inspired to express the truth on this matter when he declaimed (Isa. 19. NEB) "but thy dead live . . . they that sleep in the earth will awake and shout for joy . . . and the earth will bring those long dead to life again".

6/12/84

26:19

To be loyal to the Truth and yet faithfully to recognise the equal rights of all men to free thought and free speech is not always an easy task.

If we but trusted our hearts instead of our eyes, we should know that God is the soul's circumstance, and his infinitude is its breathing-space.

## TARTARUS

*The prison of the  
angels that fell*

*"God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell (Gr. tartaros—confined in Tartarus) and delivered them unto chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Pet. 2.4).*

A strange allusion! In all the Scriptures this word occurs but this once; and in all the revealed Plan of God none but the fallen angels are said to be imprisoned in "Tartarus," wherever or whatever that place or condition may be. The Authorised Version renders this word "hell," the translators thinking that to be the place of the angels' punishment, and the only one of which they knew; but the New Testament writers had already followed our Lord's example in using "Hades" and "Gehenna" for the death conditions and the ultimate fate of the wicked respectively, and the fact that Peter deliberately used a very different word here, and one having a specialised significance to his immediate readers, is evidence that he wished to convey a different thought as to the fate of the "angels that sinned."

There are only three verses in the New Testament referring to this sequel to the angelic rebellion of Gen. 6 and in each case they are but casual allusions introduced in support of the writers' main argument; but the surprising unanimity of these three verses with regard to two main facts presents us with a very clear picture. From 2 Pet. 2. 4, Jude 6 and I Pet. 3 18-20 we learn that the fallen angels are "in prison" and that they are "bound with chains of darkness". The first mentioned text has already been quoted. Jude confirms Peter's assertion with the words "those angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he had reserved in everlasting (aionian) chains under darkness until the judgment of the great day." Peter again speaking of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, says that He was "put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the Spirit; by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a-preparing." In these three verses we have our Scriptural basis for considering what Peter intended to convey by the word "Tartarus".

It is worth noting that many modern translators feel that "hell" is by no means the correct rendering of this word. The Revised Version puts "Tartarus" in the margin, and Young gives "Tartarus" without further explanation. Rother-

ham offers "the lowest hades", recognising a distinction; the Concordant, "Thrusting them into the gloomy caverns of Tartarus", the 20th Century, "Sent them down to Tartarus", and Moffatt, "Committing them to pits of the nether gloom in Tartarus". The difficulty with the majority of these translators is that, being already committed to belief in one hell of conscious misery for mankind, they find it difficult to accept a separate hell for fallen angels, and yet from the evidence of the word they cannot consistently include the angels in the same "hell", and hence they prefer to leave the word untranslated. Those who have attained a clear knowledge of the Bible teaching on hell can come to Peter's words with an advantage not possessed by the translator!

The Jews of our Lord's day, and therefore the early Christians also, were perfectly familiar with the word, and had a very clear idea of its meaning. Like many such terms, it belongs to Greek mythology, a knowledge of which had permeated the East by the time of the First Advent. The word "hades" itself is the Greek term which describes the state of the dead, although the Greeks looked upon Hades as a place where there was at least life and consciousness, consistent with their belief in the immortality of the soul. Now, according to the ideas of the Greeks, the universe (*kosmos*) was a great hollow globe with the earth suspended in the centre, heaven and the abode of the gods above the earth, Hades far down in the bowels of the earth, and Tartarus deep below Hades. Far back in the early days of the world, said the Greeks, there was a great rebellion of the Titans, the sons of the god Uranus and his wife Gea, against Zeus, God of Heaven. The conflict was fierce, but eventually the Titans were overthrown and cast down to Tartarus, which was closed up with brazen gates, and there the rebels remain to this day. Students acquainted with Genesis 6 will immediately perceive the striking resemblance of this scrap of mythology to the Bible story, for Uranus and Gea are the Greek words for Heaven and Earth respectively, and the myth associates the idea of a rebellion of god-like beings against the Most High with that of a union between Heaven and Earth. "And it came to pass . . . that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose" (Gen. 6.1-2).

These stories of mythology, enshrining some dim though greatly distorted recollection of hap-

penings before the Flood, together with Greek ideas of immortality, had begun to affect the religious beliefs of the Jews for some time before the First Advent. To some extent the old belief in *Sheol*, a place in which there was no knowledge, nor device, nor work of any kind, and in which the thoughts of man perish (Eccl. 9. 10; Psa. 146.4) had become coloured with ideas of future punishment, and so Tartarus began to be accepted as a place where retribution would be meted out to the specially wicked.

The Jewish historian Josephus gives a good example of this belief as it existed in our Lord's own day, when, speaking of the doctrines of the Pharisees, he says (*"Antiquities of the Jews," Book 18, Chap. 1.3*): *"They (the Pharisees) also believe that souls have an immortal vigour in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison (aionian tartarus), but that the former shall have power to revive and live again"*. Notice how Josephus endeavours to blend the sturdy Jewish belief in death and resurrection with Greek ideas of "rewards and punishments" immediately after death. It was this combining the philosophies of this world with the revelation of God which rendered the Pharisees "blind leaders of the blind" (Matt. 15. 14), and made the teaching of our Lord by contrast to have such an appeal that it was said of him: *"He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes"* (Matt. 7.29).

Another reference to Tartarus as a place of eternal punishment for men is to be found in Plato (*"Republic," Book 10, Chap. 15*), where the narrative describes the attempted escape from Hades of certain notorious Greek evildoers of previous days, and of their being recaptured, bound hand and foot, and taken down to Tartarus, from whence they would never be able to escape, there to be tormented eternally.

Although both our Lord and the New Testament writers used the term "Hades" on frequent occasions, they did not countenance the myths which had turned it into a place of conscious feeling, after the Greek model. Like Martha at the tomb of Lazarus, knowing only that her brother would rise "in the resurrection at the last day" (Jno. 11. 24), they stood foursquare for the traditional "sheol," a place of unconsciousness, of sleep, but illumined with the certain hope of resurrection by virtue of the death of Christ. Hades to them was the equivalent of *Sheol*, and Peter's single allusion to Tartarus as the prison, not of wicked men, but of fallen angels, is taken from a belief of which the most complete descrip-

tion extant is contained in the Book of Enoch.

This work, although not included amongst the canonical books, and having no claim to be considered part of the inspired Word, was widely known in the time of Christ, and there is no <sup>?</sup> doubt that both our Lord and his disciples were thoroughly familiar with it. It enshrines a wealth of detail culled from traditions handed down from earliest times, and it is here that the dread sentence, passed upon the "angels that sinned" is recorded. The resemblance to Peter's words is remarkable. *"From henceforth you shall not ascend into heaven unto all eternity, and in bonds of the earth the decree has gone forth to bind you for all the days of the world"* (I Enoch 14.5). As Peter penned this part of his epistle he must surely have had in mind the vivid description of Tartarus credited to Enoch: *"I saw neither a heaven above nor a firmly founded earth, but a place chaotic and horrible. And there I saw seven stars of the heaven bound together in it, like the great mountains, and burning with fire. Then I said: 'For what sin are they bound, and on what account have they been cast in thither?' Then said Uriel, one of the holy angels" (Uriel was said to be the archangel appointed to have charge of Tartarus, I Enoch 20.2). "These are of the number of the stars of heaven which have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and are bound here . . ." and I saw . . . a great fire there which burnt and blazed, and the place was cleft as an abyss, being full of great descending columns of fire. Then I said: 'How fearful is the place and how terrible to look upon' . . . And he" (Uriel) "said unto me: 'This place is the prison of the angels, and here they will be imprisoned for ever'" (I Enoch 21. 1-10).*

These were the beliefs, then, upon which Peter founded his words. Without endorsing the mythology and popular impressions regarding the actual existence of a place of eternal punishment, Peter has used the idea of Tartarus to define the condition in which the "angels that sinned" have been since the Flood. The idea of restraint, under chains, without any possibility of escape unless and until God permits, is the theme which Peter is seeking to stress, a restraint which is to endure for a definite time—until the "judgment of the great day".

This "prison" is one in which those confined can see and be cognisant of things happening upon earth, and in the heavens. They saw the Logos lay aside his glory and come to earth, being born of Mary. They saw him grow up to man's estate, watched him being baptised of John in Jordan, observed his ministry, his arrest, and

his death upon the Cross. They beheld the miracle of the Resurrection. Perhaps it was then that a *great light burst upon them, or at least upon many among them.* That, surely, was the sermon that was preached to the "spirits in prison."

It follows that these same spirits must have witnessed all that transpired upon earth between the Flood and the First Advent; and everything that has occurred since, and will occur, until, in the Great Assize of the Judgment of the Great Day, their turn comes, and the brazen gates of Tartarus are flung wide open, that they may come forth and be required to show how much, if at all, they have profited by the things which they have seen and heard.

The "prison," then, is evidently not a definite place in space. Many of these evil spirits were "cast out" by our Lord from human beings whom they had obsessed, and the history of "spiritism" through the ages shows that the "chains of darkness" are of such a nature as to allow a certain liberty of action to these powers of evil. There is a significant incident recorded in Luke 8. 31, where the legion of demons "besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep", and, in consequence, Jesus gave them leave to enter the herd of swine. The word "deep" in that verse is rightly "abyss"; and refers to the same place of restraint as is alluded to in Peter's epistle.

It would seem, then, that this restraint in Tartarus is a Divine prohibition which prevents the fallen angels from appearing in the heavenly courts in their normal condition as spirit beings, from appearing upon earth in materialised form as men, and from taking possession of or influencing human beings against their will. They are thus aware of all that is going on in the earth, but are restrained from interfering with humanity in any way, except to such degree as any man may allow by opening himself to their influence. In the days before the Flood they ruled by violence—each took "of all which they chose". Since then that freedom is denied them, and they can work only through darkness and in secret,

through the minds of those who are willingly given over to their designs. There have been many such throughout the ages, and there are dark stories of old which give an idea of the determined efforts made by some of the fallen angels to break through the confines of their prison. Unable to "materialise," or create human bodies for themselves, they overcame their restraints sufficiently to obsess the brain and so use the body of a man or other living creature. Thus, rather than suffer a return to the full and rigorous restraint of the abyss, the demons besought Jesus that they might enter the swine. The concession availed them nothing, for with the herd drowned in the sea, they were left without any material organism through which to operate, and would then, as they had feared, be again fully confined in Tartarus. In this condition they remain until the judgment of the great day, and the measure of such repentance as may be felt by any of them will be evidenced by the extent of their acquiescence in that restraint as a merited retribution. We are perhaps justified in picturing some at least of the fallen angels as abiding in that condition, making no attempt to communicate with humanity or in any other way to transgress the Divine Law, waiting quietly for the foretold time of judgment. To such, witnesses of affairs upon earth, passive spectators of the drama of sin and death, there may come repentance and a change of heart which will enable their Creator to pronounce them worthy of life, and assign them some station in his creation. To those who have shown irrevocable opposition to God by repeated endeavours to overcome the restraints of Tartarus, and who even in the "judgment of the Great Day" are still impenitent, there can be only one end. For angels, as well as for men, it is always true that "the wages of sin is death."

Thus, when the penitent have been ushered into life, and the incorrigible have closed their troubled existence in death, Tartarus, like Death and Hell, shall be "Cast into the lake of fire", and shall be known no more.

God does not intend us to be pressed down by our sense of weakness to such an extent that there is nothing we can ever attempt for Christ, and therefore nothing we can achieve. The indwelling sense of inability is to direct us to his ability. This sense of weakness is given that we may be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

To abide in Christ is the open secret of a holy life. To feed upon Christ continually in our hearts is the one sure way of abiding in him. In times of close fellowship Christ is so real to us that nothing seems worth living for except his blessing and his approving smile. And there sin cannot overcome us because his grace is so sufficient and so real.

## A QUESTION OF OWNERSHIP

### 1. Not your own

*"Ye are not your own for ye are bought with a price."* (I Cor. 6. 19-20).

These words, written to an early Christian community, were a reminder that those who professed to follow Christ were no longer free to indulge in the ways of the world and the natural man. They belonged to a new owner, whose laws or commandments they were in honour bound to obey. *"If you love me, keep my commandments"*. There can be no community without law. Whether it be a church or a nation, rules and the observance of them are essential to hold a society together. It is a common assumption that the human being belongs to himself. Any form of bondage is irksome, resented and in some cases intolerable. For freedom, liberty, self-possession and self-expression men have fought and died rather than suffer the restriction and suppression of the natural right of man to be free. To be captain of his own life and master of his own fate is, in the philosophy of the progressive, not only possible but proper.

The tendency of human nature is to go from one extreme to another. Between the galling shackles of tyranny and the law of every man for himself, neither of which has brought any relief to the struggle for freedom, lies an acknowledgment of a higher authority, a submission to a nobler law, a wiser set of rules, a servitude which is not galling, an allegiance which is wholesome and life-preserving. It does not lie in party, system, sect, religious or political formulae, nor does it demand loyalty to human leadership. The real liberty and life of man lies in fidelity to his Maker. This first claim upon all that is finest and best in his nature is the only certain way to that freedom which is the desire of all people. When met willingly it is the surest way to peace and happiness.

The tendency of the times is to set aside or ignore what has become known as the old theology, that God created the earth and made man to inhabit the planet as a responsible tenant. If the Christian is not his own, but bound to his Saviour in the bonds of love and service, neither is man in general his own nor does he own the earth he inhabits. The wordy reasonings, the vain babblings and the idle speculations which keep this world in perpetual confusion form a singular contrast to the simple, straight-forward declaration, *"the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein"*.

It is a statement of ownership. Man does not belong to himself. He belongs to God his Creator. He is God's creature, bearing some likeness to his Maker. As such he owes, without any loss of dignity, not only allegiance and respect but obedience to a higher, superior power. For the globe he inhabits, the air he breathes, the food he eats, his power of thought, his many abilities and pleasures, he is indebted to One whose invisible presence is overwhelmingly visible in all that concerns man.

Without God and without hope the world is a dark place, one in which man must inevitably admit himself lost in its twisted, entangling mazes, its insoluble mysteries and its bewildering confusions. That the creative Being exists, that He is the Maker of the globe and its inhabitants, the Author of universal dominion, is the only basic belief, the one sure foundation upon which the fabric of an ideal society or a successful personal life can be reared or continue to exist. Knowledge of that existence is not enough, nor a formal lip-service. Power and energy alone did not produce a planet fitted to sustain a race of living creatures; wisdom and love went into the production of both. Gratitude for the blessings of life, a ready response to the will and wish of the Life-giver, are the first essentials of growth of both a new world and a new creature. Respect for God means respect for men and women. Neither are demanded, for God leaves his creature freedom of choice, yet past and present prove man's dependence upon a supreme Will, a universal law of good for peace and complete happiness.

A self-willed world with its own selfish plans for living produces little of lasting benefit. The demolition of ancient restraints opens the door to new destroying evils. Whether men or women are saints or sinners, the reminder that "You are not your own" is always salutary and timely. Intelligently to admit the right of God to rule his own, to bow the heart as well as bend the knee before Omnipotence, is to gain the two-fold benefit of delight in his law and liberty, which is perfect freedom. *"You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free"* declared Jesus and the first great truth is that God created, and what He made are his and his alone. As the Apostle Paul, that notable student of the law emphasised, *"The law has dominion over a man so long as he lives"* (Rom. 7.1).

Law is the rule of established authority. With this, legal science and common sense agree. It is a body of rules drawn up by nations and communities for the smooth running of an orderly society. From birth to death the life of civilised man is regulated by laws formed to meet every exigency that can befall either his personal or national life. From being a few simple rules these laws have grown to mammoth proportions, needing the expensive and ponderous machinery of the law courts with all their official procedure for the administration of some form of justice. Churches and society make their own laws and regulations for general conduct. This formidable array of do's and don't's is to the rebel a thorny barrier against which he kicks, but not without injury or loss. To the daring a challenge, to the mischievous a source of derision, the law yet remains the law, the rule of authority which all classes must observe if they wish to live with a degree of peace and security. Kicking over the traces, putting himself above and beyond the law, may produce a short lived satisfaction but in the long run the end is futility and misery. A lawless society, abandoning order for the wild frenzies of revolt, is headed for catastrophe.

Obedience to rule is not the easiest thing in the world. A multitude of restrictions becomes both tiresome and irksome. Few, if any, get through life without breaking rules or conveniently overlooking some of the less weighty matters of the law. Such is human nature and the observation that "all we like sheep have gone astray" and "there is none righteous, no not one" cannot be denied. To the verdict of Holy Writ Shakespeare adds tersely, "Conscience doth make cowards of us all". The ten laws of Israel in their short and simple clarity, though not beyond the mental ability of that new nation, were beyond their moral capacity.

Laws great and small, bye-laws, books of rules and strings of regulations, dominate human existence. There are also unwritten laws governing man's whole nature which have their own system of retribution and reward according to how well or ill they are observed. Above all are those universal laws which keep the earth on its axis, which govern day and night, which keep the heavens in their place, which man with all his vaunted skill and knowledge cannot outwit. Law is essential to life, and man is subject to law. There are man-made codes which cause resentment, yet the testimony of the experienced down the ages is that the law of God is lovable, livable, easy to understand and well worth keeping. It is an eternal principle to which a materialistic, disillusioned world will someday readily submit when the wisdom of this world has perished. Men, nations, civilisations come and go, but the

law of God is the deathless word by which life will be sustained in all worlds without end, for there is a law written in the inner being of man, "*the work of the law written in their hearts*" (Rom. 2.14-15), which makes itself heard and felt in all but the most hardened of evil doers. It is a fragment of original man which the temptations and failures of successive generations have not entirely eradicated. This still, small voice of conscience continues to play a part in the regulation of conduct despite the somewhat cynical conclusion of certain scientists that man is merely a machine. Whether a remarkable machine or cleverly put together by a master-craftsman is not openly admitted. Machines are made by someone and no self-respecting manufacturer will send out a good one without instructions for its maintenance. To keep a machine in good order and efficient use, the book of rules must be studied and carried out by the owner.

When God created man in the earth and of the earth, his book of rules was issued with him, written into him, so that he did not need to seek high or low or far and wide for information. He knew what was right and wrong for himself and for others because the rules were woven into his being. Failure to follow that law written into the heart and mind of man brought about those disruptions, disharmonies and disasters which must inevitably come to any piece of intricate machinery where the instructions for its preservation are ignored or neglected. As a notable public figure recently observed—"*Whenever there is trouble of a public or private nature you can be sure that some one has broken one of the ten commandments*".

In the first instance when the one rule of obedience snapped with dire consequences it might be said that an ambitious outsider with malevolent intentions disturbed the fine harmony by throwing a false element into the works, so creating a state of imperfection which has not yet been fully repaired. When later ten definite rules were issued as a code of law to assist the diminished power of man's moral nature, these also failed to correct the faulty human creature. In spite of promises the race which received them was either unable or unwilling to bear the discipline of rules. Down the centuries law-makers have been so busy adding to the instructions that even the lawyers are lost in the mazes of their own legislation.

The sensitive and sincere still hear and feel within them the sound and touch of the true regulator. To them the book of rules is still a salutary reminder of the frailty of human nature, something to be read, studied, learned and practised through all life's changing scenes and

chequered experiences. Although time has condensed the 'Thou shalt nots' into 'Thou shalt love' through the mouth of him who came to fulfil the law which man was unable or unwilling to apply, it still remains the standard for all, the

yardstick of conduct, the measure of a man's ability to love and obey God, to love and cherish his neighbour. The law written into man by his Maker is love, and love is the fulfilling of the law.  
*To be continued.*

## CHRISTIAN ZEAL

Zeal is a wonderful quality of passionate enthusiasm, and when manifest in the service of Christ it brings great blessing to the zealot and at the same time redounds in praise to God. Zeal implies whole-heartedness and determination to do with one's might what the hands find to do. As we look back upon the gigantic efforts of the harvest-time, so we cannot fail to recognise the presence of Christian zeal in large and over-coming measure, begotten of love for the Lord and for his Truth.

It is comparatively easy to be zealous in any cause for a time, but the race in which we are running cannot be won by fits and starts, but by patient continuance in well-doing. It is only they who endure unto the end who will be saved.

Zeal may be harnessed for either good or bad ends, and, in consequence, it may easily be mis-directed. The outstanding example which comes to mind is that of Saul of Tarsus, who in later life as the Apostle Paul, wrote of himself, "concerning zeal, persecuting the church" (Phil. 3. 5). At the material time, he had no faith in Christ, and his zealous disposition was manifest in relentless persecution of the early Christians. In due time, the Lord appeared to him on the Damascus road with his arresting message: "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest" (Acts 9. 5), and then followed his conversion, whereupon his zeal was turned in the opposite direction, as he thenceforth espoused the cause of Christ.

Another outstanding example is that of the typical people of God. Paul wrote of them: "*I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge*" (Rom. 10. 2), and in consequence their zeal was inevitably mis-directed. In this, as in other matters, they are an example to us that we should not fail in the same way.

This clearly demonstrates the importance of doctrine to the end that we may know the Father's will and then direct our zeal along right lines in the performance of that will. We cannot have too much doctrine so long as we use it aright so that the Truth has its sanctifying effect upon the heart and mind (John 17. 17). In our day, too, so much light has been shed upon the

pathway of the consecrated, and, while directing their zeal, it should also increase that zeal by reason of loving gratitude for such rich blessings received in this harvest-time of the Gospel Age.

Our service for the Lord should know no limits, and we should be ever on the alert to perform his bidding, using every opportunity that comes our way, in harmony with his revealed will. Christian zeal should be manifest in various ways, as will be shown later.

It is very significant that the message to Laodicea is marked by lukewarmness. This is a feature which the Lord cannot approve in his Church hence He says: "*I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot. I will spue thee out of my mouth*" (Rev. 3. 15-16). We must not for one moment think that this cannot apply to us because it refers to Laodicea, for the same conditions can and, indeed, have developed in our own midst. Indeed, verse 19 of the same message does not apply to a "tare" class, but to "wheat." The Lord never loved the tares, but he says, "*as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.*" Chastening is an evidence of sonship as seen in Hebrews 12.

From one standpoint it is strange that zeal always flourishes amid persecution. This is exemplified in the early Church during the time of Pagan persecution. When Constantine professed to embrace the Christian faith and the persecution ceased, the salutary influence in the direction of piety and self-abnegation was removed, and the Church became slack and worldly-minded.

Think of the zeal of the early days of the harvest, when there were not all the helps to Bible study that we enjoy to-day. With what earnest zeal did the watchers in Zion then search after the light; how such light as it appeared was hailed with joy and enthusiasm; and how did they show their gratitude to the Lord in consuming zeal as reapers in the harvest field. To-day, we are in danger of taking these blessings for granted, and of becoming slack as regards our

service for the Lord by failing fully to appreciate our tremendous privileges in his vineyard.

It is helpful to review the past and to take stock of the present in order to ascertain whether we are putting forth our maximum zeal in the Lord's cause. Service for the Lord is our one aim in life to which all else is subservient and we must see to it that we do not become weary in well doing, knowing that we shall reap in due season, provided we faint not in the meantime. Zeal, moreover, is infectious; it encourages others who may tend to tire in the race, and that is one of the main reasons why fellowship is so important a factor in the Christian, and a vital means of grace.

Zeal for the Lord will manifest itself in a consuming desire to meet in fellowship with those of like precious faith. We each must recognise duty towards the other members of the Body; we do not attend meetings simply to receive blessing, but to give forth blessing to others, and this is a privilege which all can enjoy, not merely those who are public teachers in the Ecclesia. It was for this reason, we remember, that the one talented man was chosen to illustrate talent burials—to show the responsibility of those who have least.

The spirit of enquiry is most pleasing to the Heavenly Father, as seen in his commendation of the beloved Daniel. Reverent enquiry into his Truth arises out of zeal, and this should be manifest in each one of us. If we are really zealous to know, we shall not be satisfied with superficial truths, but will desire to *search* the Scripture by means of the Spirit, which enables us to understand the "deep things" of God. God will honour our zeal by giving the necessary light to those who wait on him.

The Apostle Peter gives some conception of this aspect of matters when he says that even the angels desired to look into the things now made known to us. Once again, do we sufficiently realise our privileges.

In this connection, the words of the hymn come forcibly to mind: "*And may my zeal to*

*judgment brought, prove true beneath thy test.*" This, of course, exemplifies the thoughts given above to the effect that zeal must be directed by knowledge, although we are at the moment thinking of the matter from a slightly different angle, namely, the *intensity* of our zeal.

Zeal will contrive ways and means to prosecute deep study of the Word. God has promised the Holy Spirit to all those who ask, and we know that even frail intellect is no real barrier because the Lord can make up our lack, provided we have the desire to know, that is, so long as we have *zeal*.

To-day, many of the Lord's people are in difficulties of one kind or another, in material as well as spiritual crises. If we are zealous we shall seek opportunities to assist those of like faith. Examples come readily to mind of those who are noble patterns of zeal in this direction in tending sick brethren, ministering a word of comfort, and relieving one or other of the burdens which rest heavily upon the Body members.

The solemn question comes to each one: *Am I doing all I can to assist the brethren?* There are ample opportunities to-day, yet sometimes it is said that there is so little to do these days. Let us use all our opportunities, and pray to God for more, ever remembering that true love is impelled by consuming zeal. Does not the Psalmist say, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me" (Psa. 69; 9). It is significant that the Scriptures invariably speak in this fashion, for could we conceive anything more entire than that behind the expression that zeal "hath eaten me up"? Our consecration must be *full*; our sacrifice offered even *unto the end*; we must *do with our might* what our hands find to do; and we must never be weary in such well-doing. There are the zealous efforts of the saints of the Gospel Age, especially those who were martyred and who translated the Scriptures at their peril because of zealous love for him, and above all there is the perfect example in our Lord himself.

It is completely foreign to the New Testament to split the Christian community into one speaker and a silent body of listeners.

(Prof. E. Schweizer)

Look unto Jesus to receive from him the task and the cross of each day, with grace sufficient to bear the cross and fulfil the task, patient with his patience, active with his activity, loving with his love. Do not ask—"what can I" but "what cannot He", and wait upon his strength which is made perfect in weakness.

He who has drawn a conclusion from Scripture which Reason and Conscience imperatively condemn should need no other proof that he has misinterpreted the Word of God.

(Dr. Samuel Cox)

There are people who are not getting the blessing God intends them to have, simply because they have not learned the lesson of trusting God for each new day.

## THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

*A consideration of  
Divine Right*

### 1. Vessels unto Honour

*"Hath not the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Rom. 9.21 RV.)*

When Jesus began his ministry with the announcement "*Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*" (Matt. 4.17) the message at once attracted great attention. About the time of his birth considerable expectation of great changes in the national condition had arisen, and the spirit of keen enquiry filled the minds of both the nation and its leaders. Uncertainty concerning the expiry of the "seventy weeks" foretold to Daniel left the whole people open to easy leading by anyone presuming to come in the name of the Lord. The word used by the angel, "*hebdomad*"—seventy hebdomads—was of uncertain meaning when applied to the lapse of time. Literally it meant "seventy sevens" but whether these "seventy sevens" meant literal years ("seventy sevens of years") no one could say with certainty. Then, if they did represent years, what kind of years were they? Were they lunar or solar years? Every false Messiah over a period of more than a hundred years used this Messianic time-prophecy, each one varying his basis of calculation to suit his own particular claims.

Each unit of the "seventy sevens" were made to vary and represent from nine to eighteen months, by these false Messiahs, to suit their case, the shortest period thus covering about three hundred and seventy years, while the longest spread over seven hundred and forty years. One of these Messianic claimants had made his appearance about B.C.3. Another followed in A.D.6. Both are mentioned in Acts 5:36-37. Consequently, Messianic expectation had reached a high pitch about the time Jesus was born. After the disappearance of these two claimants, expectation subsided considerably, until John Baptist came on the scene calling the nation to repentance because the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand (Matt. 3.2). Crowds of people flocked to his ministry, and were baptised so as to be in readiness for the appearance of the King. When John disclaimed that honour for himself, the people realised that he was no self seeker, and rated his credit at a high level accordingly. John's claim to be only a voice in the wilderness proclaiming the way of the Lord kindled the fires

of expectation again, and fanned them to white hot flame.

Six months after John began to teach, Jesus came with the same proclamation: "*Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*". "And Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people. And the report of him went forth into all Syria . . . and there followed him great multitudes from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and beyond Jordan" (Matt. 4.23-25). The common people followed him eagerly, because so many of them benefited from his healing ministry, but the rulers followed only from afar. Some of them, like Nicodemus, conceded that Jesus must be a prophet sent from God, otherwise He could not have done the great things which He did (John 3.2), but the rulers were not too ready to accept him in any higher sense.

In course of time a conference was called to which came Pharisees and doctors of the law from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem—a national church council, in reality. In the midst of that representative assembly the power of the Lord to heal was with Jesus. A palsied man was let down through the roof into the midst of the conference. Seeing the evident confidence of the paralytic's friends that He could heal this sufferer, Jesus said to him, "*Man, thy sins are forgiven thee*" (Luke 5. 17-25). Immediately the Scribes and Pharisees began to remonstrate. To forgive sins in that way was blasphemous. That could only be done in the prescribed manner and place. Only in Jerusalem, and only by the Priest, or by the High Council in conjunction with the Priest, could such a thing be done. "*Who can forgive sins, but God alone?*" they said. To approach God required the Priest's intercessorship, at the place where God was reputed to dwell. "*Which is the easier course,*" asked Jesus, "*to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee, or to say Arise and walk?*" Receiving no answer, Jesus said, "*But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (He said unto the palsied man) Arise, take up thy couch, and go unto thy house*". And immediately the man rose up, gathered up his bed, and walked out of their midst.

From that time the attitude of the rulers stiffened against Jesus. This was not the type of

Messiah they wanted. Talking about sin, instead of talking against Rome was unacceptable in their eyes. Forgiving sin instead of exciting the populace to rebel was contrary to their expectations. They wanted to throw off the foreign yoke, and were waiting for a prince who would lead them to war and victory. Then his interference with priestly prerogatives was not to their taste. His action on that point was revolutionary and dangerous. If that attitude spread and infected the common folk, where would it end? The central power at Jerusalem would be broken, and their authority at an end. They did not mind revolutionary things happening so long as they could direct the storm. But it was against Rome, not Jerusalem, that they desired the lightning to strike.

Little by little, thereafter their attitude towards both Jesus and his acts of mercy became more hostile, till they determined that He was too dangerous to be allowed to live. Either He or their power must die. During this phase of gathering hostility, Jesus became more revolutionary still in act and utterance. Openly He derided Priests, Levites, Pharisees, Scribes, and rulers of the people. He taught them what the nation's elite ought to do, and showed them how far the rulers came short. He publicly exposed the Temple authorities, and himself drove out the mercenary traffickers from the Temple courts. As time went by, the subject of his discourse changed. He spoke less of the Kingdom, and more about his sufferings and the purpose to be served thereby. When the mother of two followers desired prominent Kingdom honours for her sons, He told them they had not understood the changes under way. Did they really want to enter with him into Kingdom power—if so, could they enter into his baptism first? Could they drink also of his Cup? Blessing Peter for his confession—an understanding bestowed from Heaven—though He were the Christ,—the long-expected Messiah—yet He was soon to be smitten in death and not crowned with majesty. And if any man would be his disciple, let him too take up his cross, and follow him into death. Thus the objectives of his teaching changed. No longer did He address himself to the nation as a whole, but to the little group, who, in spite of the official frown, still clung to him and his words. He had come, at first, to his own as a people, but they received him not. Only a "little flock" had accepted him, and even they did not fully understand. His words and actions baffled them. Of the Priesthood He said, their house was to become desolate; of Jerusalem, it was to be laid in the dust; of his followers, He would covenant unto them a kingdom when He should return from heaven. It was

hard for them to believe that their nation would be rejected and overthrown, while they, insignificant as they were, should be accepted to a throne.

This was the germ of the great theme which the risen Lord selected another Apostle to proclaim. After revealing himself alive to Saul on the Damascus way, the Lord sent him forth as a chosen vessel to proclaim his Name "*before . . . the children of Israel*" (Acts 9.15) and to suffer for his testimony. That "Name" and "testimony" denoted many things, many facets of Divine Truth. To those who could accept the testimony of the Lord it introduced them to wonderful opportunities and privileges. To those who would not accept that testimony it spoke of rejection, and of ancient privileges withdrawn. Little by little they learned to think and speak of God's work as "Taking out a people for his Name" while the "Tabernacle of David" was to lie awhile in the dust. ?

They learned that the church of God was to be built up into Christ as a remnant of individual believers, while the nation as a whole would stumble and fall to its doom. These things they taught wherever they went, both in public synagogues and private homes. As a consequence, the ruling class, together with the Priests, became increasingly bitter and hostile to such as Paul. "*It is not fit that he should live*", they said after hearing his defence (Acts 22.22). They would have destroyed Paul forthwith. Many thousands (Acts 21. 20) sought to amalgamate the new teaching with the old, unable to see and realise that the two teachings would not blend. They could not detach themselves from the Temple and its activities so long as it remained, nor yet make a full, clean break from the services of the Priests (see Acts 21.20, 25).

In every place where Paul found a little circle of believers and organised them into a church, this Judaising section sent their emissaries to override Paul's work and gather the fruits of Paul's missionary enterprise into their fold. They persecuted Paul and his little band of helpers everywhere, even going so far as to plot his death (Acts 23. 12-14). Paul waged his side of the conflict by voice and pen, using his clear insight into the dispensational changes, and his great intellect, to speak and write incessantly to bring home, were it possible, to his erring brethren their great mistake. They would not allow themselves to realise that God had set aside the nation as a whole, rulers and people alike, and was now taking out from their midst only such as believed in Jesus and were ready to follow in his steps. That the Mosaic system could be superseded was more than they could accept. That the Aaronic

Priesthood should be terminated and the Temple service fail they could not believe.

In the peak days of this controversy Paul purposed to visit Rome. In Rome were many Jews, who, though not then hostile to Paul, had heard many things about the Christian sect (Acts 28. 22). Also, a community of Christian believers had been established there. Both these and they Paul desired to see, to tell them the good news of Christ.

Knowing the Christian community there would have the same dispensational and doctrinal difficulties as their brethren in the Asiatic churches, Paul wrote for them an outline of the Christian faith as taught by himself everywhere he went. Discussing first the great themes of Redemption and Reconciliation, he next tells them of their privileges in Christ. He explains to them the deep things concerning baptism unto Christ, into his death, leading up to a grand climax concerning the call of many brethren, who, by Divine Power, would be conformed to the Image of God's Son.

Passing, then, to consider dispensational facts, he opens up the great theme that raised conten-

tion in every Judaising community. Had God set aside his ancient nation? And was He now gathering only a small remnant therefrom? Had God decreed that if it refused Jesus the nation should fall, and only a small selected company be saved? If this were so, the Judaisers said, God was unrighteous and unfaithful to his ancient promise! In view of the great promises of bygone days God could not cast off or set aside his nation, so they said. Were they not still observing his ordinances, and maintaining his Temple in their midst? Paul meets these arguments by his parable of the Potter and the Clay, and shows that of the same lump of clay God could indeed take a portion and make it into a vessel of surpassing honour, while setting the remainder aside to be made up according to his sovereign Will some later day.

Paul's doctrine gathered up the teaching of his Master and set them out with great force. The nation was to be rejected and left desolate, while a little flock, baptised with and into his baptism, were to be made like him; and with him, and "in him", constitute God's Anointed, God's choicest vessel of all time. *To be continued.*

## A SONG OF VICTORY

*A Meditation on the  
22nd Psalm*

We read that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. They were permitted to pass through certain experiences and then to write of them, and so leave on record certain features to attend another set of circumstances which God would provide at some future date. Thus, the experiences they went through became prophetic pictures of the experiences of someone else. Often they picture those of Jesus, and so become Messianic prophecies. Sometimes they prefigure and illustrate the sufferings of the larger Christ—Head and Body—or perhaps to some extent the terrible experiences that the Jewish nation has passed through during the centuries. It is not always easy to make a proper distinction. The Ethiopian eunuch who was reading Isa. 53 asked in perplexity: "Of whom writeth the prophet this, of himself or of some other man?" It was explained to him by Philip that the prophet was describing the sufferings of the One who had recently been put to death at Jerusalem. The Jews, however, to this day suppose that Isa. 53 has reference to their own terrible history as a nation.

It is probable that the eunuch would likewise have been perplexed respecting the application of Psalm 22; was the writer describing his own

experiences, or did he speak of another? The Psalm is described as a Psalm of David. Whether that be so or not, it seems quite probable that the writer began to write about himself. Before he has got very far the Holy Spirit comes upon him, and he commences describing, with a wealth of detail, circumstances which could not possibly have happened to himself. With a poet's imagination he writes of One who suffers intense agony of mind and body. With the skill of an artist he portrays a very vivid drama which grows more intense every moment, until it mounts to a climax and then abruptly terminates. After a pause the curtain is raised again, and a happier scene is presented. The Victim has become the Hero; the Suppliant Sufferer has given place to the Joyous Victor.

It seems quite evident that the Sufferer in the Psalm is an individual and not a nation, for verse 14 refers to his heart, bones and body, verse 15 to his tongue and jaws, verse 16 to hands and feet, and verse 18 to clothing. In verses 9 and 10 He looks back to childhood, and forward to death in verse 15. His situation is described with minuteness; He is exposed to the public view (verse 7), apparently He is fixed to one spot, for his enemies gather around him

(verse 12), He is deprived of his clothing, for He can count his bones (verse 17), He sees his garments distributed (verse 18), and He has been subjected to violence, for his feet and hands have been bored through (verse 16). Inasmuch as Rotherham translates verse 17, "they look for and behold me," it may well be that either He has companions in suffering from whom it would seem to the onlookers desirable to distinguish him, or else that darkness has gathered and it is difficult to discern him. He is either absolutely friendless, or his friends are so few and feeble that they do not count, hence his repeated cries for Divine pity and succour (verse 11). Nevertheless, verse 22 shows that He has friends in the background, amounting to a large assembly, but they do not come into view till the sufferings are ended. His enemies are many; mankind in general reproach him, his own people despise him, beholders deride (verses 6, 7 and 8). Meanwhile, his sufferings are intense, his strength flows away like water, and physical courage fails like wax (verses 14 and 15). He struggles to maintain faith in God, who seems to him to be far away and slow to rescue. Crying to him day and night brings no answer—the delay to help is all very mysterious. The fathers had trusted and been delivered in their adversities, He had trusted and not been delivered; indeed, verse 11 implies almost that He had been handed over to his enemies by permission of God. The sufferings grow in intensity, and his appeals for Divine aid are louder (verses 19 and 20), but the face of God seems turned away and in anguish He cries, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (verse 1). His heart is bursting, He had never anticipated such intense mental suffering as that which these words imply. There is a last cry (verse 21): "Save me from the lion's mouth" — then silence reigns. . . .

There is a sudden calm; all at once the strain of sorrow ceases with the "Yea" of verse 21 . . . "Thou hast delivered me." There is no recurrence of pain, no further trace of a single sob, the voice is hushed in death, but, marvel of marvels, suddenly the voice is heard again and on a note of praise. It is the same voice—the same metre—the same direct address to God; despair has given place to praise, keenest suffering has given way to ecstatic joy, all is changed! Deliverance has come! So great is his gratitude that He must shout his deliverance abroad (verses 21 and 22). His own deliverance is a matter of the deepest interest to the world at large. He calls upon Jew and Gentile to praise Jehovah, "For

He hath not despised nor abhorred the humbling of the patient One, neither hath He hid his face from him, but when He cried for help unto him He heard. Of thee is my praise in the great convocation, my vows will I pay before them who revere him" (verses 24 and 25, Rotherham).

As we go through this Psalm there is in our minds one name only: JESUS. Surely, it is the crucifixion of our Saviour which is here portrayed with such a depth of feeling and wealth of pathos. It could not be anyone else. We seem to hear the appealing cry: "*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger*" (Lam. 1. 12). We cannot pass by, we are arrested and gaze at that sublime exhibition of sacrifice and suffering, we marvel and silently meditate upon the Mystery of Divine Love. It is much to us—nay, it is EVERYTHING to us.

Did the Father hear when Jesus cried unto him? Yes, He heard, and showed that He heard by mercifully cutting short those sufferings and eventually raising Jesus again from the grave. Because of his trust in God, He came forth an overcomer, a hero—a conqueror.

The lesson is an inspiring one. Often God does not answer prayer for deliverance exactly the way we expect; we have to descend into the very depths first before He puts forth his power to rescue, and then aid comes in an unforeseen manner. His ways are manifold, wise and loving and just, as He rescued our Lord and Saviour from the power of death, so He can and will rescue all who put their confidence in him. "For He hath not despised nor abhorred the humbling of the Patient One, neither hath He hid his face from him, but when He cried for help unto him He heard."

What a very fitting sequel the last few verses present. Only through the Redeemer's death—the one and only great sacrifice for sin, can mankind obtain life. There is no salvation except through Jesus, and we have the assurance that when the knowledge of God's way of salvation is known in all the earth, then all the ends of the world will turn unto the Lord. All shall worship before him and recognise that apart from Jesus none can keep alive his own soul. Through all the coming ages the story of this great sacrifice will be told, and the exulting shout of praise to God will pass from mouth to mouth: "*He hath done it, He hath done it!*" Truly, it will then be fulfilled that Jesus shall "*see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.*"



# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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

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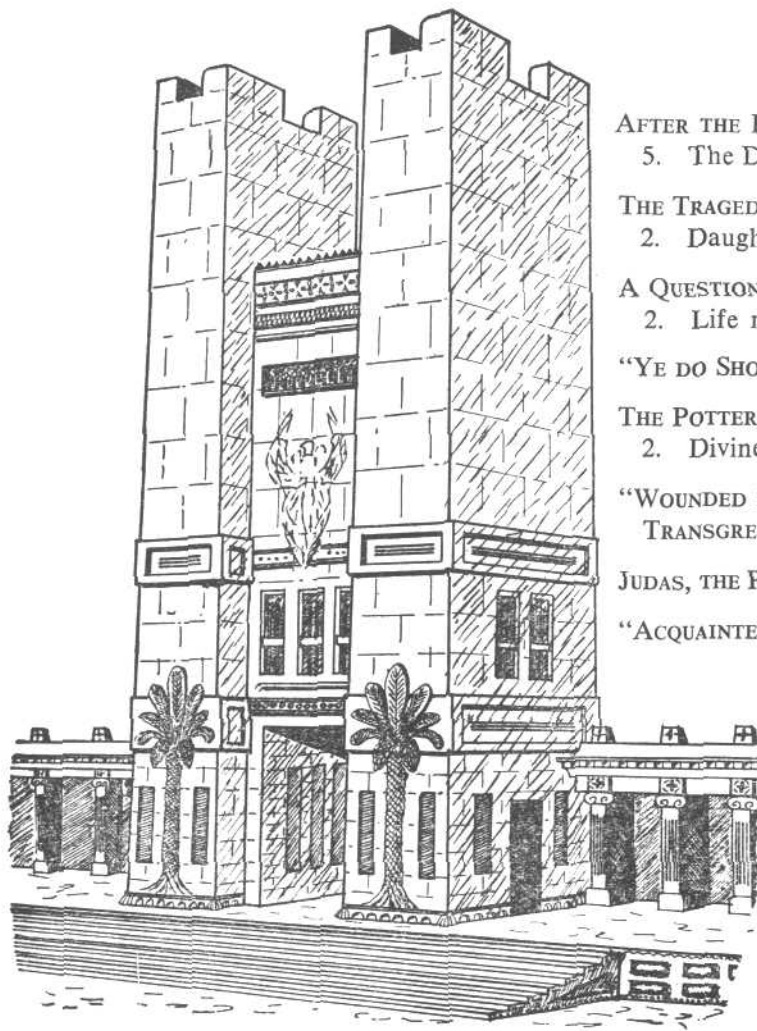
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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## NOTICES

**The Memorial.** The anniversary of the Last Supper falls this year on the evening of Thursday, April 4.

\* \* \*

### Coming Conventions

YEOVIL, one-day, Sunday, May 5, Moose Hall. Details Bro. H. Charlton, 14 Orchard Road, Milborne Port, Sherborne, Dorset.

YEOVIL, Sat.-Mon., May 25-27. Sunday at Moose Hall, St. Michaels Avenue. Other days Hillgrove Ave. Details and accommodation Bro. R. Robinson, 26 Rands Meadow, Holwell-Hitchin, Herts., SG5 3SH.

\* \* \*

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 „ 34 Everlasting Punishment.  
 „ 35 Conversion in the After-life.  
 „ 36 The Resurrection of the Dead.  
 „ 37 The Second Advent—Nature and Purpose.  
 „ 38 The Call and Destiny of Israel.  
 „ 39 The Personality of Satan.  
 „ 40 The Gifts of the Spirit.  
 „ 41 Man—the Image of God.

\* \* \*

**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 life of a soldier, even on the alert and on duty, is by no means an easy life; nor do the Scriptures warrant any such expectation. On the contrary, they say “Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ”; “Fight the good fight of faith”. And yet many Christian people seem to have the very opposite idea. Their ideal Christian life is one without a breeze or a storm; it must be one continuous calm. Such a life was indeed more possible in former days than now, though the world, the flesh and the Devil always have opposed them, and always have had to be resisted by every loyal soldier of the cross. But now the opposition is daily becoming more and more intense; for Satan realises that his time is short, and he is determined by any and every means to exert his power against the consummation of the Lord’s plan for the exaltation of the Church.

## Gone from us



Sis. E. Mayhew (Aldersbrook)



“Till the day break, and the shadows flee away.”

## AFTER THE FLOOD

### 5. The Dispersal of the People

The 10th Chapter of Genesis is called the "Table of Nations". It is the famous chapter in which the names of the immediate descendants of Noah to the second and in some cases the fourth and even seventh generation are recorded, and an intimation given that these became the names of the nations which sprang from them and the territories in which they lived. It has been argued that the reverse is really the case, that the names of existing nations and peoples have been applied to mythical ancestors and so written up in Genesis. This is a hypothesis having no logical foundation and is advanced in order to dispute the historical accuracy of the account. The rational explanation of the name of a people is that it was derived from the founder of that people, just as the surname of a family is derived from the ancestor of that family in the male line. In fact many of the names in Genesis 10 crop up regularly in the later historical books of the Bible and in secular history as those of nations occupying the lands Genesis says they did; some of the place names have endured into much later historical periods, even modern times.

A comparison of the declared ages of the patriarchs succeeding Noah with what is known of earliest history and pre-history in the lands of the Old Testament leads to an estimate that the outward expansion of peoples from the originating centre at Shinar at the time of the episode of Babel, recorded in Gen. 11 was likely to have commenced round about 3000 B.C. and that within the ensuing two centuries most of the so-called "Bible lands" were occupied and being populated by their respective peoples. The principal basis for this conclusion is the probable time of the beginnings of Egyptian and Sumerian civilisations; the time of the dispersal must have "sparked off" the emergence of those civilisations. In those two centuries the population could have grown to something like sixty millions, spreading over the present lands of Egypt, Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, an area of about three million square miles of which the population at the present time is about 80 millions.

The location of the various nations bearing these tribal names, the names of their first ancestors, is in most cases fairly well attested by references not only in the Bible but in the writings of ancient historians, and, too, in the inscriptions and records left by those ancient nations themselves. The patriarchs must have had other sons, whose names are not recorded; probably those

which are known became the tribal names which included such as well. One nation often dispossessed another of their territory, or settled down beside them and eventually amalgamated, so that it is not possible to be too precise. Accepted history, however, leaves the general framework of the dispersal in little doubt.

The sons of Japheth (Gen. 10.2-8) appear to have left the plain of Shinar completely. They rarely appear in later Bible history. They migrated north and then west and east, moving up the valleys of the rivers Tigris and Diyala into the mountainous regions and beyond. Extensive remains in northern Iraq dated by archaeologists to what is called the Halafian period, from Tel Halaf where the first such remains were found by Baron von Oppenheim in 1914 and later by Mallowan in 1933, are perhaps due to their passage. Eventually they penetrated into what is now modern Turkey, from whence they later advanced westward into Europe, and eastward into Siberia. Many centuries later in the days of Ezekiel some of their offspring, the tribes of Meshech, Tubal, and Gomer, all names of sons of Japheth, stormed down from their Siberian homes to invade the lands of the Middle East. But in these first two centuries of the dispersal Turkey and northern Iran was probably as far as they got. Bible maps of the 19th century shows them penetrating into southern Russia; during the present century it has been established that at the time in question the great Russian seas, the Black Sea, the Caspian and the Aral, were connected by an extensive sheet of water stretching far into Central Siberia, so the old maps are incorrect. The sons of Japheth had only the alternatives of turning east or west. It is generally accepted that Javan and possibly Tiras, and their sons, colonised Europe, and the others, Asia. The writer of Genesis 10 denoted both these continents by the expression "the coastlands of the Gentiles" (Gen. 10.5), territories he knew very little about.

The sons of Ham went south, then west and east, in the opposite direction to that of Japheth. The descendants of Ham's son Mizraim settled in Egypt, which thereafter bore his name (Misr) and in the Egyptian language bears it still. Here was speedily set up the second great civilisation of the ancient world. Before another two centuries had passed they were building the Pyramids and the glory that was Egypt was beginning to flourish. It is important to realise that they were already a civilised people and the rule of the

Pharaohs commenced almost at once.

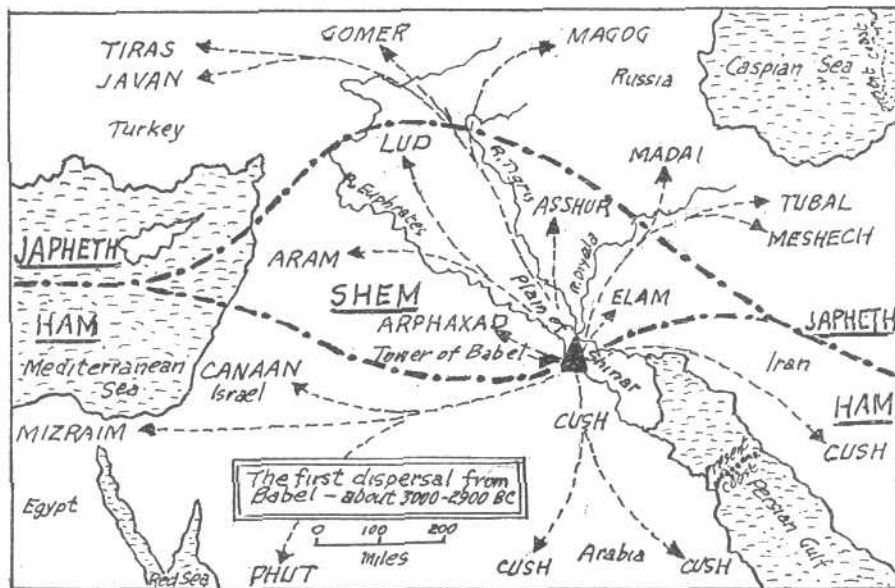
Canaan, son of Ham, did not go so far. His people reached the Mediterranean coast where Israel is now, built Sodom and Gomorrah and Tyre and Sidon—the latter town still existing—and possibly Jericho. In later times they were overwhelmed and absorbed by descendants of Shem and after the conquest under Joshua lost their identity as a nation, surviving only as scattered tribes subject to the Israelites and others thus fulfilling Noah's prediction in Gen. 9.26. The settlement of the Canaanite tribes is detailed in Gen. 10.15-19.

Phut is the son of Ham of whom the Old Testament writers know little or nothing. Gen. 10 records neither the names of his sons nor where he went. It is evident that he and his lost all contact with their fellows after the dispersal. The Old Testament mentions the Phutites only twice afterwards, in connection with matters two thousand years later, from which it appears they were celebrated as mariners and soldiers. It is known that the Phutites in after years became a virile race of commercial traders ranging over the whole of North Africa from the borders of Egypt to the Atlantic. As late as the beginning of the Christian era they are noted by Roman writers. Their empire at its greatest extent included the whole of the Sahara desert, which four thousand years ago was a well-wooded and fertile country with abundant animal life capable of supporting a large population. It seems that the people of Phut made their way from Babel to north-eastern Africa and thenceforward broke off all contact with the homeland, spreading ever westwards as the centuries passed until they reached the Atlantic ocean. The Book of Jubilees (c. 150 BC) has a detailed account of the lands into which the grandsons of Noah migrated, and a rather cryptic expression in Jub. 8.22 could be held to infer that the territory assigned to Ham's posterity extended across the Atlantic to the Sargasso Sea and by inference to the West Indian Islands immediately beyond. Since "Jubilees" was written about BC 150 and the Phoenicians were in continuous contact with the West Indies, and South America as far back as 800 BC; there is nothing unreasonable in that although it must have been many centuries after Babel that the first mariners fulfilled this part of the mandate and crossed the Atlantic. Another point of interest in "Jubilees" is its assertion that Canaan was first allotted the far west of Africa on the Atlantic seaboard as his domicile, but refused to go so far west and settled instead in the land later known as Canaan, after his name.

The Hamites of greatest moment in Bible history are the sons of Cush. Cush, son of Ham,

was the ancestor of the Sumerians who played so important a part in the early history of Israel. The descendants of Cush appear to have been by far the most prolific of the Hamites. Some went southwards into Arabia and colonised the whole of the Arabian continent, passing over the Red Sea in later centuries to establish a powerful empire in what is now the Sudan. (The "Ethiopia" of the later Old Testament is this African Cush). From there they went on through the ages to colonise Equatorial and Southern Africa; most of the black races there are their modern descendants. Another branch went down the other side of the Persian Gulf through modern Iran, by 2000 BC reaching north-western India where they established a Sumerian civilisation which maintained close commercial links with their brother Sumerians back in Iraq. That civilisation was wiped out by Japhetic invaders from Siberia a thousand years later and the remnants slowly spread across and populated in turn central India and Bengal, the far eastern countries, losing much of their high degree of civilisation as they did so, until during the Christian era they arrived in Australia as the aboriginal people found there later by the first white men to visit that continent. (In 1961 some 400 rock carvings were discovered near Alice Springs so similar to Assyrio-Sumerian style that it was considered they must have been done by a people coming from the Middle East.)

But the flower of the Sumerian peoples remained in Sumer itself. Many of them did not leave Babel; they remained there and built what is universally considered the world's first and finest civilisation. A thousand years it lasted, and in its development was set the pattern of all future empires of mankind. Here were the arts and sciences born, reaching a level which in many directions has never been equalled. Their systems of measurement, of time, quantity, weights and measures, has formed the basis of all such systems in the world since then, until the modern introduction of the metric system. The degrees of the circle, the hours and minutes and seconds on our clocks, the days and months of our calendars, we owe to the Sumerians. Their chariots gave us the width of our mediæval farm cart tracks and therefore that of our present railway gauge. In almost countless ways the effect of Sumerian culture has survived five thousand years and remains with us today. Here in this land, where these sons of Cush remained after the dispersion from Babel, and multiplied and established their cities and their commerce, was the seedbed where the true faith of God lay dormant until many years later it found its most famous champion in the man God



called his friend, Abram the Semite, a citizen of the Sumerian city of Ur. And when Abram obeyed the Divine call to leave that shining civilisation and go out to a strange land which God would show him, Sumer had served its purpose. It gave way before its enemies and ere long the glory of Sumer was no more.

Abram was a Semite, a descendant of Shem. The evidence is that most of the Semites left the land at the time of Babel. Many returned in later centuries so that by the time of Daniel, for example, the Semites were in the ascendancy. But here at this time they seem to have turned their backs on the land of Shinar and made their way, in the main, north-westward along the course of the Euphrates to find new homes. They did not go so far as did the peoples of Japheth and Ham. Elam went eastward into the Iranian mountains and became a powerful nation intermarrying with the Sumerians and becoming indistinguishable from them. Asshur went northward and survived into later times as the Assyrians. Aram finished up in modern Syria and southern Turkey and perpetuated his name to the present day in the racial division known as Arameans. No satisfactory identification of Lud seems to have been made; it has been suggested that the much later kingdom of Lydia in Asiatic Greece stemmed from him but there is not much foundation for that although in all probability it was somewhere in what is now Turkey that this people did settle. The remaining tribe, that of Arphaxad, is of greatest interest since it is from this that Abraham, and ultimately Israel, were

derived. The known territories of Semitic peoples in later times seems to justify the conclusion that the people of Arphaxad settled on the middle Euphrates a few miles to the north of Babel, to give birth several centuries later to the influential empire of Mari.

So, within say two centuries from the first entry to the land of Shinar and the incident of the Tower of Babel, men had reached and populated a wide area reaching from Egypt to Iran west to east, and Turkey to Arabia north to south. These are the lands with which the Old Testament is mainly concerned, and in fact the further distribution of humanity after this time is barely noticed. It was, of course, to be a long time before the farthestmost recesses of the earth were reached; a coherent picture of the process is almost impossible of attainment, for the migrating communities crossed and re-crossed each others' paths and settled in each others' territories so that there was continual intermarrying and cross-breeding with consequent emergence of new and differing racial types. Various types of climate and food played their part in this and all these factors worked together so fulfilling the Divine purpose to produce the varied types of men with which we are familiar today.

It may seem difficult to accept the fact that the many widely divergent types of men, black, brown, red, yellow and white, straight haired and frizzy haired, tall and muscular, pigmy and weak, should all have been derived from three sons of one father so recently as five thousand years ago. There are three main races of mankind, denoted

by long scientific words which in plain English mean long-headed, round-headed and intermediate headed, with a fourth sub-race which seems to have been derived from one of the three. But there is a bewildering number of permutations which can only mean that if the Genesis account is to be taken as accurate there has been a tremendous amount of intermingling of the races, during that five thousand years. There is nothing improbable in this; it would be surprising were it not so. What is perhaps less capable of easy explanation is the existence of evidence that the black races at any rate had acquired their characteristic colour within eight or nine centuries from the dispersion from Babel. This is attested by existing tomb paintings in Egypt going back to the 7th Egyptian dynasty of about 2100 BC on which African natives are shown with black skins and typical negro features, whereas the racially akin Egyptians are pictured with coppery red faces, and the also near-of-kin Phutites inhabiting the northern part of Africa with red and yellow skins. It is commonly held that the characteristic colours of different races are primarily due to the effect of food and climate, and prolonged exposure over many generations to tropical sun on the one hand and to temperate or polar climates on the other. H. G. Wells, the philosophic writer of the early 20th century, alludes to this in his *"Outline of History"* (1930). He cites anthropological thought of his time as holding that the human race in its early days was more "plastic" in its reaction to external conditions, so that it responded much more quickly to factors inducing physical changes than would be the case in later times. The same authorities contended that the original colour of the race tended to be dark rather than light, so that communities tended to become white or black, as they migrated into new and hitherto uninhabited regions. This, if a correct conclusion, would appear to meet the requirements of the case. In much the same way as a child develops and changes form rapidly during the first twenty or so years of life, and attains maturity and a relatively stable physique from then onwards, so, perhaps, racially, the descendants of the three sons of Noah differentiated very rapidly at first, whilst retaining their predominant Semitic, Hamitic or Japhetic characteristics, and after that only varied according to the extent of intermarrying which occurred.

There is also the fact that, while Genesis insists that all men are descended from three sons of one man, there is nothing said about their wives. They may well have been of widely different antediluvian racial types. The same considerations must have applied in antediluvian as in postdiluvian times. A favourite theme of 19th century

commentators was that Ham must have married a woman of the descendants of Cain and this would account for his descendants being black. There is no Biblical basis for that, of course. It is to be feared that the idea arose because Ham appears in an unsavoury light in Gen. 9 and Cain, of course, was the first murderer, and the sins of both are visited upon the unhappy heads of Ham's children five thousand years later. But the three wives would most certainly have had a lot to do with the varied characteristics of the three great races of mankind.

There is much in the foregoing which cuts right across the accepted theories of the origin of man and the time he has inhabited the earth. That is inevitable. There is nothing, of course, to inhibit the conclusion that many of the early remains which have been found are in fact relics of antediluvian man. There is nothing in Genesis to forbid the belief that men had spread quite widely over the earth in the period before the Flood; nothing, on the other hand, to contradict High Miller's thesis in *"The Testimony of the Rocks"*, that by the time the Flood came the human race had almost died out because of excessive degeneracy caused by sin. What has to be accepted is that if Genesis is an authentic historical record of the times with which it deals, then round about the commencement of the 3rd millennium BC the human race made a fresh start in the persons of three couples, and from them all now living are descended. What is known of human history does not militate against that position, but then human history as at present known only goes back some twenty-five centuries before Christ. Before that there are no written records, no inscriptions, nothing to yield any information what men did or how they lived, only the Book of Genesis. The fact that its own internal structure shows that it was composed or at least compiled at about that time, and the parallel fact that it is the only claimant to being a history from the beginning, should at least grant it some respect. The many hypotheses of investigators as to the origin of mankind change repeatedly as fresh discoveries nullify previously held theories; only the Bible record remains consistent and unchanging.

So, in line with the Genesis account and the time periods indicated therein, set against the background of what is known apart from the Bible of man's early beginnings, there was, about four centuries after the Flood, a concerted migration of peoples from the central homeland between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris in lower Iraq to populate that area of the Middle East which afterwards became famous as the lands of the Bible, those with which the history and fortunes of the nation of Israel afterwards became

bound up, and because of that fact, and the connection all that had with Christianity in much later times, is perhaps the best-known part of the whole world so far as ancient history is concerned. That migration gave an impetus to the emerging nations which enormously accelerated their development, and almost immediately we pass

into the sphere of recognisable history and can begin to relate the continuing story of Genesis to the records and inscriptions which the archaeologists of the past century or more have recovered in such profusion from the dust of the long-vanished cities of the ancients.

*To be continued.*

## THE TRAGEDY OF SAMSON

*The story of  
a great failure*

### 2. Daughter of the Philistines

*"And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up and told his father and his mother, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore get her for me to wife." (Jud. 14. 1-2.)*

Easy-going, casual words, but in one moment they destroyed a father's pride and a mother's hopes. That their son, dedicated to the Lord from his birth, marked out for Divine service and Divine honours, pre-ordained to deliver Israel from the Philistines, should deny all the high ideals inculcated in him from childhood, by choosing for his wife a woman of the godless aliens, must have caused heartbreak to his parents and consternation throughout Zorah. Where now were all the golden expectations of freedom from servitude and restoration of racial pride and dignity? Their champion had failed them; their idol had feet of clay. *"Is there not a woman of the families of Israel, that thou takest a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?"* expostulated his father bitterly. Samson only replied indifferently, *"Get her for me, for she pleaseth me well"*. There is all the arrogance and self confidence of inexperienced youth in that remark.

It need not be thought that Samson was either repudiating his Divine calling nor even consciously violating his obligations as a Nazarite. The trouble ran much deeper than that. All the evidence goes to show that Samson interpreted his commission in terms of his own physical strength bestowed by God, and believed that his personal relationship to God was of no consequence provided he made use of his physical powers to inflict as much damage upon the Philistines as he could. Samson is the perfect example of the natural man who perceives not the things of the Spirit of God even though he pay God lip service and believe himself to be a favoured one of God. The obligations of the Mosaic Law and of the Nazarite's vow meant nothing to Samson the while he could go out and kill Philistines for God. It was only when the natural strength failed him and he was brought low in suffering that his mind be-

came ennobled to better things. But at this time in his life that sequel lay far in the distant future.

Timnath was a village some six or seven miles from Zorah, lying just inside the boundaries of the tribe of Judah and only a mile or so from the Philistine population and mixed marriages were probably not at all uncommon, despite the prohibitions of the Law Covenant against such unions. Samson must have known the village well and some of his boyhood friends would have been Timnathites. The athletic figure of the Hebrew youth, his flowing locks and keen, clear eyes, would make him attractive in the eyes of all the village maidens and even a Philistine father would not object to a match with a man of such known prowess. So the marriage was arranged. With heavy heart, assuredly, Manaoh performed the distasteful task, demanded by the custom of the day, of consulting with the Philistine father of the girl and agreeing upon the details of her dowry, the guarantees and assurances necessary on behalf of his son, and all the arrangements which had to be made before the union could become effective. This to the Hebrews was the real marriage, after which the bride remained at her father's house for a period of months, before her husband came to take her to her new home. This part of the arrangement did not conform to Philistine custom and probably that fact was partly responsible for the sequel.

So it came about that within a little while Samson was striding along the narrow track which led from Zorah to Timnath, on the way to finalise the contract with the woman who had taken his fancy. Canaan was a fertile and tree-clad country in those days, and the wilder parts between centres of habitation harboured many wild animals, some of them dangerous to man, so that Samson may not have been altogether surprised at the sudden appearance, on the pathway before him, of a lion. The beast was probably the more frightened. The narrative says, "A young lion roared against him"—the prelude to its crouching for a spring. Samson, confident in his strength and agility, waited for the leap. As it came, he

adroitly sidestepped and in a lightning flash got behind and above the animal, his hands round its throat, taking care to keep out of the way of its flailing limbs, bending its neck backward until he had throttled its life out of existence. With, perhaps, a gesture of contempt, he flung the lifeless body by the wayside and strode on his way, reveling afresh in his strength and probably praising God for his victory. The account says that the Spirit of God came upon him to do this thing; we have to remember that there were no eye-witnesses so the account of the incident had in the first place to come from Samson himself. He must have accredited his power and deliverance to the Spirit of God and this would be in all sincerity. He did believe that God was giving him this physical strength in every time of need and the chronicler of the story would repeat Samson's assertion in all good faith. And who, reading the entire story and viewing the life of Samson in relation to the onward development of God's purposes, can doubt that the Holy Spirit did indeed give him strength above that of most men that he might work out the destiny planned for him, even though in the end he failed to make of it all that could have been had he been less a slave to his own fleshly passions?

The period of waiting ended, Samson again took the path to Timnath to claim his bride. It seems to have been an unusually casual proceeding for a son of Israel. As a rule this was the festive occasion on which the bride waited with her maidens for the coming of the bridegroom, and that fortunate man set out accompanied by all his men friends, and with every manifestation of rejoicing and merriment, to bring his bride back to her new home. On this occasion it is evident that Samson set out by himself, and that his parents must have preceded him. Perhaps the marriage was not too popular in Zorah and his friends wanted nothing to do with it. When the feast finally was held it was at the bride's house and not the bridegroom's, and the companions of the bridegroom turned out to be Philistine men friends of the bride, facts which are significant. The casual nature of the whole proceeding is heightened by the fact that Samson, on his way to his bride, found time to turn aside to look for the carcass of the lion he had slain some months previously when last he had passed this way. He found the skeleton—the flesh would have been completely consumed by vultures within a very few hours of death—and in the skeleton a colony of bees. Without ado he scooped out the honey with his hands, *"and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave to them, and they did eat; but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion."*

They would not have eaten had he told them. Staunch supporters of the Law, they knew better than to eat that which was defiled by association with the remains of the dead. Samson committed two further breaches of his Nazarite vows in this incident. He defiled himself by touching the dead carcass, and he partook of that which was defined in the Law as "strong drink," i.e., anything fermented. The ancients used honey as a means of producing fermented liquors. For so paltry an immediate attraction as a mouthful of honey he ignored his obligation to God. There is a strong likeness between Samson and Esau. Esau also insisted on marrying alien women and sold his birthright for the present satisfaction of a mess of pottage.

The wedding feast proceeded, but the outcome was disastrous. Thirty full-blooded Philistine youths drinking Samson's wine almost certainly *spelt trouble, and trouble was not long in coming.* Samson, probably himself flushed with wine, challenged the thirty to a tussle of wits. He would propound a *conundrum*, a "riddle" as the Authorised Version has it, the loser paying to the winner thirty mantles ("sheets" in the Authorised Version), and thirty sets of inner garments. The youths accepted the challenge, and Samson, remembering his finding the honey in the lion's carcass, gave them *"out of the eater came forth food ("meat" in the Authorised Version) and out of the strong came forth sweetness"*. It would seem to us a particularly difficult conundrum for anyone completely unfamiliar with the circumstances to solve; probably, however, the solution was arrived at by a series of replies to eliminating questions, after the fashion of some modern party games. This, however, was no party game. These Philistine youths had no intention of being on the losing side, and when after three days they were still as far off the solution as ever they determined on more drastic steps.

This feast was a most elaborate affair. It was apparently designed to continue for seven days. The impropriety of such a period of conviviality with the people he had been commissioned from birth to oppose and fight, and if necessary destroy in order to deliver Israel, apparently had not entered Samson's mind. These men, Philistines or not, had come to celebrate his wedding and he intended to see that it was well and truly celebrated. And so he awaited in genial equanimity the thirty mantles and sets of inner garments, the price of their failure to guess his riddle.

Samson's newly married wife, however, was in a predicament. Her erstwhile friends had threatened her with the burning down of her father's house with her inside it unless she obtained the answer to the riddle and imparted it to them. It

does not appear that she had sufficient confidence in Samson's ability to handle the matter to tell him of the threat; rather she used her woman's wiles—accompanied, according to the narrative, by floods of tears—until the hero's patience gave out and he told her the secret. After that, of course, it was all plain sailing. On the seventh day the Philistine youths triumphantly returned answer to Samson, "*What is sweeter than honey, and what is stronger than a lion?*" Samson knew how they had obtained the solution but there was nothing he could do about it. He contented himself with the contemptuous retort, "*If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle.*"

There remained the matter of the thirty mantles and sets of inner garments. It is sad to relate of a man professedly dedicated to God that this presented no problem. Samson went down to the Philistine town of Ashkelon, some thirty miles away on the sea coast and deep in Philistine territory. There, by means not recorded, he surprised and murdered thirty Philistine men, stole their garments and came back to Timnath to pay his debt.

Cold with anger, Samson returned to Zorah with his parents, leaving his Philistine wife in her father's house. At that moment he had finished with her; he never wanted to see her again. This was not the triumphant home-coming he had planned. It is not likely that his feelings were those of a man betrayed by one he loved; more likely they were those of wounded pride. His insulting reference to his newly married wife as "my heifer" shows that he had little genuine respect or love for the girl; more likely her appeal was purely to the animal passions, and now the fever had passed and he was morose and resentful. Accustomed as he was to admiration and hero-worship from the circle in which he had grown up, he now had been slighted in the very quarter from which he least expected it, and he was coldly furious.

What could have been the feelings of the older couple, trudging along wearily behind him? What had become of all the golden dreams which had coloured their up-bringing of this child of promise? How could they now expect this son of theirs to become a saviour in Israel, a champion of the people of God, going out in the power of the Holy Spirit to overthrow the enemies of the chosen people, restore the safety and prosperity of a covenant-keeping nation, and so enable its God-given destiny to be fulfilled. Rioting, gluttony, drunkenness, theft and murder; these were the fruits of Samson's wedding feast; these were embedded into the character of the man of whom it had been predicted before his birth, "*He shall be*

*a Nazarite unto God*"; "*He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines.*" And when the two arrived home and the full story of the week's disastrous happenings had been made known in Zorah, many there must have been who mourned for their fallen idol; many who uttered in their hearts, as long-cherished hopes faded, the oft-repeated plaint, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

Manoah and his wife were not the only saintly couple whose devoted training of a loved child in the things of God seems in later days to have been wholly fruitless, when that child, grown to maturity, has turned aside into lawless or godless ways. So many have asked, in all sincerity, "How can such things be?" What was wrong with the early training that it proved unable to hold the one so instructed throughout life? Many disappointed parents have been plunged into the depths of despair because of some such outcome to their efforts. The fault does not usually lie in any inadequacy of training; the root cause goes much deeper. It lies in the well-nigh overwhelming power of Adamic sin. There is no answer to these problems unless the doctrine of the Fall is accepted with all its implications. "*As by one man sin entered, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*" The accumulated effect of all mankind's sin from the beginning lies inherent in every man born into the world. Every child starts life under this handicap. Our Adversary the Devil remains vigilant and active, ever seeking to maintain and increase the content of the world's sin. Is it to be wondered at that in many cases the earnest endeavours of the best parents just fail entirely to offset that inherited poison and eventually some external chain of circumstances tips the balance sufficiently to set the unhappy individual upon the downward track? In Samson's case it was a pretty face which started him on the road to ruin; in countless other instances it has been one or another of the varied aspects of those three cardinal influences, the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Behind it all has been the dread influence of the god of this world, blinding the minds of those who believe not.

But just as the seed of evil, sown in past generations, comes to its fruitage, so must the seed of righteousness, sown in prayer and faith by godly parents, bear fruit one day. God is not mocked, and God is all-powerful. We do not understand all God's secrets, and our knowledge of his purposes is at the best immature. We do know that God desires not the death of the sinner, but rather that he may turn from his evil ways, and live. There is much in the prophetic Scriptures

which speaks of a Day of righteousness in which, under the righteous rule of Christ, returned to earth in power and glory, the Devil will be bound that he might deceive the nations no more, and all men walk in the light of Christ's Kingdom to learn of righteousness and the call to become reconciled to God. Is it too much to expect that in some wonderful manner God, who knows the secrets of all men, will extend to all the Samsons of every age in whose hearts resides the slightest possibility of repentance, the opportunity to turn again from their evil and accept in sincerity the Christ whom once they knew, and from whom in ignorance and under the handicap of Adamic taint they turned away? Let every parent who mourns a son or daughter at present thus lost take comfort from the Scriptural truth that God is not less merciful than our own hearts, that his love for the erring one is not less than is ours, and that He will by no means loose his hold until in his own infinite wisdom He sees that all hope

and possibility of repentance is dead. It was Dr. Paterson Smyth many years ago who suggested that it may take the supreme crisis of physical death eventually to awaken some wayward ones to the evil of sin and the goodness of God, and who can doubt that repentance in such circumstances, as in the story of the prodigal son, would find the Father ready to come out and meet the lost and returning one?

But here in the story, Samson is farther away from God than ever. Of what use to say that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, when the only result was to nerve and strengthen him to great physical feats but never to reach his heart. Until then he could in no sense of the word be God's man. So he returned to Zorah, a disappointed, frustrated, vengeful man, consumed only with the desire to execute further retaliation upon the authors of his wounded feelings.

*To be continued.*

## A QUESTION OF OWNERSHIP

### 2. Life more abundant

"Hear, and your soul shall live" (Isa. 55.3) cried the preacher to those hungering and thirsting for life. It is all too obvious that human kind do not live. For a few short years there is a troubled existence beset by all sorts of perils, pains and accidents. Discontent marks the lot of all classes, for few are satisfied with their lot. The apparently wealthy and outwardly successful, envied by lesser mortals, admit to longings for a more complete life. Happiness is an elusive quality for which there is no sound recipe or any lasting guarantee, for death cuts off rich and poor, young and old, eager and satiated, with total impartiality. How then can man live fully, completely, satisfyingly and usefully in the midst of so much turmoil, weakness, disappointment and futility? Having gone wrong in the quest for life, how can he be put right? It is a problem which has set the best of his doctors and teachers a conundrum which is more puzzling than the riddle of the Sphinx. Answers are numerous, nostrums many. The age old strife of man goes on. From the four corners of the earth the restless masses of mankind struggle, endure, fight, strive, wrestle, groan, hunger and thirst for life. To throw off the many yokes imposed upon them, to go unshackled by fear, by poverty, by disease, to drink great draughts of peace and plenty into famished days, to breathe new vigour from oceans of wholesome, salubrious atmosphere, would be to many millions heaven on earth.

Life more abundant can only come from one source, the original fountain of immortal vigour. The leaky cisterns of man's making hardly wet the desert of vast human needs. The voice of God calls above the raucous hubbub of Twentieth century life as it has called in every century of human existence. Throughout the disharmony, the disruption, the social and mental strife, the inviting words, "Come! Turn you to Me!" fall on heedless ears. They have a strange, foreign sound in the world of pop-music, speed, jargon and cash registers. The voice which offers life without money and without price finds few buyers in the busy marts of the world where Mammon reigns and merchandise which can be seen and handled is the chief attraction. Much that is shoddy, sordid and mean is offered for sale to the gullible. Glittering baubles and flashy toys, the prizes and playthings of a few years or days, find ready purchasers. Here today and gone tomorrow, eat, drink and be merry, is the spirit and song of the market place. A sound of revelry by night succeeds the chaffering babel of the day. In the murky cup of the pleasures and treasures of this world lie some sour dregs. In the misty flats drift many grey shadows who have passed by the milk and honey, the priceless free wine of abundant life. Deaf or indifferent, they have not heard the voice of God and they do not live.

The unchanging word of a changeless God still calls through his prophet. "Make you a new

heart and a new spirit, for why will you die! For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, saith the Lord God. Therefore turn yourselves and live!" (Ezek. 18.31). Christ later carried on the same theme in his teaching. He looked about him on the multitudes who listened eagerly to what He had to tell them about life. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd, bewildered, frightened, sick and poor, with none to lead them or provide for them, to give them the security and pasture which sheep so much need. He had compassion upon them, taking upon himself the role of the Good Shepherd. He saw them at their hard, ill-paid toil and called the weary and heavy-laden to his side. He invited them to learn from him, to take his yoke upon them for his burden was light and his yoke easy. The yoke which chafed their tired shoulders and the burdens which almost bent them double were not only those of literal toil and hardship but the pressure of the Law which by now had become a cumbersome load of ritual and trivialities. What had begun as a simple set of Divine rules, intelligible to all, had snowballed under the hands of priestly scholars into massive books of religious rules and observances demanding a variety of penalties and sacrifices which filled the coffers of the Temple and enriched the merchants. As all were prone to sin and to stray in spite of the penalties imposed the people could see no way out of their weakness and difficulties. Often they were hungry and thirsty in a dry land. When Jesus supplied them with bread and offered them the water of life they followed him in the hope of more loaves. It was then He advised them to "labour not for the meat which perishes but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life".

His words were a restatement of the prophet (Isa. 55.2-3) whose voice was the voice of God to his people. Why spend labour and money on that which does not satisfy? For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world and lose himself or be cast away? As Jesus walked among men he saw them as buyers making bad bargains, working or scheming for money which they spent on trifles or treasures which brought them trouble and anxiety. Again and again He rebuked the acquisitive desires of men for gain, to be rich in this world's goods rather than being rich toward God. Mammon offered pleasures, excitements, goods for which they were eager bidders. God offered life more abundant, peace, tranquility, contentment, a blessed assurance of life to come, a continuation of being in a richer and nobler environment. Then as now there were few takers. Many who had walked with Jesus turned away. Only a rare few in any period of man's existence have had the courage and foresight to take God at his word, to provide for themselves the good,

full life which even death cannot destroy.

The Bible claims to be the word of God, his written advice to man on how to live. Sceptics may dismiss it and critics peck peevishly at what their vanity considers to be flaws in the great Book but its crystalline substance is harder than the everlasting hills. They may pass away but the word of God lives forever. Life is its theme. It offers, it promises, it invites, it pleads, it guides, teaches and demonstrates by example, parable and picture. All its paths are toward life. The gift of God is life. The Bible may be sifted, shaken or squeezed by its detractors, its enemies or its friends but "Life" is still the vital essence which drips from its sacred pages. The great philosophers of the world have offered their medicines to tonic a jaded mind but their effects are fleeting. Nothing so quickens the spirit of man as a draught from that water of life which Jesus claimed was an everlasting life-sustainer. Nothing so puts a man on his feet and keeps him going like the bread and water of God. Under these metaphors of man's daily, physical need are included the needs of his heart, his mind, his spirit. His body with his natural needs takes second place to the moral and spiritual part of his nature which must draw its nourishment from a finer source than that of the material world.

"Man does not live by bread alone." There is an energising power, a word which enables him to discern between true values and false, to weigh the advantages of one against the disadvantages of the other. The world with its gods of gold may be gained; the world with its alluring voice may win, or be won. Money and all that money can buy may give a few thrills, a little excitement, a short pleasure in which the spender may be lost in strange mazes, or cast away from all that money cannot buy, for the gifts of God are beyond price and without price. Peace, wisdom, kindness, compassion, gentleness, contentment, humility, justice and joy are the rich qualities of life which make the human creature God-like. They are summed up in the one word; love. Love for God. Love for man. Had all the race this love within themselves they would have life. The whole world would be gained, without its love of money, its armaments and evils. Without God the world is lost. Without love man is lost, whatever else he may have gained. Law, love and life, these three. They are powerful agencies which cannot be separated one from the other, and of the three the writer to the Corinthian church would have added "the greatest of these is love".

Love is not merely a natural passion between men and women, or the filial affection of parents and children, or the affinity of friend with friend. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." (Rom. 13.10).

It is a quality, a gracious principle, a golden thread wrought into the tapestry of man's being. It is that which leads the mind of man to appreciate and esteem beauty and goodness, to desire to do some good to others; to be on the whole kind, honest and likeable. Godliness or God's likeness about which the cynical often bitterly sneer, is no more than a commendable urge to like people and to be liked in return. If this were a universally established principle then as a poet has written "There were no need for arsenals nor forts".

The good neighbour is not merely a figure of speech or a picturesque custom. It is the duty of man. "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." The brotherhood of man, the great fraternity of mankind is an ideal which has never yet been realised. When man failed in his duty to God, he also failed in his duty to his brother. "Am I my brother's keeper?" is a question which has received a negative reply by the ruthless, ambitious, tyrannical sections of the human race who have thirsted and striven for wealth and power over the souls of men.

Apart from those enslaved by tyranny and greed, other forms of bondage and excess have caused men to kill, hate, rob and generally illtreat each other. "Man's inhumanity to man" has made "countless thousands mourn." Grief, fear and oppression have been the lot of millions of the displaced, cheated, disinherited children of men, whose rights have been ignored, whose lives and labour has been sold cheaply. The annals of the family of man make wretched reading, all because the law of God on the duty of man has been ignored or is not recognised by the selfish who seek their own ends. Human nature as a rule looks after its own best interests, provides for, cherishes and cares for self.

To love one's neighbour with the same degree of interest would ensure peace, safety and happiness. The lover of God can neither hate himself nor his fellow man. He respects the sanctity of human life, seeing man, made in the image of God, with certain rights and privileges which he must respect and honour. The second great commandment of God is the protector of human welfare and the passport to happiness. If it were observed, love would be welling up in every heart for every other heart. The whole atmosphere of the world would be changed to a healthy, joyous unison.

Disregarded, disaster has written and is writing history as failure fills the prisons and the daily newspapers. The cry of governments is not for more brotherly love but for more prisons, more police and more laws. Nations increase their military might with the most deadly weapons ready to destroy each other at the press of a

button. This is not love but its opposite. Animosity, distrust and suspicion preside over the counsels of rulers. Godliness and brotherly kindness ebbs from a world going its own way. As evil increases love grows cold. None have ever yet succeeded in serving both God and Mammon. In times of crisis it is easier to cast faith to the winds of war than to cast all care upon God. The voice of God has been drowned in the fearful uproar. To seek help from such an unseen source has been called "a counsel of despair" by those without God and without hope, yet there have been examples of faith working miracles, of love subduing evils, on the part of those who have made the Eternal God their refuge and tower of strength. The quality of life depends upon personal choice, whether we choose to walk the narrow way with God which leads to life or the broad road of the world which leads to a dead end.

*"Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide*

*In the strife of truth with falsehood for the good or evil side."*

David, the famous king of Israel made his choice — "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." (Psa. 84.10).

Men and women can rarely choose their own circumstances, but choice of camp is an exclusive personal right. Many have dared to be poor rather than abandon their principles for wealth or high office. They have given up certainties for uncertainties, rather than mix with doubtful or suspicious business. Some have elected to walk in the wilderness, choosing a solitary way rather than effect a weak compromise or keep company with the shallow, thoughtless crowd. Among the truly great, renunciation has contributed largely to their success. For everyone written into history whose choice has influenced or shaped national events, there are thousands more unknown and obscure who have chosen to walk with God rather than live in an atmosphere of aimless pleasure. David became King of Israel but his heart remained as humble and loyal to God as in the days when he kept the sheep and silenced the giant who menaced his people. Moses forsook the treasures of Egypt for the obscurity of the wilderness, but his decision fitted him to be the deliverer and leader of his people. Of the two daughters-in-law of Naomi, Orpah chose to return to the pagan ease of her own people, never to be heard of again, while Ruth went on with her mother-in-law, leaving a certainty for an uncertainty. The result of her choice was love, happiness and a place in history as the ancestress of the house of David. Mary

chose to sit at the feet of Jesus listening to his wonderful words of life rather than the bustle of domestic tasks. He commended her for having chosen the better part. Words failed the Apostle to the Gentiles to tell of all those who had chosen the Lord's side. He himself chose a hard road rather than continue as an honoured councillor in a dying system. So space and time would fail after so many centuries to speak of all those who, like David, would rather live lowly and obscure lives serving God, than occupy greater positions in the world, where faith, obedience to high principles and ideals are often forfeited through unbelief, indecision or a lack of moral courage to uphold them among a hard-bargaining, hard-

headed crowd to whom such refinements are neither practical nor welcome.

Choosing the right side, the side of God and goodness, may mean a splendid throwing away of self and natural ambition. It may not lead to wordly success but it leads to peace. Worldly-wise spectators may regard that as a foolish choice, which in this world wins no reward other than that of an untroubled conscience, a heart at rest, a mind at ease. Faith looks for its recompense when faith becomes lost in sight. It would not exchange its lowly rest with God for all the pomp of kings and princes; rather would it have the peace of God than all the fleeting vanities this present world can offer. *To be continued*

## "YE DO SHOW THE LORD'S DEATH"

*A Memorial  
exhortation*

In the ordering of the Lord's providence the due time to remember in a special manner the death of our Lord draws near. This special act of remembrance we perform in compliance with our Lord's direction. The story has been told so many times that every phase of truth associated therewith cannot but be well understood by all who see that our Lord was the true Passover Lamb on the higher plane of God's purpose.

But the story will always bear repetition at this season, in order to stimulate to greater intensity our appreciation of that sacrifice, and what it did for us, and to prompt us with greater earnestness and sincerity to renew our own covenant with our God, to die with Christ Jesus our Lord.

Every year that goes brings us a step nearer "the year of My redeemed", when the greatest and grandest deliverance in all the annals of time will be brought to pass. Each passing year should invest the act of remembrance with greater solemnity and beauty, enabling each participant to carry away a deeper sense of reverence and gratitude than from any preceding occasion. Another year's crucial experiences and refinements should have prepared our hearts to receive the emblems of our slain Lamb with deeper appreciation and satisfaction than hitherto. The leadings of Divine providence should have created a keener appetite for the "true bread of God"—a sharper hungering and thirsting for the privileges spread out on the Lord's table, and though we may eat and drink our daily portions to meet each day's spiritual needs throughout the year, the very special and sacred meaning attached by our Lord to the simple annual service of Remembrance should cause us more ardently to approach the Christian's festal board.

Carrying our minds back to that last eventful night when our Lord gathered the little company

around the Paschal board, we find them following first the ancient order of procedure, established away back in the days of Moses, and revised and augmented as time went by. They had met privately in a room prepared for them, on the anniversary of the actual night during which their fathers had also gone behind closed blood-sprinkled doors to eat the flesh of a slain lamb, and to wait, fully robed and shod, for the Angel of God to pass through the land. Nothing that Jesus said or did in the early part of the night's proceedings changed the order or sequence or the meaning of the great event they were keeping in memory. They ate the Passover together exactly as their fathers had done down the centuries. Authorities tell us that the Jews in Jesus' day partook of the flesh of a lamb and unleavened bread to remind them of the hasty meal prepared and eaten in Egypt, of a blend of herbs and vegetables consisting of coriander and endive, lettuce and horehound, thistle leaves and succory, to remind them of the bitterness of the bondage their fathers endured, and crushed fruit and nuts brought to table in shape of a brick, to impress on their minds the arduous labours of the mudpits and the brick-kilns. They drank together the expressed juice of the vine, from a cup which from times long distant had been called "the Cup of the Covenant".

If this assortment of fruits, herbs, bread and flesh had become the established fare at the Paschal board, no valid reason exists for doubting that these were the ingredients that had been prepared by the owner of the room and set out in order by the two disciples (Mark 14. 13), Peter and John (Luke 22. 8) in readiness for the arrival later of Jesus and the rest of the band.

As they thus ate and drank and sang their way through the ancient feast they called to remem-

brance the slaying of the lamb, the sprinkling of the doorposts the extraordinary postures of the participants, the angel's midnight flight, the morning's early commotion as prince and peasant rushed to Pharaoh, the royal audience accorded to Moses, and the imperative order to "be gone". They would remember that Israel's first-born sons had been "spared" as the angel, with flashing sword, "passed over" their huts or tents. They would not fail to be reminded that God had spared those first-borns for himself, and that He hallowed them to himself and his purposes in the dead of that eventful night. Then with the early flush of dawn the hosts of the Lord began their march of liberty and to life with God. The old, old story was enshrined in every drop and particle on the Paschal board, and every year, each generation drew forth the same meaning and purpose. It was a memorial—a looking back—a remembrance of the great things which God had done.

The usual procedure ended, Jesus took a piece of the remaining bread, and raising over it a special prayer, passed it to his disciples, saying "Take this and eat—this represents my body". He took the cup, in which yet remained a quantity of the juice of the grape, and again giving thanks to God, passed it with the words "Drink ye all of it. This is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26. 27-28). This was new procedure, and had an entirely new meaning. Yet it was superimposed on the old. It was still intended to be "the Passover". It was still intended to presage deliverance. It was like going back to the night in Egypt to start it all over again, but on a higher plane. It still required a Lamb to be slain, it still required the sprinkling of the blood (1 Pet. 1. 2); it still had special application to the first-borns among the families of Israel. It was still intended to be the prelude to the breaking of bonds, and to the start of a journey towards the land of promise and of life with God. For the first-borns it still meant salvation from the destroying angel's sword. For the remainder of the house of Israel it meant emancipation from a great and terrible taskmaster so that they could enter anew into covenant relationship with God.

The ultimate purpose of the Covenants was to constitute Israel a holy nation and a kingdom of priests, that through them the outcast families of the earth may be regathered to God and blessed with eternal life. That great objective was and still is God's great purpose. But it needed a better Lamb than Israel's paschal lamb. It needed a better firstborn to be brought forth on a higher plane, and to a higher ministry. Jesus came to earth to be that Paschal Lamb. Jesus

went back to Heaven the firstborn among many brethren who are the Church of the First-born, "whose names are written in heaven". In that quiet, upper room, a great change began. The old order, observed by Jesus to the very letter, came to its end. The new order began. Jesus' act and claim to put himself in place of the Paschal Lamb, and his invitation to his followers to eat the bread in lieu of eating him, carried the Paschal idea and the Paschal work to a higher plane. His death that very day provided the slain Lamb for Israel's "Redemption" feast. His surrendered life provided the Redemption blood. From that upper room on that eventful night influences went forth which yet will change the world. Already they have changed the lives of those disciples, and of others who believed on Jesus through their word. And they will do much more as they constrain Israel and the nations into the way of God.

But here and now it is not this wider field of blessing and blessedness we seek to contemplate, but that one central fact on which the whole redemptive plan reposed. It required the death of our beloved Lord. There was no other way to effect release. Jesus, the Lamb of God, must die. No one in heaven or earth could meet the great need. All depended upon him—upon him alone! Jesus knew this. He knew the seriousness of all He said and did. He faced the greatest issue of all time. But no cost to him was too great to ensure the success of the Father's plan. His death would make redemption sure, so He went to his death with open eyes and understanding heart. He offered himself without spot or stain, a sacrifice of noblest worth. He poured out his soul to death.

For one night in the yearly round it is the Christian's privilege and delight to show forth the Lord's death, to think and speak of his voluntary surrender to the will of God, and commemorate the greatest sacrifice of all time. Each child of God knows and understands that every gracious privilege he or she enjoys flows from that sacrifice. Reconciliation and redemption, hope and expectation all spring from that unique surrender. The resounding hosannas of a world restored trace back to that unblemished offering. (Rev. 5. 12-13). That is the one event in the whole range of time which is inevitable and indispensable. It is the one thing needed—the one thing all-essential to make God's "yea" YEA! God's promises, though immutable, were all made with this in view. He was accounted "slain" from the dawn of time.

It is no light thing which we do. It stands related to eternal things. Once for all the holy Lamb of God died. It can never occur again. In showing the Lord's death we make contact with

the "imperatives" and "absolutes" of God's universal plan. We need to be humble and sincere in our approach to the table of the Lord. We need to purge out the least trace of the leaven of sin. We need to be hungry and athirst for him, as the panting hart over the water brook. No matter how much the Cup may symbolise to each and all, apart from him there could be no "bread", there could be no cup.

Let all remember that that which they do shall be done by countless thousands when the story of his deathless love shall be made known to all,

and that it is honour beyond compare to have a place among them in these dark days, to know their Lord and God, and walk in the footsteps of his worthy Son. Our opportunity to do this thing is nearly run. The outlook shows us that the Church's race is almost at an end. The last days should be the best, and to each and all, this commemoration should be the most solemn and encouraging of all. May the blessing of God be with each soul, as we turn our eyes and hearts to him who died for us that we might live with him.

## THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

*A consideration of  
Divine Right*

### 2. Divine Right

Discussing for the Roman brethren the question of Israel's fall and God's sovereign prerogative to choose and equip whom He wills to serve his purposes, the Apostle wrote: "... *hath not the Potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour?*" — or less honour (Rom. 9.21. R.V.).

This is a profound question, and probes deeply into the then perplexing problems of the Christian Church. And it has helped to cause deep perplexity in the church in more recent times.

The doctrine of Divine selection—election, as it is called—as cast in the Calvinistic mould is a most repulsive doctrine. It has caused more heartache among Godfearing men than any other single feature of Christian theology. Men of kindly heart have writhed in pain and groaned in perplexity at the stark statements of that austere creed because they had no way of escape from having to admit that the words of the Holy Writ (particularly from the pens of Peter and Paul) required their consent to the claim that those men upon whom God's favour came were his elect, and that those upon whom no such favour came were non-elect" and "passed by". It was the misfortune of these men to find their lot cast in a day when theology knew no other destiny for men than an eternity in Heaven or Hell. It was a soul-racking experience to be compelled without personal choice to proclaim that the God whom they tried to love and serve had consigned by far the greater part of this sinful race to an indescribable destiny of conscious pain and suffering to last for evermore. It was a terrible doctrine for any man to teach, even were he himself brutal and callous as a beast. Kindlier men revolted at the thought, even when necessity compelled them to assent thereto.

Among those who joined revolt against this repellent creed was Robbie Burns, who wrote with little sympathy but much fine scorn for this then prevalent theme in his native land:

*"Oh Thou, wha in the heavens dost dwell,  
Wha, as it pleases best thyself,  
Sends aye to heaven and ten to hell  
A' for thy Glory,  
And no for ony guid or ill  
They've done afore thee."*

That this creed was a travesty of one of the finest themes of Holy Writ makes the tragedy of its proclamation all the deeper. Had some of these kindlier souls known the real truth about the Potter's right to fashion his clay as it pleased him, they would have rent the very heavens with praise and exultation.

May the Lord be praised that our lot is cast in more favoured days, and that we can now face up to the tremendous claims of Divine sovereignty with keen appreciation of the love that chooses to bless all the nations of the earth, and spends time and effort to prepare a chosen channel through which his grace may flow to all the residues of men. Not an eternal exclusion from his love, but an eternal redemption for the "passed-by" mass, is the objective behind all God's electing processes.

The language in Paul's argument in Romans is very direct and penetrating. He does not ask whether God, as the Master Potter, has any clay to work upon. He takes it for granted that He has. He also assumes that God does possess power to work up that clay into vessels which will serve his purposes. Paul's question, therefore, is: "Has not the Potter the right (R.V.) over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (less honour). It is the question of the

Potter's "right of choice", that is to say, of his prerogative to select one portion for a particular purpose and allot another portion for a different purpose altogether.

In the ordinary work-a-day sphere from which this illustration is drawn men would readily say that the potter has every right to fashion the clay in such moulds or in such manner as he pleases, *according to the purpose he has in mind*. If the clay is his own, and the factory is his property, then he has every right to work the clay to his own design. But this is scarcely the question which Paul is considering. It is a portion of the clay itself which is represented as taking tongue and voicing its dissatisfaction against the Potter's right. "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it: Why didst thou make me thus? Why hast thou made me thus and the other portion otherwise?" It is thus seen to be a question of *the use to be made of the clay and whether the Potter has free option or choice to make it up according to a single design or to many designs, if need so arose*.

Behind this "Potter" argument there lies a great fact of history and experience. To Paul's mind, God is the great Master-Potter. And God's creative work on some vessel upon which He has been engaged is that which accords with the Potter's productive activity. The earthly craftsman's side of the illustration pertains only to God, and therefore the potter's right to use some of the clay for some one particular purpose, and some of the remainder for another, illustrates God's right to use some of his clay for one purpose, without finding it necessary to use *all* the clay for that one purpose exclusively. The argument claims for God the Potter's right to use a portion of his clay in making a special vessel for a very special purpose, and to devote the remainder to the construction of a different type of vessel, or many different types, as his will and pleasure, *without in any way being answerable to the clay for what He has already done or is presently about to do*. "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?" he says. That is, who are they among men who will presume to question or remonstrate against the workings of God's hand! Must the Most High justify himself before men, and ask their concurrence with his designs before He can commence his work?

"But", says the objector, "that is only one side of the argument. If God were really working on clay—and on nothing of higher import than clay—we would concede your argument. There would then be nothing for us to say! But God is not working upon clay. He is working upon men! Moreover, these men are of one common stock, and above even this, these men are creatures en-

dowed with free will, with the abilities to choose for themselves whether they shall or shall not become the craftsman's materials for his workmanship. As such, we claim the right to be consulted before God begins to work upon us! Secondly, being of one common stock, we may not be able to concur with the design to make some part of us into a special vessel, and relegate the remainder to inferior use. Such partiality may be unfair, and we may need to reserve our right to object to such partisan selectivity?"

Thus, two major questions of God's relationship to men were involved in Paul's argument, though they may well be called "questions behind" the main question at issue, questions of deeper and more fundamental importance than that propounded by Paul's reasoning. The first major question is the old, old question of God's Divine Sovereignty versus man's free will and right of choice. If God is absolute sovereign in his wide domains possessing not only the right to express his determinate will, but having at his command all authority and power to operate created things accordant with that will, how then can man be free to choose contrary to God's will? Or to state the problem from the other side, if man is free to choose, or if man was originally created free to choose, the evil course as readily as the good, how then can God be accounted absolute ruler of the universe?

This question need not detain our study now, although it is a question always of fundamental consequence to every moral being both in heaven and earth. The complete answer to its issue can be forthcoming only after a comprehensive review of the whole Plan of the Ages, when it can be shown that the co-operation of adverse circumstances, consequent upon man's fatal choice, and the free flow of Divine benevolence to meet the dire need of man's extremity, will at last bring the will of man to choose, by its own free swing, a course concordant with the will of God.

The second major issue underlying Paul's argument is this: Has Divine sovereignty the right to choose among *fallen* men, and take into his hands one section only of the human race, leaving the remainder to wallow in sin and weakness, without help or comfort from his almighty throne? To this second fundamental question every son of Abraham would readily give assent! Their whole historic national experience would be evidence to that end. That God had chosen them, to be his people, was the bedrock of their very existence. Other people had been excluded from God's care, and left to their own designs, while Israel was God's holy race. That claim was the core of Israel's faith, and around it all her hopes were built. On this second major issue

Paul and his critics would be agreed. But this major issue was capable of sub-division, and of further application in Paul's day. A new issue had arisen by reason of new circumstances. That issue had been narrowed down, and could be stated thus: Has the Divine sovereignty the right to take one portion only of his previously selected nation and mould it to a higher destiny, leaving the uncalled section to mark time and wait till his work in the selected portion was complete? Has the Potter the right to take one portion of the clay to make a vessel unto special honour, while reserving the set-aside portion to make a vessel unto less honour afterwards? This issue has been raised in consequence of the coming of Jesus into the world, and the invitation which He gave to such as were ready to follow in his steps.

Paul's whole argument centres round this call. All his references to their ancestral history are cited to prove that, though men were common stock, God made choice of some, and excluded some. And as it has been in the ages past, so it could be again in their own day. No captious critic among the Jews had complained of God's choice in former days, for it was on these heavenly preferences the whole house of Israel had built its claim until this day.

Now, when a further application of the same principle was proposed, the whole Rabbinic structure was up in arms to dispute and combat it. They now denied the Potter's right to choose a portion of his clay, and set the rest aside. Self-interest had blinded them so that they could not understand the application of the age-old principle when applied to themselves. The issue, so obvious in ancient days, was not so obvious to them in their own day because the issue had not yet reached its final stage. The setting aside of the cast-away was not complete till Jerusalem was overthrown and the Temple levelled to the ground. Then the "passing-by" would have become obvious to all, for, in that destructive climax, the nation had become set aside like Esau and Ishmael had been set aside. That climax was the sequel to a trend of circumstances which men like Paul could see in their own day operating in the nation everywhere. The call of Jesus to his

sheep to follow in his steps had divided the nation wherever Jewish people dwell and set the tendencies and trends of thought and activity so that one part was called to higher things, while the remainder drifted in gathering darkness till they were broken on the rocks. While the Word of God had not been without some effect, in that it had gathered a "remnant" to the cross of Christ, there were at that time many who, while claiming descent from Israel, were not now in standing as Israel. A new situation had arrived, and their old standing was not enough. Hence, while the new situation remained, they who had no standing except the old, had no place in the economy of Israel. Hence, also, because so utterly unfit for the new day, they stumbled, and eventually fell, and were set aside, to wait with hardened heart, till the new situation (the Christian call) had passed away, and a still newer situation should be come. Though in themselves they were Abraham's natural seed, they were not the "sons" of this "better" situation. Only the "sons" born out of the "Promise" have inheritance in the privileges of today.

Was there, then, unfaithfulness in God, as the Rabbinic teaching alleged, in setting the Jew aside in the Apostolic days, because He insisted that his clay must have plastic qualities adapted to his present purposes? If so, He must have been unrighteous in "by-passing" Ishmael, and in showing greater love for Jacob than Esau! But no Jew would have admitted that. Out of their own mouth, therefore, God established the righteousness of his claim to set aside such as were not in step with dispensational adjustments and requirements, taking only such as suited his purposes and concluding all the rest in unbelief and hardness of heart till a better day should come. The whole selective scheme, from its first beginning to its final end, rests on a well-defined principle that God may rightly take the better part and mould it to a special end, leaving the less suitable part to lie aside till another day has dawned and then, under less stringent conditions, making it another vessel as it shall then please him to make, a vessel still unto honour, but less honour, than the first. *To be continued.*

"Beware of much talk; remain in some secret place and enjoy thy God; for thou hast him whom all the world cannot take from thee. I am He to whom thou oughtest wholly to give thyself up, that so thou mayest live the rest of thy time, not in thyself but in Me and be free from all anxious cares."

—(Thomas a Kempis, 1380-1471).

Just as a church is the shell which houses a congregation of worshippers and has no lasting value in itself, so also must the whole fabric of our earthly fellowship and service ever remain but an avenue by means of which we can feed and build up each other with the realities of Divine Truth.

## "WOUNDED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS"

An Easter  
meditation

*"He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities . . . by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities."* (Isa. 53. 5 and 11).

The great depth of our Redeemer's love for mankind is nowhere more eloquently expressed than in this fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. Too often do we take the surface meaning of the well-known words and content ourselves with the thought that Jesus has taken the sinner's place and accepted in his own person the penalty of sin which should rightfully come upon guilty man. Too often do we sing—

*"Christ gave his life for me  
His precious blood was shed  
That I might ransomed be  
And quickened from the dead."*

and accept the matter as settled without need of any further realisation of what the death of Jesus really means to us.

There is so much more in the doctrine of the Ransom than the acceptance of Paul's words regarding the *anti-lutron*—the purchase of all the human race by Jesus at the cost of his own human life. Isaiah 53 tells how intimately the story of the Ransom is bound up with the "suffering servant" of whom the prophet speaks so eloquently. From the twenty-second chapter, where the Lord's "servant" is first mentioned, the theme is developed until it reaches its climax in the fifty-third chapter. Man can only be redeemed and reconciled to God by means of one who would be prepared to "suffer" in order that the compelling power of that suffering might lead men to the only course of life which can bring them happiness and the purging of their sins. The old law of Israel was "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth". That law is still the principle upon which nations and systems are founded today, and which leads to strife, violence, war and death. Isaiah was used by the Holy Spirit to introduce a new theme to man, a theme which must be put into practice amongst men before the troubles of this world can be solved. There must be one, whether man amongst men or nation amongst nations, willing to become a servant instead of an oppressor, seeking to do good to men by serving them instead of oppressing men by ruling over them; one willing to suffer in his service that others may be glad, rather than be an exactor of suffering from others in retribution for their faults; one that will

eventually win men by love, instead of compelling men by force. That is the ideal which God has planned the principle upon which the work of the Kingdom Age will be carried on, the principle which accomplishes the work of the Good Shepherd amongst his own sheep during this Age, and the principle which Isaiah declared would be exemplified by "He that shall come".

So Christ came as a "suffering servant". He said so himself. *"I am among you as one that serveth."* "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10. 45). "He gave himself a Ransom" (1 Tim. 2. 5), and he was also a "sin-offering"—an offering on account of sin. The blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin, yea, and neither does the blood of Christ remove sin, *unless* the sinner, passing through the successive stages of repentance, faith and justification, takes to himself the benefit of that offering made "once and for all" and in whole-hearted surrender to the saving power of Jesus becomes reconciled to God.

The power of the sin-offering, then, lies in its compelling force, drawing men first to an appreciation of what Christ has done for them, secondly to remorse for their sinful condition and repentance for their sin, thirdly to faith that the work and sacrifice of Christ can be efficacious on their behalf and upon their acceptance of him as their Saviour, and finally sincere acceptance of him and consecration to his service. Not until any man has accepted the Law of Love as the guiding principle in his life, is wholly devoted to the service of his fellows even at the cost of suffering to himself were that necessary, is prepared to be servant of all if by any means he may save some, can he even commence in the way that culminates in eternal life.

Men in Isaiah's day did not realise that to be the only way. Neither did they at the First Advent. Neither do they now. Because of their lack of understanding, it was necessary that there be a great Exemplar to show them the way by walking in it himself. So the prophet cries: "He was wounded *for* (on account of) our transgressions. He was bruised *for* (on account of) our iniquities. By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many *on whose account* he shall bear iniquity."

Rotherham says:

*"He was pierced for transgressions that were ours,*

*Was crushed for iniquities that were ours,  
The chastisement for our well-being was upon  
him,*

*And by his stripes there is healing for us."*  
and the Septuagint renders vs. 5 and 8:

*"He was wounded on account of our sins and  
was bruised because of our iniquities...  
Because of the iniquities of my people he was  
led to death."*

Is it not true that Christ's footstep followers, the Church of this Age, are associated with him in this great thing? Consecrated Christians now, buried with him by baptism into his death, suffering with him, are also "suffering servants", seeking nothing better than to serve mankind in the good things of God which shall be for their salvation. This course in life brings suffering now,

a suffering gladly borne, because it is pointing the whole world to the only way by which it will eventually attain its destiny. We suffer, not "for" the sins of the people in the ordinarily accepted sense of that word, but most certainly "on account of" the sins of the people—for were there no sin in the world there would be no suffering for righteousness' sake, and no necessity for it. Thus we may rejoice, knowing that our suffering is working out, not only a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory for us, but salvation for all the world, "in due time".

*"He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."*

*"In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*

## JUDAS, THE PRIESTS, AND THE FIELD

*A short article in the Sep/Oct 1984 issue, "Cast unto the Potter", commenting upon the rather difficult allusion in Matt. 27.9, has led a reader to submit an alternative view, culled from earlier commentators, which if justified would throw a new light upon the traditional understanding of the actions of Judas and the priests. The gist of the suggestion is reproduced here as affording some assistance to the elucidation of the narrative.*

\* \* \*

The usually accepted reconciliation of Matt. 27. 3-10 with Acts 1.18-19, is that the priests used the money thrown back at them by Judas to buy a field for the burial of aliens and that Judas in his despair hanged himself in that field, so that only in the sense that the field was bought with his money could it be said in Acts that "*this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity*". It is a sound rule where doubt or obscurity exists that the explanation which most closely fits every factor in the narrative is the most likely to be correct. This possible reconstruction of the elements of both passages seems to meet that condition very fairly. (There is however an alternative reconstruction which appeared in the May/June 1972 BSM under the caption "Judas and the Potters Field" which also seems to meet the case and for this reason that article is appended to this treatise so that readers may compare for themselves the respective merits of the two.)

Matthew says the priests bought the field, and Acts that Judas bought it; Matthew that he hanged himself therein and Acts that he "*fell headlong and burst asunder*"; Matthew that the priests used the money to buy "the potters field",

quoting words of Jeremiah which do not appear in his written prophecy, wherefore a similar expression in Zechariah is usually thought to be referred to in which thirty pieces of silver are "*cast to the potter in the house of the Lord*", which is not quite the same thing. If one is perfectly frank, it has to be admitted that the two accounts differ in almost every major element, and perhaps something other than the suggestions in the Sep/Oct 1984 BSM article would be of assistance.

The principal argument against the traditional understanding is the time element. Jesus was arrested late on Thursday night and taken to the Palace of the High Priest. Only then did Judas receive his money. (Matt. 26.15 says that at the first meeting the priests "covenanted" to give Judas the money in exchange for the betrayal; obviously he would not receive it until he had fulfilled his undertaking.) Jesus was crucified at nine o'clock on Friday morning and by that time Judas, in despair at his crime, was dead. Not much time in which to buy a field even if, the day being the Passover, he could find a seller willing to transact the business. Beside, he had thrown the money back at the priests and presumably had nothing therefore wherewith to effect the purchase. It could be argued that Judas had made a contract previously to buy the land conditional on payment of the money, (which is the suggestion in the 1972 BSM above-mentioned), but even so the narratives by both Matthew and Mark seem to indicate that his interview with the priests was within two days of the arrest at a time when all Jews were busy preparing for the Passover, which would leave

little time for such a proceeding.

The solution suggested therefore is that there were two fields, not one, and two separate purchases, one by Judas and one by the priests. The order of events could then be made to agree with every statement in both accounts, something like this:

Judas was a thief (John 12.6). As "treasurer" of the little company, he looked after the moneys donated by their supporters for their sustenance. John says plainly that he diverted some of that money to his own purposes. Those purposes may not have been entirely selfish. The revealed character of Judas show him to have been much more materially minded than his fellow-disciples. He probably despised the others as visionary mystics and considered himself the only practical man among them. What more likely than that he should tire of this ceaseless wandering about the country preaching, and begin to think of the position arising if their mission failed and they had no homes. If, unknown to Jesus and the others, some of the contributed moneys could be invested in a piece of land, with or without a cottage upon it, they would always have a "home base", and in the outcome he himself might even be congratulated on his foresight. A darker hypothesis could be that the land, acquired in his own name, would be a haven for himself if he decided to abandon his discipleship and separate from the others. Either surmise is supported by the fact that in Acts the purchase was not of a "field" (*agros*) as in Matthew, but of a farmstead, landed property, estate (*chorion*). The process, likewise, in Acts is not *agorazo*, to purchase, as in Matthew, but is *ptaomai*, to acquire for oneself, to enter into possession.

Judas, then, could have already possessed a property somewhere near Jerusalem, perhaps an appreciable time before the Crucifixion. It was not likely to have been more than a small piece of land, with perhaps a cottage and a few trees, but more than can be described by "*agros*", a field. It would be in this place, after witnessing the failure of his attempt to force Jesus into asserting his Divine power to deliver himself and take open action to make himself King, that Judas hanged himself on one of his own trees, there remaining unseen until the rope broke with the result described in Acts. This would have been on the Friday morning after his last visit to the priests.

They, of course, did not need to act so precipitately. They gathered up the silver pieces, but, "*it is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood*". So they "took counsel", almost certainly after the week-long Feast of Passover had ended, and decided to

use it to buy a certain field, the "potters field", for use as a burying place for "strangers", aliens, non-Jews, who happened to die in Jerusalem. Because of the circumstances of its purchase, it was unhallowed, unfit for Jews, and so became known as the "field of blood"—the blood of Jesus.

The other field, that in which Judas met his end, became known to the local populace, because of that fact, in the Aramaic language of the peasantry, as *Acel-dama*, again meaning "the field of blood"; this time it was the blood of Judas to which reference was made.

Matthew's final comment (27.9), quotes Jeremiah as predicting this incident; "*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 potters field, as the Lord appointed me*". The Book of Jeremiah contains no such passage; this has led to the suggestion that this was a "spoken" word only, preserved in Jewish tradition; against this must be set the fact that Zechariah (11.12-13) certainly does contain the passage but in what at first sight appears to be a totally different context. It is also true that a number of 2nd century Syriac versions omit the name "Jeremiah" and it may be that one suggestion on this point, that the name did not exist in Matthew's original Gospel but was added, perhaps as a marginal comment afterwards copied into the text, is correct, although this kind of suggestion always has to be treated with caution, especially since in this case the same Syriac versions render "potter" by "treasury", by changing one letter to accommodate the word to Aramaic.

An important aspect here is that Jesus himself referred to this prophecy in his last discourse to his disciples, applying it to himself. "*It is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered*" (Mark 14.27; Matt. 26.31; Zech. 13.7). (A full exposition of this and related passages appeared in the exposition of the Book of Zechariah, chap. 11 in Sep/Oct 1969 and chap. 13 in Mar/Apr 1970). Matthew therefore would have good reason for bearing Zechariah's prophecy in mind when recounting the story of Judas. The usual difficulty in trying to relate Zechariah to Matthew is the assumption that in Zechariah the Shepherd has received a "goodly" wage from a grateful people for his ministry. In fact, as shown at length in the above-mentioned exposition and more briefly in the article "Cast to the Potter" in Sep/Oct 1984 BSM, the wage was a niggardly one from an apostate and ungrateful people, and the expression "goodly

price"—*"this magnificent price at which I was assessed by them"* as one rendering has it—was uttered ironically. The Lord came to Israel and ministered to them and they rewarded him with the traditional price of a slave—thirty pieces of silver! Hence, says Matthew, the Jews of our Lord's day, in the persons of the priests and the rulers, assessed him at thirty pieces of silver and God showed his contempt for the offering by having it "cast to the potter" as a worthless thing, on the floor of the House of God which they had so lightly esteemed. Thus seen, the vision of Zechariah was a picture of what actually happened five centuries later.

There is no connection between the expression "cast unto the potter" in Zechariah, which only meant casting out as a worthless thing, and the "potters field" which the priests purchased with Judas' money. The picture finishes with the casting of the money on the floor of the Temple, and what the priests did with it afterwards is irrelevant. The dual use of the word "potter" is merely a coincidence. In point of fact, the word rendered "potter" in Zechariah applies to any kind of artist or fashioner, such as for the making of idols, although in Zechariah it is almost certainly intended for the worker in clay. The superabundance of broken and spoiled earthenware vessels inseparable from the potter's craft renders the idea of casting worthless things on such a "rubbish dump" peculiarly appropriate.

\* \* \*

*That is one suggested explanation. The other, first appearing in the May/June 1972 BSM, is repeated here.*

\* \* \*

Who did purchase the field, Judas or the priests? What was the real origin of its name, "the field of blood", the fact that it was the scene of Judas' tragic death or that it had been purchased with blood money? The first point to notice is that the priests "covenanted" with Judas for thirty pieces of silver if he would betray Jesus (Matt. 26.14). This implies that he would receive the money when he had fulfilled his obligation. As soon as Jesus was taken into custody and brought to the High Priest's house where the Sanhedrin was assembled, Judas would be calling upon some appointed official who would pay him his money. This would have been between nine and twelve o'clock at night; by six the next morning the illegal trial was over and Jesus on his way to Pilate. Now it is in the highest degree unlikely that Judas, during those few early morning hours, would find anyone willing to negotiate the sale of a piece of land—and on the eve of the Passover to boot! Whenever Judas agreed to buy the land, it was not that night. But before the

second trial began before Pilate, Judas was back with the money. It had been in his possession for less than six hours!

The High Priest and his supporters began seriously to consider the arrest and execution of Jesus a week before the Crucifixion. The raising of Lazarus had alarmed them; as they themselves said, with that act there was danger of the whole nation becoming adherents of Jesus and they feared for the consequences, both political and ecclesiastical. So they discussed the possibility of having both Jesus and Lazarus put to death, *"but, they said, not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people"* (Matt. 26.5). The Feast of Passover would begin in a week's time; the city would be thronged with people from other parts, including many turbulent Galileans who knew Jesus to be of their own province, and there could be a mass uprising in favour of the man they plotted against. The trial and execution must be carried through and completed before the commencement of the Feast, and that was the day after Passover itself.

In this dilemma the visit of Judas came as an unexpected assistance. That visit must have been during the course of their deliberations at some time between six days (Jno. 12.1 and 4) and two days (Matt. 26.2 and 14) before the day of the Crucifixion. The agreement was made and Judas went off satisfied that within the next few days the money would be in his possession.

This is when he went off to buy the field. He could not yet pay over the money for he had not yet been paid. He could however agree the matter with the owner and they would "strike hands" on the bargain. From now on the field belonged to Judas and he was bound to pay the money at the agreed time a few days hence.

What was his purpose in buying the field! The motives of Judas have always been shrouded in obscurity for no real lead is given us in the Gospels. The most reasonable explanation is that he realised the supernatural powers possessed by Jesus, was convinced that He was the Messiah, but was sorely perplexed at his refusal to use his powers to dispossess the Roman occupying authorities and establish himself by force as King of Israel, so fulfilling the ancient prophecies. By scheming to put Jesus in a position where He would be compelled to use his power to avoid condemnation and death, Judas would have precipitated the establishment of the Kingdom and more or less urged his Leader into the kingly position. If this was in fact the motive of the betrayal then this business of buying land might have been connected with some idea of providing a site for some great dream palace suitable for his king, or an arena from which the ceremonious

announcement of the Kingdom could be made. No one can know for sure, but that this field was intended for something that had relation to Jesus and his assumption of sovereignty after He had delivered himself in some spectacular fashion from his captors may well be the solution of the enigma.

And then, as the mockery of a trial dragged towards its climax, Judas suddenly realised that Jesus had no intention of saving himself. He intended to go, as He so often said He would go, to death.

In the shock of that discovery the demented man went first to the priests, with his unavailing cry. In unreasoning despair and remorse he flung the money before them and rushed out to the field he had contracted to buy, and there hanged himself on one of its trees. How long the body hung there we do not know; it may have been for days or even longer. Probably a superstitious horror of his deed precluded men from approaching it. At length the rope parted and the body crashed down to the rocky ground and was

dashed to pieces. Peter recounted what was an accredited fact in all Jerusalem.

Now the field was defiled—defiled with the blood of a traitor. The former owner would want nothing to do with it; moreover a bargain had been struck and he wanted his money. To resolve the problem he went to the priests, who were the administrators of legal affairs. They also had a problem—the money was in their possession but it was tainted money, the price of blood. They picked on an obvious solution. They paid the money over to the vendor who then was satisfactorily dismissed from the transaction. The field, now their property, itself defiled with blood, became a useful cemetery for any who were not of the covenant people, not Jews, and therefore could be buried in such ground without compunction. *Aceldama* was the Aramaic name by which it became known in after days, “the field of blood”, doubly so because it was purchased by the betrayal and death of Christ and because it held within itself the blood of the betrayer.

## “ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF”

*An Easter  
meditation*

Often, when the suffering and death of Jesus is considered, the theological aspect receives undue emphasis with consequent neglect of the practical view-point. Christian schools of thought tend unfortunately to centre their exposition around the cold legal doctrines concerning Christ's ministry rather than the “perfecting experiences” through which our Master passed. The reactions of affliction and trial upon his character were such that his sacrifice not only expunged the death sentence on mankind but prepared him for the work of re-education and reconciliation of a future age. Meditation upon this side of the subject will enable us more clearly to see why we should follow closely in his steps, that we also might become sympathetic priests who will in due time assist the sin-stricken world back to health and life.

Had the religious and political Jewish leaders at the First Advent been familiar with all the prophecies relating to the Deliverer of Israel, they would have perceived, and instructed the people in, the knowledge that the Messiah for whom they looked was not to be born into a princely environment of luxury and ease, nor was he to be a mighty general, schooled in the arts of war. They would have realised that their Messiah was to be a humble, peaceful healer, brought into the world amid the poorest circumstances, reared in a peasant home, ministering to the needs of contrite souls. Comparatively few of these simple

folk would have understood the more intellectual side of his doctrine, but they did know that Israel had been riven by the conflicts of great empires for many generations and now in their midst had appeared One who healed as many as lay within his contact. Jesus of Nazareth, the wonderful physician, trod the rough roads of Palestine, telling forth a message of good-will; preaching of love toward God and fellow man. It was a mission which was seldom undertaken without expense to personal comfort, and often He continued his labours while weary and foot-sore. He stood out even above previous holy men who possessed the gifts of healing and prophecy, and yet for all the good that He did and said for over three years among God's chosen people, his own people, they slew him as a traitor.

Rich and poor, pious and publican, young and old, had felt the effects of his work of curing the sick and making whole those who had hitherto not known the joys of vigorous life. Cripples who had begged out their miserable existence at the Temple gate for decades were bidden to rise and walk; poor sightless eyes yet without vision of God's universe were able to gaze into the face of the Master; deaf ears heard the voice of him who spake as yet no man had spoken and speechless tongues were loosed to praise the Creator. Whether stricken by bodily disease or afflicted in mind, their distress was remedied, not by some freakish “cure-all” which lasted an hour or day,

but set the captive at liberty to enjoy the freedom of health in physique and brain which the Life-giver had intended. Where He had obtained the superhuman power they knew not, nor did they see in him the One who had come from God to turn away ungodliness from Jacob and bind the broken hearts. They did not recognise the fulfilment of the words of God's holy prophets and realise that of this One it had been said "*Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him*", and they understood not that this was the "Man of Sorrows" who was despised and rejected of men. Blindness of eye was great, loss of spiritual vision was manifestly greater in them.

Sin had taken a severe toll of human life during the long ages, and in spite of man's relentless effort to combat disease and pain, the struggle was mostly in vain. Therefore it may seem strange to the casual observer that Jesus of Nazareth, one imbued with a living message and blessed with such curative power should be so wrongfully treated and put to death. There is more however in the story of the Saviour's ministry than merely a wasted life and needless death,—very much more.

"*Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone*" were the words of the Master, sublimely expressing one of the principles of Creation. Thus, the loss of Jesus' life will bring resurrection to all mankind, including peace and health—and most of all promise of reconciliation to God, without which everlasting life would be impossible to man. Harmony with the Creator is an essential part of the happiness of humanity, and it is this work which is that of Jesus and his Church, for the age of Restitution. It is their blessed task to restore that condition which prevailed in Eden, of which it was written "*so God created man in his own image*" (Gen. 1. 27).

Within the scope of God's redemptive purpose there lay even further beauties, for He planned that those who gave sufficient evidence of their love for himself should be changed into the likeness of their Lord. What a depth of goodness is here revealed in the Creator, that He should gather a family from among the sons of men, and that these brethren of Jesus should be associated in the work of restoration. And yet, Divine wisdom is again manifest, for who better could understand the weakness and hopelessness of sinful man than the Redeemer and those who have shared his thorny pathway while yet in the flesh? Who could more closely sympathise than those who have experienced the barrier between themselves and their Maker?

Sometimes the way with Jesus is difficult and sorrow seems multiplied on every side. It is just at those times when we should lay aside our work

awhile, leave the rush and bustle of the day's pressing duties, and enter into communion with One who trod this way before us. The great tomes of theological learning will not give us the comfort in such circumstances as will the simple gospel story of one who endured unto death amid the most heart-breaking experiences.

Recall the picture of the Master as he provided bread for a hungry audience after discoursing to them all day; see him as He tenderly spoke to the Samaritan woman concerning the Word of Life! The centurion's servant was made whole by the Prince of Peace; the widow's son was raised from the dead. Was He ever too weary or too bitter to minister to even one poor soul? Were any too foreign or too humble or too young for his healing touch? Did He ever lose his temper with that stiff-necked generation of scoffers? No, indeed, his life was a sublime example of the wonderful precepts which He had enunciated on the mountain side in the early part of his ministry. (Matt. 5. 1-12). His words and actions never became hasty even under the intense persecution of his latter days upon the earth. The nearer He came to death, the greater manifest was his love for his brethren and for the world.

But what is all this to us and what does it mean to our hearts and lives? If the word of the Lord is deeply rooted in our minds and if the "first love" for our beloved Lord has been retained through the trial and stress of life's experiences, then slowly but surely the impression of his likeness is being made upon our characters. Beyond all intellectual knowledge, above the gifts of speech or pen, beside every Christian activity, must come this process of sanctification and development within the heart, of a fruitage of love which shall bring life to the nations and joy to all mankind. It is the inward reaction to the buffeting and straining in life's battles that makes or mars Christian character. Troubles arise within the very church, to which the godly soul must respond submissively to the Father's will and with affection for our brethren. Intellects differ widely and cause the development of opposing view-points about certain doctrines; personalities having been formed within contrasting environments, clash easily and cause friction among God's people. What is the result upon the church? Do such experiences draw us closer together by the very fact that we have to learn to be patient and care for each other's limitations and weaknesses or does the reverse happen? Do the differences of opinion produce the fruit of the Spirit within us, drawing us nearer to our God and to each other? What opportunities are ours to practise the qualities needed to attain the standard of association with the great High

Priest? The privilege of thus serving each other now is that we might be fitted for the future work of serving together. But patience is not developed in a community where everything runs smoothly, where all think the same way upon all points of Christian teaching. Nor is love engendered when those who irritate each other part company, for that abolishes many opportunities to express the joy of "in honour preferring one another".

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples" was the identification which Jesus gave to his followers, "if ye have love one for another". Looking into the future of his church He saw this distinguishing feature from the world, and recognised that while it toiled amid a scornful world, their unity, their constraining love would shine forth as a wonderful witness. Has this been the experience of his Bride through the ages? Does this illustrate the path of the Narrow Way through the Gospel Era? We leave each one to answer that question, now, but it is sufficient that in looking back over the centuries we take note of the failings of others and endeavour not to stumble as they have done. The world is quick to criticise weaknesses in Christian communities, especially when internal strife is evident, and it is of no avail displaying leaflets and tracts, and becoming noisy about "world events" unless there is a *living witness* within our fellowship shining clearly and purely.

Thus shall we be prepared to go forth into the world here and now ministering such blessings and assistance as lie within our scope. If we have wrought good works among our brethren we shall be in a better condition to help our fellow man in the daily routine. It is easy to talk about brotherly love and shut half of God's children outside our walls in cold isolation. It is even easier to explain how we shall "bless all families of the earth", and then fail to bless the few of those families which we contact every day now. It may not be our privilege to labour among men in any healing or social capacity, but every child of God has the opportunity during some part of his life to manifest those qualities which will enable him to share the Kingdom work. As we jostle in the bus queue or shopping market, we are in one of the environments in which God has placed us to show forth his glory. God is training men and women now to be tender, kind-hearted and patient with the human race. The qualities of *mercy and wisdom* will surely be required of those who have lived amid iniquity and unrighteousness for decades, as they restore to life and re-educate earth's millions. Who better will be trained for such a work than those who have manifested God's love while they have been

under the burden of human imperfection and subjected to persecution? Do we rejoice in affliction and revile not again when troubled on every side? Do our workmates, our colleagues, those with whom we have to do, day by day, see the gentle, compassionate side of our nature or the impassioned, ill-tempered brutal aspect, which if allowed to spring up can easily spoil God's *workmanship*.

"Henceforth know we no man after the flesh" wrote the great Apostle Paul to the Romans—"No man" includes the fellow passengers in the train in which we travel, the man behind the store counter or the brother and sister in the home; most of all, our brother and sister in Christ. The way we act and speak is that which is covered by "after the flesh", for after we have given our all to God, we look through new eyes of love and behold *everything* from the standpoint of a "New Creature". *Everything* now is seen as Jesus would see it, and as a priest of God would see it. Any other attitude toward our associates in life's experience will lead us away from our calling.

So as another year of the Christian walk is ending, and we gather again in communion with our risen Lord, let us have in mind the grand outcome of sharing the bitter experience of "His cup". It is our privilege to come to the Master's table year by year and speak one to another concerning the suffering which He bore for us, and meditate upon the joys we have in following *his steps*. *May we remember we are part of one large family, one large loaf composed of many grains of wheat. But unless the loaf is broken, unless the grapes are crushed, the labour is vain. May the year before us give us fresh vitality to assist our brethren in the bonds of Christian love, that we may "bear one another's burdens and thus fulfil the law of Christ"*.

Suffering with Christ will deepen our union with our Lord and Head (Phil. 4. 10) and it will also give a firmer basis of fellowship with our brethren. Sharing his cross will also bring the happy experience of sovereignty with him. What joys will be ours then, we can only meditate upon now. What was lost in Adam will be regained in that glad day. We shall have the privilege of spreading leaves of healing among the nations and teaching them the way of peace, health and life-everlasting. What little we suffer now will be more than outweighed by one glance at our beloved Lord's face, but we shall more than see him. If we co-labour with him now, if we commune with him, share his sorrows and joys *now*, we shall share his life, when we are beyond.



# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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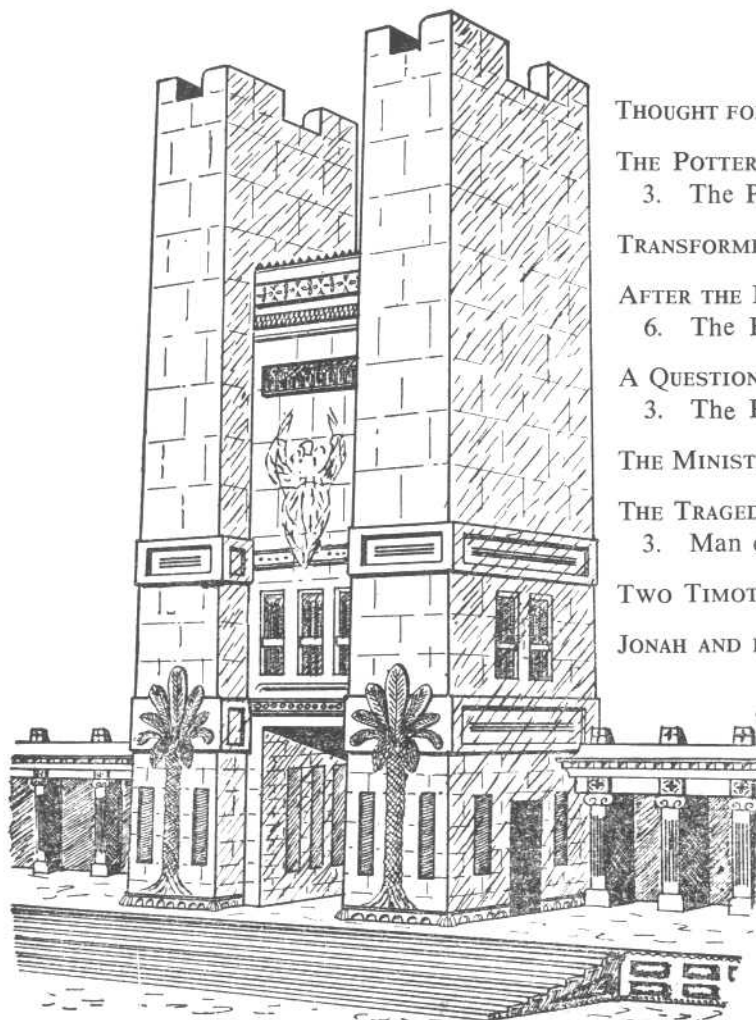
Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

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Next issue July 1st

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

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### Thought for the Month

*"If thou, O Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be revered"* (Psa. 130.3-4).

There is so much said about the wrath of God—in fact too much—and his severity with evil-doers. A sober view of normal Christian theology, which has remained unchanged since the Dark Ages, gives the impression that there is a greater passion for the punishment of evil-doers than there is for their conversion and redemption. The Psalmist did not share that attitude. He did not mitigate the sinfulness of sin, nor deny the culpability of the sinner. In fact he included all men without exception in the "legion of the lost" because of their sin, unless God should find a way out. If the Lord shall take due notice of our iniquities, he asks, who shall stand; who can escape? But there is a way out; there is forgiveness with God, albeit that forgiveness is conditional. It is that the forgiven man may reverence God and that implies repentance and conversion. That in turn demands that the Christian must be more solicitous and zealous for the conversion of the sinner than he is for his punishment.

*"Yet doth God devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him"* (2 Sam. 14.14). That old wise woman standing before King David enunciated a profound truth when she uttered those words. God is actively working to bring his straying children back into the fold. He does not leave them to wander in the wilderness bereft of counsel or guidance. Like the shepherd in the story, He leaves the ninety and nine who are safe, and goes out to find and bring home the one who is lost. Jesus *"gave himself a Ransom for All, to be testified in due time"* (1 Tim. 2.6), and if words mean anything at all, that can only mean that every man and woman who has ever lived must at some time in their life's experience come

in contact with and have the opportunity of accepting the benefits of that Ransom, and only fail of entering into the fruits of that Ransom if, after that full knowledge and experience, they turn deliberately away.

Jesus referred to the time of his Second Advent and his Millennial reign over the earth as "the regeneration" (Matt. 19.28). Regeneration means the imparting of new life. Is it too unreasonable to expect that in that superb Age of liberty and peace and progressive elimination of sin, every one of Adam's race right back to the beginning will share in the opportunity of renouncing sin and experiencing the forgiveness which will be the portion of all who, despite their previous sins and shortcomings, will then be among those who sincerely reverence the Lord?

### NOTICES

#### Coming Conventions

YEOVIL, Sat.-Mon., May 25-27. Sunday at Moose Hall, St. Michaels Avenue. Other days Hillgrove Ave., Details and accommodation Sis. M. Robinson, 26 Rands Meadow, Holwell-Hitchin, Herts., SG5 3SH.  
 CHESHAM, Sat. Sun., June 8-9. Malt House, Elgiva Lane. Details and accommodation Bro. F. Binns, 102 Broad Street, Chesham, Bucks., HP5 3ED.

### Gone from us



- ( Sis. F. Brice (Aldershot)
- ( Sis. S. Fendley (Bournemouth)
- ( Sis. I. Henderson (Blackmore)
- ( Sis. M. Humphrey (Ilford)
- ✱ Sis. M. Panteny (Romford)
- ( Sis. M. Ray (Upminster)
- ✱ Bro. R. Robinson (Hitchin)
- ✱ Sis. K. Thompson (Milborne Port)



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

## THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

*A consideration of  
Divine Right*

### 3. The Potter selects his clay

The Apostle's argument concerning Divine-election begins with Abraham, and continues in the experiences of Abraham's seed. All the illustrations (save one) offered by Paul in evidence comes from the experiences of that Seed. Even that one exception (Pharaoh) is introduced into the argument because of its relationship to Abraham's Seed.

God's choice of Abraham and his seed to be his people is the broad foundation upon which the principle of election is built, and its history is the sphere where the elective principle is applied. Election, in its every phase from beginning to end, centres and operates in Abrahamic and Israelitish experience exclusively. Even the election applied to the Christian Church is no exception to this fact, for the Church (in Christ) is Abraham's Seed, and is selected to occupy a special place in relation to the Abrahamic Covenant.

The first man among men to become God's chosen one was Abraham himself. The call of God inviting him to leave his home and kindred and migrate into the land of God's choice was the first act in the long-continued system of Divine choosing which in course of time came to be called "election". And the Divine institution which knew beforehand what it intended to do or choose (as here in Abraham's case), is an exhibition of the principle underlying all Divine foreknowledge. God fore-knew Abram; that is, God was fully cognisant of Abram's character before He approached him in Mesopotamia. More than that, God was able to estimate aright what Abram could and would become under his guiding hand. Divine foreknowledge saw the possibilities in that worthy patriarch's life, and on the basis of that preview invited him to further intimacy with himself. When Abram became responsive to the heavenly call, he became the recipient of a special Divine care and over-sight, which in directing Abram applied itself to a specific purpose having distant ages as its goal.

In the call of Abraham God began to open the pit from which He purposed to dig his clay. But, when God called upon Abram he had no son. The over-ruling act of Providence kept Sarah childless during her virile years, till maternal hopes were dead. Realising this, Sarah sought to procure a son by other means, but God told them explicitly that this child of Abram could not inherit the promises nor enter into the purpose for

which Abram had been called. Ishmael, though Abram's son and the darling of his heart, was set aside and "by-passed" by Almighty God. The only child who could inherit his father's heritage must come from Sarah when all hope was dead, as gift from the Most High. And high heaven also exercised its prerogative to choose his name, when God said "call his name Isaac", and "In Isaac shall thy seed be called". Divine choice deliberately chose Sarah's son, and just as deliberately excluded Hagar's child.

When the next generation was on the way, born from a mother of God's own choice, the Divine preference was again expressed. Of the two babes about to be born, before either had done good or ill, the rights of primogeniture were over-ruled, and the younger child was chosen to inherit his grand-sire's privilege. Paul takes these two instances to point his argument. What does he mean thereby? Evidently this. He wants his brethren to know that participation in God's purposes is a matter of pure grace on God's part. And where all the motive is of grace, can the receiver say the giver nay, or stipulate that the gift must be bestowed in the receiver's preferred way, or bestowed not at all? Ishmael, though Abram's son was set aside. Isaac, also Abram's son, was accepted and made heir to his father's inheritance. Could Abram complain of that? Esau, though Isaac's child, was passed-by and disinherited. But Jacob, also Isaac's child, was selected and constituted the heir of the promise! Could Isaac find cause of grievance there?

God has been faithful to his promise, and permitted Abram's privilege and blessing to pass to Abram's seed. God had been faithful again to Isaac, and allowed the promises to pass to Isaac's seed. In this He fulfilled all which He led the patriarchs to expect, but reserved to himself the right to choose how He should confer his gift.

God could look farther down the years than could Abraham or Isaac. He knew the possibilities of each case, and in placing Isaac and Jacob in preference to Ishmael and Esau in relation to his eternal Plan, Divine Wisdom made no mistake. Let the history of Ishmael's progeny, and Esau's descent through the centuries, vindicate or challenge, if it can, the Divine choice.

But, apart from this, it can be shown that the declared purpose behind all God's selective processes, could be justified before the whole congre-

gation of heaven and earth. When the Most High swore an immutable oath to Abraham it was openly declared so that all heaven and earth might know that the chosen seed had been selected, that through it all the non-elect nations of the earth might be blessed. In that case, Isaac was to become a channel of blessing for Ishmael; and Jacob should be a river of grace for his disinherited brother Esau, and Israel shall then hold out her hands to Ishmael's seed and Esau's progeny. If then, the All-merciful has mercy to bestow on all, shall it be denied to him to do it in his own way and time? If the chosen one receives the merciful gift today and the "bypassed" one in a better tomorrow, can any voice in heaven or earth say the Bounteous One is not just and kind?

The chosen of today is first blessed to become the channel for tomorrow's flood. Abraham's seed may be the "first-born" among the nations of the earth, but the blessing is just as sure to all the other nations of the earth as it is to Israel—the only difference is in the way and time of its bestowment. And if God shall choose one specific way above other probable or possible ways, is it not his privilege so to do?

Having guided the trend of events through the first two generations, God then took the twelve tribes of Israel as his chosen people. He directed their course into a land of bitter experiences and raised up a despotic ruler who oppressed them severely. This cruel king was destined to challenge Divine Power and so suffer in consequence that the name of God might be published abroad in the earth. To achieve this end God "hardened Pharaoh's heart" by removing one plague after another till Pharaoh felt safe in challenging the God of Israel repeatedly. But he found out that he could not challenge the Lord with impunity nor hold the people whom God had come to set free. This captive people was to be constituted in a most spectacular manner the elect people of God. Many times in after days they were told that they were God's chosen people, separated from the nations of the earth, to live their life in communion with God. He gave them his laws to teach his way, that they might be a people prepared to serve his purposes.

In view of the remarkable origin of this people from the child of Promise, it could be construed that that miraculous origin alone entitled God to consider them as his clay. Apart from that Divine interposition in Sarah's life they could not have had existence at all. Their very life was the result of a Divine gift. Again, the restoration of Isaac from the altar, on a principle well-established in Holy Writ, implied the dedication to God of Isaac and all who were to be born from him, or

at least, as many as God should desire to take.

Thus, this could be considered the place whence God began to dig his clay. With this thought the words of Isaiah seems to agree: "*Look unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you, for when he was but one I called him, and blessed him, and made him many*". (Isa. 51.1-2). From his Abrahamic pit God has brought up his clay ready for its working up his vessels for God's glory.

How appropriate is Jeremiah's picture of the Potter at his work to this creative world of God. "*Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house and behold, he wrought his work on the wheels. And when the vessel that he had made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made it again as another vessel as it seemed good to the potter to make it*".

How simple is this illustration. A lump of clay was taken from the working-trough and placed on the revolving plates, while with deft fingers the potter began to work it into shape. But the clay would not work up to the intended design. It became spoiled in the potter's hands. He then crushed the clay together again, and worked it till more pliable. Then he put it on the wheel again and made it another vessel, this time succeeding in making it up according to his desire.

"*Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'O House of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel'*" (Jer. 18. 1-5). This is the prophecy from which Paul borrows his forceful illustration of the potter and the clay. And by the homely parable the Divine teaching becomes quite clear. God was the Master Potter who had taken clay dug from the Abrahamic pit, and had subjected it to discipline and manipulation. He placed it upon the forming-wheel to mould it into a goodly vessel in accordance with its purposes. But Israel would not come to shape. It lacked plasticity and pliability. It would not respond to the Divine working. The vessel was marred in the Potter's hand. But the same clay was crushed up again, and worked and tempered over again, and is to be returned to the wheel. This time God will make it a vessel according to his desire. In the better days yet to come, with "better things" all around, Israel will take shape and become a vessel of mercy to a needy world.

How appropriate to that better time are the words of Isaiah: "*But thou, Israel my servant, and Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of*

*Abraham my friend, thou whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the earth, and called them from the corners thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant, I have chosen thee and not cast thee away. . . ."* (Isa. 41. 8-9). *"But now, thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob; and he that formed thee, O Israel; fear not for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine"* (Isa. 41.1). "Called", "redeemed", "formed", "created"; suggestive terms indeed, showing that God first selected

Israel, and then formed them to be his people, his servants and witnesses.

Thus the election and information of Israel as the people of the Lord accords completely with the Divine principle of calling an elect nation to be the channel of blessing for all the peoples of the earth, showing that the process of election is the prelude to the operation of Free Grace for all who will take the gift of life from God's bounteous hand.

*To be concluded.*

## TRANSFORMED

*Counsel for the  
Christian Life*

*"We all with unveiled face reflect as a mirror the glory of the Lord and are transformed into the same image from glory to glory."*

Christians are not the only ones who would like to be better men and women. Professor Huxley said, *"I protest that if some great power would make me always think truth and do right on condition of my being turned into a sort of clock and wound up every morning, I would instantly close with the offer"*. Oh, that I could only think right and do right" has been the desire of great men right down the ages.

This is our inheritance if we are the Lord's people. This is shown in the Word of God and can be obtained under the right conditions. It is as natural for the character to become beautiful as for flowers to become beautiful: the same Creator who instituted laws for the production of beautiful flowers instituted laws for the creation of beautiful characters.

Some claim that the only way to be transformed into the likeness of the Lord is to resolve by sheer willpower to overcome sin in our bodies and minds. There is nothing wrong in resolving to overcome sin, but that is not the vital point. Suppose we were on a ship which, when in the middle of the ocean refused to go, and those on deck tried by pushing at the masts to move it. It would not move, however much pressure they used; their strength would be used in the wrong way. They need to go down to the engine room, the real seat of power, and use every energy to put right what was wrong. Effort is useless unless exercised in the right direction. A drowning man cannot pull himself out of the water by his own hair.

Some say, *"Our idea is to tackle one sin at a time and thus eradicate sin from our hearts that good may work."* That would be a very big task for any man, to get sins one by one out of his life. That is the wrong way; sin is only overcome by something taking its place. The evil spirit discharged from the man must be replaced

by the Lord's spirit or the last condition becomes worse than the first. The tackling of one sin at a time is therefore not the right method.

Still another method is to copy Christ's virtues. The word "copy" suggests the thought of an artist in wax or paint trying to reproduce a beautiful flower. Many believe in Christ as the standard to be copied, but very few are able to copy him. The power that is used is a power of self—a power within themselves instead of a power from without.

Again, some say, "How about self-examination"? Setting up a code of rules to which we must keep! A watchmaker once made a present of the parts of a watch, but when they were put together the main spring was missing. The vital thing is the power, or main-spring.

The Scriptures give us a valuable formula for our sanctification. There are laws of science and art, and if we would produce anything correctly we must use a formula. We are told that God's thoughts are higher than man's, and if the wisdom of men sees the necessity for a formula, God has not left us without one. 2 Cor. 3. 13-18 provides this formula, and in verse 18 reveals three laws: 1, *reflection*; 2, *assimilation*; and 3, *influence*.

Notice that it does not say we are transforming ourselves into the same image from glory to glory. No, we do not transform ourselves, we are changed or transformed. The changing power is something that does not naturally belong to ourselves, it is a power that comes from without. Throughout the New Testament we find that the verbs used in connection with our sanctification are passive. As far as the power of sanctification is concerned it is a power from without. We can come under the influence of his spirit and so be transformed. The barometer is made to tell us the condition of the weather, but it does not itself register the condition of the weather. The weather does that, the barometer responding to changes

in the weather. So our responsibility is to bring ourselves into the attitude of susceptibility in which God can work on our minds. That is our part of the work, to get our hearts into that attitude of full consecration: take out anything and everything that would hinder the working of His Spirit. The Word of God must be received into our prepared hearts and the whole being must be yielded as members of righteousness. That is the thought in this text. We, beholding Christ with unveiled face, in our study of the Lord's Word and His example and teaching, see the glory of God. We see the beauty of God. He exemplifies to us the character of God, and as we set our affections on that lovely character, our love for God and our study of His Word is so close to our hearts, we cannot but reflect it. A man is shaped and fashioned by that which he loves. We find two young people coming together; they see something they love in each other. They marry and live together for fifty years, and during that time a reflecting work is going on; one would speak as would the other; their very appearance becomes alike. If we are in love with the Lord, the things He says are the things we would say, the words He has given us are the words which express the sentiments of our hearts. We take them into our hearts and reflect them. Beholding Christ, we reflect His image, and we are changed from glory to glory. This word "glory" is rather a crude word to express the thought here. The Psalmist says, "*The heavens declare the glory of God*". There is a demonstration of the glory of God, His power, His wisdom and the grandeur of His mind. In other words, God's glory is His character. So we, beholding Christ, reflect His image and are transformed from character to character, from one character to a better character, then on to a still better one until we are ready for our final change. We are all mirrors, we cannot help it, and we are all reflecting, whether we know it or not.

Now, what is it we reflect? We reflect what we have gained from our environment. If we choose an environment that leads to a depraved life, we shall reflect that depravity. We shall also reflect if we have been reading uplifting books and have been in uplifting company. Are we living in an environment of the Spirit? Do we read the Word of God? If so we shall reflect it. Do we keep the company of the brethren? Then we shall reflect the spiritual effect.

This reflection is not merely a matter of mind or memory. The impressions we have gained are made on our very beings, so much so that a man is shaped and fashioned like that with which he comes into contact. Where we cannot change our circumstances, we can use them. It will either be

a matter of our circumstances using us or we using them. This is important. We may find one who goes through a trial and the result is a stronger faith in God than ever before, whilst another may pass through similar circumstances in a spirit of questioning, murmuring and complaint, producing a very different result. By taking Christ's precepts, no matter what experiences we go through, they will all work out for our good; whether painful or pleasant, they can be used for our sanctification. We not only reflect what we receive from our environment and experience, but we receive these impressions into our own beings. This we have referred to as the *Law of Assimilation*.

Now, *influence*: Our study of great men's works, or our contact with individuals, have the effect of changing our lives. David and Jonathan had a great influence on each other. How about the influence of Christ? If the influence of good people is great, and yet they are only a very small part virtuous in comparison with Christ, what would be the influence of Christ on those who make Him their companion? Some may say that there is a difference, that there is something tangible in a friend. But we do not love our friend because of his virtues. So it is with Christ. It is His life and influence that does the work of transforming. It is by the begetting of the Spirit of God that the Christian is in receipt of a power that the world cannot know or comprehend.

There are certain laws governing the Christian. "*Except a man be born from above.*" We must receive a power from above before we can be transformed. There are laws governing the material world, organic and inorganic. A mineral is inorganic and must remain so, for it cannot by any power from within itself cross into even the lowest form of life. Plants are also governed by laws of growth, which are peculiar to themselves. While the mineral cannot reach up into the organic, we find that a plant can reach down its roots into the mineral and by absorbing it, transforms it to part of itself. The mineral has been "born from above" and entered the Kingdom just above it. No law governing the human can make the human spiritual by effort or power from within itself, but God can take hold of us if we yield ourselves to Him, and so we can be transformed into His image. The power is the power of life and we derive that life from the Word of God, for the Word of God is living, and we have been begotten of the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever, and by imbibing that Word we are transformed. If we study His Word and character and take His Word into our hearts, we receive a power that changes us from glory to glory.

## AFTER THE FLOOD

### 6. The Beginning of Empires

Between the dispersal of the tribes at Babel and the beginnings of recognisable history there lie two or three centuries of which Genesis tells us nothing, and archaeology only a store of semi-mythical legends behind which lurks some basis of fact. Genesis 10 shows the peoples, sons of Shem and Ham and Japheth, making their way from the common centre at Babel into the surrounding lands and creating their village-settlements wherever each party came to a stop and forming the nucleus of future nations. Two centuries later and these villages had grown into cities—not cities in the modern sense of the term but at least built-up towns of anything up to twenty thousand inhabitants living an orderly and civilised communal life. This is where ancient secular history begins to take definite shape and it is at this point that the first written records begin to appear and yield some definite information as to what life was like in those far-off days. Set against the Old Testament background this period is probably that of the early lifetime of the patriarch Eber, fifth in descent from Noah (Gen. 11.14 Sept.) about the time of the death of Shem, Noah's eldest son. Shem must certainly have witnessed the developments which led to the first abortive attempt to build the Tower of Babel, and the separation of the peoples as they began to migrate in various directions to distant lands, and perceived in this the hand of the Lord moving to the fulfilment of the injunction laid upon them when they came out of the Ark "*be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth . . . and bring forth abundantly therein*" (Gen. 9.1 & 7).

Although from this point of time the affairs and histories of each emerging nation began to run in separate tracks the background of Genesis and the story of the patriarchal line from Noah to Christ remains in the land of Babel, the Plain of Shinar, until the days of Abraham, and that was a thousand years in the future. It may come as a surprise to realise that this is the period of time which separates Gen. 11.1 from Gen. 12. 1 and throughout all this time the only records of events are those preserved—in very imperfect form—in the inscriptions which have been recovered by painstaking investigators from the sands of Iraq. But the only lucid and reliable history of man from the very beginning up to the time of the Flood is that which was preserved through those years by the forebears of Abraham; when he left Ur of the Chaldees the sacred records must have come with him, and the dated line of

his ancestors back to the first man, to give us the earliest chapters of the Bible we know. If the confused and mutually contradictory accounts of the period between the Flood and Abraham which are all that the Sumerian and Babylonian tablets give us can be taken by experts as a guide to the events of those days, then certainly the much more precise and definite account in the Bible should be accepted as authoritative.

But before tracing out the history and developments of those days in the land of Babel with which the descendants of Noah were to be so intimately involved, a glance at the progress and welfare of at least two of the peoples who migrated over the earth is necessary. The nation which made the most rapid advance at this time was Egypt, the children of Mizraim or Misr, son of Ham. They may well have been the largest body of migrants to separate at Babel and seek for themselves a home in the far west. So they set out. Climbing steadily, from the pleasant valley in which stood the half-built Tower, ascending the three thousand feet slopes to the highlands of the present Syrian desert, they faced a long and arduous journey. Egypt is nearly a thousand miles from Babylon, and it may be conjectured that the migrants were unlikely to have got so far in so short a time. The answer probably lays in the nature of intervening terrain. Between Babylon and Egypt lies the great Syrian desert, an elevated rocky plateau having no rivers and on which nothing grows. Braidwood and Howe, in "*Prehistoric Investigations in Iraqi Kurdistan*", have stated that in ancient times this whole area was covered with luxuriant oak forests, but even so it was no place for permanent settlement. The scouts must have been out in front and eventually reported the discovery of a fertile arable land with a mighty river, (the Nile), adequate for all their needs for generations to come. Unlike the sons of Shem and of Cush, they left no settlements in their passage, but attained and colonised the land of Egypt as one body. To this day that Syrian desert contains no relics of ancient cities and habitations as do the countries round about.

Here, in this fertile territory, watered by the Nile, they found a home every bit as desirable as the one they had left. Here they rapidly built up the second great civilisation of the ancient world, that of Egypt. They entered Egypt a neolithic (stone-using) people, having nothing in the way of metals or tools; within a few centuries

they were building the Pyramids. Casson, in "Ancient Egypt" (1969) says "Within a century after the first Pharaoh of the Old Kingdom had ascended his throne, Egyptian builders had graduated from sun-dried bricks to highly sophisticated construction in stone . . . within two hundred years or so Egypt's builders had so mastered the new material that they had finished the Pyramids at Gizeh". This means that technical progress was extremely rapid, much more so than the scholars and savants of to-day care to admit.

The usual view of Egyptian history, shared by most scholars, considers that human settlement commenced at an extremely distant date and that men evolved only slowly from a state of primitive savagery to the highly civilised position which is revealed by the extant remains. Thus the periods of development before the first Pharaoh, which are known as the Tasian and Badarian eras, (from the names of villages where remains were first found) is pictured as being immeasurably long. If in fact, as indicated in Genesis, the first Egyptians were already civilised when they entered Egypt, this hypothesis is unnecessary. From the entry into Egypt to the first Pharaohs need only have been a matter of two or three generations, say a century, and this would bring the early history of Egypt into line with that of Sumer. After all, if one compares the fantastic progress of human achievement during the last hundred years, in science, invention, technology, exploration, there is nothing unreasonable in thinking that the first civilisations, Egypt and Sumer, should have followed in their fullness in something like two or three centuries.

One factor which led to exaggerated ideas of the antiquity of Egyptian history was the 19th century scholars' habit of taking the records of kings' reigns and dynasties as strictly consecutive, and stringing them all in succession, failing to recognise that ancient men, like modern ones, are only human and apt to exaggerate their terms of years to increase their own importance. It has been realised in this 20th century that many of these dynasties overlapped so that sometimes two or more kings reigned simultaneously in different places. Hence the scale of Egyptian history has been considerably reduced in more recent years. Just to illustrate this point, here is a list of some dates formerly believed to have marked the accession of Menes, the first Egyptian Pharaoh.

A.D. 1867	Breckh	5702 B.C.
1870	Unger	5715
1880	Lenormant	5004
1903	Petrie	4520
1909	Breasted	3400

1920	British Museum	3300
1934	Monckton Jones	3400
1942	Albright	2900
1960	Rutherford	2900
1962	Anati	2900
1967	Biblical Archæologist	2850

A reduction of nearly three thousand years in a century is not bad going; the latest dates arrived at by the experts line up very well with the chronology of Genesis as given in the Septuagint and supports the view herein advanced that the story of the Tower of Babel recounted in Gen. 11 should be placed at about 3000 BC and the accession of Menes about 2800 BC.

They arrived in Egypt a civilised, knowledgeable and God-fearing people but they arrived with nothing beyond a few flocks and herds and seed for their hoped-for crops. This latter is known because wheat grain found in ancient tombs of this period has been analysed and found to be of a type which is native only in Euphrates territory. But with their boundless energy it could well have been no more than a century before their first primitive culture had developed into one in which towns were being built with permanent houses and temples, and Egypt's first Pharaoh, Menes, was on the throne at a little settlement which much later on became the famous Memphis, capital city of Egypt in after times. Within another century they had devised a calendar and begun to devise the famous hieroglyphic writing, and had even produced a treatise on surgery. A further hundred years and they were mining copper and precious stones in Sinai, near the mountain afterwards made famous as the place of the Mosaic Law, getting gold from Sinai and East Africa, and cultivating the native river-reeds to produce papyrus for writing material—the plant name from which we have our modern word "paper". Not long after that, about 2600 BC they were building the Pyramids.

The early Egyptians were deeply religious and at this time had not developed the pantheon of gods for which Egypt afterwards became notorious. They brought with them from Babel the original worship of the God of heaven. Some of the sacred texts, recovered from tombs of a not-much-later time, testify to this. They speak of the Most High as "the only true living God, self-originated, who exists from the beginning, who has made all things, but himself was not made". He is "the God who has existed from old time; there is no God without him. He is not visible, not carved in marble. There is no shrine with painted figures of him; there is no building that can contain him. He does not manifest his form". There is nothing in this from which any Christian

or Jew would dissent; here, clearly, is a written expression of the faith which the sons of Noah must have brought with them from the antediluvian world and planted in this new world they were building.

At this point the Egyptians pass out of Bible history, not again to be noticed until a thousand years later when Abraham, followed by Jacob and Joseph, came to sojourn in that land. After that the destinies of Israel and Egypt were intertwined but by then the Egyptians had a thousand gods to worship and temples in the land innumerable.

The other party to depart from Babel whose going was to have significant consequences for Israel in later days was that of Asshur, grandson of Shem, and the ancestor of the Assyrians. ("Assyria" is merely the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Asshur"; the nation was named after its founder.) The origin of the Assyrians is accorded a brief notice in Gen. 10 when Asshur is said to have left Babel and built Nineveh and other cities. Says Gen. 10.11-12 "*Out of that land*" (i.e. Babel) "*went forth Asshur, and built Nineveh and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; the same is a great city*". One immediately has visions of a mighty concourse of people armed with all the necessary implements and materials to set about the building of those magnificent cities for which Assyria afterwards became famous, but in fact there was nothing of the kind. Many generations had to pass before the sons of Asshur got around to building permanent cities; at the start they were nothing more than herdsmen living in tents. In the advance of technical progress the Assyrians lagged well behind the Sumerians and Egyptians and it was getting on for a thousand years before they had any real cities. At this time it was more like a migration of perhaps twenty or thirty thousand people under the leadership of their patriarch Asshur making their way three hundred miles northward along the course of the river Tigris until they came upon the rolling grasslands and low foothills of Northern Mesopotamia and here they called a halt and began to erect their tents and a little later on mud-brick houses in little villages around which stretched their farmsteads and pastures. All over this land which eventually became the Assyria of the Old Testament there are the remains of literally hundreds of these settlements bearing evidences of habitation at this early date. They were much more primitive than their neighbours the Sumerians in the south and the land they occupied was not so congenial. The summer there is not so long and the winters are often bitterly cold. But there they

settled and there in the course of time they built their cities and at the last Nineveh was their capital and for a time the world's most magnificent city and they increased in military might and became the scourge of the nations.

But when Asshur led his people into that grassy plain all these glories were in the distant future. It is known that Nineveh was founded at this early date; one of the greatest of 20th century archaeologists, Sir Max Mallowan, only recently deceased, has conducted extensive researches on the site of the ancient city and probed its past right back to the time when it was no more than a village settlement of mud huts. That could well have been when Asshur entered the land. Calah, the Assyrian name of which was Kal-hu, is about twenty miles from Nineveh, and was in Asshur's time doubtless a similar village. Resen is still unknown and undiscovered; it may never have attained city status or it may have survived into history under another name. Various suggestions emanating from early mediæval writers hazard the idea that it is represented to-day by a "*village near Nineveh called Rash-al-ain, meaning the fountainhead*" but since this Arabic name is fairly common over all Mesopotamia there is not much reliance to be placed on that. Resen is defined in this verse "a great city"; more properly it should be rendered "a strong city", as though it was some kind of fortress offering protection. A modern suggestion is that it may have been the notable city a few miles to the south of Calah called Asshur, which itself was the capital before Nineveh. This was in later times a fortress city guarding the Assyrian dominions from the incursions of invaders from the south. No one really knows, for the name Resen has not survived.

The general picture then is that of a group of villages comprising Nineveh in the centre, Rehoboth-ir, "*the suburbs of the city*", the open spaces around, and Calah a little way off. Surrounding these main centres were the smaller settlements and farmlands which ultimately grew into the sovereign State of Assyria. There has been preserved lists of the kings who ruled from the first but it is known that the early so-called "kings" were in actual fact petty tribal "sheiks" living in tents; the days of palaces and royal thrones came much later.

The A.V. margin has an alternative reading; "*out of that land he went forth into Assyria*" implying that it was the great hero of Gen. 10, Nimrod, who built the northern cities as well as his own, not Asshur the Semite. It is not likely that this is correct; it is based on the existence of a personal pronoun in the phrase, so that the expression runs "*from this land he went Asshur*"

but there is no preposition of motion governing "Asshur" and the pronoun could equally well be masculine or neuter so that the phrase could well be "out of that land one went forth, Asshur" and so refer to Asshur anyway. Nimrod as a Cushite is hardly likely to have gone north into Assyria which was a Semitic stronghold; the verse is much more likely to indicate that Nimrod went south and Asshur went north in this matter of city building and took the lead in setting up the separate Sumerian and Semitic communities.

This narrative was not written originally in Hebrew; it first saw the light at the very beginning of writing, in the early Sumerian pictographic script of which few examples are as yet discovered. What is known of the language, how-

ever, shows that grammatical forms were very elementary; there were no pronouns or conjunctions and a literal representation of what is likely to have been the original account would run something like "from land went Asshur built Nineveh". All things considered, it seems that Gen. 10 is telling us that Ashur went north and Nimrod went south.

This latter name is that which has next to engage attention. Nimrod, the "mighty hunter before the Lord" who is credited in legend and folk-lore from that day to this in the doing of great deeds and the execution of mighty works. Who was this man, mentioned only by name in Genesis but remembered in the Arab world to this day?

*To be continued*

### The Writings of Solomon

These three productions come down to us from Jewish archives of sacred religious literature; and notwithstanding the imperfection of the writer, they come with clear indication of Divine supervision and inditement. The wisdom expressed is above that which is natural to our fallen humanity. It is not necessary to the reverent study of the moral philosophy therein set forth that we should either forget or ignore the defective moral character of Solomon; for even the story of his life with its chequered manifestations of virtue and vice is no inconsiderable part of the lesson of these books.

In 1 Kings 3. 11-12, we have the assurance of the Divine inspiration of the wisdom of Solomon: "And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life, neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment, behold, I have done according to thy word. Lo, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee". But while we recognise and duly appreciate the wisdom of Solomon, we also mark his typical character, and perceive that only as a type of Christ could the fulness of the promise belong, of wisdom and riches superior to any preceding or succeeding him. In this light the statement of our Lord (Matt. 12. 42) "A greater than Solomon is here" is in perfect harmony with 1 Kings 3. 12. His peaceful and prosperous reign, his famed wisdom and his marvellous wealth and glory were typical of the Millennial reign of Christ, though it all falls far short of the glory of the antitype—as types always do. As a type,

the peace of his reign in contrast with the warlike reign of his father David is strikingly similar to the predicted peace of Christ's reign in contrast with the turmoil and war and confusion of the Gospel age which precedes and prepares the way for the reign of his Son and for the building and establishment of the glorious temple of God, whose living stones are now being made ready, even as David similarly prepared the materials with which Solomon built the typical temple.

The Song of Solomon, though in the form of an oriental love song, is really an allegorical representation of the mutual love of Christ and the church.

The Book of Ecclesiastes seems to have been written in later life, when the heart had grown sick with excess of sensuous pleasures and the lack of real happiness which comes from a close and perfect walk with God, when he turned from all his riches and honours with the sad refrain, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." From his own experience he proves the truth of his theme, and counsels to others a different course from that which he himself had pursued, saying, "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth . . . Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." (Eccl. 12. 1, 13).

The Book of Proverbs was probably the latest production of Solomon, when not only the promised wisdom from above, but also an experience gained under very peculiar and varied circumstances found expression in numerous concise and pithy sayings for the guidance and instruction of all who would live godly. These are frequently quoted and referred to in the New Testament.

*(selected)*

## A QUESTION OF OWNERSHIP

### 3. The Peace of the Law

"Great peace have they who love thy law, and nothing shall offend them" (Psa. 119). So wrote the poet king of Israel, who in spite of his faults exalted the law of God.

Peace is only a word to many people. In a demanding, pushing, rushing world, it means no more than a cessation from work, noise or competition, a freedom from domestic strife or party feuds or an end to the hostilities of war. Calm repose, serenity of mind, is neither desired nor sought until the frayed system is driven to desperate measures for its preservation in some degree of health and sanity. Even the still silence of quiet places is something generally shunned as unnatural. Modern man has become addicted to the din, the discords of a roaring, restless age where peace is a stranger to his environment. The eternal harmonies, the music of the spheres, is a foreign language pertaining to a world he neither knows, nor desires, nor understands.

If outward peace is hard to find how shall inner peace, great peace, be attained under conditions of stress and strain where solitude is frightening and the busy multitudes, the ceaseless hum of activity is both familiar and safe. Once gained, how can it survive amid the grueling pressures and discords imposed upon the everyday life of all classes of people? Few are free from fret and worry; anxiety, pain and sorrow stamp many faces. Discontent, disappointment and frustration spoil many more. The varied and hurrying crowds of mankind bear few traces of that serenity and happy confidence defined as peace. That peace of harmony with God is not the calm of a stoic indifference or the quiet of a resigned and uncomplaining spirit, or the dumb lethargy of those who have ceased to hope. It is the strength of confidence, of harmony with the great fountain of life, a blessed assurance amid the contrary tides and treacherous currents of human frailty and evil forces. For lack of it many people are sick in mind and body. All the pills and treatments of the medical world cannot cure the divided, unhappy souls who voyage through life without the rudder of love and the anchor of faith. The plausible arguments of natural wisdom and philosophy cannot produce peace, certainly not that great peace which comes to those who love the word of God, who endeavour to live by it, who make a practical application of it to life's daily affairs. It does not mean they live in a charmed circle, hedged

in from the world or the experiences common to man. It does mean they are saved from the consequences of rebellion and self-seeking, from foolish mistakes and empty follies which waste the time and substance of the shallow minded. In a world beset by fears and confusion they are saved from ignorance and doubt. They depend for counsel and guidance upon the invisible source of wisdom and power.

The mistakes of man create danger and bring defeat. God does not make mistakes. Those who trust in him have extra common sense. They know how to avoid the pitfalls and the stumbling blocks which cause havoc and bring anguish. There is no room for the seething jealousies and hatreds which torment so many minds when the peace of God occupies the central place. The *Why?* of offended self-will has no voice in the affairs of those who rest their all in the hands of him who steers the universe through ages without end.

Limited in wisdom, in knowledge, in power and length of days, dependence upon and submission to a higher authority in no way belittles an intelligent human being. It is the best insurance for the life we now have and for that which is yet to come. "*The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul*" (Psa. 7.19). The instructions are ideal, the epitome of all that ensures social and personal peace. In their observance lies the power to change people from miserable, discontent to noble dignity. They are the standard of human behaviour well within the ability of normal, intelligent understanding and performance. Spoken and written for a nation selected to teach other nations by their example, this second attempt to gain the affections of men foundered on the reefs of a hard human wilfulness and indifference. The riotous worship of the golden calf by the multitude who had shrugged off the absence of their leader as a thing of small account; the broken tablets of the Law and the ensuing miseries of the camp, seem like an omen of all that was to follow. The denial of God has been less than the indifference. Apart from the pagans who still cling to the rites and superstitions attached to their various deities, the nations of Christendom, having professed to know God, to understand and accept his law through association with the faith of Israel, have like them made many promises. There has been much profession but a poor performance, which has

created cynicism and some mockery.

The requirements of God are both just and reasonable. The law of the golden rule has in every century been an ideal, ignored or found impossible of achievement except by a persevering few who have been looked upon with curiosity as oddities, or venerated as saints beyond the common touch. The simplicity of the Law, like the simplicity of the Gospel, has been largely lost, overlaid by additions, by creeds, by conventional ritual and a lip-service which has robbed it of its life-giving qualities. The letter of the Law is a dead letter without the stimulating spirit which moves the mind to an acknowledgement of its rightness, with a corresponding urge to obey, to carry out and live up to its precept. Its value to man and the trouble arising from a lawless or law-breaking state have never been in question with the discerning. *"In the keeping of them there is great reward."*

In spite of all these assurances, testimonies and the evidences of the need and safety of the governing laws of nations created by or modelled upon the *Ten Commandments*, written by the hand of God in his mountain rendezvous with a choice and chosen man, there are those who ask "Why the law? Why should we observe rules ancient or modern? Why bother with religion? It is the cause of a lot of trouble. Why do we not think what we like and do what we like?" Such freedom is a tempting proposition to youthful ardour impatient of restraint. The questions are those which every self-willed generation has put to its austere and critical elders condemning or mourning the waywardness of its youth. The experiences of life alone offer the best answers

and teach the best lessons. The fees are somewhat heavy. It is when they are demanded, when fear, loneliness, pain and frustration assail the human mind and body that men and women begin to realise that everything has a price, even freedom to cast out the Word of God like an old shoe. For Adam, the ancestor of the race, the beginning of intelligent human relationship with God, the answer was clear but devastating. He was a free agent with liberty to enjoy a thousand lawful pleasures in the sylvan glory of his paradise. Only one restriction tried his metal. The simple record of that first failure, all too readily classed as allegory, folklore or an unforgotten dream of a desirable residence and a care-free life for which the generations, as they pass, persistently search but do not find, has left its mark upon all Nature, a black mark for which there has been no man-made erasure or remedy.

Untried, unready for knowledge, man, choosing his own way, broke the one rule of his kingdom, broke faith with his Maker, lost his trust in his friend and advisor, so setting in operation another law whose grim results are still at work throughout the earth, a law which can neither be defeated nor repealed except by the Author of all law.

As that wise monarch Solomon, after what seemed to be a successful and profitable life, observed somewhat bitterly, *"There is a way that seems right to a man but the end of it is death"* (Prov. 14.12). Not only were its fleeting pleasures and transitory treasures "Vanity of vanities", but the day came when the whole experience stumbled to a full stop.

*(To be continued)*

## St. Peter's Fish

Nine years ago a series in the BSM on the life of Peter came to the incident related in Matt. 17. 27 when the Lord instructed Peter to go down to the lake (of Galilee) and he would find a fish swimming in the water with a coin in its mouth. He was to take the coin and use it to pay the Temple tax on both their behalves. Sometimes the story is ridiculed or doubted, but in that series it was pointed out that a well-known fish, the *musht*, native to the Sea of Galilee, is known to carry small objects such as pebbles or coins in its mouth, being especially attracted to anything bright or shining as a coin. The wonder of the story is, of course, that Jesus with his Divine power knew that such a fish carrying such a coin would be in such a place at such a time. It was

also stated that the *musht* is still found in the Sea of Galilee and nowadays is reared commercially for food production.

An interesting side-light on this is the fact that in 1983 an international symposium on the breeding of the *musht* for such purposes was held at Nazareth. A hundred and fifty scientists and fishery experts from forty countries met seventy of their Israeli counterparts to discuss the technical and commercial aspects of the process, all in the sacred cause of production for profit. One is led to wonder how many of those men, if any, remembered the first recorded occasion, two thousand years ago, when the *musht* brought its tribute to the needs of man.

## THE MINISTRY AND GENIUS OF ISAIAH

Isaiah was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets; the outstanding evangelist of the Hebrew race. His name is a compound one; it means "*the salvation of Yahweh*". The prophet was conscious of his name, and realised that he did not bear it accidentally. *Jesha* and *Jeshuah* are among his favourite words, and seem to infer that, like Abraham he lived by faith in the day of the future Jesus, who is the personal salvation of Jehovah (John 8. 56; Heb. 11. 13).

His father, Amos—no relation to the prophet of that name—appears to have been a citizen of Jerusalem. The social position of Amos cannot be defined, but Isaiah seems to have held high rank, for when Hezekiah, King of Judah, enquired of him, he sent a deputation of his chief officials (2 Kings 19. 2). His prophetic ministry extends through the reigns of four kings, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, covering a period of at least forty years. Isaiah's prophecies have much in common with those of the other great prophets of the same period, Amos, Hosea and Micah.

Many pieces of prophetic history are interwoven in the book of Isaiah. That these pieces are from the pen of Isaiah is probably on this account, for prophecy and historiography were from the beginning never absolutely separated. The Chronicler refers to a portion of these historical pieces as incorporated in the book of Isaiah (2 Chron. 32. 32). He also informs us that Isaiah was the author of a historical monograph which embraced the whole reign of King Uzziah (2 Chron. 26. 22).

His prophecies are divided into two parts: chapters 1-39 forming Part I, and 40-66 Part II. Some modern scholars insist that Part II was written by an unknown author who lived in Babylonia about the close of the Exilic period. This unknown writer has been referred to by the names of the "Deutero-Isaiah," the "Babylonian Isaiah," and the "Great Un-named". Needless to say, the most spiritually minded evangelical scholars do not share this view. Luke, the writer of the Third Gospel, knows nothing of a "Second Isaiah". He states that there was delivered unto Jesus the book of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus opened the book and read from the sixty-first chapter (Luke 4. 18). John speaks of Jesus doing many signs, yet without convincing the people "*that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake*". John then records the opening verses of Isaiah,

chapter fifty-three (John 12. 38). Paul does not share the modernist view, for he only speaks of one Isaiah. One of the chief difficulties of the modernist school is inability to comprehend how Isaiah could prophesy concerning Cyrus, King of Persia, 174 years before he reigned.

"*The question*," says Prof. A. B. Davidson, "*is one of fact and criticism exclusively, and not a matter either of faith or practice.*" The thoughts of the great Jewish Expositor, Samuel David Luzzatto, in Padua, are much to be preferred. He said: "*As if Isaiah had foreseen that later scepticism will decide against the half of his prophecies he has impressed his seal on all and has interwoven the name of God, Holy One of Israel, with the second part, just as with the first, and even more often.*" Isaiah makes mention of the phrase, "Holy One of Israel" no less than seventeen times in the second part of his writings, and twelve times in the first.

It is convenient to divide Isaiah's ministry into five periods, which, although unequal in length, are marked each by features peculiar to itself. The first three may be said to be Assyrian in outlook, the fourth Assyrian and Babylonian, and the fifth Babylonian.

The first period extends from the death of Uzziah, about 740 B.C., to the beginning of the reign of Ahaz, and is dealt with chiefly in Isaiah, chapters 1. 5; 9. 8-21; 32. 9-14. Like Amos, Isaiah appears here mainly as a preacher of righteousness and judgment to come. His ministry begins at a time when Israel had forsaken God and placed their confidence in worldly prosperity, warlike resources, superstition and idolatry. Middle-class luxury, oppression of the poor by wealthy merchants and tradesmen, wantonness of women, excess in festive drinking, and perversion of moral distinctions, abounded on every hand. He portrays this tragic condition of the spiritual life of Judah in these words: "*And the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city*" (Isa. 1. 8). He describes their waywardness in these words: "*The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider*" (Isa. 1. 3). Isaiah traces all the manifestations of national corruption to a single source; absence of a religious spirit, or the knowledge of God, in the men of his time. This truth he graphically describes in the unique story of the vineyard

(Isa. 5. 1-7).

The second period covers the critical period of the Syro-Ephraimite invasion of Judah, about 735 B.C., and is described in chapters 9. 8-21; 5. 25-30; 17. 1-11; chapters 7 and 8; perhaps also 9. 1-7. This period finds Isaiah in an entirely new rôle, that of a political adviser. This fact can be better appreciated when we look at the contrast which in this respect he presents to Amos and Hosea in the North. Like Isaiah, they looked forward to a future time of blessing for Israel, yet their writings contain no hint of political direction for the leaders of the state. It may be said here that Isaiah revives this political function of prophecy which had been in abeyance since the days of Elisha.

One of the outstanding events of this period is the impressive interview between Ahaz and Isaiah as a result of the invasion of Judah by the combined forces of Syria and Ephraim. By this unbrotherly act the Northern Kingdom sealed its own doom. Both it and Syria fell a prey to the advancing Assyrians under the leadership of Tiglath-pileser. Isaiah, chapter seven, sets out the interview between God's prophet and the faithless Ahaz. Isaiah assures the king that the conspiracy will come to nought, and holds out a promise of deliverance on the condition of faith in God. Ahaz replied: "*I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord*" (7. 12). Isaiah then continued the conversation, and gave utterance to the remarkable promise concerning a coming king in these words: "*Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel*" (7.14). The king's unbelief is answered by the threat of an Assyrian invasion.

Isaiah did not accept the king's decision as final, but made an appeal to the people at large. From the court he delivers his messages in the form of a series of oracles which are contained in chapter eight. They probably extended over a period of some months. Isaiah could see that the Syro-Ephraimite conspiracy would be destroyed by the king of Assyria. He endeavoured to impress this encouraging fact upon the minds of the people by the erection of a motto: "*To Maher-shalal-hash-baz*" (8. 1, 2). Months later he gave the interpretation of the motto in connection with the birth of a son to whom he gave the motto as a name (8. 3, 4). The people did not believe him, his message fell on deaf ears. The prophet was right. Damascus was overthrown in 732 B.C., and Samaria some ten years later. Judah, however, did not become a theatre of war between Assyria and Egypt.

The rejection of the prophet's message by the common people marks a temporary cessation of his public activity (8. 16-18). The Lord hid his face from the house of Israel, in that he withdrew the guidance of the prophetic word which had been so coldly received. The next period is marked by the strange absence of any record of Isaiah's reflections on the events with which it is associated, namely the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C. This event is foretold in several of Isaiah's most striking prophecies. Read Isaiah 5. 26-30; 8. 1-4; 17. 1-11; 28. 1-4. The fall of Samaria must have profoundly affected Judah, especially so when it is realised that the Ten Tribes comprised the larger portion of God's people. This following by the proud boast of the Assyrian: "*Shall I not, as I have done to Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her images?*" should have had a very chastening effect on the heart of Judah (10. 11). Judah seems to have concluded that if God failed to avert the doom of the Northern kingdoms, there was no assurance that He would protect her. This may have been the cause of the desperate struggle which afterwards took place to throw off the Assyrian yoke.

We now come to the most eventful stage of Isaiah's career, which covers a period from 720 B.C. to 701 B.C., during which time Hezekiah is king of Judah. It must be remembered that, throughout his prophetic career, Isaiah had always urged upon Judah the need for a position of isolation and absolute dependence upon God. Ahaz absolutely refused to be guided by the prophet, and, fearing the consequences of a Syro-Ephraimite conspiracy, tendered his allegiance to Tiglath-pileser, who promptly responded to his appeal (2 Kings 15. 29).

The first hint that Hezekiah might endeavour to free himself from the pact to which his father was a party, might be found in the short oracle of Isaiah 14. 29, 32, which is thought to have been the year of Hezekiah's accession to the throne. The next time that unrest is witnessed in Judah we find the Southern kingdom in the black books of Sargon. It has been suggested that Isaiah chapters 28-31 consist of the prophet's protests against negotiations on the part of Hezekiah with Egypt with a view to a revolt against Assyria. It is interesting to note that the originators of this revolt against Assyria in favour of an Egyptian alliance were anxious to keep the prophet in the dark in regard to their plot (29. 15; 30. 1). They did not succeed. Isaiah draws attention to their attempt to outwit the Almighty (29. 15, 30. 1-12; 31. 1-2).

Isaiah then resorted to an even more drastic attempt to turn public opinion against rebellion. For three years he walked the streets of Jerusalem "naked and barefooted" as a sign of humiliation which awaited not only Egypt—the power with which certain statesmen of Judah sought alliance — but the power of Ethiopia at the hands of Assyria (20. 2, 4). To quote the words of Dr. Skinner: "Isaiah consistently upheld the maxim that the safety of the state lay in abstinence from all attempts to recover its independence, and in quiet resignation to the will of God." There is no reason to suppose that the prophet held out any hope that such alliance would spare them from the trial of an Assyrian invasion.

In this, as in other periods, we find Isaiah against the spirit of unbelief and unfaithfulness which inspired Judah to seek deliverance through human wisdom and effort and alliances with surrounding heathen states. It seems clear that Isaiah expected the defeat of Egypt and Ethiopia at the hands of Assyria (chap. 20). He foresees a great expansion of the Assyrian empire under their victorious king, Sargon. Isaiah also realises that Assyria is an instrument in the hand of God to fulfil a Divine purpose. But, as one historian asks: "How could an immoral force (Assyria) be used for moral ends? When and where and how would the Assyrian overstep the limits of his commission and appear in open conflict with the will of him who had raised him up? And when this point was reached, how would God rid himself of the formidable tool He had fashioned to execute his strange work on the earth?" This is the subject-matter of Isaiah, chapter 10. 5-34, which covers the major portion of the period under review.

The contrast should be noted between God's purposes in raising Assyria up and the unholy ambitions of that despotic world power (10. 5-15); the annihilation of this mighty military power under the metaphor of disease and conflagration (10. 16-19); the encouraging message to the faithful remnant in Israel (10. 20-27); the destruction of Assyria under the very walls of Jerusalem (10. 28-34). The picture ends with the attempt of Assyria to overrun the earthly seat of God's visible government in Jerusalem, as he stands over against the capital, "swinging his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion" (10. 32). His armed forces suffer a mortal blow, and Judah is saved from the Assyrian terror. "The Lord God of Hosts shall lop the boughs with terror; and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down and the lofty one shall be humbled" (10. 33). Thus is the epic defeat of

the Assyrians under Sennacherib foretold by God through the mouth of his faithful prophet. This prophecy was fulfilled in 701 B.C. Other references to this defeat are to be found in Isaiah 14. 24-27; 17. 12-14; and chapter 18.

Isaiah felt that the hour had arrived when God would destroy his enemies, and thus vindicate the truth that He was indeed the "Holy One of Israel". This was probably the gravest challenge to the power of God since the day when Samuel exclaimed: "Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God; for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears" (2 Samuel 7. 22-24). Read also Isaiah 28. 7; 31. 5, 8; 30. 27-33.

In order that we might obtain a clear impression of this crisis, it is necessary briefly to review the policy of King Hezekiah. He had formed the opinion that Sennacherib's enterprise against Babylon had considerably weakened his armies. On the other hand, Egyptian might under the influence of the Ethiopian Kings of Napata appeared to be in the ascendancy. The traditional Egyptian interest in the Plain of Esdraelon—a triangular plain that breaks the central range between Galilee and Samaria—was now likely to increase. Just as the close of Tiglath-pileser marked a change in the foreign policy of Judah, so the close of the reign of Sargon, also a king of Assyria, witnessed another change in the policy of Judah. The prospect of freedom from the financial yoke of Assyria, imposed during the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah, together with the visit to Jerusalem of a mission of the envoys from the Ethiopian kings of Napata, caused Hezekiah to believe that the psychological moment for action had arrived. From this time onward, Hezekiah acted swiftly. He fortified Jerusalem and placed in protective custody in the capital Padi, Assyrian vassal king of Ekron. The toil of the king was unavailing. God did not intend Judah to think that, within herself, she had the power to deliver herself from impending disaster, or that her ends could be accomplished through alliances with heathen kings.

As soon as Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was free from Babylonian commitments, he lost no time in directing his attention to the powers with whom Hezekiah had associated himself. They were all soundly defeated, thus leaving the road to Judah clear for a full-scale invasion. The puppet king, Padi, was surrendered by Hezekiah and restored by Sennacherib to his throne. The campaign against Judah then followed. The record of Sennacherib—now in the

British Museum—and that in 2 Kings 18, 13-16, are in broad agreement, Hezekiah was defeated and subjected to a heavy fine.

Certain difficulties arise when comparing the foregoing account with Isaiah, Chapters 36 and 37. Of the various explanations that have been presented, it is generally held that after the capture of Ekron, Sennacherib set about the systematic reduction of the cities of Judah. Separate corps had the responsibility of capturing the capital. The Arabian army which Hezekiah had enlisted to his cause was easily defeated. Realising that further resistance was futile, Hezekiah sued for peace, which he obtained at the price of a very heavy fine. Assuming that he did not include the surrender of Jerusalem in his peace overtures, Sennacherib must have repudiated the agreement and gone back on his peace terms, for a siege of Jerusalem followed.

Hezekiah realised the helplessness of his position against so formidable a foe. In his extremity he went into the Temple, and humbly and earnestly appealed to God for protection against the opposing forces. He beseeches God to "see and hear the words of Sennacherib which he had sent to reproach the living God" (37. 14-20).

Isaiah was commissioned to reassure Hezekiah that the Assyrian army would not lay siege to Jerusalem, nor "shoot an arrow at it, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it" (37. 33).

Hezekiah's extremity was God's opportunity. Sennacherib's army perished in a night; the angel of the Lord performed his work swiftly, suddenly, and in silence (37. 36). Of the miraculous destruction of this mighty host, it has truly been said that "it is one of the outstanding examples of pacifism in practice."

An historian has summed up the crisis of the fate of Jerusalem in these words: "The crisis of Jerusalem's fate becomes the occasion of that final revelation of the majesty of God to which Isaiah had looked forward from the beginning of his work, and which he with increasing distinctness connected with the overthrow of the Assyrian power. The whole history of redemption converges to this one event; it is the consummation of God's work of judgment both on Israel and on Assyria, and the inauguration of the reign of holiness and righteousness and peace reserved for the purified remnant of the nation."

### Two Men Went Up

"Two men went up into the Temple to pray . . ." A story so well known that it needs no repetition. Yet how often do we stop to consider whether we ourselves are become like the man who, fasting twice in the week and giving tithes of all he possessed, found cause for glory, not in his separateness to God, but in his separateness from his fellow-men. "I thank thee that I am not as other men are." What a miserable confession to make. In looking upon his fellows he saw nothing to emulate, no characteristics or virtues which he could desire for himself, but only the sordid evidences of evil. The reign of sin and death was a very real thing to this Pharisee; and with an exquisite nicety he carefully dissociated himself from it all and explained to the Almighty that, living perforce in an evil world and amidst sinful men, he was nevertheless not of them nor with them, and that he at least was one to whom had come the superior inward knowledge which rendered him a fit companion for the One Who dwelt in the inner sanctuary.

We read the story, we smile pityingly at the vivid picture of this pompous Israelite, and mentally place ourselves with the publican standing afar off, as we continue our reading. But what of the lesson behind the parable? Is it

not true that at times in the Christian life we find ourselves thanking God that we are not as other men. Does it not happen that this separateness to God which we call consecration can degenerate into a smug and self-satisfied separateness from the world. And worse still, at times the suggestion is made that in this latter day when the purpose of God in calling from the nations a people for his name seems to be on the brink of completion, a still more exclusive and narrow-minded outlook is called for:—to wit, that our age-old mission as witnesses of Jesus and ministers one to the other must be abrogated in favour of an individual contemplation of the sacred mysteries and a refusal to extend the privilege of fellowship and the Word of Life to all but the favoured few who are accepted as being likewise the "sealed of God". Alas; that the fruit of a one-time zealous response to be "not conformed to this world" should be, not a transforming by the renewing of the mind, with all the light of spiritual understanding that transformation can bring, but a gravitation to the lowest depths of bigotry, of self-delusion, of the spiritual blindness which separation from our fellows must mean when we are not separated to God.

No matter how discouraging our experiences

with those to whom we bear the Word of Life—no matter how disappointing our efforts to serve and strengthen our brethren—we must not become narrow or bigoted. We are exhorted to be sure of our foundation and to have a reason for the faith that is in us. We are expected to be rooted and grounded in the knowledge which has come our way and we are warned not to compromise our understanding of Divine Truth for the sake of outward harmony. But above all things we are impressed, time and again, with the necessity for continual progress and advancement in our personal understanding of Truth. There may be things upon which various

disciples do not see eye to eye, and because of differences of thought there must upon occasion be a physical separation into groups for orderly worship and service. But that mystic communion which binds together all who truly name the Name of Christ transcends such temporary divisions and triumphantly demonstrates the fulfilment of the Saviour's prayer "*I will . . . that they may be one.*" Stand upon this sure foundation, and we shall have cause to rejoice, not in works of righteousness which we have done, but in that common standing in Christ which is our privilege and seal of Divine sonship.

## THE TRAGEDY OF SAMSON

*The story of  
a great failure*

### 3. Man of Blood

It was probably not very long after the disastrous sequel to his wedding at Timnath that Samson decided to go to the wife he had abandoned, presumably with the idea of bringing her back with him to Timnath and making her his wife in fact. His anger had abated; his nature was probably not capable of maintaining any deep emotion for very long, and in the casual way which seems to have characterised so many of his actions he apparently assumed that all that had happened would by now be forgiven and forgotten and that he would be received as cordially as when he first came to Timnath, a prospective son-in-law.

His easy-going hopes, however, were soon dashed. His father-in-law was by no means pleased to see him. "*I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her, therefore I gave her to thy companion.*" It looks as though the old Philistine quite thought he had seen the last of his turbulent son-in-law and considered the marriage to be at an end; he had in consequence disposed of his daughter to one of the young men who had been the cause of all the trouble at the start. What freedom of choice the girl herself had in all this does not appear. Most likely, very little, but it is quite evident that she was not the sort upon whom much sympathy need be bestowed. The father, however, probably eyeing Samson's menacing bulk a little apprehensively, was ready with a suggestion "*Is not her younger sister fairer than she? Take her, I pray thee, instead of her.*" He misjudged his man. The aggrieved husband was in no mood to discuss the relative merits of the two sisters' physical charms. He had been slighted once again, his vanity wounded even more deeply than before. One can well imagine the swift revulsion of

feeling, the transformation of genial placidity to blazing anger as he strode out of the house vowing vengeance for this, the supreme insult of all. "*Now shall I be blameless from the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure.*" To describe the ensuing wholesale and widespread destruction of the Philistines' standing crops as "doing them a displeasure" is such a masterly understatement of the facts that one is justified in concluding that if the word Samson used actually does have the meaning of the English phrase then he could hardly have been fully conscious of the enormity and significance of what he did. The whole story of Samson yields the picture of a man whose mind had not developed in pace with his body, a giant not aware of the moral significance of his actions. Now he went out possessed of one idea only, revenge; revenge upon the whole Philistine community which he blamed for the miscarriage of his dreams and plans.

One of the commonest of small animals in Canaan at that time and during most ages since is the jackal (mistranslated "foxes" in the Authorised Version). Samson was a country lad born and bred and he would well know how to track them to their holes and catch them. The time was the time of wheat harvest, when the standing grain was dry and ripe. The early rains had ceased and there would be no more rain for several months. The watercourses were dried up or drying up as is usual in the summer. Samson started catching jackals, tying them in pairs tail to tail and fixing a burning truss of straw or similar material to each pair of tails. The terrified animals struggled frantically with each other, darting madly about as each sought to rid itself of the flaming encumbrances, setting

fire to the growing grain in a myriad places as they fled. The account says Samson thus treated three hundred of them. It is not necessary to suppose that he caught the entire three hundred at once and released them simultaneously; rather it is more reasonable to think that he went about the countryside catching and releasing jackals wherever he could. The Philistines, desperately endeavouring to quench the rapidly spreading flames which burst out anew in one place as fast as they extinguished them in another, would have little time to spare to hunt down the instigator of the trouble, who in any case could easily keep one jump ahead of them all the time. By the time the last fire was out and order had been restored, Samson was nowhere to be found.

The loss to the Philistines must have been enormous. It was not only a question of their grain supplies for the coming year; it was the fact that the land of the Philistines was the main grain producing centre for their own homeland of Crete, seven hundred miles away across the Mediterranean Sea. An area of something like a thousand square miles, some of the richest agricultural land in Canaan, was held by the Philistines for this purpose, and Samson's three hundred jackals could easily have destroyed crops over the major portion of this territory. In the dry season, with water scarce and the fields packed with ripe grain, the conflagration must have grown to epidemic proportions and raged for days, leaving at the end miles of blackened fields and burned out homesteads. The disaster might easily have been the turning point of Philistine fortunes in Canaan. They had been in the land for more than eight hundred years without their power being seriously disputed; from Samson's day onwards the Hebrews waged what was a gradually increasingly successful warfare, until in the days of David, not much more than a hundred years later, their power was broken and they were finally subdued. It might well be that the Philistines never recovered from the damage done by this widespread catastrophic fire and that this event marks the real fulfilment of the prophecy "*He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines*". But if so, there is no credit to Samson on that account. This is one more instance in which God "makes the wrath of man to praise him". Samson may have diverted the course of history but all he was thinking of at the time was personal revenge.

The Philistine authorities were also in the mood for revenge after this. Samson himself was beyond their reach, but the mob, as mobs always do, demanded a scape-goat. It would

appear that the whole trouble had been started by the betrayal of the husband's secret by the wife, and the betrayal of the husband's rights by the father-in-law. Mob justice is seldom conducted on judicial lines and is characterised more by expedition than discernment. "*The Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire*". That did not restore the ravaged grain fields but it probably did help to pacify the homeless and hungry mob. It also did something else. It raised Samson to fresh fury. Throughout the story his intention to be the one to strike the last blow stands out. The Philistines should not have the last word. He had destroyed their crops, but now, learning of the fate that had befallen his ill-fated wife, he declared "*Yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease*." He sallied forth once more across the frontier, "*smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter*", and withdrew as quickly back into the territory of Israel.

This brought out the Philistine army. Samson was becoming too much of a menace to be ignored. An occasional frontier skirmish in which one or two men were killed could be treated as beneath official notice, but the way things were going it could be that this Samson would be putting himself at the head of an Israelite army of rebels and that would be a very different thing. The five rulers of the Philistine colony gave orders and the soldiery advanced into Judah to apprehend the trouble maker.

Samson had taken refuge in the precipitous crags of Etam, a jagged peak in the centre of Judah some thirty miles from Zorah and fifteen from the frontier. As he looked down upon the plain he found that he had roused a veritable hornet's nest this time. "*The Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi*". For the first time he was on the defensive. The men of Judah, in whose territory he had taken refuge, were not disposed to help him. Apprehension for their own safety outweighed any feeling of support they may have had for the man who would fain be their national champion. "*Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us?*" they asked him plaintively "*What is this that thou hast done unto us?*" Samson's sullen reply "*As they did unto me, so have I done unto them*" did not influence their attitude, perhaps understandingly, for the Philistine soldiers had only just told them that they sought Samson "*to do to him as he hath done to us*". The craven-heartedness of the men of Judah is shown by their willingness and even anxiety to hand over Samson, bound, to his enemies in order to save their

own skins. Samson might well have asked himself if Israel was worth delivering, but he submitted to being bound in confidence that he himself could burst the bonds when it suited him so to do.

So it came about. The Philistines shouted for triumph as their enemy was brought into their lines, securely trussed up with fine new ropes; their exultant shouts changed to cries of alarm as the wild-looking Nazarite's bonds snapped like flax under his muscular efforts, and alarm became panic as the giant seized the only handy weapon, an ass's jaw bone lying on the ground, and advanced threateningly into battle.

There must have been a great deal of superstitious fear in the Philistine attitude to Samson. In this case a thousand men are said to have been slain. A man even of Samson's calibre and physique can hardly have been expected to prevail against an army of that size. The nature of his past exploits and the fact that he had always emerged unscathed, coupled with the terror induced by his personal appearance, a giant of a man, flowing locks and beard, enormous muscles, probably a grim and fear-inspiring countenance, all might well have built up a legendary atmosphere about him which could easily throw the Philistine ranks into confusion once their opponent was seen to be free.

It is quite likely that the men of Judah, seeing him free himself and advance into combat, shook off their fears after all and rallied spontaneously to his support. The account says "*the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him*" and something of that Spirit might have communicated itself to the watching men of Judah and caused them to remember the past glories of Israel when their ancestors fought to establish a foothold in the land. Perhaps the Battle of Lehi that day was in very fact the first real blow Israel struck for her independence from the Philistines. It is much more reasonable to think that Samson, wielding his jawbone to good effect in the midst of the Philistines, was assisted by a goodly contingent of men of Judah armed with whatever they could lay hold of, since the result of the battle was the defeat of the enemy with a thousand left dead on the field.

There is a strange little sequel here. Samson, after the victory, thirsted, and for the first time in the story of his life is shown calling upon the Lord. Regrettably, it was only for an immediate benefit, a drink of water, but it does at least indicate some acknowledgment of God. "*Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant*" he said "*and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircum-*

*cised?*" His mind was still on himself and the material things, but God, ever ready to respond to the slightest trace of faith, gave answer. The hero found water suddenly bubbling out of a cleft in the rock, and drank, and was revived. There used to be a queer idea that God performed a miracle here in bringing forth water from the discarded jawbone; the Authorised Version says "*God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw; and there came water thereout*". The translators were confused by the fact that the Hebrew word for jaw, *lehi*, is the same as the name of the plain on which the battle took place. Rightly rendered, "*God clave an hollow place that was in Lehi . . .*"

The result of this battle established Samson as the recognised leader of at least the southern half of Israel, including Judah, Benjamin, Simeon, Dan and Ephraim, and possibly the remainder of the tribes also. He remained "judge" of Israel for twenty years although at no time during that twenty years was Israel freed from the Philistine yoke. Such law and order as there was in Israel was vested in Samson. Such freedom from oppression and victory over enemies as was achieved was due to the leadership and prowess of Samson. But there was no religious revival, no national return to God, no restoration of the covenant. The fact that their subjection to the Philistines continued is evidence of that, for whenever Israel did repent and return to God He gave them actual deliverance from servitude to their enemies; that was a condition of the covenant. The rule of Samson, Nazarite though he was, remained a purely secular one, without God. Small wonder that it ended in disaster.

Not very long after Samson's death another Nazarite child, born of a God-fearing mother, and devoted to God from his birth, was born in a village of Ephraim. Samuel, like Samson, was brought up under the Nazarite discipline, but Samuel, unlike Samson, had an ear to listen to God's voice from earliest years. Samuel also had to contend with the Philistines but Samuel put his trust first in God; and Samuel it was who did deliver Israel for at least part of his life from Philistine domination. Samuel, the last and greatest of the Judges, has the story of his judgeship recorded in extreme detail in the Old Testament and every incident in the story reflects his abiding faith in God and sterling loyalty to the laws of God. The only incident in the judgeship of Samson that is recorded concerns his visit to a harlot in Gaza, the Philistine capital. It is not a particularly edifying story. The Philistines had observed his coming and had shut the city gates

and laid in wait for him with the intention of capturing him in the morning. Samson remained with the woman until midnight and then, finding his egress from the city barred, pulled down the closed gates complete with gateposts and crossbar and carried the lot to a hill near Hebron, full forty miles away in the territory of Judah. He would have to cross fifteen miles of Philistine territory in order to get to the frontier and one wonders how he could have done that without interference and what was the size and weight of the gates that he carried. The action seems to have been a completely irresponsible one and the record of this incident seems to serve no other purpose than to indicate that Samson during his judgeship manifested the same characteristics as at the beginning, overwhelming indulgence of his animal passions and complete absence of any consciousness of responsibility toward God. It seems that the Philistine endeavour to capture

him was at all times a half-hearted one; he came and went to the Philistine cities more or less as he pleased, and for twenty years figured in the public eye as the leader of Israel. He seems to have remained in possession of prodigious physical strength coupled with a flair for outwitting his enemies on every occasion so that they despaired of ever getting him into their power. It is almost certain that during those twenty years he was a constant thorn in the side of the Philistines and probably waged a desultory guerilla warfare against them, leading sudden raids into their territory and generally keeping them always in a state of tension. But he did nothing whatever to lead Israel to trust and faith in God and in consequence he never achieved real deliverance. At the end of the twenty years the Philistines were still their masters, and Samson himself was still a man in whose life God had no place.

*(To be continued)*

### Dr. Seiss on 2 Pet. 3.7

*Dr. Joseph A. Seiss was a noted Lutheran minister of Philadelphia, U.S.A., a century ago, editor of the "Prophetic Times", a prolific writer and a convinced exponent of the premillennial Advent of the Lord Christ. As early as 1856 he pointed out that the Second Advent must take place in several stages, first, an invisible coming "as a thief" in which He would take his Church, then a bringing the world into judgment, mankind being quite unaware of what is happening, refusing to believe, and finally his appearing with his Church to establish his Kingdom. The following extract from his writings comments upon one aspect of these later events, in that judgment.*

\* \* \*

God never obliterates his own creations. The dissolving fires of which Peter speaks are for "the perdition of ungodly men," and not for the utter depopulation and destruction of the whole world. They may consume cities, destroy armies and effect some important meteorological and geological changes; but men and nations will survive them and still continue to live in the flesh. The earth is to be renovated and restored from its present depression and dilapidation, and thus become "the new earth" of which the Bible speaks. It is to pass through a "regeneration" analogous to that through which a man must pass to see the kingdom of God; but there will be a continuity of its elements and existence, just as a regenerated man is constitutionally the same being that he was before his renewal. It will not be another earth, but the same earth under another condition of things. It is now labouring under the

curse; but then the curse will have been lifted off and all its wounds healed. At present, it is hardly habitable—no one being able to live in it longer than a few brief years; but then men shall dwell in it forever without knowing what death is. It is now the home of rebellion, injustice and guilt; it will then be THE HOME OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

It is now under the domination of Satan; it will then come under the blessed rule of the Prince of Peace. Such at any rate, is the hope set before us in the Word of God, and this I hold to be "the world to come" of which the text speaks. It cannot be anything else. It cannot be what is commonly called heaven, for the word *oikoumene* cannot apply to heaven. It is everywhere else used exclusively with reference to our world. Neither can it be the present Gospel dispensation, as some have thought, for that began long before this epistle was written and could not, therefore, have been spoken of by Paul as yet "to come". We are consequently compelled to understand it to mean our own habitable world in its Millennial glory. And as the prophecies concerning the Messiah's eternal kingship are here referred to as having their fulfilment in the subjection of the Millennial world to his dominion, we are furnished with another powerful argument of Scripture in favour of the doctrine of Christ's personal reign as a great Prince in the world. Indeed, the Bible is so full of this subject and its inspired writers are so constantly and enthusiastically alluding to it that I am amazed to find so many pious and Bible-loving people

entirely losing sight of it. Ever and anon the Scriptures return to it as **THE GREAT AND ANIMATING HOPE** of the Church in all her adversities and depressions, and it does seem to me that we are depriving ourselves of much true Christian comfort by the manner in which we have been neglecting and thrusting aside that glorious doctrine. My present object is to show,

from the Scriptures, and by just inferences from them, what sort of a world this "world to come" is, and to describe, as far as I can, what we are to look for when once this earth has been fully subjected to that Divine King whose throne is for ever and ever, and the sceptre of whose kingdom is the sceptre of righteousness.

*Dr. J. A. Seiss, D.D.*

## TWO TIMOTHY TWO FIFTEEN

*A basic principle  
in our fellowship*

The whole of this epistle is firstly a personal letter to him whom Paul has trained, and whom he hopes will succeed him now that his own departure is at hand. Timothy already has knowledge of Paul's doctrine, manner of life and purpose; and so these final words are largely confirmation of guidance received. Throughout the letter will be seen how words of caution and admonition are coupled with words of encouragement. Paul, knowing his pupil, foresees that he could be sidetracked from the great evangelical work that lies ahead and wishes to warn, yet at the same time build up his confidence. And it may be that Timothy could be inveigled into striving about words to no profit; and so Paul emphasises the Word in contrast to the profitless words and babblings of opponents. It is apparent that Timothy will encounter several opponents (Paul even names some); and that the ministry be not blamed he is exhorted to preach the Word "*with all long-suffering and doctrine*". (These two qualifications for the ministry are not often found in one man; and it seems that if ministers of religion were appointed on these bases very few would be found suitable, and the history of the Church would be very different had this been followed.) The problems that would confront Timothy would partly be due to his hearers thinking that the new message abrogates the traditions; that it makes void the law; that it appears to set aside the words of prophets whom God himself appointed. He has to act with such care that he could not be harshly judged if he wanted to avoid his solemn charge, but providentially there seems every likelihood of him stirring up the gift that is in him so that he will not be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord. The first letter to Timothy (ch. 4, 16) well states the requirements of all evangelists: "*Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.*"

To assist him in his work of preaching the Word comes the advice of the well-known words

of 2 Tim. 2. 15—possibly the best known verse of the epistle. The Christian will do well in following the advice to remember that the verse itself should not be isolated, but should properly be interpreted within its own context; though we may apply those principles in all Scripture given by inspiration of God. It appears necessary to say this, for it seems that this is the last verse in which the advice to rightly divide is applied!

The very first word may mislead; it is not urging that study which is supposed to be a necessary step towards acquiring knowledge. If it were so many Christians who have no bent for such study would be discouraged; and what would be thought of the faithful of past centuries in the Christian era whose opportunities of even reading the precious words were much limited. Other versions suggest that diligence in gaining God's approval is meant in the word "study." Having this assurance, he would indeed be a workman needing not to be ashamed.

Why is he styled a workman? No more appropriate word need be found, for he is called to no sinecure. A search in a concordance will reveal how often the duties of ministers are covered by the words labour and work. And thus may be realised why, in the first letter to Timothy, Paul says that those who labour in word and doctrine are worthy of double honour.

Another need of the worker is "rightly dividing the word of truth". Much has been said about this piece of sound advice, especially in these latter days by those who would like all doctrines and Bible principles filed in their respective dispensations. Does rightly dividing mean pigeon-holing? Sorting out the texts and placing them in their correct ages, or collating them under topics and themes? Is this what Paul was advising Timothy? This form of dissection need not be discouraged, for it certainly helps in memorising and assists discussion, but let us apply these principles of right dividing in this verse, and remember that the advice was origin-

ally given to Timothy to help him in the field. Think of the opposition that he was likely to encounter, and consider what divisions of Scripture would be useful in countering them. He would not need any more dividing than Paul himself gives. For we need not look far to find the true divisions of Scripture. In this very epistle our search is ended. The Apostle, after stating the primary rule that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, divides under four headings—doctrine, reproof (or proof), correction, and instruction in righteousness. Enough to furnish Timothy for all he may encounter, or need for himself. No other divisions are given in Scripture, and we may properly question ourselves should we think that Paul did not go far enough. It may be that the Author of the Book foresaw that in the latter days would arise those who, ostensibly following the advice to rightly divide, would in fact exceed the instructions; and so He caused Paul to so divide, and thus forestall the dissectors.

Division has been made by putting the words of one writer against another, forgetting or ignoring that ALL scripture is God-breathed, and is therefore by One Author. Such dividing would never enter the mind of Timothy, for he from a child had known the Holy Scriptures as being from God through holy men moved by the Spirit. Another modern trend which seemingly assists correct division, but may easily lead away from it, is the tendency to champion a particular version of the Bible. This is especially true when one has an idea, a notion or an interpretation that requires support. (Generally speaking, if Biblical details are needed to convince an enquirer, it will be found preferable to quote from that version he will already know—the Authorised.) Did Timothy need a special version of the Scriptures to bolster the gospel he was proclaiming? If he had, what an opportunity for his opponents! These modern versions are often the work of one translator, and whilst worthy translations have resulted from their labours they have been unable to avoid bias, and if it happens that the translator has favourite doctrines he will find it difficult not to weave his views into his version. And in some versions may be seen more of the scholar than the Christian. It is because of this, that after trying the versions one turns gratefully to the A.V.—the work of several good men—which for all its faults may well be immortal, and has been an anchor for the saints for many years.

Of the four sections made by the Apostle it will be thought that doctrine is the most impor-

tant considering Timothy's duties. Whilst all four are needed to thoroughly furnish the man of God, looking back over the centuries will be seen grave errors through lack of or distortion of doctrine. But, what is doctrine? Very frequently the word is used to mean those tenets of the faith which we believe are essential to salvation. Every declaration of faith, every creed is chiefly a list of doctrines which would-be members must assent to. Did Paul mean it to be so applied? Has the word a harsher sound now than was originally intended? At least, let us not when we say doctrine mean dogma.

The questions which arise in our minds are answered in this very epistle—as we expect from so logical an Apostle. There we see what doctrines were in his mind and which he wanted Timothy to proclaim. They may be paraphrased as follows: Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead, and has brought life and immortality to light; that He will judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and kingdom; and that those who love his appearing will be given crowns of righteousness in that day. What a wealth of teaching in few words! This is doctrine; but if we augment this teaching and require our fellows to assent to it, we make dogma. And becoming dogmatic we cease to divide aright, and such dogmatism is partly responsible for the dividing of Christians into sects. On the other hand, it would not be true division to pass these doctrines by as of little importance, which might occur if one saw only moral teaching in the Word, or if one wanted to avoid controversy for the sake of amity. The middle course between dogmatism and mere moral teaching may be difficult to tread, and so Paul was helping Timothy to avoid some of the pitfalls by telling him which doctrines were to be proclaimed. And knowing what he must preach he would be prevented from wasting time on dubious questions and things which gender strife. It will be observed that in thus limiting Timothy to preach the Word and not be involved in useless or harmful discussion, Paul was giving wisdom gained in years of the same preaching; and he was urging all this because he knew that the time would come when they would not endure sound doctrine. In fact, even in those days were those who divided by wrong teaching. The doctrine that the resurrection was past already had overthrown the faith of some. It is such words that ate as doth a canker—it eats away faith in the Word and divides the church instead.

And Paul, by mentioning the important doctrines, has curtailed our dividing in these days.

Much time has been spent even by the Bible's best friends in dividing points which did not matter. Looking back over the years we can recall arguments on details of Bible truth which at the time we thought were foundations of the faith. Possibly the Adversary, knowing of our zest for right dividing, magnified some items to our minds so that we may pursue them and waste time.

It happens that the doctrines mentioned above meet much of the needs of the Word to prove, correct and instruct in righteousness. The doctrine that Christ was of the seed of David is for proving or convincing the Jew who has Messianic doubts as to our Lord's kingly rights. His resurrection from the dead corrects or sets right again the hopes that had been placed in him by his followers, and puts the

Messianic hopes of Israel in a new perspective. The resurrection of Christ gives to every believing Israelite a new song to sing for he thus finds that God's holy Arm has gotten him the victory, and to the believing Gentile his resurrection means everything, for he was once void of all hope. His raising from the dead brings into right position all other doctrines to convince and correct—it would be useless to consider them were He not raised. Then the doctrines that his faithful will be rewarded in that Day, and that his kingdom will surely come and with it the judgment of the quick and the dead encourages "instruction in righteousness" that all may be ready for the great event. If our right division of Scripture leads to all this in head and heart we shall indeed be thoroughly furnished.

## JONAH AND HIS GOURD

*A Old Testament Story*

The Book of Jonah tells how the prophet, disappointed because his predicted destruction of the wicked city Nineveh had been averted by the speedy—and unexpected—repentance of its citizens, sat himself down outside the city in the hope that God might after all reconsider, and inflict the judgment Jonah felt they so richly deserved. Thus waiting, the tropical sun beat down upon him and he was "exceedingly glad" of the shadow provided by a "gourd" which grew up above his little shelter. Alas; a horde of caterpillars appeared, biting into the succulent stem, and the plant withered away, and Jonah was exceedingly angry. Answering his petulance, the Lord said "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which was a son of the night, and perished as a son of the night (Heb.) and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand?" (Jon. 4. 10-11).

The key to the story is this expression "son of the night"; the impression given by the A.V. is that the gourd grew in one night and perished the next, but the Hebrew usage implies that the plant was the "son" of the night-time, i.e. that it belonged to the night and was therefore of a transient nature. The saying was a metaphor, adopted to point the moral of the story, which was to contrast Jonah's solicitude for a humble plant, which was destined to die anyway, with his indifference to the fate of the Ninevites.

The Hebrew name of this plant is *kikayon*;

it is most likely the castor oil plant, which in the Middle East grows rapidly to the size of a small tree and is used as a windbreak, having large fleshy leaves offering considerable shade. It has the peculiarity of withering extremely quickly when cut. An old description by Niebuhr (1776-1831) tells of one he saw which was eight feet high, the flowers and leaves of which withered in a few minutes when gathered. Jerome (346-420) says of it "It is the same as in the Syriac and the Punic is called *el-keros*, a shrub of upright growth, with broad leaves like a vine, and yielding a dense shadow. It springs up so rapidly that in the space of a few days where you saw a tender herb you will be looking up to a little tree". The doubt as to the identity of Jonah's gourd with this plant is due to the fact that mediæval scholars confused the then Arabic names for the castor oil plant and the vinelike gourd plant, which had very similar spellings, and adopted the gourd. The point is only of academic importance but the modern view is that *kikayon*, (Egyptian *kiki*) is the castor oil plant.

This incident of the swiftly growing shade tree and its equally swift demise is the climax to the story of Jonah. The prophet felt that God had cheated him. He had gone through well-nigh incredible adventures and been put to a considerable amount of personal inconvenience in coming to Nineveh and proclaiming the imminence of Divine judgment upon the Ninevites on account of their sins; bearing in mind the savagery with which these Assyrians had

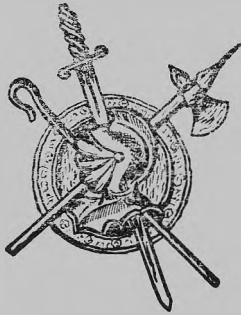
treated his own people for several generations past it is perhaps understandable that he was only too anxious to see the judgment executed and this nation exterminated. Most unexpectedly the Ninevites had repented at his preaching; in consequence God had lifted the threatened judgment. They were not to be destroyed after all, and Jonah was exceedingly angry. He knew that God was like this. *"Was not this my saying?"* he protested *"when I was yet in my country; for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil"*. In disgust he went out of the city and sat himself down on the hillside to see what was going to happen.

It was at this juncture that his own personal comfort began to be affected. He had built this little booth outside the city and there he sat, fuming inwardly and baked by the Mesopotamian sun outwardly. The plant grew up outside his booth and quickly provided some much needed shade, and Jonah was *"exceeding glad because of the gourd"*. He began to look upon it almost as a friend. Then came disaster. A caterpillar (*"worm"* in A.V.) appeared; this is probably a generic name implying a host of the particular species. The plant was attacked and within a few hours it had withered away. And once again Jonah was exceedingly angry with God, this time not because He had *not* destroyed, but because He had destroyed. And that gave the Almighty his opportunity.

*"You have had pity on this gourd"* He accused *"on which you bestowed no labour, neither did you make it grow, which is but a son of the night and destined anyway to perish as a son of the night . . ."* It was but a part of the vegetable kingdom, created to serve men and animals in the grand scheme of Nature, and having served, to pass away like all other plants of the earth. *"And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons so ignorant of true values that they cannot distinguish between their right hand and their left, between what is right and what is wrong?"* Jonah's desire for vengeance upon the Assyrians for the wrongs they had committed in the past blinded him completely to the fact that they had now repented and from King down to commoner had prostrated themselves before God in sackcloth and ashes, pleading that God would turn from his fierce anger, and they perish not. (Jon. 2. 5-10). Jonah was not prepared to give the Assyrians another chance; God was so prepared. That was the difference. One of the most profound truths in Christian doctrine is enshrined in this second

chapter of Jonah with its momentous climax *"And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not"*. It must be noted carefully that it was not merely the fact of repentance for the past which lifted the judgment; they *"turned from their evil way"* and *"God saw their works"*, the practical change of life and conduct. It was that which caused him to relent.

It must be remembered that our Lord said of these same Ninevites *"The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold a greater than Jonas is here"* (Luke 11. 32). Here is his own endorsement that the story is true, that the repentance was a true repentance, and that there is to be a sequel in that Day which Jews as well as Christians know as the Last Day, the Day of Judgment, the Day when all men must face reality in the presence of the King, the Lord Christ. And if, in that day, which we must equate with the thousand year reign of Christ over the earth, the Ninevites are to condemn First Advent Jewry for their rejection of Christ, it follows that their own acknowledgment of him still stands, and their repentance is still valid. The Ninevites in the day of Jonah merited judgment, immediate and complete, for their savage deeds, and that judgment was proclaimed. But God looked down upon them and saw them for what they were, children of ignorance. They had never had the saving power of God preached unto them. So God deferred the judgment and destroyed them not. But that is not the end. They have yet to learn of Christ as the First Advent Jews could have learned of Christ had they a mind. They have yet to prove the sincerity of their repentance. Dr. Clement Clemance, the celebrated London Congregational minister of three generations ago, laid down a basic principle in his book *"Future Punishment"* that *"no human spirit reaches the crucial point of its probation till it has come into contact with the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ for acceptance or rejection"*. God looked forward beyond the times of ignorance when the Ninevites could not discern beyond their right hand and their left to a day when they would be brought into contact with those claims and on that basis confirm their choice for eternity. Jonah was not prepared to go that far; but God is, and *"the Son of Man came, not to destroy men's lives, but to save them"*.



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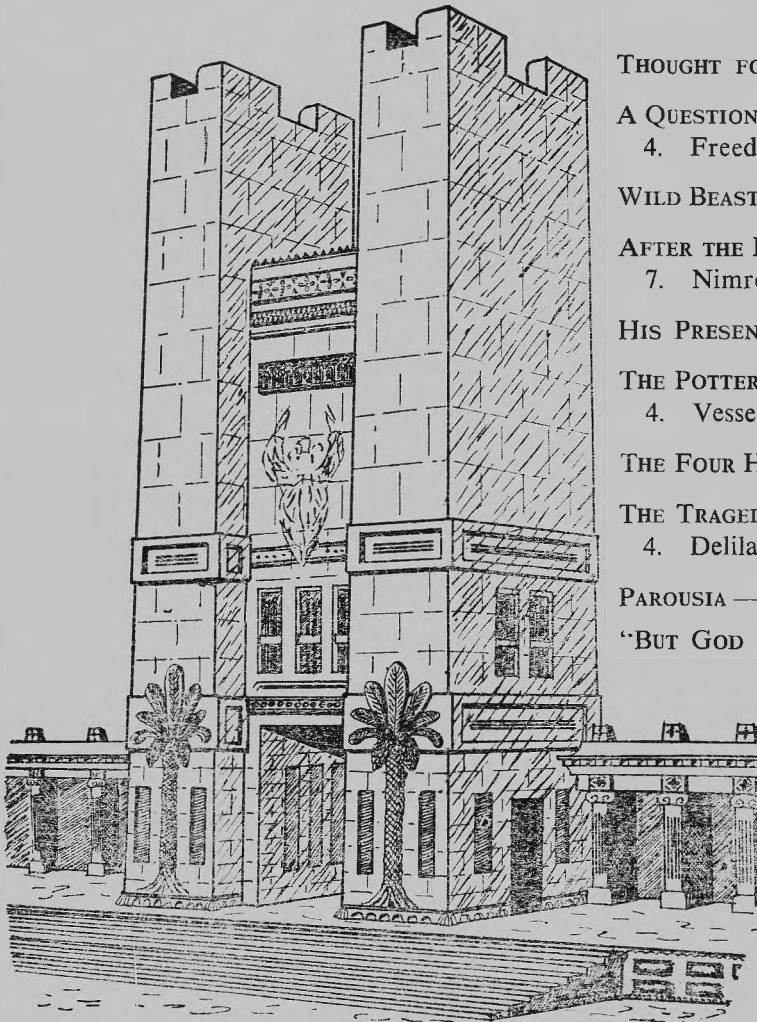
Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

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

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# Bible Study Monthly

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## Thought for the Month

*"That the forlorn and the downtrodden may have justice, and mortal man may no more be a terror" (Psa. 10. 18 Moffatt).*

Dr. Moffatt might be said almost to have had a flash of prophetic inspiration when he selected those words for his translation. With mankind to-day living in daily apprehension of the hazards being created by the "defence experts" it is glaringly obvious that there are in our midst mortal men who in their potentialities for bringing sudden destruction upon mankind do truly earn the epithet "terrors". It is understandable that men and women who themselves have no vital faith in the power of God, no real belief that He exists or at least cares, live in a state of fear at the prospect of a doom from which they see no way of escape.

The Psalmist had the right outlook when he reminded us that this man of terror is, after all, mortal man. There is a limit to his life and his powers for evil—for despite all the pious talk about "harnessing science for the defence of freedom" the fact is that these agents of destruction are blatantly and unashamedly evil—but there is no limit to the power of God. He will not suffer the works of man to wreck the creation He brought into being and, looking upon it, "saw that it was good". Twenty years ago they set off a nuclear blast in space which many experts feared would destroy part of the "Van Allen belt", the envelope of ionised particles which surrounds the earth several hundred miles up. They did not know, and they still do not know, what damage might or has been done to earthly processes in consequence; the function of that envelope is still unknown, but that it must exert some influence on the planet is certain. And none among the masses of men, none among the forlorn and downtrodden, can stop this mad-

ness; only God. And in his own time and way He will. *"Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but by means of his chosen ones those days shall be shortened"*. That is what Matt. 24 really means. It may yet be the work of the Christian Church in the next Age to remove this, terror from mankind.

There stands in the town of Urfa, in northern Mesopotamia, two stone columns, relics of Roman or Greek days. Local legend has had it for ages that one of these columns is filled with gold and fabulous treasure, ready for the taking. But the other column stops up the hole from which the Flood of Noah's day broke out to devastate the earth. And no one knows which is which. So to this day the treasure remains intact, for no one will run the risk of breaking open the wrong column and letting the Flood loose again on the earth. Perhaps those clever scientists who want to knock holes in the Van Allen belts would do well to consider the simple Arabs of Urfa.

**Samuel—Greatest of the Judges.** This 38-page booklet published ten years ago is an account of the life of Samuel and the influence he had upon his nation. A story of unswerving faith. Booklet sent gratis in exchange for postage; British readers send 34p loose stamps for 5 copies. Overseas readers one dollar note for 7 copies.

## Gone from us



Bro. C. Anderson (*Blaby*)  
 Sis. M. H. Charlton (*Melbourne, Aus.*)  
 Sis. E. Hall (*Southend*)  
 Sis. G. Laughton (*Sheffield*)



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

## A QUESTION OF OWNERSHIP

### 4. Freedom in Christ

The general tenor of the teaching of God by both the Bible and Nature is that of obedience to universal laws. It is evident that order was brought out of the chaos of remote ages, that it is maintained in a great starry empire which the astronomers for all their probings and curiosity do not fully understand. Turning back the green veil of the earth the geologist discovers the fiery furnace and the watery baptisms through which the earth passed before it became a fitting home for man who was a new creature in the great scheme of galaxies and globes, something of a problem to himself, his descendants and those doctors and advisors who see something wrong with him and try by any means to put him right.

There has been so much advice, so many nostrums, such a variety of medicine, such a host of doctors, that an impartial spectator might justly fear they are in danger of killing the patient. While the earth abounds with beauty, riches and pleasures lawful to enjoy, there is also a painful sense of limitation, frustration and failure as though the foundation for some great mansion house had been laid but the building remained uncompleted. A strange contradiction in the conditions of the earth and the life of man seems to retard the progress of both towards that ideal for which they were made, of which both are capable and which remains the ultimate aim and end of Divine purpose. This is nothing less than the complete harmony of man with man and man with God in a liberated earth free to make her deserts blossom, her wilderness places rejoice and her solitary places sing.

Such a picture of things to come is no dream. Past and present are a reality. The future can be no less so. It is yet a vision and though it seems to tarry the advice of the prophet is to "Wait for it!" In spite of all the revolt, the wickedness and wilfulness of humanity as it has marched boldly through the ages in increasing strength and numbers upon a broad road that has seemed right and proved to be wrong, the compassion of God for his house of unruly children has neither wavered nor failed. The severity of the law was softened by the goodness and greatness of the prophets, men of pastoral origin who became by their separation from the throng and their closeness to nature more in tune with Nature's Creator. They became his voice, his pen-men, speaking and writing of clearly determined changes as they were moved by Divine inspiration, not only to their own generation but to those yet to come.

They not only looked through a long telescope at a rejuvenated earth but into the mind of God and his desire for men, that they would make a right about turn, "to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God". There were pleadings and invitations which fell for the most part on deaf ears. Eyes long blinded by superstition, rituals and self-indulgence could not or would not see or share the heavenly vision of the prophets. In time even their voices were silenced and it seemed that the race of man, and the people of Israel who had received the Law and the prophets, were left to their own devices.

Unknown to man the great time-clock of the Ages ticked on until it reached the appointed hour. "When the fulness of time was come God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons." (Gal. 4. 4-5). "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sent his own Son." (Rom. 8. 3). The weakness was not in the Law but in faulty human nature. It was the measure of a perfect man's ability, a perfect code for a perfect person, as none such existed none could keep the law completely. Only a complete performance gained the prize of life. Forty centuries was a full and fair trial with plenty of opportunity to each generation to prove whether they would or could live up to the Law's demands. In the sight of both Divine and human judgement none had obtained what they sought. Every man had gone his own way. Like sheep all had strayed from the path of life. None were completely good, just or untainted with hereditary or acquired faults or flaws of character.

The Law and the prophets could neither compel nor coerce the human heart to a full compliance with the will of God, contained within the commandments which had been simplified into one word—Love. That love which is the fulfilment of the Law found a way whereby the best intentioned could overcome their disabilities by believing on the Son whom God had sent into the world, their faith obtaining what their works could not. Jesus the Man of Nazareth, holy, harmless and separate from sinners, did what no other had ever done. He rendered to God a perfect obedience, a faultless performance in spite of all temptations and the pressures put upon him. By so doing He did for man what man could not do for himself. His whole life's action and ultimate total sacrifice, won life for the whole

human race, "*that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life*".

The emphasis shifts now from a total obedience to law to an unwavering belief in the Son of Man, as a Saviour, a life-giver. God appeals to man now, not from Sinai but by his Son who fulfilled all that the Law and the prophets had spoken. From henceforth He is the truth, the living way. By him men may have access to God. In him they are reckoned as perfect, justified by their faith, accepted by Divine justice and love into the household of sons of God, into the great brotherhood of faith where natural assets do not count nor disabilities create a barrier race, rank and sex are not recognised by him who is no respecter of persons. Only the living human creature, the "new creature in Christ Jesus" has a valid claim on unending life. To every questioner seeking life; What must I do? How can I be saved? salvaged from the futility and frustration of this present evil world? there is only one answer—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved". "*He that believeth on Me has everlasting life.*" To the listening Jews this was an astonishing claim. The Law had made them a chosen race, a nation separated from all other nations. They were bound together in their daily life and worship by the ritual of the Law which outwardly at least they strictly observed. Descendants of men of faith who had served God in every century, they had no difficulty in tracing their ancestry to Adam. As individuals, then as a people they had been taught and moulded to become instructors and examples to all other nations of the origins of man and the ultimate purpose of the Most High God for the human race. That they had failed was evident in their strange and chequered history. A few had found the Law their delight as a few had listened to and venerated the prophets. When Jesus began his teaching ministry among them, the poor heard him gladly but the rich and the rulers earned his rebuke on several counts. Arrogance, a show of religion without its practice. Hypocrisy and the ritual sacrifice of animals by whose blood they sought to atone for their law-breaking sins, came under the lash of his righteous indignation. Even their expensive efforts to make converts to their faith did not appear to be a success, for the convert also became enmeshed in the outward forms of the Law which did nothing for the heart. (Matt. 23-15). What then, they asked, should they do? What was the will of God for them? To both questions they received the same reply. Believe on him whom God had sent into the world on their behalf, Assurance that Jesus was more than a prophet, but one of whom all the prophets had spoken, a Saviour, a Redeemer,

a giver of life was the strong rope and the sheet anchor by which many were drawn to the safe shelter of the great Rock of Ages. It was one of their own ardent young lawyers who saw in a blinding flash of insight that "*The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.*" (Gal. 3-24). To exchange the rugged hemp which blistered and tore, for the silken strands of the gospel of faith and love, was a hazard for the early believers as it has been and still is for all seekers after truth and life. To cut free from all outward show of the flesh, to soar in the power of the Spirit into a higher realm, to sit with Christ in heavenly places, was a flight which none have ever undertaken without struggle and effort. It was and is an adventurous step into the unknown, as great an undertaking as that of any explorer who has gone out with faith and courage to seek a far country beyond the horizon because he believed it to be there and well worth seeking. To walk alone and free out of the old paths that used to be is not without risk. To forsake the world, to leave behind so much that seemed safe, familiar and treasured was never accomplished without moments of doubt and uncertainty. Jesus said "*No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God*" (Luke 9. 62).

Belief in Christ as the new and living way, the mediator between God and man, in no way sets aside the Law. That is there for all time, the Divine yardstick for human conduct. Faith and acceptance in Christ make up for human deficiencies. As none could obtain life through the Law a way was found by which it could be awarded to faith through the person of Jesus Christ. His claims, his works and his life were a demonstration to men that He came from God, that He had the power of Life. Far from setting aside the Law He came to fulfill the Law, to show that it could be kept. Without fault or moral blemish He had the right to life and the power to give it to others. Union with him by faith was a passing from death unto life, to walk not after the flesh but after the spirit, to become a new creature.

Spiritual things are a foreign language, a foreign world to natural people who understand natural things. The one drawn into Christ feels the pull of a force which is supernatural. God draws or attracts to himself the mind of the seeking one. As God is Spirit his power is spiritual. His words are spirit and life, elevating one so drawn onto a new plane of life, like a blind man receiving sight, like one risen from the dead. The new creature in Christ begins to discern hidden things about life. He begins to live and learn; to become a transformed character.

The Law is no less the Law. Heart and mind are still prone to err, but there is an inner strength which enables the just who walk by faith to continue the pursuit of the ideal man of God, to fight the good fight and to know the taste of victory through Christ. Such are taught and disciplined by the great Husbandman who through the ages has sought and striven for the minds and hearts of those who would be his people, who were likened to the ripe fruit of the true vine.

The Law found its fulfilment in the Son of man, whom God sent into the world to save men from their futile struggle with failure and death. All the promises of God were life but it came not by the written word but through the living Word, the culmination of the love of God in the person of the Anointed Son and Saviour, Jesus Christ. For this reason the great Apostle to the Gentiles could write with confidence *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 6. 1). Those words are among the most precious and important ever written to men. It is a declaration of freedom, a promise of life not yet understood by the masses of mankind, a great boon scarcely estimated by the few who have entered into that union with Christ Jesus, who have begun that mystic walk, not after the flesh but after the spirit.

The law of 'Thou shalt not' condemned the transgressor to death. Death being the opposite of life it signifies the end of living. *"By man came death"*, *"The wages of sin is death"*. Since the sentence fell at the beginning of man's occupation of the earth, death passed upon all, for all have transgressed, fallen short of the original standard. Death has reigned over the house of Adam, None of the isms or theories of

the schools can explain away or deny that hard fact. In Christ God provided a new and living way, by which the believing might get out from under the gloomy portals of the house of Adam into the house of Christ, variously described as a world of light, life and harmony with God, To such as took or have taken, or are ready to take, this way through a clear understanding of the human situation, a belief and acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, God's choice and way, there is no longer condemnation to death under the justice of the Law. Favoured are all those who make God their choice, for his path and his gift to men is Life. Love and mercy have provided in Christ a Saviour and deliverer, a way out of the dark world of sin and death into a world of life and love and service. *"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."*

This gospel, this good news, was the tidings of great joy for the perishing race of man which the angels sang at Bethlehem. It was the message which the Early Church preached with enthusiasm, renouncing the fleeting pleasures of this life to go out into all the world, to make it known unto all people. It is the word of God to man, the offer of salvation, still preserved, still available to any who are discontented with the world as it is, dissatisfied with themselves as they are. God has arranged one way, one person, one Name only by which mankind may obtain life, by which they may be set free from the law of sin and death. To step out of one house into the other brings about a change to living as great as that involved in any other change of residence. The eloquent testimony of those who have made this change, runs like a river of praise to the ends of the earth.

*To be continued*

## WILD BEASTS IN THE ARK

The usual understanding of the story of the Flood includes the assumption that the wild beasts of the earth, the carnivorous, lions, tigers, etc., were taken into the Ark in company with the domestic and herbivorous (vegetarian) animals. A detailed examination of the text does not bear this out and there are a number of considerations which seem to indicate the opposite.

In times past when it was universally believed that the Flood waters completely overspread the entire globe it was necessary to include all such animals in the Ark's company, otherwise none would have survived to continue the species. It

is becoming increasingly accepted nowadays that the Genesis account does not demand a universal Flood; the Hebrew *"erets"* can mean either the earth as a whole or the local area of land which happens to be the subject of the passage. A detailed analysis of that matter would show that the true cause of Noah's Flood was most likely a colossal tidal wave set up by the catastrophic descent to the planet of pre-historic aerial waters at the poles, in Noah's case sweeping in from the south and flooding the entire Euphrates valley in concert with other low lying areas such as that of the Indus in

*Handwritten notes at the bottom of the page, including the date 'A 1-16-85' and some illegible text.*

India, eventually receding into the ocean. The mountainous regions were relatively untouched, and here the wild species of animals could have survived unscathed. It is easy to see that what might be called the logistics of Noah's enterprise would be enormously helped by having only vegetarian animals to feed for twelve months; provision of fresh meat for the carnivores for that period would have been a real problem. It is often overlooked, also, that had the Flood covered all the mountains there would have been no olive trees with leaves for the dove to pluck off when all was over.

The basis of the argument lies in the words used in the account. There are two Hebrew words used to denote animals, quadrupeds. One is "*behemah*" which denotes what we would call domestic animals such as sheep, goats, cattle, pigs and so on, together with the naturally wild herbivorous animals as camels, deer and the like. This word is usually rendered cattle, beast, or clean beast and usually in a domestic connection. The other word is "*chaiyah*", which means literally a living creature and when used without qualification is also applied to domestic animals. When qualified with a descriptive noun or adjective it refers to wild, carnivorous animals; thus "*chaiyah erets*" is "beast of the earth" or "beast of the land"; "*chaiyah sadah*" is "beast of the field" and "*chaiyah yaar*" is "beast of the forest". There are also such terms as "evil beast", "noisome beast", "ravenous beast". Wherever these qualified terms appear the reference is to wild carnivorous animals.

With all this in mind let the narrative be examined.

The entire account of the sojourn in the Ark is contained in Chaps 6 to 8 of Genesis. There are fifteen references to quadruped animals in these three chapters. Of these ten are "*behemah*" (beast, cattle, clean beast, unclean beast) and five are "*chai*" or "*chaiyah*" (living thing in 6.19 and 8.17, beast in 7.14, 21 and 8.19 but always meaning living creature). In no case do any of these instances refer to a carnivorous animal. A parallel instance is in the books of Leviticus and Numbers where in ten instances "*chaiyah*" is used to denote sacrificial animals used in the ceremonies, which of course were always bulls, goats, rams or lambs.

Reverting to the story of the Flood, the only reference to carnivorous animals occurs in the 9th chapter after Noah and his family had come out of the Ark. Said the Lord to Noah (ch. 9.2) "the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth" (*chaiyah erets*)—carnivorous animals. It would seem hardly necessary for the Lord to give Noah such an

assurance had they been with him in the Ark for the past twelve months. But the decisive verse is ch. 9.10, and this enshrines a quite important point. The Lord told Noah He was making a covenant never again to destroy the earth by a Flood, with Noah, his sons, every living creature that was in the Ark, and every beast of the earth, which by implication therefore had not been in the Ark. The full text reads in the AV, "*and I, behold I, establish my covenant with you, AND with your seed after you, AND with every living creature (behemah-nephesh) that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle (behemah) AND of every beast of the earth (chaiyah erets) with you; FROM all that go out of the ark, TO every beast of the earth*" (*chaiyah erets*).

The plain meaning of this passage is that the promised covenant is to extend to all earthly creatures, from those that came out of the Ark to those that were never in the Ark and this makes it evident that the *chaiyah erets*, the wild carnivorous animals, were not taken into the Ark.

This, incidentally, provides an answer to the off-times mooted query as to how Noah was able to bring in to the Ark animals which are unique to lands far distant from his own country and separated by oceans. The kangaroo and the dingo of Australia, the armadillo and the iguana of South America, the giant tortoise of the Galapogis, how did he get these without trailing round the world after them and building a ship in which to bring them to the Ark. And how did he get them back to their own land afterwards without leaving some of their progeny on the way to breed and remain in other lands—for such animals are still to this day unique in their own habitats. The short answer is, of course, that none of these were in the Ark. Sufficient of them survived in the higher reaches of their native lands to continue their species when the Flood had passed.

There were some that did not survive. The mammoths, for example, which roamed in their thousands over the plains of Siberia, northern Europe and Canada were completely exterminated and their frozen bodies remain, discovered every now and again by natives or explorers. The north polar flood devastated the northern hemisphere as far as the 40th degree of northern latitude and very little wild life could have remained. An inland sea communicating with the Arctic was formed in southern Siberia remnants of which remained until the early years of the Christian era. The effect of the southern polar flood was different; apart from Australia there is little land below the 40th southern paral-

lel and the flood assumed the form of an oceanic tidal wave which left the higher levels of South America, Africa, India and Australia untouched. Hence the unique animals of these

areas largely escaped its effects. The realisation that the carnivorous animals did not go into the Ark answers quite a few questions and resolves several difficulties.

## AFTER THE FLOOD

### 7. Nimrod, leader of men

The most famous name in Middle Eastern folk-lore and legend, whether Jewish, Arab or Persian, is Nimrod. This legendary hero of five thousand years ago is the subject of countless stories, songs and even books, recounting his deeds of daring and his mighty achievements. The Arab world, through the repetition of the Hebrew form of his name in the Koran, knows him as well as do the Jews from the Old Testament. A notable Arab work of unknown age, the "*Kusset el Nimroud*" (Stories of Nimrod) was still in the late 19th century regular winter's evening reading and reciting by Middle East Arab villagers.

The Rabbis of pre-Christian Israel blamed him for the first great rebellion against God after the Flood, and Christian writers of this Age, taking the cue from them, have fastened on him responsibility for the system of paganism and idolatry which commenced in Babylon, later permeated the Aramaic, Greek and Roman worlds and subsists in another form in our own day. The fact that the historical figure upon whom all this has been blamed lived long before there was any paganism or any rebellion simplifies the task of disentangling religious prejudice from sober enquiry and endeavouring to discover just what can be known of this man and his deeds.

The Old Testament is the basis of investigation. What the Sumerian and Babylonian legends have to say about Nimrod was written down round about 1800 BC and the Book of Genesis was in existence long before that. But the Genesis narrative is tantalisingly brief. After recounting the names of the sons of Ham, Gen. 10. 8-10 says "*Cush begat Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said 'Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord'. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar*".

That is all, but the passage, brief as it is, makes it possible to locate Nimrod approximately on the stream of time. The cities mentioned are well known to archæologists; the Hebrew text in the phrase "the beginning of his kingdom" etc., is

more accurately rendered "his kingdom was the beginning of Babel, and Erech" etc., which means that he lived at the time these places first appeared as small villages at the very beginning of Sumerian settlement. This in turn must have been within a couple of centuries from the dispersion at Babel so that Nimrod must have lived at about that time.

This leads to consideration of his genealogy. Vs. 8 says that Cush "begat" Nimrod, but he is not included among his sons and grandsons as in vs. 7. The inference is that he was a lower descendant of a later generation. If he flourished soon after the time of the dispersion of Babel he could have been anything between the 3rd to 6th generation from Cush.

He is distinguished as having been "a mighty hunter before the Lord". This word "before" means "in the presence of", and infers a creditable rather than discreditable position. At this point in time, it must have been that Nimrod stood with his fellows in that what he did, he did as unto the Lord. "Hunter" is "*tsayid*", which indicates a man of the field, like Esau, who was adept at hunting game for food or dealing with wild animals. The same word is used for providers of food, which would stress the close connection that must have subsisted in those days between the hunt for food animals and the provision of food for the growing community. This Nimrod must have attained fame and approbation as a skilled and successful exponent of the art of the chase.

So one comes to his name. If this man really did live—and Genesis 10 asserts that he did, so that unless this 10th chapter is to be dismissed as legendary fiction, the fact must be accepted that he did live—can he be found in ancient history outside the Bible? Here one comes up against a real obstacle. The earliest writers of history or legend so far discovered did not live until something like eight centuries after the time indicated in Genesis as that of Nimrod's life. But the old-time legends they recorded do tell of a great hero of ancient time who in the interim had become a god. This god, the especial patron god of the city of Babylon in later times, amongst other great exploits was accredited with

having built the Tower of Babel. Here, then, is a point of contact. And the name of that Babylonian god Marduk, when translated into Hebrew, is the Nimrod of Genesis.

Marduk, in the year 2000 BC, was the name of the Sun-god, son of the God of heaven, proclaimed as the "Word of God", by whom all things were made, the executor of the Divine work of creation, the protector and redeemer of mankind. (More can be said about this later when the translation from monotheism to polytheism, the worship of one God to that of many gods, comes to be discussed). The name "Marduk" was the Babylonian equivalent of the Sumerian "*Amar-utu*" which means "wild ox of the sun-god". The wild ox (Sumerian *am*, Hebrew *reem*, translated "unicorn" in the AV, and now extinct), was the most powerful and ferocious beast known in the ancient Middle East. As such, the name could well mean "Champion fighter for the sun-god". There was, however, no sun-god in the earlier days of Babel, and it is not surprising therefore to find that the earlier Sumerian name was "*Amar-aduk*" which means "wild ox of God". Going back even earlier, to about 2500 BC, a temple at Lagash has the name "*Nimaraduk*" which can be interpreted as "chief champion fighter for God". This appellation might well be set against the Genesis "mighty hunter before the Lord". (There are grounds for thinking that it was about this time, 2500 BC, that Genesis was first committed to writing in the Sumerian language).

It is this name Ni-marad-uk which was transliterated into the Hebrew language at the time of Moses in Egypt more than a thousand years later. Conscious perhaps of the later association with the sun-god, the Divine suffix "uk" was dropped and the name left as Ni-marad. Centuries later, after Israel's contact with Babylon throughout history, culminating with the days of Daniel, and their knowledge of the alleged pagan exploits of the sun god Marduk, Nimrod, had left its mark, the Rabbis could not resist the temptation to re-interpret the meaning of the name. In Hebrew, "*marad*" is a verb meaning "to rebel" and when expressed grammatically in the 3rd person singular passive is spelled *Nimarad*, meaning "he was rebellious". This, of course, was too good to miss, and so Josephus in his history of Israel followed the Rabbis' lead with a full description of Nimrod's rebellion at the time of the building of the Tower—all quite imaginary. Whether the historical Nimrod did or did not apostasise from his allegiance to God at some time in his later life may be a debatable point; there is nothing in the Genesis

account to say one way or the other. It is quite feasible though, that the later Sumerian legends which assert that he was the leading spirit in the second, and successful, building of the Tower, after the dispersal of the peoples, rest on a basis of truth, and that this led by successive steps to the introduction of paganism several centuries later. The true position is that he was a leader among men who was deified after his death to the status of a god—no uncommon thing in those early stages of the world's history.

The statement that "his kingdom was the beginning of Babel, Erech, Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar" indicates, first, that he was an acknowledged leader among men, and second, that he exercised his influence at the time the Sumerian cities began to come into existence. These and other cities commenced as hamlets and villages at a time very soon after the dispersal at Babel. Within two centuries of that event they were in process of becoming "city-states", each exercising royal authority over an area of territory around them. In such case the second—and this time successful—attempt to build the Tower of Babel must have been little more than a century after the first, and with this there began the rise of the Sumerian civilisation, which led to the universal worship of the one Most High God becoming superseded by an increasing array of "gods many and lords many", thus creating the idolatry for which Babylon in after years became notorious.

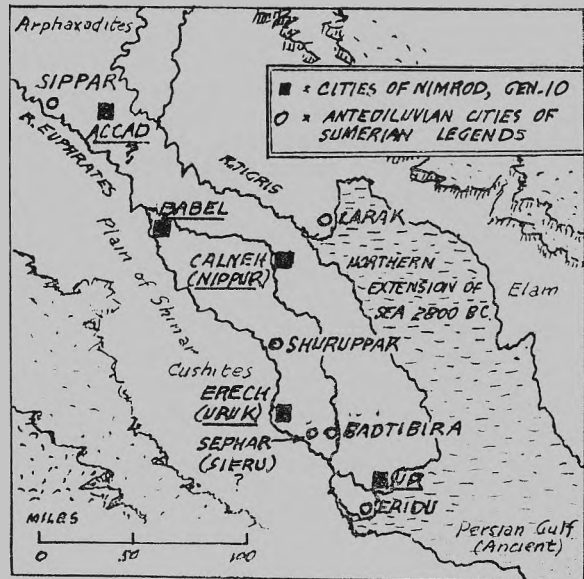
The cities of Nimrod were to the south of Babylon. At the dispersal from Babel the sons of Cush went south. Calneh (Nippur) was the holy city of the Cushite Sumerians, sixty miles south-east of Babylon. Erech (Uruk) was fifty miles farther on. Accad (Agade) was, on the other hand, about sixty miles north of Babylon; it was so thoroughly destroyed by invaders from Iran seven centuries later that its site has never been satisfactorily determined, although the Iraq State Antiquities authorities have quite recently stumbled upon what they believe is all that is left of the city. There is just the possibility though that where Gen. 10 says "Accad" it is the city of Ur that is meant. Accad first appears in history several centuries later; it was a Semitic and not a Sumerian stronghold and being to the north and not the south of Babylon not so likely to have formed part of the domains of the Sumerian Nimrod. It so happens that the archaic native names for both these places in the Sumerian language is the same—*uri-ki*. If this name appeared in the early or original version of Gen. 10 later copyists or translators may well have been uncertain which city was intended and in the upshot have picked the

wrong one. The point is of little importance but a glance at the map herewith will show that Ur is more likely to have been included in Nimrod's sphere of influence than Accad, even if the latter did exist in his day.

If, then, Nimrod did extend his influence over the south, and the first four settlements were those named, then Gen. 10 is in full accord with the known facts. Babel, Calneh (Nippur) Erech (Uruk) and Ur were all in existence as incipient centres of habitation within a century or so after the Dispersal, four settlements strung along the then course of the Euphrates over a distance of less than a hundred and fifty miles, all destined eventually to grow into powerful and influential city-states. This was the sphere of Nimrod's influence and this, perhaps, the first attempt at rulership and empire-building.

There were other settlements which probably came into existence at much the same time. The legends and inscriptions tell of five cities,—Eridu, Badtibira, Larak, Shuruppak and Sippar (possibly Sephar)—which existed "before the Flood" and that Eridu was the first of these and the first to be built in the land. Modern discovery tends to dispute this; Frankfort in *"Earliest Civilisations of the Near East"* gives reasons for placing Nippur (Calneh in Gen. 10) as the first in the south country and it is becoming increasingly accepted that the initial settlement at Babel, originally a priestly centre, was first of all, as is indicated in the Bible. It is quite possible that these legends preserve the memory of a separate community of Cushites who settled nearer the edge of the then sea-coast and perhaps were the first to start the sea trade which brought metals and the arts of metal-working to the Sumerians. As such these places will figure later in the story. In the year 1950 there was found in the ruins of Eridu a model sailing-boat dating from these early times—the oldest model of a boat now in existence. The legends relating to these cities are much later in time, and the Flood to which they refer would not be that of Noah, but one of the later and lesser ones, either that which ravaged Ur, evidence of which was discovered by Woolley in 1930, or the rather later one at Kish found by Langdon and Watelin at about the same time. It is possible that these legendary places did have their foundation in the days of Nimrod but rather more likely that they appeared a century or more later. The accompanying map shows the relative positions of both groups of cities as they existed later; it is very possible that "Ur" should be read for "Accad" in Gen. 10 and "Sephar" for "Sippar" in the Sumerian legend.

It might well have been, therefore, that some



four or five centuries after the Flood, when the people of Shem had left Babel to settle in the more immediate north, this Nimrod rose to a position of leadership, and incited his fellow-Cushites to resume the abandoned project and complete the great Tower. That it was thus completed is undeniable; when history begins some centuries later it was there, and it, with the city, was then, as McQueen says in *"The Greatness that was Babylon"*, "of unknown antiquity", and George Smith, in *"Assyrian Discoveries"*, "lost in the obscurity of the past". The later Sumerians were positive that it was built by Marduk and those legends could well possess some element of truth.

The Tower stood, with many reconstructions and embellishments, for nearly three thousand years; there are several descriptions in the writings of ancient historians of the last five centuries before Christ, who either saw the Tower themselves or copied the descriptions of those who had. There is a clay tablet in existence discovered by George Smith in 1875, lost, rediscovered in a private collection and tentatively deciphered in 1913, deposited in the Louvre at Paris and more correctly deciphered in 1950, which purports to give the construction and measurements of the Tower as it existed in the days of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, written after the Tower had fallen into ruins, and not agreeing in all points with Herodotus who had seen it two centuries earlier; but the combined testimony of these witnesses does afford a good idea of what it did look like.

Upon a paved courtyard adjoining the river

Euphrates in the centre of Babylon there stood an elevated platform built of solid brick six hundred feet square and fifty feet high. Upon this rose the tower in seven successive stages, the first three hundred feet square, and the seventh eighty. According to Strabo, geographer of 1st Cent. AD, the height was six hundred feet. It was ascended by means of stairways built along the sides of each stage. The top was crowned by a sanctuary to the god Marduk, facing East, looking towards the sacred mountain of the Flood, the "Mount of the East". South of the Tower, stood the temple of Marduk, the Temple in which the golden vessels from the Temple of Jerusalem were kept during the days of Daniel. "*E-sagila*" they called it, "*the temple of the high God*"; this was the centre of the Babylonian idolatry which became the source of the world's pagan religions in after days.

Although the people of Shem left the Plain of Shinar at this time and migrated north, there is plenty of evidence that before very long some of them—probably sons of Arphaxad, son of Shem—began to filter back and live alongside the sons of Cush. Although Babylon started out as a Sumerian Cushite city it eventually became Semitic and finished up as the capital of a great Semitic empire. Consequently it was not very long before the Cushites built themselves a new holy city in the south which became known as Nippur. Here they built another ziggurat, similar to the Tower at Babylon although not so lofty, which they called E-kur, "*the temple of the mountain*". This one also faced directly to the sacred mountain in the East and this fact is the strongest evidence that this was indeed the mountain where the Ark landed. The Sumerians were accomplished land surveyors and although Mount Anaran is a hundred and fifty miles from Babylon and a hundred from Nippur they would experience no difficulty in orienting their towers correctly.

Both towers with their temples were sacred to the one God who had been worshipped since the days of Noah, the "Most High God of heaven". There is no indication of any other gods as yet. To whatever extent the powerful personality of Nimrod had thrust him into the position of a leader among the people, it does not seem that there was yet any failure to recognise the God of Noah. Many of the grandsons of Noah were still alive and their influence must have counted for much.

Nimrod is not only credited in legendary history with building the Tower and a number of cities; he is also alleged to have commenced the construction of the system of irrigation canals which made Shinar the wonderfully productive land it

was for centuries. There exists to-day on the river Tigris not far from Samarra the remains of a gigantic dam some ten miles long which is known as "Nimrod's Dam" and reputed to have been built by him. Straddling the great river, with an intricate system of locks and lock gates to allow boats to pass the dam on their way up and down the river, spillways to pass excess water, and subsidiary canals running all over Iraq, it created an immense lake some forty miles long in which the winter rainfall and snow-water from the Armenian mountains was stored until needed for irrigation. So well was the work done that the dam remained in use for nearly four thousand years until destroyed in the 12th century AD by Mongol invaders from Siberia; in consequence the entire Iraqi canal system fell into disuse and the land reverted to desert. It is questionable whether Nimrod really did build it; a couple of centuries after his death is the more likely time but that he had much to do with the first attempts to control the rivers is possible in the light of legend. The flat plain of Sumer was constantly being ravaged by the rivers overflowing their banks and changing their courses and for many years the people fought a continual battle with the elements, building raised earthworks in the marshes on which to erect their villages, and embankments to keep the rivers and streams in check.

There are Sumerian epic poems still existing which describe in glowing terms the exploits of this ancient hero. They were written in about the 18th century BC and therefore about a thousand years after Nimrod must have lived, and by then he had been exalted to the status of a god, but behind the legends can be detected the substratum of truth. In these poems the god Marduk, Nimrod, is the hero who wages a bitter fight with Tiamat, the dragon of the waters, and a host of monsters who devastate the land. Having won the victory he becomes pre-eminent among the gods and in the sight of men. All this is a very picturesque description of the efforts of those early settlers to grapple with the floodwaters of the Euphrates and Tigris and restrain them by an orderly system of canals and reservoirs, and the man who took the lead in this was acclaimed a public benefactor and deliverer. They had left the more genial land around Babel and found themselves in a land of marsh and swamp and wide-spreading lakes with no trees and little in the way of building materials, but a fertile soil which could be made to bring forth abundantly. If the epics preserve a modicum of truth, then this Nimrod was the man who taught them how to make the best use of what they had and maybe the rapid rise of their civilisation from that time

onward might well have been in no little degree due to his insight and organising genius. At any rate, here is what their descendants a thousand years later said of the man to whom they accredited the beginning of their world.

*"In the beginning all lands were sea.  
No reeds had sprung up; no trees had grown.  
No bricks had been laid; no building set up,  
No houses erected, no cities built.  
Nippur did not exist, nor its temple,  
Erech did not exist, nor its temple,  
Eridu did not exist, nor its temple.  
The house of the gods, Babylon, did not exist.  
Then there was a movement in the deep.  
Marduk laid reeds upon the face of the waters;  
He made dust and spread it over the reeds;  
He formed mankind.  
The goddess Aruru together with him created the  
seed of mankind.  
He formed the beasts of the field and the living  
creatures.  
He created the Tigris and the Euphrates and set  
them on their courses.  
He created the grass, the marsh rushes, the reeds  
and the forests.  
He created the green herb of the field.  
He created the lands, the marshes and the  
swamps, the plantations and orchards.  
The lord Marduk built a dam by the side of the  
river.  
He created a swamp, a marsh, land he brought  
into existence.  
Bricks he made and set up buildings.  
Houses he made and built cities.  
He built Nippur and its temple.  
He built Erech and its temple.*

The likeness of this to the creation story in Genesis is obvious; equally obvious is its local setting in the land of Shinar. The Genesis story had existed in written form for at least eight hundred years when this epic was composed; that much can be deduced from the archaic Sumerian word-forms which are still embedded in the later Hebrew text. So much for the oft-repeated assertion that the Bible account of creation was derived from the Babylonian legends. In actual fact the reverse is more likely the case.

One of the most famous epics, the "*Enuma Elish*" (meaning "*When in the height*" the opening words of the first stanza) of about the same date, 18th century BC, shows vividly how the people of later generations came to exalt Nimrod among the gods as idolatry grew and prospered. The particular part of the account is immediately after the building of the Tower by the *Annunaki*, the spirits of heaven and earth, and occupies the latter part of the sixth and nearly all of the seventh tablet of the poem. A few per-

inent extracts will serve to show how the encomiums showered upon Marduk correspond with and illuminate, the brief details given in Genesis regarding Nimrod.

*Tablet 6*

- Line 107 *"Let him exercise shepherdship over mankind"*  
108 *"Throughout the days to come let them, without forgetting make mention of his deeds"*  
119 *"Let mankind stand in awe before our god"*  
120 *"As for us, by as many a name as we have called him, he shall be our god"*  
135 (He) *"only is the refuge of the land, the protection of his people"*  
136 *"Him the people shall praise"*  
137 *"He stood up and seized the reins of the land"*  
140 *"The commands of his mouth we have exalted above those of the gods his fathers"*  
141 *"Verily he is the lord of all the gods of heaven and earth"*  
142 *"The king at whose instructions the gods above and below shall be afraid"*

*Tablet 7*

- Line 14 *"No one among the gods can equal him"*  
18 *"May he not be forgotten among men, but let them hold his deeds in remembrance"*  
21 *"The creator of riches and plenty, the establisher of abundance"*  
22 *"Who has turned our wants into plenty"*

If these were the terms in which the people of the land praised their hero it is not surprising that a few centuries later Abraham, the "father of the faithful," found himself alone in the land in his possession of faith in the One God. Neither is it surprising to read the words of Joshua to the hosts of Israel at the beginning of their occupancy of the land of promise. "*Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood*" (the river Euphrates) "*in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham and the father of Nachor; and they served other gods*" (Josh. 24. 2). The immediate forebears of Abraham were idolaters, worshippers of Nimrod. That true understanding of God which must have been possessed by the immediate descendants of Noah had by the time of Abraham been submerged in the new worship of this man who by his prowess and enterprise had won the allegiance of the masses. It was left to Abraham to spearhead that return to God which has been marked in subsequent ages, first by the development of Israel and its emergence during the five centuries

before Christ as a truly monotheistic people in a polytheistic world and then by all that Christianity has meant to the world during the past two millenniums.

In the meantime, all that is left of the great Temple of Marduk in Babylon, and its mighty Tower, the Tower of Babel of the Bible, is a few lines of mouldering brickwork about four feet high rotting away in the middle of a marsh in an

area desolate of man and inhabited only by wild creatures. The cities, the temples, the canals, which at one time made this land the zenith of world civilisation have all gone. The name of Nimrod is remembered but all his exploits are in the past. Nothing has remained. He was not a god after all; he was only a man. And he has been dead for more than four thousand years.

*To be continued*

## HIS PRESENCE IN THE MIDST

About the time of our Lord's departure from this earth He sent his servants out into a wider field of service. Hitherto, at his instruction, they had confined their labours to the Jews, in Judea—now, the Lord commissions them to go out into the whole world seeking disciples; and, for their comfort and assurance, says: "*Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*" (Matt. 28, 20).

Thousands of his followers since those days have lived and laboured—and faced the ordeal of death—in the assurance of this promise. In densely populated cities, or thinly inhabited country places, thousands who have loved his Name have believed, though unseen, that a great vital Presence has been with them; not only the great congregations, but also the twos and threes—and also the solitary ones—have had their portion in his watch-care and oversight.

It is not possible fully to explain the method or the philosophy of that Presence. Even among men there are so many subtle factors associated with Presence and Personality, that even advanced psychological students find themselves unable to account for all the phenomena which different men and women exhibit. There are men and women who repel their fellows on the instant. Others are as magnets, and draw friends from everywhere. In the lesser range of things with which the ordinary man is familiar there is some mystery to what we call "presence". We speak of a person being present in a room and of things that transpire in that room as taking place in his presence. In what way is he present beyond the few square feet of space occupied by his body? That his presence extends beyond that small circle, marked by the outlines of his physical frame, all know and realise, but how it does so is not so easily explained. A lecturer is as much present to men in the hindmost seats as to those who sit close before him! It may be a blending of personality and presence, but there it is; some subtle force emanates from that body located within the tiny space, and radiates itself

throughout the room! There are dictatorial men in our world to-day who, though occupying but a few square feet, make the whole world tremble and fear. Why? Because out from them goes an aggressive spirit; and because of its peculiar nature, backed by reserves of military power, the whole earth becomes their audience-chamber. Their slightest words and their tiniest acts are bruited about the world over.

Now, let us try to imagine these men exalted into a majesty and glory like that of Jesus. Imagine their few square feet expanded out to corresponding proportions! Increase the scale of their influence by as much as the heavenly is greater than the earthly! That may then serve as some slight assistance in conceiving how the blessed Lord can have been present with all his people, and yet have occupied a definite place in the heavenly realms. The whole wide world is not as great to him as a small room is to us. If, then, it is possible for a mere man to make his presence fill some audience-room, or for a dictator to send thrills and fears throughout this earth, then surely the glorified omnipotent Saviour can fill his Church, entire and individual, with the sense of his saving presence, even from his celestial location at his Father's right hand. This whole world is to him but as an ante-room. The whole wide universal creation, including every dimension, known and unknown, is his audience-chamber.

"*Whither shall I go from thy Spirit,*" the Psalmist asks, "*or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.' Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*" (Psa. 139. 7-12).

All through her dark days, when faggot and sword encompassed her, the Church of Jesus was never left untended or alone; and though the flame of her love burned low, and the glow of her light was feeble, yet, not once in all the years since she set out to follow him, has He left his charge uncared-for. In her periods of joy; in her seasons of sorrow, He has been at his post—walking “*in the midst of the candlesticks*”.

Her eyes may have been under earthly limitations, but his were not. His eyes of flame could pierce the barriers imposed by mundane things, and through her walls He made his presence felt—“a living blest reality”. Still is He walking among the candlesticks, trimming our lights, feeding the oil, diffusing the fragrance of his Presence and the charm of his Personality through our lattice-windows.

## THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

*A consideration of  
Divine Right*

### 4. Vessels unto Glory

Thus far in this discussion the application of the principle underlying Divine selection has been set forth as it applied to Israel. That application may be called “the Election of the Race”. With this application every opponent of Paul would be in full agreement. Every impressive term he used in connection with the doctrine of election would be true of Israel. Abraham’s seed was fore-known of God, and was predestinated to be the earthly channel of his grace to all the nations of the earth. They were his elect—the seed of Abraham his friend (Isa. 41.8). This is the elect people for whose sake the days of the great tribulation are to be shortened or restrained (Matt. 24.22). This is the elect people, which, after those days of tribulation are ended, are to be gathered together, from every quarter of the heavens (Matt. 24.29-31). That will be the regathering and remoulding of the “set-aside” portion of God’s clay. Today we have the benefit of the historical testimony that that portion of the clay was set aside as Paul intimated it would be. It has been set aside, in blindness and hardness of heart, to wait while other things have been completed by the Master Potter. God did not cast Israel away. This Paul states explicitly. They stumbled and fell, so that others might enter the privileges of membership in Christ, so that another and more precise election, an election of grace, might take effect. A Remnant according to the election of grace was to be moulded and prepared to become Israel’s deliverer—her Messiah—in due time, when all its members had been conformed to the image of God’s Son. Paul illustrates the existence of this Remnant by a reference to an experience of Elijah, who, seeing the northern nation of Israel fallen away in gross idolatry, thought he was the only faithful servant of God left in the land. In his sad complaint, he said, “*Lord, they have killed thy prophets, they have digged down thy altars, and I am left alone, and they seek my life*”. But God informed him that that was not the case. “*What saith the answer of God unto*

*him? I have left for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal; even so, then, at this present time also, there is a remnant according to the election of grace*” (Rom. 11.1-5).

Thus, the lump of clay had been divided, and a small portion selected for a special purpose, while the national mass had fallen away. Thus, Paul establishes his point decisively, and has demonstrated that God not only has the right to choose his clay, but also to divide it up and apply it to the purposes which please him best.

The doctrine of an elect Remnant within, or gathered from, an elect nation was shadowed forth in the ancient history of Israel, by the separation of the Levitical tribe from among their brethren. After God had separated Israel from the nations to be his peculiar people, the Divine prerogative expressed itself again and separated Levi from his brethren to appear before God on their behalf. Of his own determinate counsel He chose Levi, without seeking Israel’s consent and sanction thereto. Out of Levi, God again applied his selective prerogative, and separated the house of Aaron from his Levitical brethren, to be his special servant for a special work. This selection was based upon God’s fore-knowledge of Israel’s needs, and was carried through entirely in accordance with his own pre-determined purposes. This also was a case where from the same lump of clay—Levitical clay—one vessel was chosen to higher honour, leaving the remainder of the mass to occupy the honour to which it had previously been called.

This selection of the house of Levi—and particularly the house of Aaron—is the framework upon which the New Testament doctrine of Election is built. The very language used by the Apostle to describe its phases and stages is borrowed from the Levitical constitution. And only with this Levitical constitution in his mind can the student of the New Testament counterpart comprehend the depths of meaning and shadings of thought expressed by Peter and Paul in their

reference to fore-ordination, predestination and election.

*"For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren, and whom He fore-ordained them He also called, and whom He called them He also justified, and whom He justified them He also glorified"* (Rom. 8. 29-30).

Thus writes the Apostle Paul in words of great force and insight.

*"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ to the elect . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet. 1.2).

Such are the words from Peter's pen.

These are the most direct and specific phrases in the New Testament setting forth the stages in the process of selection, and of the experiences involved in the equipment of the elect for the work to which they have been called. It may be to some advantage to strip the language used in our Versions of some of its Calvinistic austerity by substituting other words for those around which Calvinistic and Arminian advocates fought so fiercely in other days. Fore-ordination and pre-determination sound much harsher and forbidding than the word "pre-arranged", but in essence they mean the same. "Select" or "choose" have a milder sound than their equivalent "elect", but their meaning is the same.

Carrying the New Testament phrasing back to the institution of the Aaronic service, it may be said, first, that this priestly service was instituted exactly as it was pre-arranged by God. It was all foreknown by God, and predetermined by him before the pattern of the Tabernacle was shown to Moses in the Holy Mount. It was arranged before the foundations of that "kosmos" (arrangement or order) were laid. Thus Aaron and his house were foreknown of God in connection with that service from before the foundation of that world.

When God commanded Moses to take Aaron and his house apart and prepare them for the Priesthood, those whom He had foreknown had now been "called" to their sacred office. Appropriate vestments were put upon Aaron and his sons. These vestments were exclusively for priestly wear (see Lev. 8. 6-9, 12-13). Here the fore-ordained and called persons were made clean and clothed in robes symbolic of righteousness. "Those whom He called, He also justified . . ." For what purposes then were they called and justified? The answer "to approach the 'Glory'", And what was that? First and foremost it was the

mysterious glow that constituted the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day. Then, after the Tabernacle had been dedicated, that Divine Light came to dwell between the cherubim in the Most Holy place (Exod. 40. 34-35). All the preceding stages of Aaron's call were preliminary to and preparatory for the purpose of approaching this "Glory". To Israel, as their High Priest, he was the emblem and representative of this Glory. None else but he might draw near thereto, and none but he might withdraw from its presence to serve and bless Israel. The sanctity of that Holy Light was set forth in his robes, and in his holy estate. He was to Israel the token of that Glory in living flesh. Thus was he "Glorified". Again, whom God did foreknow him He called, and him whom He called, He also justified, and him whom He justified, He also "glorified". Thus the selection and service of the Priesthood in Israel (the election) constitutes the framework on which the Apostle's great theme of Christian election is built.

Taking Peter's words back to their origin we have the same basic facts. "*Elect . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father in (or by) sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*" are Peter's words. Here, again, "election", is according to the foreknowledge of God, but is manifested forth by the impartation by God of his Holy Spirit, and by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. This reference is to the consecration of the Priesthood (Lev. 8) and the ceremony by which they were inducted into their sacred office. "*And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take Aaron and his sons with him and the garments and the anointing oil . . .*" (Lev. 8.1). This indicates that God foreknew Aaron as the candidate for the High Priesthood and his sons as his underpriests. "And he (Moses) poured of the anointing oil (symbol of the Holy Spirit) upon Aaron's head, and anointed him to sanctify him . . . And Moses took of the anointing oil and of the blood which was upon the altar, and sprinkled it upon Aaron, upon his garments and upon his sons, and upon his sons, garments with him, and sanctified Aaron, his garments, and his sons, and his sons' garments with him" (Lev. 8. 12, 30). Here the sprinkled blood and oil are emblems of consecration and show that these foreknown and pre-destined chosen men were sanctified (set apart) to the service of their God, as ministers for their nation. The sprinkling of the oil and blood set a visible seal upon the foreknown and pre-determined purpose of God concerning them, and was to be taken as the sure token that God had called them to and equipped them for their sacred office.

Thus, the purpose inhering in their election was that the chosen company should be the channel of God's favour and mercy to those who had been passed-by, and remained numbered among the non-elect. A small section of the nation had been taken and prepared for a higher purpose than the rest—"of the same lump" God had taken clay and made it a vessel unto greater honour.

Again, since Apostolic days, God has been taking clay to make for himself a vessel unto greater honour. Another higher and better Priesthood is on the wheel, and is being worked into shape for its high destiny. In spite of Rabbinic or Pharisaic remonstrance in Apostolic days, God has exercised his sovereign prerogative as the supreme Master-Potter, and has made for his purposes a vessel through which his grace will flow—a vessel foreknown long ago, and predetermined from ancient times to receive its fashioning; a vessel elect and precious; foreknown, called, justified, and glorified. No matter how it hurt Pharisaic pride or roused Rabbinic ire, the Potter exercised his sovereign right and of the same lump has made a vessel suited for higher honour, leaving the remainder of the clay in hardness of heart to bide his time till He shall make it also a vessel of honour, though by comparison a vessel of lesser honour.

The Potter's great design first matured in the character of his Son, but that Son is to have a brotherhood of faithful souls conjoined with him in his calling. Known unto God from before the world, this brotherhood was predetermined to be conformed to his likeness—to be linked with him in his sufferings so that they might share in his glory.

In his letter to Rome, Paul tells us in the magnificent phrases of his argument, of God's foreknowledge and predetermination to create a family of sons—a family of many brethren, all of whom will have been conformed to the image of his Son. To reach that glorious estate each of these brethren will have been called and justified and glorified. Together they were all foreknown to God, not as individuals, but as a class or brotherhood.

Peter's words help us to specify the actual time in each believer's life and the processes by means of which he becomes the elect of God. When the Holy Spirit is given, and the blood of Jesus is applied, then each consecrated believer is set apart to the Will of God, and becomes one of God's "elect". Then, and not before, does the accepted believer enter within the circle of God's elect. That brotherhood was predetermined long ages ago, but who should enter into it was left to the workings of time and Providence.

Thus, irrespective of Rabbinic remonstrances or Pharisaic questionings, God has exercised his sovereign right over his clay and has taken one part of it to make a vessel unto the highest honour. But He will satisfy every willing heart even of the residue, when He has made of the remainder a vessel, still unto honour.

*"O, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God; How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past tracing out!"*

*"But God has revealed them unto us through the Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2.10).*

*The End*

## THE FOUR HEADS OF THE LEOPARD

The four-headed leopard of Dan. 7.6 and four-horned goat of Dan. 8.8 in the visions of successive world empires symbolised by various wild beasts is stated in the Book of Daniel, and is generally accepted by prophetic expositors, as denoting the empire of Greece, founded by Alexander the Great and destined to break into pieces shortly after his death. The four heads and horns, it is indicated, picture four divisions into which the empire resolved itself, each under a different king. At the time in question, the 4th Century B.C., Alexander had invaded Asia to do battle with the Persian empire ruled by Darius Codomanus, and had slain the latter in battle, thereby winning for himself the submission of all the Persian dominions, ranging from Egypt in the

west to India in the east, including in the process the nation of Judah. After pursuing his conquering career as far as southern Asia and the Indus valley, he returned on his tracks and reached Babylon, and there he died, the year being 323 B.C.

This, say the majority of commentators, is where the four heads and horns come into the picture. Alexander, they say, divided his empire between four of his leading generals. Cassander was to take European Greece; Ptolemy, Egypt, North Africa and Arabia; Lysimachus, Asiatic Greece (modern Turkey); and Seleucus, Syria, Judah, Babylonia and Persia and the East to India. The picture afforded is that of an orderly and immediate transfer of sovereignty to the four

generals, thus fulfilling the prophecy. But it has been pointed out that according to the historians there was a fifth general, Antigonus, who also was in process of carving out an empire for himself from the dominions of Alexander. This leads to the question; is the vision of Daniel incorrect and should there have been five heads, or does the fault lie with the historians?

It can be said at once that Daniel was right; the empire did divide into four sovereign entities. The apparent paradox arises from an oversimplification of the position on the part of the commentators—most of whom copied from one another anyway. It is not certain that Alexander on his death-bed divided his empire between four of his generals; so far as can be substantiated, he left no definite instructions. (He is reputed to have died after a drinking bout and may have been in no position to do so anyway). It is true that I Macc. 1.5-6 (Apocrypha) retailing the events of those days, does say "*after these things he (Alexander) fell sick and perceived that he should die. Wherefore he called his servants, such as were honourable, and had been brought up with him from his youth, and parted his kingdom among them, while he was yet alive*". This, written about two centuries after the event, gives no guide to the number of kingdoms. The Roman historian Livy, of 1st cent. BC, says of the empire that it was "*broken up into many kingdoms by reason of the death of Alexander; all in power were exhausting their strength in the eager rapacity for extended dominion*" (Livy 14.7). Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Greek historian just before the beginning of the Christian era, says almost the same thing (Ann. Rom. 1.2.3) Josephus, 1st Cent. AD., mentions five contending generals, of whom Antigonus was one and concludes "*and as these princes ambitiously strove one against another, every one for his own principality, it came to pass that there were continual wars . . .*" (Ant. 12.1). Plutarch, Greek historian of the 1st Cent. AD., also mentions the five generals and dwells upon the continual wars between them. But Polybius, another Greek historian who lived little more than a century after the events and therefore nearer in time than any of the others, refers to four kingdoms as emanating from Alexander's dominions (Polyb. 2, 3, 5).

The essence of the whole matter is that after the death of Alexander there was a general scramble between his leading generals for power. This lasted for some twenty years after which four generals remained and they headed four separate kingdom-empires. Antigonus was the senior and most prominent among them and it

seems clear that he expected, and intended, to be the head of the entire Greek empire. There was an obstacle. Although Alexander was dead (died 323 BC), his brother Philip was still alive and he held the right to the succession. Antigonus staged a rebellion and in 317 Philip was murdered. A year later Antigonus set out to campaign in Asia for the succession but there was still the son of Philip, lawful heir to the kingship. In 312 Demetrius, an ally of Antigonus, engaged Ptolemy and Seleucus at Gaza and was defeated. Ptolemy thereupon took possession of Egypt and Judea; Seleucus took Babylon, and laid claim to Persia. The "Seleucid Era" thus began on Oct. 1, 312 BC. In 308 the son of Philip, Alexander Aegis, died and with his death the family and dynasty of Alexander became extinct. The field was now clear for the contending generals. Two years later, in 306, Demetrius defeated Ptolemy in a naval battle, but his victory was indecisive and in 303 he went to Greece to try conclusions with Cassander, in which operation he was unsuccessful. By 302 Antigonus was in Cappadocia facing Lysimachus and Seleucus, who had ganged up against him. This resulted in the battle of Ipsus, in Phrygia, in 301 and in that battle Antigonus was slain and that settled the matter. The four surviving generals parted amicably and each settled down to administer their share of the spoils. Judea came under the domination of Seleucus who established his capital at Antioch of Syria.

The position therefore is that following Alexander's death there was a twenty-year period of civil war between the various military factions which was brought to an end by the death of Antigonus who had aspired to inherit the whole of Alexander's empire. The vision of Daniel indicating four heads was accurate enough; it took twenty years of internecine strife to effect it.

The four heads of state did not survive long. Cassander died in 296, only five years later; Ptolemy in 283. He lasted eighteen years. Two years after that Lysimachus was slain in battle by Seleucus and Seleucus himself was murdered the following year. None of them got much out of it. But the four kingdoms survived into the Roman era. Centuries later the whole of the territory west of the Euphrates was incorporated into the Roman empire and that east of the Euphrates into the kingdom of Parthia, with which the prophecy of Daniel is not concerned. Daniel saw the four-headed leopard, Greece, superseded by the final great power, Rome, which subsists to this day in the powers of Western Europe.

## THE TRAGEDY OF SAMSON

*The story of  
a great failure*

### 4. Delilah

Samson had now exercised rulership over Israel for twenty years without having made any contribution to the moral or religious progress of his people. The period was one of stagnation. Israel remained uneasily under the yoke of her Philistine masters, although it is very probable that while Samson lived the Philistines left them more or less alone, probably contenting themselves with the exacting of a certain amount of tribute in kind—wheat, olives, grapes, cattle, and so on. It was probably not as heavy a bondage as they had known in earlier times, and for that the credit went to Samson. It was not a time of religious revival; Israel in the main went on worshipping other gods and no voice was raised in the land calling them back to the God of their fathers.

The blame for this has to be laid at the door of the ruler. Samson had every possible advantage fitting him for the role of a national religious leader as well as political ruler. His Nazarite upbringing and early training coupled with unusual physical attributes could have marked him out as a leader whom all would follow. Had the power of God been behind him he would have been irresistible; but God can work only through men who are utterly and sincerely devoted to him, and Samson was not. He was too much a slave to his own fleshly desires and passions. It is impossible to read the story without realising that the women in Samson's life were the cause of his undoing and his failure to achieve what otherwise would have been a memorable destiny. Now after twenty years of unchallenged rule we find him entangled with yet another woman, Delilah of Sorek in Judah, forty miles from his home village of Zorah and not far from Etam where he had taken refuge from the pursuing Philistines twenty years earlier.

The nationality of Delilah is not known. She was not necessarily a Philistine—living in Judah so far from Philistine territory it is in fact unlikely that she was a member of that race. It has been thought that she was probably an Israelite, but there is something that does not ring true in the idea of any Israelite woman, however abandoned, betraying the hero of her nation to the unbelieving Philistines. It is perhaps more likely that she was an Amorite, a daughter of the people which inhabited Canaan when the children of Israel first entered the land, and whom Israel never succeeded in completely driving out. Traces of Amorite descent still linger in even the present

inhabitants of the land. The Amorites, like the Philistines, were exceptionally tall and well built, usually having fair hair and blue eyes; it is quite possible that Samson, himself a giant among his fellows, would feel a natural preference for the tall Amorite and Philistine women as against the more slightly built Hebrews. At any rate, we are told quite frankly and brutally that "*Samson loved a woman in the vale of Sorek named Delilah*". There is no intimation that he was married to her or had any intention of marrying her. The setting of the story lends colour to the supposition that he visited her whenever he saw fit and interspersed such times of dalliance between periods of attention to such of his duties as ruler in Israel that he chose to discharge. He had long ago given up any apprehension that he stood in any danger from the Philistines; twenty years' confidence in what men would to-day call his "good luck", and reliance on his personal strength and agility, had built that impression firmly in his mind. As for the things of God, it is evident that he never gave them a thought.

Samson's infatuation for this woman did not go unnoticed. Such things rarely do. In this case it proved the subject of interested discussion in very high quarters indeed—no less than the councils of the five "lords of the Philistines". This word "lords" is the Hebrew "*seren*", describing an official rank amongst the Philistines which denoted a member of the quinvirate, or ruling executive of five, which governed affairs in the Philistine colony in Canaan. Samson had proved too elusive for all their efforts of twenty years past but they still wanted to get him in their power. His personal prowess had hitherto defied their schemes; could they get at him through this woman? Samson was neither the first man or the last to be brought to ruin that way.

The upshot of all this was a visit to Delilah by duly accredited representatives of the five rulers. For information leading to successful apprehension of the hero they would each contribute the sum of eleven hundred *keseph* ("pieces of silver" in the Authorised Version). Five thousand five hundred silver *keseph* amounted to a sum which would have the purchasing power of about forty thousand pounds sterling, or equivalent in dollars, in AD 1985. Such a sum of money must have represented a big temptation. True, no scope for spending it or even a fraction of it could possibly have existed in the primitive villages of Judah, but the

emissaries would not have been slow to point out that life could be very different in any of the five Philistine cities, Gaza, Askelon, Ashdod, Lachish or Gath, all on or near the seacoast and replete with all the luxuries, the pleasures, and the vices also, of the Cretan civilisation from which they had sprung. A smart girl like Delilah, they might well have pointed out, was wasted in a backwoods village like Sorek and upon a country-bred Hebrew like Samson, when with her looks and money she could enjoy life and see life to the uttermost in the Philistine cities or even, perhaps, travel to Crete and move in the highest of Cretan society. There is nothing fantastic or impossible in all this, for human nature is much the same in all ages, and these arguments have been advanced, and accepted, in similar circumstances a myriad times in the world's history.

Delilah accepted the proposition. She agreed to betray the man who, for all his faults, trusted her, and to learn from him the secret of his great strength and how that strength could be nullified. One incidental evidence which might indicate that Delilah was not of Samson's own people is the fact that a Hebrew woman, unless profoundly and improbably ignorant of the Mosaic Law, would have known the Nazarite secret without having to worm it out of the man.

One would have thought that Samson, after a similar disastrous experience at his marriage twenty years earlier, would have been proof against a repetition. He would by now be at least in his early forties and, presumably, wiser in the ways of men, and women, than he had been in those past days. But there is no indication that he was any wiser, or at any rate more discreet. Perhaps the guileless blue eyes of the fair-haired Amoritish damsel persuaded him that she was incapable of the villainy once perpetrated by his dark-eyed Philistine love. More likely it is that he had become reckless in the conviction that he was invulnerable, and that come what may, the Philistines could never capture him, so that whilst fully aware of the danger of revealing his secret he was prepared to "play with fire" in a spirit of bravado, purely to torment the Philistines with false hopes which would not be realised. So to Delilah's tearful entreaties he responded with an entirely fictitious story, to the effect that if he could be bound with seven green withs (the stem of a rush-like plant) that had never been dried, his strength would go from him and he would become like any ordinary man. Delilah, being after all, only a simple country girl, believed him, and next time Samson visited her she had a suitable party of Philistines concealed in the chamber where she waited to receive him. Samson probably had a shrewd idea they were there, especially

when Delilah proposed a pretty little piece of play-acting in which she would bind him with seven green withs just to see if his strength really would go from him. The giant probably assisted in adjusting his bonds, and stood there laughing as Delilah, believing that her fifty five hundred keseph were as good as in her purse, called out the pre-arranged signal "*the Philistines be upon thee, Samson*". Even as his would-be captors burst forth from their hiding-place he had snapped his bonds, "*like a thread of tow in the fire*" and was gone, laughing uproariously at the joke.

It was not long before the moth was again fluttering around the candle, to be met by more tears and reproaches. There was probably a certain amount of comforting to be done, and in order completely to restore friendly relations Samson indicated to Delilah that the real trouble was that the green withs had snapped unexpectedly. What were actually needed were two new ropes that had never been stretched. This sounded reasonable enough; it may be imagined that Delilah, in consultation with her advisers, took a few lessons in knot tying. It was not desired that the fiasco of the last occasion be repeated. It was then necessary to wait until Samson's next visit was due; it does not seem however that he allowed affairs of State to interfere too much with pleasure, so that before very long the Philistines again lay concealed in Delilah's room—but with no better result than before.

This was discouraging. Delilah would have a hard time explaining to the Philistines that all this was not her fault; she was doing her best. She was probably told she had got to do better: there may even have been threats of possible unpleasant consequences in the event of failure. At any rate, perhaps with some misgiving, she approached her admirer once again.

Samson was getting reckless. Mischievously, as his eyes fell upon the loom standing in the corner of the room—a loom was a very necessary implement to every woman in those days—he suggested that an effective method of curbing his strength would be to weave his long hair in with the web of the partly made cloth even then standing on the loom. Delilah would look at the loom too, appraisingly, and realise, as Samson most likely intended her to realise, that a man whose hair was woven in with the cross-threads to make as it were a piece of cloth, tightly stretched on the loom, would be quite unable to break free unless he scalped himself. The more Delilah considered the idea the more foolproof she felt it to be. The loom was a heavy timber construction and once securely fastened to that

a man's enemies could easily make short work of him.

The next step was to persuade Samson to act the part he had facetiously suggested. He may or may not have demurred a little. Some thought may have crossed his mind that he could conceivably tempt his good fortune too far. Perhaps Delilah intimated to him that the continued granting of her favours would be dependent upon compliance with her wishes, and he, infatuated man that he was, would comply rather than risk losing the object of his desires.

So it came about that on a set night the hopeful captors crouched in their hiding place while the loom creaked and turned as Delilah steadily wove her lover's luxuriant hair with her balls of yarn into the strangest cloth ever woven by an Amorite woman. When it was finished the weaving lay wound tightly around the roller (the "beam" of the Authorised Version narrative) which Delilah thoughtfully locked with the "pin" to avoid any possibility of unrolling. Samson must have presented a pitiable and undignified sight with his head drawn close up to the roller, around which his hair was now wound, and his body sprawled across the woodwork of the loom. What more fitting a picture could there be of a man who had become a complete slave to his own weaknesses? Could the writer of the Book of Proverbs, a couple of centuries later, want any better inspiration for his pen-picture of any man caught in the same kind of snare? *"With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life"* (Prov. 7. 21-23).

So, for the third time, the Philistines sprang out expecting this time that there could be no escape. But they had still underestimated their quarry's strength. With one mighty heave Samson wrecked the loom, tearing free the roller with its roll of cloth into which his hair had been woven, together with the broken pin and such parts of the loom as could not be detached from the cloth, and was away. The account does not record how, on arrival home, he explained the peculiar condition of his hair and perhaps beard, ostensibly sacred to God, but now inexplicably and inextricably woven in with some woman's weaving material. Neither does it say how many women of Samson's household laboured, and for how long, to disentangle the yarn from the hair and restore his flowing locks to their usual luxuriance. In any case Samson's own people must by

now have become well used to his eccentricities and only a few of the older ones who had regard for the God of Israel and remembered the circumstances of Samson's birth, would shake their heads sadly and look hopelessly at one another.

Here in this story is enshrined all the tragedy of a man who flirts with temptation and whose successive escapes from serious consequences only encourage him to live even more dangerously. In a sense it is the story of mankind, fallen into sin. Only utter disaster and heartbreak at the end brings him to a consciousness of his own folly and the true means of reformation and eventual happiness. So it was with Samson; so it is with all men who tread this way.

At this stage the Philistines apparently lost interest and went home. The attempt to capture Samson with the help of Delilah was written off. But Delilah had no intention of giving up so easily. The promised reward still dazzled her. So she resumed her efforts with Samson and began to wear down his resistance. He was apparently seeing a great deal of her now, for *"it came to pass when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death, that he told her all his heart . . ."* Wearied by her importunity, and lacking strength of character to resist, he at length imparted the fatal secret. *"There hath not come a razor upon my head, for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my birth"*.

With that admission Samson signed his own death warrant. Delilah's instinct told her that this time he had revealed the truth. Maybe she waited a while to lull any suspicion on Samson's part that she might make use of the information; his utter blindness to possible consequences is almost incomprehensible except on the supposition that he relied again on his own physical ability to extricate himself from any difficulty into which Delilah might seek to involve him. But he was now altogether entrapped in the snare of his own folly and he could not escape. Delilah was clever enough and unscrupulous enough to know how to hold and keep him. The expression in Judges 16. 19, *"she made him sleep upon her knees"* is almost identical with an ancient Sumerian allusion which would indicate that Delilah held him in an intimate embrace from which he had neither strength nor will to loose himself. Devoid of all feelings of modesty or shame, she held him thus fast whilst her confederate deftly shaved the luxuriant tresses from the head of the unheeding giant, oblivious to all but his passion. The task completed, triumphantly and cruelly she jerked him back into consciousness with the familiar words *"The Philistines be upon thee, Samson"*.

This tragic highlight to the story demands more careful consideration than any other part of the narrative. Samson, shorn of his locks, found himself suddenly bereft of the mighty strength which had so long been his and in which he had trusted. He himself had apparently believed that the secret of his strength lay in his standing as a Nazarite, the symbol of which was his long hair. And the symbol meant more to him than the reality. It would seem that he could break every law of God and every aspect of his vow without considering his status as a Nazarite imperilled but he must retain his long hair. Samson's tragedy was to hold to the symbol whilst rejecting the reality behind the symbol, and that has been the tragedy of a great many Christians and has led them into excesses as great, or greater, than those of Samson.

Must it then be assumed that the removal of the hero's "seven locks of hair" was in fact the actual cause of his loss of vital strength? As a medical or physical reason the idea is absurd. It has also to be noted that nowhere in the story of Samson, or elsewhere in the Bible, is unusual physical strength said to be inherent in the Nazarite's long hair. Samuel was a Nazarite but no indication is given that he was of other than ordinary physique. The idea that the strength was in his hair rests entirely on Samson's own testimony and represents only his own belief.

If then Samson's physical strength was not affected by the shaving of his head, to what must be attributed the fact that at this moment his strength evidently did desert him and at last he fell into the power of his enemies? What was it that happened in the instant he said "*I will go out and shake myself, as at other times before.*"

*And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him."*?

He had betrayed his God! . . . That was the terrible realisation which smote Samson with all the force of a sledge-hammer blow as he leapt up and realised that the hair in which he had taken such pride was gone. He was no longer a Nazarite and God was departed from him. It had been so long since he had given any thought to the things of God that he had become quite unable to distinguish between the reality and the symbol. Whilst he kept his unshaven locks he gloried in the strength which he believed they conferred on him and cared not one jot about the remainder of God's commands. Now he had lost that which had been his glory and in one moment of acute self perception he saw himself as he was, a man whose persistent self indulgence had separated him from God and blinded him to the calling of God and at the end had betrayed him into the hands of the enemies of God. The bitterness of that moment deprived him of all power to resist, and as his exultant enemies led him away securely bound, he went with them passively, helplessly, a broken-hearted and despairing man. His own foolishness and wickedness had led to the loss of that which made him a man of God and with that loss he had lost all. God had departed from him and he would never again possess strength with which to outwit and overcome his enemies. Those were the bitter thoughts which possessed his mind as he trudged wearily into Gaza and through the cheering crowds, come to gloat over the capture of the man who had been their scourge for twenty years.

*(To be concluded)*

## A Prayer

*A child of God, in a bygone day, expressed his heart's feelings in this prayer! May it be the prayer of our hearts too!*

"Blessed Lord Jesus—Divine Master in the way of the Cross, we would be for ever choosing our own crosses, not meekly bearing after Thee those which thou chooseth for us, and layest upon us in the order of thy good and wise Providence. We would have great crosses forsooth, romantic crosses, picturesque crosses, and lo! Thou sayest 'No, my child, it is the small crosses, the prosaic crosses, the homely crosses, the vulgar crosses, those trials of temper, those mortifications of petty vanity—of indolence and love of ease, wherein thou must be conformed by the discipline

of my Spirit to mine Image. These crosses, and not others, do thou take up daily and bear after me. Is not my choice for thee much better for thee than thine for thyself? Is it not a wise choice? Is it not a loving choice?' Be it so, dear Lord! Precious indeed, above thousands of gold or silver, must be the cross which thou chooseth for me as the fittest, and which thou dost lovingly adapt to my strength and powers of endurance. Truly, O Blessed Master, as thou sayest, such a cross is an easy yoke and a light burden, in the bearing of which I may find rest unto my soul. Thereafter, dear Lord, lead thou me on in the Way of self-denial, until thine Image is crystal clear in my heart."

The chief lesson and study in divinity is well and rightly to learn to know Christ . . . and Christ himself also teacheth that we should learn to

know him only out of the Scriptures, where He saith, "Search the Scriptures, for they do testify of me."  
*(Luther)*

## PAROUSIA — THE SCHOLARS' VERDICT

Doubts are sometimes expressed as to the meaning which should be attached to the word *parousia* when applied to the Second Advent. Until a century ago no question as to the accuracy of the Authorised Version rendering of "coming" was raised, this being due to the universal "catastrophic" view of the Second Advent, a moment of time sufficing to reveal the Lord Jesus Christ descending from heaven in fire and storm to conduct the Last Assize—a twenty-four hour day in which a few "saints" would be taken away to celestial glory, and the vast majority of earth's millions consigned to everlasting woe.

With a more accurate understanding of the purpose of Christ's return—the reconciliation of "whosoever will" of the human race to God, a work destined to occupy a long term of years—it was inevitable that more critical attention would be focussed upon important New Testament words such as this one. Hence men of unimpeachable authority—translators and theologians alike—have recognised for many years that a truer rendering of the word *parousia* is found in the English word "presence"; and that "Second Advent" texts in which it occurs refer not only to the moment of arrival of the Lord Jesus, but also to the entire period of time which Luke (17. 24-26) calls the "days of the Son of Man", including the coming of the Lord for his Church; their change to be "like him"; the destruction of the "kingdoms of this world" (Rev. 11. 15); and that period spoken of in Revelation as the "thousand years" in which all mankind is to come to a knowledge of the Truth and the opportunity of reconciliation to God held out to all.

The word *parousia* occurs twenty-four times in the Authorised Version, and is rendered "coming" in every instance except 2 Cor. 10. 10 ("His bodily *presence* is weak") and Phil. 2. 12 ("As in my *presence*, . . . more in my absence"), where the correct rendering is demanded in order to avoid an absurdity. When the Revised Version was published in 1884, its translators recognised the necessity of correcting the rendering, and indicated the meaning therefore in every instance as "presence" (margin).

The majority of modern translators agree. The Revised Version, Young's Literal Translation, Rotherham and the Concordant version all adopt "presence" consistently. The Emphatic Diaglott uses it largely, and to a lesser degree Ferrar Fenton, although in many cases the latter trans-

lator prefers "appearance". Moffatt generally adopts "advent" or "arrival". Dr. Weymouth's own views regarding the Second Advent dissuaded him from translating the word consistently, and hence he uses "coming" or else words equivalent to "presence" as may be demanded by his understanding of each passage. In his notes on Matt. 24.3 he comments on the word "coming":—

*"Or 'presence', A capital C is used in this translation to indicate this word in the seventeen passages where it occurs as signifying the Second Coming of our Lord. In a more general sense it occurs in 2 Cor. 7. 6-7, and in six other places."*

Rotherham demonstrates his usual carefulness in a comment on the word *Parousia* in the later editions of his translation, reproduced here in abbreviated form.

"In this edition the word *parousia* is uniformly rendered presence. The difficulty expressed in the notes to the second edition of this N.T. in the way of so yielding to this weight of evidence as to render *Parousia* always by presence lay in the seeming incongruity of regarding 'presence' as an event which would happen at a particular time, and which would fall into rank as one of a series of events. The translator still feels the force of this objection, but is withdrawn from taking his stand upon it any longer by the reflection that, after all, the difficulty may be imaginary. The *parousia* . . . may, in fine, be both a *period*, more or less extended, during which certain things shall happen; and an *event* coming on and passing away as one of a series of Divine interpositions. Christ is raised as a first fruit—that is one event. He returns and vouchsafes his 'presence,' during which he raises his own—that is another event, however large and prolonged; and finally comes another cluster of events constituting the end. Hence, after all 'presence' may be the most widely and permanently satisfying translation of the looked-for 'parousia' of the Son of Man."

Confirmation of this rendering has come from an unexpected source. Since the beginning of this century Eastern excavations have brought to light, mainly in Egypt, hundreds of papyrus documents written in the first century, many during the lifetime of Jesus himself, and comprising the daily correspondence of ordinary people. These records are of all kinds—private letters, traders' accounts and receipts, official reports, medical

treatises, etc., and many New Testament expressions are found in them and allusions corroborated. In these documents the word "*parousia*" has been frequently found, particularly as applied to the state visits of the Roman emperors to a city or country. Where in our day we would speak, for instance, of the king's visit to an exhibition, implying the period of his stay there, the people of A.D. 50 spoke of the king's "*parousia*." The fitness of this application to the royal "visit" of Christ the King to reign over the earth is obvious, and these contemporary documents afford valuable evidence as to the correct meaning of this word.

The July, 1938, issue of the "*Advent Witness*" (now the "*Prophetic Witness*")—a paper circulating among those who look for an imminent "coming" in the traditional sense—touching on

the word, states that the true meaning is "presence," quoting Liddell and Scott as an authority. Coming from a source holding to orthodox belief, this declaration is of value. Present-day research has made it clear that, in referring to his return to earth, both our Lord and the Apostles had in mind a *period of time* during which the various phases of his work would be accomplished, and that the "signs of his Parousia" would be those evidences which, arising from a correct interpretation of the significance of contemporary events, were intended to assure the "watchers" living *at that time*, of the fact that they were beholding for themselves the beginning of the "days of the Son of Man", that the time of his Second Presence had already begun—truly the most wonderful inspiration and encouragement to renewed zeal and faith which the Church has enjoyed at any time during the Age.

## BUT GOD IS ONE

*A discourse upon  
Gal. 3. 20*

This very simple statement in Paul's letter to the Galatians is one of the big conundrums to the expositors of the New Testament. One noted commentator says that there are no less than two hundred and fifty different explanations of it in Christian literature. Another writer, also of considerable reputation, gives the number as four hundred and thirty, all of which show varying shades of difference at one or more points of the argument. It is just amazing to us, as simple students of Divine things, to be told that it is possible to have such a wide variety of opinion about the meaning of just four simple words.

All this variety of opinion is due to a different interpretation of some part of the context, and the relationship of that part of the context to the text; for it is owing to their varied understanding of the context, that all their applications of the four words of the text arise.

Some of these Christian writers see in these four words a reference to the Unity of the Godhead, saying that, although there are three Persons, yet those three Persons are but one God. It requires some dexterity in the usage of language (in view of the special nature of the context) to evolve this idea—still, it has been done, and stands on record as an attempt to explain four simple words.

Others interpret these four words in line with Deut. 6. 4: "*Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one—Jehovah.*" In principle, that interpretation is true. But it is quite another matter whether Paul uses these words in just the same sense and setting that Moses did. Moses used them as a

challenge to, and refutation of, "idol" claims, and assured any man disposed to idol worship in Israel that they had only one God, not many (as other nations had)—One God, whose name was Jehovah. Paul's argument is a totally different one. He is discussing the question of Covenants into which God had entered with certain men, and had made a strong contrast between the Covenant made with Abraham—a Covenant of Promise—with that made with Israel—a Covenant of Law and Morality.

The main point of the question under discussion is the "inheritance" of the promises, and the blessings therein contained (see vv. 16 and 18), and whether it was possible to "inherit" them under the Mosaic or Law Covenant. This discussion had arisen because the Galatian brethren were showing signs of turning away from their simple faith in Christ to an observance of the ceremonies and precepts associated with the Law. Certain Judaising teachers had gone out from Jerusalem, and were following Paul around, dropping into the little churches which he had founded, and telling them: "*Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved*" (Acts 15. 1). These teachers wanted to settle and incorporate the movement initiated by the Lord, and carried forward by Paul, as one more of the varying systems of thought embodied in Judaism—a broader and more tolerant form of Phariseism, a blending of the new wine of Nazareth with the older wine of Sinai. They wanted the teachings of the Lord to be applied as a patch to cover the threadbare garments of Mosaism.

This was the burning question which was keenly debated at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15. 6-29), and when both sides had been heard the question was decided by the resident Apostles and Elders there in favour of the Apostle Paul's contention that it was not necessary, nor in accord with the voice of Providence, to compel Gentile believers to be circumcised or to be made subject to the Law.

Some of these teachers, even after, and in spite of that unanimous authoritative decision in Jerusalem, continued their subversive work and had found their way into the little churches of Galatia, and were persuading the immature believers there to blend their belief in Jesus with an observance of Mosaic ceremonies. This is the form of misleading teaching which Paul refutes in his letter to his Galatian brethren.

If the "inheritance" which God bestowed upon Abraham, for himself and his then unborn Seed, were to be obtained by Law, then it could not be of Promise; so reasoned Paul. In such a case Christ could not profit anyone, in any way. This was a position that could not admit any blending of the old with the new. It was a case of "all" or "none". It must be "all law" and "no promise". There was no middle position where Promise and Law could amalgamate—in other words, there could be no compromise between Christ and the Law.

As proof of this he shows that the beneficiary and heir of Abraham's inheritance could not, at one time, be both Sarah's son and Hagar's as well. Each woman's child was exclusively her own, and nothing could be done to make them otherwise. But it was Sarah's son who could become heir to the inheritance—so Paul shows to the Galatian brethren (and to us) in his allegory in Chapter 4.

Now if God intended the inheritance to stand upon the Word of his Promise, why did God add a Covenant based upon Law to that previous Covenant, based upon a Promise? Paul answers that by saying that it was added in order to reveal sin in its true nature, as a thing exceedingly abhorrent to God, and this revelation could be made only by defining which of man's actions were right and which were wrong according to the Divine immutable standards of morality. Concerning those which were wrong, God had said, "*Thou shalt not . . .*" (Exod. 20. 1-17). Concerning those which were right, God (through Moses) had said, "*Thou shalt . . .*" (Deut. 6. 4-6), thus laying the "wrong" action under prohibition, and according the "right" action his approval and blessing. God prohibited the wrong action, and defined its performance as disobedience and sin. It was for this purpose that a

Covenant based on Law was superadded to a Covenant based on Promise. But that condition of a Law Covenant superimposed upon a Promise Covenant was not intended to be perpetual and unending. It was added to last "*until*"—until the True Seed implied in the Promise should come; until the greater "Isaac" should be complete (compare Chapter 3. 16 and 29).

In the act of super-adding that Law Covenant to the original Promise Covenant, "*it was ordained by angels in the hands of a Mediator.*" The angelic part of its construction is of little moment, but the Mediation part is of great importance in Paul's argument.

Here, of course, the subject is the Law Covenant (vv. 19-20), for of these two Covenants only the Law Covenant was established through a Mediator. And on this point Paul says, "*Now a mediator is not a mediator of one,*" or, in the better rendering of the Diaglott, "Of one party, however, he is not the Mediator". No mediator is required in a uni-lateral or one-sided arrangement, such as that made with Abraham, because Abraham was God's already-proven friend.

There must be two parties involved to call for the services of a Mediator, and he must negotiate equally with both and for both in turn. Hence, in negotiating the Law Covenant Moses had to place God's proposals before Israel, and return Israel's answer to God before sealing the Agreement (or Covenant) with blood (Exod. 19. 7-9). It is this law Covenant which is the subject to Gal. 3. 19-20). That means that we must find two parties thereto, for both of which Moses had to mediate. Israel, as the receivers of the Law, was one of them, God was the other.

The difficulties in the text arise from the two words "BUT" and "IS"—"BUT God IS one".

No difficulty would have arisen had it read, "*And God was one*", that is to say—Israel *was* one party, and "God *was* one". That statement would have been quite accurate according to the historic facts, but it would not have answered the question from the Galatians' present point of view. Nor would it have revealed how the same God could have undertaken responsibilities towards a people, under two such dissimilar Covenants as the Promise Covenant and the Law Covenant.

Originally Israel inherited from her illustrious Father the Promise of God, "*I will bless thee and thy seed after thee*"—but the super-added Covenant added to that Promise the word "if"—"*I will bless . . . if . . .*" This was where Israel failed. She did not observe the "ifs"—the conditions of her later Covenant. Consequently, she could not claim the blessing on her own account till the claims of the Law were taken out of the

way. This is where the righteousness of Jesus, for the believer comes in.

Christ is the "end" of the Law to the believer—that is, He served the same purpose to the believer as though he had kept the Law. And belief in Christ brought the believer from under the Law, so that he was "not under the Law," but under Grace" (Rom. 6. 15).

But Christ was not the end of the Law to the Jewish unbeliever. Whether the unbeliever was a full-blooded Jew, preferring the bondage of his Law to the liberty he would have found in Christ, or a subverted proselyte who turned away from Christ to observe the Law, he was still under the claims of the Law, and the Law still had a "curse" among its penal provisions to inflict upon those who broke the terms of the agreement. They remained still unredeemed from that curse, and could hope for no release till that Covenant was superseded by a new and better Covenant. That old Covenant did not die after Calvary, nor relinquishing its claims upon the consenting Israelite, but it has no blessing now to bestow.

The old-time sacrifices have been superseded and withdrawn because better sacrifices are under way, hence all who prefer to consider themselves, whether involuntarily (as the Jew), or voluntarily (as the Galatians were proposing to do) under its claims, can only reap its curse and bondage in return. They have no atonement sacrifice to cleanse and cover over their sins.

Paul was showing the Galatian brethren that the mediated Law Covenant had lost any worth or value it may once have had, and was now utterly and completely worthless as a source of blessing, yet in the very nature of things God is still a party to it, and could not be otherwise, till it is superseded and taken out of the way by a new and better Covenant. God *is still* one party to it. And although He is the God from whom Abraham obtained the Promise Covenant, and who stands pledged to bless Abraham and all his

Seed, still, because Israel blindly clings to her Law Covenant as a means of attaining Life, God can only heap up censure and blame against Israel, till the day of the great change-over to better things has arrived. All this comes of preferring the mediated Covenant and still desiring to remain under the two-party agreement. Christ Jesus could redeem the Jew from all its claims, and keep the Gentile believer from ever knowing or experiencing those claims, but if they still preferred Moses to Christ, well, then, God is still a party to that Covenant, but He cannot bless or help the other party in any way. He can only view them as under the curse of the law. Only in the light of such a fact can Paul's words in 1 Cor. 16. 20 be understood: "*If any man loveth not the Lord, let him be anathema*" (accursed). It was so contrary to the usual sentiments of Paul to speak like that, that nothing other than inexorable facts would make him pronounce anathema upon any man. He would not thus speak except in accordance with Divine Law—with full Divine approval.

The basis of the great uncertainty underlying the 250 (or 430) interpretations of this simple text lies in the fact that all these expositors think that the Old Law Covenant is null and void and has no further validity, and that the New Covenant has begun to operate. That is not so—for the New Covenant was never promised to the Christian Church. It was promised only to the House of Israel and the House of Judah. As neither of these Houses stand in New Covenant relationship with God, it is thus obvious that the Old Covenant is not yet superseded and dead. God is one party still, to a Covenant which has only censure and punishment to mete out. That is why the House of Judah (the Jew) is still suffering today, and must continue to suffer till Moses is taken out of her way, and Christ sets her free from her bondage to the Law. In no other way can we adequately explain those four simple words, "*But God is one*".

### Ancient carvings in Australia

"*Science Journal*" (February 1968) reported the discovery, in wild territory west of Alice Springs, Australia, of more than four hundred rock engravings of a type not hitherto known in Australia, by an explorer, Michael Terry. The engravings were later studied and photographed by an archæological party and are considered Australia's most important ancient art discovery. The finder, Terry, considers that they were made by immigrants from the Near East on account of their nature. The significance of this is that when the sons of Noah and their descendants spread over the earth, the descendants of Cush,

son of Ham, who became the Sumerians of the third millennium B.C. were the ones who afterward colonised, in order and among other territories, successively India, Malaya and finally Australia. It would seem that it took them about three thousand years for their successive generations to colonise these lands in succession but if these rock carvings do indeed as is thought offer evidence of their derivation from the artistic skill of the ancient Sumerians of which so many examples have already been found in the sands of Iraq then we have here a quite interesting link between the story of Genesis and one factor in its sequel of the present day.



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

# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

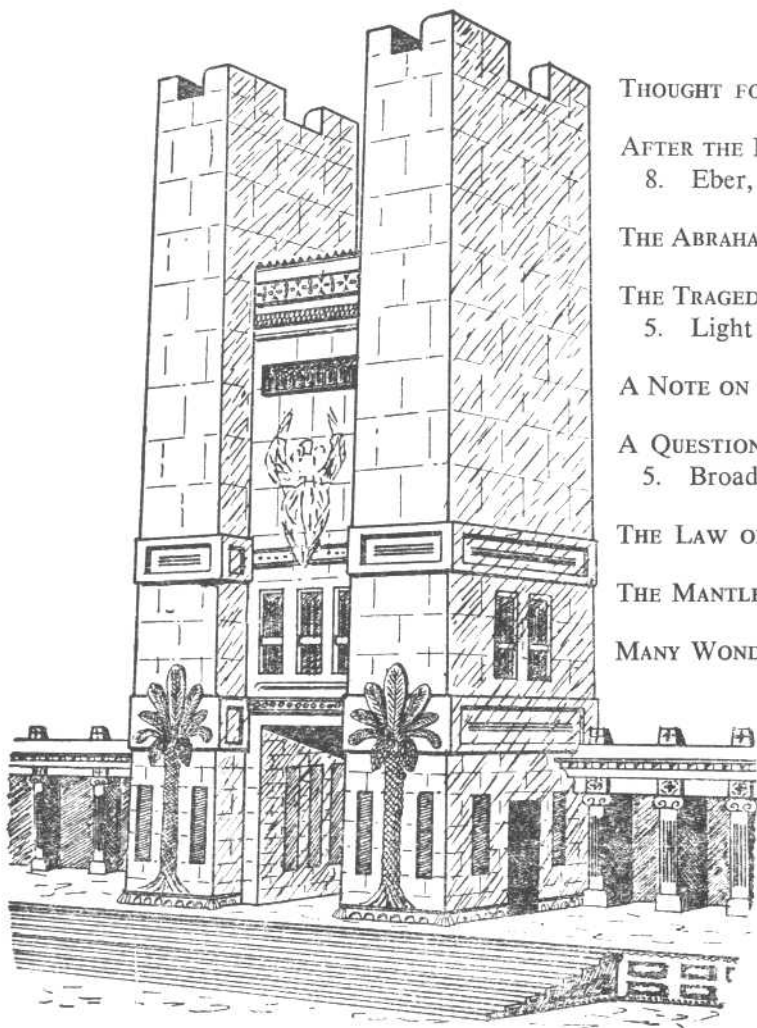
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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### Thought for the Month

In Greek tradition Odysseus was a famous warrior, King of Ithaca, and Orpheus a great musician. Somewhere in the ocean, a long way from Greece, there lay an island on which dwelt three maidens, known as the Sirens. Their singing was so sweet and compelling that any sailors upon whose ears the strains of their song fell were driven to turn their ships to shore, where the Sirens met them and after making them intoxicated with wine, slew them and devoured their flesh. No seafarer, said the story-tellers, had ever heard the Sirens' song and escaped with his life. So Odysseus determined that he would be the first to hear the song and yet live to tell the tale. A time came when his ship came within sight of the enchanted island. Odysseus commanded his men to bind him firmly to the mainmast with leather cords, stop their own ears with wax and row swiftly past. As they came near, the three maidens could be seen making gestures to the travellers to come closer. The sweetness of their voices seemed to draw the very soul of Odysseus out of his body. He struggled and strained to break his bonds which encircled him; he alternately implored and commanded his men to set him free; he groaned and cried in agony as they refused to heed him, until, bending to their oars they had carried their ship out of ear-shot and their commander was himself again.

Later on, Orpheus, the sweet musician at whose playing, it was said, the birds hushed their songs and wild beasts became docile and gentle, passed the Island of Sirens. But there were no bands and no straining in agony this time. Orpheus played his lyre so skilfully and sang so sweetly that neither he nor his shipmates heard so much as a note of the Siren's song, and they passed swiftly by the fateful place into safety.

So it is with the Christian. If we try to enlist mechanical aids to resist temptation, or endeavour to withstand the Devil by the strength of our own will, we may possibly get by, for God will surely honour our good intentions, but it will prove to be a hard way. Much easier will it be if we fix our eyes upon Jesus and let his voice ring in our ears; the temptations then will not obtrude themselves so easily upon our notice and we shall withstand them with greater ease.

God does not ask us to give up anything that this world has to offer without putting something else in its place. Perhaps that is why Jesus gave the parable of the man who was cleansed of a demon but put nothing else in his mind and life to replace the obsession. The demon looked back and saw his old home empty, swept and garnished. So he took seven other demons more evil than himself and they all entered in and dwelt there, and the last state of that man was worse than the first. And there was no need for it. The man could have filled his emptied mind with Christ. So should we, "bringing every thought into subjection to the obedience of Christ," so being transformed at the last into his own image.

The Yorkshire Bible Fellowship announce a week-end of Witness and fellowship on 26-27 October, commencing Sat. 26 at St. Sampsons Church, St. Sampsons Square, Church Street, York, at 8.0 p.m. with a showing of the film-picture-commentary "For This Cause", a two-hour visual-audio presentation of the Divine Plan from the creation of man to his entry into eternity at the end of the Millennium. The venue on Sun. 27th is at the Village Hall, Low Catton, near Stamford Bridge, from 11 a.m. onwards, where Bible expositions and studies will be given, light refreshments being provided between sessions. Local guest house accommodation at £6.50 per night B & B is available for any coming from a distance; further details from Mrs. A. Johnston, 48 Roman Avenue North, Stamford Bridge, York, YO4 1DP.

## AFTER THE FLOOD

### 8. Eber, Man of God

The passing of the period of Nimrod saw the emergence of another figure, one of greater significance to later generations, for to him, in all probability, must be given credit for the compilation of the first ten chapters of the Old Testament in the form we now have them. Eber, great-great-grandson of the patriarch Shem, was born some four hundred years after the Flood and grew to manhood during the days of Nimrod. He lived to within four hundred years of the birth of Abraham and so came just about halfway between Noah coming out of the Ark and Abraham leaving Ur for the land of Canaan. Nothing is said about him in Genesis save his place in the line of descent from Noah to Abraham and the reason for the naming of his son Peleg, but it was this man who gave his name to a numerous race of descendants which included many Arab peoples and also the nation of Israel. The term "Hebrew" is derived from Eber and it is from him that the chosen people traced their pedigree. Anything else that can be suggested as connected with the life of Eber has to be inferred from what is known of the history of the times in which he lived, times which saw the rise of the Sumerian civilisation and the commencement of a series of events which was to lead to Abraham, to Moses and eventually to Christ.

The later part of Eber's life of four hundred years is likely to have spanned a hundred and fifty year period the beginning and ending of which were marked by two disastrous floods. When he was about a hundred and eighty years old the south country, in which stood Ur, Erech (Uruk), Calneh (Nippur), and Eridu, suffered a widespread overflow of the Tigris and Euphrates which flooded the entire country and, according to Woolley, wiped out many of the country-folk, leaving mainly city-dwellers to survive. This was the flood of which evidence was found by Woolley during his excavations at Ur of the Chaldees in 1930, when he uncovered a bed of water-laid clay ten feet thick with human remains above and below. (At that time this discovery was thought to be that of the Flood of Noah's day and even today is sometimes thus quoted. It was established after examination that it was in fact a much later and lesser Flood.) A hundred and fifty years later there was a second similar flood, this time in the northern part of the land in the area of Babel, and this time it was the important city of Kish, near Babel, the capital of the entire country, which suffered most. The city was com-

pletely destroyed. According to Langdon and Watelin, who excavated Kish in 1924-30, the calamity "*definitely marked the end of an era*".

Between these two major floods there were several lesser ones, affecting various parts of the land, and it was probably this, occurring as it did during the latter part of the life of Nimrod, which led the Sumerians to commence work on the comprehensive system of canals which in after years regulated the floodwaters, and also gives credence to the legends asserting that Nimrod himself took the initiative in leading men to this harnessing and restraining the floods. There is one Biblical allusion which connects all this with Eber. The genealogy of Abraham's forefathers related in Gen. 10 contains a rather obscure remark. Vs. 25 says "*And unto Eber were born two sons; the name of one was Peleg, for in his days was the earth divided*". This word "divided" means to cut a channel, watercourse, canal, and "earth" (*erets*) equally means the land. The Genesis chronology places the birth of Peleg at just about the beginning of this "flood" period and just when the digging of canals in Shinar is shown by the evidences. Here is an incidental testimony to the historical accuracy of Genesis.

Another evidence confirming the above comes from a different sphere. The work of the climatologist C. E. P. Brooks on world climate in ancient times has already been cited. Referring now to this period, 2800-2600 BC, Brooks shows that in 2800 there occurred another sudden and drastic degeneration in the climatic conditions of the earth leading to two centuries of abnormally cold and wet conditions. Such a change could well account for these widespread floods in Iraq in the days of Eber, the cold increasing the annual snowfall in the Armenian mountains which fed the two great rivers and so flooding the Iraq plain from time to time, bringing to pass these precise conditions indicated as obtaining at the time of the birth of Peleg.

It is to this period, in the middle of the life of Eber, that the rapid increase of the Sumerian cities must be credited. Over the short span of under two centuries the land became dotted with settlements which quickly grew to sizable communities of anything between five and twenty thousand inhabitants each. Of these the two most important politically in those early days were Uruk (Erech of Gen. 10) and Kish. In these two cities the concept of kingship and kings commenced, albeit in a rudimentary fashion. Kish

was situated about eight miles from Babylon. It was the first city to exercise political control and for the whole of this period, the latter part of Eber's life, about a hundred and fifty years, it had rulers who ruled over the whole land of the Semites and Sumerians. There is evidence that at this time Babylon (Babel) with its Tower, was a purely religious centre, devoted to the worship of the one true God, and Kish the political capital. The remains of Kish, excavated in 1924-30, reveal it to have been a city of crude and primitive construction but built by a knowledgeable and civilised people. The houses stood along well-planned straight streets and had a good sanitary system of drains and water supply. Their only metal was copper, but of this they made carpenters' tools—saws twenty inches long and chisels—table cutlery and polished mirrors twelve inches across with handles. Four-wheeled chariots with leather furnishings drawn by horses traversed the streets, and craftsmen made fine coloured pottery and life-like copper ornaments. The inhabitants were agriculturalists and shepherds; there was no evidence of warfare or of warriors. They seem to have been a peaceful people, living chiefly on fish, fruit, grain and vegetables. The population was definitely a mixed one, Semitic and Sumerian, sons of Shem and of Ham (Oxford University Museum at the present time possesses the skeletal remains of seven of these people, contemporaries in their lifetime of Eber and Peleg). Two dynasties of "kings"—more properly city governors,—reigned simultaneously, one over the Semitic element and one over the Sumerians and it was two of the earliest Semitic rulers whose names reveal their worship of the one true God. One remark of Watelin (*"The Excavations at Kish."* Vol. 4) in this respect is illuminating. In discussing their burial customs he says "*the rituals which attended the burials reveal belief in a future life*". It is so often claimed by supposed authorities that early man had no belief in resurrection or a future life that this testimony to their understanding of the doctrine at so early a date, nearly three thousand years before Christ, is valuable.

It is quite possible that Kish was the home town of the patriarch Eber. Genesis gives no clue whatever in respect to any of the patriarchs until it comes to Abraham six centuries later living in Ur of the Chaldees, a hundred miles to the south. But in Eber's day the people of Shem were hardly likely to have got so far south as Ur. At the dispersal from Babel, Arphaxad son of Shem migrated with his people some hundred miles northward where they eventually founded and developed the city and nation of Mari, which was coming into existence in Eber's time. But some

of them were continually trickling back into the Plain of Shinar and Kish was at least fifty per cent Semitic, of Arphaxad. And there is one very good reason for associating either Eber or his son Peleg with the city of Kish and that is in all probability this is the city where the stories of Eden, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel were first written down in the form in which we have them today; no one is more likely to have been the writer than one or other of those two men.

Kish is the place where the oldest writing at present known has been found. Several other places, Uruk, Shuruppak, Elam, run it close but Kish does seem to be the oldest. It was a long time before the knowledge and practice of writing penetrated to the Semites of the north. The savants of today declare that this is when writing was invented; at no previous time did man know how to write. From the Bible point of view this may be questionable. Gen. 5. speaks of "*the book of the generations of Adam*" which seems to imply the practice of writing; it has often been remarked that the narrative of the Flood bears all the signs of having been written by an observer at the time of the event itself. It is hardly conceivable that the human race should have endured the two thousand years before the Flood without learning how to record its thoughts on paper or its then equivalent. On the other hand the early form of writing found at Kish and elsewhere is elementary and immature, without grammatical distinctions or many of the parts of speech which are necessary to a valid written language; it was another four centuries before the Sumerians arrived at that stage in their inscribed clay tablets and so far as the present store of knowledge is concerned no one could be blamed for asserting that this is where writing originated.

Does the answer to the conundrum lie in the circumstances of the early post-Flood world? Noah and his sons, emerging from the Ark, may well have possessed the art of writing but in this new world where numbers were few, all of one family, and the necessity of labour to obtain the necessities of life paramount, there would be neither necessity, time nor inclination to practice the art. After a few generations it could easily become the case that none, or at least but a few, knew how to write or read. So the art once known was lost, only to be recovered in the days of Eber when men were multiplying fast, trade with distant peoples was being developed, and the need for writing became evident.

A much more recent instance may serve to illustrate this point. In the fifth century A.D. the Romans withdrew from Britain, after a period of rule of some five hundred years. The declining

power of the Roman empire led them to recall their legions, leaving the Britons and the Roman civilian farmers to their own devices. They left behind them an orderly and civilised country the population of which was literate; everybody could read and write. Came the Saxons and Angles and Jutes, illiterate barbarians from the Continent, who overran the country and destroyed the British-Roman civilisation they supplanted. For another five hundred years the people at large became illiterate, unable to read or write. The only places where literacy survived were the monasteries and abbeys where the monks, secluded from the world, preserved the ancient books and the ancient knowledge. Not until the time of the Norman conquest did literacy return to Britain.

Did something like this happen in the days after the Flood, and was it the generation of Eber, five hundred years later, which saw the first attempts at reviving the lost art? In such case, just as the monks of the fifth century A.D. preserved the old writings until better days should come, so, it may be surmised, did some line of reverential men preserve the ancient records handed down from the days of Noah and the antediluvians. No line would be more appropriate, and none more probable, than the line of Shem which led eventually to Abraham and then to Israel, to whom, says Paul "*were committed the oracles of God*" (Rom. 3.2). Hence at the period in question Eber could be the one having custody of these priceless records, and on him would fall the task of editing and arranging—perhaps translating—them into the form which later on became the early part of Genesis, the first book of the Bible.

There is some internal evidence in these early chapters of Genesis to support this view. The 10th chapter, the famous "Table of Nations" goes as far as the twelve sons of Joktan, son of Eber, and there stops. For details of subsequent patriarchs down to Abraham one has to go to chapter 11. 10-32 which clearly was written six hundred years later, after the death of Terah. This looks as though the early record, up to Chap. 11.9, was brought to an end by someone unable to go beyond Eber's grandsons, the presumption being that this author was Eber himself. A further evidence resides in the geographical names appearing in Genesis. Some are known from cuneiform inscriptions of 2000 BC and later to have been in use in earlier times; others are so archaic that they had passed out of use by 2000 BC or at least do not appear in any known tablets. Thus Hiddekel (river Tigris) and Euphrates have survived as names of the two chief rivers of the land. "Eden" is the Sumerian

edinu, meaning "the plain" and was applied to the whole land of Shinar or Sumer. "Ararat" meaning "the highlands" was the name (despite popular impressions) of the mountainous land to the east of the plain (now the Zagros mountains of N.W. Iran) and only in later days extended northward into present day Kurdistan and Armenia. (The whole of this area was still called the land of Ararat as late as the 13th century of the Christian era, as witness the narratives of travellers such as Rabbi Petachiah of Ratisbon). The "land of Nod" of Genesis 4 was the Sumerian Nadu, halfway down the eastern coast of the Persian Gulf where the river Mandel still preserves the name. The land of Havilah (properly Khavilah) of Genesis 2 has been identified as lying between Iraq and the Caspian Sea—until the middle of the Christian era that sea was still called the Sea of Khavilah—but that name for the territory does not appear in the tablets and is superseded by the only recently identified city-state of Aratta which was probably founded towards the end of Eber's life. The land of Cush with its river Gihon (modern Batin) in north-eastern Arabia became known as Dilmun by 2400 BC and here the later Sumerians fixed the site of the Garden of Eden. It follows from all this that the first few chapters of Genesis must be dated to at least as early as 2600 BC, within the lifetime of Eber.

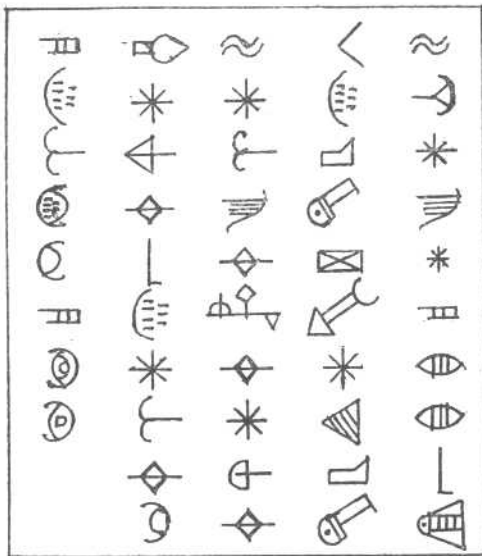
This archaic semi-pictographic writing, as it is called, is only very imperfectly understood at present. It consists of symbols which appear to have been derived from pictures of the objects represented (the original and quite unknown "pictographic" picture-writing). Only a very limited number of tablets have been recovered from Kish, and Uruk, and elsewhere, and any reconstruction is at present largely conjectural. Nevertheless the basic principles can be discerned. Thus the symbol for "foot" is a crude representation of a human foot and the same symbol serves to indicate the ideas of "to walk", "to go", and "to stand". It also stands for the preposition "on"; the human foot, of course, is "on" the ground. Likewise the symbol for "sea" or "water" is two wavy lines and this also does duty for the preposition "in", on the principle of being "in" the water. On this basis the accompanying sketch illustrates what might have been the general appearance of the first five verses of Genesis 1 as written by Eber, probably on a thin wood platen. The writing was arranged in vertical columns and the reader started at the top right-hand corner, reading from top to bottom and from right to left. Four centuries later this type of writing was superseded by the more familiar "cuneiform" (wedge-shaped) characters which

were more easily impressed upon the clay tablets that had become the only writing material available, and the old semi-pictographic writing disappeared.

Is this possible connection of Eber with the preparation of the beginning of the Bible the reason for his apparent special status in the genealogical line of patriarchs between Noah and Abraham? If in fact this man was one of notable stature among his fellows in the things of God, perhaps a champion of righteousness standing rigidly for the God of Noah, and was known to immediate later generations as the one who preserved the ancient writings and rendered them into the current tongues, then perhaps it might be easier to understand why Eber and not Abraham

was regarded as the ancestor of the later people of God, so that even Abraham himself came to be referred to as "Abram the Hebrew". It might be that in that dim far-off time when the post-Flood world was young, there were two figures noted among men, Nimrod the Cushite who admittedly achieved great things in the material building of the new world, and Eber the Semite who cared more for the things of God and began to blaze the trail of written history which led to the story of Sinai and of Israel and the coming of Christ, and eventually to the New Testament. And the work of Eber has survived where the achievements of Nimrod are dust.

*To be continued.*



and	good	waters	void	In
darkness	God	God	darkness	beginning
called	divided	said	on	God
night	light	let be	face	created
Evening	from	light	deep	heaven
and	darkness	was born	Spirit	and
morning	God	light	God	earth
first day	called	God	went Forth	Earth
	light	saw	on	without
	day	light	face	form

### Watchfulness

*"For, just as the days of Noah, SO will be the presence of the Son of Man; For as they were in those days that were before the flood, feeding and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage—until the day Noah entered into the Ark; and they observed not, until the flood came and took away all together, so will be the presence of the Son of Man."* (Matt. 24; 37—39—Rotherham.)

With each of these comparisons there is repeated the exhortation to *Watch*. The allusion is taken from the function of watchmen upon the city walls, alert to report every new and unusual occurrence before the city dwellers could possibly

have become aware of such. The watchmen first saw the dawn, they hailed the approach of deliverers when the city was besieged, they became in every respect the symbol of the nation's watching and waiting on the things of God and communion with Heaven. Hence we have in the glowing words of Isaiah:

*"I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace, day nor night."* (Isaiah 62; 6.)

*"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him (the watchman) that . . . sayeth unto Zion 'Thy God reigneth.'" (Isaiah 52; 7.)*

*"Thy watchman . . . shall see, eye to eye, the Lord returning to Zion."* (Isaiah 52; 8 Margolis.)

## THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

The Lord's covenant with Abraham defines the whole scope of his Plan for the ultimate salvation of all from among the sons of men who will yield to the power of the Gospel and attain harmony and communion with God. Expressed at the first in purposely vague and obscure terms, it was re-expressed and repeated through the ages in increasingly clearer form so that at the last it is seen pointing to the agents God will use in the execution of that purpose. It is a picture, delineating the principles upon which He is acting and will act, and in that delineation forms a clear exposition of Christian doctrine.

The story starts with Abraham, back there some two thousand years before Christ. The Lord called him to leave his native city and land of Ur of the Chaldees and go to a strange and distant land which He would show him, there to work out his destiny. There, He said (Gen. 12. 1-3) "*I will make of thee a great nation, and I will make thy name great, and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed*". And Abraham went as he had been bidden.

This expression "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" is the first intimation in the Bible that God purposes to do anything for the sin-stricken and dying human race. True, He had told Mother Eve, in the story of Eden, that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head, but that did not convey much in the way of hope that the power of death then coming upon all men would in some way be reversed and men live again. Here in Genesis 12 was the first intimation that in a future day there would be blessing and therefore happiness for all mankind, "all families of the earth". The Divine promise opened the door of hope.

Some twenty years later Abraham entered and settled in the land to which he had been guided, the land of Canaan. There the Lord appeared to him and made a further statement; "*unto thy seed will I give this land*" (Gen. 12.7). From that moment the possession of that land was bound up with the Covenant whose formal terms were yet to be declared. That promise was amplified and a dual aspect hinted at when the Lord went on to say (Gen. 13.15-16) "*all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth . . . for number*" and then, after the lapse of a little time "*look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to count them. So shall thy seed be*" (Gen. 15.5). Dust of the

earth; stars of heaven; what means this talk about a numerous seed, earthly on the one hand like the dust of the earth, heavenly on the other like the stars of heaven? A land as a gift, a seed to inherit it, world-wide blessing to be the consequence. Abraham must have wondered to what all this was going to lead.

"*Lord God*" he said suddenly "*whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?*" (Gen. 15.8). He is not the only one in Scripture history to ask for a sign, and the Lord gave him one.

A covenant is an agreement between two parties, either one in which each party agrees to abide by certain conditions, or else a unilateral declaration by one party for the benefit of the other on account of a pre-existing situation, which in this instance was the faith of Abraham that God would fulfil his promise. From time immemorial the sign and seal of such a covenant has been a ceremonial meal shared by the contracting parties. At the Lord's instance, and with Abraham's concurrence, this is what was inaugurated now. Abraham was to take certain animals from his flock, a heifer, a goat, a ram, and so on, dismember them and arrange them upon a cairn as a ceremonial meal to which the Lord was invited and expected. This was not a blood sacrifice; there was no question of expiation for sin. This was a symbol of a new relationship into which Abraham was to enter with God. The meal prepared, Abraham waited. When the carrion birds swooped down upon the pieces, he drove them away. The day wore on, he watched and waited, the sun went down, and darkness came. Then Abraham saw the sign, a supernatural fire and light which hovered above and among the pieces of the offering. That was the presence of God, come down to share with Abraham, in symbol, that covenant meal. Then Abraham knew the reality of the promises he had received during those past years. He realised that from this moment and for all time he was to be God's man, utterly and irrevocably dedicated to his service. God was his God, each bound to each in a relationship which would never be broken. "*In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying, unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates*" (Gen. 15. 8-20). For the first time the territorial limits of the Promised Land were clearly defined.

This was not the full Covenant. At this point in time it extended only to the promise of a land

which would be the inheritance of the promised seed when that seed should be revealed. Throughout history the promised inheritance of the land has always been an integral part of the Covenant but only later—in some aspects much later on—was the promised seed which should bless all nations of the earth manifested in the picture. And at present there was no seed; Abraham had no son. The fulfilment of the promise seemed to be stultified at the outset. Sarah, Abraham's wife, was barren and she had now passed the age of child-bearing. How then could the purpose of God be achieved?

Cogitating on this, Abraham and his wife thought they saw the way out. Agreeably to the prevailing laws dealing with such situation in the land in which they had been brought up, and the generally accepted custom, Abraham took his wife's slave-girl Hagar and by her became the father of a son, Ishmael (Gen. 16). Here, thought he and his wife, is the seed of promise and through his descendants in future ages would all families of the earth be blessed. Abraham cherished that confidence for thirteen years.

But this was not God's intention and in due course Abraham was apprised of the fact. Thirteen years later, when he was ninety-nine years old, the Lord came to him again (Gen. 17). *"I will make my covenant between me and thee".* He said—the covenant was not fully defined or completed even yet — *"and will multiply thee exceedingly . . . thou shalt be a father of many nations . . . kings shall come out of thee . . . and I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee for an everlasting covenant . . . and I will give unto thee and to thy seed after thee . . . all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God . . . and Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed, and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant and with his seed after him".*

Here in this revelation was the scope of the covenant extended into the far distant future. "Multiply exceedingly"; "father of many nations"; "kings shall come"; "Canaan an everlasting possession"; all this began to lay the groundwork for the final ideal of a seed which would bless all families of the earth. And a very essential truth had to be impressed here. This seed was to be a separated people, cut off and distinct from all other peoples of earth, that it might be wholly and solely given to the execution of its Divine mission. It was to be a people for a purpose. Hence Abraham was given an outward sign by which to distinguish him and his, the rite of circumcision, denoting separation, and this too became part of the inauguration of the covenant.

From this time and forward the seed of Abraham was to be a people separated from the world to the things of God.

Nearly half a century had elapsed since that first invitation and promise back in Ur of the Chaldees, and still there was no seed. Ishmael had been rejected by the Lord, even though He did have a destiny for him (Gen. 17.20). The promise was that a son should be born to Sarah, and in him the prediction be fulfilled. Of his line would come those who in distant days would bring the blessing. The Divine messengers of Gen. 18 brought reiteration of the promise and foretold that it would be within the year, and there for the moment the matter rested.

Then came the miracle. *"The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age . . . and the child grew"* (Gen. 21.18). So Isaac, the first generation of the promised Seed, the heir of promise, came into the world as it were by Divine power. In him the developing Covenant, heretofore only enshrining a promise of inheritance of the land and an obligation of separation and consecration to God's purposes, took within its framework the reality of the Seed in the person of Isaac. The time for the formal ratification of the Covenant was drawing near. But before that could be effected Abraham must needs demonstrate his loyalty in the greatest test of faith of his entire life—the Divine call to offer his son in sacrifice.

It is a strange story, this narrative in Gen. 22. It is the only occasion in all the Bible where the Lord is depicted as calling for a human sacrifice; in many other places He expresses his abhorrence of such practice. He called Abraham to take his well-beloved son, then about thirteen years of age, in whom the whole hope of the promise rested, and offer him up as a burnt offering to the Lord on Mount Moriah in the centre of Canaan. That to any ordinary man would have spelt the end of all things, for there is finality in death and no hope after that. But Abraham was not an ordinary man. His faith in God was strong, so strong that he was prepared to obey the Lord unswervingly, assured that despite all outward appearance and the apparent wreck of all his hopes the "Judge of all the earth would do right". Of that faith the writer to the Hebrews spoke admirably when he said *"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and he that received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: 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). And this, of course, is what happened. The moment it was demonstrated that Abraham's faith was strong enough to lead him to the execution of the Lord's command, the voice from heaven stayed his hand. A ram trapped by his horns in the adjoining bushes was substituted, and Isaac came back as it were from the dead. In a very real sense his life had been given to God and restored again that he might be the means of blessing all families of the earth and in that became a fitting type of our Lord Jesus Christ who did that same thing, giving his life by death and resurrection for the life of the world.

So, at last the Covenant was ratified over the recumbent form of Isaac, and went into full operation. *"By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore, and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice"* (Gen. 22. 16-8).

This was the Covenant, ratified, sealed and made sure by the Divine word "By myself have I sworn". From this time forward the Abrahamic Covenant was in operation, developing and bringing to full fruition that promised Seed which is destined to bless all families of the earth.

Where then, and what then, is that Seed, and how can it be identified in the Scriptures and on the pages of history?

At this point the Seed seems to take on a duality of form, as though it must eventually emerge in two manifestations, yet in combination fulfilling the original promise. After this time the Lord said no more to Abraham about the Covenant, but after the patriarch's death He reaffirmed it to Isaac, in a particular form. *"I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father, and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven . . . and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed"* (Gen. 26. 2-5). Then, later on still, He reaffirmed it again to Isaac's son Jacob, in a different form. *"I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac. The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, . . . and in thee and in thy seed shall all families of the earth be blessed."* *"I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea"* (Gen. 28. 13-14; 32.12). It had been said to Abraham, variously, that his seed would be as the stars of heaven, the dust of the earth, and the sand of the seashore. Is there here the first intimation of that division

which does become apparent in later history, the development of an earthly natural seed sprung from Jacob which is likened to the dust of the earth, and a heavenly spiritual seed spiritually sprung from Isaac which is likened to the stars of heaven? One has to remember that Paul, writing to the Galatians, laid down the principle *"we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise"* (Gal. 4. 23).

The fact of this division of the Seed is made plain by the Lord's appearance to Jacob when he returned to Canaan from his father-in-law's land with his family and household to take up possession. The story is related in Gen. 35. God appeared to Jacob and surnamed him Israel. He was to be the head of that branch of the Seed which would possess the land to all perpetuity and constitute an earthly nation, a people, which would be the agent of the promised blessing of all families of the earth, dispensing the blessings which would come down from the Divine government in heaven. Jacob recalled that incident on his deathbed (Gen. 48. 3-5). There God confirmed, reaffirmed, his Covenant originally made with Abraham insofar as its earthly phase through Jacob was concerned, and that great thing was remembered by King David nearly a thousand years later in the words *"be ye mindful always of his covenant . . . which he made with Abraham, and of his oath unto Isaac: and hath CONFIRMED the same to Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant, saying, unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance"* (I Chron. 16.15-18), and then again *"He hath remembered his covenant forever . . . which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac, and CONFIRMED the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenants"* (Psa. 105. 8-10).

But by David's time the bright vision was becoming dimmed by the apostasy of the sons of Jacob. The promise still held; they surely would at the end succeed to their destiny, but in the meantime there was necessity for another covenant, that of the Mosaic Law, to be added to their obligations, that under it they might learn the lesson of separation and sanctification to God which they had so far failed to recognise. So the Apostle Paul, again to the Galatians, (3.19) declares that the Law Covenant was "added" to the original covenant insofar as fleshly Israel was concerned *"until the Seed should come unto whom the promise was made"*—the clearest indication so far that there was to be a second and superior phase of the Seed stemming, not in a fleshly sense from Jacob, but in a spiritual one from Isaac. And he is at pains to point out (Gal. 3.17) that this additional covenant in no sense

limits or abrogates the original one. "This I say, that the covenant CONFIRMED before of God" (with Jacob at Bethel, Gen. 33) "the Law" (Covenant) "which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect". (Note: the words "in Christ" in this passage are an interpolation; they are not found in the oldest Mss, Sinaitic, Vaticanus, Alexandrian or Ephraemi.) That four hundred and thirty years prior to the Law at Sinai points precisely to the time Jacob returned to Canaan; God confirmed the Covenant with him there at Bethel.

So Jacob and his seed were guaranteed their place in the Covenant to all perpetuity, but it was not to be the chief place. The spiritual seed of Isaac is to take precedence over the natural seed of Jacob. And to illustrate this truth Paul sketches a vivid allegory drawn from the history of Abraham himself. In Gal, 4 Paul points out that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid—slave-girl, Hagar—and the other by a free-woman, his wife Sarah. The son of the bondmaid, Ishmael, was of the flesh, born in the natural way; he of the wife, Isaac, by the intervention of God, as it were spiritually. This, says Paul, pictures the two covenants and these are the children of the covenants, "the one from Mount Sinai" (the Law Covenant) "which is Hagar, Jerusalem which now is" and the other "Jerusalem which is above", the child of Sarah. In no clearer fashion could Paul enunciate the truth that Israel after the flesh, literal sons of Jacob, are children of the Law Covenant, and Israel after the spirit, spiritual sons of Isaac, are children of the Abrahamic Covenant; yet at the end united as the promised Seed of blessing for all mankind.

This is made plain by Paul in Gal. 3. The true Seed, he says, is Christ himself; the blessing of Abraham is to come on the nations through Jesus Christ (3. 14-16). But just as Jacob had natural descendants who with him form the earthly Seed, so the anti-typical Isaac, Christ, has those who are his to form the spiritual Seed. Paul concludes triumphantly (3.29) "and if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise". This is why it is said that the Abrahamic Covenant is the one under which the Church is developed. There is to be a New Covenant made with "the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Jer. 31.31), which is to supersede and replace the old Law

Covenant and succeed where the old one failed, but the time for the operation of that is in the next Age when God has turned to his ancient people and brought them into position as it were for their destined role as missionaries to the nations. The development of the Church is in this Age and it is in this Age that the Abrahamic Covenant is fulfilling its own role of producing the Seed which then will become the means of blessing all families of the earth.

Did the writer to the Hebrews have this in mind when he referred to "the blood of the everlasting covenant" in Heb. 13.20? "*The God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, through the blood of the everlasting covenant make you perfect to do his will*"? What is this "everlasting covenant"? Certainly not the Law, for that is done away in Christ for Christians and superseded altogether eventually by the New Covenant. The New Covenant is introduced only when Israel and Judah are ready to have the laws of God written in their hearts, and that is not yet. The only covenant with which the resurrection of Christ can be associated is the Abrahamic Covenant, and that immediately brings to mind the central feature of that Covenant, that which made it firm and immutable, the offering of Isaac. The blood of Isaac, who was offered in figure to God and received back as it were by resurrection from the dead, may appropriately enough be termed the blood of the Covenant. So too, in a greater and more intense sense, may it be said that, as with Isaac in a material sense, so in Christ in a spiritual sense, that "Seed" which is "in Christ", his Church, is "made perfect" by that offering and that resurrection.

Only when this Covenant has completed its purpose in producing the "Seed", both heavenly and earthly, can the purpose of God in the reconciling of mankind to himself go forward. Not until then can the inspired vision of Isaiah 42 the Lord's servant, fully developed and ready for his destined work, be fulfilled. "*I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will . . . give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations, to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prisonhouse*". That is why the New Covenant, made primarily with the restored nation of Israel but intended to extend its benefits to all men everywhere, can only go into effect when the Abrahamic Covenant has achieved its purpose.

It is not a bad sort of faith to come and tell your troubles to Jesus, even if you cannot see anything that can be done at the time.

Often those who bear the heaviest crosses do the least talking—I am doing the groaning and my brother the bearing.

## THE TRAGEDY OF SAMSON

*The story of  
a great failure*

### 5. Light at Eventide

There, in the prison house at Gaza, Samson found God. There is really not much doubt about that. Blinded, in chains, condemned to spend the rest of his life trudging round and round a circular path pushing the bar of a heavy cornmill, work that was normally performed by animals, he had time to think. Not now for him the admiration of the multitudes, the excitement of skirmishes and battles of wits with the Philistines, the indulgence of his tastes and desires. Men and women alike had deserted him and he was left entirely alone, alone to reflect on his past life and his failure to accomplish that mission which had been his from birth. What passed between Samson and his God during those dark hours is not known to any man; all we do know is that at their close Samson is found supplicating God in a manner which is entirely alien to his former attitude. That is the evidence that in prison Samson became a changed man. There he saw himself in his true light; there he repented; and there God, who desires not that any should die, but would that they turn from their wickedness, and live, accepted that repentance, and wiped Samson's slate clean. And something happened in prison which must have been an outward evidence to Samson of God's acceptance of his repentance. His hair began to grow again!

The Philistines had apparently overlooked that contingency. The thick, long tresses began to fall around the shoulders of the poor slave labouring at the mill, and as they grew Samson began to flex his muscles and discover to his surprise that he still possessed his tremendous physical strength. It is perhaps understandable if he concluded that there was a connection between the growth of his Nazarite locks and the re-discovery of his physical powers. But this time there is no attempt to deliver himself. It does begin to look as though now he is waiting upon God. The recovery of his long hair became a sign to him that God had forgiven. But he made no attempt to escape; submissively he waited God's leading and God's time.

So it came about that on a set day when all Gaza was gathered together for some particular celebration of which a feature was acknowledgment to their god for delivering Samson into their hands, the blinded giant was led out of prison and into the arena to be made a public spectacle. The five lords of the Philistines were there and all the appropriate nobility and gentry, and on the roof of the building some three

thousand of the proletariat, shouting themselves hoarse. It is said that Samson was brought forward and compelled to "make sport" for them; it is not very clear what this implies. The word means "to play", and it is probable that in his blindness he was baited in various ways to the vindictive delight of the barbarous crowd which formed his audience. Tiring perhaps of this after a while, the people looked on interestedly as the lad appointed to guide Samson's steps, began, at his request, to lead him toward "*the two pillars upon which the house was built and whereby it was held up*". What was he going to do next?

There is a well-known painting of this scene in which Samson is depicted with his arms clasping two solid stone columns each about three feet in diameter, in the act of pulling them down by main force. In fact, of course, no man, not even one of Samson's reputed powers, could dislodge massive stone structures of that nature. It is necessary to visualise the type of building which was probably concerned in order correctly to appreciate the story.

This function was apparently a public celebration and a public holiday not a religious proceeding. The building concerned was not the Temple; more probably it was the local games stadium. There would almost certainly be an open-air arena in which the players performed, with a kind of "grandstand" of which the interior was reserved for people of importance and the roof thrown open to the public. A clue to the size of the building is given by the intimation that there were three thousand people standing on the roof. To accommodate such a crowd, even if closely packed as at a modern football Cup Final, would demand a structure something like eighty feet long by thirty from front to back. Both the interior seats and the standing space on the roof would be sloping upward from front to back so that all could see. If made like modern grandstands the front of the building would be open throughout its length and the roof supported along the open front by light wooden posts, perhaps little more than slender poles, with a balustrade along the roof to keep the excited crowd from falling off. The five lords of the Philistines would of course be seated in the middle of the interior in the best seats, surrounded by the nobility and gentry of Gaza.

Upon arriving at the pavilion, Samson can be imagined as taking his stand between the two

centre pillars, grasping them in his strong arms. There then follows one of the most tragically pathetic prayers of the Old Testament, a prayer noble in its utter dependence upon the power of God. Samson had never prayed like this before; he had always relied on and exulted in his own strength. Now when that strength, misused, had brought him to this sorry state, he prayed God that he might do at least one deed of valour, though it should be the last deed of his life, in the strength and power of God instead of his own. "O Lord God" he prayed "remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes." And so saying he bore with all his might on the two posts around which his strong arms were braced.

Jostling humanity to a total weight of something like two hundred tons occupied that roof. Samson had for the moment disappeared from sight just under its front. Human nature being what it is, there was undoubtedly a movement of people to the extreme edge of the roof in the endeavour to look over and see what he was doing. The distribution of weight on the roof was altered and a strain imposed on the front portion and the front pillars which they were never designed to take.

It is a fundamental mechanical property of any long thin column supporting a superstructure that its power of support decreases rapidly so soon as it is bent or bowed from its normally straight position. When bowed beyond a certain point it will tend to collapse without any additional strain being applied. This is evidently what happened in this case. The excited crowd of people crowding to the front of the roof and craning over the edge had already increased the load on the front pillars to danger point. Then Samson voiced his prayer, braced himself against the two columns—they would be of wood probably no more than four or five inches in diameter, and already creaking and bowing under the undue strain—and heaved with all his might. The more he was able to bend the columns out of the perpendicular, the greater would be the crippling effect of the human load above, until at length he reached the "point of no return" after which the roof would begin perceptibly to sag, the milling crowd above start to shout their apprehension, and the sardonically smiling nobility under the roof jump up in sudden alarm at the reality of what a few seconds earlier had seemed but a foolhardy gesture of the blind captive.

At this point the wooden pillars would have to fracture under the tremendous strain, and then, with a rending and cracking of heavy timbers accompanied by cries and shrieks from

above, the entire roof cave in and fall forward, with its three thousand occupants, upon the seated audience below. The heaviest casualties would be among those nobility, crushed and buried beneath a tangled mass of timber and struggling survivors. The story infers that when at last the wreckage was cleared away and the victims extricated, more than one third of the people in the building were dead. Among them lay the body of the Nazarite. True to his nature he had the last word with the Philistines after all.

"So the dead which he slew at his death were more than those which he slew in his life." It is not a particularly creditable epitaph, but it is spoken of a man who despite twenty years of failure to live up to his calling repented at last in time to justify the angel's original prediction. In life an apostate, in death Samson was a true Nazarite, in communion with God, putting his trust in God, and invoking the power of God. His was a wasted life, but before his death he saw the light.

The disaster must have shaken the Philistines, for without interference "his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the burying place of Manoah his father." It is evident that his parents were already dead. They were spared the final heart-break of seeing him captive to the Philistines. He judged Israel twenty years, the chronicler says, but he never delivered Israel as did the other judges. He shook the Philistine power but he did not destroy it. If, as is very probable, the five lords of the Philistines perished in the catastrophe at Gaza, there would be a period of political uncertainty in the country which would help to explain the evident decay of Philistine power over Israel in the time of Samuel, which was only a generation or so later. Samson, the Nazarite who failed his commission, was the one judge who wrought no deliverance in Israel. He did at least "begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines".

It might reasonably be wondered why the name of Samson appears in the gallery of "heroes of faith" in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. His life was not one of service to God; he had nothing of the faith of Abraham, the loyalty of Moses, the devotion of Samuel. There is nothing in his story to hold up to emulation or to glorify as an example to be followed. He does not appear as a leader of the type that will be wanted in the next Age when the law of the Lord goes out from Zion and there will be princes of God established to direct and lead men in the ways of God. Yet his name is included as one of those who having "received a good report through faith, received

not the promise, God having provided some better thing for us" (the Christian Church) "that they without us should not be made perfect." Is it possible that God, who knows the secrets of all men's hearts, saw something in Samson's character that the story, written by onlookers, does not reveal and that we cannot see? Could it be that the lad Samson up to, say twenty years of age or so was sincere and devout in his profession of God's service, that he was swept off his feet by the attractions of the woman he wanted for his wife and thereafter floundered twenty years without God, basking in the light of popular admiration and flattery, and that the final tragedy of blindness, captivity and neglect brought him to his senses so that, like the prodigal son in the parable he said to himself "I will arise and go to my Father"—In such case we know the Father would go out to meet him and bring him home. In such case, although the consequences of those twenty years of folly could not be avoided, the Father put them behind his back and they were no more seen. Might it not be that the character of Samson while in the Gaza prison was purified and ennobled by this sequel to his life's experiences so that in the future, whether he lived or died, he would forever be God's man? If this be so, then he suffered physical blindness and death in order that he might receive spiritual sight and eventual life. So it might well be that Samson, at the end, in the all-embracing sight of God, was after all seen worthy and suitable for a place in the procession of "Old Testament Saints" or "Ancient Worthies" as they are variously called, who will occupy positions of influence in the new Kingdom when Christ reigns on earth. If such be the case we can only praise God who alone can produce characters of sterling worth from such weak clay.

As a pictorial representation of the entire history of man the story of Samson is very apt. Mankind, in the persons of our first parents, was created for the Divine purposes to fulfil a Divine commission, and endowed with every possible

blessing and advantage. Like Samson, mankind turned away from God and into paths of self-indulgence, dissipating the marvellous powers given by God in unworthy ways. At the end mankind's own wilful course leads him to utter ruin, as is evident when we look at the world around us today and realise that we are now face to face with that ruin. But after the wreck of all that his own hand has created mankind will find God, and "whosoever will" become reconciled to God. For God has appointed a day, the coming Messianic Age, in which men, chastened by their experience of sin, will be led in better ways and brought face to face with the ultimate choice between good and evil. The salvation of Samson at the eleventh hour is our guarantee that God will never let go of the sinner whilst there is any hope whatever of his seeing the error of his ways, coming to Christ in sincere repentance and acceptance of him, and so being reconciled to God and becoming a citizen of God's world. That is why in the wisdom of God there is an Age appointed to follow "this present evil world", an Age in which Satan is to be bound that he might deceive the nations no more, and Christ reign as King over the restored and perfected earth. In that Age the entire human race will continue their lives' experience with full opportunity to compare the equitable administration of the Kingdom of righteousness with the darkness and injustice of this present world of sin. Only after that final lesson in God's school will the ultimate choice be demanded; the incorrigibly unregenerate reap the inevitable wages of sin and the regenerate be received, like Samson, into full fellowship with God and into eternal life. That is the gospel of the Kingdom, the good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. That is the sublime truth which lies behind the words of Jesus "*The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost*". And it will always be gloriously true that "*there is joy among the angels of heaven over one sinner that repenteth.*"

THE END

## Precious Promises

Soberly, thoughtfully, we are to weigh and endeavour to realise the import of the exceeding great and precious promises and to gather from them their invigorating inspiration; earnestly we must apply our minds and hearts to the instruction of the inspired Word of God, availing ourselves also of such helps—of "pastors and teachers" and their literary productions—which prove

harmonious with, and helpful to, the study of the Scriptures; diligently and patiently we must submit ourselves to all the transforming influences of Divine grace and truth; and then, loyally and faithfully, we must devote our consecrated talents, however few or many, to the great work of preaching this gospel of the Kingdom to all who will hear.

## A NOTE ON GOG AND MAGOG

The identity of the peoples comprising the latter-day hosts which fulfil the vision of Ezekiel 38/39 in descending upon regathered Israel "to take a spoil and to take a prey" at the end of this Age has long been the subject of variant views. Ezekiel took, as the illustration of his prophecy, the Scythian invasion of Bible lands occurring in his own time. The Scythian barbarians from the southern parts of present-day Russia and Siberia, hitherto quite unknown to the peoples of the Bible, swarmed over those lands looting and destroying wherever they came. Not until they reached the borders of Egypt was their onslaught checked but it was ten years or more before they were finally expelled and returned whence they came. The memory of that happening gave inspiration for Ezekiel's prophetic description of a similar but much more momentous event to take place at the Time of the End.

The Jews, between the Return from Babylon and the time of Christ, some five hundred years, maintained a very literal acceptance of Ezekiel's prophecy and expected the Scythian invasion to be repeated. Rabbinic literature is full of allusions to the coming day when the Scythians would invade Judah and be overthrown by the all-conquering Messiah. Josephus (Ant. 1.6.1) about 100 A.D., repeats the prevailing belief that the hosts of Gog and Magog are the Scythians. As late as the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. the same impression continued to be held in Jewish circles. Rabbinic literature of the time of the First Advent hazarded a number of opinions. Thus the "Chronicles of Jerahmeel" (31.4) states that the peoples of Gog are the Scythians. The Book of Jubilees (Jub. 9.8) describes the land of Magog as lying in what is now the Crimea. There is a definite understanding in some of these writings that the prophecy of Ezekiel refers to a time at the end of the Age when barbarian peoples will come from the farthest recesses of the world to attack Jerusalem and will be destroyed by the King Messiah ("Targum of Jerusalem"; "Apocalypse of Baruch" (76. 7-10); 4 Ezra 13. 8-35; Rabbi Akiba). Time and time again there is this theme, that the assault is not by one particular nation but the entire non-Jewish world, making common cause against the holy people.

Christian interpretation, in the pre-Augustinian days of general Millennial belief, more or less accepted Jewish tradition in this respect. Augustine himself, (4th Cent) seems to be the

first to advance a wider view of the prophecy when he said ("City of God" chap. 28) that the hosts of Gog and Magog "do not represent one particular nation but are spread-over the whole earth". By then the Scythians as a people, with all their tribal divisions enumerated by Ezekiel, had passed away, but the old idea that the barbarian horde was to come from the territory which later on became southern Russia persisted, as witness the writings of Pseudo Methodius (7th Cent) Bishop Haymo of Halberstadt (9th Cent) Abbot Joachim (12th Cent) and the Franciscan Roger Bacon (13th Cent), although most of these, like Augustine, placed the event at the end of the Millennium and not at the beginning.

The 12th Century saw a change. With the inception of the Crusades it became fashionable to interpret this prophecy as relating to the Moslem menace to Christendom. The Saracens of those centuries were thought to be the hosts of Gog and the Christians the would-be victors over them. The fact that the Saracens came from the south instead of the north was ignored, as was the parallel fact that in the upshot the Christians were not victorious over the Moslems. Nevertheless the idea persisted, and held the field until the 17th century. Notable exponents were Martin Luther (16th cent.), Lord John Napier, the mathematician and inventor of logarithms (17th Cent.), Henry Hammond, the so-called "Father of English Biblical Criticism" (17th Cent.) and the noted Boston U.S.A. Congregational minister Edward Griffin (18th Cent.). Agreeably to the Augustinian theology, which placed the Millennium in the early part of this Age, 4th to 14th centuries, these all located the invasion of Gog in the past, at various dates in the 13th to 15th centuries, and pointed to the gradual expulsion of the Moslems from Christian Europe as evidence of fulfilment.

There were, of course other more fanciful interpretations from time to time. The Bavarian Abbot Gerhoh of Reichersberg in the 11th Century saw the prophecy fulfilled in the conflict between Emperors and Popes, the Papacy eventually emerging victorious. John Purvey, co-labourer with Wycliffe (14th Cent.) on the other hand found fulfilment in the persecution of evangelists by Catholics. Although put forward in all sincerity, such suggestions can hardly be considered serious expositions of Ezekiel's vision.

In later times the old explanation, with an up-to-date twist, was revived, to wit, that the modern

sovereign State of Russia is to fulfil the prophecy. It is believed that the revival was due to Samuel Bochart (1559-1667) a learned French theologian and Oriental scholar, author of a celebrated and voluminous work on early Scripture history, and another on the Natural History of the Bible. He was an avid collector of data on his chosen subjects, for which reason he has been frequently quoted by writers and commentators on the Bible ever since. (The research and advance in knowledge of the three centuries which have elapsed since his day have shown that many of his statements and much of his data are inaccurate, but they still continue to be copied and re-copied from Christian publication to Christian publication.) Bochart pointed to the Russia of his day as destined to fill the role of Gog's host, apparently unmindful of the fact that none of the territory possessed by the tribes mentioned by Ezekiel—Magog, Rosh, Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, and Togarmah, was in his time under Russian control. (It was not until the 18th/19th Centuries that the Ukraine, Caucasus, and most of Siberia became part of Russia; prior to that these lands were partly Turkish and partly Mongol, mostly true descendants of the ancient Scythians whereas the original Russians emanated from Sweden).

In Old Testament times northern and central European Russia and northern Siberia were virtually uninhabited. The Scythian tribes of Ezekiel's prophecy came from southern Siberia and from the area around the Black Sea and the Caspian. Pressure of population drove more and more of them to the Bible lands and there were constant wars between them and the Assyrians and the Hittites of Asia Minor so far back as twelve hundred years before Christ. The less hospitable lands to the north were not appreciably colonised until much later, when in about A.D. 800 there was a migration of Scandinavian peoples from Sweden and adjoining lands into northern Russia. These tribes were related to the Swedes, Angles and Vikings and were denoted by the Finnish word *Ruotsi*, from which was derived *Rossiya* which in turn became Russia. Their southward expansion was halted by the Jewish empire of Khazaria which in the ninth century A.D. stretched across the Ukraine and the Caucasus—an empire consisting of a union between Jews of the dispersal and native Scythians, ruled by Jewish kings. Eventually the incoming Russians intermarried with the Khazarians and became one people. Then in the 13th century came the Mongol invasions of Genghis Khan and his descendants from Siberia, and the whole of the two continents from Hungary and Russia to China became one great Mongol empire.

Bochart's reputation and influence was such that any thesis advanced by him became well known and in the early 19th Century it was taken up by the Adventists and today is a common interpretation of Ezekiel 38/39 among Christian groups interested in "end of the Age" prophecy. It is not necessarily the correct interpretation on that account. Coming as it does largely from Bochart in the 17th century and Francois Gausson in the early 19th, many of the arguments founded on similarity of names are not valid. Whereas Meshech and Tubal were definitely the names of Scythian tribes existing in the time of Ezekiel and appear in Assyrian annals of the time as the Mashku and Tabalu, there is no etymological foundation for associating them with the modern towns of Moscow and Tobolsk as is often done. Neither existed in Ezekiel's day (Moscow was founded in A.D. 1147 and became the capital in the 13th Century; Tobolsk in 1587 when for the first time the true Russians penetrated into Siberia.)

In Bochart's time, early 17th century, western Europe knew very little about Russia and still less about Siberia. In a dim and general sort of way it was known that those areas were the home of eastern barbarians who once before in history had ravaged the lands of the Bible and according to the Bible would in the last days do it again. Today a great deal more is known about those lands and that people and a great deal more about the Divine Plan for mankind and the prophetic delineation of the events at the end which will lead to the establishment of Divine rule on the earth in succession to the rule of man. There is no longer any real ground for holding on to mediæval methods of interpretation when we know, or ought to know, that what we are dealing with is something far greater, the implacable opposition of all the institutions of evil in this world to the incoming kingdom of God. That means a world-wide force arrayed against the powers of righteousness and this is what is implied in the picture of the barbarian hordes of Gog and Magog, from the four corners of the world, converging upon the city of God's holiness. Something of this was seen by sober commentators as long as a century ago, as witness the *"Speakers' Commentary"*, standard work of the 19th century, which says of Ezek. 38/39 *"In this prophecy there is little distinctive of a nation. It is a gathering together of the enemies of Jehovah to make their last effort and to be overthrown. The seer passes now to the final conflict between Good and Evil, and the triumphant establishment of Divine rule"*. Says Ellicott, also late 19th century, *"Ezekiel intended to set forth under the figure of Gog and his armies all*

*opposition of the world to the Kingdom of God, and to foretell, like his contemporary Daniel, the final and complete triumph of the latter in the distant future*".

One of the important factors in the whole prophetic picture of Gog and Magog is frequently overlooked. As a rule it is assumed that the primary object of the invading host is the conquest of Israel, the Holy Nation settled at peace in the Holy Land. It is probably true that Ezek. 38.11 is the basis of this impression; "*I will go to them that are at rest . . . to take a spoil and to take a prey*". Whilst this is undoubtedly the avowed intention of the invading hosts, there is a more important underlying factor. The hosts of Gog and Magog set their faces toward that land and that people because they know that the coming Messiah is there and the beginning of his Kingdom upon earth. It is not so much the conquest and despoliation of a few thousand square miles of territory in the Middle East that is the object of their action, but their realisation that Israel's Messiah and the world's Lord, with all the powers of heaven behind him, is advancing to dispossess them of the rulership of this world, and even although from the nature of things they cannot and do not comprehend the nature of the foe they have to face, they do realise in a manner that maybe we cannot at present understand that they must face the issue. It is not the oil or the crops or the treasures of the literal land of Israel which they covet. It is the threat posed to the whole edifice of the "kingdoms of this world" standing behind the curtain of the clouds, our Lord Jesus with his resurrected saints, ready to be revealed to the whole world for the elimination of sin and the establishment of everlasting righteousness. The picture is displayed in Rev. 19. 11-21 where the kings of the earth and their armies are gathered together to make war upon the Rider on the White Horse and the armies of heaven. This is the same event in history that is described by Ezekiel under his similes of the onslaught of the hosts of Gog and Magog; Zech.

14 affords another picture of the same thing and with the same end result.

This is Armageddon, and this the end of the "kingdoms of this world". There is no more any resistance to the new Millennial kingdom of which Christ is undisputed king, no more any doubting the fact that He has taken his great power and commenced his reign. The Messianic kingdom of righteousness is established and all opponents are overthrown. That this is the true nature and outcome of the invasion of Gog was well understood by the Jews in the immediate pre-Christian centuries and at the time of the first Advent. Always the target of the attack is the Messiah, coming to the deliverance and exaltation of his people. All through the apocryphal writings of that era the prophecy of Ezekiel is interpreted in that fashion. The First Book of Enoch, the 4th of Ezra, the Psalms of Solomon, Tobit, the Targums, the writings of Rabbi Aqiba, all of these dwell upon the day when the hosts of Gog and Magog face the conquering Messiah to destroy him and are themselves destroyed instead.

But not for ever. The Messiah follows up his victory by bringing those hosts of evil into the circle of his love. The Lord chastises only to eradicate sin and then He turns to heal. All too often as we read this prophecy we tend to dwell upon the utter disaster and ruin that comes upon those decimated hosts without stopping to reflect that God has a plan and purpose for them which involves an opportunity for repentance and salvation. Says Isaiah at the conclusion of his prophecy, speaking of the same thing (Isa. 66.19) "*I will send those that escape of them*" (the holy people) "*unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul and Lud, to Tubal and Javan, to the lands afar off, that have not known my name, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations*".

The crushing defeat suffered by the hosts of Gog and Magog is one that leads to their conversion. Let us never forget that.

### On Prayer

Someone has remarked that as the sharpening of scythes in harvest time does not mean lost time and energy, so also time spent in prayer is not lost as respects the affairs of life. Unquestionably the best men and women in the world are those who pray, and pray regularly; who bow the knee as did Daniel. Unquestionably the moments thus taken from earthly affairs are well spent and bring more than commensurate blessings upon the worshipper. Unquestionably it is impossible to live a consecrated life in neglect of prayer.

What would Daniel have been without his praying time? How would his faith in God have persisted in that heathen land? How would his loyalty to principle have maintained itself in the midst of corruption had it not been for his communion with his maker? To the Christian this privilege is still further enhanced by a realisation that "*We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous,*" in whose all-prevailing name we may approach with courage, and obtain mercy and find grace to help in every time of need.

## A QUESTION OF OWNERSHIP

### 5. Broad Road to Destruction

There were those who came to Jesus to be made whole. He had the power to heal the sick and they came to him crying out, begging for his word and touch to relieve them of their pain, distress or the severe handicap of lameness, blindness or deafness. Whether they were conscious of other defects which made them mentally unsound or morally unwholesome was not always clear to themselves but it was clear to him. His advice was often "go and sin no more lest a worse thing befall you".

When the Pharisees, in an attempt to disparage him, accused him of associating with sinners, he replied that "they who are whole need not a physician"; so linking sin and disease together. He had the power to heal both. He touched lepers and they were cleansed of the dreadful malady which made them outcasts from society. This dreadful contagion of the flesh had become a synonym of that sin which made man an outcast from God. It was a hated word, a thorn in the flesh to all who heard it or were conscious of its brief pleasures and unhappy consequences. When Jesus forgave sins for which the Law demanded punishments and sacrifices, his critics were quick to question his authority. To tell a man his sins were forgiven was even worse than opening blind eyes or healing the sick on the Sabbath day! He saw them as both sinned against and sinning, the blind leading the blind, walking in darkness, beset by rampaging foes which destroyed the wholesome vigour which might have been theirs. He pitied them in their rejection of his remedy of love, for He had come to seek and to save that which had been lost. Sadly He watched them turn away. "You will not turn to me that you might have life." When Paul the Apostle was reaching the end of his mission to the Gentiles he wrote to Timothy "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. (I Tim. 1. 15). Sin, its vicious consequences and its removal by Christ were much to the fore in his writings. Perhaps his insistence that sin and death entered the world by man has rendered his doctrine unpalatable to those who look on the fall of man as a myth, who by elevating him to the stars, hope that he has found his salvation through a more scientific way than that of the sacrificial lamb of God on the cross of Calvary. The sad truth is that while science and the engineers have provided the power to send man soaring into the skies his moral path does not correspond with

his lofty ambitions. Sins and sensuality pull him down as the thorns and thistles spring in his footsteps, vexing his heart and blighting his best endeavours. It is a common experience to do and say the wrong thing while the good deed and the right word at the right time seem elusive, defeated by emotional conflict, to become so many lost opportunities.

The search-light of heavenly wisdom, turned upon the struggling mass of mankind tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, heaving with discontent, reeling under the weight of its own intoxicating self-indulgence, reveals it as lost, stupefied, dejected and dying. These are afflictions for which the most skilful have no remedy. Only those who have been warmed by the Divine ray, moved by the spirit of God to turn in his direction, have received the healing touch. They are alive as those risen from the dead.

*"Awake you that sleep and arise from the dead: and Christ will give you light"* (Eph. 5.14).

This is the confident cry of hope, the stirring voice, the loud ringing of the bell which arouses the sleeper, sets him on his feet, turns his face toward the risen Sun of Righteousness whose warming, healing beams will yet thaw the whole human race out of the frozen torpor of its unbelief, giving it the living light of day in exchange for its night of sin and death.

Change is the great unwritten law of the universe. All things change and are changed. The earth itself is the product of change, and there are others yet to come before it is complete, a fitting home for a changed and nobler race who will match its beauty and peace. Old things pass away. Disintegration and decay are followed by reconstruction and renewal. The end of the Twentieth century sees a moral world changed for the worse, seduced, deceiving and deceived. A failing faith, effete systems which have outlived their usefulness, a scientific threat to end all life by the use of nuclear weapons, are indisputable evidence that the present civilisation has reached a perilous period in its history.

The time is ripe for a removal of much that is evil, for a shaking of everything which can be shaken, for a throwing down and a casting out of a great deal that spoils the planet and oppresses the spirit of the discerning with a sense of failure, tragedy, fear and future disaster. Some see it as an ebbing tide, others as a gathering storm. By whatever picture events present themselves to the serious minded, they indicate change of a

hitherto unknown nature, both turbulent and drastic. Nature is the living parable of change with her Winters of death and her Springs of renewal. As a poet exclaimed, 'If Winter comes can Spring be far behind?' If the old ways die off in a winter of great tribulation can the Spring of renewal, of restoration, of rejuvenation be far behind? the new heavens and the renewed earth under a new rule of righteousness, where evil will not prosper because the sacred law of God will be at last in full operation.

This is looking ahead with hope, but the Word of God sees the end from the beginning. It is full of hope. Those who have discarded its testimony as myth, who have changed the truth of God into a lie, who are without God and without hope, must either be very frightened people or utterly indifferent to their own fate or that of the millions who occupy the earth. In plain words, by metaphor, parables and by living pictures the Great Book declares that God by his knowledge and use of powerful forces created all things; that He formed the earth to be inhabited by the race of man whom He made at the beginning of a new epoch which seems to have run its course. When Paul spoke to the men of Athens about the Unknown God and his determinations for mankind, most were sceptical and some mocked. There have always been mockers of God and goodness. The ribald and the irreverent were at the cross of Calvary mocking the Saviour who would not come down and save himself, who endured their jeers in silence. The modern world has its scoffers who treat lightly the subject of sin and death, who can without a blush of shame turn the life of Christ, the life of man and the authority of God into impudent farce. For them and for all who are ready to scorn virtue and exalt evil the Apostolic warning to the Galatians is still timely: "*Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap*" (Gal. 6.7). Defied or ignored it is still a law which will not be repealed until the day of reckoning when all will be forced to reap the harvest of their words and deeds. After two thousand years of religious strife, of a profession of Christianity which has not and does not live up to its name, there is a critical spirit abroad which questions the need and purpose of religion. God is being ousted from his place in the earth, in the minds of men, women and children, by what is called "the beauty and truth of science". Salvation has become an outmoded and meaningless word to many. Science with its power over the atom, its raising of man from the swamps to the stars, is the new miracle-worker which excites the wonder of a generation which knows not God. Jesus had no illusions about the reception

of his message, neither had the apostles who were commissioned to carry it to all nations, They spoke of tares among the wheat, of wolves in the fold, of strong delusions, of preachers diluting the pure milk of the Word to suit a pleasure loving world, of teachers babbling about they know not what, if only they might be seen and heard. Paul in his letter to Timothy advised him to "*avoid profane babblings and oppositions of science, falsely so called*". which even in those early days, "*some professing have erred concerning the faith.*" (I Tim. 6. 20-24). He also warned of deceptions, of a great falling away from the faith before the Man of Sin, the mystery of iniquity which would usurp the place of God in the Temple of worship.

The world has not been won for Christ. The present state of man is as far removed from the ideal state of Christian love as ever it was in the days of its paganism. What Christian influence there is hardly likely to set the world on fire at this late hour, to bring it to repentance or save it from its fierce hatreds and burning animosities. The Church of God is not a mighty army marching to victory but a handful of faithful hearts out of all earth's teeming millions, holding fast to their trust; a wavering light in a world of darkness whose peoples still walk in sin and the shadow of death. Even that small light is being assailed by the winds of doubt blown in by clever intellectuals who think they can create a new and better world without God. A society raised upon a denial of God is a monstrous deception long foreseen. Warnings have been given in plenty and it is up to those who received the faith, who have the sacred flame of the love of God and Christ in their hearts, to guard it well. It is a precious heritage handed on at great cost from one generation to another. During the centuries God has not been building churches, founding orders or splitting religion into a thousand sects and cults, each wearing a tag, distinguishing itself by some creed or formula of faith from its neighbour. He has been selecting living stones out of all nations, kindreds and tongues, to build one Church, one Temple whose chief foundation stone is Christ. So few have been these select ones they are called "a little flock". Modern evangelism seeks to comfort its converts with the idea that 'God has got the whole world in his hands' but Christ said "my kingdom is not of this world". While it is true that nothing can happen without his knowledge or permission, the kingdoms of this world are not in his hands.

The present system is termed evil, ruled by the prince of darkness whose deceptions blind the minds of men to the gospel of Christ, to the character of God and his ultimate purpose to re-

fashion man into his own image. That there is a force of evil at work in the earth, a mystery of iniquity, which is set to deny and thwart every good thing, can scarcely be doubted or denied. The god of this world is not the God of Heaven, the living, holy Divine Being who created, who

upholds all things by the Word of his power, who watches and cares for his own but allows the rest to go their own way until He calls a halt of "thus far and no further".

*To be concluded*

## THE LAW OF DEVELOPMENT

*Thoughts on  
I Cor. 13. 11*

Spiritual law is as fixed in its principles and operations as is physical law. If it were not so the physical could not be so frequently used as it is for illustrations of spiritual things. Thus, for instance in spiritual life, as revealed in the Scriptures, we have duplicated that principle so well known in physical law, of growth and development—first the blade, then the ear, and afterward the full corn in the ear; first the infant, then the boy, and afterward the full grown man; first the babe in Christ, then the growing child, the young man, and finally the full stature of a man in Christ. In both cases there is also a marked similarity in the process of development. As in nature both plant and animal life are sustained by appropriate nourishment, food, light, heat, air, thus strengthening them to perform the various functions of their being, so the spiritual "new creatures" in Christ must have and appropriate nourishment that they may continue to live and grow. There is this difference, however, to be observed between the physical and the spiritual life in the process of development, that the former matures quickly, while the latter is of slow growth, a plant to bloom in eternity.

As babes in Christ we realise our adoption as sons only when we have renounced the vain pomp and glory of this world and turned fully to God, claiming no righteousness of our own, but humbly accepting the imputed righteousness of Christ. No one is even a babe in Christ who still cherishes iniquity in his heart, or who fails to recognise his need of the covering of Christ's righteousness. But having been converted, turned about, from sin to God and righteousness, having learned of Christ, having put off the old man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4. 24), and having been renewed in the spirit of our minds, we are reckoned sons of God, babes in Christ. And from that infantile standpoint, which has in it, undeveloped, all the elements of the man, the duty and privilege of such is to grow, to develop as "new creatures" in Christ. We are not to content ourselves with the lisping and prattlings of infancy, nor with the milk diet suitable to that age, but, making

due use of these as stepping-stones, we should go on unto perfection.

The Apostle Paul had rapidly passed on from the early stages of Christian character to higher degrees of development, and yet he was not counting that he had attained the perfection which was the mark at which he was aiming. (Phil. 3. 13, 14). He had, however, passed beyond both infancy and boyhood to the stature of a young man in Christ. Looking back over the pathway of his Christian experience, he recognised these different stages, and for our profit recorded his thoughts, saying, "*When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things*" (I Cor. 13. 11).

This was true of his natural life and his spiritual life—the reference being specially to the latter, of which the former was merely an illustration. By the illustration he would draw our attention to the fact that if we have been children of God for some time we should be able, on looking backward over our Christian experience, to trace a good degree of advancement toward the mark of perfection. While as mere babes in Christ our hearts must always be loyal to God and true to righteousness, our very inexperience causes us often to stumble: our knowledge of the right ways of the Lord is very imperfect, and our powers of discernment are very unskilled: we have much to learn both of revelation and experience. The child in Christ has his own childish understanding, thoughts and ways, and his brethren in Christ should not expect from him the wisdom of the sage. Nor should he himself presume to have such wisdom; for only through knowledge and the discipline of experience does wisdom come; and then, only when we have allowed them to work in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

For our growth and development in the Christian character God supplies all that is needful in the way of nourishment, and it is our part to make use of all the help He sends. By study and meditation upon his Word of truth, by prayer and communion with God, we partake more and

more of his Spirit, and are led into a closer acquaintance both with the Lord himself, and also with his works and ways. And by exercise of the strength thus gained in active service of the Lord, we are prepared to receive more and more of the fullness of his grace, and so to go on from grace to grace, and from one degree of advancement to another.

But notwithstanding these recognised principles of Christian growth and development, it is a lamentable fact that many who can point with exactness to the day and hour when first they gave their hearts to the Lord and received the Holy Spirit, are compelled to realise, when they consider the matter at all, that, instead of advancing toward the stature of men in Christ, they have actually retrograded. It is a thing of the past with them, and its joys have fled. Why is this? It is because they have failed to appropriate the means of grace which God has supplied, and because, instead of striving against the downward tendencies of the carnal nature, they have allowed those old dispositions to rise up and re-assert themselves. In some cases a morbid desire for something new and strange has led away from the truth into the forbidden paths of human speculation—philosophy and science, so called—until the mind became bewildered and confused in the labyrinths of error—the snares of the Wicked One. In other cases the measure of truth possessed has been held in unrighteousness. The tongue has been permitted to wag in the service of sin and uncleanness, manifesting unkindness, lack of Christian courtesy and forbearance, evil surmising, self-exaltation, pride, boastfulness, vaunting, and these unholy indulgencies have been excused and even cultivated; they have not been striven against nor repented of; hence the spiritual decline.

It is for these causes that the blessed sense of fellowship and communion with God, experienced when first the Holy Spirit set the seal of adoption upon the heart, has been lost. God cannot dwell in a heart so unfit for his presence; and no Christian can look back to the time of his first experience as a child of God and recall any such evil dispositions at that time. Had his heart been in such a condition then, God would not have accepted him; and it is only as we strive against sin that we can continue to abide in his love and

favour.

Who cannot look back to his first experience in the Christian life and remember how the love of God filled his heart and overflowed to all his creatures, especially to them of the household of faith—a love that could bear well the beautiful description of 1 Cor. 13 4-7. "*Charity (love) suffereth long and is kind, envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things*".

Realising such to be the will of God, this was the attitude of heart which the seeker after God sought to attain; and such an attitude he was enabled to realise when the Spirit of adoption sealed him as an accepted son of God. Yet God, who remembers that we are dust, that we are morally weak from the Fall, knew with what difficulty we must endeavour to maintain this condition of heart and mind when assailed by temptations, and worn with the disappointments and trials of life. Nevertheless, He does look for the cultivation of these graces of character in us. He does, and has a right to, expect us to strive to live godly, and to war a warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil. And, therefore, notwithstanding the facts of trials and temptations, the maturer growth of Christian character should find our first love deepened into a more steady, constant and enduring thing, not characterised, perhaps, with so much of the gush and fluster of youth, but rather with the mellow benedictions of a more nearly ripened character.

That the Church in this sifting and proving time will be individually tested as to character, as well as to faith, is certain. The prospective heirs of the kingdom must, like their Lord, be tried and tested in every point; and it behoves everyone, therefore, to watch and pray, lest he enter into temptation, and diligently to cultivate such a character as will stand every test applied to it. But in the hour of testing let none mistake love of peace for love of righteousness. Let us see to it that the same mind dwells in us that is in Christ, our pattern. So shall we be children of God, beloved and owned of him.

The overshadowing and oversight of a surrendered human life by the Almighty God is one of the most amazing things in all Creation. It is the latest phase of Creation—for therein the Omnipotent Architect of the Universe is engaged upon the absolute masterpiece of all his varied work.

There is, in fact, a Greatness of Littleness. Costly gems are often small. The dewdrop is beautiful but very minute. A grain of sand is insignificant, but our great beaches are made up of them. A drop of water is infinitesimal, but the mighty ocean is composed of such drops.

## THE MANTLE OF SAMUEL

*Reflections for  
to-day*

He was the last of the Judges and one of the greatest law-givers and administrators God raised up for Israel. He came to the nation at a time of crisis and the nation took him to its heart. He served his people well and faithfully but at the end they rejected him in favour of a king who oppressed and betrayed them. During Samuel's span of power he brought his people back to God and lifted them to the heights of faith; before he died he saw them in grievous apostasy and once more under the heel of their enemies. In his life he ruled the nation but at the end he was gathered to his fathers in obscurity. Yet he lit a torch that was never put out; he spent his last years teaching a handful of youngsters who continued in the spirit of his life after that life was spent. He passed on the torch; and in after years the work of Samuel blossomed and bloomed afresh.

We do well to heed the story of this man's life. We too hold a Torch, a torch of Truth which it is our duty to hold aloft while we live, and when our failing hands can carry it no longer, to pass it on to younger and eager hands outstretched to receive it. This Truth we hold as a Stewardship is not ours alone; it was passed to us from those of old time as a heritage to be guarded and amplified and passed on to our successors. The work of God goes on, generation after generation, and nothing that we have is ours selfishly to enjoy and cast to the ground when the time comes that we can possess it no longer.

There is a strong parallel in our own time to the early days of Samuel. Once again the lamp has burned low in the Temple of God, and Eli has gone to sleep. Once again the people are sorely in need of instruction and guidance. Once again the word of the Lord has come to some who have been ready to give up worldly interests and aims in order to serve God in his Temple and await his word, and once again such have gone forth into the world with the message of salvation and have done a work such as the world had not seen for many generations. Temporarily, it may be, but none the less definitely, the enemies of righteousness have been checked and the Truth made known to the people.

But Samuel in his turn has become old and the glories of past days are slipping away. Who is to take the torch? Upon whom is the mantle of Samuel to descend, and continue the proclamation of this glorious Truth in the world of men? For there is still a message to proclaim.

Those who are disappointed or, maybe, perplexed, because the ending of the Age and the establishment of the Kingdom have not come at so early a date as they may have expected must not lose faith. The Plan of God is still being wrought out on time. The fact that we are not able correctly to discern the time makes no difference to that. And in times of uncertainty we do well to study the lives of those ancient stalwarts who, with more limited knowledge, must have found the purposes of God an even greater enigma than we do ourselves, and yet triumphed in faith and completed their course with joy.

Samuel was a leader and a prophet, a man of action and vision, utterly and completely consecrated and surrendered to the service of God. That was the secret of his success and that is the secret we have to know if we also would remain steadfast to the end. He went about his work with the serene confidence of a man who habitually walked with God and knew without a shadow of a doubt that the work he was doing was God's work. That confidence was the driving force behind the work he did.

There are many examples in the Old Testament of such men who gained "a good report through faith". Daniel, Isaiah, Nehemiah, John the Baptist, were all men of action, vigorous, positive action, but they were all visionaries. While their hands were set to the plough their eyes were fixed on the heavens, and there they saw visions of God. It is a noteworthy fact that so many of these men pledged their lives to God in their early youth and were almost immediately called to serve him. That should be a pointer to us not to despise the aspirations of our younger brethren after effective service for their Lord, but rather to realise the immense potentialities in a young life fully surrendered at so early a stage, and to do all in our power to assist it. There is more than a passing fitness in our Lord's reference to new wine and old wineskins in this connection. It is quite possible that some among the younger generation can receive and assimilate some elements of unfolding Truth peculiar to this generation which most of the older ones could never accept and are not expected by our understanding, all-wise Lord to accept. In such a case it is clearly the bounden duty of the older ones to view with tolerant understanding the endeavours of those who must perforce tread a somewhat different path because they live in a somewhat different world.

The life of Samuel was a hard life; his victories were not easily won. That he was able at the end to turn his back upon all that his prowess had won him and live contentedly teaching his handful of students in a quiet country retreat says much for his strength of character. But then, Samuel knew something of the end from the beginning. He knew that all his mighty works, wrought in the heyday of his physical maturity, must be as nothing compared to the spiritual legacy he must leave behind him if he was to be truly faithful. And with nearly all of Israel apostate from the faith and most of his life's work already in ruins he knew full well that in the hearts and minds of those few "sons of the prophets" reposed the real hope of the future. So he taught them in the same serenity of mind in which he had once led Israel against the Philistine hosts, and conquered without any weapons save his faith, and his people's faith, in God.

The story of Israel's varied fortunes in their many wars with the Philistines in Samuel's day is an object lesson in itself. It was when Samuel was quite young and still attendant on the High Priest Eli that the great disaster came. Israel lost her greatest glory, the Ark of the Covenant. The word of Samuel had already begun to go out to Israel, but quite evidently as yet there was no real heed being given, and when the fortunes of war began to go against Israel they gave way to superstitious beliefs and took the Ark into battle with them in the hope that God would not suffer the indignity of losing the symbol of his presence into the hands of the unbelievers. But God did; can there be a more telling example of the utter disregard the Most High has for form and ceremony? If Israel no longer had faith in him, the sacred Ark was no longer a symbol of any value, and its capture by the Philistines a matter of indifference to him. So the first Philistine war ended in disaster for Israel, the death of Eli, High Priest of the line of Ithamar, and twenty years of utter hopelessness and dejection on the part of the people of the Lord.

It was during that twenty years that Samuel came into his own. With the death of Eli he stepped into the place of authority, and although he could not be invested with the dignity of High Priest, he was in practice both sacred and secular ruler of the people.

One wonders why the Ark of the Covenant was not restored to its place after its recovery from the Philistines. According to 1 Sam. 6 and 7 it was in the Philistines' land only seven months but after its recovery it remained in the house of Abinadab of Kirjathjearim until the reign of King David. It is probable that the Philistines destroyed

Shiloh, where the Tabernacle stood in the days of Eli, after the capture of the Ark, and with there being no officiating High Priest and Israel as often as not under the heel of alien powers, it seems that the Tabernacle service, together with the Day of Atonement sacrifices, fell into disuse for a considerable number of years. That was the price the people paid for their presumption in taking the Ark of God into battle before them as though it had power to deliver inherent in itself.

The "twenty years" of 1 Sam. 7. 2 cannot be the time the Ark was at Kirjath-jearim for that is altogether too short a period to extend to David's reign. It seems more reasonable that it betokens the period during which the people languished under Divine disfavour and gradually, under Samuel's leadership, awakened to a sense of their apostasy and undone condition. So at the end they returned to the Lord and 1 Sam. 7 is the account of their return. That provoked the second Philistine war. The change in the hearts of the children of Israel was remarkable. The same enemy; the same invasion; the same threat; but this time there was no suggestion of taking the Ark before them into battle. They had learned their lesson. This time they said to Samuel (vs. 8) "*Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines*".

And, of course, God heard. The Philistines were routed without Israel having to lift a finger in their own defence. Samuel offered a burnt offering, and Samuel cried unto the Lord, and the Lord heard him. That was all. It was on this occasion that Samuel set a great stone and called it "*Eben-ezer*", signifying "*Hitherto hath the Lord helped us*", and gave us thereby a word and a theme that we have used constantly for each other's comfort and encouragement in these later years.

Samuel was now an old man. The time had come for his mantle to fall on other shoulders. The people loved and respected Samuel, but they wanted a king. "*They have not rejected thee*" said the Most High to his faithful servant "*but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.*" So Samuel anointed the young man Saul, and saw his own authority pass to the man of Israel's choice. He saw the man prove unworthy of the anointing and heard the Divine sentence of rejection. Therefore in the fulness of time he anointed another young man, one after God's own heart, the youth David. He was not destined to see David king. Samuel finished his days with his own life-work completed but God's work in the nation still unfinished. But he passed on his mantle to those young hearts who surrounded his death-bed.

Perhaps that is one great lesson we all have to learn. Though we live a hundred years twice told, we can do no more than finish our own life's work. The work of God in the world will still remain unfinished and will still be going on. We may, each of us, make our individual contribution toward that work and the contribution we have made, be it great or small, will have made some difference to God's great work. We shall have been co-workers together with him.

But after our little time of activity is ended and we take our place among the "great cloud of witnesses" there will be others to continue the work and play their part in the accomplishment of the Divine Plan. God grant that we individually may be faithful to our calling, and before our own end comes pass the flaming torch to one younger and newer in the race who is waiting to pick it up and follow in the path which we have trod.

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## MANY WONDERFUL WORKS

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Coming at the climax of a sermon unparalleled in all the recorded sayings of Jesus Christ, that reference to those who sought entrance into his Kingdom by virtue of their words and works has formed the subject of many a homily. With a very ready unanimity we join together in condemning the man who puts his trust in the arm of flesh and brings the fruits of his own works as an offering to the Almighty. Here in no unmeasured terms the Saviour of all men denounced the mental attitude which had made the Pharisees what they were in his day—a class of men who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. The awful results of that self-blinded egotism were manifested when they crucified the Prince of Life, and desired a murderer to be granted unto them. Thus does the evil bring forth its bitter fruit—the husk of an outward righteousness as fair to the casual eye as the whited sepulchres to which Jesus pointed, but concealing a corruption and a defilement as nauseous and repugnant to the All-seeing One as ever the contents of those same whited sepulchres were to the Jews.

Is it because, like Isaiah, we see the glory of the Lord and wish straight away to be used as his messengers that we so easily fall victims to the temptation of engaging in outward activities for their own sake rather than the inward work of the heart, to which all external things are but handmaidens? Just as a church is a shell which houses a congregation of worshippers and has no lasting value in itself, so also must the whole fabric of our earthly fellowship and service ever remain but an avenue by means of which we can feed and build up each other with the realities of Divine Truth. And yet just as in a church there is an altar which symbolises the presence of God, so in every form of Christian activity and service springing from the efforts of sincere and loving hearts, there is always manifest the Spirit of Christ—the material erection becoming in very truth an agent of Divine things.

Still must be remembered that truth enunciated by Paul in saying "*we know that if this earthly house of our dwelling place be dissolved, we have a building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*". So must it be with all our fleeting arrangements and organisations, all those things which minister to the needs of the saints while in the flesh, but which must necessarily vanish away when their work has been done. Not one of these "mighty works" goes with us into the eternal light of the Divine Presence—for their purpose will have been served, and amply served, in the ministry to the saints here below. The Church, founded at Pentecost upon a hope and conviction which had its anchor in things unseen, developed and multiplied by means of the unremitting toil of saintly men and women who counted not their lives dear unto them, and who in lives given up and sacrificed on the altar of service found a richer and fuller and nobler life even here amidst the imperfections of the earthly state. Paul in organising new communities of believers; Timothy setting in order the things that were wanting; the seven first deacons administering the serving of tables: in all of this we do not see the frantic building-up of a vast and imposing edifice which would absorb the thoughts and energies of all believers and dissipate those energies in a useless beating of the air. What we do see is the serious and solemn administration of a sacred trust left by the Master himself, who knew only too well how the heart left to theorise and meditate upon his message without the broadening influence of service for others must inevitable become self-centred and egotistic. We see thoughtful and zealous men and women full of the Spirit and of wisdom, rejoicing not only in the intellectual satisfaction of a clear knowledge of the Truth, but also in the abundant opportunity of manifesting the influence of that knowledge by their works and activity among their brethren and neighbours. There can be little doubt that the early years of the primitive

Church were years of ceaseless activity. *"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the Temple and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart"*. The wonderful growth of the Christian community was due as much to the burning zeal of those who went forth to propagate the new faith as to the readiness of a sinweared world to listen with hope to the message.

But in all of this the early Christians thought little of their own personal relation to the organisation they were building. Sufficient that this marvellous fellowship which was coming into being was steadily making progress through every stratum of society. Sufficient that the name of Jesus Christ was becoming increasingly familiar to those who met on the Sabbath day throughout all the cities of the Dispersion. Sufficient that the words of Jesus *"Ye shall be witnesses unto me—to the uttermost parts of the earth"* were having a glorious fulfilment. Of their own place in these things they thought not at all, but, like saints of earlier times, took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that in heaven they had a better and a more enduring substance.

Let us take to ourselves the lesson they so nobly taught. Let us, in all our activities and arrangements, our organising and building, ever

remember that all these "mighty works", desirable and even necessary as they are today, are not intended to endure for all time, to be jealously guarded and handed down to posterity. They are for the needs of the moment, for the promulgation of the Word of God and the *"edifying of the Body of Christ—UNTIL we all come, in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, to the measure of the full stature of the Anointed One"*. Happy is the brother or sister who can touch lightly these things of this earth, realising their place in the leadings of the Good Shepherd, thankful for their provision, and yet without regret or repining seeing them wax old and varnish away when their period of usefulness has passed.

So doing, we shall not be of those who, at the end, must needs claim their wonderful works as their only recommendation for entrance into the Heavenly Kingdom. If our building has been with the gold, silver and precious stones of the eternal truths which are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit of God, and if we have also learned Christ that the failure of all material supports and defences leaves us *"strong in the Lord and in the power of his might"* then indeed we shall not be of those to whom will come the sad, regretful words *"I never knew you. Depart from Me"*.

### Widow's Mite

These words are part of the commendation Jesus uttered concerning the poor woman who cast her two mites into the Temple treasury. Rich men, out of their abundance, were casting therein lavish gifts, but they still had a plentiful reserve. This poor woman cast in all she had (Mark 12. 44).

We may be inclined to take it for granted that she was old—and alone—as well as poor. But that need not be the case, for there was still poverty in the 19th century among the young, of equal intensity to this of the poor woman of whom Jesus spake. One such, whose husband had been killed in some rioting, was left with four young children, whose "whole living" consisted of just "five olive trees".

No widow's pension or government relief was available to meet her need, and all she had to

meet the requirements of five appetites was the produce of five olive trees. One day an Englishman, passing near a group of Arab women, heard the very phrase, in Arabic, which, in the Arabic Version of the New Testament translates the words of both Mark and Luke. Voices carry far in the clear air, and only a deaf person could fail to listen to some conversations. These Arab women were discussing the predicament in which a young friend had been placed by the death of her husband.

She was left with nothing more in the world than a small share in a vineyard, and that, said the speaker, was *"kull ma'ishitha"*—the exact phrase of Mark and Luke rendered into Arabic.

Two mites was the entire income of the poor Jewess whom Jesus praised. From what source it came we do not know, but be that as it may, this meagre sum was her "all". Out of her dire poverty she gave more than they all.

Do not have your concert first, and then tune your instrument afterwards. Begin the day with the Word of God and prayer, and first of all get into harmony with him. (Hudson Taylor).

If you would be blessed, get many seasons of prayer into your busy, harassed, tempted, struggling life. It is in these quiet moments that you really grow.



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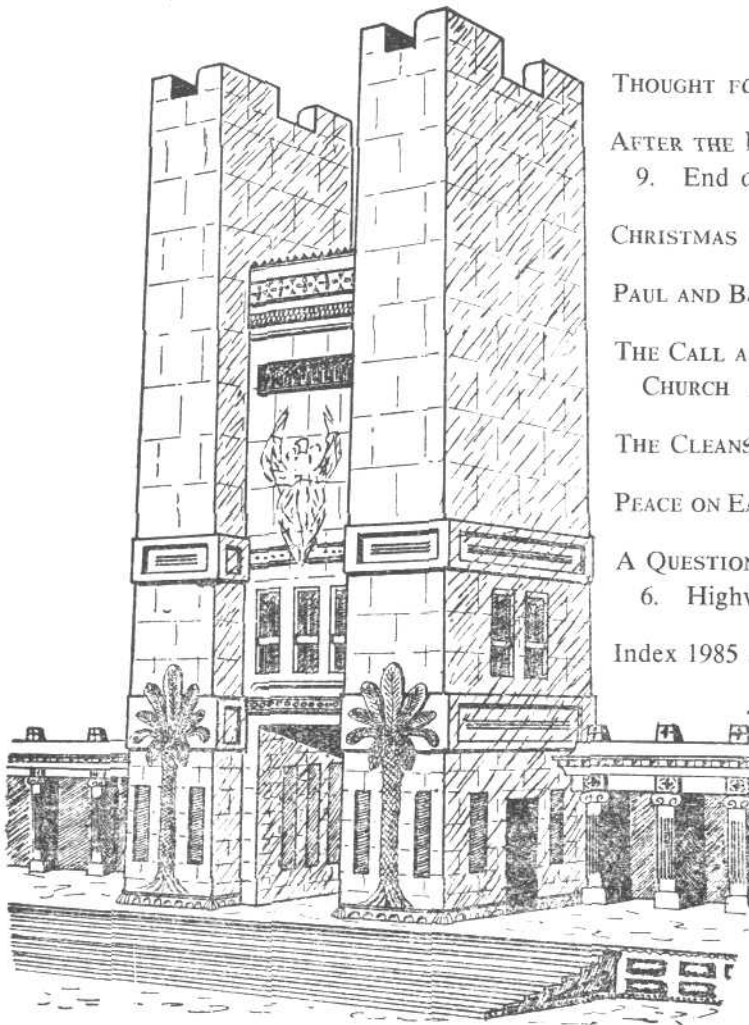
Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

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

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### Thought for the Month

It is a commonplace for men in the public eye to talk about the danger of mass starvation consequent upon the rapidly expanding population of the world, and it is well known that even now by far the majority of the earth's inhabitants do not get enough to eat. In consequence we get learned discourses about the necessity of establishing "farms" at the bottom of the seas around our coasts in order to tap a new and rich source of food supply; some hardy souls in 1965 lived in a submarine construction two hundred feet below the surface to discover the possibilities inherent in this new and exciting way of life. Someone else, however, has just found out that the vast and increasing quantities of household detergents now being poured into the sea from the drainage systems of civilised lands is killing all sea life to an appreciable distance out from land, so that the one process appears likely to cancel out the other.

Prof. Jose de Castro, Chairman of the United Nations Food Organisation thirty years ago, showed that this idea of the earth's inability to grow food for its expanding population is based upon misapprehension of the facts. He established that high birthrates go with hunger conditions and that the more well-fed a community the slower its rate of increase. The answer to present population problems, he said, lies in the better use of available land so that all have enough to eat. Only one-eighth of the possible farming land in the world is at present under cultivation for food, and if this area was merely doubled there would be food to spare for everyone.

The pressing need, then, if Prof. Castro is right, is for investigation, not into bizarre experiments under the seas or endeavours to synthesise foodstuffs from inert chemicals, but to make better use of Nature's bounty in the land we have

got. The physical life of man is sustained by means of solar energy through the medium of growing plants. Plants absorb sunlight in conjunction with carbon dioxide and water vapour from the air and produce food for men and animals. Only an infinitesimal fraction of the energy in sunlight is normally used in this process. But it has been calculated that if means could be found to utilise as little as one per cent of the solar energy falling upon one acre of ground for six months, something like four tons of carbohydrates would be produced. At this rate one man could live off the produce from a patch of ground forty feet square.

Perhaps so satisfactory a solution to the problem will not be realised in man's day. His inventive genius, marvellous as it is, may not be quick enough to keep abreast of the rising population. In a century from now, say the experts, there will be between two and three times as many on earth as at present. But the glowing pen-pictures of the Millennium painted by the Hebrew prophets are so often set against a background of earth's fertility and abundance—"the desert shall blossom as the rose"—that one might well conclude here is another instance of man's extremity proving God's opportunity. In that coming day of Christ's reign there shall be food for all, for "the earth shall yield her increase".

**The Tragedy of Samson.** The series which has been appearing under this title during this year was concluded in last issue. It is available in booklet form and while stocks last we will be pleased to despatch in response to requests. It is supplied free, but we do ask for postage, which is as follows: In U.K. 34p stamps for 4 copies Overseas, One dollar for 7 copies.

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## AFTER THE FLOOD

### 9. End of the Golden Age

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The latter part of the lifetime of Eber, the man who is most likely to have first committed to writing the early chapters of Genesis as they now appear, witnessed a rapid and substantial increase in population. Some six hundred years had elapsed since the Flood, and the posterity of the sons of Noah was beginning to penetrate territories far distant from the first settlements in the "Plain of Shinar", the Euphrates-Tigris valley. Archæologists have remarked on the evidences of this population increase at this time in this land itself, and with it the indications of peoples in far-away areas with which trade, the exchange of goods and materials, was beginning to develop. The human race was beginning to spread over the wider world.

Egypt, of course, had been settled for nearly three centuries and was already on the way to becoming a powerful force in world affairs. There was close contact between them and their fellows in Sumer (Shinar); they were at this time beginning to adapt the recently introduced Sumerian writing to form their own characteristic script, the well-known Egyptian hieroglyphics which adorn so many of the Egyptian tombs. It is established by scholars that the writing of Egypt was derived from that of Sumer, as was, in fact, every other kind of writing the world has known. At this time, also, the Great Pyramid was built, enshrining the geophysical and astronomical knowledge which the Egyptians had acquired. But now other influential nations which figure in later Bible history were in process of formation.

The most significant of these from the point of view of Bible history and the affairs of the future nation of Israel would be the people known as the Canaanites. At the time of the dispersion from Babel it would seem that the sons of Canaan, son of Ham, made their way by easy stages to the land which was afterwards called by that name. Following the Euphrates northward and then striking west across the plains they came to the Mediterranean sea-coast and there they settled to become farmers and traders. They built towns on the coast—Sidon of the present day is one of them—and Joppa. Striking inland they founded Gaza and Damascus, Jerusalem, Jericho, Sodom and Gomorrah. Other centres known only to archæologists and long since passed out of existence appeared in later years but were probably started by the Canaanites; Ugarit, better known today as Ras Shamra, on the Syrian coast, discovered in 1929, Alalakh in Syria, and Ebla,

located and excavated only a few years ago. They seem to have established and maintained a network of trading connections with their Sumerian and Egyptian counterparts and rapidly grew in power and influence. The Canaanites were still there when Abraham entered Canaan but by then there had been a great deal of immigration by Semitic peoples more or less kindred to Abraham and these mixed and intermarried and so gave rise a thousand years later to the celebrated nation of sea-going traders known as the Phoenicians. By that time their ships were making regular trading journeys to Britain, the Mediterranean countries, the West African coastlands, the West Indies and Central America. In the days of Eber, however, the farthest they appear to have penetrated was the area of the eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, Crete, Greece and Egypt.

The Canaanites seem to have abandoned the recognition and worship of God more quickly than did the Sumerians or Egyptians. Their religious practices became debased at a very early stage, so much so as to become proverbial in the ancient world. On the other hand the Phoenician historian Sanchuniathan (regarded by experts as mythical until the Ras Shamra tablets were found in 1929) writing about a thousand years before Christ—the time of King David, who had a great deal to do with the Phoenicians of his day; Hiram, king of Tyre was their ruler—said that in the earliest histories of his country the Deity was known as the Most High God, the same term as used by the Sumerians of the same period. Perhaps even the depraved Canaanites were sincere worshippers of the true God when first they settled in the land, and then its luxuries and pleasures turned their hearts to gross idolatry. The same thing happened to Israel in the same land a thousand years later. There are evidences that the worship of the true God endured at least among some of the Canaanites; when Abraham entered Canaan six hundred years after the time of Eber he found the Jebusites of Jerusalem, a Canaanite tribe, ruled by the Priest-king Melchisedek, "the Priest of the Most High God"; another of the same period was Abimelech king of Gerar, near Gaza, also with his people acknowledging the God of Abraham. But in the main the Canaanites seem to have been apostates almost from the start.

North of the Canaanites were settled the Arameans, men of Aram and to some extent Arphaxad, sons of Shem. They had made their

way up the Euphrates river and found the wide plains of what is now northern Syria and southern Turkey admirably adapted for their nomadic habits. Here they could tend their flocks and herds, moving their encampments from place to place as necessity dictated, with none to say them nay. Much later on, as they increased in number and the land became more densely populated, they had to establish farmsteads and grow crops to feed themselves and their animals, but that was away in the future. They eventually built towns—Haran, to which Abraham came when he left Ur of the Chaldees, was one of their chief centres—and when that patriarch sent his steward to find a bride for Isaac, and when Jacob set out to get away from his brother Esau, this is the land to which they came. This land of Aram-Naharaim, “the land of the two rivers”, was henceforth to be closely associated with Old Testament history.

Away on the eastern side of the Plain, beyond the Tigris river, lay the mountains, those mountains from which the early descendants of Noah first came into the Plain of Shinar. Now they began to go back, contingents of men and women seeking living space, hardy men and women not afraid of the rigours of a mountain habitat. Elamites, they called themselves; they were, in the main, descendants of Elam the son of Shem, and once established in the mountains they speedily found that they had entered a land which yielded metals and precious stones—gold, silver, copper, rubies, emeralds, and the greatly prized blue-green mineral called lapis-lazuli. Building stone could be quarried in abundance, granite, limestone, sandstone and a wondrous polished black stone which used to be called diorite but has now been found to be limestone impregnated with carbon under heat and greatly to be desired for the making of statues and images. Forests of cedar, rivalling the famed cedars of Lebanon, of oak, and of fir trees, were there, providing unlimited supplies of timber for building. None of these things existed in the Plain itself and so it was not long before the Elamites up in the mountains and the Sumerians down in the Plain were engaged in an intensive and expanding trade with each other and so the famous era of Sumerian artistic manufactures in metal and stone began.

Although bearing the name of Elam the Semite, the probability is that this people was a fusion of both races, Semitic and Sumerian, of Shem and Ham. Their national characteristics tend to show this, their commercial and artistic qualities betraying Sumerian ancestry and their ferocity in war their Semitic. But this latter emerged later; at this time they lived at peace

with their fellows although in later centuries they became a scourge to the more peaceable inhabitants of the plain.

The land of Havilah (Khavilah) of Gen. 2, south-west of the Caspian Sea, was probably an Elamite colony and so, too, in all likelihood, the city-state of Aratta, the existence of which was unknown until a few years ago, and the precise site of the capital city of which is still undiscovered. This was a time of population expansion when groups of pioneers set out in all directions to find hitherto uninhabited lands in which to settle. Their children upon attaining maturity would set out still farther and so the world became populated. Within the next three or four centuries the Cushites had colonised the whole of Arabia and penetrated Iran and into Pakistan where by the time of Abraham a second extensive Sumerian civilisation existed on the plains of the river Indus. The descendants of Phut, son of Ham, had colonised North Africa over the area of the present Sahara desert, which in their day was fertile and forested, and those of Japheth had reached half-way across Siberia on the one hand and half-way across Europe on the other.

And while all this was going on the people in the Plain were quietly building their cities and organising their lives together, without acrimony and without war, still serving and worshipping the God of their forefather Noah. Here was the seed-bed in which was nurtured and carried through from generation to generation the Seed of Promise, that line of descent protected and guided by Divine Providence which was to lead first to Abraham and finally to Christ. Eber, at this time the custodian of the Divine oracles, must soon relinquish his charge to his son Peleg, and he in the fulness of time to Reu, and so on for three more generations and then to Abraham. That is the point at which the story of the out-working of God's Plan of redemption really begins. Perhaps that is why what may be termed comprehensive Bible history there has its commencement. From that time God began actively to work in the world of men to bring men back to himself.

The latter part of the life of Eber saw the birth of the conception of kingship. The first kings—little more than tribal chiefs—were at Kish, eight miles from the Tower. For nearly two centuries they held sway over all the settlements in the land, according to the old legends. Their rule was kindly and beneficent. The name of the third king of the dynasty, Palakinatim, living during the lifetime of Eber, means “reign of righteousness” and of the fourth king, Nangishlishma, “may God listen with gladness”. The second monarch was a woman whose name in-

corporated a suffix indicating loyalty to "the most high God". Such engravings as have been found have no indications of war; they depict only scenes of the hunting of food animals and the arts of the agriculturalist and the shepherd. Farming, fishing and trade with the mountain-dwellers to the east and with Egypt and Canaan in the west filled their life. The Most High God was worshipped by the Semites at Babel and at Nippur by the Sumerians, and all creation seemed to be at peace. A Sumerian poet of six centuries later said of this period "*There was a time when the cities of Shubur and Hamazi, the many cities of Sumer, the land of kings, Divine laws, and of all that is good; the land of Martu, living in security; the whole universe; the people in unison, to Enlil ("lord of the heavens") in one tongue gave praise*". Another of the same period described the time in the distant past when the wild animals were tame and submissive to man, there was no strife or rivalry between men, the land brought forth its crops and the rain came in its season and the sun shone warmly always and there was peace amongst men.

But changes were on the way. Towards the close of Eber's life a new power began to rise in the south to challenge the rulership of Kish. The little settlement at Uruk (Erech of Gen. 10.11) was becoming an influential centre and beginning to manifest ambitions for dominion. According to the "King Lists" compiled some eight centuries later, the first man recorded as asserting himself as ruler was one Meskiag-gashir, and of this man two curious and unexplained things are recorded. The first is that he was "*the son of the Sun God*" and the second that he "*crossed the sea and ascended the mountain*". Now at the time the "King Lists" were compiled the Sun-God was Marduk, and the origin of Marduk (as was shown in July/August BSM) was the Biblical personage Nimrod. Does this suggest that this first recorded ruler of Uruk was in fact the actual son of Nimrod and perhaps succeeded his father in the rulership of the Sumerian south country? The timing could be right; Nimrod is most likely to have lived during the early part of Eber's life and this postulated son in the latter part. If the case is indeed so, then it is possible to link Nimrod with the annals of history outside the Bible. The second expression is more obscure. Why attach special significance to his crossing the sea to ascend a mountain? One immediately thinks of the sacred mountain which they all revered as the "Mount of the East" where their fathers emerged from the Ark and toward which their temple-towers at Babel and Nippur pointed in recognition of its sanctity. In later times that

same mountain was to become the mountain of the gods, the centre of the world and the entrance to *Arallu*, the nether-world of the dead, but at this time it was sacred to the Most High God, the God of Noah and his sons. Is this expression a reference to some kind of pilgrimage to the mountain undertaken by this man in recognition or celebration of that event? One of his descendants, Gilgamish, King of Uruk a century or so later, is recorded as having done the same thing. A glance at the map in the July/August BSM will show that to reach the mountain—Kuh-i-Anaran in Lat. 32N, Long. 46E—from Uruk the traveller would have either to cross the then existing northern extension of the Persian Gulf or make his way around its northern end. The latter course would involve travelling through the home domains of Kish and it might be that relations between Semites and Sumerians were already becoming strained and so the pilgrim elected to follow the sea route.

Somewhere about this time the city and land of Kish suffered a major disaster. A colossal flood completely destroyed the city and its surroundings, and drowned most of its inhabitants. An abnormal quantity of water carried down by the great rivers built up in the level plain and brought the peaceful life of the people to an end. It was a long time before Kish recovered—probably several generations. Says Langdon ("*The Excavations at Kish*," Vol. 4) "*This flood definitely marked the end of an era. It covered uniformly and for a long time all that remained of the civilisation of Kish. This flood layer marks a complete separation between the types which we have now left behind, the industries of the potter, founder, sculptor, and the types of industries which will be found above it*". The physical remains show this; the evidence of a highly sophisticated civilisation below the "flood layer" is replaced by a considerably less cultured one above, and in some respects Kish never recovered its former grandeur. It might well be this event which gave the rising power of Uruk the opportunity to take the initiative and make its bid for the leadership of the country. In another sphere of life, it might also have been the reason for the migration of the family of Shem marked out in the Bible—Eber, his son Peleg, and his grandson Reu, all of whom might well have been alive at this time—from the Kish-Babel area to the southern city of Ur of the Chaldees where Abraham, great-great-grandson of Reu, is found living four centuries later. A rather flimsy evidence to this effect is found in the Gen. 10 statement that the sons of Joktan, son of Eber, made their dwelling in an area which, although at present very uncertain, was most probably in the

south country and in the vicinity of Ur.

But Langdon's statement above quoted to the effect that this Kish flood "*definitely marked the end of an era*" has proved true in more senses than he could have realised in 1924. The discoveries of this present century have established that it was at about this time that three great evils affecting mankind had their rise, evils that have afflicted men ever since and will inevitably continue so to do until the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. From the time of the Flood until this time, the evidence is that men lived peaceably with each other in the reverence and worship of the one true God, the God of Noah their common ancestor. In all the remains and relics that have been discovered there are no warlike weapons; in such admittedly scanty records as exist there are no references to man fighting man, and no evidence of worship offered to false gods. But

now there came a great change.

Those three great evils which brought this "Golden Age" to an end were commercialism, war and paganism. It is a remarkable fact that all three made their debut into the world together, as though they were interdependent. Men were penetrating fast into the outer world and discovering all kinds of exciting materials and products; trade between the peoples developed in consequence and that gave rise to greed and selfishness and so eventually to war; with the loss of high moral values men lost faith in the Most High God and began to imagine lesser gods, gods made in their own image and likeness, and so a pattern was set which all generations have followed to this present day. In the days of Eber the old order passed away and life was to be very different thereafter.

*To be continued*

## CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

*"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder" (Isa. 9.6).*

On Christmas morning it is natural that thoughts should be about Jesus, born a baby, but born to be King.

At other times in the year one thinks of Jesus and considers the aspects of his life which took him to the Cross, the Tomb, and finally to Heaven, but this morning thoughts are on his birth, and in particular the beautiful narrative of the Gospel in Luke 2 which records the manner of his birth. Let thoughts be directed to the events that led up to this, the greatest of all birthdays, and to the events and happenings that immediately followed.

Looking at the story, what is the first thing that strikes us? It is surely that Mary had this necessity of journeying to pay taxes, thrust upon her, when she was so near to having her baby.

In most homes the 'mother-to-be' is fussed over and she is forbidden to do anything energetic, she has to have plenty of rest and generally prepare herself as well as possible for the forthcoming event. Fathers no doubt take over the necessary chores; children have it impressed upon them that they have to be good. Grandmas and Granddads are usually in attendance to offer advice and speculative comment, and generally everyone tries to keep the 'mother-to-be' cool, calm and collected.

One may ask—why of all times should it be, that now, at this very time, Mary had to go, with Joseph her husband, to the city of David, Bethlehem?

The answer is that it was God's will, for had it not been foretold in Micah 5.2. "*But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting*"? A vital principle needs to be remembered, that all prophecy has to be fulfilled.

The hand of God was leading them on. He who overrules the purposes of Emperors and Kings, of statesmen and Parliaments, for the accomplishment of his designs (though they know them not), He who hardened the heart of Pharaoh, called Cyrus King of Persia like a slave to his foot, made the mighty King Nebuchadnezzar his servant, was using Augustus, through his decree for taxes to bring Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, to fulfil the prophecy recorded in Micah.

Mary neither argued or grumbled; she just packed her bags and accompanied Joseph her husband to Bethlehem, the city of David, because being of the lineage of David this was where he had to pay the taxes.

One can imagine her ordeal, for there were no modern comforts in those days, no motors, ambulances or buses. She would no doubt ride on an animal's back and there would be personal possessions to look after, money for the taxes, the things she had no doubt prepared in readiness for the arrival of her baby, and among these things were no doubt the swaddling clothes.

The distance between Nazareth in Galilee and Bethlehem in Judah is some sixty-eight miles as the crow flies, but on the way they had to pass Mt. Ebal, Mt. Gerisim and the Mt. of Olives, and

so it seems safe to assume that by the time they had followed the winding path, they would have trekked some 80 or 90 miles. And this was not the end of things; another ordeal awaited her, because there was no room for them at the inn.

Imagine for a moment how tired and weary Mary must have felt after such a long journey and then to be confronted with "no room at the inn". Imagine how we would feel in similar circumstances, and a birth imminent; we would no doubt be at "panic stations", feeling hot under the collar and exceedingly bothered for the comfort of the mother and the safety and well being of the child. But the Gospel bears no mention of Mary being worked up and anxious; we are merely informed that she brought forth her first-born son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger.

What an example of trust, of humility, of confidence in her God! There are other considerations we must have on this Christmas morning.

First of all, the baby Jesus. Had it not been uttered by the mouths of the holy prophets since the world began, that He would come to be the Deliverer, the counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, the Government to be upon his shoulder, and of the increase of his Government and Peace to be no end. A Prince indeed! and yet He was born in such a humble manner and in such humble surroundings.

All know the excitement that takes place when a royal birth is in the offing. The papers are full of the events leading up to the great day, speculation is rife as to whether it will be a girl or a boy child, a Prince or a Princess, what they will be in line for succession to the throne, what they will be called. Television, Radio, all take up the theme and the whole event is at the forefront of people's minds and is the talking point of the day. They are born to live in a Palace, with everything they need for comfort and security, and yet here is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords being born in a stable, in a manger, with little light by which to see, and with the smell of animals and sweat in the atmosphere. This again teaches humility, but what of Jesus, did He mind? There is absolutely no doubt, He laid there without a care in the world, a very happy, loveable little baby.

The Bible teaches us to be humble and in both Mary and Jesus there is the perfect example. No wonder Jesus could say, some thirty years later, "Blessed are the meek, Blessed are the merciful, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God". But in spite of all Mary's humility, this event was not to pass unnoticed. She would never

have gone round bragging that she had given birth to the Holy child, Jesus; she was no doubt content to give the child all the love she had. But God had other plans. Although Jesus made his entry on the stage of life so humbly and silently, although the citizens of Bethlehem dreamed not what had happened in their midst, although the Emperor at Rome knew not that his decree had influenced the nativity of a King who was yet to bear rule, not only over the Roman world, but over many a land where Roman eagles never flew, although the history of mankind went thundering forward next morning, quite unconscious of the event which had happened, yet it did not altogether escape notice.

This was a great day, a day for rejoicing, and even now for rejoicing that this day took place. This was a day and an event that had to be made known. To whom did God choose to send his mighty angels to make it known? The humble, trusty shepherds in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. That which was unnoticed by kings and the great ones of this world was so absorbing a theme to the princes of Heaven that they burst the bounds of invisibility in which they shroud themselves in order to express their joy and explain the significance of the great event. Seeking the most worthy hearts to which they might communicate it, they found them in these simple trusting shepherds, living the life of contemplation and prayer, in the fields where Jacob had kept his flocks, where Boaz and Ruth had wedded, and where David the great Old Testament character had spent his youth.

One can imagine in the stillness of the night, with the peaceful atmosphere and the stars shining overhead, the amazement of the shepherds when the angel appeared and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. The good tidings to the humble-hearted shepherds were that the long expected Saviour had been born this day, in the city of David, none other than Jesus Christ the Lord. None may forget the wonderful implied and outspoken promise that these good tidings of great joy shall be to all people.

At this season of the year, many will refer to their experiences as being of great joy. Gifts and the giving and receiving of them all add to the occasion, but the greatest joy will be found by those, who in simple faith, receive this message and ask Jesus into their hearts and lives, as their Saviour. Recall the familiar words of the well known Christmas hymn 'O little town of Bethlehem' (3rd verse).

*"How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given, so God imparts to human hearts, the blessings of his heaven, no ear may hear his com-*

ing, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in" And as Jesus enters into our lives, is it not a fact that the words "I bring you good tidings of great joy" have a much greater depth of meaning. It is as Jesus reveals himself to us, that we begin to know something of "Gods Peace on Earth" and experience a foretaste of his "goodwill toward men".

The wonder of it is, that that baby born in the stable at Bethlehem nearly two thousand years ago, can be born again in the "stable" of our hearts, and we are "born again" into the family of God, to receive his Spirit as sons and daughters, and to ultimately share his glory, if we remain faithful and make our calling and election sure.

As we consider the wonder of the Christmas message, yet again, remember the wider application of the words of the Prophets and the Apostles, and rejoice that God has devised a wonderful plan of salvaion for all mankind, in which plans it can be our privilege to share.

At the First Advent of Jesus, Zacharias in Luke 1 68-75 voiced the hopes of the Jewish race when he said "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited us and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us, in the house of his servant David, as He spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us. To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant. The Oath which He sware to our father Abraham, that He would grant us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life".

This hope of deliverance from the Roman oppressor was in evidence again when Jesus spoke to the disciples on the Emmaus road. (Luke 24. 17-27), Jesus, joining himself to them said "What manner of communications are these that you have one to another as ye walk and are sad". . . . they said unto him "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God, and all the people. . . . the chief priests and rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him, but we had trusted that it had been He which should

have redeemed Israel". . . . then He said unto them, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory". And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself. How then should we understand today the meaning of the prophetic words?

The Apostle Peter provides the answer in Acts 3. 13-25. "The God of Abraham, and Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our Fathers, hath glorified his Son, Jesus, whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate. . . . ye denied the Holy One and Just. . . . and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead. . . . And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But these things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled. Repent ye, therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you, Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me, Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you."

The time of the restitution of all things is the Second Advent of Christ, and it is at this time that the words of Isaiah 9. 6-7 and Luke 2. 10-11 and 14 will be fulfilled. "For unto us a Son is given, and the Government shall be upon his shoulder, and his Name shall be called Wonderful, counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his Government and Peace there shall be no end, upon the Throne of David, and upon his Kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth, even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this."

At this time the good tidings of great joy shall be to all people. Then all will know the Saviour which is Christ the Lord. Then all will give "glory to God in the Highest" as there is on earth "Peace and Goodwill to all men".

"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." Strange words—but what heartening words! Redolent of strife and conflict, of severe trials to come, they imply nevertheless that this is only to be expected; this is all part of the programme for final victory.

The wise steward will seek always to cultivate along the lines of his natural abilities, and not expect the Lord to work a miracle for his advancement, and so waste valuable time seeking to develop that which he does not by nature possess.

## PAUL AND BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD

*"Else what shall they do which are baptised for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptised for the dead?" (I Cor. 15.29).*

It has been estimated that there are over two hundred interpretations of the Apostle's words in this intriguing verse, and it must be acknowledged that there are no immediately discernible solutions concerning what Paul meant when he penned them.

The writer does not suggest that the basic theme of his interpretation is a novel one; in fact, a superficial glance at the verse in question would probably cause the reader to draw this interpretation or conclusion before all others. However, those who accept the "obvious" explanation of Paul's words are immediately faced with several knotty problems that then lead them to conclude that the "obvious" explanation cannot be correct after all, and so they abandon it and begin to search for a different one. The suggestions proposed herein are "alternative" in the sense that they harmonise other aspects of the 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians into a hypothetical framework that allows the "obvious" explanation of the problem verse to be accepted with very little difficulty.

The "obvious" — and highly controversial — explanation is, as most are aware, that members of the ecclesia in Corinth were practising vicarious baptism. In short, they were being baptised not for themselves, but in proxy for others who had died without consecrating themselves as Christians. Why? There are several possibilities, but most likely through a wrong understanding of Christ's words in John 3.5. If baptism is essential for entrance into the Kingdom of God, then they may have concluded that dead friends and relatives were without hope. After all, one cannot baptise the dead. However, one can baptise *for* the dead, and this is what some seemed to be doing in Corinth. To the vast majority of thinking Christians, the idea of vicarious baptism is obnoxious. How then, are we to explain the fact that Paul uses the practice as a proof of the resurrection? This is the question which causes many students of the Bible to abandon the obvious explanation and search for another.

It must be confessed that this intriguing passage of Scripture is entirely genuine. It is found in all the leading manuscripts with little or no variation, and fits comfortably between the preceding and succeeding verses. Several attempts have been made to discredit vss. 29-34 as interpolations, but these attempts were made not so

much on the basis of textual evidence, but rather because the critics were unable to make doctrinal sense of their contents. The first objection to the validity of these verses—and it is the only one with a measure of substance to it—is that they are disjointed in some sense from the rest of the chapter. Vss. 29-34 could almost be lifted out of the main body of the text without spoiling the fluidity of Paul's words. The writer agrees with this observation, but does not draw the same conclusion from it as some critics. The next compelling reason for suggesting that the verses have been interpolated into the text is that their doctrinal contents—particularly in vs. 29, are nonsensical. When one looks at the whole Christian experience, and the need to nurture and maintain a personal commitment to God and Jesus Christ, the idea of baptism by proxy becomes absurd. Thus, the real objection is not "Paul did not say such a thing," but rather, "Paul *would not* have said such a thing". However, the fact remains that not one single shred of textual evidence exists to discredit the verses in question.

But if Paul really did pen these curious verses, what is to be made of them? Before attempting to answer this, it is well to look at the literary construction of the entire chapter. The 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians is really an entire sermon in itself, and if treated as such, it becomes easier to understand certain of its aspects. A breakdown of its contents can be described as follows:

- Vss. 1-3 Introduction to the sermon.
- Vss. 4-23 First Aspect of sermon—The reality of the resurrection.
- Vss. 24-28 Second Aspect of sermon — God's Kingdom through the risen Christ.
- Vss. 29-34 Problematical verses.
- Vss. 35-56 Third Aspect of sermon—The mechanics and nature of the resurrection.
- Vss. 34-56 Conclusion.

In vss. 1-3 Paul gives an exhortation to the Corinthian brethren, and an introduction to his theme of Christ's death and resurrection. Then, in vss. 4-23, he plunges himself into the reality of the resurrection in the most logical way possible; he begins with the raising of Christ himself from the dead. In vss. 5-7 we are presented with a summary of the eyewitness accounts of Jesus' resurrection, and naturally Paul concludes this section with a remembrance of his own experience (Acts 9. 3-9) on the Damascus road, (Vss. 8-11). In vs. 12, Paul widens the scope of his

subject matter and begins to discuss the resurrection in its entirety. He criticises some of the Corinthian brethren who were, at least in part, denying the truth of the resurrection. In vss. 13-23 he proves the fallaciousness of their position, combining the logic and methodism of Aristotle with the grace and optimism of the Psalmist.

In vss. 24-28 Paul covers the second aspect of his sermon—God's Kingdom. The Kingdom of God, restoring a debased humanity to perfection, is the ultimate reality of the resurrection. Without the resurrection of the Saviour we would have no king, without the King there can be no Body of Christ, and without the Church, whence the earthly families of mankind who will look to them as kings and priests? Without the resurrection there can be neither King nor Kingdom.

Paul is now free to move on to the Third aspect of his sermon—that is, how the resurrection will be accomplished. *Surprisingly, he does not do this.* Instead, he returns to his *original* theme of the reality of the resurrection.

Now it must be admitted that this is a little strange. Why did Paul not include the subject matter of vss. 29-34—the reality of the resurrection—with the other evidences encompassed in vss. 4-23? Logic would seem to dictate that the contents of vss. 29-34 would have been better sequenced, in a revised format, between vss. 18 & 19. So then, why did Paul sequence his thoughts in the manner that he did? Why do the resurrection evidences of vss. 29-34 suddenly appear after the other evidences had been discussed and Paul had moved on to another aspect of his sermon? The answers to these questions will help to determine how Paul viewed the practise of vicarious baptism.

It can safely be assumed that the evidences that Paul presents in vss. 4-23 are those which he feels carry most weight. Had baptism for the dead—whatever we may conclude it to be—been a forceful reason for accepting the resurrection as fact, then it would have been presented as such by Paul when he specifically discussed the subject. Thus, it can be concluded that, for some reason, the practice of vicarious baptism was not of great doctrinal significance to Paul, if indeed it was of any doctrinal significance at all.

The textual position of the problem verses also offers a secondary reason for concluding that Paul did not view vicarious baptism to be of great import. Paul had gone on to another aspect of his sermon when, *almost as an afterthought*, he returns to discuss his original theme of the reality of the resurrection, and gives one last piece of evidence in its favour. It is highly likely that the subject matter of vss. 29-34 was something that Paul decided to "throw in" at the end of his

dissertation, but—because it lacked the weight and forcefulness of the other evidences—it temporarily slipped his mind.

Two questions are posed here;

- (a) What was "baptism for the dead"?
- (b) What conclusions can be drawn as to the nature of vicarious baptism from the fact that Paul did not consider it to be doctrinally important?

The answer to the latter question will give us the strongest clue to the whole mystery, but first must be examined some alternative explanations as to what Paul meant by the expression "baptized for the dead".

Unger<sup>1</sup> suggests a tempting solution. "*If Christ's resurrection is not a fact, and ours consequently not a living hope, (12-19), then what purpose is there for the rite of Christian baptism? What course of action shall believers take who through this introductory water ceremony have publicly taken their places in the ranks left vacant by believers who have died, vs. 29?*"

So then, perhaps Paul was simply referring to new Christian brethren who, at their baptism, were taking the place of other believers who had passed beyond the veil. But if this is the meaning, why did Paul talk of being "baptised for the dead", and not more accurately of being baptised as *replacements* for the dead?

Henry<sup>2</sup> runs into similar problems when he suggests that certain Corinthian Christians had been Divinely executed (I Cor. 11. 30) for partaking of the Emblems unworthily. Those "baptised for the dead", suggests Henry, were new converts who were frightened into becoming Christians and were baptised because they saw God's power exercised over those who partook of the emblems unworthily" if that is what he really meant?

An even more extreme "solution" to the problem is to alter the text of Scripture so that Paul seems to be saying something totally different to what the original Greek would indicate. Amazingly, some Bible translators have done this. The Missionary Complete New Testament" renders I Cor. 15. 29 as follows:

*"Else, what shall they do, those who are baptised in place of those who have died? If the dead do not rise, why do they get baptised in their place?"*

The "New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures" reads:

*"Otherwise, what will they do who are being baptised for the purpose of (being) dead ones? If the dead are not to be raised up at all, why are they also being baptised for the purpose of (being) such?"*

The fact that translators will go to such lengths is indicative of the serious problem vs. 29 causes them.

There is, it is suggested, only one conclusion that can reasonably be drawn concerning the nature of "baptism for the dead". *Paul's statement clearly refers to the baptism of living Christians in proxy for those who have died outside of the church.*

This idea poses huge problems to most Christian theologians. Surely, to suggest that the beloved Apostle Paul would approve of vicarious baptism is a terrible slander! And of course, they are correct. At this point, it is well to take a closer look at Paul's attitude towards vicarious baptism, for this will help to understand why he did not consider it to be of doctrinal importance. The textual position of the problematical verses indicates that vicarious baptism did not carry much weight with Paul; but the practise is still mentioned in Scripture nevertheless. However, a closer look at the problematical verses and their context indicates that Paul not only viewed the practice as doctrinally insignificant, but also disapproved of it. Throughout the entire chapter, Paul consistently uses the pronouns "us" and "we". But curiously, in the problematical verse 29, he changes to the pronoun "they". This is the strongest possible argument for the case that Paul was distancing himself from those to whom he was referring. Vicarious baptism was anathema to Paul, hence he talked of "they" who practised it, and not "we".

But this raises further questions. Now that it has been determined just what baptism for the dead was, and the Apostle's attitude towards it, who actually practised it? Why did Paul refer to them? Was vicarious baptism a heresy that threatened the doctrinal purity of the early Church?

Quite simply, Paul used this wrong practice as an illustration to prove a point. It need not be assumed that Paul automatically approves of a practice or condones it simply because he uses it to bring something to our attention. In Acts 17: 28, for example, Paul quotes the Cretan poet Epimenides and the Cilician poet Aratus to bolster his line of argumentation. Now Paul knew the works of these poets well—particularly the writings of Aratus who was from Paul's homeland. Paul is certainly not quoting these poets "in context"—and does not claim to be; he simply finds their phraseology powerful, and utilises it. The quote from Epimenides, "in context", refers to Zeus and not the true God Jehovah! Thus we can see, from just one of several examples, that Paul utilised false statements from heathen literature to illustrate a truth. This undermines the

argument of some vicarious baptists that Paul would not have used a wrong practice to illustrate a Scriptural doctrine. Paul's readers in Corinth *knew* that he did not condone baptism for the dead, therefore he did nothing wrong in using it as an illustration. In a similar way, Paul's audience at the Areopagus in Athens knew that, just because he quoted from the *Phainomena* of Aratus, he was not bound to agree with its every last word.

It is known that several sects (some of them pseudo-Christian) practised baptism for the dead in one form or another. The Marcionites and the Corinthians definitely performed vicarious baptismal ceremonies, and there is some circumstantial evidence that the Essenes did too. It is tempting to suggest that these were the sects to whom Paul was referring in vs. 29, and perhaps in part he was. But this does not clear up all the questions concerning his dialogue.

Paul suddenly confronts his readers with "they who are 'baptised for the dead.'" A logical retort to Paul's statement would be "who?", for he gives no background information or introduction to those he refers to; or at least it *seems* that way. But to suggest this does an injustice to Paul's literary abilities. It must be remembered that Paul was trained at the feet of Gamaliel, grandson of the famed Rabbi Hillel. Such training—which included teaching in the art of argumentation—would have precluded any possibility of Paul suddenly confronting his readers with a set of characters concerning whom they may have known little or nothing. This leads to the conclusion that (a) Paul had already introduced the characters earlier in his sermon, and/or (b) the Corinthian brethren were well acquainted with them and no introduction was needed. It is thought that both possibilities are close to the truth. A closer look at chapter 15 will show that Paul *had* already introduced his readers to the vicarious baptists mentioned in vs. 29, but that his audience were also well acquainted with them anyway.

Before the Scriptural evidence is considered, the writer would like to present a theoretical framework into which the passages referred to can be comfortably housed. To form a theory and then find Scriptures to fit it is a dangerous pastime, and the reader can be assured that this has not been done. Rather, it will make matters clearer to present the framework before the evidence.

- (1) Within the Corinthian ecclesia, an unidentified movement had arisen, the members of which were expounding several unscriptural teachings.

- (2) In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul mentions these individuals, not by name, but by reference to their teachings.
- (3) The teachings of this group were; (a) that only the Church drawn out from among mankind during the Gospel Age would gain salvation, and hence, (b) that those who had died without becoming Christians had lost all hope of salvation, unless living Christians were baptised in their place. Thus, it became possible to become a Christian after death, and sidestep the restriction of Christ's words in John 3.5. This ideology may also have incorporated the Greek thought of a conscious "spirit" leaving the body at death and ascending to Heaven or some other sort of afterlife.

That this movement of thought was both coordinated and objective can be inferred from I Cor. 1. 12, where certain Christians are seen to have a blind allegiance to prominent individuals in the Church. Although these leaders are all known to be sound Christians, it is highly likely that certain unsound individuals also gained a following and enjoyed it. Undoubtedly it was these false teachers who spearheaded the "vicaribaptist" movement at Corinth.

But the first real mention of this sect comes in I Cor. 12. 15. Here, they are spoken of by Paul as denying "the resurrection of the dead". Now this phrase "the resurrection of the dead" is curiously broad in its possible applications. Which resurrection of the dead was Paul referring to? Paul had not visited Corinth for several years, and he may have been unsure as to the exact details of what this sect was teaching. He knows that they are denying the resurrection in *some* way, but he is not sure in *what* way. Hence, he criticises them for denying "the resurrection" and leaves it at that. All that is known for sure is that they were NOT denying the resurrection of Jesus Christ (vss. 12 & 13). Why may Paul have been unsure of the sect's teachings? In the introduction to his letter (1.11) he informs the Corinthian brethren that he was informed of their problems by "Chloe's people" or "the servants of Chloe". We simply do not know how well informed Chloe's servants were concerning these false ideas. Perhaps they just had a vague idea of these erroneous teachings, and passed what little they did know on to Paul.

Life is too short to spend in bickering and strife; love is too sacred to be for ever lacerated and torn by the ugly briars of sharp temper. Surely we ought to be patient with others since God has to show every day such infinite patience towards us.

Vs. 12 of chapter 15 strongly suggests this. Paul asks the Corinthian Christians "how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" Paul just does not understand how they can say such a thing, and the reason for this is that he does not know all their teachings. This is seen again in vs. 29; "... if the dead rise not at all, why are they then baptised for the dead?" It is as if Paul is saying "I do not understand these people. First they deny the resurrection, then they baptise for the dead. Why do they bother baptising for the dead if the dead are not to be resurrected?" If we accept that the heretical teachers mentioned in vss. 12 and 29 are the same, we no longer have to puzzle over their apparently abrupt "introduction" in vs. 29. They had already been introduced in vs. 12!

From the foregoing facts, it seems reasonably safe to make the following deductions:

- (a) that certain pagan and pseudo-Christian sects were practising vicarious baptism.
- (b) that the practice was adopted by some Corinthian Christians, who used it as a means to "save" unbaptised deceased relatives. They were enthusiastic about vicarious baptism because it made their other doctrine—"no salvation outside the Church"—escapable.
- (c) Paul, in his "sermon" on the resurrection in I Cor. 15, uses this practice as an illustration to prove the reality of the resurrection. He does not condone the practice, and by his use of questions indicates that he does not understand the heretics' reasoning on the matter.

Vicarious baptism is of pagan origin and has no place in Christian service. Those who suggest that it is necessary not only read something into the Apostle's words that he never intended, but also nullify Jesus' office as Redeemer. It is He who saves the dead, not their living relatives.

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#### References

1. **UNGER'S BIBLE HANDBOOK.** Merrill F. Unger, Moody Press, 1967.
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It is in prayer that God shows his face to his children, that they have visions of his beauty and glory, that the sweet things of his love come down as gifts into their hearts, and that they are transformed into his likeness.

## THE CALL AND PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

The formation of the Christian Church is the predominant theme of the New Testament. The major part of the four Gospels contains the teachings Jesus gave his disciples to fit them for their role as the founding members of his Church; the Book of Acts relates the early history of its establishment in the Jewish and Greek worlds by the ministry of St. Paul, the Epistles concentrate upon instructions and exhortation relative to the Christian life, and Revelation pictures the ultimate triumph of the Church when its enemies have been overthrown and the object of its calling achieved. This latter factor, the object and purpose of the Church, is one to which singularly little importance has been attached in contemporary theology, but it is one a clear understanding of which is vitally necessary to every dedicated Christian. The common practice of referring to any individual Christian denomination or organisation with its full membership—or to all of them jointly—as “the Church” and equating their membership rolls with that of the “Church of the Firstborn, whose names are written in Heaven”, obscures the fact that from the New Testament point of view the Church includes only those believers in Christ who have consecrated themselves completely to his service by a dedicated life in the positive knowledge that by so doing they are being conformed to his likeness. Such will be associated with him in the eventual evangelising and reconciliation of the world. The Church is a “called out” people, its members those who find their vocation in the service of God, and identify themselves completely with his purpose to eliminate evil from the world and persuade all who can be persuaded to come into harmony with him and take their appointed place in his creation. This is the meaning of the declaration of James at the first Council of Jerusalem “*God visited the nations to take out of them a people for his Name*” (Acts 15. 14). The general evangelical appeal to all mankind, exhorting to conversion and reconciliation, goes on after the completion of the Church, and in fact this completion is the signal for an immensely intensified and widened scope of that appeal, for at its completion the Church is joined with its Lord in heaven and invested with enhanced powers which can never be its possession on earth.

This is the truth that lies behind the many Scriptural allusions to the reign of the saints with Christ, the “marriage of the Lamb”, and so on. “*In the regeneration*” said Jesus “*when the Son*

*of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*” (Matt. 19. 28). Regeneration here means the giving of new life; the function of the Church is to be the medium of that new life to men; the thrones of judgment symbolise the Divine authority with which the Church will execute that duty. “*They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years*” (Rev. 20. 4) says the Revelator, assigning this process in time to the Millennial reign of Christ following his Advent. St. Paul had the same idea in mind when he reminded the Corinthian believers “*do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?*” (1 Cor. 6. 2). The Christian life therefore is not merely a means whereby the individual can assure his personal salvation and attain the felicity of a future life when this one is ended; it is a vocation which must be entered with dedicated loyalty to God in whatever path He indicates is his will, and for the acquirement of qualifications which will fit the individual for continued and increased active service for God in that next life. The Church is a “people for a purpose”, “called according to his purpose” (1 Pet. 2. 9; Rom. 8. 28), and the recognition of that purpose is essential to one who would “*follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth*” (Rev. 14.4).

An apparently casual remark of St. Paul extends this purpose to fields of activity beyond the race of men. “*Know ye not that we shall judge angels?*” he asks (1 Cor. 6. 3). The fact of, and the nature of, sin in the celestial world is only hinted at in the Scriptures, but that there is a time of trial and judgment yet to come for certain celestial beings as well as for man is clearly stated several times. And Christ is definitely to “*reconcile all things to himself whether they be things in earth or things in heaven*” (Col. 1. 20). It is unthinkable that Divine creative activity will ever come to an end, and the eternally close association with the Father and the Son promised to those who “*make their calling and election sure*” (2 Pet. 1. 10) is sufficient ground for expecting that the Church will play an important part in the execution of the Creator’s future plans, whatever they may be.

Many notable Christian thinkers and writers have realised the importance of this element of future purpose in the call of the Church and have left their thoughts on record. Space permits of only one or two quotations.

"We are to be priests and kings. There are vast spaces in the universe that may have to be evangelised or ruled or influenced for righteousness. It may be that important spheres of ministry are needing those to fill them who have learned the secret of victory over the power of Satan. Earth may be the school, the training ground, the testing place for the servants and soldiers of the hereafter. If it became him to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering, it stands to reason that his comrades and soldiers must pass through the same, that having overcome they may sit with him on his Throne."

(Dr. F. B. Meyer: "Call and Challenge of the Unseen" 1917).

"We know not what great works in respect to the future our Creator may have in view but we do know the promise is ours that we shall be like him and see him as He is, and share his glory. Whatever therefore shall be the future activities of the "heirs of all things" we shall be with him and share his work. The sacrificing will be at an end: the reigning, the ruling, the blessing, the assisting, will all have begun, and they will be entirely competent to accomplish the Divine promise that all the families of the earth shall be blessed, that "whosoever will" may come back into full harmony with the Creator and his laws" (C. T. Russell: "The New Creation" 1904).

"Not for our own sakes alone should we long for the return of our Lord and Saviour, but that the earth, now groaning and travailing in pain, may be delivered from the curse. Christ has already in his own Person triumphed over the serpent, and He now waits only for the completion of the company of joint heirs that shall rule with him. It is an idle dream which now possesses so many that the Church is to bring in the Kingdom in the absence of the King. It is inconsistent with the foretold humiliation and sorrow of the Church during the whole of this dispensation in which she is to walk in his footsteps and be perfected by the fellowship of his sufferings. The one great hope for the whole creation, towards which, blindly and unconsciously, all are reaching forward, is the "marriage of the Lamb". It is the hope of the Bride, who shall then be one with the Lord in all his glory, and power, and fulness of blessing" (William Andrews c. 1850).

"When the Gospel is preached again, it may be that Christ will not be the only preacher. If we are of those who have been chosen and redeemed, it may be that we shall be the happy messengers of God's love and mercy to those who are still being purged from their sins, thus entering at once into the eternal passion of God and into the redeeming work of Christ; thus

afflicted, like the Father, in all the sins and afflictions of the unrighteous. It may be through our ministry that the purpose of God will be accomplished. God grant that it may be so, for that surely would be an infinitely diviner service and reward than to sit, clothed in white raiment, striking harps of gold" (Dr. Samuel Cox: "Salvator Mundi" 1877).

The standards set for those who would attain entry into the company of the Church are high. That is only to be expected if its future mission is anything like that suggested above. The first and essential requirement is unreserved dedication to the service of God, of complete and whole-hearted consecration of life, possessions, abilities, everything, to him, to be henceforth administered as a stewardship in his interests. That is what St. Paul had in mind when he exhorted "I beseech you therefore, brethren, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12. 1-2). He touches here on the basic principle of the dedicated life—our transformation from earthly-mindedness to heavenly-mindedness by a process of renewal which is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things become new" (2 Cor. 5. 17). It is to illustrate this truth that the New Testament so many times depicts the entry into this "new life" as a dying to earthly things and a raising again to heavenly things. "We are buried with him by baptism into his 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" (Rom. 6. 4). "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3. 3). The consecrated believer is of necessity dead, not only to evil things of this world which are to be repudiated anyway, but also to many good things of this world, honourable and elevating and benevolent and useful interests, purely on account of his life's dedication to God which fills his hands and his time with active service for God in the world. The very meaning of the word "consecration", which is an Old Testament term, is "to fill the hands". Hence it quickly becomes true of the believer aspiring to inclusion in the Church and ultimate association with Christ in his glory and work that, as Jesus said of such, "they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (Jno. 17. 14). That might appear to the onlookers as a spirit of exclusiveness, or denoting indifference to the troubles and necessities of society, but it is not really so. The consecrated Christian life is tantamount to the position of the medical student or other aspirant to a profession who willingly

gives up much of life's ordinary interests during his youth that he might undergo the training, the instruction, the discipline, necessary to fit himself for his intended vocation. Thus it is with those who would be members of the Church of Christ.

The eventual home of those who thus "endure to the end" and receive "an abundant entrance into the Kingdom" is Heaven. That, of course, is always the hope of every Christian. Ideas as to the nature and location of Heaven vary from individual to individual and much depends upon one's personal interpretation of the symbolic imagery of the Scriptures. The modern idea that Heaven is a "state" rather than a "place" means, when analysed, just nothing. We are living beings needing an environment in which to live our lives and a means of contact with that environment, which is provided by our bodies. "Heaven" is clearly defined in the Scriptures as another world, another sphere of being, in which we shall exist as individuals as truly as now, having communion with fellow-beings and activities relevant to an environment just as truly as now. But the nature of that life and the conditions of that sphere are transcendently superior to those we know now. Paraphrasing the cogent reasoning of the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 15, there is a terrestrial world and terrestrial body, and a celestial world and celestial body. As we now bear the image of the terrestrial, we shall then bear the image of the celestial. But since terrestrial flesh and blood cannot enter the celestial world, being of a different order of creation, we must, at the time of entry, be changed from terrestrial beings to celestial beings. The nature of that change is incomprehensible to us, for as John says in 1 Jno. 3. 2 "it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is". In another vivid picture—2 Cor. 5. 1-4—St. Paul likens the earthly body to a house, an earthly house, in which we live temporarily while looking forward to a celestial house which God is building for us in Heaven. With a swift transition of symbol he changes his thought to a set of clothing; in our desiring that which is from Heaven we do not wish to be "unclothed" but to exchange our present inadequate garments for the better ones which Heaven provides. In no clearer fashion could the Apostle have indicated the radical nature of the change that takes place when at the end of our earthly experience the terrestrial body is discarded and returns to its dust, and we are "clothed upon" with the celestial body with all its enhanced powers and attributes. As Paul so eloquently puts it, "mortality is swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. 5. 4).

The fact that the Church, thus developed, com-

pleted, and "changed" to celestial conditions, is then to be the Divine instrument in the final and crucial era of world evangelisation implies that there must be a time limit to the "call of the Church". There is a point in human history after which entry into the Church will no longer be possible because the Church is complete and God is ready to speak his final word to the "residue of mankind". "The earnest expectation of the creation" said Paul "waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. 8. 19) and in this pithy sentence he enshrines the truth that the promised era of Christ's reign over the world with its progressive elimination of evil cannot begin until his Church is joined to him and ready to take part in this work. Hence the many Scriptural allusions which insist that the first work of the Lord at his Advent is to gather to himself his entire Church and only then reveal himself to the world and commence his reign. It is this consummation of the hope of the Church which is depicted as a royal marriage—the Church is the Bride of the Lamb, to use the symbolism of Revelation, and the time of the wedding feast has come. At this climax in human history the heavenly chorus is depicted singing "Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19. 6-7). Immediately following this wedding feast the symbols change; the Lamb becomes a militant and avenging rider upon a white horse, issuing forth from Heaven to wage battle upon, and defeat, the massed evil forces of earth; the Bride becomes the "armies of heaven", following him and sharing in the work that has to be done.

The Christian gospel has been preached in the world for two thousand years. The commission given to the first disciples was "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16. 15) "Ye shall be witnesses to me" Jesus told them "to the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 1.8). True to that injunction, the evangel of Christ has been carried by word of mouth or by printed page to every part of the inhabited earth, although not all of the earth's millions have accepted or even heard it. It has to be noted that Jesus did not say they would; his disciples were to be witnesses to him and to declare his word in a world-wide manner and this they have done. But this has not been an increasingly successful campaign in consequence of which the whole world has ultimately become Christian, and with no reverses. In some lands the missionary work of one period has had its successes completely blotted out in a later period. Much of the present day Moslem world was predominantly Christian in the early Middle Ages;

large Christian populations existed in China and other parts of Asia and in North Africa in the sixth to eighth centuries. Even the Western world, the world of the white races, where Christianity is nominally accepted, is increasingly rejecting the faith. One might say, hastily, that the two thousand years of preaching has been a failure and the intention of Christ not realised. But there has been no failure. Jesus himself indicated that upon his return at the end of this Age lack of faith in him would still be a prominent factor in the world situation. The most effective result of the witness has been the call and selection of the Church; that work has proceeded throughout the

past centuries quietly, unostentatiously and yet effectively, in full harmony with the Divine intent. With that aspect of the Divine plan an accomplished fact, God will turn to the nations which as yet know him not or will not have him, with the full force of his persuasive power, exerted through the agency of this same Church. Those who have trodden the dark paths themselves will be the ones best fitted to lead sin-sick humanity into the green pastures and by the still waters of the Divine goodness. So it will become literally true that "*the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together*" (Isa. 40. 5) and the triumph of the Church be realised.

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## THE CLEANSING OF ISRAEL

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*"And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me; I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn."* (Ezek. 20.38).

The fact that the modern re-establishment of the sovereign State of Israel, hailed by many as the fulfilment of prophecy and sign of the end of the Age, is inspired largely by political and commercial interests, and that only a minority of the immigrants profess any profound faith in God and the Divine mission of Israel, has fostered the impression that Israel will experience Divine intervention and deliverance whilst still in a condition of unbelief. The miraculous nature of the event, it is argued, will bring about an instantaneous conversion and national acceptance of Christ as Israel's Messiah. It is not so quickly realised that this is not God's way. In all past history deliverance has come in consequence of pre-existing faith; in this present case the high destiny which awaits Israel at the Time of the End demands a people which is already converted and dedicated, ready to enter into that destiny the moment the deliverance takes place. The process of realisation of unworthiness, of repentance, of conversion, of dedication, of preparation for the Millennial work ahead, must surely take place before and not after the Lord and his heavenly forces are revealed for their deliverance and the discomfiture of their enemies. The analogy of the Christian Church applies here. Those who are the Lord's during this present Age must "make their calling and election sure" before and not after their "change" to heavenly glory at the end of the Age and the Advent. So far from the Lord coming to the rescue of an unbelieving nation still living by the standards of this world and trusting in the "arm of flesh", the policies and weapons of the kingdoms of this

world, it is essential that He is revealed for the deliverance of a fully converted and purified "remnant" living in a cleansed land from which the unbelievers have been eliminated. As Zephaniah says, speaking of this very thing, "*In that day . . . I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt be no more haughty . . . I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord*" (Zeph. 3. 11-12).

Always in Old Testament history in this principle enunciated. Continually is the refrain intoned "*Because they rebelled against the word of God . . . therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses*" (Psa. 107). In the early days, the days of the Judges, Israel continually violated the Covenant, and earned the consequent penalties. Only when they turned back and "cried unto the Lord" did he raise up stalwart champions, Othniel, Ehud, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, who delivered them. Later history provides even more convincing examples; Samuel and the Philistines, Jehoshaphat and the Edomites, Hezekiah and Sennacherib (I Sam. 7.7-14; 2 Chron. 20. 12-13; 2 Chron. 32. 7-8). In all these instances the Lord delivered only after Israel had manifested their faith in him for salvation and refrained from taking action in their own strength.

The application of this principle to the last great conflict of the present Age is evident from the principal prophecy relative to the matter, the assault of the forces of Gog and Magog in Ezek. 38/39. Note carefully the implications of what is said. "*Thou (the invaders) shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them*

that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, to take a spoil, and to take a prey" (Ezek. 38.11). In Old Testament days the towns and cities of Israel were encircled by defensive walls and gates whereby invaders could be resisted. The country villages, the "*perazoth*", termed "open villages" or "unwalled villages" in the A.V., had no such protection and when the land was invaded their inhabitants fled to the nearest walled town for protection. This "land of unwalled villages" of Ezekiel is clearly one which has no walled towns, no means of defence. That fact implies that Israel at that time is trusting in the Lord for defence and deliverance and that implies in turn that the unbelievers have been eliminated; they are no longer within the confines of the Holy Land.

This is confirmed and illustrated by a number of allusions in the prophecies. Perhaps the most detailed is that declared by Zechariah. It is generally agreed that the 12th to 14th chapters of Zechariah constitute a vivid account of the conflict of the Last Days, when Israel is assailed for the last time by her enemies and delivered by the active intervention of the Most High. The sequence of events in chaps. 12 and 13 show a time when righteous and God-fearing governors are in control of the land (Zech. 12.5), trusting in God for their strength, followed by a national repentance and calling upon God, in response to which God pours upon them "*the spirit of grace and of supplication*"; yet parallel with this national turning to God there is another element, unbelieving, idolatrous, false prophets, (chap. 13) whom the Lord will remove. "*I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land . . . I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land*" (Zech. 13.2). The outcome of all this is that "*in all the land, two parts shall be cut off and die, but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire and will refine them . . . they shall call upon my name, and I will hear them*" (Zech. 13. 8-9). Who and what are the two parts cut off and the third part left in the land?

The theme of chap. 12 is the rejected Shepherd, rejected at his First Advent and consistently throughout the Age, and still at this late stage in the Second Advent rejected by the unbeliever. Now the Lord is about to come to his ancient people and deliver them according to the old promise, that they should then become "*a light to the nations, that thou mayest be my salvation to the end of the earth*" (Isa. 49.6). But not to those who do not believe! These are in no fit state to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth! Like the rest of mankind, they stand in need of salvation themselves. So two sections

of Israel, the natural seed of Abraham, are rejected out of hand as unfit. And why two sections? Because on that eventful day there will be two sections of unbelievers involved in this matter. First there will be those, constituting by far the greatest portion of the sons of Jacob who live to-day, who have never been fired with the desire to go into the Holy Land and become identified with the new Israel. They remain still in the lands of the Dispersion, whether West or East, Occident or Orient. They have failed to recognise the significance of the times and of their historic mission and so, as at the First Advent, the kingdom of heaven is taken from them. The second element is composed of those who have assembled in the Holy Land but have not partaken of the spirit of the Restoration. Unbelievers still, they see Israel only as one of the political and commercial entities of the world, and the Lord has at present no use for them either. As the threatening clouds gather they will depart for what seem to them to be safer havens—as many from that land are doing even to-day. Only the third part remain, those who have faith in the Divine promise of protection. These are the "remnant" who form the seed of the future.

Zechariah's 14th chapter depicts the final assault on Israel in terms reminiscent of Sennacherib's campaign in the days of Hezekiah. Here the city Jerusalem is representative of the whole land of Israel. The city shall be "*encompassed as in a net*", the meaning of the word "taken" in ch. 14.2. "*Like a bird in a cage*" boasted Sennacherib in his own account of his campaign—now in the British Museum—"I shut him (Hezekiah) up in his holy city of Jerusalem". "*One part shall go forth into captivity and the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city*" says Zechariah, where the word "half" means an undefined portion best expressed as "part". In the preliminary stages of Sennacherib's siege, before Hezekiah took the matter to the Lord, the Assyrian conqueror demanded, and took, the treasures of the Temple and of the richer citizens, the king's wives and the women of his palace—all this is the meaning of verse 2—and then boasted that many Israelites escaped out of the city in the hope of saving their lives but were captured by his army and sent to Nineveh. Here is the same picture; those who have no faith in Divine deliverance abandon the city and nation and are cut off; only those of faith remain.

Much the same theme is advanced in the writings of the prophet Ezekiel. From chaps. 34 to 39 there is a connected foreview of the sequence of events involved in the regathering of Israel at the end of the Age up to the final assault of the powers of evil upon them and the intervention of God for their deliverance, leading then to a sym-

bolic description of their place in the Millennial kingdom from chap. 40 onward. In this sequence chap. 34 introduces the subject with a reference to the unfaithful shepherds of Israel of past centuries and the continued unfaithfulness of some at the Time of the End itself, just as in Zechariah's vision. By the time the prophet gets to chap. 37 he is seeing in vision the process of restoration in its fulness and the Divine spirit coming upon Israel (ch. 37. 9-10, 14). Following that, and not before, chaps. 38 and 39 describe the attack of malevolent forces upon a defenceless but confident Israel, a confidence which is justified when the Lord comes out of his place to nullify all the power and wrath of the attackers (ch. 38. 10-11, 39. 1-8). Now as a prelude to all this ch. 34 tells of the Lord taking action against those in the community of Israel who are still unbelievers, and he describes that action in terms similar to our Lord's parable of the sheep and goats in Matt. 25. "As for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he-goats. Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down the residue with your feet . . . to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue?" (ch. 34. 37-38). Although the nature of the judgment

on the "he-goats" is not explicitly defined here, the chapter goes on to indicate that the "he-goats" are eliminated and "my servant David" appears, to be a prince in Israel—a clear reference to the kingship of Christ at his appearing.

There is not much sign as yet in the land of Israel of that national espousal of God and his righteousness which is demanded by the Scriptures, not much evidence of the existence of a "remnant" which will be the nucleus of a people dedicated to the Lord. But it will come. When the Lord comes to Israel, He must come to a people waiting to receive him and careless of the gathering threats of the rest of the world. They must be ready to take up their historic mission directly the great deliverance has taken place and that can only be if they have been prepared beforehand and declared themselves God's men. Only when Israel is in this attitude as a nation, with all discordant elements removed, can our Lord's words have their fulfilment "*Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord*" (Matt. 23. 37). Until the contemporary peoples of the world begin to see signs of such a national spirit in the land of Israel the end of the Age and the inauguration of the Millennium cannot come.

## PEACE ON EARTH, GOODWILL TO MEN

A Christian  
Message

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men'." (Luke 2. 14).

That was the song of the celestial choir at the Nativity. It came to the wondering shepherds in its fresh simplicity and they accepted it with child-like faith. Perhaps they thought that the promise was to be fulfilled almost at once, or at least in their own lifetime; it must have been a source of perplexity to them all during the next thirty years that nothing of the glorious word had come to pass.

The purpose of God in Christ is still a mystery to all except those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit in consequence of their acceptance into the High Calling, and their walk in the way of consecration. Only to such is it given at this present time to enter into a knowledge of the "deep things of God". And in order to understand how and when it will be true that there is peace on earth and goodwill amongst men, it is essential to understand our Lord's relation to the continuing reign of evil, and the place in this that is occupied by the "Church which is his Body".

These shepherds must have listened to the message with an especial intensity because their land had not known true peace for many years. The background of the people of Judea was one of warfare, captivity, rebellion and severe suffering. Six hundred years earlier they had endured the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and the national disintegration which followed that calamitous event. Even although, seventy years later, they found themselves restored to their own land, it was only as a tributary nation, first under the Persians, later the Greeks, and finally Rome. The attempts of the Greeks to Hellenise them led to revolt after revolt, interspersed with dreadful persecutions. Their temporary success during the Maccabean period, while due largely to the prowess of Judas Maccabeus, was also contributed to by the decay of Greek power before the growing influence of Rome, and the brief period of Jewish independence ended abruptly in the year 63 B.C. when the Roman, Pompey, marched his legions into Jerusalem. From then until the year A.D. 70 there was almost continual rebellion against the invaders. It is little wonder that, despairingly seeking some relief from their

sufferings, "*All men were in expectation*" of the long-promised Messianic deliverer. The terrible consequences of the struggle for independence led by Judas of Galilee, during the childhood of Jesus, culminating in the death of Judas and the crucifixion of four thousand of his followers by the Romans, was only one of those dark happenings which made men long for true peace.

In the midst of these conditions Jesus grew to manhood's estate. Standing head and shoulders above his fellows, men at the first must have looked to him for leadership, in confidence that He would be able to deliver them from the Roman yoke. They expected, as do so many to-day, that "peace on earth, goodwill to men" could only come by the use of armed force by means of which their enemies would be crushed in the same way as they themselves had been subjugated. Great must have been their disappointment when at length the One on whom they had pinned their hopes came back from the wilderness to preach an entirely different message than that they had expected. Trained as they were in the Mosaic Law, which called for "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth", and encouraged to go forth to slay the enemies of the Lord, they utterly failed to understand this new gospel of non-resistance, of love for enemies, of turning the other cheek, of doing good to the ones who were inflicting evil. And in their disappointment and chagrin they turned away and rejected the only One who could have brought them the peace they so much desired.

Many there are to-day who understand no more clearly. The majority still uphold the principle of fighting the forces of evil with the weapons of evil. There is no real comprehension of the true purpose and power of God except in the hearts of the few. Not many appreciate the meaning of Jesus' words "*If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me*". And yet in no other way could the Father pave the way for the Son to take up his destined work as the anointed Priest-King, made "*higher than the heavens*". Christ defeated the sin of the world by accepting it into his love, and at the same time, says the writer to the Hebrews, "*learned obedience through the things that he suffered*". So He became, again as Hebrews declares, a merciful and compassionate High Priest, able to "*have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way*" and, praise God, thus to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.

Men and women at the time of the First Advent could not understand how such a method could avail. Even Jesus' closest associates, the twelve disciples, failed to follow this "more excellent way". There was a strife amongst them,

which should be the greatest in the Kingdom. They wanted to call down fire from heaven in the fashion of Elijah of old to destroy the inhospitable Samaritans. Peter, defending his Master, drew his sword and struck off the ear of the High Priest's servant. The old training and beliefs died hard; it was not until after Pentecost that they began to see the why and the wherefore of the pattern Jesus set for them. Here it was that the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus was first discerned and first made known. It could not have been so proclaimed earlier, for it was here that atonement had been made by Christ Jesus entering into the presence of God and the Holy Spirit sent to the waiting disciples with creative power to transform them into his likeness. That is why their writings afterward gave such clear instruction concerning the meeting of evil and the overcoming of evil by the force of love alone. That was henceforth to be the guiding principle in the lives of true Christians, necessary preparation for their future work in the next Age, when the work of conversion and reconciliation will depend upon the power of the love of God and on that alone. So in this Age that same principle is to be adopted by the Sons of God, both collectively and as individuals.

Collectively—yes, for the members of the true Church in the flesh are to be the salt of the earth; they are to be as lights in the world. It is a grievous thing that no matter how much we may succeed in measuring up to this ideal individually, in our personal lives before God, we so often utterly fail to do it collectively, as a community or as a group. And it is as a community that we are judged by them. No small part of our failure to give an effective witness in the world and win men and women for Christ must be put down to our lamentable failure to manifest among ourselves the standards we preach.

The Apostle Paul was one who well learned the way of Christ. His object lesson at the first was the non-violent resistance of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. He was falsely accused, but he refused to meet evil with the weapons of his persecutors. "*All that sat in the council, gazing steadfastly upon him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel*". How could it have been otherwise, lighted as it was with the indwelling radiance of the Holy Spirit? At his stoning he retained the same disposition and died praying the Lord that He would not lay their great sin to their charge. From the point of view of those around at the time it could be argued that Stephen's death was pointless, unavailing, powerless to accomplish any good. From the standpoint of history that argument is futile and valueless. The power and effect of Stephen's death was

seen a few years later when a bright light blinded with its glare a traveller on the Damascus road, and a voice broke through that proud man's reserve with the fearful question "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*" Had Saul not stood by and witnessed the death of the man whom he helped to condemn he may never have come to that later experience and become a man utterly broken and humbled, moulded into a chosen vessel to do and suffer great things in and for the Name of Jesus. It may well be that we owe the superb power of the Pauline Epistles, and the tremendous legacy Paul left to the Church of after ages, to the faithfulness of the first martyr Stephen.

Little wonder, then, is it that we find St. Paul clearly defining Christ's terms in the words "*Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good*" (Rom. 12. 21). These are the terms of the One who "*loved righteousness and hated iniquity*", realising that it was not yet God's time to restrain evil in the world at large. This Gospel Age is a time in which Christ the Head, and the Church which is his Body, are called to resist evil by non-violent methods, and so receive their training for the work of that coming Day when all evil everywhere is to be removed and banished.

It is a costly way when measured by human standards. It entails sacrificial death, as it did in the case of Jesus, but if we are faithful unto death we shall be raised in the power of the First Resurrection into the glory of the Kingdom. Then, and then only, will it be possible to bring about what so many well-intentioned men are striving by their own efforts to accomplish now—peace on earth, goodwill towards men. The ordinary man, desiring to help his fellows, feels it little less than criminal to stand idle in the present chaos; he is impelled to do all that lies in his

power to crush collective evil, whatever the means he employs. That is because he does not understand God's plan of the ages. The Kingdom of peace and righteousness will never and can never come by man's efforts, but only by the power of God in the person of Christ, the great Mediator, the One who has resisted evil by non-violence. Men will never cause wars to cease; it is only God who can and will do this in his own time and way, making "*wars to cease to the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder. He burneth the chariot in the fire*".

The ministry of affliction plays a very important part in the development of the Church. The example is set before us in 1 Pet. 2. 23 "*When he was reviled, reviled not again, when he was threatened, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously*". It is no use asserting, as some do, that the case of Jesus was different, and that we are called upon to fight evil with weapons He did not and would not use, for the Apostle Paul also says "*Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer, being defamed, we intreat; we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day*" (1 Cor. 4. 12-13). This line of conduct is no sign of weakness; it savours not of compromise and its practical outworking savours both strength and beauty of character.

So peace will come at last. In the meantime it is for us to continue along the narrow pathway, faithful to the increasing light of truth as we endeavour to make our calling and election sure. Always remember that "*there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*" (1 Cor. 10. 13).

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## Little Points in a Big Programme

- (1) A little more love for everybody.
- (2) A little closer cleaving to God's Word as my guide.
- (3) A little wider open purse in helping to support God's cause.
- (4) A little softer heart towards sufferers around me.
- (5) A little more readiness to see the viewpoint of others.
- (6) A little more freedom from the poison of prejudice and ignorance.
- (7) A little better remembering of the Lord's Day (every day) as a day of spiritual privileges.
- (8) A little more time spent in prayer and meditation in the Scriptures.
- (9) A little more obedience to the commands of the Lord in His Word.
- (10) A little sweeter heart towards those who antagonise me.

## A QUESTION OF OWNERSHIP

### 6. Highway to Zion

Part of the tragedy of mankind is that their kingdoms are neither their own nor Christ's; however much they strive for freedom, for perfection, for a Utopian ideal of society, they cannot achieve it but fall back defeated. If the nations of Christendom had practised his gospel of peace, of goodwill to all men, they would never have known the horrors of war, the worse horrors of the concentration camps or the cruelty by which men of power have sought to solve their problems, to silence their critics, or force all minds into one common mould of thought and action which removes the image of God, leaving a servile caricature which can no longer look upwards. The Twentieth century has been described as 'terrible'; an epoch of tragedy in which nothing is expected but what is horrible and destructive, nothing portrayed but what is evil, ugly and degrading. A tailor-made religion to suit such an age is a monstrous and dangerous apostasy in which God is denied, the Bible rejected, the scientific skills of man exalted into an egotistic mastery of the elements, of man straddling the earth like that Colossus which the prophet Daniel saw brought down to earth, crushed to dust and blown away as though it had never existed.

Society has never at any time presented a very pleasant picture to the thoughtful observer. Behind the glittering facade have lain the ugly evidences of a ruthless selfishness and the pride which rides before a fall. Today's face does not look any better. There is something about it from which the lover of all things beautiful, noble and good report must turn with loathing and amazement at the readiness of men and women to fall for the propaganda by which the evil genius of the world leads them captive at his will. Historians have painted the past but John the Divine drew the portrait of the present in the picture of the Babylonian queen who insisted "I sit a queen and am no widow and shall see no sorrow" (Rev. 18. 7-8), yet in one unexpected day her troubles came upon her until nothing was left of her kingdom. Jesus in his message to the church of the last days was no less sharp in a vivid portrayal of one "rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing," yet in the Lord's eyes was "wretched and miserable, poor, blind and naked, neither hot nor cold but luke-warm," almost apathetic its defence of him and his gospel. His counsel to these semi-worldlings to buy of him gold, eye-salve and clean raiment will hardly be heeded as they are spewed out of his system as something

unwholesome. So the world of men reflects little credit on all the skills, gifts and opportunities which have come their way. Where much is given much is expected. In a way some have done their best with the highest motives. All is not utterly lost. There is at the heart of mankind a love of goodness, a strong desire for better things; a fretted, battered rope of faith to which the best still cling, hoping that it will bring them to their desired haven. They have broken every rule in the book, defied Divine authority, yet there is something about them which moves the compassion of God to save them in their extremity. That they have been willing and unwilling victims of evil, snared, deceived and half destroyed by foes too strong for them, arouses a pity which will plead for them at the bar of judgement.

Looking upon this great scenario as it unrolls from its idyllic beginning to its dramatic end, the spectator may be forgiven for asking Why? It was a question put by Israel to their prophet Isaiah. They too had cause to question their destiny in the roughness of their experiences, often forgetting that they brought about a lot of their troubles by ignoring the laws given to them, finding other gods and seeking more enticing pleasures in their worship. To them came the answer and the caution "*Woe to him that striveth with his Maker! Shall the clay say to the Potter, what makest thou?*" (Isiah. 45. 9). The illustration of the potter's power over the clay is more than a question of ownership. It is utter dependence upon the will of another and submission to his choice. Either the vessel is to his liking and remains whole, useful, and treasured, or it is flawed, broken down and remade into a better thing. Through the last of the prophets comes a rebuke, "*Your words have been stout against me. You have said it is vain to serve God and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance and walked mournfully (or humbly) before God?*" They saw the proud happily enjoying the seats of the mighty, arrogant, high-handed, high-minded and self-righteous. The criminal got away with his crime and those who made a farce out of religion prospered. It was and is enough to raise questions, to create doubts, to cause offended faith to turn away frustrated. Times change but human nature does not nor will nor can until that period is reached when all will go into reverse. The same prophet saw evil and the consequences of evil consumed as stubble. Then would be seen the difference between the righteous and the wicked,

for both would reap what they had sown and the just rewards of both would be seen as evidences that in the long run God has the final word. (Malach. 3). This last messenger had also a last word for the faithful remnant who do not waver but spoke to one another of the things which warmed their hearts, loving God—honouring things which so delighted his ear he had a book of remembrance written before him, their names recorded, their lives precious to him were always before him. *"They shall be mine saith the Lord of Hosts in the day that I make up my jewels."* It is a dazzling prospect for the few, those men and women more precious than rubies, unwaveringly faithful, polished and transformed by Divine wisdom in the harsh world of experience until they shine like the sun, bright gems to be worn on the heart or the head of the all-glorious Majesty which created, owns and directs the destiny of man to his own appointed climax and conclusion.

"There is a destiny that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will." Man cannot always fight with God nor will he want to continue his own way when at last the obscuring veils of ignorance are removed, when the scales are fallen from blind eyes and the goodness of God is seen in all its richness and benevolence. The real peace and happiness of man, his total well-being, lie in unity, harmony and appreciation of all that God is and does. Sooner or later the lesson not learned readily will be forced upon the nations by a humiliation and defeat which will never be forgotten. He who will not be ruled by the rudder must be taught by the rock. God is Master, Maker and Owner and not man. *"I am the Lord. There is no other God beside Me. I have made the earth and created man upon it."*

The statement is written in the rocks, in sea and stars, in the changing seasons, in the adaption of man to the earth and the earth to man. Those who have already learned to trust the Maker and lover of man have ceased to question. They lean on Almighty strength. They love with all their heart, mind and strength. Their expansive love like his takes in all creation. Reverence, respect, tolerance, forgiveness and reconciliation are the hall-marks of the children of God; the credentials of those who have been made ambassadors for Christ. They must go on to the end, the end of this world, deploring its conditions and the inevitability of its crash. They must go on to the end of this life, however long or short it be, yielding themselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead; outlook, thought, purpose, words and actions under the control of the love and Spirit of God, who having begun the good work in a yielded life will never let go until He has finished

the work to the mutual satisfaction of both. It is a life of separation, of isolation from the world and ways of the world. There is almost a command to "Come out of her and be separate!" Paul also exhorted *"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them."* (Eph. 5.11). The open, honest, healthy life lived in opposition to the evils in the world is a wholesome contrast. To shun its brutalities, to avoid its intrigues, to make no compromise with its chicanery, to maintain a moral soundness in the contagion of its sensual pestilence and the plague of its money-hunting, pleasure loving society is a silent rebuke to the self-seeker.

That has not always been enough. From time to time men of God have arisen to administer a salty rebuke to the wayward, to call a halt to the lack of justice, to censure bad behaviour, to hold a mirror before the false face displayed for truth. For lack of the moral courage to speak out many heedless young lives have been thrown away. So long as those who have knowledge and love in them to instruct, to warn and to win, they have the responsibility not only to live it but to preach the life-saving word, *"Not with eye service as men pleasers but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart"*.

The end product of all experience is the will of God for Man. The selection of the saints or the elevation of a chosen few from terrestrial life to a celestial inheritance is not all there is of God's Plan of the Ages. It takes in the whole race of man, erring and unworthy though they be. Jesus Christ gave his life a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. That clause makes provision for life, the continued life of man on the earth under better conditions and new management. The law will still be in operation, no longer in weighty tomes of judicial science, or graven on tables of stone but written on the tablets of the heart. It will be an essential part of his being, as close as breathing, as natural as any other of his senses, needing not the offices of a priest or an interpreter. The simplest will not be able to make a mistake, for *"I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts, and will be their God and they shall be my people. They shall teach no man his neighbour or every man his brother saying 'Know ye the Lord:' for they shall all know me from the least unto the greatest. I will be their God and they shall be my people. I will forgive and they will sin no more."* (Jer. 31. 33-36). *"Then will I turn to the people a pure language that they may call upon the name of the Lord to serve him with one consent."* (Zeph. 3.9). Originally a forecast for unfaithful Israel the words apply to all people since all nations,

kindreds and tongues have been brought within the boundaries of the kingdom of God. The forecast implies a set time for such a change in the heart and mind of all peoples. Quoting these words in his letter to the Hebrews the Apostle who took the Gospel to all nations, gives the reason. "*Now that which is decayed and waxes old is ready to vanish away.*" He saw the end of an era of tuition and the beginning of a new Age which is now itself in a state of decline, ready for removal that a better and nobler way of life may succeed the failures of the past. If the law was the schoolmaster to bring them to Christ then Christ is the Headmaster to bring them to the full stature of manhood, to the final grade; the ideal man recreated in the image of God. It is as

though man sets out with a clean sheet, with everything to learn.

Spotted, stained, torn, crumpled, written in blood and tears as that history book has been, it has been a story of increasing knowledge and maturity. When at length the earth is filled with the knowledge and glory of God and every critical voice is silenced, and all tumults stilled, it will be the final triumph of love, the brimming fulfilment of the law to which all people will sing with heartfelt praise from the outermost bounds of heaven and earth. Then will the "*kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.*" (Rev. 11.15).

THE END

### The Millennium

"Step about fifty years into the Millennial age, and take a view. The blessings of peace and wise government by *perfect* rulers, in whose hearts selfishness has no place, have wrought wonders: they have transformed the world; the people are happy, industrious and contented; the idle rich are gone, the unemployed poor are gone, "walking delegates" and breeders of discontent are gone; Love and Wisdom and Justice and Power are in control, under the name of the Kingdom of God. Education is general; for, under the new order, wastes are saved and all have an abundance, and that with fewer hours of labour; besides, wisdom is general, and saves woeful waste, while yielding increased comfort. Aside from climatic changes, the wisdom of perfect rulers is causing the earth to yield great increase in quantity as well as in quality of food. Machinery now is marvellous and the results benefit all the people. Health is good, proportionately, as people obey the laws of the kingdom; and none now die except the wilfully perverse, who resist all the beneficent arrangements provided for their welfare, now and everlastingly."

(selected)

The Master has himself served, and knows all the difficulties of the service. It gives a master great power over his workmen when they know he is not a mere amateur in the thing itself; not merely master because he has money enough to employ them, but is a master who has done the work well and thoroughly, and joins them in the work, saying, "Come and work with me; what you do not know, I will show you." It is such a Master whom we serve.

### Satan bound

"When Satan no longer has power to deceive men and to put good for evil and evil for good; when the eyes of their understanding have been opened to see and appreciate "the true Light,"—until "every man that cometh into the world" has been thus enlightened (John 1. 9; 1. Tim. 2. 6); when the knowledge of the Lord fills the whole earth as the waters cover the depths of the sea (all *covered*, but some more deeply than others); when there shall no longer be necessity to teach every man his neighbour, saying, "Know the Lord," because *all* shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest (Jer. 31 34); when the Lord's kingdom shall have come and his will is done on earth as it is done in heaven—instead of the message of the Gospel being limited to a few, all will know the plan of God; and the evidences of its truth will be so clear and convincing that none will have excuse for disbelief; for the conditions will be such that doubt would be more difficult than is belief at present. Nevertheless a personal acceptance of "the way" (Christ) and of the conditions of the New Covenant will be required of each individual thus enlightened."

(selected)

Daniel was a man of power, and because he was prayerful he was powerful. His radiant witness made its impression on all around. The threats of men terrified him not, for God was on his side. Neither could he be bribed, for God was his all in all. His humble heart soared above these things and he could speak with calm fearlessness to the kings of Babylon, because of the exceeding glory of Jehovah.

(Alfred Mathieson)

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