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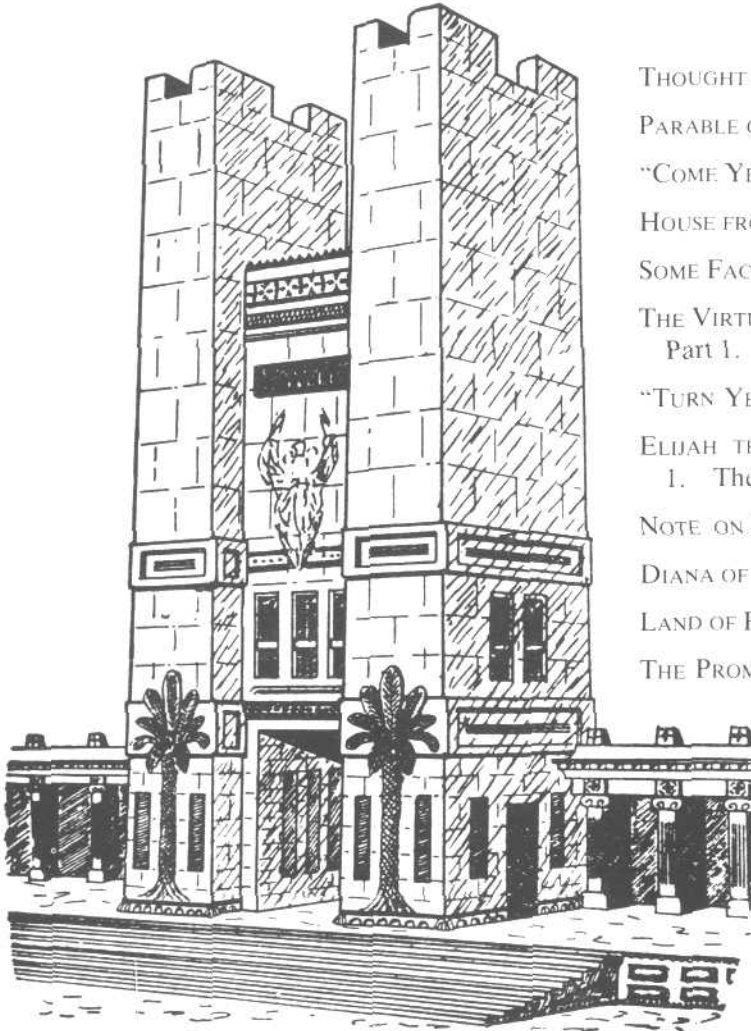
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Next Issue March 1st

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

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

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Thought for the Month

"The glory of young men is their strength and the excellency of old men is the grey head" (Prov. 20.29)

For a considerable time now Government statistics are tending to show that during the next two decades the number of elderly people in this country will tend to increase and of young people to decrease. There is going to be a swing in the direction of age. The commercial element in society is already awake to this development and the impact of advertising will change accordingly. Now the churches are beginning to take notice and realise that the emphasis placed upon "youth activities" during the last two generations or so has been at the expense of attention not only to the needs but also to the contributions of the elderly in church life. Maybe closer adherence to the precepts of Scripture—not so noticeable nowadays as it might have been—could help. There is a place and function in the life of Christian communities for young and old, as says the text above quoted ("beauty" of old men in the A.V. is more correctly rendered excellency, honour, majesty) and the community which ignores that fact suffers. The tendency is to forget the contribution given and work done in past days by the elderly, when they themselves were young and active, and ignore the contribution and work in other, less active but just as necessary, fields now that they are no longer so. Jesus touched on an important truth when He told his disciples, themselves in the twenties, and "raring to go", "I send you forth to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour; other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours" (Jno. 4.38). As each generation of youthful enthusiasts goes out to engage in whatever service for the Lord they have elected to undertake, they do well to reflect that if their predecessors, now in the later stages of life, had not laboured as they did labour, the work would not be there for these enthusiasts to do. And the knowledge and experience of the elderly can with great

profit be brought into play in the execution of that work. "With the ancient is wisdom, and in length of days understanding" said the old patriarch Job (12.32), to which his friend Eliphaz the Arab rejoined thoughtfully "with us are both the greyheaded and very old men, much elder than thy father" (Job 15.10). Perhaps those old philosophers have a message for the Christian church of this Twentieth century.

NOTICES

New features for 1988. Commencing in this issue is a three-part series entitled "A Virtuous Woman" in which a theme based on the picture in Proverbs 31 of an industrious wife draws an analogy with the relationship between the Lord Christ and his Church, symbolically denominated in the New Testament as his Bride.

An Old Testament study cast in quasi-narrative form, "Elijah the Tishbite" also makes its appearance in this issue and will run throughout the year.

The series of cameo pictures of the life and work of St. Paul will continue through this year as the story unfolds.

Expression of thanks. It is opportune at the beginning of the year to express our sincere appreciation of the donations made by our readers towards publishing expenses. From personal knowledge we are aware that there are some who are honestly unable to contribute to the cost for one reason or another but love to receive the journal and find it helpful; the gifts of others better able to help makes it possible to meet the desires of such. We on our part take care that copies are sent only to those of such who are genuinely interested so that no one's gift is wasted.

Gone from us



Bro. E. Haslam (Warrington)
 Bro. E. E. Martin (Australia)



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

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO DEBTORS

Luke 7.36—47

This Pharisee was a righteous man, one who held sin and every manifestation of sin in a very correct abhorrence. One of his favourite texts was that spoken by the prophet Habakkuk (1. 13) "*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil*"; in every affair of life he endeavoured to keep himself undefiled by contact with the sinful and the unclean. He believed in the coming of Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom and he was sure that when Messiah did appear He would look for those who had remained true to the Pharisaic traditions and could stand before him in the integrity of their own righteousness, model keepers of that Law which was at the first given to Moses. Such men, the Pharisee believed, would be welcomed into the Kingdom; the sinful and the unclean would be unceremoniously ejected, and after that, life would never again hold anything to besmirch or defile the purity of God's own people.

Now he had invited this new young prophet of Nazareth to dine with him. It was not necessarily that he believed Jesus to be the Messiah. Rather he had been much more impressed with his bearing and his words than had his brother Pharisees and he wanted to know more. It looked very much as if this young enthusiast was in the tradition and spirit of the old Hebrew prophets and the Pharisee felt that he owed it to himself to explore the matter further. He probably prided himself a little that he was not prejudiced or bigoted or dyed-in-the-wool as were so many of his brother Pharisees. God had undoubtedly spoken in the past by his servants the prophets and history was witness to the fact that if Israel had taken a little more notice of those prophets the nation might not now have been reduced to its present straits. Moses had told their forefathers what would befall them if they forsook their covenant and Moses' prediction had undeniably come to pass. This young man without doubt possessed a clear understanding of the sinful condition of Israel and He was not afraid to voice his opinions; it could very possibly turn out that here was the leader for whom all right-thinking men were looking and if so it would be a good thing to get better acquainted with him right at the outset. So the Pharisee invited him home to dinner.

So far so good. He had brought in a few friends, Pharisees of the more liberal turn of mind like himself, and they were gathered round his table reclining in the customary manner, facing the table, leaning on the left elbow, with the feet outside forming a kind of outer ring. The meal proceeded, servants flitting to and fro attending to the needs of the guests, whilst round the table grave question was followed by equally grave answer. Simon the

Pharisee rubbed his hands with satisfaction; things were going well. His guest was certainly coming up to expectations.

There was a slight disturbance at the farther end of the room where it opened out on to the central courtyard. Simon did not take any notice. In conformity with custom his courtyard was open to anyone who wished to linger there awhile, in the shade, and perchance catch a glimpse of the prophet or just satisfy their curiosity by watching the feast. As befitted a Pharisee who took his profession seriously, there would be a certain amount of provision of plain food out there for whoever felt hungry, for hospitality to the traveller and kindness to the poor were incumbent upon Pharisees. But he pursed his lips somewhat as the slight form of a woman emerged from the group in the courtyard and came forward towards Jesus where He sat. It was not her sex which brought Simon's brows together in disapproval; it was his recognition of her identity, a woman known as a prostitute in the town. Had he consulted his own inclination, he would probably have ordered her away from the house, but to do so at this moment would have been a breach of etiquette to his guests and bring an element of dishonour upon his head. Frustrated and impotent, he watched as she knelt down behind the circle, right at the feet of the principal guest. This was altogether too bad; the woman had no sense of decency. Relying on the unwritten code which she knew Simon would not break, she was taking advantage of this opportunity to bring herself to Jesus' attention. He waited, tensely, for Jesus to notice her, his fine eyes to go hard and cold, his voice chill and severe, to condemn her and bid her remove her defiling presence from the house. The Prophet of God could so easily do what he himself could not do, and so he waited expectantly.

Jesus seemed slow to observe. He was still talking earnestly with the other guests. Simon, at the other side of the table, could give his attention only to the woman. Everything else was a blur; his eyes were fixed only on her, so near to Jesus' feet. Shamelessly, like all such women, she had removed her veil and allowed her long tresses to fall down around her shoulders. She was weeping, sobbing uncontrollably with overpowering grief, in the intensity of her emotion grasping convulsively at the Lord's ankles. Perceiving that her tears were falling upon his feet, she bent her head to the floor and used her flowing hair to dry them; from the recesses of her clothing taking a small phial of perfume, she opened it and poured its contents over them, filling the room with a fragrance it had

perhaps never known before. The buzz of conversation had died down now; the assembled guests were all looking, with various expressions of disapproval or repugnance, at that crumpled figure on the floor. Only Jesus appeared to be unconcerned at her presence. He went on quietly talking, making no movement either to encourage or discourage her ministrations.

Looking at his serene face, Simon was attacked by a sudden doubt. "This man" he thought to himself, "if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner". He could have understood and approved Jesus receiving this kind of homage from a devout woman, but—if He were indeed a prophet—if He indeed had that extra-human knowledge which was the hall-mark of the prophets of God—why did He not shrink from that defiling touch, refuse the offering of that perfume which itself was probably the reward of sin, command the woman begone? Had he made a mistake in his assessment and was Jesus not the man of God he had imagined him to be? Simon looked down at the woman, distastefully, then back to Jesus, to find those candid eyes fixed full on him. He waited, wondering.

The quiet voice broke the silence. "Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee". He felt instinctively that this was going to be a momentous word. On the one part he feared what was to come, on the other he felt there was something he had not yet grasped and he wanted to know what it was. There was something in Jesus' attitude which told him the situation was not so easily resolved as he would like to think. And he wanted to know; more than anything else he wanted to know what was the power behind Jesus. More humbly perhaps than he had ever spoken in his life before, he met Jesus' eyes and replied "Master, say on".

The room was very quiet now. The guests had all ceased eating and talking and were giving close attention. Probably more than one of them had had the same inward thought as had Simon, and were each looking upon Jesus with varying degrees of cynicism or speculation according to their respective measures of sincerity. Even the woman had restrained her outward grief, and remained in her recumbent posture, listening intently to the calm voice.

"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors". A story! the atmosphere became electric. No surer means of obtaining rapt and earnest attention. "The one owed five hundred pence" (denarii) "and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?"

Simon was not quite sure what connection this hypothetical case had with the situation before

him, but he was prepared to be honest. "I suppose" he said—the Greek word does not imply doubt or dubiousness, but the reaching of a conclusion based on the evidence presented, as though one would say "I consider the answer is thus and so"—"I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most". Came the answer, in tones of quiet approval, "Thou hast rightly judged".

Now for the first time Jesus turned himself about and looked directly upon the woman behind him. Who can doubt that she lowered her head in shame before that countenance of sinless purity? The level voice went on. "Seest thou this woman?" That was a hard one for Simon. He had been only too painfully aware of her presence ever since she entered his house and now Jesus was talking as if he could hardly have been expected to notice her. Yes, Simon did see this woman: he only wished he could truthfully say he did not. But the next words shattered him completely.

"I entered into thine house. Thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment".

A slow flush of embarrassment crept into Simon's face. His fellow-Pharisees were looking at him curiously. He realised, now, that he had under-estimated the man before him. Knowing him as one of the labouring classes, born and bred among the peasantry of Galilee, it had just not occurred to Simon that the courtesies normally extended to guests in his own walk of life were just as much in place with respect to Jesus. It was customary for the host to provide water and servants for the cleansing of guests' feet upon entry to the house; as a mark of special honour the host might even perform the washing operation himself. Some reluctance to treat this Galilean peasant as on the same level as his Pharisee friends must have caused Simon to omit this formality, doubtless excusing himself on the ground that the peasantry were not so scrupulous in such matters and might even be embarrassed at the service. Every guest normally received a kiss of welcome from the host but somehow Simon could not bring himself to this act of close fellowship; there was, of course, always the question of his own friends' reaction to his too ardent espousal of the young prophet. It was true that he had omitted to have a servant anoint the visitor's head with fragrant oil, but that was pure forgetfulness in the stress and hurry of the occasion. The unspoken excuses faded from his mind again as he became conscious of Jesus' gentle regard and realised that all those excuses counted for nothing. The plain fact was that this woman,

sinner though she be, had performed all the duties which he had neglected to fulfil, and performed them with an infinitely greater ardour and sincerity than he could ever have displayed. He looked again at the woman and was bitterly ashamed.

Jesus' voice was very gentle now. "*Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven: for she loved much; but to whom little be forgiven, the same loveth little*". So He had known all the time! The realisation came in a flash to Simon. "*Her sins, WHICH ARE MANY*". Jesus did not mitigate or seek to gloss over the woman's sinful state. He knew her for what she was the moment she entered the room and yet had made no attempt to restrain her in her act of love. So He was a prophet after all! Simon was conscious of a great relief on that score. He had not after all misjudged his man and perhaps his own lack of courtesy would be over-looked. But what was this about forgiveness of sins? Jesus had turned again to the woman, listening fearfully and perhaps only half comprehending what was being said. This time his eyes were ineffably tender. "*Thy sins are forgiven. Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace*". And she got to her feet and went out of the house to a new life.

It says much for the sincerity of those Pharisees there gathered that they did not break out at once into impassioned protest. They did not even question Jesus' words outwardly. They asked themselves, each man in his own mind, "*Who is this who even forgives sins?*" There was something in all this which was new to them and they were prepared to reserve judgment. It would seem that Simon had collected some most unusual Pharisees there that day and it might well be that they all learned a most unexpected and unusual lesson.

What of the wider implication? There is much in this incident to throw light upon that other statement of Jesus "*They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*" (Luke 5. 31). Simon the Pharisee is not the only one who, priding himself upon his own rectitude and cleanliness of life, has come to God in a smug and self-satisfied attitude of mind which is none the less frightening although it is characterised by perfect sincerity. We do not necessarily have to demonstrate our repentance by floods of tears and an agony of self-reproach, as did the woman. A lot depends upon the individual temperament and intensity of feeling; some are less outwardly demonstrative than others. But we do all have to realise that of ourselves we have little wherewith to commend ourselves before God and we all come short of his holiness in a variety of ways. The woman's sin outraged and shocked the conventions and customs of the day and violated the writ-

ten law; the Pharisees' selfrighteousness outraged the holiness of God and violated his moral law, and in the sight of Jesus there was no difference between the two kinds of sin. They both needed repentance, conversion and forgiveness. The difference was that the woman realised her need of forgiveness, was repentant, and went out a child of the Kingdom. In the eyes of Jesus the whole of her sin was as though it had never been. The Pharisee had not yet realised his need, had not yet come as a suppliant to the feet of the Saviour, and therefore was yet in his sins. Not for him had the golden vista of the Kingdom gleamed through the partly opened gates.

Perhaps it did in after days. It is noteworthy that in all this story there is no word of reproach for Simon, only the implied reproof at his omissions. It may well be that he, and maybe some of his fellows at that meal that day, became followers of Jesus and eventually followed the "woman a sinner" into the light of the Kingdom. That there were some such, even among the bigoted Pharisees, who thus espoused the cause of Jesus, we know; perhaps this was the beginning of the way for some of them.

As in so many instances, this story illustrates the Divine principle "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, wherefore turn ye from your evil ways, and live ye". The passion for the punishment of the wicked which characterised all good Jews and still characterises far too many good Christians has no counterpart in the counsels of God. He is much more interested in the reclamation of the wicked than their condemnation, and if there is any capacity for repentance at all He is going to explore that capacity to the full before He permits condemnation to come. "*The Son of Man*" said Jesus "*is come to seek and to save that which was lost*". Both woman and Pharisee were lost; Jesus came to save both.

Neither Simon nor the woman appear in the Gospel story again. It is sometimes suggested that the woman was Mary of Magdala, the one who loved her Lord with so fervent a passion that her faith held when that of all others had well-nigh failed, who became the acknowledged leader of the little band of women during the dark days after the crucifixion when even the disciples had fled into hiding. But there is no proof; only the fact that the character and temperament of Mary of Magdala as revealed in the Gospels harmonises very well with this brief picture of this repentant woman.

The incident in the house of Mary sister of Lazarus at Bethany, recorded in Matt. 26, Mark 14 and John 12, is a totally different one and must not be confused with this story in Luke. This one was at the beginning of our Lord's ministry and took place in Galilee; that one was just before his

crucifixion and occurred near Jerusalem. The only similarities in the two stories are the use of a phial of perfume and the fact that the host's name was Simon, a very common name in Israel anyway. There is no foundation whatever for connecting

the sister of Lazarus with the woman who came to Jesus on that memorable day, weighed down by the burden of her sin, and went out a free woman, rejoicing in the glorious liberty of the children of God.

COME YE APART

The Twelve had returned from their first extended missionary journey, spiritually refreshed but physically wearied, and Jesus knew it.

"Come ye apart . . . and rest awhile"; so spake the Master to the tired but eager men who stood around him that special day. What a time they had had since He had sent them out two by two! How they had been paired off for this service we cannot know, but two by two they had journeyed forth and passed through many cities and villages of Israel, calling on men and women everywhere to repent, to confess their sins, and look up to God for help and understanding for their day. What a spate of stories they had to tell of men who had received them well, of others who had scorned their words and rejected their appeals. And of the suffering souls from whom they had cast out demonic spirits, and of the ailing folk they had anointed with healing oil and made them well. (Mark 6, 7-13). But, oh dear! Why did the thronging passing crowd press them so? Why must they intrude just at this hour? Why could they not have the Master's ear for once undisturbed?

Did some slight gesture of impatience or resentment show upon their face, or in that effort to retain, or even to regain their bodily equilibrium? We cannot say. But Jesus had seen it all, and understood right well how eagerness and resentment might walk hand-in-hand.

Noting all these little movements He said to them, "Come ye away into a quiet place by yourselves and rest awhile." (Mark 6, 31). Boarding a ship anchored near at hand, they found, upon the rippling waters of the lake, the quiet hour they desired to unload their well-stored minds and hearts. And surely Jesus listened patiently and interestedly to all they had to say, turning first to this, then to that member of the eager company.

How true is this little episode to the throb of life for you and me in our little crowded day. Perhaps we too may have been seeking to find some hearing ears, or to pour the oil of gladness into some burdened heart. And perhaps our words have been received with gratitude, or perhaps—a more saddening experience—they have been laughed to scorn, or rejected with a superior curl of the lip. In any case this thronging world with some one or

more of its many toys comes thrusting in—the daily Press, the Radio, the business tie, the family ailment or the common task—so that we cannot get the opportunity to unburden our hearts as we would. We have wanted to tell Jesus all about the episode—how we had been overjoyed or saddened by the experience, but ever as we sought to frame our prayer some pressing thing would thrust itself upon our service and attention, and prevent us from reaching the Master's ear.

Oh, then, for that power to hear, in our inner ear, the Master's words "Come ye apart . . ."! How beautifully the poet has caught the spirit of our Master's watchful eye and loving care.

"Come ye yourselves apart and rest awhile

*Wearied, I know it, of the press and throng;
Wipe from your brow the sweat and dust of toil,
And in My quiet strength again be strong.*

Come ye aside from all the world holds dear,

*For converse which the world has never known;
Alone with Me, and with My Father here;
With Me and with My Father, not alone.*

Come, tell Me all that you have said and done,

*Your victories and failures, hopes and fears;
I know how hardly souls are wooed and won;
My choicest wreaths are always wet with tears."*

We cannot go with Jesus to ride the ocean's wave for privacy, nor may we always have another quiet room where we can retire to be alone with him, but there is a secret of retiring into a place apart which we may learn if we apply ourselves thereto; each child of God is a living temple of God—he has within his heart—in the inner man—a sanctuary of the soul.

According to his consciousness of these deeper realities will that sanctum of his soul take on the sense of an actuality, and in proportion thereto become a retiring place in which to meet the Lord. The old Quaker practice of retiring inwards to the Holy Light was along the right lines. No spoken words would necessarily escape the lips, but communion, both sweet and strengthening, resulted therefrom. So with us, the more momentary inward turning to the Lord, the unspoken trembling prayer, and the "aloneness" with him is complete.

HOUSE FROM HEAVEN

That the terrestrial and celestial natures are separate and distinct, each appertaining to its appropriate sphere of life and inappropriate to the other, is not always appreciated as clearly as it should be. In former ages the conception that the soul inhabits the body until death, and then floats off into the celestial or nether regions until Judgment Day, when at the resurrection it is re-united with its body, rather beclouded the subject. Perhaps it is better understood nowadays that the real man, the real identity, so to speak, must of necessity be manifested in this terrestrial world through the medium of an organism, adapted to the terrestrial environment, perceptive of the environment by means of the five senses, supported by the air, water, food and so on of the environment. In a very true sense he is made, as was Adam in the Eden story "of the dust of the earth" into which was inbreathed "the breath of life" and so "man became a living soul" (Gen. 2.7). Logically enough, therefore, it must follow that life in the celestial world is manifested through an organism, to use the term, adapted to that environment, responsive to it, with sense perception appropriate to it. Because, scripturally, man is made "a little lower than the angels" (Heb. 2.7, Psa. 8. 4-5) it follows that the nature of intelligent beings in the celestial world must differ fundamentally from human beings and that the terrestrial body with its particular type of organic structure can have no place in that world.

The Apostle Paul makes this clear in 2 Cor. 5. "We know" he says "that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven, that being clothed" ("really clothed" is literal sense of the Greek) "we shall not be found naked . . . not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. 5. 1-4). The body is likened to a house in which one dwells; the earthly body is only of service whilst one dwells upon this earth. At death that body is of no further use; it returns to its dust and the atoms of which it was composed are distributed all over the earth to enter into new chemical combinations and perhaps into other living creatures. But we Christians, says Paul, you and I, are "clothed upon" in the resurrection with a new, celestial body, adapted to the new environment of heaven. To stress this fundamental principle he states categorically in 1 Cor. 15. 30 "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God". In this he anticipated his brother-Apostle John, who, half a century later, penned the words "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" (1 Jno. 3.2). That statement implies in the first place that when that time comes we shall not be as we are now, bodies of flesh and blood, for it certainly does "appear" what we are now. John says that while in the flesh we are incapable of visualising or imagining the celestial body and the celestial land because we have no mental powers capable of appreciating it. We can only use human, terrestrial, analogies such as golden streets, white robes, harps and trumpets, which is how Christians have pictured that land from the dawn of the Age. In the second place John tells us that "we shall be like him", our Lord, for "we shall see him as he is". That implies, when one comes to think of it, that no man in the flesh, no man existing as a terrestrial being, can behold the celestial risen Christ with human eyes. The man must himself have become a citizen of the celestial world before he can behold "the King in his glory".

It was to stress this cardinal principle that St. Paul compiled his memorable 15th Chapter of First Corinthians, linking the fact of eternal life by means of a resurrection from the dead with the two separate orders of existence to either of which the sons of men can conceivably attain. He contrasts these two orders, the natural and the spiritual, the terrestrial and celestial, in such a manner that there need not be any ambiguity of thought or expression. First of all he draws the analogy of differences in the natural, terrestrial, world, differences with which all are familiar. Starting with a loaded question "how are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?" he cites the analogy of a seed which is sown. "That which thou sowest is not quickened (awakened to life) except it die". The production of the seed (wheat or other grain, he says) involves the death, disintegration, of the plant which bore and nourished it. Only the seed is left, but it is the repository of life. "Thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain". God provides the new body. "God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body". The new plant arising from that seed is God given, having nothing in its physical composition carried over from the old wheat-stem which had died. This, of course, is what 2 Cor. 5.1. implies; the old earthly body discarded at death and the new heavenly body received at resurrection.

From this he goes on to another aspect. In God's creation there is variety, different kinds of living creatures each adapted to a particular environment and incapable of existing in any other. Even on this planet earth this is the case. "All flesh is not

the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds" (vs. 39). Each of these is adapted to, and able to live in, its own world, but not in the others. The beast lives its life on the land, the fish in the depths of the sea, and the bird in the air above the earth. The fish could only live in the air by becoming a bird, a "change" of the nature indicated by Paul a little farther on in vs. 51. On the foundation of this analogy he comes in vs. 40 to his climactic point: "There are also celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another". In just the same manner that the sentient life of the beast, the fish, the bird, is manifested through the body it possesses, one designed to suit its environment, its world, whether that world be land, water or air, so must the life of man, now or future, be manifested through the medium of a body suited to its world, whether celestial or terrestrial, heavenly or earthly. And these two worlds are not the same; they are fundamentally different. Paul has just said so, in this verse.

Now comes the application of all this. "So also is the resurrection of the dead". . . . "it is sown a natural" (physical, terrestrial) "body; it is raised a spiritual" (celestial) "body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body". The Greek is more forceful; "If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body" (vs. 42-44). And here he crowns his argument with a fact which cannot be gainsaid. "And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a life-giving spirit" (after his resurrection; as in (I Pet. 3.18. "Christ . . . being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit"). Resurrection to another world involves being "clothed upon" to use Paul's words in 2. Cor. 5. with a new and fundamentally different body. We cannot take the old one with us into that other world. Flesh and blood cannot inherit that world and that kingdom.

"How then" as St. Paul's hypothetical question asks in vs. 35. "are the dead raised up?" If a material body such as humans now possess is not adaptable to the eternal state, then "with what body do they come?" There is obviously no question of re-constituting the old fleshly body which went to dust and ashes perhaps ages ago, or of creating a new but similar one here and now. The centuries-old theological idea expressed in the hymn "On the resurrection morning, soul and body meet again" has to be abandoned for good. The literal opening of graves in cemeteries and the emergence therefrom of the dead to meet the Judge is no part of a reasoned understanding of the Christian faith today. The fixed Christian belief that for the believer the next conscious experience after death is that of standing in the presence of the

Lord in heaven, not on earth, and to be in his likeness, the likeness of his celestial being, is a much more accurate representation of the truth. And this is what St. Paul indicates when in vs. 51-52 he says 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". That word "changed" means "to be made different", fitting word for the awakening in a new and totally different environment. And although it is true that not all of those thus resurrected will in fact first sleep in death—some there are who are living still at the time of the Lord's coming, at the Last Trump—these too share the same experience, changed "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye". This word moment, *atomos*, means the smallest possible division into which anything can be parted; applied to time, the smallest conceivable division of time. Our word "instantaneous" would be the best rendering. That change from earthly to heavenly conditions is the work of an instant. At one moment here on earth; the next "there" in the new body with the Lord.

It is this understanding, coupled with reliance upon the A.V. translation "caught up" in I. Thess. 4.17 which led, again in long-past centuries, to the belief that at the Lord's coming the living believers will be literally "caught up" into the skies to meet and be joined with him. The Greek word has no thought of direction or motion; it means simply to be transferred instantaneously from one place to another and so understood it expresses the same truth as the word "changed" in I Cor. 15. What is commonly called the "rapture" of the saints pictures their human bodies being carried up into heaven to appear in the presence of God, which seemed logical enough in the seventeenth century when the Ptolemaic cosmogony held the scientific field in Europe and pictured heaven as lying on the surface of a "crystalline sphere" not very far above the earth's surface and the sun inside circling round the earth, but not so appropriate to Twentieth Century knowledge of the terrestrial universe nor theological advance in the knowledge of the Divine Plan. The essential nature of the resurrection of the Lord's followers, his Church, is that like him (I Pet. 3.18) they meet their death in the flesh, on this earth, and awaken in the resurrection in the spirit, in the celestial world, and find themselves with the Lord, and this is the same experience whether the particular believer is one who died at the beginning of the Age or is still living at the time of the Lord's Advent at its end.

When all is said and done, it cannot be denied that the interpretation of Scripture in any generation, even under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has to be against the background of the state of

human knowledge at that time. The ancient Greeks believed that the earth, which to them included only Europe, Asia and northern Africa, was completely surrounded by ocean beyond which there was nothing. Underneath there was a vast subterranean sea, and above it, floating as it were upon the top of the atmosphere, a land which was the home of the gods and the place of eternal felicity of the righteous. This is the meaning of Peter's allusion in 2 Pet. 3.5. to "*the earth standing out of the water and in the water*". No one would endorse that now. The Ptolemaic cosmogony at the same time pictured the earth surrounded by a number of spheres of which the third was the abode of God and this is the meaning of Paul's reference in 2 Cor. 12.2. to the "*third heaven*". Whether in reality or in vision he knew not, but he was "caught up" (transferred or translated) to that sphere which he called paradise, the then name for the state of the happy dead. No one now would argue that God rules his creation from the region at present littered with the debris of discarded satellites and criss-crossed repeatedly by modern spacecraft. It is not many years since the first Russian astronaut traversed that region and the then

Russian premier, Kruschev, remarked that he found no signs of God up there. The same idea was perpetuated by the translators of the A.V. in 1688 when they started on Genesis. Gen. 1. says that God made the "firmament" and called it Heaven. The Hebrew word means "expanse" and that would be quite a good description of the sky, but in line with their then conception of heaven they used the Latin *firmamentum*, meaning something solid. John Speed's map of the world dated 1626, now in the British Museum, shows these encircling spheres. It is very necessary therefore that these facts be borne in mind when interpreting Scripture texts.

As to the nature of these celestial bodies; as to the activities, the occupations, the achievements of those celestial beings, as to how they live, and move, and have their being, how can mortal man visualise? All this is altogether outside the scope of our mental powers. As said Paul after his brief glimpse, they are "*incredible things which it is not possible for a man to relate*" (2 Cor. 12.2. Diaglott). We can surmise, to the extent of our own personal insight and understanding, but that is all. For the rest, we must wait.

SOME FACTS ABOUT ISAAC

Isaac is the second of the three patriarchs in whom the promise and purpose of God resided before it became vested in the chosen nation of Israel. Whereas Abraham and Jacob lived lives which were rich in incident fully recorded, that of Isaac is quiet by comparison and little is said about him. After the example of his father he followed the nomadic way of life, tending flocks and herds, never moving far from southern Canaan, but continued in his father's prosperity and evidently became exceedingly wealthy by the standards of his day.

Gen. 25 to 28 cover the main incidents of his life. These read as though they all occurred after the death of Abraham, which is recorded in 25. 7, but in fact his sons Jacob and Esau were fifteen years old when their grandfather died. Isaac married at forty (25.26) Rebekah probably being considerably younger—she was the daughter of his first cousin Bethuel—and was sixty at the birth of Jacob and Esau. The story of Isaac and Ishmael was repeated; two sons of the same father, one of whom was destined to be the heir of the promise, and he the second born. The other, Esau, a man of the world, finding his life and enjoyment in the natural things of this earth just as did Ishmael his uncle, whilst Jacob was destined to be dedicated to the service of God as was Isaac and become the means through which God will eventually fulfil the

promise of bringing blessings to all families of the earth. On the larger canvas, the Christian Church is the later born compared with Israel the chosen nation; both have a share in God's ultimate purpose but whereas the Church is to administer Divine blessing in association with the Lord Christ in heaven, Israel is to act as the Divine ambassador on earth.

A Divine intimation was given at the birth to the effect that the younger of the twins—Jacob—was to be the heir of promise (25. 23) but, inexplicably, Isaac strongly favoured his elder son Esau, just as Abraham had longed for Ishmael his elder son in similar fashion. It is certain that Rebekah, who had received the original Divine decree that Jacob should be the heir, had told Jacob of this fact; this throws some light on the story of the birthright (25. 27-34). Esau thought so little of the Divine calling inherent in the family that he was perfectly willing to trade any rights he may have had in exchange for a meal at a time when he came in hungry from hunting. Jacob's purpose in making the deal was evidently to strengthen his claim to the promise by a voluntary relinquishment of claim by his elder brother. It is sometimes suggested that Jacob took unfair advantage of Esau at a time when the latter was famished; there is no substance in this view; the social system of the day in which the whole tribe lived together as a community, family and

servants alike, meant there was always plenty of food available and no one ever went hungry except in times of famine. The story plainly states that Esau had no interest whatever in the birthright and was perfectly willing to exchange it for the smallest immediate benefit.

Chapter 26 covers a span of twenty-five years, roughly from the death of Abraham to the marriage of Esau. During this time the family moved about. *Forty years before the death of Abraham* Isaac moved southward into the Negev, into the district already occupied by his half-brother Ishmael (comp. 16. 14 with 24. 62 and 25. 11). It is evident that there was no enmity between the two and Isaac was probably building up his own possessions and a separate establishment became desirable. There was now, however, another famine in the land; Isaac moved on in the direction of Egypt as his father Abraham had done before him, halting for a while in the territory of Abimelech in the *Sinai peninsula just as Abraham had done. At this point he received the Divine warning "Go not down into Egypt". Unlike Abraham, he was to retrace his steps towards Canaan again.*

Isaac's deception in telling the Philistines that Rebekah was his sister, so like that of his father in Egypt respecting Sarah, has provoked much comment but is understandable in the light of the social customs then obtaining. A powerful man desiring the woman for his wife might not scruple to have her husband murdered in order to clear the way, but he would not dream of marrying a woman whose protector was her brother without a long and involved series of negotiations with the brother. It is probable that both Abraham and Isaac thought that by posing as the brother they would in the event of any local celebrity casting covetous eyes on their respective wives, be able to delay the negotiations long enough to get out of the country and out of danger.

Some scholars think that the double mention of Abimelech king of Gerar shows that the stories of Abraham and Isaac are merely variants of the same original "folk-tale", pointing out that accord-

ing to the narrative nearly a hundred years separated the two episodes and no king could be expected to reign so long. They ignore the fact of the greater longevity of the day—Abraham lived 175 years and Isaac 180; there is nothing out of place therefore in thinking of other characters in the story living for similar spans of years. It is however possible that the two proper names given in 21. 22 and 26. 26 are titles rather than proper names. "Abimelech" means "The king is father" or "father king"; "Philcol", given as the name of the captain of the army, means literally "mouth of all" or as we might say "commander of all". It is noticeable that in Isaac's time there was the same wrangling with the Philistines over the possession of wells as in Abraham's day—water being an indispensable necessity—and matters were settled in both cases by a covenant or treaty by which the Hebrews agreed to settle at Beer-Sheba, leaving the Philistines in possession of the south land. By the end of chapter 26 Isaac finds himself in his father's old home and settles finally at Beer-Sheba, a name and place which survives in Israel to this day.

Here, at forty years of age, Esau married two native Hittite women, thus allying himself with the people of the land and sealing his indifference to the Divine calling inherent in his family (26. 34-35).

The amazing physical vitality of this family which God had called from Ur of the Chaldees now begins to make itself felt. 25. 12-13 concludes the story of Ishmael. His twelve sons became the heads of twelve Arab tribes, spreading over what is now southern Sinai and northern Arabia. In after days they were to take a major part in populating the whole of the Arabian peninsula and even to this day many Arab peoples refer to themselves as "Beni-Ishmael"—sons of Ishmael. He died at 137 years of age having seen the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham a hundred and fifty years earlier regarding himself, "*twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make of him a great nation.*" (17. 20).

Justin Martyr on death

Justin Martyr, one of the "Early Fathers," a Greek Christian born in Samaria about A.D. 89, converted about A.D. 132 and martyred at Rome A.D. 165, had this to say in his writings as to the state of the dead:

"If therefore you fall in with certain who are called Christians, who confess not this truth, but dare to blaspheme the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in that they say there is no resurrection of the dead, but that immediately when they die, their

souls are received up into heaven—avoid them and esteem them not Christians."

If a leader in the Church could express himself thus strongly it is evident that in his time, some forty years after the death of the Apostle John, there was little dissent from the Apostolic teaching that the dead are asleep in the grave, waiting the call of the Lord to come forth at the time of the setting up of his Kingdom.

THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

Part 1 of a three-part series
on Prov. 31. 10-31

In the Word of God the highest of human relations is lifted beyond the earthly plane, above angels in the courts of Heaven, pointing to that blessed union which belongs to the Divine; "I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (Eph. 5.32). Proverbs 31. 10-31 is a description of the virtuous woman of any Age, a glowing account of ideals, a helpmeet for a perfect man. The Word points to such a list of qualities and character, and the Spirit of God reflects therein some glimpses of the Bride of Christ.

This statement of perfection may bring little comfort to those who are only too aware of imperfection. The high standards seem as remote as they are beautiful. As perception deepens so the goal appears to recede farther from our reach. We know that we have not yet attained, but how conceivable is it that we shall attain? The answer lies in the blessed truth that this is a work of grace, his grace, producing ours. Just believing, and staggering not, brings into a relationship of at-oneness with the source of all perfection through the Lord Jesus Christ. That He is Lord is enough in the sight of the Father to give faith's access "into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God".

Here then is a check-list of those attainments of the Bride in making ready for the eternal union with the Heavenly Bridegroom. The Divine resources are at hand, the power of God at her disposal, the angels of God waiting upon every spiritual need of Heaven's princess, with echoes of mercy and whispers of love.

The description of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31. 10-31, in which can be caught glimpses of the betrothed of the Lord, consists of 22 verses. It is alphabetical, in that each verse commences with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet, no doubt to aid the memory of a passage worthy indeed of engraving on the mind. It has been noticed that in each letter there may be some deeper link than at first appears in the principal point of the verse. A further bonus may thus lie in that an opportunity is afforded to become a little better acquainted with the language of the Holy Word.

The Nineteenth century was a remarkable one for Bible students in many ways, not least for the works of the Hebrew scholar Gesenius which marked its opening years. To him we are indebted for the designations given to each Hebrew letter by those who used them. Thus the first letter "Aleph" is designated "the ox," probably because if viewed with imagination it does look rather like the head and horns of an ox. "Beth" is a house, "Gamel" a camel, and so on.

If our Lord uses the ideal of the virtues of this woman to paint a picture of the "virtuous woman" of this Gospel Age, then indeed the Spirit's power is needed to translate both the picture and ourselves in the highest spiritual terms. The love of God that has overflowed into human hearts is even now at this moment expressing itself in countless ways in the lives of his saints. Here the human is but the vehicle, the vessel, of the Divine. A new mind is in control, a new light in the eyes, a new life and purpose in the step. A woman in love lives in a different world. She faces the realities around her but is not inhibited by them, for she has in her heart a glowing vision of a life shared with the man of her dreams.

"Who can find a virtuous woman, for her price is above rubies" (Vs. 10).

Aleph The ox, symbol of domesticated strength! The ox, from which all domestic cattle are thought to be derived, was for man a great source of harnessed strength. It is used to depict the strength of God's throne in Ezek. 1.10. Virtue is strength under control.

Who can find so great a source of strength to man? Eliezer found her at the well. Boaz found her at his feet. In both accounts are afforded a glimpse of the preciousness of the call to the fellowship, the sharing of his Son. So important it was to Abraham that the right choice be made, the right woman be found for the son of his love. Can it be sensed, in the weight of responsibility laid upon his faithful servant, something of the great importance of the Divine choice and selection in this present Age? There can be no room for mistake. She must be right, exactly right, for the One who now inherits all things, in whom all the promises of God are positive and sure, yea, and Amen.

The mission of the Age is not in vain. He has found him a wife, a woman whose qualities of character and purity are after the likeness of her Creator (Col. 3. 10). He has revealed her worth to him in the bride-price He has paid, in her Redeemer's blood. Can any human husband love his wife "as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5. 25-27). The able woman, her first great feat of ability, just to believe, just to say "I will go with this man" (Gen. 24. 58). And as she thus walked with him, and as we walk in the Spirit, to that faith is added virtue, the character of full spiritual strength and ability in Christ (Ruth 2. 12-13; 3. 10-11).

"The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil" (vs. 11).

Beth A house, tent, tabernacle. The woman is the home of the man, the place of his rest, in whom he lives. There are no possessions, no material things, that could replace a woman's love. The house is full of her love for him, full of sweetest odour. It is a place of mutual trust.

"And she lay at his feet until the morning" (Ruth 3.14). She was at rest and so was he. It was the highest place she knew. And at that trysting place of love he made to her his vow and she to him. That I believe in him has changed my life, but that He believes in me! That He has such confidence in his ability to finish, to perfect, that trust of which He is the Author, to anticipate even now that work of grace, to share with me that mutual trust which is the basis, the foundation, walls, and topmost stone of love's eternal abode!

Who shall love most? Not the one who felt most worthy, but the one to whom most was forgiven. It is grace that enriches the heart, furnishes it right through as we treasure its message from the Word, follow its instruction in what is right for our Lord, accept its correction and value its reproof. Friendly reproof, for all those spots in our character must be removed for that perfect union to be known. He knows we will thus respond, knows the motivation of our heart and the strength of its desires towards himself.

He shall have no need of spoil means that she becomes totally reliable in her management of all his affairs. She above all will value his provision. She will never despise or waste opportunity or time, nor will she pass by privilege of service or work for him that He needs to turn to other means for its performance. Though to some her life's devotions and outpourings seem great waste, He believes in her, and she desires no greater joy than his defence. *"Let her alone; she hath wrought a good work"* (Mark 14.6).

"She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life" (vs. 12).

Gamel The camel, long used in the service of man, bearing forth his goods and treasures with remarkable powers of persistence and with great durable qualities, even in the most hard-going wilderness conditions. Part of the train of Rebecca as she journeyed to Isaac, and of the Queen of Sheba too, bearing good things to Solomon.

She is good, and does him good. It is her nature and her role. The fruit of God's own Spirit (Gal. 5. 22; Eph. 5. 9), goodness may be variously defined. It is the receptive state of heart, ready to embrace his every word and nurture it as living seed to bring forth much fruit (Matt. 13. 23). Goodness is as salt, fully effective in the fulfilment of the purpose of its being. If it should lose its savour it is good for

nothing (Matt. 5.13). Goodness is the giving of the best gifts, the supplying of the one thing needful. The Hebrew carries the thought of "pleasing". Attitudes and works are only good in that they are pleasing to our Lord. It is his own definition of goodness to do only those things that please his Father, and it is our longing more and more to share that only worthy aim of existence.

So does each "body member" function every day and every hour, with precision and sensitivity fulfilling every desire of the Head in every service it can pay. What goodness is there in the vine except to bear grapes? All other purposes are broken off from the day of the engagement. Each day is now her Lord's, each act part of the daily language of love. In the youthful days of inexperience, to please is her endeavour. In maturer days it forms into absorbing delight. In riper years, fulfilment. When love looks for adequate means of confession He whispers "tend my lambs". *"My goodness extendeth not to thee"* unless directed *"to the saints that are in the earth"*, in his eyes and in mine, *"the excellent"* that reflects the excelling glory of all his goodness as it passes before those *"in whom is all my delight"* (Psa. 16. 2-3).

"She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands" (vs. 13).

Daleth A door, opening into a further realm, thus used figuratively of the door of opportunity. Knocking thereon signifies diligence in seeking and pursuing a certain course. Digging of the ear of the willing slave to the doorpost (Exod. 21. 2-6) implies opening of the heart to avenues of service entered with joy.

Diligence in seeking is ever opening doors, enquiring, exploring, opportunity to serve the master of the house. The wool and the flax are the raw materials of such service, perhaps the needs of others of the household, discovered with the delicacy of love, and developed with design and delight into the dress or durable garment or whatever may cover that need. Sometimes we need the comforting warmth of another's understanding interest and care, sometimes the cool refreshing covering of encouraged faith—sometimes the wool, sometimes the flax, the fine linen. The Lord supplies our needs in the needs of others and in the drawing forth of that generous love that seeketh not her own. In comforting we are ourselves comforted, in watering we are watered.

The working on that garment that will fit the need of someone we love may take long persevering effort. It may need more than one fitting, much repeated application. David epitomised the spiritual despondency of lapsing faith in his fear that he would die at the hands of Saul; in our case, that at the end the flesh would conquer. We need many "kisses of his mouth", many reassurances of

love. What priceless privilege is mine if my Lord, knowing intimately the needs of one of his anointed, places in my hands the very means of their supply. However lowly and unworthy the vehicle, the tether must be loosened at the words "the Master hath need of it". What is that in thine hand? Is it a box of precious ointment? Why has He thus filled my vessel with such a fulness of his love? "All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces" (or boxes) "whereby they" (the king's daughters) "have made thee glad" (Psa. 45.8).

"She is like the merchants' ships; bringeth her food from far" (vs. 14).

Heh A window or lattice, presenting a view through and beyond a wall. Figuratively it speaks of the penetration of that wall of our own personal feelings, thoughts and lives, and also of time. In this sense it denotes perception, farsight and foresight. The "windows of heaven" also depict the Divine abundance when opened towards us, in Genesis 7 in judgment, in Malachi 3 in mercy.

Enriched of God by jewels of silver and of gold bequeathed by Eliezer the betrothed goes forth. She emulates all that is edifying, like the merchant ships laden with good things. She is an exhibition of blessing-laden grace. The windows of heaven have been opened unto her, and from that vast and wondrous store she draws forth supplies abundant as she has space to receive. Her eyes on her treasure, she shares a view of higher things of a different realm. Beyond the momentary she sees the eternal.

From this body of humiliating contradictions she looks away unto Jesus, waiting there at the victor's place and God's right hand, ready to intercede between her prayers with the addition of his own sweet incense of love confessing her before her Father and his. Thus finds she the boldness to enter and explore the courts of Heaven, the land of far distances and Divine immeasurables. She dwells on earth, yet her heart sojourns in a land of promise, spying out its resources, and tasting its precious fruits. Yet not for herself alone. Beyond her own needs she has an eye to the needs of others. Ever ready to dispense portions to fellow saints, her presence adds something to all she meets. Into

their lives she enters only to edify, and leaves behind a blessing of peace and a breath of hope. Comforted of God, she has wherewith to comfort. Enriched of him she has within her that life abundant that is destined to enrich every groaning creature of this earth.

"She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maids" (vs. 15).

Vav A nail or hook, something fixed and solid upon which one may depend (as the "nail in a sure place" of Isa. 22. 23-24). Its own reliability depends upon two factors, the solid firm reliability of the wall, and the tenacity of its hold. Its faithfulness is linked by faith in him.

The English alphabet would bring us now to F for faithfulness. The Hebrew roots deeper in suggesting by its sound "vav" that vital union with Christ on which that faithfulness depends. Herein lies the vivacity of that compelling vital force of the Spirit of God which habitually rises early. In Scripture this is the language of great earnestness. So in Psa. 63; "O God, thou art my God. Early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is. To see thy power and glory, thus have I seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness". Such a state of heart prepares it for the spiritual food of the household of God. Only the truth-hungry thus are filled, with the fulness of God.

Who are these maids to whom she assigns her tasks? They are all the powers she owns now dedicated to the Lord's business. Her lips, her feet, her hands, her heart, mind and strength, all she is in joyful service for the glory of her king. Many have expressed such sentiments, some in words and some in the living language of love, that special kind of love shared between the Lamb and those who will follow that Lamb everywhere, the love that will not let go. It is these He betroths to himself in faithfulness and love forever. These are the Lord's jewels, those that are his to-day, tomorrow, and for eternity.

To be continued.

He shall come

A party of men stood gazing into the sky. Overhead, the Syrian sun blazed in a vault of blue. In the distance a patch of cloud drifted lazily away. That solitary group on the eastern slopes of Olivet stood looking still, faces radiant with sudden understanding. Their Master and daily companion had just ascended into Heaven before their very eyes, and still in each mind echoed the words spoken by strange visitors only a few minutes before, "This same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1. 11).

No longer could there be room for doubt and perplexity. He had left this world; they had seen him go; and one day He would return to establish that Kingdom on earth which they in their ignorance had imagined so close at hand. In the meantime there was a commission to execute; the building of a spiritual Kingdom of God, of which they were to be his witnesses, not only in Jerusalem and in all Judea, but to the uttermost parts of the earth. That was the vista which opened before their mental vision as they climbed over the brow of the hill and found themselves back in the world of men.

"TURN YE TO ME . . ."

A Meditation

" . . . *I have put my word in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, thou art my people.*"

So speaks our Heavenly Father through Isaiah, at the conclusion of what has been said to be the longest promise in his Word. Read chap. 51, vs. 12 to 16. So the Almighty Creator, Lord of heaven and earth, desires still, today, "A people for a purpose" (1 Pet. 2, 9, *Diaglött*), and that purpose nothing less than the heralding of his King and the establishment of his Kingdom, in its two fold phase—"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven." So, "today, if ye will hear his Voice, harden not your hearts . . ." (Heb. 3, 7, 15).

Only as we "abide in his dear Son" can we hope and expect to be used of him in the fulfilment of this, and his many great and precious purposes which He intends to fulfil through the Christ, Head and Body. To him, their beloved Lord and Head, their Shepherd, Saviour, Brother, Friend, their Prophet, Priest and King, the Church, which is his Body, says: "He is altogether lovely; this is my Beloved, and this is my Friend. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine." (Cant. 5, 16).

"Thy Love is better than wine!" If wine be, as it is, the symbol of doctrine, how true the sentiment here expressed! How often have his people, in the past, through too great an insistence on this, that, or the other doctrine, failed to express the love to him, and to his people in him, which is the all-important manifestation of their abiding in him, and one-ness with him, and is, quite literally, as a man of God has said, the greatest thing in the world. Says our Beloved, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." "I pray . . . for them . . . that they all may be one . . . that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." (Jno. 13, 34-35; 17, 20-21).

"One thing is needful," said the Master. (Luke 10, 42). Still He says the same today. What is that

"one thing needful?" Simply, *the necessity of keeping close to him.* Firm, rock-like belief in the rock truth of Peter's great confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt. 16, 16). This is the Stone the builders have rejected, now made the Head of the corner, and an honour to all who believe and obey him. (Psa. 118, 22, Matt. 21, 42, 1 Pet. 2, 6-7).

Unity is strength! "Like a mighty army moves the Church of God"—first, united to him who is their Lord and Head; secondly, united in him to each other. Both are essential, that every member may be fitly joined together, and compacted by "that which every joint supplied" (Eph. 4, 15, 16). "Come, let us to the Lord our God with contrite hearts return"—through his dear Son. "Our God is gracious, nor will leave the desolate to mourn . . ."

"I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations . . ." (Isa. 42, 6, 7). Spoken first of his dear Son, our beloved Lord? Of course (context—verse 1, on). But spoken also, in his Son, of his people—see Acts, chap. 13, vs. 46 and 47. Note particularly the "us", in vs. 47!

" . . . *That I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, thou art my people!*" Mourning ones crave comfort, blind ones grope for day. "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people . . .". Shall we be, by his exceeding grace, vessels of mercy, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, fitted and prepared by his Divine workmanship to carry the word of comfort and cheer to others, sons and daughters of comfort in Zion, and channels of the Holy Spirit, as well as of the truth? Oh, come on, all ye faithful! Rise up, O men of God—have done with lesser things. Jesus goes before us—Zion beams with light. Glorify him in your bodies. Show forth his praises, who hath called us out of darkness, into his marvellous light. The love He gives us He will ask again—in love to him, and to our fellow men.

"By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."—Matt. 12, 37.

The Lord takes our words as an index of our heart condition. But since we are imperfect, it is not possible for us to be faultless in word and deed. Yet we are diligently and faithfully to seek to attain the perfect mastery of our words. We should be especially on guard in respect to evil speaking.

Every tendency toward slander is to be checked. Whoever of us is reviled is not to revile again. These tendencies belong to the old nature. To be pleasing to the Master, we are to keep our hearts free from every form of evil. If this be done, the heart is rightly instructed of the Lord. Then we will know that we must make good whatever is wrong."

selected

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE*1 Kin. 17. 1-24***1. The Widow's Cruse**

And it was in the olden time, before any of the prophets of Israel had given utterance to their visions and written their books, before even Hosea and Joel the first of the prophets, in the reign of King Uzziah, had spoken the word of the Lord and told Israel of the end that was soon to come. Hosea had just been born when Elisha died, an old man of nearly a hundred years, and Elisha was only a lad of about eighteen when he first heard of the Tishbite. Elisha did not dream then, as he followed the plough on his father's farm, how closely his own life was to be linked with that strange man. But that is a different story and the years have to be rolled quickly backward until they come to a stop in the days that Ahab ruled the people of Israel from his capital city of Jezreel in Samaria.

Nearly a century had passed since good King David had been laid to sleep with his fathers and since then the kingdom had been divided. King Jehoshaphat, of the line of David, ruled over the two tribes in Jerusalem and he was a good and wise king and under him the people were content. But as for Israel, the ten tribes, in Samaria and Galilee and Gilead, they were ruled by the son of a usurper, Ahab the son of Omri, a man who cared neither for the laws of God or the welfare of his people. And now King Ahab had taken as his chief wife a woman of the infidels, even Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal the King of the Phoenicians, ruler of the merchant cities Tyre and Sidon by the Great Sea. It meant nothing to Ahab that this woman, beautiful as she was, a beauty renowned throughout the ancient world, was a pagan and idolator, devoted to the worship of Baal the Sun-god and determined to draw the people of her new country away from their own faith and compel them to accept hers. He thought only of the material riches this alliance would bring him. Friendship with the father of Jezebel meant rich store of luxuries hitherto unknown in Israel. The ships of the Phoenicians, traversing the seas from every part of the greater world outside Israel, would bring to Ahab ivory and marble, gold and silver and precious stones, rare woods for his buildings and curiously carved vessels and furniture for his palaces, that he might become the wealthiest king Israel had ever known and his capital city of Jezreel the most luxurious. So Ahab built a great Temple for Baal in Samaria and erected an altar therein, and made places on every hilltop where those rites and ceremonies so sternly condemned by the Law of Moses might be celebrated to the degradation and degeneration of the people. Therefore the chronicler in after days, writing of these things, said "*Ahab did more to provoke the*

Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him".

Now we who live in later days know that God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. King Ahab was very soon to find this out. It was written in the Law of Moses that prosperity would be the portion of the nation whilst they remained faithful to God and adversity when they apostasised from him and violated his covenant. "*I will break the pride of your power*" God had said "*and I will make your heaven as steel and your earth as copper; and your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits*" (Lev. 26. 19-20). Now was it not true that some in Israel had heard stories in their childhood of days long gone by when Israel had broken the covenant and the dread prediction had been fulfilled? The rain had ceased to fall, the land had dried up. The heavens above shimmered like burnished steel in the glare of the tropical sun; the baked earth glowed with heat like copper in the smelting furnace. And the trees and crops withered away and the flocks and herds lay down and died. This King Ahab, proud and arrogant with his new wife and his new possessions and his new god, failed to reflect that what had happened before could happen again, until that day when he looked superciliously from his throne upon the messenger standing before him.

A strange figure indeed, Elijah the Tishbite, and greatly out of keeping in that luxurious court. Bearded, unkempt, a towering, massive man of strength, clad in garments crudely fashioned from thick woolly goatskins, grasping a stout staff in his hand, he stood, his piercing, burning eyes holding the king as if by a spell. His voice, when he spoke, commanded attention and none who heard could resist the authority in its tones. This was Elijah from Thisbe in Gilead, a place so small and unimportant that no man since has been able to say where it was or find any remains of the houses and people who once lived there. Gilead beyond the Jordan, far from the metropolis of Israel and generally esteemed the home of a rude, uncultured people who made their living as often by brigandage and banditry as by honest farming and stock raising. Stalwart sons of Nature were the Gileadites, living close to the soil and the rivers, ranging over field and mountain, breathing God's fresh air by day and sleeping under the stars by night, men of a world the soft-spoken and effeminate courtiers of Ahab's palace never knew. Now the noblest son of Gilead stood in the midst of that decadent assembly, facing its apostate King and pagan

Queen, and threw down his ringing challenge.

"As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

Then he was gone. No one saw whither he went. One swift movement as he turned, shouldered his way through the gaping bystanders, and was gone. Court decorum forbade the turning of heads to look after him; all eyes remained fixed upon the royal pair. There was that Queen Jezebel with a contemptuous smile upon her face. She had seen these wandering prophets in her own land and knew that Baal rarely backed up what they had prophesied concerning his intentions. This King Ahab, he sat by her side, somewhat annoyed and, yes, just a trifle apprehensive. He was beginning to remember that there had been famines in the land before and it was certainly true that for some weeks now the weather had been unusually hot and rain showers had been less frequent than normally to be expected for the time of year.

Elijah was away from the city now, striding along the road, for God had told him to hide by a little stream, the brook Cherith. There, among the reeds and rushes of the river bank, he built himself a hut, concealed from sight by the overhanging trees, and in that hut he dwelt for perhaps a year, watching the waters of the river shrink and vanish away leaving wide stretches of baked mud where once the waterfowl swam and paddled and flew. There he waited for the word of the Lord to come to him again but God only said that He had *"commanded the ravens to feed thee there . . . and the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening, and he drank of the brook"*. Now some people find this hard to believe, that ravens could bring food to a man, and so they suggest that the word *oreb* which means a raven, a crow, a rook or a jackdaw, is a mistake for *areb* which means an Arab. But the people who are called Arabs to-day were called by other names in the time of Elijah, and there were none such within many miles of the place where he was dwelling, so that this explanation is not very likely. Much more probable it is that this little brook was one of the few left in the land where water still flowed and that all the birds of the district came to it for water after scouring the countryside for food and in the providence of God carried some of that food to their watering place and left it for the prophet. "Bread and flesh" says the story, and bread in the Old Testament is a general term for any and every kind of non-meat food, so that it could well have been fruit or nuts or green-stuff besides pieces of goats' or sheep's flesh that the ravens brought, if indeed they were ravens. And before we reject the idea we have to remember that on one occasion it is said of Jesus that he told Peter to go down to the

Lake of Galilee and he would find a fish swimming with a silver coin in its mouth which he could take and use to pay the tribute money. And before we reject that story also we must accept the fact that in modern times the same type of fish in the same Lake behaves in the same way, picking up and carrying in its mouth bright objects such as coins and coloured pebbles, and for this reason it is called St. Peter's fish still. Now if the one story is thus shown to be possible so might the other when we remember that behind all this is the controlling power of God. But whether by ravens or by Arab, Elijah was sustained in his quiet retreat while the pitiless sun blazed down by day and the hot, dry air blanketed the earth at night, the streams dried up and the wells ceased to give water. Then at last Elijah's little brook dried up also and he knew that soon God would speak to him again.

When God did speak it was to send him to the very land from which Queen Jezebel had come. He was to make his way to Zarephath, a seaport on the coast of the Great Sea only ten miles from Sidon where was the palace of King Ethbaal the father of Jezebel. Surely for Elijah this was putting his head into the lion's mouth with a vengeance, for by now King Ahab and Queen Jezebel were searching the country for the man who as they thought had inflicted this terrible drought and famine upon them. True, God said He had commanded a widow woman in Zarephath to sustain him, but how could a widow woman protect him from the soldiers of the King if his identity should become known? Nevertheless Elijah demurred not, but set out for Zarephath, a hundred miles journey in the blazing sun, through the valley of Megiddo, usually a vast expanse of smiling cornfields but now nothing but bare parched brown earth, past the lofty height of Mount Carmel where later on he was to destroy the priests and the worship of Baal, along the sea coast for fifty miles, until at last he came to the gate of Zarephath. But the drought and the famine were afflicting the land of the Phoenicians also, and when Elijah found his widow woman it was only to see her gathering a few sticks from the ground that she might make a fire whereby she could prepare her last cake of bread with the sole handful of meal and a little oil in the bottom of the cruse which she had left, that she and her son might eat thereof and lay them down and die.

Now to this widow and her son Elijah came as a saviour. His presence in her dwelling guaranteed their sustenance while the famine lasted. But that deliverance could only be hers upon a manifestation of faith. *"Make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it to me"* said Elijah *"and after make for thee and for thy son."* Yet there was only enough meal and oil for one cake! Herein lay the test of faith. *"For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The*

barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth." This woman was a Gentile, a member of a Baal-worshipping nation. Why should she have faith in the God of Israel or in Elijah his servant? But she did, and from that moment Elijah became one of her household and remained with her perhaps two years or more, while the famine persisted. And in all that time the meal in the vessel was constantly replenished and so was the oil in the cruse, so that they had no want. A miracle, yes, but no more so than the feeding of the five thousand from two loaves and five small fishes by Jesus, and if we believe the one we must also believe the other. A miracle indeed to a man but a commonplace with God, whose power orders the constant transmutation of one substance into another that is always going on in Creation and was in operation here, perhaps speeded up, in a particular case for a particular purpose.

And before we leave this part of the story let it be noted that the term "barrel of meal" gives a false impression, for the word there used means an earthenware jar of the kind Eastern women used to carry on their heads and it was a handful of meal in the bottom of such a vessel that was all the widow had left.

But now trouble of another kind came to the little household for the widow's son fell sick and presently he died. Then the widow in her grief reproached Elijah with having come to her and saved her from the famine only to slay her son and that because of some sin in her past life the knowledge of which she had looked away in her own heart and perhaps had thought was quite unknown to others. And now she was finished with Elijah, for the words she used "*What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God*" mean that from now their ways must diverge. But Elijah took the child to his own room and laid him there upon his own bed and prayed to God that he would restore the child to life. In the intensity of his supplication he laid down beside the child's body—for the expression here "*he stretched himself upon the child three times*" means that he "measured his length", as we would say, and that several times in succession, as he strode the length of his room communing with God. Then God heard the voice of Elijah and the breath of the child came into him again, and he

revived. So Elijah brought the child to his mother and she said "*Now by this I know that thou art a man of God and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth*".

There is nothing more said about this widow and her son. One wonders why the incident happened at all unless it be witness to the universal scope of the protecting power of God. There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, said Jesus upon one occasion (Luke 4. 36) but the prophet was not sent to any one of them but to a Gentile outside the bounds of the Promised Land altogether. This woman was a woman of faith, that is evident, even although her faith was strained by the untimely death of her son; the miracle of the never-failing meal and oil convinced her that this was no ordinary man and his God no ordinary God. But to what did it all lead? There was no witness given to the idolatrous people of Zarephath, of Sidon and of Tyre, of all that pagan land. Elijah remained hidden and unknown throughout the remainder of the famine, until three years had expired; he disappeared from Zarephath as silently as he had come, and the widow and her son saw him no more, neither are they mentioned again in the history.

Perhaps all this was for Elijah himself, a sign that God was with him and would sustain him in all that he was afterwards to be called to do. All three of these miraculous happenings were of one nature; they were preservative of life. In the midst of famine, whilst death stalked the land, Elijah had been furnished unflinchingly with means of sustenance, as it were from heaven. At the end he was shown that Divine power extended over even the issues of life and death, that the one who had been received into the land of the enemy could be brought back into the land of the living. Elijah must already have believed in God's power to do this thing, for that is revealed in his supplication at this time. But perhaps now he learned the place of faith and prayer in all this and realised the necessity of these in his own life if God was to work through him. Certain it is that Elijah was forever afterwards a man of sterling faith and fervent prayer. At the time of Israel's greatest peril he stood like a rock for the laws of the God of Israel and became his instrument in the most spectacular mass return to God which Israel ever knew.

To be continued

"His Word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." (Jer. 20. 9).

Whoever would be in accord with God must confess him and must confess Jesus, his representative, whom He sent into the world. He is to be confessed in the life, in the conduct, in the words, of

his followers. They are to have his Spirit and to "*show forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light*". Whoever makes a profession of being a disciple, and then ignores the Master's teachings, misrepresents him, slanders him, denies him, and will not share in the glorious presentation of the Bride at the end.

NOTE ON ISA. 52. 10

"As many were astonished at thee: his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men". (Isa. 52. 10).

The first phrase means to be dumb with astonishment, to be compelled to silence by the solemnity or the strangeness of what is seen. The subject of astonishment is the second phrase "His visage was so marred" and here it is very possible that the traditional view is hopelessly wrong. The word for "marred" occurs only this once in the Old Testament and there is serious doubt whether it is correct. It means, not only "marred" in the modern sense of that term, i.e. to deface, but it means to destroy utterly by decay and corruption. Such an expression carried to its logical extreme is quite out of place in any description of our Lord. There is no evidence that our Lord was in any sense unlovely to look upon. There is at least some piece of evidence to the contrary. We know that little children came spontaneously to him. Children do not come spontaneously to a miserable man and are not likely to come spontaneously to a deformed or hideous man. Jesus as a perfect man must have arrived at the maturity of human life in possession of a physical beauty far excelling anything that had been seen on earth since Adam. The sorrows and disappointments of life may and probably did leave their mark on him to the extent of a more serious and reflective mien but there is no more likelihood that those experiences, or the "going out of virtue" from him as He expended vitality for the good of others, rendered him unlovely to look upon than it does in our own cases to-day. We are witnesses that such experiences in the life often tend to make the countenance sweeter and more attractive; it is usually bitterness and discontent which sours the visage, and that we do not associate with our Lord.

The Septuagint has it "*so shall thy face be without glory from men, and thy glory shall not be honoured by the sons of men*". This rendering must

have come from a different Hebrew text than the one which declares his countenance to be in process of destruction by decay, and it makes a much more fitting commentary upon the person of our Lord, so much so that we are perhaps justified in accepting it in place of the Authorised Version. Our Lord while in the flesh did indeed manifest a glory all his own, a "*glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*" but it was not a glory He obtained from men, neither was it a glory that was honoured by the sons of men. They despised and rejected him instead. The words of the Septuagint are literally true therefore in our Lord's experience.

Some scholars consider that the word has suffered the alteration, at the hands of an ancient copyist, of one letter which has changed the word from one meaning "to anoint" and that on this supposition the reference here is not to a countenance that has been marred by disfigurement but one that has been anointed for ceremonial purification. The word in this case would be the same as that used in Leviticus for the consecration of Aaron and his sons, and elsewhere for the anointing to office of the kings of Israel. If this be in fact the true interpretation—and such cases of a changed letter altering the whole meaning of a word are not uncommon—then this verse indicates the astonishment of the beholders at seeing one among them who is anointed for the purpose of cleansing the people from sin, which is itself a fitting introduction to the sublime theme of the 53rd chapter.

It is tolerably certain that the passage in the original never taught that our Lord's physical appearance would be repulsive or unattractive and if we can at least dispose of that relic of traditional thought we shall have approached to a more accurate conception of Jesus' human nature.

Trial of faith

"The trial of our faith, to which the Lord and the Apostles refer, is a trial, not only of our intellectual recognition of Divine Truth, but also of our heart reliance upon God. In both respects every true child of God will find his faith severely tried. As a soldier of Christ let him not fail to be armed for the conflict. If an attack is made upon the intellectual foundation of our faith we should see to it that we have a "thus saith the Lord" for every item of our belief. If the foundations of faith become unsettled, the superstructure cannot stand when the winds and floods of adversity and temptation beat against it. It is your faith that is on trial now. In the

calmer days when the sun of favour shone brightly upon you, you were quietly laying the foundation of a knowledge of the truth, and rearing the superstructure of Christian character. Now you are in the furnace to be proved: summon therefore all your courage; fortify your patience; nerve yourself to endurance; hold fast to your hope; call to mind the promises, they are still yours; and cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. "*Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him,*" and faith has gained her victory."

(selected)

DIANA OF THE EPHESIANS

No. 13 in a series of stories of St. Paul

The Apostle Paul was about fifty-one years of age when he set out upon his third missionary journey, destined to lead him seven years later to his first trial—and acquittal—before the Emperor Nero at Rome. He could not have stayed at his home base of Antioch more than a few months following his second missionary journey, as a result of which he had been able to plant Christianity firmly in Greece. Now, as he set out along the high road leading northward from the city, he could hardly have known that he would never see Antioch again. The flourishing church which had taken the lead in missionary endeavour for so many years watched their most famous ambassador disappearing into the distance, little realising that they would sit under his ministry no more; never again see him in the flesh. From now onwards, the first Gentile church, the place where the name “Christian” was coined and first used, the community which above all others had grasped the vital truth that Christianity is essentially a missionary religion, and had grown in spiritual strength and understanding of the faith beyond its fellow-church at Jerusalem in direct consequence of this realisation and the zeal with which it had instigated and supported missionary work, continued its course bereft of its greatest son. Antioch was a famous name in Christian history for many centuries after; the torch lit by Paul and Barnabas and Simeon and Lucius burned brightly for a long time, although at the last the false doctrines and the false brethren foreseen by the great Apostle gained the ascendancy and had their way. Little more than two centuries after those early Antiochean believers watched the figure of their beloved father in God disappear into the distance, another Paul, Paul of Samosata, lorded it as Bishop over the Church of Antioch, living in luxury and dissipation, introducing heresies of doctrine and conduct, and the bright light that had been the Church of Antioch burned low and went out.

How much of all this St. Paul's deep spiritual insight showed him must one day happen no man knows. Perhaps in any case his active mind was already working on the details of another problem. He had planted Christianity in two notable centres, apart from the many towns in which he had left groups of believers, Antioch in Syria and Corinth in Greece. Now his eager steps were taking him in the direction of one more famous city of another great section of the ancient world, Ephesus in Asia. For the first few weeks he traversed the Asiatic hinterland in the provinces of Galatia and Phrygia, revisiting groups of disciples he had established during the course of his second

missionary journey, but inevitably his steps were tending towards the cultural and commercial centre of Asia, where he had left Aquila and Priscilla at the time of his brief initial visit two years previously. Ephesus was the capital city of Roman Asia. Situated on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea and possessed of a fine natural harbour, it had become the terminus of several main roads and trade routes stretching far into the interior of Asia. From its quays merchant vessels carried the produce of Asia to Greece, to Egypt and to Rome. It was in consequence a city of trading and of markets, and the Jews were very much in evidence. Side by side with Greek paganism there flourished the worship of the One God, and the city's greatest architectural treasure, the Temple of Diana, looked down from the eminence on which it was built to the synagogues of the Jews. The cosmopolitan nature of the population gave opportunity for every kind of superstition and fanatical practice; of all the cities which figure in the travels of St. Paul this one was noteworthy for the extent to which sorcery, astrology and all forms of magical practices had obtained a hold, so that, like Corinth, it seemed a most unlikely place in which to expect any response to the preaching of the Gospel.

Nevertheless Ephesus shared with Corinth the distinction of being one of the most successful of Paul's missions. In later years the flourishing church established in this place by the Apostle was further blessed by the residence and ministry of the Apostle John, who ended his days here. It became the leading community of the informal federation known as the Seven Churches in Asia, and was to Roman Asia what Antioch was to Syria, a centre of ministry from which dedicated men journeyed in various directions ministering to the needs of local town churches. Writing to the church at Corinth, at this time, the letter known to us as the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul said of his opportunities here “*a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries*” (1 Cor. 16. 9). It must have been with high hopes that he renewed his friendship with Aquila and Priscilla, and began to look out for opportunities to preach.

His first effective contact was a unique one. He came across a small company of believers in John the Baptist. They apparently knew of no developments beyond John's brief and tragic mission; the later Advent of Jesus of Nazareth was something with which they were quite unfamiliar. It is probable that this little group owed its origin to one or two disciples of John the Baptist who fled Judea after Herod's summary execution of their Master

and settled in Ephesus, holding and teaching the message of their deceased leader, so that a quarter of a century later there were these dozen men modelling their lives around the baptism of repentance which John had preached. It is strange that Aquila and Priscilla had not already met them, but there were many Jews and a number of synagogues in Ephesus and it seems to have been the enquiring and penetrating instinct of Paul which found them wherever they were. Having encountered them, he quickly showed how the work of John found its sequel and fulfilment in that of Christ, and so these twelve men became the nucleus of the afterwards celebrated church of Ephesus.

As usual, Paul was at first well received in the synagogues; his preaching and exposition found willing hearers. Inevitably the dissentients began to make their voices heard and within three months the Apostle found his work being hindered by objectors. The pattern of things was very familiar to him; he had seen it so many times before, and without hesitation he withdrew himself and his converts from the fellowship of the synagogues and established them in the lecture room of one Tyrannus. The word "school" in Acts 19, 9 is hardly the happiest word with its twentieth century connotation even although the Greek word here is the one which gives us our English word "school". The Greeks were very partial to discussions and debates on philosophical subjects and the building belonging to Tyrannus was obviously an establishment where such functions took place. Paul probably hired it for the regular meetings of his group as an ordinary commercial transaction; whether Tyrannus was Roman, Greek or Jew is not stated but the name is not a Jewish one and in the circumstances it is most probable that he was a Greek. At any rate, this arrangement subsisted for two years and the Christian community thus formed became a centre for missionary work: "*all they that dwell in Asia*" (Roman Asia, more or less the western part of modern Turkey, not the whole of the present continental mass known as Asia) "*heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks*" (ch. 19, 10).

More Christians meant less pagans; less pagans meant a decreasing demand for certain miniature silver models of the inner Temple enshrining the great goddess Diana. One Demetrius, a silversmith, finding sales dropping off, began to look with somewhat jaundiced eye on the crowds attending the meetings in the school of Tyrannus. He probably had no particular reverence for Diana himself, but business was business, and he could see his craft being seriously affected by the results of this Jewish preacher's eloquence. The outcome of his annoyance was a trade meeting of the master craftsmen and their employees addressed by

Demetrius in terms which left no doubt of his concern; not only was their craft in danger of extinction, he claimed, but additionally—this must have been said unctuously—the worship of Diana was threatened and the Temple, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, would lose its reputation and with that the city itself sink into oblivion. This happy combination of business and religion has in all ages formed ample justification for launching a crusade, and the present occasion was no exception. The meeting broke up to a tumultuous accompaniment of the city battle-cry "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" and the indignant metalworkers poured out of the building looking for trouble.

In a city like Ephesus there was never any lack of street loafers and others spoiling for a fight, and it was not long before the whole place was "*filled with confusion*" (ch. 19, 29). Somehow or other two of Paul's travel companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, both Greeks of Macedonia, came face to face with the mob and before they could grasp what had happened found themselves being rushed off to the "theatre", the huge open-air stadium which served as the venue for plays, sporting events and every other kind of public function. Next to the Temple of Diana, the Stadium at Ephesus was the city's chief glory. When excavated in modern times it was discovered that it could accommodate twenty-five thousand spectators. It is possible that Gaius and Aristarchus found that most of the twenty-five thousand were present on this particular occasion.

News of the occurrence came quickly to Paul and he was for going into the stadium to the aid of his co-workers but was persuaded against doing so by "*certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends*" (ch. 19, 31). These "chiefs of Asia" were the Asiarchs, Greek officials of the Games, whose duty brought them into Ephesus at times when notable athletic events were due. They had considerable experience of mob rule in the stadium, and evidently felt the matter could be handled better with the unwitting cause of the trouble absent from the scene. It is worthy of note in passing that these very important Greek officials had formed an esteem for Paul and did not appear to view his threat to their religion and city in the same light as Demetrius and the populace.

Meanwhile the scene at the stadium remained one of unmitigated confusion. "*Some therefore cried one thing, and some another; for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together*" (ch. 19, 32). In the general disorganisation, Gaius and Aristarchus seem to have disappeared, for they are mentioned no more: In their place there appears one Alexander, put forward by the Jews—these latter, of

course, representing the orthodox synagogue—to make some kind of defence to the concourse.

It is not clear whether Alexander was a Christian or an orthodox Jew. The fact that Jews were present at the stadium appears to infer that some of the orthodox community had come along to see vengeance meted out upon the Christians. Whether their presence further inflamed the mob, who were not likely to make much distinction between Christian Jew and orthodox Jew, and Alexander was one of their number chosen to justify their own position, or on the other hand he was a Christian the Jews had picked up and brought into the stadium as their contribution to the proceedings, is not known. Years later, writing to Timothy, St. Paul refers to an "Alexander the coppersmith" who "did me much evil". This Alexander had once held, then made shipwreck of, the faith, and was apparently a resident in Ephesus during Timothy's time of service there. This may have been the same man; at the time of the riot he may not yet have become a convert and being of the metal-working fraternity himself could well have been put forward as the best person available to appease Demetrius and his fellows.

There was, however, to be no appeasement. From his attire it was plain that Alexander was a Jew. For the next two hours the concourse, "with one voice" kept up a continuous shout "Great is Diana of the Ephesians". There does not appear to have been any question of physical violence; the impression gained is that the working population had decided to make this a kind of one-day holiday and having crowded into the stadium intended to stay there and enjoy themselves.

At last the town recorder (the English "town-clerk" is a very exact equivalent of the Greek office here) managed to restore order. Two hours' continuous exercise of the vocal chords was probably enough for the mob anyway. The thunderous shouting died away and a blessed stillness reigned. Perhaps even Demetrius and his comrades were a little scared of the storm they had raised. They listened now, rather shamefacedly maybe, to the measured reproof of this worthy civic official, who seems to have handled the matter very expertly. In the first place, he reminded them, it was a well-accepted fact throughout the Greek world that

Ephesus was the city of Diana and there was no dispute about it. Secondly they had illegally apprehended two men who had transgressed no law and were entitled to the protection of the civic authorities. If Demetrius or anyone else had any kind of grievance against them there were the ordinary processes of law to which they had access; let them lay their accusation in the proper quarter and have the matter judicially determined. Thirdly, and most important, "we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse". That last remark must have brought Demetrius and his fellow business men up with a jerk. Ephesus was subject to Rome. Being the political capital of Roman Asia it was also the official residence of the Roman Governor, the "Pro-Consul" of Asia. Rome did not like disorderly conduct or the taking of the law by provincial citizens into their own hands. There might very well be an enquiry into this affair should the story reach the ears of the Governor and in that case the least the city could expect would be a heavy fine. When such a thing happened, since the authorities were not particularly concerned from which of the citizens the money came, and most of the working population had no money anyway, it was usually the business men and the traders who had to pay up. Possibly Demetrius, on reflection, felt that this thing had gone altogether too far. There was at any rate no further trouble. When the townclerk "had thus spoken he dismissed the assembly". The enthusiasts for Diana who had raged into the stadium like lions went out like lambs. It is likely that the streets of Ephesus were models of order and rectitude for the next few days.

But the incident terminated Paul's work at Ephesus. He evidently felt, in the light of this personal hostility to him, that the interests of the growing church would be better served by his absence rather than his presence. During his two years' residence in the city the Church had become well organised; there were several responsible men well able to fulfil every duty of the Christian ministry and the Apostle felt that he could now resume his travels. He took his leave of them and set sail for Macedonia. (To be continued)

"Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually."—2 Kings, 4, 9.

Elisha himself was, in his life and spirit, the proof of his message. It is what we are, and not what we say, which does the most for God. We leave behind us, in every house we enter, some traces of God, of ourselves, or of the enemy. Some Christians cannot enter a house without leaving

behind a wonderful consciousness of God's nearness; but some leave behind traces of their own personality—talent, will, energy. Others leave a strange, terrible unrest behind them; they have served the enemy in sowing strife, bitterness, evil speaking.

Let us never forget that our message is gauged by what men see in the messenger.

LAND OF PROMISE

News of Israel

"Nothing hidden that shall not be made known"

The latest development in archaeological research in Bible lands is typically Twentieth Century. At the dawn of such research in the early Nineteenth, dogged excavators like Rich and Layard dug patiently into the ground to see what lay below; teams of local Arabs wheeled masses of desert sand away to reveal the palaces of the ancient Assyrian kings and the treasures of their libraries. The methods have not changed much except that the science of photography has been brought into play to assist, and the methods of preservation have improved enormously. But perhaps they will not dig much longer. In conjunction with NASA of USA, the Israelis are now using a device which intercepts and interprets signals from orbiting satellites to reveal what lies undetected under the ground. A kind of underground radar is being used to produce representations of buried ruins

and buildings, so that they can be studied without being uncovered.

C. Leonard Woolley in 1930 at Ur of the Chaldees thought he had dug down to the level of the antediluvian cities but he afterwards found that what he had thought was evidence of the Flood was in reality not so. No one has yet got down that far. Deep down below the remains of all the civilisations of the Euphrates plain lies a thick layer of stiff waterlaid clay which was taken by the archaeologists to be the basis of all things before man existed, and no one has got through that. But if the Bible story is true then that clay was deposited by Noah's Flood, and below that must lie the remains of the cities that were before the Flood. It would be fascinating if the new device gets to be tried out there and those cities came to light after five thousand years.

* * * *

News from the Hula region

Even the experts slip up occasionally. It is quite usual to hear of some country or other that has caused environmental damage to the land by interfering with Nature's normal operations, as Egypt is now finding with the Aswan dam. But now, Israel, normally far-sighted in these matters, has done it. For centuries past the area north of the Sea of Galilee, known as the Hula, has been a swamp given over to reeds and wildfowl. Because it was malaria infested, and in order to render the area suitable for farming, the Israelis, thirty years ago, carried out a mammoth scheme to drain the area and divert the water into the Jordan. Now, according to the Daily Telegraph, it is found that half the dried-up land is unsuitable for farming, and although the malaria has gone the dried peat beds,

of which it mainly consists, have furnished an ideal breeding ground for rodents which have multiplied exceedingly and eat up everything the farmers do manage to grow. Therefore pesticides are used broadcast to keep them down and the pesticides poison the ground and the settlers' fish ponds and kill the fish. So there is a proposal to flood the area again and restore it to the condition Nature made it in the first place.

There is a case for concluding that God ordained the course of Nature in a wise and satisfactory manner at the first, and that men would do well to consider the position very carefully before presuming to disturb it. According to the record, Adam was placed in the garden of Eden "to dress it and to keep it", not to experiment with it without having full knowledge of the possible consequences.

* * * *

Solar power station in Egypt

Israel is to manufacture and build a 30,000 kilowatt solar power station in Egypt. Israel leads the world in the technology and use of power from the sun and this latest effort will be a real achievement. Such a station could serve a town of 10,000 homes with its energy requirements, without the hazards of nuclear power stations or the pollution of coal or oil firing. And the fuel costs nothing; the heat of the sun is free to all. Egypt and the Sahara has the highest rate of solar heat in the world—two and a half times as much as in Britain. No details of

the new plant are given, but it is probable that the sun will generate steam to operate turbine-generators so that a certain amount of machinery is involved. By the time the Millennium has got going it is probable that the parallel science of "solar cells" will be more or less perfected in which the electricity is generated from inert devices having no moving parts at all. The scientists of the seventeenth century spent a lot of time trying to invent a machine giving perpetual motion without the use of fuelled energy and failed; the time may be near at hand when that dream may come true.

THE PROMISE OF RESTITUTION

Some foundation principles

The doctrine of the Messianic Age has its roots in the soil of Eden. In that intensely interesting record there are two important elements. One, that man was created sinless and physically perfect, capable of living for ever, the subsequent entry of sin being responsible for death and every other evil. The other, that God permitted the dominion of sin for a wise purpose and for a limited time, but its power will eventually be destroyed and mankind restored to primal perfection and everlasting life. The Messianic Age is the period during which this restoration process takes place, for those capable of conversion and reconciliation to God.

The story of Eden is not only one of condemnation, it is one of hope, speaking of God's intention to undo the evil effects of sin. Historically it records the conditions that existed when God, having brought the earth into existence and furnished it with plant and animal life, placed Man, its crowning glory, upon it, and commissioned him to increase and multiply, bring the earth under control, and make use of all its amenities in harmony with Divine law. Man was free to repudiate that law, but the consequence of violating the principles which God had ordained was cessation of his existence—death. *"In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die."* Man did transgress; death reigned in consequence.

We do not fully understand the necessity of this temporary power of sin over the human race, but that it can be and is being used by God as a means toward achieving his designs for the human race is undeniable. That in some sense we do not fully comprehend—or perhaps do not comprehend at all—perfection is attained through suffering (Heb. 2: 10) is indicated in the Scriptures. Something of this may be meant by the cryptic statement that was man's first ray of hope. *"I will put enmity between . . . thy seed and her (the woman's) seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"* (Gen. 3: 15). That text has been conventionalised into an oft-quoted saying: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head"; all Bible history and prophecy is a record of the development of that "seed" through the ages and its final and complete victory over the "serpent".

Israel was to be fitted for the ultimate conveyance of God's blessings to all men. It could, in fact, have been the Kingdom of God upon earth in miniature. Israel as a nation came short of that ideal, and eventually lost its nationhood during the troubled period 600 B.C. to 135 A.D., but during the fifteen hundred years of its existence it acquired characteristics which peculiarly fitted many of its sons for God's future purposes in the

administration of the world after the Second Advent of Christ.

Two-thirds of the Old Testament was written during this period, and these books trace the gradual revelation of God's purpose regarding the coming of Messiah to deliver the world from the power of sin and death. At first the emphasis was laid upon the deliverance of Israel and Divine retribution upon Israel's enemies, but intermingled with this theme there was consciousness of Israel's mission to *"declare his salvation to the ends of the earth"*. The Psalms of David show the first real hope of an ultimate Messianic Kingdom in which *"righteousness shall flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth"* (Psa. 72: 7), over which the Son of God will reign as King for the elimination of all evil (see the Second Psalm). Isaiah, the most farsighted of all the Hebrew prophets, described this Messianic kingdom as a time in which *"the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, . . . and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose"* (Isa. 35: 1). He dwelt at length on the nature of the physical changes that will characterise that day, saying that God will create a new heaven and a new earth, a condition of things in which his elect will long enjoy the work of their hands. But in contrast to this sunlit picture of the Messianic Age Isaiah also drew another one of more sombre hue, that of the Lord's "suffering servant" who by means of his suffering *now*, becomes fitted to be God's minister *then*, an instructor and guide of the nations. In the supreme sense these prophecies were fulfilled in the person and life of Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for men, and having been raised from the dead awaits the time to set up his Kingdom on earth, in fulfilment of all the Messianic prophecies and hopes of old. Isaiah spoke of both his Advents, the First, when He took upon himself human nature in order to suffer and die as a man, and the Second, when He returns in the glory of his Divine nature to establish the Kingdom that is to restore the willing of mankind to human perfection and so complete the Divine purpose.

Jeremiah, two centuries later, described God's purpose concerning the Messianic Kingdom in terms of a covenant made between God and man. God is to put his laws in the inward parts of men and write it in their hearts (Jer. 31: 33). All men will know the Lord, from the least to the greatest, and the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Vs. 34; compare Isa. 11: 9). Daniel, nearly contemporary with Jeremiah, by virtue of his position as Prime Minister of Babylon brought into contact with the highest political movements of his day, stressed the

essentially practical nature of the coming Kingdom, how that it is the world's only hope for peace and security; how that all existing forms of government and power must yield place to this universal empire of righteousness that is destined to rule the whole earth (Dan. chaps. 2 and 7). It was Daniel who saw clearly, more clearly, perhaps, than any before, that God must have trained and qualified men, thoroughly experienced in his laws and his righteousness, to administer that Kingdom, and this understanding had a profound effect upon later teaching regarding the Messianic Age. Ezekiel the priest, a man gifted with prophetic vision of a very high order, described the forces of evil in the world hurling themselves in vain against the incoming Kingdom and failing, vanishing away to be succeeded by the orderly and beneficent system of Millennial government which he symbolised by his description of a vast and fair Temple from which proceeded a River of Life to the nations. This was the theme which led directly to John's description of the New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation nearly seven centuries later.

Thus, then, does the Old Testament describe this coming Age of blessing which will abolish evil, undo the havoc wrought at the time of Eden, reconcile man to God, and bring in everlasting righteousness. The work of converting the nations is to be effected by the "servant" which God has appointed and trained for that purpose, an essential factor in that training being the endurance of "suffering". In the end, death will be ended, the dead will have been raised, the righteous made perfect, and sin no longer mar Divine creation.

The coming of Jesus Christ threw a tremendous flood of light upon this almost purely material, earthly, expectation. Until only a few centuries before Christ there was no idea that God's plans included any kind of spiritual salvation, and it was expected that the "righteous" would attain their ultimate destiny here on earth. The teaching of Jesus as understood and expounded by the apostles and other New Testament writers reveals another phase, a spiritual phase, to God's plan, and shows that some from among the nations during the period between the First and Second Advents are called to inherit a spiritual or heavenly state of being by becoming personal disciples of Jesus Christ. In the wisdom of God all such are trained and fitted by suffering, as were their Israelitish predecessors, that they might be qualified to occupy a supremely important position in the work of the Messianic Age. That position is one of association with Christ, in the spiritual glory of his exalted station as King over the earth during the Millennium. The New Testament thus shows that the "Seed of Abraham" through which all families of the earth are to be blessed has a three-fold aspect. In the first place, Christ himself is the

Seed. Associated with him in the heavens, having the oversight of all that is done during the Age of Blessing, is his Church, comprising the faithful consecrated disciples of this present Age; for "*If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*" (Gal. 3. 29). Associated with both Christ and his Church in service, but stationed upon the earth, is the restored and purified nation of Israel, administering the Kingdom arrangements. Within these three aspects the whole of the promise concerning the "Seed" is contained.

Additional to this new understanding the teaching of Jesus made plain another principle upon which the work of the coming Age must rest, *the necessity for conversion and intelligent, willing acceptance of the moral laws which God has ordained for the orderly conduct of life*. The Jews of the time shortly before Christ visualised the righteousness of the Kingdom as a formal and ritualistic righteousness, a state in which observance of the Mosaic Law was the indispensable and all-sufficient condition of eternal life. Jesus changed all that and described a system in which every man will be led to see for himself the rightness of righteousness and the sinfulness of sin, and make his choice accordingly. God seeketh such to worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4. 23). *Hence Jesus called attention to the necessity of repentance and conversion to his way of life*. For this reason He commissioned his disciples to become missionaries and preachers, calling men to repentance, and although they were thus bidden to preach in all the world *for a witness* during this Age, it is evident that this is only by way of preparation for the next Age, when that missionary work will receive an impetus such as could not be given whilst the world is still in bondage to sin and death.

The New Testament, then, completes the Old Testament picture by revealing God's purpose "*to send Jesus Christ*" (Acts 3.20) at his Second Advent, to establish an order of society upon earth in which all evil will be progressively eliminated, and men encouraged to repentance and conversion, and so to everlasting life. The resurrection of the dead to human life will take place at the commencement of this era, and thereafter death, except as the end of those who are incorrigibly determined to continue in evil, will cease. At the close of the period the formal Kingship of Christ over the nations will end, their probationary period having expired, and men enter into full relationship with their Creator as sons of God.

"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father . . . then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that did put all things under him, that God may be all in all." (1 Cor. 15. 24-28).



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

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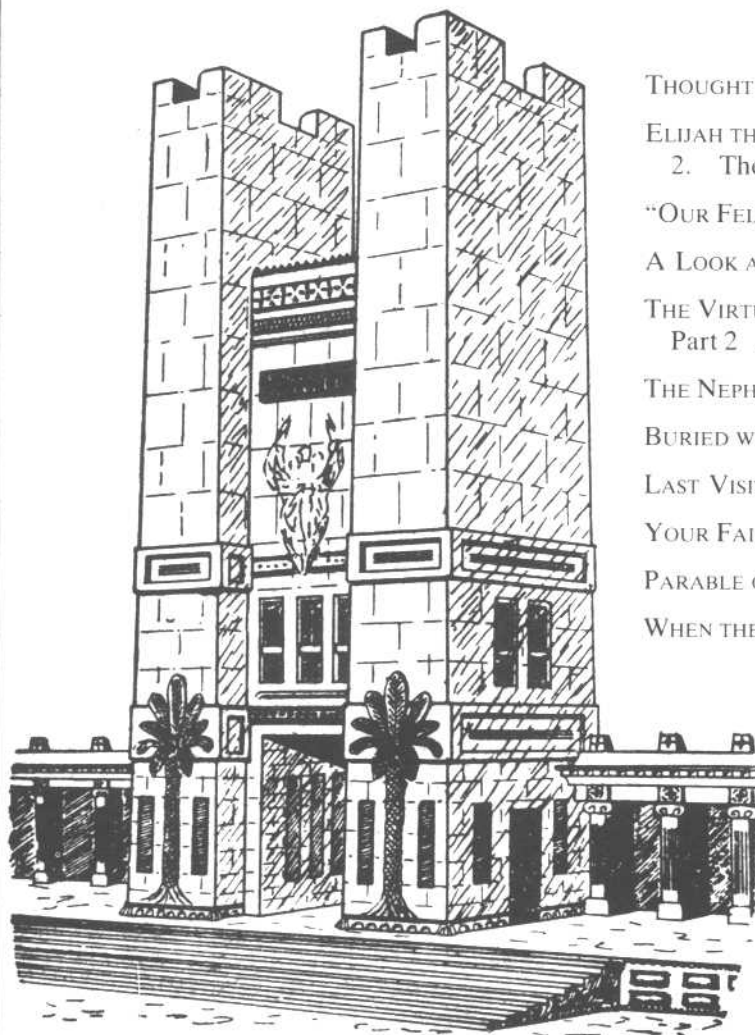
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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Thought for the Month

"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth!" (Rom. 14.4).

It is so fatally easy to value another brother's or sister's service by one's own bushel measure. We all desire very earnestly to serve our Lord and the interests of his Kingdom. We generally take delight in speaking of him and the Divine Plan to any who will listen. And we all have our own ideas of how best the Gospel may be preached. Is it the very intensity of our own earnestness in this direction that makes us want every other bondslave of Jesus Christ to serve in just the same manner that seems good to us? Is it the measure of our own personal talent and success in one particular field of ministry that blinds us to the possibility of effective services being rendered in another manner, in other hands?

"There are diversities of gifts . . . there are differences of administrations . . . but it is the same God that worketh" (1 Cor. 12. 4-6). When will we learn that the grandest characteristic of all God's handiwork is variety, and that He has ordained the accomplishment of his service in such fashion that "every joint" supplieth a contribution fitted to its place in the Body?

Says one, loftily secure in his ability and privilege to address the assembly as befits the office of an elder in the Church, "there is no doubt that the preaching of the Word is the great means the Lord has ordained for the spiritual growth of his people". All very well,—but what discouragement to the brother who is temperamentally quite unable to stand before an audience and deliver a prepared discourse, but in his own quiet way can lead a study circle in leisured discussion of the

Scriptures to the very real edification of his fellows . . .

It was teacher's birthday. For weeks beforehand her pupils had been making pretty aprons and tending little plants in pots to give her on the day, for this teacher was greatly beloved. At length lesson time was over, and they crowded round with their offerings, stepping back with gratified smiles as the teacher expressed her surprise and delight at each successive gift. Last of all came the "black sheep" of the class, grubby and untidy, half hesitating and half defiant, avoiding the amused looks of his classmates as he extended a tightly clenched fist and deposited into teacher's hand—a hot and sticky piece of butterscotch and three marbles.

But that teacher was wise—wiser than some who have attained to eldership in the assemblies. "Oh, how lovely" she cried, smiling down at the anxious little face below her. It's years since anybody gave me marbles for my birthday, and I just adore butterscotch".

The grubby one made his way back to his desk, head held high and face radiant. He loved his teacher, and he had so feared his gift would be rejected, but she had understood. He had done what he could.

Brethren in the Lord! Be very careful how you disparage the service another is trying to render, just because you "cannot see what good it will do". You may be the means of dashing the enthusiasm of one who will never be able to serve in the big things, as you may be privileged to serve, but is nevertheless trying to contribute some small mite to the work of the Master whom we all love. "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones".

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE 1 Kin. 18. 1-46

2. The Lord—He is God

The days and the weeks and the months had passed and still there was famine and drought in the land. The historian who wrote down the story of those days did not say how long the famine lasted but James the Lord's brother somehow came to find out, and he said that Elijah "prayed that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months" (Jas. 5. 17) so that Elijah must have stayed with that widow woman at Zarephath and shared with her and her son the ever-continuing meal from the jar and the oil from the cruse for at least two years. And meanwhile because of their sin the people in Israel suffered from hunger and thirst and watched their cattle die and their crops wither. Like the men of Isaiah's day a century or so later they passed through the land bestead and hungry, "and when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upward, and they shall look unto the earth and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness" (Isa. 8. 21-22). For although the famine is pictured in the narrative coming as a punishment from God for apostasy, it is in the highest degree probable that much of its severity was due to the inordinate ambition of King Ahab and the self-indulgence of his subjects in spending too great a proportion of their time and energy in the pursuit of commercial gain and selfish pleasure, so apparently easy and desirable in this time of close alliance with the merchant people of Tyre. And the penalty of that pursuit of riches and ease had to be neglect of their lands and their pastures, their crops and their flocks, failure to maintain the water-courses and aqueducts which alone could preserve their water supplies under that fierce Palestinian sun, ruthless despoiling of the forests to provide timber for their ornate city buildings, only to find, too late, that when the forests go the rain goes also and the land quickly turns to desert. Have not later peoples done the same thing and incurred the same consequences? And are not men even now despoiling this fair earth, heedless of the inevitable retribution which must come upon them and which a few far-sighted men can perceive, while the masses go ever more feverishly after the worship of Baal which they have set up?

But there in the days of Ahab the Lord did not intend to let the situation get out of hand, and so, one day when Elijah was sitting outside the little house in Zarephath, the familiar inner voice came to him, saying, "Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth" (1 Kings 18. 1). So the prophet collected his few belongings, bade goodbye to the widow and her son, doubtless leav-

ing her with the heartening news that the famine would soon be ended and life become normal again, and set out to retrace the hundred miles that lay between him and Ahab's palace at Jezreel.

Now in the meantime the people in Israel were reduced to desperate straits. This wicked King Ahab was more concerned at the prospect of losing his prize horses and mules, the mainstays of his military power and the adornment of his pageants, than for the welfare of his people, the preservation of the flocks and herds, the wheat and the barley. So he called his chief steward Obadiah to his side to join with him in an expedition through all the land, searching all places where water might yet linger, to find "grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts". He cared not that his subjects were slaying their sheep and cattle in desperation for food, leaving nothing or next to nothing wherewith the land might recover when the rain should return. Though the nation perish, he must cling to the empty grandeur of his personal glory and his military might, and in this he was not so very different from many a ruler and many a statesman in the world to-day.

So they set out, Ahab with his attendants in one direction and Obadiah with his attendants in the other; and Ahab was an unbeliever and an apostate, but Obadiah was devoted to the Lord God of Israel, and without doubt he mourned greatly in spirit as he traversed the countryside and perceived how the Lord's curse had blasted field and forest, flock and herd, and knew how well-merited had been the calamity. And as he went, and as he mourned, he came suddenly face to face with a terrifying apparition, a fierce giant of a man, shaggy of beard and wild of appearance, clad in goatskins and grasping a stout staff. And Obadiah fell on his face in the dust before him for he knew who this strange man must be and he feared for some new calamity to fall upon suffering Israel. So in submissive tones he asked "Art thou that one, my lord Elijah?" Swift and uncompromising came the incisive reply "I am.—Go tell thy lord, behold, ELIJAH IS HERE!"

But this command put Obadiah in great fear, for although he was a sincere and devoted believer in the Lord God of Israel he was not the stuff of which martyrs are made, and if he carried such a message to Ahab, and then whilst he was gone Elijah took himself off again, Ahab would vent his chagrin upon Obadiah. For, said he tremblingly, "there is no nation or kingdom whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee . . . and as soon as I am gone from thee the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me". Then to make the

best case he could for himself he protested to the grim-faced man before him *"but I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth. Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, how I hid an hundred of the prophets in a cave and fed them . . . and now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, behold, Elijah is here; and he shall slay me"*. The future looked very dark to this doubting Thomas son of Israel. Caught between the unpredictable king and the redoubtable Elijah, he felt that circumstances were altogether too much for him and probably wished heartily that he had taken the other road so that Ahab himself had been the one to make this unfortunate encounter.

But Elijah, for all his forbidding exterior, was a kindly man at heart, and he reassured the fearful steward. In the most solemn and binding words known to Israel he gave his pledge. *"As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to-day"*. So Obadiah went to find Ahab, and Ahab came with haste, and there was Elijah, standing in the middle of the highway where Obadiah had left him.

Now Ahab was inwardly greatly quaking, for by now he had realised the truth of Elijah's prediction of more than three years ago, but he was a proud man and he professed an air of arrogance which he did not really feel. He thought he would take the offensive and try to put the blame upon Elijah, and so he advanced towards the silent prophet with a supercilious air. *"Art thou he that troublest Israel?"* came his insulting question. Sharp as a sword-thrust, loaded with condemnation, came the reply. *"I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and hast followed Baalim."* That quickly wiped the cynical sneer off the king's face. More meekly now, King Ahab listened to the prophet's instructions; he was to gather all Israel to Mount Carmel, and all the prophets and priests of the false god Baal, and attend himself, and Elijah would meet them there. And the king, even although he was the king, and normally took instructions from no man, felt he could do naught else but obey, and he turned and went back the way he had come, and all his attendants with him, to do as the prophet of the Lord had commended.

So the people came, and the prophets and priests of Baal, and King Ahab with all his court, and they climbed the mount Carmel, which is not much of a mountain really and can be climbed to the top in less than an hour, and there was Elijah, waiting. He looked upon them and they gathered around in a wide circle ready for whatever the man of God was going to do. Although in Elijah's command to King Ahab he had told him to gather all Israel to mount Carmel it is hardly likely that he intended all the millions throughout the land to

leave all their pursuits and come; much more probable it is that there were representatives present from every tribe and every part of the country. And when all were present and all was ready there was made a great silence, and it was then that Elijah spoke.

"How long halt ye between two opinions" he demanded of them. *"If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him."* And there was none that made answer, or opened the mouth, for some of the people were afraid of Elijah and many indifferent as to which god they should worship, and some believed secretly in the God of Israel but served Baal outwardly because of the king's command, and not many were there who really believed in the reality of Baal, and so for a variety of reasons the people were ashamed in the presence of this champion for the true God, and they looked at one another and away from the piercing gaze of the prophet and they shuffled their feet and they held their peace.

Then when Elijah had waited, yet no man spoke, and the prophets of Baal looked on, and moved not, he made his proposal. Let the prophets of Baal, said he, prepare an altar and a sacrifice, and he would do the same and call upon the Lord to accept it. *"And the God that answereth by fire"* said he *"let him be God"*. Then the people found their voices and in unison they responded *"It is well spoken"*.

So the prophets of Baal built an altar, a little pile of rough stones large enough to bear the wood of the fire and dismembered carcase of the bullock which was to be the sacrifice, and they set to work with a will, for Baal was the sun-god and here the sun was shining upon them from an azure sky and the morning heat was already beginning to be felt. So by about nine o'clock in the morning they were ready and that wicked King Ahab looked on from his place in the front as the leaders of the prophets approached the altar. And Elijah stood still, watching.

"O Baal, hear us" they cried *"Thou who art the lord of the heavens and floodest the earth with light, send thy fire upon this offering and show that thou art God. O Baal, hear us; hear us and answer"*. But there was no voice, and no answer, and no fire; the sun pursued its accustomed way in the skies and climbed steadily towards the meridian but no sign came from heaven and the offering lay on the altar, lifeless and still. So the minutes passed and all the prophets of Baal took up the cry *"O Baal, hear us"*; and the hours passed, and they worked themselves into a frenzy and leaped about and around the altar, and cut themselves with knives until the blood flowed. And still there was no sign from heaven, and the sun climbed still towards the meridian, and the prophets of Baal cried and implored, and the offering lay on the altar, lifeless and still.

And now it was noon, and the sun was at its zenith, blazing down from a cloudless sky upon a parched and baked earth. The people, waiting still for the sign; that wicked king, beginning to look a trifle apprehensive; those prophets, flagging in their efforts through sheer physical fatigue, still crying faintly "*O Baal, hear us*". And Elijah, who had stood immovable these three hours past, now striding across the grass towards the now well-nigh frantic prophets. "*Cry louder*" rose his stentorian voice in tones of bitter scorn "*for he is a god; perhaps he is meditating some important thing and has not heard you. Cry louder!*" and in rage and anger they redoubled their efforts. But there was no voice. "*Cry louder*" came the mocking tones again "*he is a god; perhaps he is pursuing the chase and in the excitement of the hunt your cries have not reached his ears. Cry louder*" and again their entreaties went up into the silent skies. But there was no sign. "*Cry louder*" urged their tormentor. "*He is a god; perhaps he is on a journey from home and too far away to hear you. Cry louder*" and in their frenzy they foamed at the mouth and fell motionless upon the ground. But there was none that regarded. "*Cry louder*" came the culminating insult. "*He is a god, but perhaps he is fast asleep and will have to be awakened*". And the sun went on its way in the heavens, declining to its setting, and it was three o'clock in the afternoon and the offering lay on the altar, lifeless and still. And when the prophets of Baal saw the symbol of their god sinking into the western skies and knew it would soon be shedding its dying rays over the land they ceased their supplications, and there was a great quiet.

That wicked King Ahab looked on with sombre eyes as the prophet of the Lord came forward and beckoned to the watching crowd. "*Come near unto me*" he commanded and all the people gathered around him in a wide circle. The altar of Baal with its useless sacrifice lay behind them, forgotten. Now the prophet was gathering stones, twelve large stones, carrying them one by one to the centre of the circle where he began to build them into an altar. The people counted them as he built; twelve stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel. Guiltily some of them began to remember they were the children of twelve sons of one man who had been a man of God, a man who had given them their name, Israel, a name that meant "A Prince with God". Recollections began to flood into their minds, memories of the heroic times of old when their ancestors came into this land in faith that God would there make them into a great nation which should be his instrument in declaring his salvation to the ends of the earth. A few of them thought of the covenant which promised them so much and which they had despised and broken. And while they thus pondered, that strange figure in their midst finished building his little altar—perhaps not

much more than eighteen inches square and two feet high—and dug a little trench around it and turned then to the tethered bullock waiting to be made the offering. And before very long the wood was on the altar, and the burnt offering cut into pieces, waiting only for the sign of Divine acceptance by fire from heaven.

See now this strange thing! The offering was to be consumed by fire and yet here were men, under Elijah's direction, pouring water over the altar so that all it bore was sodden wet. Four barrels of water, three times repeated, did they pour, and the water ran down the altar and filled the trench. True, the English word "barrel" does give a wrong impression; the Hebrew term means an earthenware jar such as women carried on their heads, as it did in the case of the widow's barrel of meal in the earlier story, jars which probably held about a gallon of water each. And the trench around the altar was not very large either. The "two measures of seed" which the historian says it would hold amounted only to three gallons each so that it could have been no more than a little channel in the turf about six inches wide and two inches deep. But there was the altar and the sacrifice dripping and saturated, and the trench around filled with water; how could anyone expect that to burn? The prophets of Baal looked on uncomprehendingly and the people wondered.

"*Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and of Israel*" rose the stentorian voice, calling to the heavens "*let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again . . .*"

A blinding, vivid flash . . . the lightning drove down from the clear sky, a dazzling sword-thrust to the altar, a consuming fire that burned the offering and the wood in a moment and vapourised the water in the trench into a white mist of steam . . . the vapour cleared away, and the people saw the stones of the altar lying riven and scattered, the remains of the offering cinders on the ground. And when they saw that, those people fell on their faces in fear and in awe, and they shouted "*The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God*".

Then the prophets of Baal sought to escape, for they knew that their cause was lost. And the people, in the swift revulsion of feeling that had been induced by the spectacle they had seen, pursued after those prophets and, led by Elijah, took them down the mountain to the River Kishon which flowed hard by Carmel on its way to the sea, and there they slew all the prophets of Baal the false god and joined themselves anew to the covenant of the Lord. And that day was the greatest day Israel had known since the day in which Moses the

the Lawgiver had led them out of Egypt to find the Promised Land.

But Elijah was back on the top of Carmel, wrestling with God in prayer that the rain might now come and the famine end, and his servant on the crest of the headland looking westward across the Great Sea. Thus he presently saw arising out of the sea a cloud no bigger than a man's hand and that was a signal to Elijah that his prayer had been answered and that the rain was coming. So the

prophet told Ahab to get himself back to Jezreel before the rain overtook him, and the people to disperse to their homes in faith that God would turn his face towards them again. And presently "*the heavens were black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain*", and Elijah, that stalwart man of God, girded up his loins and ran in that rain, ran before Ahab's chariot to the gates of Jezreel.

To be continued

"OUR FELLOWSHIP"

*An interesting quotation
from the past*

This manifesto was published some ninety years ago under the above title to define the outlook of the "Bible Student" movement of that time. The sentiments it expresses are so much in line with what many regard as fitting to-day that it is reproduced here and commended to all our readers. Probably no fellowship then or now has completely attained this ideal, but that it is one worthy of striving for few would deny.

* * *

Our fellowship sprang up spontaneously and gradually. It is composed of thinking Christian people of various ages who are studying the Bible reverently and profitably. There are no limitations as to membership, except such as could be properly applied to any true Christian, (1) Faith in God as the great Creator and Heavenly Father, (2) Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the world's Redeemer, (3) Faith in the Bible—that it is the inspired message of God, respecting his will and purposes in connection with mankind, (4) A clean and honourable life.

We find this platform broad enough for all true Christians, regardless of denominational differences. We have no bondage, and anyone is as free to leave the local gatherings as to enter them. Indeed, following the example of the Early Church in this as well as in other matters, we avoid any special enrolment, or any special commitment as to faith and practice other than the broad principles already mentioned.

Each local gathering is independent, manages its own affairs, conducts its own meetings, and provides for its own expenses. The personnel of these gatherings come from all walks of life—labourers and physicians, pupils and teachers, housewives and the leisured.

There is reason why our position is blessed of

God—the time mentioned in the Scriptures when the "wise" of God's people are to understand is here. The Scriptures show, what men are now beginning to realise, that we are in the dawn of a new era. This is the time concerning which God promised that He would give special enlightenment respecting his Word and his Plan, and the mystery of God should be finished.

Our fellowship therefore, while not affiliated to any of the older denominations and sects, is sympathetic with all Christian people of every creed. We realise that the various denominations were organised, not for the purpose of dividing and distracting the Lord's flock, but each with an endeavour to find the light and truth. We urge Christians to ignore all sectarian fetters and fancies, and would point out that there is one true Church, and but one Head of that Church.

Our fellowship therefore endeavours to bring all Christian people into relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, as his members. We recognise that the different denominations contain true people of God, and are glad to co-operate with them in any manner for the furtherance of the Lord's work in harmony with the Scriptures. We urge Christian people to stand for the Divine character, Plan and Word, even although this may mean opposition and persecution from those of sectarian spirit.

We labour therefore specially for Christian unity, on the Bible basis, in harmony with the words of the Apostle. "*By one Spirit we are all baptised into one Body*". (1 Cor. 12. 13).

*"There are great truths that pitch their
shining tents*

*Outside our walls, and though but dimly
seen*

*In the grey dawn, they will be manifest
When the light widens into perfect day."*

A LOOK AT THE COVENANTS

The importance of the Biblical doctrine of the covenants lies in the light it sheds upon the dispensational aspect of the Divine Plan, the time periods in which God is working out the details of that Plan, and the development in different ages of the instruments He uses in that development. As such, a dispassionate understanding of the function of each Covenant and the manner in which they interact with each other is to Bible students illuminating; time spent on this aspect of Scripture teaching can be of deep interest and by no means wasted.

There are three major Covenants between God and man about which much is said in the Bible, the Covenant with Abraham made about 2000 BC, the Law Covenant with Israel at the hand of Moses at Sinai, and the New Covenant to be made with Israel at the close of this world-Age and the dawn of the Messianic Age. There are others, that with Noah after the Flood and that with David at the time of his kingship, but these relate to more local matters not directly connected with the major three to which attention is now directed.

A Covenant in the Biblical sense is an agreement between God and man enshrining a specific purpose of God for man's welfare and embodying a promise on God's part that He will perform some beneficent act, either unconditionally, or conditional upon man assuming an obligation to respond in some defined way. The covenant with Abraham was unconditional in that it enshrined a declaration of what God will do for man without imposing any reciprocating obligation on man's part; the other two are conditional in that man must play his own part to ensure fulfilment of God's part.

The story starts in the Sumerian city of Ur, where the Lord invited Abraham to leave his home and settle in the distant land of Canaan, where He would make him a great nation, and in him should all families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12. 1-3). This is the first intimation in the Bible that God has a purpose which will eventuate in the happiness of all mankind, and this of course implies the elimination of sin and death. Abraham did as he was bidden; in due course the Lord amplified his promise by telling him that his Seed would be as numerous as the "stars of heaven and the sand which is upon the seashore" (Gen. 22.17), because, said the Lord, of his faith and loyalty. This was the making of the Abrahamic Covenant, unconditional and irrevocable, "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and has 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 in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22. 16-18).

The writer to the Hebrews, in Chap. 6, ascribes this declaration to the "immutability of (God's) counsel" This covenant will surely be fulfilled in the promised blessing of all men, and achieved by means of Abraham's "Seed", grown into a multitude likened both to the stars of heaven and the sand of the seashore, a distinction the significance of which became apparent later on.

Nearly a century later the promise of the Covenant was confirmed to Abraham's son Isaac; the Seed was likened only to the stars of heaven (Gen. 26.4). Half a century after that it was repeated to Isaac's son Jacob, this time likened only to the dust of the earth (Gen. 28.14), and a formal confirmation of the Covenant a half century later still when Jacob returned to Canaan from his exile (Gen. 35. 9-13; Psa. 105. 8-11).

Between Isaac and Jacob the development of the promise divided into two streams. The one, from Isaac, led straight to Christ, as the Apostle Paul makes clear in Gal. 3.16, going on then in vs. 19 to include the Christian Church of this present Age as part of the Seed. Since part at least of the Church are not of blood descent from Abraham this composite Seed must be considered so, as it were, by adoption. And because these are destined for eternal association with their Lord in heaven they are fitly pictured as the stars from heaven, the promise given to Isaac. The other stream, through Jacob, leads directly to the literal nation of Israel created at Sinai, and these must also, as a purified and qualified people, become the means of blessing all families of the earth at the last, for the Divine promise cannot be abrogated. So the stream that comes through Jacob, whose destiny and sphere of service is on the earth at the end, is fitly pictured by the sand and dust of the earth as formerly declared. So the Covenant enshrines a dual Seed, Israel of Jacob, an earthly people, and the Christian Church, spiritually of Isaac, a heavenly company associated with the Lord Christ in the heavens. When the time comes for the promise to go into effect they come together, and jointly constitute the Seed of Abraham which will bless all families of the earth.

But all that was in the future, for Israel as a nation still had to run its course in history before Christ could come and the Christian Church could commence its course. So the Isaac stream, the spiritual branch of the Covenant, now had to lie fallow a while whilst the earthly stream, Israel, entered upon its period of training to be what the Lord declared He planned, a Kingdom of priests, a holy nation, to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth. And for that purpose they had to be bound to God under another Covenant.

The Law Covenant is the name given to that

arrangement, entered into by Israel at Sinai, whereby they undertook to become a separated and dedicated nation apart from all other nations of earth, and to keep the Divine laws in their entirety that when the time came they could receive their Messiah and under his leadership execute their mission of blessing all the nations of the earth. It seemed so easy; the Law was codified, written on tables of stone, and recited in their ears; all they had to do was keep it. "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do, and be obedient" they shouted, and they meant it. What they failed to realise was that fallen man is unable to stand in his own righteousness and keep the perfect law of God. Their own king, David, realised that in later years. He told them "None can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Psa. 49.7). This Covenant was conditional, and they could not keep the conditions. "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant" the Lord had said "then ye shall be a choice treasure unto me above all people, and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19.5). Under Moses the Mediator of the Covenant, a Mediator who represented them before God and pleaded their case before God, they began to learn what the Covenant really had to teach them. It was not merely a question of keeping or not keeping the law of God enshrined in the Ten Commandments; it was a question of understanding what it was that separated them from God and what was necessary if ever they were to be truly one with God and so truly his "choice treasure". That is why, associated with the Covenant, there was a system of ritual ceremony and sacrifice intended to picture the way which man must traverse in order to be truly reconciled to God and so enter into lasting life. Somehow or other they, and all men everywhere after them, must come to see that only by giving their own lives unreservedly to God on the basis of a redemption from the effects of Adamic sin can they enter into the life which is for all eternity. So they came to the priest with their offerings, and the blood of the offering, which represented life, was offered to God in the sacred place, and in picture form the Lord accepted that life and bestowed upon them the life from above, freedom from condemnation for sin. But that was valid only for twelve months and then had to be repeated, just to show that it was only a picture after all and could not be real, because, as Heb. 10.4. tells us "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin". The Covenant did fulfil its object of measurably keeping the earthly seed of Abraham, the sons of Jacob, separate from the nations and in measurable degree preparing them for their destiny when the time should come. It also fulfilled another essential purpose. "The Law" says Paul in Gal. 3.24 "was our

pedagogue"—child-leader—"to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith". Had Israel as a nation rightly profited by the lessons of the Law, they would have been in a position to recognise Christ when He appeared; but "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for, but the elect—(the choice ones)—hath obtained it and the rest were blinded" (Rom. 11.7). A few were brought to Christ, when He appeared and in subsequent years throughout this Age, but the rest still need something more than the Law Covenant can give them.

There was another important aspect of the Law Covenant. One might well ask, if the Covenant already made with Abraham promised and guaranteed eventual blessing to all families of the earth, which must imply eventual eternal life, through the Seed of that Covenant, why the need for a second, the Law Covenant? St. Paul asks and answers that question in Gal. 3. 18-19. "If the inheritance be of the Law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the Law? It was added, because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made". And the reason is the existence of sin, sin which must be eradicated before the promise can be fulfilled. The Abrahamic Covenant took no notice of the fact of sin; it was a plain statement and promise of God's intention to bless all men with life. But life cannot be unless sin be atoned for and eradicated, and the Law Covenant was "added" to teach men, through Israel, that truth. The failure of the Law Covenant to give men everlasting life drove home the fact that only by the coming of a Redeemer, who by the yielding up of his own life becomes the means of leading men away from their sins, can that life be attained. It was inherently impossible for the Covenant of itself to give men the life they sought. Something more was necessary.

That something is the New Covenant.

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which my covenant they brake. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people . . . for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, and I will remember their sin no more". (Jer. 31. 31-34).

This covenant is to do for Israel what the old covenant did not do—bring them into a condition of full acceptance with God and full conformity with the laws of God. The time when this covenant is to be made and become effective is indicated

in this chapter as that time when God regathers Israel to their own land that they might be purified and enter upon their immortal destiny to be a light to the nations—the time of the Messianic Millennial reign and the End of this present world-age, a time still future. Until then, says the Apostle Paul in Rom. 11.25. blindness is upon Israel and they have nothing but the old covenant; but when *"the fulness of the Gentiles be come in"*—the Christian Church of this present Age is completed and "changed" to be eternally associated with the Lord in Heaven—that blindness will be turned away (vs.26) and the New Covenant become operative toward them. *"This is my covenant toward them, WHEN I shall take away their sins"* (vs.27). Not until Israel's sins are about to be taken away does the New Covenant come into operation, and that is at the dawn of the Millennium, not before.

Now here is a new and important factor introduced into the operation of this Covenant. Moses was the Mediator of the old Law Covenant; the New Covenant, being conditional, also needs a Mediator, and that Mediator is, and can be no other than, Christ, who alone is able to purge men from sin and lead them away from sin. So the writer to the Hebrews, in chapter 8, after referring in vs. 6 to our Lord as the *"mediator of a better covenant"*—the New Covenant—quotes at full length the passage in Jer. 31 upon which the doctrine of the New Covenant is based.

Our Lord at the Last Supper made the same assertion relative to himself, and in so doing widened immeasurably the scope of that Covenant. Giving the cup to his disciples and bidding them drink of it, He said *"This is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matt. 26. 28). That the death of Jesus is to be efficacious for the remission of sins of all men, if they will, none will deny. That his blood sprinkled symbolically over all people in all the world as a sign of their induction into the New Covenant is a counterpart to Moses sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice over all Israel as a sign of their induction into the Law Covenant (Exod. 24.8) is perfectly clear from Scripture. The irresistible conclusion, therefore, is that the benefits of the New Covenant are not confined to Israel alone but extend to all mankind. The work of the New Covenant is synonymous with the work of Christ

the Priest-King of the Millennial, Age, bringing all who will into reconciliation with God and so ushering them into eternal life.

At his First Advent, therefore, our Lord received the office of Mediator by virtue of his sacrificial death on the cross, but the Mediatorial work did not begin at that point; the time of its commencement was not yet. For that there was a reason.

When Christ appeared for the express purpose of giving his *"life a ransom for many"* (Mark 10.45) the Seed promised to Abraham back at the beginning had come. The Apostle Paul is positive on that. Says he in Gal. 3.16 *"to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He (God) saith . . . to thy seed, which is Christ"*. Here is the One who is to execute the Divine intention to bless all families of the earth—the purpose of the New Covenant. But there is a further factor. Paul concludes this chapter (Gal. 3.29) with *"and if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"*. So the Lord Christ is to take associates to himself, the Christian Church of this present Age, to work with him in the task of converting and cleansing man from sin, the work which under the Covenant is the task of the Mediator. The Church, then, are joined with the Lord in his Mediatorial work of the next Age and this is why Jesus the Mediator cannot begin that work, nor the Age allotted to that work begin, until the Church is complete and gathered to him. Defining this position, Paul declares in 2 Cor. 3.6. that God *"hath made us able ministers of the New Covenant"* although, like our Lord, though invested with the office, we cannot commence to discharge its duties until its inauguration at the dawn of the next Age.

So the one promise to Abraham diverged into two streams in the days of Isaac and Jacob, the second stream taking the Law Covenant into its scope with Israel, the first stream leading to the Christian Church. At the Second Advent and the dawn of the Millennium the two streams converge together again in the union of the Abrahamic stream of the Seed and the New Covenant stream of Israel, a union the fruits of which will be seen in the end of sin and the salvation of the world. *"The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come'. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"*.

Somebody has said that "God expects to hear from us before we hear from him." Keep the prayer bell ringing.

We have no promise that the road of life has no detours; but that the love and grace of God for evermore endures!

In every rainstorm there is a rainbow which will be brought to light as soon as the light can touch it.

Faith will bring your soul to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your soul.

now we have received the covenant

?

THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

Part 2 of a three-part series
on Prov. 31, 10-31

"She considereth a field, and buyeth it; with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard" (vs. 16).

Zain A weapon, instrument or tool, for measuring out, cutting out, chopping down and building up. Weapons not carnal, yet mighty through God. His Word, like a sword, searches our hearts, laying bare our very motives. Instruments of iron cut and prepare the stones for the Temple of God.

The zeal that uses every opportunity as a tool, instrument, weapon in the Lord's work in order that she might grow in the acquisition both of knowledge and of grace. *"Hearken O daughter, and consider"*. It was to her an invitation to begin to try and evaluate and weigh the immeasurable. Since that first wonderful day of receiving that proposal of love new fields of knowledge and understanding have opened up for her zealously to explore, to comprehend and to make her own. The land is good land indeed, richly flowing with honey-sweet words of grace, nurturing milk and the fruit of the great vine.

Not for long does she clasp in her palms the earnings from all their efforts of meticulous endeavour. The profit ensuing from such hours of sweet research are turned to the planting of more vines, to produce the more abundant harvest that brings glory to him, fruit of heavenly wisdom and love overflowing the heart, fruit that remains. Might not such growth in knowledge puff her up? The invitation was to weigh and expand the mind to consider a proposal of great love. Her thirst is to know that One from whom it came, more intimately to know that wise and mighty skill revealed in his wondrous works, more closely feel the things that fill his mind, that grieve his spirit, that bring him joy. She has the zest of love to share the whole realm of his being, the abundance of his living. Without that love the understanding of all Heaven's secrets would be academic and empty. He is her Light, and light is sown for the righteous to harvest, and all the gladness of exploring that eternal light, for the upright in heart.

"She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms" (Vs. 17).

Cheth A surrounding hedge or fence. Used both to mark out a possession and to protect and defend from the wind, wild beasts, enemies. So the Lord set a hedge around the vineyard He had planted, Satan complains about the hedge surrounding his servant Job.

Her character of strength is not based upon her own powers, but on her weakness. It lies in the joy of her Lord, knowing He cares for her, having assured her with many infallible proofs that she is precious in his sight. He loves and cherishes, comforts and consoles, circles her with that closegird-

ing conviction that she is in the centre of his desire. Thus cosseted with love she clasps to her heart his promises, and knows he will never leave her nor forsake. This is the ground of her strength. Did she prefer her own she knows it would let her down again and again, but his strength never fails. She had heard of such serenity in others, noted the evidences under trial of such sense of security that even under threat of death it has beautified the face with a holy light of peace, as if it were the face of one who bore within the heart the most wonderful message of God. She had heard that his sheep were always in his care, that He guaranteed their life eternally, that they could not perish, nor anyone or anything pluck them out of his hand. And she had asked of him the way. She had sought to enter and enjoy all the blessedness of that place of love "where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest" under the full warmth and glory of noonday sunshine.

Now that she had found that place of rest at his side she realised well how foolish it would be ever to lose that sense of deep inward calm. She trusts him, come what may. She knows that the strength of his arms will be the strength of hers. The path of trust has taught her that He never asks her to do anything except He supplies the strength.

"She perceiveth that her merchandise is good. Her candle goes not out by night." (Vs. 18).

Teth Something that twists, hence a serpent, something entwined. Be wise as serpents. Strength of understanding and wisdom depends not on just one strand of knowledge. There are many strands which entwined form a great cable of faith.

As in the kitchen the woman tastes what she prepares, so this woman tests and tries her work against the Lord's standards of what is true and right. She tests her understanding alongside his understanding revealed in the Word of Truth. At that moment of truth, the hour of his coming, she will stand before him without shame for her work. Its value lies in the hours of diligent care, the testing of each stage, that its finished state reveals and reflects. The pattern was not of her devising, just the endeavour, and the love for her Lord that prompted such persevering devotion to her task. His the instruction, that had sometimes meant the destruction of cherished but worthless conceptions of her own. That left to her the construction, the careful marking out according to the pattern, the right dividing, the making up, and the needlework of grace, the result of all the ins and outs of the way.

There is one word of truth, yet read into it are many messages. When something gets in the way of light it refracts, impedes, distorts. Such is the Lord's way of searching the heart of those to be

counted worthy of the inheritance of the saints in light. They despise not, indeed welcome, the expressions of, and results of, others' pursuit of truth, but each day they are preaching that Word of God with which all truth is in accord.

"She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff" (Vs. 19).

Yod A hand, which performs the will in all activity. Used so many times of the Lord in whose hand we rest secure. Also of the handmaiden of the Lord who takes not her eyes from that hand that signals to indicate the Will she has made her own.

Her hands are yielded to her Lord. Like all her members, they are his, no longer servants of the former will, but instruments of righteousness. Cleaned from all that is unworthy, they function at the impulse of his Spirit. Gladly do they accept his filling of the hands with that offering which must be waved continually before their Lord. Day after day, hour by hour, they untiringly seek his glory, showing his praise in working out that holy, acceptable and perfect Will of God. More homely language is used here to describe the same offering. In one hand is the distaff from which the thread is slowly unwound, in the other the spindle hangs. Inch by inch the thread of life passes through her hands. Moment by moment the spindle spins the seconds by. There is no going back. Something is made of every moment; it cannot be reversed. Something learned, something done, some victory for truth won. It is a work in which each moment counts and plays its part, and it is with this sense of wondrous purpose that she takes and uses each to the glory of her Lord, approving herself in much patience as the servant of God.

Tedious is the work of gleaning, like that of spinning inch by inch; single ears of corn, picked one by one. So Ruth gleaned in the field until even. But one was watching and noting her meticulous care, her careful searching and gathering. And her future Bridegroom gave instructions to his servants concerning her that they let fall "handfuls on purpose" for her to find. Did she realise? Did she recognise that overruling? Do we? "Where hast thou gleaned to-day?"

"She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy" (Vs. 20).

Caph A covering wing, the hollow of a palm. Wings are used to cover and protect, to succour and defend. Used so aptly of the Lord in his care of his own. His hands too, open to satisfy the desire of every living thing.

Her name is Charity as her Father's name is Love. The good cheer her Master brings into her life she gladly shares, knowing that whatever practical form such cheer might take, her own supply will never fail nor her vessel empty. Each cup of water in his Name carries his guarantee of blessing upon the heart that cares. She is touched with the

feeling of her Lord's compassion, and knows the joy of the love that lives when it gives. The 'poor' in this verse refers to those depressed either in mind or circumstance. The reaching out to all such in need of succour and encouragement involves a keenly sensitive spirit, a true communing or sharing on both counts, the bearing of the burden and the sharing of the consolation. She is known like her God for a refuge. The spirit of Christ within her attracts the needy soul; it induces trust and makes her the first to turn to in every time of need.

Hers is the privilege of dispensing to others now a foretaste of that sweet power that will transform this earth in the Age of love to come. She cannot yet wipe away all tears but introduces the broken of heart to the One who can and will. She cannot stay the Reaper of Death, yet her own cheerful courage under trial is a song in the night that others hear. It is a witness to the power of Divine love. If it turns one prisoner of darkness into a prisoner of hope, if it turns one tearful face towards the Cross of Christ, this our present joy is fulfilled. Each act of sharing and caring love deepens the character-likeness and prepares us more for the work of lifting every human load.

"She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed with scarlet" (Vs. 21).

Lamed An ox goad, used to guide the ox in accordance with the wishes of its master. In Eccl. 12. 11 it is used to describe the words of the wise. In Acts 2. 14 it refers to the pricking of conscience in the mind of Saul of Tarsus.

Labours motivated by true love for the brethren, love ever seeking their highest welfare. Love that anticipates with wise foresight the future needs of failing years, and seeks to build up and strengthen faith in the things unseen and dependence on the source of strength that never fails when human strength gives way. The effect of her fellowship is thus to deepen trust and encourage that state of spiritual activity and the fitting of the armour that will enable each saint to stand in the evil day.

Having a Father who loves to make abundant provision for his children's comfort and blessing, the Betrothed shares that deep desire that the household of God indulge in all the blessing of the abundant living available to them now. The Lord's saints may be poor in the eyes of the world, yet are they rich in faith. They must learn to live with glory, learn to live in the centre of a great love. Their garments are of scarlet (margin, 'double-garments'). Theirs are the great privileges of firstborns; they are of a royal line, all children of a King. All these blessed realities, the great and precious promises, the height of the Heavenly Calling, the treasures of Divine truth; all things are for their sakes that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, resound to the glory of God.

This wondrous provision, the abundance of his thoughts towards us, the riches of his mercy and tender love, combine to produce that warm inward glow of the beloved of God. Her household will not fear the snow in winter, the chill of earthly loss. The mighty fortress of all the Divine resources remains, her impregnable abode.

"She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk (linen) and purple" (Vs. 22).

Mem Water, waves of the sea. The greatest covering. When the earth was passing through its earlier stages "thou coverest it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains" (Psa. 104.6). In due course the whole earth will be thus filled with the knowledge of his glory.

The vision of that day in her heart, the wife of the Lamb makes herself ready. As probationary minister of reconciliation she adorns herself with meekness and the mantle of mercy. Her ability as a minister of the New Covenant is related to the preparation of the garments of glory and beauty which depict the blessed qualities required of the Christ to befit the work before them, and relate to the satisfying of every human need. Here and now is the place and time of that preparing. Then there is the wedding dress, the character development that results from the hope and the experimental knowing of the 'suffering-with', the 'dying-with', the present fellowship of his proving experiences. The path to glory for the saints is in the steps of God's Lamb.

She spends her hours in the beautifying of the House of God, his dwelling-place. She takes to heart the instructions, corrections and reproof of the Word of God that his Sanctuary may be thoroughly furnished right through, in that blessed and holy way that will make the God of glory feel at home and at rest. The Spirit of God grants the wisdom and the skill for the work of preparing. By that same Spirit she adorns all that she touches. The ordinary and everyday she transforms, for everything she does is to the glory of God. Her garments are the priestly dress of fine linen (not silk) of righteousness, and royal garments of purple. The order is that of Melchisedek, King of righteousness, King of peace. The Calling is so high. The days of labouring to enter in are so few. But her times are in the hands of the One who called; He

trusts her judgment of the situation as she indeed does trust that of her Lord. He knows she will redeem the time. She knows He will supply all the sufficiency for her needs.

"Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land" (Vs. 23).

Nun A fish; also the name of one gate of the city of Jerusalem. The fish became one of the earliest symbols of the Christian Church, and an acronym for the title in Greek, "Jesus Christ, of God the Son, Saviour", each first letter being taken to form the word *ichthys*, 'fish'.

Wonderful Counsellor. He sits at the gate of all knowledge, the epitome of the wisdom of the truly wise. Of the great Creator, source of the unsearchable, He could only say "I have known thee". He also knows with intimate experience what is in man. "Then went Boaz to the gate (place where all matters of judgment were decided) and sat down" (Ruth 4. 1-2) with the elders of the city. The Law had claims over Ruth, but could not help her; Boaz settled the claims of the Law on her behalf. He acted as her "gaal", her next-of-kin, her redeemer. "What the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh" He has done for us. "He hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law" (Rom. 8. 2-3; Gal. 3. 15). The cost of that redemption; the way it was met! The name of Jesus is, in the eyes of his redeemed, the name of wisdom, of righteousness, of great and uttermost love; the Name, above every name that is named.

Nearer and dearer than the closest friend, his is the name she shares. This is the honour she treasures above all others, to bear his Name. With what sense of greatest privilege she seeks to walk worthily of that name. It is in his Name that she serves, in him she utters to God her heart's deep desires. To call upon that Name is deliverance, to breathe it, peace. Its holiness and glory repels unworthy thought. No impure word, no shameful act of hers, shall bring reproach upon that Name. Her whole life honours it, and hers are the first knees to bow at its sound. When, one day, every knee bows and every tongue confesses He is their worthy Lord, she will be at his side, welcoming for him that blessed acclaim. Even then she will know in her heart that she was the first who trusted in that Name.

To be concluded

"The trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." (James 1. 3-4). There is something about the atmosphere of trial which seems to clear the vision of the children of God. In mountain scenery it is in stormy weather that the landscape takes upon itself the greatest beauty, and spiritually our vision is often dim and hazy when the skies are fair, but the day of trial often gives us the loveliest views of God and things Divine. It is in the furnace heated hotter

than usual that the form of the Son of God is seen. It is in the fourth watch of the night of toiling that the Lord appears walking majestically upon the sea. God's witness in His word is so sure that we may draw solid comfort from it, and no attacks made upon it, however fierce or subtle, can ever weaken its force. What a blessing that in a world of uncertainties we have something sure to rest upon! We hasten from the quicksands of human speculation to the terra firma of Divine Revelation.

THE NEPHILIM

An investigation

One of the—at first sight—incredible stories of the Bible is that of the angels who attempted to father a new race of men with human women. Incredible, that is, were it not that the narrative forms part of Bible history and cannot be dismissed as fiction without dislocating much other Bible doctrine. The fact that two of the Apostles—Peter and Jude—refer to it as true history lends it an authority which cannot be disputed, and it remains therefore to examine the account to see what it really does say.

It was the period before the Flood, the antediluvian era, which saw this strange happening. It is introduced in Gen. 6. 1-4 as one reason why the Lord allowed the Flood to bring that world to an end and start again. The translators of the A.V. had some difficulty with one or two phrases in the account but most modern versions, notably the R.A.V., the R.S.V., the N.E.B., besides the Douay and the Septuagint, have straightened these out and the result is a readable and readily understood account.

"And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the Lord said, my spirit shall not remain in man for ever, because he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years. The Nephilim were upon the earth in those days and afterwards, whenever the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men and they bare to them. These are the mighty ones of old, the renowned ones".

It is a very restrained and matter-of-fact account, with no indication that the historian saw anything unusual in the incident he records. The idea of angels, celestial beings, intermarrying with terrestrial creatures of this earth must be so strange, though, to modern minds, that some thought to this opening statement ought to be given.

Bible history records something like forty instances of visits by angels to men on earth, each time on some definite mission. On each occasion they appeared in human form, their celestial nature embodied in a material organism similar to that of man and functioning in a similar manner—the three who appeared to Abraham (Gen. 18) partook of a hearty meal with him. Such messengers from the other world must necessarily use Divine power to form terrestrial bodies from the atoms of Nature around them, much as in the Eden story the first man was created from the "dust of the ground" (Gen. 2.7), the angelic life being related to this earthly environment through that terrestrial body just as under its normal condition it would be related to its heavenly environment

through its celestial body (as Paul makes clear in his exposition of this subject in 1 Cor. 15). In all probability such would be magnificent specimens of humanity, much as was the first man at his creation before his fall into sin. The union of such with human women—the "daughters of men"—then becomes a perfectly feasible proposition.

Why did they do it? The idea that heavenly angels from the celestial world, temporarily "posted" to earth for the execution of some special mission, would become so infatuated with the beauty of its women that they preferred life on earth in company with what would have involved a succession of dying wives, is so grotesque as to be quite untenable. The nature and the glories of the celestial must be so transcendently greater than the terrestrial that there could not possibly be any attraction of this kind. The reason must have been something much more fundamental.

Perhaps the Lord's comment, in verse 2, when He saw what was happening, furnishes a clue. "My spirit" He said "shall not remain in man for ever, because he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years. (The expression "shall not strive with man" in the A.V. is recognised nowadays to be defective; the word has the sense of abiding in, dwelling in, remaining in). Gen. 2.7 tells how the Lord, after forming the human body of Adam from the dust of earth, infused his spirit, the spirit of life ("breath" and "spirit" are the same word in Hebrew, "ruach"), and man became a living being. Whilst man remained loyal to God that Divine spirit of life, permeating his being, guaranteed everlasting life, but when he sinned, the day had to come that the residue of that life expired, and he died. And this has been the fate of all men since, and was that of the generations before the Flood. "Thou shalt not surely die" said the Devil to Eve in the Garden, but he lied, and men have died, from that day to this.

At the first, directly after the Flood, men survived, according to Genesis, for periods of up to four or five hundred years. Reasons, historical and otherwise, exist for taking these figures literally. A thousand years later this was reduced to round about two hundred years and at the Exodus to a hundred and twenty or so. The average age of death has progressively decreased since then to the present level of seventy or eighty and even less in some parts of the world. A calculation taking into account all the ages of death given in the Old Testament, together with some gleaned from ancient history, added to statistics relating to modern times, would indicate an average age at death for the entire period in the region of a hundred and forty years,—not too far from the Lord's words. Did He mean to infer that so far from there being

a possibility of prolonging human life He had ordained that death must come, and the measure of life taken over the period of this world-age was to be expressed as a mean of a hundred and twenty years? There are other suggestions as to the significance of this phrase in this verse but none that connect it so directly with the context, and such connection would seem to be demanded.

So, says the Lord, the lifetime of man must be limited, because of sin, and the original Edenic sentence, and therefore the Divine spirit of life cannot remain in him for ever—not until a Redeemer for man's sin can come and effect a way of salvation, but that was to be three thousand years future and has no place in this history. But this insistence that human life must be limited and every man eventually pass into death may afford a clue to this attempted union of angelic with human life, and throw some light on the rest of the passage. "*The Nephilim were upon the earth in those days and afterwards, whenever the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare to them. These are the mighty ones of old, the renowned ones*". (Giants for "nephilim" in the A.V. is derived from the Greek Septuagint, which adopted the Greek "gigantos" in that translation, so giving the English "gigantic" and "giant"). These were the resultant progeny of these unions. But why "nephilim"?

The customary explanation is that the word is derived from the Hebrew verb *naphal*, to fall or drop, thus indicating fallen ones or dropped ones, and sometimes a premature birth or an abortion, as in Job 3. 16, Psa. 58. 8 and Eccl. 6. 3. This ignores the fact that when the events happened and Genesis was written there were no Hebrews and no Hebrew language. Genesis chaps. 1 to 11 were originally written in the Sumerian and Akkadian (*Ham and Shem*) languages of the time before Abraham. This is where the meaning of the word has to be sought. "*Nephilim*" is most likely to be the Hebrew equivalent of the Akkadian *napistu-ilu*, two words together meaning life-breath of God. This, transliterated into Hebrew, would become *nephesh-elohim*, in ordinary speech nephilim. There could be an indication here that these creatures, fathered by the angels and born of human women, were claimed at the time to be bearers of life from God. That would tend to support the view that the object of the angels was to impart to mankind the eternal life which Adam had lost.

But something went terribly wrong. There is no record that in the outcome men like gods walked the earth, bringing life and happiness to the world; according to the apocryphal "Book of Enoch" and the "Book of Jubilees" of the 2nd century B.C., which have a lot to say about this, based on old Jewish tradition, they were monsters, bringing

further death and violence so that the chronicler says a little later on that the earth was filled with violence. It is significant that the word "children" in vs. 4 of the A.V. is inserted by the translators; it does not appear in the Hebrew text. Vs. 4 says that "the women bare" but it does not say what they bare. And whereas the generic word *adam* is used for "man" in every other occurrence in this passage, where "mighty men" appears it is "*anashim*", meaning strong and violent ones like warriors and fighters of later days. Says the Book of Jubilees (Jub. 5.21) "*the angels of God saw that they were beautiful to look upon and they took themselves wives of all whom they chose, and they bare them sons and they were nephilim And they began to devour each other and lawlessness increased on the earth and every imagination of the thoughts of all men was evil continually*". The narrative goes on to say that in their violence they turned upon each other and finally were all thus destroyed. Likewise says I Enoch 7. 3-5. "*They consumed all the acquisitions of men, and when men could no longer sustain them, the nephilim turned against them and devoured mankind. And they began to sin against birds and beasts and reptiles and fish, to devour the flesh and drink the blood.*" The archangels are depicted appealing to the Most High to intervene; "*they have gone to the daughters of men upon the earth and the women have borne nephilim, and the whole earth has thereby been filled with blood and unrighteousness*". This of course is Jewish tradition, but there must be a basis underlying the tradition, a memory so fearful that it was embedded in the national consciousness for long ages afterwards.

Had the angels made a colossal mistake? Had they, with the aid of their adopted physical bodies and in association with their human wives, produced sons who were human in appearance and physical organism, but whose mental faculties were only those of animals, denied that which God implanted in Adam to make him distinct from the brute creation, so that they were not really men at all, but human-like beasts? Is this why the author of "Jubilees" says they were "different"? Such hypothesis would explain their conduct. In appearance, strong, virile men of the physique and stature perhaps of Samson or Goliath of later days, but in mind and disposition, in nature and instincts, rampaging wild beasts who devoured men and all the acquisitions of men and then treated similarly the animal creation, and finally fought and devoured each other. Was this the result of the angels' endeavour to bring into being a new species of supermen who could infuse new life into dying humanity?

The angels do not have all knowledge. Although superior to men in intellect and powers they are, nevertheless, created of God as are men; one or

two Scripture allusions indicate that their knowledge, like that of man, has limits. They are not cognisant of the full extent of God's creative purposes; some aspects are hidden even from them. (1 Pet. 1.12; Mark 13.32). That fact suggests the possibility that in their scheming and planning the apostate angels overlooked, because ignorant of, one vital factor. Man is endowed with faculties possessed by no other earthly creature—consciousness of God, instinct for worship, powers of reasoning reaching into the past and the future, everything that goes to make up human intelligence as distinct from the instinct which governs the lower creatures' lives. But nothing of this is to be found in man's physical structure; it is an attribute of mind implanted there by God at the time of man's creation. The Lord, we are told in Genesis, formed man of the dust of the ground—the atoms of elements which constitute the earth—breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul—a sentient, breathing creature responsive to his environment. But if that is all God did, Adam was merely another animal. Animals are all made of the dust of the ground and all possess the breath of life, and all are living souls—Scripture so refers to them in several places. God endowed Adam with something more, something that was not physical and not derived from the atoms of the earth, and it was that which linked him with God and made him man. Something which could only come from God, an unseen bond or power which made Adam both a man and a son of God.

Is that where the angels went wrong? Did they, with what we would call their biological knowledge, create for themselves complete and entire human bodies by means of which they could father sons who turned out to be complete and entire biological specimens of humanity, but lacked that quality which God bestowed upon Adam? Thus their sons were not really human at all; they were brutish, savage monsters in the form of men who followed the laws of their animal nature by ravaging and devouring as the narratives say they did.

If this be indeed the case, another problem is solved. It has been said that these sons of the angels, who perished before the Flood, an illicit race, not sons of Adam, can have no resurrection. As a

theological principle this stands true. So far as this earth is concerned only those who die in Adam are those made alive in Christ. This hybrid strain, half-angelic, half-human, would introduce an element of disorder into Divine creation which could not be suffered to endure. Yet, on the other hand, if these beings were indeed endowed with the intellects of men, at least capable of the hopes and fears, the impulses, and the loyalties toward God, of men, not themselves responsible for the means whereby they were brought into the world, it would seem horribly unjust for them to be denied the opportunity of everlasting life which is extended to all other rational beings. But if, on the other hand, they were in fact as other beasts that perish, the question does not arise.

Perhaps there is a warning in this for our own times. Scientists of to-day are trying to create man from the dust of the earth. They call it genetic engineering and advance many reasons in justification. There is much being done to-day in the field of attempts to combine genes, the mysterious determinants of characteristics carried in the cells of the body, from differing animals in the endeavour to create a new and improved type of animal. Some talk of trying to do the same thing with human beings. Others talk of making genes from non-living matter. But suppose they did one day succeed in constructing a living, breathing creature from the correct arrangement of atoms and molecules. It could never be more than an unreasoning animal. Reverence, worship, loyalty, love, appreciation of God, none of these can ever reside in atoms or a conglomeration of atoms. These things are the gift of God and only bestowed by him. The yearning to create a "master race" of superbly physically healthy and intelligent men and women is always there. But what if the experiments takes an unexpected turn? Not so long ago an endeavour to "cross" African bees with South American ones to "improve the strain" resulted in the emergence of a new type of "killer bees" which in a matter of two or three years has spread from South to Central America and is now threatening the United States. "Playing at being God" can be a dangerous and terrible pastime, one that can only end in utter and final disaster. The angels found that out.

"The outward features of our life may not be all that we would choose them to be; there may be things we wish for that never come to us: there may be much we wish away that we cannot part from. The persons with whom we live, the circumstances by which we are surrounded, the duties we have to perform, the burdens we have to bear, may not only be other than what we should have selected for ourselves, but may even seem inconsistent with the formation and discipline of character which we

honestly wish to promote. Knowing us better than we know ourselves, fully understanding how greatly we are affected by the outward events and conditions of life, He has ordered them with a view to our *entire and final*,—*not only our immediate happiness*: and whenever we can be safely trusted with pastures that are green and waters that are still, in the way of earthly blessing—the Good Shepherd leads us there".

(Selected)

BURIED WITH HIM IN BAPTISM

*Comment on
Rom. 6. 4*

The choice of fitting words by the Apostle to describe the experiences involved in the Christian life is very precise and accurate. It is wonderful to find how much of vital truth, and of religious experience can be compressed into a single word.

In this respect take note of the first word quoted at the head of this study—"Buried". Who among us has not witnessed a little cortege wending its way to some selected spot, at which the earth has been opened in readiness, to lay away the lifeless remains of some beloved one whose torch of life has been extinguished. The angel of Death has swept by, and one who had been full of activity and vitality has fallen a victim to the sweep of his ruthless scythe, and now lies inert and motionless. And so the little farewell ceremony has progressed, and the officiating minister and the bereaved mourners have laid "earth to earth—ashes to ashes—dust to dust", and there have left the precious burden, as with weeping eyes, and sorrowing hearts they have turned away from the place of repose, and returned to the habitation which will know the loved one no more, till the voice of the Son of God calls the waiting dead from their long silent sleep. And then, after the mourners have moved away, other hands have returned the earth to the cavity, and have hidden from sight all that was left of the dear-departed, and the earth has given to her bosom that which she had hitherto given, for dust we are, and unto dust shall we return.

Burial! entombment! interment! sepulchre! the close of a career; the end of an existence! a sleep—and a forgetting. No matter how strong and directive the will of the deceased had been, how brilliant the mind and intellect had been, how strong the affections and love had been, they will not move the lifeless form again. They are as lights that have become extinguished, and have left no trace behind.

How impressive and full of meaning, then, is the symbolic ceremony whereby the surrender of the Christian's life is pictured forth. All things considered, the descent and plunge into the watery sepulchre, with waters above, around, and beneath seems to be the most fitting symbol to represent complete submergence into the Will of God.

And suitable and fitting as is the symbol, it is not

one whit more emphatic and definite than the great reality which it depicts. For it means, by a process of agreement and covenant, all that is seen every day of our life, when some member of our earthly kith and kin comes to the gates of the dark valley. In the Divine purposes, it means the termination of a life—not merely of a mode of life or a way of living; something very much more than that. Consecration does not merely mean the turning over of a "new leaf", and the beginning of a different clean page. If that were all, the same old book is still retained and though the page is new, the book is still the same—the "identity" is still the same. "Burial" with him means the cessation of the identity; the dissolution of the personality which hitherto had lived and functioned; and in God's sight the dissolution of the identity is just as complete when made by covenant, as when made by death, for when we go down into the waters of baptism it is to depict that "We"—our "self"—have gone down into the Divine sepulchre for ever. We are swallowed up into his Will and his Purpose, and there is nothing left for any other purpose. By the terms of the covenant the old will and mind and affections are dead; and if God should call upon us at any moment to consummate our existence in his service, we have no cause of complaint open to us.

But this burial is a prelude to a new life—a New Creation life—a resurrection life—a life of great possibilities, a life in association with Jesus, in heavenly exaltation and glory. From out of this covenant tomb the flowers of immortality will spring, if so be that the Will of God is not thwarted and hindered by the perversity of the members of the human body which has to serve the New Creation till a better one is found for it.

Thus in going down in to the symbolic waters of baptism (down into the waters of God's Will) we go down into death and dissolution as men, but when we come up therefore, we arise as a New Creation, a new being, with hopes thenceforth of a spiritual existence, blossoming forth into immortality.

What a wonderful height and depth, length and breadth of Divine truth, and Christian experience, therefore, is crystallized and condensed into this graphic word "Buried".

Dare to trust God; dare to follow him! And discover that the very forces which barred your progress and threatened your life, at His bidding become the materials of which an avenue is made to liberty.

We need to guard against fretting because we do not see the results of our labours. It may be possible that a Christian will not see the fruit of his labours; but, if he has sown the Good Seed he may safely entrust the results to God.

LAST VISIT TO JERUSALEM

*No. 14 in a series of
stories of St. Paul*

The tall, scholarly looking man looked up from his writing as a shadow darkened his doorway. His momentary expression of incredulity gave place to manifest pleasure; he rose from his chair and went forward to grasp the hand of his visitor. The last thing Luke the physician expected was to see his close friend, Paul, walking into his house here at Philippi. It is easy to visualise the unfeigned delight with which he drew the newcomer to a seat, called for a meal to be prepared, and began to enquire into the progress of his work at Ephesus and the reason for Paul's unexpected appearance so far from the scene of his labours.

Something like six years had elapsed since last these two men met. Upon the establishment of the church at Philippi during the course of Paul's second missionary journey Luke had remained there to nurture the infant community while Paul went on to Berea, Athens, Corinth and eventually home to Antioch. They had probably kept in touch; casual travellers would have carried letters and news, but such opportunities were few and far between so that in great measure Luke had been left to his own resources in the discharge of his obligations. How well he had succeeded was evidenced by the healthy state of the Philippian church. The two old comrades-in-arms must have sat up late that night satisfying each other's excited queries, the one asking after affairs in Philippi and the other seeking information about the many places Paul had visited since they parted six years earlier.

After the riot in the Ephesus stadium which precipitated the end of Paul's work there and his rather hurried departure from the city he took the road to Troas, the seaport for ships going to Greece, with the evident intention of visiting the churches he had established there during his second missionary journey. It was at Troas, six years earlier, that he saw in a dream the man of Macedonia calling him to come over and help them; those churches in Greece were the fruits of that call. Now he was in Troas again, doubtless in fellowship with the believers, waiting there for the return of Titus, who a little while previously had been despatched to Corinth bearing the letter known to us as the First Epistle to the Corinthians. From Paul's words in 2 Cor. 2, 12-13 it seems that Paul was getting worried about the failure of Titus to meet him in Troas as expected. The Epistle had been sent to correct certain abuses which had crept into the Corinthian church and it is only natural to surmise that the period of waiting, loaded with uncertainty, following his recent harrowing experience at Ephesus, had thrown the usually confident Apostle into a mood of deep depression. It seems that at last he could stand the inactivity no longer, and deciding that Titus was not coming to meet

him at all he took ship for Macedonia and made his way to Philippi where he could be certain of finding his old friend, Luke.

It was here that Titus did join him eventually. The news was partly good and partly bad. The brethren at Corinth had taken his letter of reproof and admonition (the First Epistle) in the right spirit and had taken steps to correct the abuses in their assembly. On the other hand, there had been other visitors to Corinth casting doubt upon the validity of Paul's apostleship and upon his personal integrity, and a section in the church had accepted these accusations as true and were repudiating his mission and his message. The upshot of this was the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, which was written probably at Philippi and sent to Corinth by the hand of the ever willing Titus. Paul himself determined to delay his own visit to Corinth for a while longer to give his letter an opportunity of having its full effect upon the Corinthian brethren.

As if the shortcomings of Corinth were not enough, the Apostle now encountered trouble from another quarter. News came to the effect that the churches in Galatia were being influenced by teachers who claimed that Christians must be subject to the Laws of Moses. This "Judaising" tendency was a constant problem in the early Christian communities and several generations passed before it was finally settled. Fully alive to the situation, Paul lost no time in preparing and sending to his Galatian converts a complete refutation of this doctrine, this "yoke of bondage", as he described it; thus did the Epistle to the Galatians come into being.

In addition to these literary activities, written in the house of Luke at Philippi, the Apostle found time for a brief tour through Macedonia, revisiting Thessalonica and Berea, and pushing farther westward than he had done before, into the district of Illyricum on the coast of the Adriatic Sea. On the other side of that sea lay Italy, and in Italy was Rome. Whilst he was still in Ephesus he had determined within himself that after this tour through Greece, and one more visit to Jerusalem, he must go to Rome (Acts 19, 21). Now as he gazed across the heaving waters of the Adriatic he pictured beyond the distant mountains that proud city which had become the capital and centre of the Empire, and told himself that he must certainly visit the Christian community which already existed there and proclaim the truths of the Gospel with no uncertain voice in the city of Caesar itself. With these thoughts in mind he finally made his way to Corinth.

Paul stayed in Corinth for three months. Three momentous months they proved to be, for during this time the Epistle to the Romans was written.

First of all he had to undo the work of the false apostles who had been busy in Corinth, and set things in order in the church. Secondly there was the question of the money gift for the brethren at Jerusalem. Throughout Greece the Christian communities had been working on this proposal; news had come their way of the desperate straits of poverty to which the Jerusalem church had been reduced, partly because of famine and partly the disturbed political state of the country. Judea was already entering into that era of active rebellion against Rome which came to a head ten years later when the Roman general Titus destroyed Jerusalem and expelled the Jews from the land. Paul had made himself responsible for seeing that the gift was safely taken to its intended recipients, and already he had, travelling with him as joint custodians, Jason and Aristarchus of Thessalonica, Sosipator of Berea, Gaius of Derbe, together with Timothy, Trophimus and Tychicus, all of Ephesus, and his close friends Luke and Titus. It had been a lonely journey up to this point, but now he was with a goodly company of stalwart warriors of the Lord and his heart must have rejoiced. It was in that exultation of spirit and relative freedom from stress that the Apostle Paul sat down to write what is universally acclaimed the greatest of his written works, the Epistle to the Romans.

Paul was no stranger to the Roman fellowship. Although he had not as yet visited Rome, many of the Christians living there were personally known to him. Aquila and Priscilla, whom he first met at Corinth and afterwards worked with at Ephesus, were now back in the capital. The decree of Claudius, expelling all Jews from Rome, was never rigorously applied by the authorities, and by now, fourteen years after its promulgation, had become a dead letter. So Aquila and Priscilla had gone back. Epenetus, the first convert in Greece, and Andronicus and Junia who worked with Paul at Ephesus, were also in Rome. So were a number of others whom the Apostle had met or with whom he had laboured at various times, and at the end of the Epistle he makes special mention of them all, revealing his intention, not mentioned in any other record of his work, of one day journeying not only to Rome but onward into Spain, the western extremity, as Judea and the adjacent lands were the eastern extremity, of the Roman empire. So the epistle was finished, and Phoebe, the deaconess of Cenchrea, who had been converted when Paul first came to Corinth, was entrusted with the task of making the long journey to Rome to convey it into the hands of the Christians in the great city. There must have been considerable excitement among the brethren there when the letter arrived, and at the prospect of a visit from the famous Apostle. There was as yet no persecution of Christians in Rome. The Emperor Nero had been on the

throne for four years but had not yet developed those characteristics which bore such terrible fruit a few years later. The church in Rome included Romans as well as Jews, highly born as well as slaves, and all were able to follow their faith without let or hindrance. So the Apostle was able to discourse to them without necessity or thought for exhorting to steadfastness under persecution as the writers frequently do in some other New Testament books. This three months at Corinth was a quiet interlude in the Apostle's stormy life, an interlude which he used to good purpose in writing the most celebrated of all his epistles. The interlude was all too short; three months was as long as the orthodox Jews of Corinth could stand before making plans to do him a mischief. It had apparently become known that he intended to take ship direct to Syria, en route to Jerusalem with the money gift that had been collected, and the Jews plotted to waylay him as he set sail. Taking evasive action by a change of route, Paul and his party travelled overland into Macedonia instead, doubtless calling at Philippi on the way, and sailed across the sea to Troas on the Asiatic coast, from which port he had come to Greece. To all intents and purposes this concluded the third missionary journey; from now onward he was making his way to Jerusalem to hand over the gift.

The brethren at Troas were not going to let him go easily. The Apostle spent a week in the city and while he was there the incident of Eutychus occurred. The believers had come together on the first day of the week to break bread; Paul was present with them and was to preach. The story is of value as showing that at this early date, only twenty five years after the Crucifixion, the adoption of the first day of the week as the day of gathering for worship, instead of the seventh, the Jewish Sabbath, had become established. It was to be another three centuries before the Emperor Constantine legalised Sunday as the weekly day of rest and worship throughout the Empire. The reference to breaking of bread is often taken as indicating a celebration of the Last Supper, or "Holy Communion", but this is open to question. There is no indication in the New Testament as to how frequently the early Church obeyed our Lord's injunction "this do, as oft as ye do it, in remembrance of me". It is perhaps more likely that this occasion at Troas was the weekly "agape" or love feast, mentioned several times in the Book of Acts, the simple communal meal which was held at frequent intervals in the life of each local Church to express in symbol and practice their joint fellowship in Christ. At any rate, the centre of attention was the Apostle Paul; he continued his preaching until midnight and apparently was showing no sign of finishing even then. His hearers were not tired of listening and gave him their undivided and rapt

attention; all, that is, save one young man, Eutychus.

Eutychus was sleepy. The weakness of the flesh had overcome the eagerness of the spirit. He might well have been a slave who had performed an arduous day's work before coming to the service. The meeting was being held on the third floor of the building and Eutychus had seated himself in one of the window embrasures which were just plain openings admitting light and air—perhaps in the hope that the cool night breeze would keep him awake. But "*Paul was long preaching*" and "*there were many lights in the upper chamber where they were gathered together*". Despite his best endeavours, Eutychus began to nod. The voice of the speaker went on and on, impinging dully on his consciousness, but all the time Nature was demanding, and receiving, the blessed relief of sleep. The account is so realistic that one might think that St. Luke, who was there and recorded it, was himself looking apprehensively toward Eutychus at the time but was not near enough to prevent the mishap. The lad was at first "*fallen into a deep sleep*" but as the sermon went on "*he sunk down with sleep and fell from the third loft, and was taken up dead*". One can picture the cry of alarm which suddenly interrupted the meeting and the rush of some downstairs to the inert body lying in the courtyard, and then perhaps the anxious faces as Luke, the physician, knelt by the unfortunate lad to ascertain the extent of his injuries.

There is a certain amount of doubt as to whether Eutychus was actually dead or merely rendered unconscious by the fall, a doubt which is due to the remark attributed to Paul himself, who came down, embraced the still form, and said "*Trouble not yourselves, for his life is in him*". Later on "*they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted*". Against this hypothesis there must be considered several factors. In the first place, a fall of this nature, even if it did not result in death must have involved serious physical injuries—at the least broken bones. Secondly, with Luke present it is most unlikely that Paul would take it upon himself to give what amounts to a medical opinion; by common consent the examination of Eutychus would have been left to Luke, and he says that he was "*taken up dead*". A layman might have been mistaken but not so likely a professional medical man. It seems more probable that we have here one of the very few examples of Divine intervention following the end of Jesus' life on earth and that Eutychus was literally dead and was restored to life. The action of Paul in "*embracing*" the body is reminiscent of Elijah and of Elisha in Old Testament days; both those prophets raised from the dead, one the widow's son, the other the Shunamite's child, in a similar fashion. In the New Testament a detailed account of the restoration of

Tabitha to life by Peter shortly after death had taken place is given, so that Paul here might well have done what his brother Apostle had done a few years previously. Such an exercise of miraculous power would, of course, include the healing of such physical injuries as might have been sustained; thus Eutychus could be brought back into the meeting shortly afterwards as implied by the account.

Paul continued his discourse until break of day, so that the gathering must have been in session for almost twenty-four hours. That accounts for what appears to be a second breaking of bread in Chapter 20. 11 in the small hours of the second day of the week. They probably needed it. This was most likely a more substantial meal during which the Apostle talked in a more informal fashion; that seems to be the implication of verse 11. Then he took his leave of the brethren at Troas and set out on the last lap of his journey to Jerusalem.

The ship on which the little party of evangelists had secured a passage was evidently one of the small trading vessels which coasted along the shore, calling at each port in turn, remaining a while to discharge and take on cargo, and if night was imminent waiting until next morning before resuming the voyage. A few days sailing brought them to Miletus, which was the port for Ephesus, distant from the city about forty miles. The vessel was evidently scheduled to stay here for several days, long enough for Paul to summon the elders of the church to meet him at Miletus for a brief conference before the ship departed. It was a memorable meeting; the Apostle reminded them of the ministry and teaching he had so freely given them over the space of three years and exhorted them to prove true to their calling and their obligations as elders in the church. He warned them that "*grievous wolves*" would enter among them and wreak havoc with the "*flock*", men speaking perverse things and drawing away disciples after them. "*I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God*" he said, striking sadness into their hearts by telling them "*I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the Kingdom of God, shall see my face no more*". It is apparent that at this time Paul did not expect ever to return to Ephesus; he felt that the unrelenting enmity of his Jewish opponents was bringing him steadily nearer to the day that he would fall victim to their machinations. He had just told these very elders "*And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Spirit witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me*". At this moment Paul had no clear foreview of the future and probably no plans. He only knew that he must go to Jerusalem; after that all was in the hands of his Lord.

So at length, after changing ships at Patara in Lycia, and again at Tyre in Phoenicia, Paul and his companions arrived at Cæsarea, the nearest seaport to Jerusalem. There they entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, to spend a few days in quietude and rest before going up to meet the

Jerusalem church.

There was to be no more quietude and rest for the Apostle after this. Within a few days he was to be Paul the prisoner, and more than four years were to pass before he was again to know freedom.

To be continued

YOUR FAITH

I came to your door and I met your faith. I had met faith at various times, but not *your* faith. Faith indeed had much to do with my experience with life. When I had come to the borderland where the country of knowledge ends, Faith had taken my hand and led me forward and shown me things that were strange and of wondrous interest. But your faith had an individuality of its own, and impressed me with directness and with power. Perhaps that was because I was weary. I do not know. I only know that I was glad to rest awhile and to bask in the sunshine of your faith.

The way had been toilsome and long. There had been the mountains to cross, and there had been avalanches and great storms. There had been the forest, where wild beasts roamed at large and where to lose one's way was easy enough. At times my strength seemed unequal to such a journey, but I had undertaken it, and my mind was a citadel where resolution had intrenched itself and where it was not likely to yield to conditions of difficulty and opposition from without.

The sun was declining in the west and a golden shaft of light fell upon your door as I stood there before you for the first time and met your faith. There was music as of many birds singing, and then your faith enveloped me as with a mantle of peace.

Conspicuous elements of your faith were kindness, tranquility and strength. You received me as I was and took for granted that my intentions were the best. As I looked upon your faith, it translated life into beauty. It cheered me with the hope of higher and better things to come. It sat upon you with outstretched wings as a thing meant to soar. I still think of your faith as I met it that day.

And your faith has not lost anything with the passing of years. When illness entered into my

dwelling, the memory of you and your faith was there as a soothing balm. And then—wondrous to relate—your faith became my faith and this with no loss to you. I mean that my faith took on the hue and colour and power of your faith, which seemed greater than mine had been heretofore. When pain assailed my tabernacle of flesh, Faith stood beside me. His locks were all gold, and his eyes were bright with the shining of joy. When he smiled upon me, the darkness passed away, and I knew there were ministering angels at hand, and I was enabled to look beyond the present things to those realms where love and peace abide forever.

Oh, I am glad—glad because of victories gained along the trail that runs through the years. Glad because of stars and flowers and the songs of birds. Glad because of white-robed peaks that spear the sky and whisper of eternal realities that shall not fade with the fading of earth. Glad because that once when I was weary, and my heart was heavy after a toilsome way, and when the vanities of life looked down upon me with sombre eyes, after the mountain had been crossed, I came to your door and I met your faith, and it led me to heights where today I can look up and see the smile of God.

*I sat me down in earth's benighted vale,
And had no courage and no strength to rise;
Sad, to the passing breeze I told my tale,
And bowed my head and drained my weeping
eyes.*

*But Faith came by, and took me by the hand;
And now the valleys rise, the mountains fall;
Welcome the stormy sea, the dangerous land!
With faith to aid me, I can conquer all.*

(Walter Sargeant, from the "Herald of Christ's Kingdom".

Look back and praise him,
Look up and trust him,
Look around and serve him,
Look onward and expect him.

It is far easier to place a child's arms round the cross of Christ than a man's.

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

Luke 12, 13-34

The man broke in abruptly, breaking the thread of Jesus' conversation with his disciples. He had a personal matter which to him was more important than all that Jesus had been saying. "Master" he urged "speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me". The total irrelevance of his request to the subject on which Jesus was dwelling shows that in this case at least the Master's teaching was falling on completely deaf ears. The man was not interested in what Jesus had to say to him; only in what He would do for him.

A very noticeable factor in our Lord's ministry is the unceremonious manner in which He dismissed those claims on his attention which came from unworthy sources. Although He never missed an opportunity of doing good when such action was in accord with the object and tenor of his mission He would not use his power or authority on unworthy objects. In this case He saw through the man and refused his request without hesitation. "Man" He said—what a world of scorn and contempt lies in the use of that epithet—"who made me a judge and a divider over you?" And without another word to him He turned to his disciples and began to talk about the evils of covetousness. "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of goods which he possesseth".

It is evident that the original suppliant was a covetous man; he had become involved in argument with his brother over the disposal of their inheritance and was hoping to introduce the authority of Jesus to favour his side of the argument. That was his only interest in Jesus; he called him "Master" but he was not particularly interested in becoming a pupil, less still a follower who would give up the interests of this world and follow Jesus wheresoever He might lead. He was a covetous man and he meant to get all he could while life lasted and if the moral leadership of Jesus could be invoked to his advantage in this argument with his brother he was going to invoke it.

The remark about covetousness was only the prelude to some more positive teaching. Straight away Jesus plunged into his parable. The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, so plentifully in fact that he was faced with the problem of the disposal of his gains. There were of course a number of alternatives. Having taken enough to provide himself with a comfortable living he could devote the remainder to the relief of the poor—there were plenty such in Israel and the need was always there. Or he could make a generous donation to the Temple treasury for the work of God. There would be no lack of worthy outlets for his surplus. But no; he intended to keep all that

he possessed for his own selfish enjoyment. He decided to pull down his granaries and storehouses and build bigger ones, and there store all that his land brought forth. Having done so, he would say to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry". The rich man was too covetous to part with anything that he had or to do good with it; he would hang on to it and look forward to a life of ease and indulgence.

But man proposes and God disposes. This man does not seem to have considered God in his calculations at all, but now God spoke to him. "Thou fool"—an epithet meaning one lacking reasoning power, unintelligent; perhaps our colloquial use of the word "idiot" is the best equivalent—"Idiot, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" To that, of course, there was no answer. The one circumstance in life over which the man had no control was come upon him, and in the face of that fact all his planning and expectation was come to nought. There is an expression in use in this our expressive day "You can't take it with you" and that is the thought which came at last to this man who had laid up treasure for himself but was not rich toward God.

Let that last point be well considered. This man's fault lay not in the acquiring of wealth or of goods. To the extent that he diligently cultivated his lands and cared for his flocks and herds he did well, for the earth hath God given to the sons of men as a stewardship, to be wisely administered and made to bear increase. Slothfulness and idleness are never extolled in the Scriptures—rather the reverse. The unprofitable servant is reproved but the one who increased the money entrusted to him is commended. Up to the point where the man had increased his productivity tenfold he did well; the fault lay in the disposal of his gains. He failed to recognise his wealth as a stewardship from God. "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" sang the Psalmist but this man had forgotten that. The needs of his daily life were supplied, and well supplied; now came the question of an acknowledgment to God and some return made to God. There was nothing of that in the man's mind. He failed to admit that all he had gained came in the first place from that which God gave and that some return was meet. More than that, he also failed to realise that the purpose of man's existence is not merely to absorb food and drink and pleasure and thus enjoy the blessing of life without bearing any responsibility toward others or fulfilling some useful purpose in creation exterior to himself. "No man liveth to himself" said

St. Paul. Each and every man is designed by God to live for a purpose, both now and in eternity, to fulfil some useful function in the fabric of his entire creation. This man intended to live a life of idleness, and idleness has no place in the Divine purpose. "Ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure" (Psa. 103, 20-21) is a conception of the celestial world and its abounding activity for which we are indebted to the Psalmist; the same energy and zeal for the administration and orderly conduct of the material creation must animate men if they are to be adjudged worthy of what, in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, is called the inheritance prepared for them from the foundation of the world. The keynote of creation is work—without fatigue, without sweat of brow, divorced from the unpleasant associations normally attached to the term, but work nevertheless, those activities necessary for the proper maintenance of the order of existence in which men have their being—and this man did not want to work any more. He had made his pile and he wanted to sit back and enjoy it.

So the rich man passed through the gates of death empty-handed, with nothing to show for all his years of labour. He could have laid up in store rich provision with God for the eternal future, stores of sterling character and understanding of the principles of righteousness and Divine government, that he might fill a useful place in the eternal world. He might have had stores of sympathy and compassion and experience of human folly and weakness, gained from the wise and beneficent administration, in this life, of the wealth he had acquired, qualifications which would fit him for use in God's future work of reconciliation and reclamation of men in the day of Messiah's Kingdom. But he had none of these. He came to God without anything to show for what God had done for him, a unit of creation that had yet to find his proper place in God's scheme of things.

Jesus drove the lesson home. "Therefore" He insisted, "take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, nor for the body, what ye shall put on." Jesus did not mean that we are to give no consideration whatever to our bodily needs nor plan for the future; that would be the very negation of all his practical teaching. The Greek word employed here and in many like passages is not one that refers to taking thought in the sense of considering or reasoning, but one which means literally to be anxious for, or to have care or concern. Most modern translations render "take no anxious thought" or "be not anxious" and this is precisely what Jesus meant. We who are Christians must needs realise that God has the oversight of all our interests and will overrule circumstances for our good; He can provide against the unforeseen events of life and

we may give ourselves without distraction to his service in the security of that knowledge. That does not mean that we should live a hand to mouth existence without using any part of our present gains to make necessary provision for the future. Christian stewardship does demand that we so order our lives within the limits of our ability that we can expect to go on serving the Lord to the end. Neither does it mean that we should announce our intention of "living by faith"—which all too often turns out to be an excuse for sponging on the generosity of other Christians to avoid working at a regular occupation or undertaking any of the normal responsibilities of citizenship. It does mean that we should put the service of God and the interests of his work foremost in our lives, making all other things subsidiary and using all that comes to us in this world as aids to this supreme object.

Jesus' reference to the ravens and the lilies is liable to be misunderstood. The ravens, He said, neither sow nor reap, but God feeds them; lilies neither toil nor spin but are arrayed more magnificently than Solomon in all his glory. His words need carefully reading. God has designed creation so that the ravens can obtain their food and live their lives in a perfectly natural fashion, instinctively going to the place where food is to be gathered and finding it there. He has so ordered Nature that the lilies, as they grow, can absorb light and air and moisture, and the elements of the earth, to build the wonderful structure that is a flower. These things happen because the ravens and the flowers fit quite naturally into the place God designed for them, and so fulfil their function in creation. So with us. If we rest in the knowledge that there is a place for us in God's purposes and that nothing save our own unbelief or obstinacy or wilfulness can prevent our occupying that place we can be as the ravens and the lilies, fulfilling our designed place in creation in complete orderliness and serenity, giving glory to God by the very fact of our being. Just as the ravens must go to find their food, just as the lilies must lift up their faces to the sun and push their roots deeper into the earth, so must we be diligent in sowing and reaping, toiling and spinning, to fulfil our own particular destiny before God, but always in the serene knowledge that He is overseeing all and we are doing his will. There need be no anxious thought then; we are units in his scheme and He is controlling all things, cognisant of every life which waits upon him.

"Which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?" asked Jesus. He called this "that thing which is least" but the addition of eighteen inches to one's height would seem to be a pretty big thing. In point of fact the A.V. translators misunderstood this expression altogether. "Helikian" means extent of years, not extent of inches, and is rendered "age" in other translations. Which of

them could lengthen his life by the shortest possible span? That was Jesus' question. No man can extend his life by worrying about it. No man can avoid entering at last into the portals of death. In the final analysis we have to trust God because we have no power of ourselves. He gave us life, all the things which are necessary to continuing life, and He alone knows the ultimate purpose of life. The things of the present are transient and must sooner

or later pass away. The life that is in us is capable of eternal continuance, sustained always by God, who is all-powerful. We have to discover his purpose, and place ourselves in line to be fitted into that purpose. Everything else will fall into place. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God" was the conclusion of the lesson "and all these things shall be added unto you."

WHEN THE SUN STOOD STILL

An examination of a wonderful happening (Joshua 10. 6-14)

The story of the sun and moon standing still at the command of Joshua provides the incentive for many excursions into astronomical science in order to demonstrate that the idea is by no means so fantastic as it sounds. Some enthusiasts, such as Prof. Totten in the Nineteenth Century, have produced elaborate calculations to show that such a supernaturally lengthened day must have happened once in human history, and the records of ancient nations have been searched for stray allusions to so noteworthy an event; but in all this fervour of scientific research the fact that a careful examination of the passage in question fails to justify the popular impression has generally escaped notice.

It was shortly after the entry into the Promised Land that Joshua's army, battling to secure possession of their new home, marched all night from Gilgal to Gibeon, an uphill journey of sixteen miles, involving a climb of several thousand feet into the mountains, to intercept and do battle with the Canaanites and Amorites. Upon their arrival, at probably about five in the morning, Joshua gave battle, and, tired as his men must have been after their all night forced march, defeated the enemy and pursued him for seven miles to Beth-horon (Josh. 10. 10) and over the crest of the mountain into the valley of Ajalon, which runs in a south-westerly direction to the Mediterranean Sea. It was apparently at this point that Joshua, seeing that his prey was escaping him, uttered the cry which has been interpreted as an invocation to the powers of heaven to intervene on his behalf: "*Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves on their enemies . . . So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.*"

Whatever the real purpose of Joshua's appeal, the powers of heaven were already taking a hand in the battle in another manner. A violent hailstorm from the Mediterranean was sweeping up the valley of Ajalon—a not uncommon phenomenon in the valley, then or now—in its course overwhelming the fleeing Canaanites. Their rout was complete; many of them perished; "*they were more that died with hailstones*" says the chronicler "*than they*

whom the children of Israel slew with the sword". The Israelites, high up on the summit of Beth-horon, apparently escaped the hail but the Canaanite host was decimated. This was the decisive battle which laid the land of Canaan open to the invading Israelites.

From verses 10 and 11 it is clear that the Canaanites encountered this storm whilst they were between Beth-horon and Azekah, and therefore well down in the valley. Joshua must have been standing on the summit of Beth-horon, and from his exalted position perceived the storm approaching from the sea long before the Canaanites were aware of its onset. From where he stood, facing the south, his gaze could take in the heights of Gibeon on his left hand, and on his right the valley of Ajalon, crowded now with the retreating foe. The time would have been about eight a.m., for the seven mile pursuit between Gibeon and Beth-horon could hardly have occupied more than two or three hours. Gibeon lies E. by S.E. of Beth-horon, so that at this time the sun would appear to Joshua to be directly over the heights of Gibeon. Upon turning to his right and looking W. by S.W. through the valley of Ajalon, Joshua would see the crescent moon, in its last quarter, directly over the valley, faintly illumined by the rays of the sun. That this was the phase of the moon at the time is deduced from the fact that the Israelites crossed Jordan on the 10th of Nisan, and therefore ten days after the new moon, and that a study of the subsequent events with their datings as recorded in the Book of Joshua shows that the battle took place about six weeks later, within a day or two of the 24th of Zif, the second month, so that the moon would be in the third quarter of the second lunation of the year. It is an interesting testimony to the historical accuracy of the Book of Joshua that only at this one time in the month could the sun be over Gibeon and the moon over the valley of Ajalon simultaneously from the point of view of an observer on the summit of Beth-horon.

It was not the "standing still" of the sun and moon, but the hailstorm, that achieved the victory for the Israelites. The confusion and disaster into which the Canaanite hosts were thrown by the pitiless rain of hailstones completed the havoc begun

on Beth-horon by Joshua's warriors. What then was the purpose of Joshua's command to the sun and moon?

The words in question are not original to the Book of Joshua—they are quoted from the "Book of Jasher" (see vs. 13). The account of the battle occupies vs. 10 and 11, and the thread of the narrative is not taken up again until vs. 16. The intervening portion is a parenthesis, inserted by some later transcriber of the Book of Joshua, in order to place on record the words used by Israel's great leader on this occasion, words which apparently had been preserved only in this "Book of Jasher". After the quotation, which occupies vs. 12 and part of vs. 13, and the acknowledgment "*Is not this written in the Book of Jasher*" there follows a short observation (vs. 14-15) by the same unknown transcriber by way of comment on the situation.

The Book of Jasher is referred to once elsewhere in the Scriptures, namely, in 2 Sam. 1. 18. Here there is mentioned a song or poem called (the song of) "the Bow", dealing probably with the prowess of archers in battle; a song which David ordered should be taught the children of Judah. From this fact, and the fact that in the Joshua quotation the passage concerned is, in the Hebrew, not prose, but poetry, it has been concluded that the Book of Jasher was a poetic composition telling of the great events in Israel's history, and was in existence certainly in the time of David. We probably do well therefore to allow for poetic licence in the words in which Joshua's appeal is recorded—much as must be allowed when reading Jud. 5. 20 "*The stars in their courses fought against Sisera*" and Psa. 18. 9 "*He bowed the heavens and came down*" both of which expressions are taken from similar poetic compositions.

The passage in question then needs to be considered as a fragment of true history preserved in a fine piece of poetic language.

"Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon." The word here rendered "stand still" is "*dom*" and means to be silent, quiet, still or dumb. Gesenius says that it is derived from the sound made by the shutting of the mouth and that its literal meaning is "to be dumb". Its significance is not that of standing still in the sense of cessation of motion, but of being still or silent in the sense of ceasing to perform a customary activity. Instances of its use are in Lam. 3. 28, Jer. 8. 14 (silence), Hab. 2. 19 (dumb), 1 Kings 19. 12 (still). The literal English of the Hebrew text is "Sun, on-Gibeon be-dumb, and moon, on-valley Ajalon".

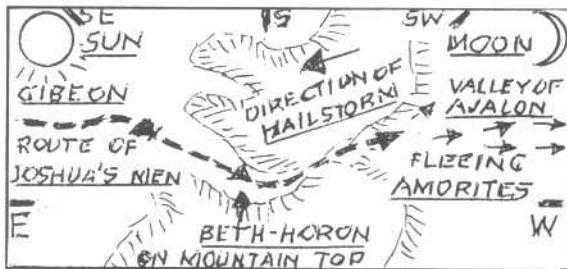
The Israelites would be hard put to it to keep up with their fleeing foes. They had been on the move since the previous evening and it was essential that

this victory be complete and that no appreciable number of Canaanites be allowed to escape. The sun's heat was rapidly increasing as the morning advanced, and Joshua must have feared above everything else its effects upon his weary troops. In this extremity he appealed to the Lord (vs. 12), not for the cessation of the sun's progress, which would involve a corresponding increase in the duration of noonday heat, but for the silencing or cessation of the sun's activity so that the greater coolness of the day might invigorate his tiring forces.

God answered the prayer by sending the hailstorm described in the account. As the dark clouds swept up the valley, first the crescent moon over Ajalon, and then the sun over Gibeon, were blotted out, and their rays "*ceased*" from the earth for the remainder of the day, "*until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies*".

In vs. 13 "*The sun . . . hasted not to go down about a whole day*" there is no justification in the Hebrew text for the use of "down". The word is "*boa*", a verb meaning to come in or to enter, but not to go down or descend. It is normally used for "to enter" as into a chamber, and is so used in some parts of the Old Testament to describe the sun's setting, as if entering into his chamber, but in the passage under examination it probably signifies that the sunlight failed to break through the clouds so as to enter upon the earth for the remainder of that day. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that the word for "sun" used in this account is not "*chammah*", the sun itself, but "*shemesh*", the sun's radiance or rays, or as we would say, the sunlight. Similarly the word for "moon" used in the passage is "*yareach*", "the scent of the moon", i.e., moonlight, and not "*levonah*", the lunar satellite itself.

"*And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel*" (vs. 1. 14). This is the comment of the unknown transcriber who felt bound thus to complete his quotation from the Book of Jasper. The reference is of course to the hailstorm, which, the account tells us, was definitely sent by the Lord to ensure the Israelite victory.





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

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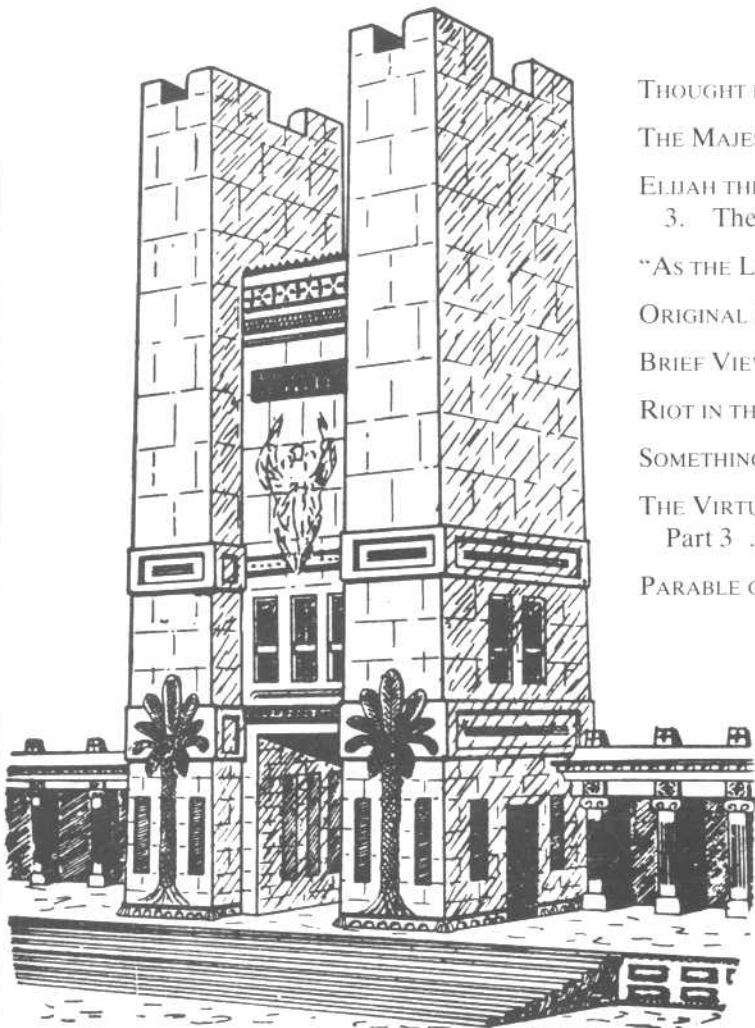
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*



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This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, 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

"Do not toil to acquire wealth; be wise enough to desist. When your eyes light upon it, it is gone; for suddenly it takes to itself wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven." (Prov. 23, 4-5 RSV)

Timely advice to-day, when fortunes are won and lost by unexpected financial crises. A noticeable factor in contemporary society is the intensive and oft-times frantic endeavour to make money and still more money. Whether it be the manual worker, demanding higher and ever higher wages in proportion to the success of earlier demands, or the business executive working the stock markets, or the housewife filling in her football pools coupon, the dominant motive is the acquiring of wealth. And who can blame them when every aspect of modern industry takes measures under the pretext of "efficiency" and "stream-lining" to increase its profits, and every national government devises ways and means to extract progressively heavier taxes from its citizens? The acquirement of wealth has become the major pre-occupation and few are wise enough to know when to desist.

The Wise Man knew better. He knew how transitory a thing is worldly wealth, even apart from the fact that "you cannot take it with you". And this is the important thing. The life we know is but the beginning of life, a caterpillar stage, as it were. Beyond the traditional three score years and ten lies an infinity of expanding life and increasing achievement, and nothing of this world's wealth is of any value in that world, or those worlds, and the life we shall then experience. Good it is for one to acquire wealth in this world if it is used to do good, and so to enrich character, that one is better fitted for entry into the next stage of life, but that involves knowing "when to desist"; no good at all, said Jesus, to lay up treasure if one is not rich toward God. To be of any use in the next world, treasure must be laid up in heaven.

NOTICES

Chesham. The usual convention is planned for Sunday June 11 at the Malt House, Elgiva Lane, Chesham. Programmes and details from F. Binns, 102 Broad Street, Chesham, Bucks, HP5 3ED.

Changes of address U.S.A. readers. The "Monthly" takes about eight weeks to reach U.S.A. readers. Every time we receive advice of an address change at least one issue is already on its way and of necessity arrives at the old address. Presumably the U.S. Post Office will redirect it. But all too often it appears that some readers rely on the U.S. Post Office returning the copy to us with the yellow label giving new address. These returned copies usually get here about six months after the original despatch by which time several more issues are on the way, and these get returned also.

It is vital that you advise change of address by letter as early as possible and then expect at least one issue to arrive at the old address.

Another source of confusion is that some readers appear to have both a street name and number, and a Post Office Box number, and are not always consistent in which one appears on their renewal notice, so that we sometimes change the address where it is not necessary. In such cases please use always the same precise address when renewing your readership.

Gone from us



Sis. J. Bonage (*late Fareham*)
 Sis. P. Denham (*Birmingham*)
 Sis. E. Denney (*Windsor*)
 Sis. O. Everett (*Rugby*)
 Sis. B. Hill (*Loughborough*)
 Sis. D. Macfarlane (*London*)
 Bro. C. Pilgrim (*Burton-on-Trent*)
 Bro. E. T. Springett-Moxham (*Ormskirk*)
 Sis. K. Wellwood (*Dublin*)



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

THE MAJESTY AND MYSTERY OF GOD

This treatise is the record of a sermon preached by Rev. Dr. R. P. Downes, minister of Stoke-on-Trent Methodist Church at the turn of the century, and Editor of a national Christian journal called "Great Thoughts". The depth of insight into the ways of God as revealed by his words here preserved is such as to render them worthy of reproduction now.

* * *

"Lo! these are parts of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him!" (Job 26. 14).

How little can we know of God! Three great thoughts of the Infinite are revealed to us in creation, providence, and redemption, but what are these when compared with the vast designs, unknown to us, which yet occupy the mind of the Eternal? We look upon the sunbeam, but the sun itself is too glorious for our gaze. We analyse the dew drop, but the great ocean stretches beyond us, boundless and unexplored. The Infinite cannot reveal himself to the finite, except as One past finding out. In him that inhabiteth eternity there are, and ever must be, mysteries unresolved and abysses unfathomed and unfathomable, so that the sublime challenge may be everlastingly renewed, "*Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?*" Of this truth none of the inspired writers seem more deeply conscious than the writer of the Book of Job. Hence in the chapter before us, after soaring through God's great creation, after studying the splendours with which He has garnished the heavens, and the art by which He has hung the world upon nothing, bowing at last beneath the pressure of thought too great for man, the solemn expression escapes his lips, "*Lo! these are parts of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him!*"

We may consider these words first as a testimony to the glory of that Being of Whose ways all creatures see but a part, and as the text implies, but the very fringe and lower end. Look at the manifestation of Divine power which confronts us in the universe! Look at the power implied in the act of creation—a power which to the human mind is inconceivable, because we pass from something in God of which we have no equivalent in ourselves. Men and angels may conceive and design and mould, but they cannot create. Give a man the materials and he will build a St. Paul's Cathedral. Give an angel the material, and he may build a structure of which, perhaps, we can form no adequate conception, but neither man nor angel can bring into existence the smallest atom from nothingness. And yet the universe which shines around us had a beginning. It did not create itself, for that is implying that it acted before it existed, which is a simple absurdity. It is not eternal, as it is continually changing, and we can chase it back in

thought to a mere nebulous vapour. It had a beginning. "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*" He first threw the outlines of Creation over the universe of rayless darkness. He created the primal atoms, with their potencies and their laws, and then, intensely watching, He saw the grand picture evolve gradually and grow until all this mighty wilderness of suns and systems trembled into being.

And that which He at first created He momentarily sustains. His sustaining energy is indeed but the continual repetition of the creative act. He rolls the clouds which else were useless; He fires the sunbeam which else would not shine. The angels that excel in strength excel by catching from his presence alike the splendour that gilds the pinions and the love that fires the soul. That perennial freshness, that exhaustless energy which permeates the universe, rightly interpreted, is but the breath and imminence of God, filling all things with his presence, as the human soul fills and governs the human body. He has not put the world out of his hand, as man puts out a clock. It is continually permeated by his energy. "*In him we live and move and have our being.*" Hence the science of today has come to this great conclusion that force—or what man calls force—is not something inherent in matter, but something standing outside matter altogether. That which we call force is nothing but the exhaustless power of the living God filling creation with his sleepless energy.

Here also is the secret of the wisdom that appears in insensate things. The march of the universe is not a discord but a rhythmic song, and the Author of that melody is God. The stars do not hold consultation as to how they should move in their orbits in space without accident or collision. The comet drew no outline of his wild wanderings through the starry spaces. God gave music to the stars and the pathway to the comet. How vast is the universe which his wisdom governs, and which his energy sustains! We know that this little planet is a hundred million miles from the sun, whose diameter is so vast that a hundred suns strung in a straight line would touch the earth. The sun again, with its attendant planets, is sweeping round its own centre at the rate of four hundred thousand miles a day, and it will take it eighteen million years to complete one revolution. Our planetary system, as we gaze upon it, reveals about twenty million worlds, and there are many thousands of such nebulae visible, some of them capable of packing away in their awful bosoms hundreds of such galaxies as ours, and still these are but fragments and fringes of the universe.

When Herschel lifted up his great telescope to

the sky it was thought that he had fixed the farthest star, and that all beyond was blank, unpeopled space; and they carved on his tomb "*He burst the barriers of the heavens*". But since he passed away his idea has been exploded, and dust-like shoals of stars have been discerned in the regions which he relegated to unpeopled space. And still we behold but a corner of that

"... stellar sea

*Whose waves are suns that break upon the shore
Of God's infinity for evermore.*"

And as we do not know the whole, so we do not fully know any part which constitutes the whole even of the smallest star that glitters in the sky.

Seeing but parts of the ways of God, and seeing those but brokenly and imperfectly, it is not for us to criticise the Divine procedure or assume the dignity of arbitrators with regard to it. The great Bishop Butler lays down the important proposition that the government of God in this world is a scheme imperfectly understood. And as we think of the government and look upon the action of God in the world, we find ourselves continually in the position of the finite mind attempting infinite problems. Where to us all is mystery, to God it is all clear; where to us there seems to be endless contradiction, to God all is in perfect harmony. We can only know the whole when we know each part which constitutes the whole. We can only find the final reason for anything when we know the final for everything.

Hence, as Goethe tells us, we are not born into this world to solve the problem of the universe, but to find out where that problem begins, and then to restrain ourselves within the limits of the comprehensible. All the men who have tried to solve those, like Carlyle, Goethe, Fichte, and Hegel, have only broken their wings against the bars of their cage. There are limits to the human mind, as well as to the restless sea, and God has said to the human intellect as well as to the ocean, "*Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed*". We should smile if we heard an insect on the top of this church criticising as folly the wisdom of the architect, or of the man in the pulpit. Just so, I fancy, the angels must smile when they hear men with finite faculties criticising the stupendous government of God. When however, we do understand anything that God has made, we find it to be perfect. As, for instance, an animal or a plant. If you analyse a flower, you find it adapted to the ends it is intended to serve, and if we knew all that God has done and permitted, we should find it perfect also. When Sir Isaac Newton discovered the great law of gravitation he found that certain planets did not move in a perfect orbit, but were drawn hither and thither in their course. He thought that this aberration might mean future disorder in the universe, and that the system was

not complete. We sometimes seem to think that God has thrown the reins on the horse's neck and allows this world to bound on ungoverned and unrestrained; but we find that all has been included in the Divine purpose, that the existence of sin and sorrow will be explained, and that the justice of their permission will be demonstrated. We shall know when God has done all, and so certain is his vindication that an anthem is prepared in Heaven to celebrate it, and the angelic fingers are trembling to strike their harps to the music of the song: "*Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy Name, for thou only art holy; for all nations shall come and worship before thee, for thy judgments are made manifest.*"

When the judgments of God are made manifest, when the perfect picture of which we see only the outline is complete, when the sublime melody of which we hear only a few broken notes rolls its chorus to the stars, then we shall see that God's purpose is universally wise and tender. Meanwhile, we say, "*Lo! these are parts of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him!*"

Again, we may consider the words of our text as a needful admonition to the student of physical science. The peculiar passion of the century is one for physical study. But we must always remember that the votary of physical study is a specialist, and he is always in danger of isolating himself from other fields of knowledge that do not come under his special examination. Hence Charles Darwin said that his study of physical phenomena had so warped him that he had lost all taste for poetry and imaginative literature. He was thoroughly absorbed in the study of the physical, the tangible, and the seen. We must not permit the student of science to plunge us into the gulf of dark materialism by telling us that there is nothing but matter. There is matter in us, and there is mind in us. There is matter in the universe and there is God in the universe. We say to the man of science, "*Your studies are laudable and beautiful, but these are but parts of his ways*". There is a moral and a spiritual as well as a physical universe.

Spirit is as real as matter, for God is a Spirit, and God is as great a reality to the spiritual consciousness of the man who loves him as the outward universe is to the scientist. We believe in the veracity of the representations that are given not only through the senses, but through our higher faculties: the instinct of our intellect, which demands an adequate cause for all which we see around us; the solemn monitions of the conscience, which demand a moral lawgiver; the ideal longing of the imagination, which conceives of a Being altogether perfect and altogether beautiful. We refuse to dwell in a world of shadows, indifferent to the

highest relation of our being. Rather do we, by due steps, aspire to enter into fellowship with the Supreme Spirit:

*"To lay our just hands on the Golden Key
That opens the palace of eternity."*

"Oh God! our God! whom have we in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that we desire before thee."

We may consider the words of our text again as an incentive to the Church's faith. The faith of the Church is oftentimes darkened, and the "Where is the promise of his coming?" of the doubters swells into a deeper murmur as they watch the apparently slow progress of the Gospel in the world. This difficulty is chiefly the result of our human impatience. Human life is short, and God's great purposes are so long, there is little wonder that to us the advance of the Gospel should appear slow. Let us remember that these are but parts of his ways. If there be any seeming delay in God, it is only such delay as belongs to steps of majesty. Faith and patience are not at all incompatible, nor protraction and mystery, with the certainty and glory of the issue of the struggle now waging in the world between light and darkness, holiness and sin.

Great temples are not built, nor great works accomplished, in a day. According to the geologists the world took ages to create; why then should we expect it will be regenerated in a century? God knows the final and triumphant issue, and without haste and without rest He is advancing towards it. Let us wait his time, with whom a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day, assured that He is not slack concerning his promise, but that

*"Ever through the ages an increasing
purpose runs,
And the reign of Christ is widened with
the process of the suns."*

The world in which we move is not yet righteous and good, but God, Who governs it, is. He will subdue it to his own righteousness and goodness. The Lord in whom we trust does not lie in some obscure grave in Galilee, but is risen, enthroned, expectant, calmly waiting until his enemies shall be made his footstool. Christianity lays its hands on the future. It has its records in the skies. It is as yet but a mighty germ. Give it time to grow. The power which shook, demands only time to change and regenerate, the world. The resources of God are equal to the great purpose He has set before him, and that purpose will be triumphantly achieved. When the pace seems slow, when the march seems to linger, when we are impatient to see the Kingdom of God come in our mortal lives instead of our immortal lives, let us remember that these are but parts of his ways.

We may consider these words finally as comfort to the Church in sorrow. Let any one of you,

bowed down by trial and adversity, remember that these are but parts of his ways. Your years are not all winters. The blue of heaven is larger than the cloud. There is more joy than pain in the world, more love than hate, more song than sighs. The sorrows are but part of his ways. If we are bowed under the mystery of pain, we do but share the common lot. Unless we wish to be separated from the brotherhood and sisterhood of our race, we must bear the pangs of sorrow and the thrill of pain. It is the common lot, and because it is, there must be some beneficence in it, that we cannot at present fathom. Because it is universal it must have some magnificent ministry, or God would not have permitted it.

Yes, and it is a magnificent ministry! We have felt it already. The strokes that have chafed us have been the strokes of the invisible Sculptor, shaping us into nobleness. We need not only the garish day, but also the sweet intercession of overshadowing night, when God opens up the universe to our vision. We need not only the sunlight, but the tender blessing of the refreshing rain. There is no music brought out of this fretting of the strings of the heart. We are selfish enough now, How selfish we should be if we had never known tears! We want sympathy now. How utterly unsympathetic we should be if we had never been bowed down beneath a common sorrow!

Furthermore, let us think of the future. The reason we are so perplexed and crushed by the calamities of time is that we think we are going to be here for ever. As an old divine has said, if we realised that human life is but the stopping for a night at an inn to go forth again in the morning, we should not be so troubled about the insufficiency of the accommodation. It is only because we think we are going to stay here for ever that we are so perplexed and broken and crushed. Paul, whose life was so shot through with agony and bitterness, standing, as it would appear, with his back against Heaven's pearly gates, flung wide open, beholds the sorrows of his life dancing like motes in the sunbeam, and bursts forth into the triumphant utterance, *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."*

We are not going to be here for ever. This battle with the pain and mystery of life will soon cease.

*"For be the day weary or be the day long
At last it ringeth to evensong."*

Rightly interpreted, our sorrows are the black foundation stones planted deep in unfathomable darkness, on which God builds the temple of our everlasting peace.

So dear friends, we will ponder the simple

unfathomable words of our text. They shall teach us that mystery is not incompatible with faith since we cannot fathom the purposes of the Eternal. They shall teach us that our duty is to keep chime and step with that which is noble, and wait for the

radiance which shall either clear up the mysteries which baffle us, or leave us contented with our ignorance.

"Lo, these are parts of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him!"

THE SPIRIT OF HOSPITALITY

"Among the qualifications for elders Paul specifies *"a lover of hospitality"*, and under his general exhortations to Christians he lists "given to hospitality" (Rom. 12. 13). Peter says *"Use hospitality one to another without grudging"*, while Heb. 13.2 reads *"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares"*. The deliverance of Lot out of Sodom depended upon his hospitality to the angels. In Biblical times the practice of entertaining strangers was a very necessary one, when there was no other provision for lodging strangers as there is in modern society.

"Hospitality is usually associated with providing food and lodging, but it is by no means limited to this. If we really entertain others we do more than put a meal in front of our guests. We shower love and attention upon them. We do our utmost to make them welcome and to make them feel at home. Indeed so important are these other factors, especially under present-day conditions, that we should not consider it hospitality without them; neither indeed would it be, for this is the very spirit of hospitality.

"But the spirit of hospitality is expressed not merely by inviting others to our houses, for this is often done for baser motives. We can invite them into our fellowship and into our affections, making

room for them and their convictions in the spirit of liberty, even though with temporary inconvenience and sacrifice to ourselves. The spirit of hospitality will create in us an earnest desire that we may be able to give some blessing and help to others on their earthly pilgrimage. It will make us generous, not only in what we give, but in what we allow in our judgment and in our treatment of those from whom we may differ in matters of interpretation. We shall have the spirit of Jesus who taught us to pray "forgive us as we forgive".

"The hospitality of the widow was put to the test very sorely when Elijah told her first to bake him a cake out of her last scanty handful of meal upon which the lives of her son and herself were depending. But her compliance in faith with this request brought a reward beyond her dreams. The Shunammite woman, whose hospitality provided a little chamber for the prophet Elisha, was also greatly blessed by God, who is no man's debtor, and never overlooks the least service done to those who belong to him. The spirit of hospitality in our hearts, in seeking to give freely of our love and service, will most surely receive generous recompense from the Giver of every good and perfect gift."

(Forest Gate Bible Monthly)

TOWER OF THE FLOCK

"And thou, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion." (Micah 4. 8).

This has always been considered a Messianic prophecy, speaking of the time when Christ shall take his power and reign, proving himself the true "tower of the flock", the true "stronghold of the daughter of Zion". The theme is associated with Chapter 5 *"Thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah . . . out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel . . ."* Bethlehem, in old time the royal city of David, is pictured as the place from which the Messiah comes forth to his people—as indeed in the days of his flesh He actually did.

The reference to the "tower of the flock" is to a tower having that name which stood near Bethlehem in ancient times. Mention is made of it in Gen. 35. 21 in the story of Jacob. Immediately

after Rachel's death and burial *"on the way to Bethlehem"* it is said *"and Israel journeyed and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar."* That name in Hebrew is *Migdol Edar*, "the tower of the flock". It was probably a tower from which the shepherd could look afar and watch the interests of his scattered flock. It must have stood all through the fourteen or fifteen centuries which elapsed between Jacob and Micah, a silent witness to the purpose of God that royalty, the leading of the flock, should one day come forth from Bethlehem. Who first built the tower and what was his purpose in so doing we do not know. All we do know is that Jacob pitched his tent there, that it stood through the centuries, that Micah addressed it with poetic fervour and prophesied that the promised dominion would one day come to the true "tower of the flock", the Lord Jesus Christ.

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

I Kin. 19, 1-18

3. The still small voice

Now this story of Elijah running away to Mount Sinai because he was afraid of the vengeance of Queen Jezebel has to be looked at again and viewed from a much more rational standpoint. It is certainly true that Elijah had led Israel in the matter of the slaying of the prophets of Baal and that was a great day in the history of Israel and everyone rejoiced except this haughty Queen Jezebel and when her husband that wicked king Ahab told her about it the fat was really in the fire. So she commanded a messenger to seek out Elijah and give him a message: "*so let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as one of them by tomorrow about this time*". And the unfortunate messenger must have set out upon his mission with a quaking heart for was not this Elijah an unpredictable man and who knows what fate might befall the daring emissary who came to him with such a threat. For that expression "*so let the gods do also to me*" was a kind of oath in which that Queen Jezebel called down upon herself the fate with which she threatened Elijah if by any means she should fail to effect her purpose. And it did turn out that way later on, for Elijah did escape, and that pagan queen did meet a violent death many years afterwards. But that is a different story and we have now to come back to the story of Elijah.

So many commentators and students have concluded that Elijah ran away to Mount Sinai because he feared for his life. Surely that is a completely unwarrantable conclusion for it ignores two important factors. The first is that if this wicked Queen really did intend to have Elijah killed she would know better than to warn him in advance. The second is that the man who had already flatly defied that miserable King Ahab and this scheming Queen Jezebel to their faces, and would do it again in after times, was not going to be deterred by threats of that nature. And the Queen must have known that; and, too, there was something else. She had seen the powers exercised by this Elijah, powers given to him by the God he served, powers which she knew full well had never been manifested by the god she worshipped, Baal, the sun-god. How plain it is that Queen Jezebel it was who was frightened, frightened at the powers possessed by Elijah, so that her purpose was to induce him by her threat to leave the country and not to trouble her again. Thus what she really did do was to give him twenty-four hours notice to quit the land of Israel and not come back.

But, you will say, the Scripture says that when he heard the message, "*he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba*", which was in Judah and outside that wicked king Ahab's jurisdiction. And so he did. But was it not that his life was utterly and

altogether devoted to his prophetic calling and he must needs take all reasonable care to preserve it lest the Lord should have further need of him? Therefore he set out knowing that by so doing he would be there and ready when the Lord should commission him again, and he come back to Israel for such commission. And he did eventually come back, and that wicked king Ahab and this idolatrous Queen Jezebel were again to hear the whiplash of his tongue delivering the Lord's message of condemnation to them.

But now he had left Jezreel behind and was striding along the road which led southward over the central mountains of Samaria, out of the dominions of that wicked Ahab, making his way towards the friendly kingdom of Judah where good King Jehoshaphat ruled his people in the worship and service of the God of Israel. Forty miles to the frontier it was, over a gruelling mountain road that was little better than a track, skirting Ahab's principal city of Samaria as he went, Samaria with its idols and its Baal-worship, passing through village after village bearing the name of the hated god, Baal-Hazor and Baal-Famar and theest, and the detested idol sanctuary of Bethel. He viewed on his left the ruined town of Shiloh from a distance as he passed, the town where the priests of Aaron had once tended the Tabernacle made by Moses in the wilderness of Sinai in the days before Baal-worship had come to afflict his people. On his right he looked upon the heights of Beth-Horon, and far below, the valley of Ajalon, where in the days of Israel conquering the land Joshua the courageous had led the hosts of Israel against the Amorites and the Lord had sent a driving hailstorm into the faces of the fleeing enemy and enabled Israel to win a resounding victory. And that reminded him of the storm cloud which had come up from that same direction when he was on the top of Mount Carmel and he wondered a little if his victory then was going to be as decisive and lasting as had been that of his illustrious predecessor. So he came to a little village called Adasa and knew he was in the territory of King Jehoshaphat and it was the second day and the sun was declining to its setting and he laid him down and slept.

See now this unpredictable man, for it is morning and he is striding out along the southward road. Will he not relax and take his ease, free from the malice of that vengeful Queen Jezebel? He will not take rest. He strides forward as a man with a purpose. Fifty more miles he must go, over the tops of the Judean mountains, to Beer-Sheba, the southernmost town of Judah on the southern frontier of Jehoshaphat's dominions. So on the second or third day he was there, speaking to no man and

staying for none. And then he was gone again, gone into the trackless wilderness which lay beyond Beer-Sheba, that wilderness from which Israel had come at the beginning, that wilderness in which lay the sacred mountain of the Lord, hallowed by the making of the Covenant which made Israel the Lord's own people, Mount Sinai. Thus then, after another day's journeying into the mountains, he lay down and committed himself to God. "It is enough", he said "now, O Lord, take me away, for I am not better than my fathers".

And was this despondent man really he who a few days earlier had called fire down from heaven to demonstrate the reality of God? And had the zeal which inspired him to lead the people in the slaying of four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal so soon evaporated? Could it possibly be that the fearlessness with which he had faced and challenged this wicked King Ahab and that pagan Queen Jezebel in their own court, surrounded by their own courtiers, should so quickly have vanished? So many, reading the story as it has been set down, have taken it that way. But how uncharacteristic of the man, and how unlikely. Might not his apparent despair have been not for himself, but for his nation, for Israel? True, the representatives of the people gathered there on Mount Carmel had shouted with awe and conviction "the Lord, He is God. The Lord, He is God", but how many of their fellows would believe them when they got back home to their tribal villages? How many of the nation would sincerely and zealously abandon Baal worship and turn to the living God? Judging by the recorded condition of national affairs during the rest of the reign of Ahab and his successor, Ahaziah, not many. He had not really achieved deliverance for Israel, any more than the men of God who had gone before him. He had done no better than his fathers. And now, he was the Lord's man, now and for ever, and if it was the Lord's will to take him out of the way and raise up a better man, he was quite content that it should be so. He, like Moses of old, was willing to go to his rest in the mountains, no man knowing of his sepulchre or of his end, and some other man finish his work.

But the Lord had other plans.

See now an angel approaching over the rocky desert. A moment ago he was not there; now he is, clad in the attire of a Bedouin nomad. He sets down a loaf of bread and a vessel of water. A moment ago those were not there either. He touches the sleeping man. "Arise and eat". Elijah opens his eyes, sits up, and sees the bread and water. He looks round over the wide plain. There is no one there. He recalls the provision God had made for him at the brook Cherith in the days of the famine; the three years spent with the widow woman of Zarephath; and he knows that God is about to make his next revelation to him and give

him his next commission.

So then in the peace and confidence of that conviction, he slept again, quietly, peacefully, until in his sleep he felt again that soft touch, and heard again that quiet voice. "Arise, and eat, for thy journey is a great one". At that he opened his eyes and realised where he must go. His feet must take him even to Mount Sinai, the mountain of the Covenant, where God had spoken to Israel through Moses. Was God now going to speak to Elijah? He hesitated not one whit but set out to traverse the two hundred and fifty miles that separated him from his goal.

Forty days, it took him. Forty long days under the scorching sun, climbing steep mountain tracks, stumbling over rock-strewn deserts, traversing tortuous ravines, finding food where he could and sleeping wherever he might find shelter from the ice-cold nights. He had not gone this way before and he must have sought directions from the occasional nomadic tribesmen he would have encountered from time to time. They would know, for Sinai had from ancient times been a sacred mountain revered by all the inhabitants of that desolate land. So at length he came within sight of the mountain, and found himself a little cave in its sides, and therein he entered, and tested, and waited for the voice of the Lord.

"What doest thou here, Elijah?"

So strange a question. Surely the Lord must have known why he had come. Was He oblivious to the apostate state of Israel, unmindful of the continued power of that pagan queen Jezebel, of the idol temples and sanctuaries defiling the land which He had declared his own. Had God not seen into his own heart and perceived his despondency and concern? He must put the Lord right at once. "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of Hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, only I, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away". So hopeless a plaint, he must have thought as he spoke, and yet, and yet, what else could he say and what else could he do? He spoke, and waited.

"Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord".

He obeyed, and waited again.

Now what is this? A murmur in the distance, a sound, undulating softly and becoming steadily louder; a noise, as of a strong wind blowing; suddenly a raging gale which shook the mountain crags and tumbled loose rocks down the precipices. Elijah quickly withdrew back into the protection of his cave and stood . . . now the wind has died down and passed away and all is quiet but there is no word from the Lord. Surely then the Lord was not in the wind.

A rumbling below the ground and a shaking.

The mountain quivered and chasms opened as the earthquake struck. The jutting peaks were riven and rock masses fell down the mountain side to the valley far below . . . Now the shaking has ceased and the rumbling has died away and all is quiet but there is no word from the Lord. How plain it is that the Lord was not in the earthquake.

A vivid, dazzling lightning flash; in a moment the sky was alive with fire, driving down to earth to the accompaniment of crashing thunder. A tropical thunderstorm of a severity never experienced in temperate climates, one which illumined the sky with the accompaniment of an inferno of noise . . . The lightning ceased to flash and the thunder sank to a low rumble and died altogether and all was quiet and there was no word from the Lord. And nothing there was to show that the Lord was in the fire.

And then; and then, "*a still, small voice*". The Hebrew is literally "*a sound of soft stillness*". Only Elijah heard it; perhaps only Elijah could hear it. And no man knows what it said to him, for he never told anyone. But whatever it was, and whatever it said, the consequence was that Elijah covered his face with his mantle and went out to the entrance of the cave, for he knew, now, that he was going to meet God. And he stood.

"*What doest thou here, Elijah?*"

He repeated his plaint—perhaps not despairingly as on the former occasion, but more dispassionately,

as a concise statement of the impelling force which had brought him to Sinai. He had done all he could in Israel; he had earned the enmity of its pagan rulers; there seemed no one of consequence who remained true to the Lord, and he had no direct lead on what he was to do next. So he had come to Sinai to put himself in the Lord's hands and accept his decision.

"*Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholeh shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room . . . and I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to Baal*". (And let the studious take note that the Lord did not say "I have left" as in the A.V. The Hebrew is in the future tense and He was telling Elijah that all was not lost; there would yet be some who remained loyal.)

Hazael the captain of the Syrian army; Jehu the captain of Ahab's army; Elijah yet to be involved again in the politics of his nation and concerned in the eventual overthrow of Ahab. And he was to seek out and anoint his own successor to his prophetic office. There was work for him to do. That wicked king Ahab had not yet seen the last of him.

So Elijah went back.

To be continued

AS THE LIGHTNING SHINETH

A Bible Study

"*For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*" (Matt. 24. 27).

This is a widely-discussed text. It is frequently used to support either of two considerably variant expectations regarding the manner of the Second Advent. That Advent, think some, is to be sudden and spectacular, as a flash of lightning. Not so, say others; lightning does not emerge out of the east and shine unto the west. Our Lord must have referred to the bright shining of the sun, and his coming of gradual perception to the minds of men, even as the dawn steals upon sleepers unawares, broadening gradually into full day.

Which view is correct?

Consider first the context. By way of warning to his disciples, Jesus told them that they were not to heed any assertion that He had come "in the desert" nor yet "in the secret chambers"; "FOR", said He, "AS the lightning . . . so shall also the *parousia* (presence) of the Son of man be". The meaning of this is clear; his presence, which we know will extend over a period of a thousand years, is to be universally known and perceived.

It is obvious that Jesus was likening his presence to something in nature with which they were

already familiar, and had themselves witnessed a hundred times before. His use of the analogy would have been futile otherwise. We need then to determine the precise nature of the allusion.

It is sometimes suggested that the Greek word here used, "*astrape*", does not mean "lightning" but it does mean "bright shining", and in this text refers to the sun. Put like this, the suggestion is not altogether accurate. "*Astrape*" is the regular Greek term for lightning, as reference to any lexicon will show. But the dictionary definition of a word is not sufficient unless the usage of that word in the literature and language of the period in question is also taken into consideration. Only thus may the true meaning of recorded utterances be appreciated.

The English word "lightning" is restricted in its use to that flash of light which accompanies the electrical discharges associated with a thunderstorm. The term, however, is a derivation of "lightening", any dazzling or radiant display of light, and a trace of this older English usage appears in Luke 17. 24. Just so did the Greek "*astrape*" refer, in the current usage of the time, to any bright or intense display of light and the question as to whether lightning or other form was concerned has to be decided by the nature of the allu-

sion, or by the context.

The word occurs quite often in the New Testament, in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) and in the Apocrypha, and since all these represent the language as it was spoken in the first century, their testimony can be admitted.

The following texts are quoted to show how "*astrape*", both as a noun and as a verb, has been translated in a number of instances and from these it is apparent that its general application is as suggested above.

From the New Testament.

- Acts 9. 3. "There *shined round about* him a light from heaven."
 Acts 22. 6. "*There shone* from heaven a great light round about me."
 Luke 24. 4. "Two men stood by them in *shining* garments."
 Luke 11. 36. "As when the *bright shining* of a candle doth give thee light."
 Luke 9. 29. "His raiment was white and *glistening*."
 Luke 10. 18. "I beheld Satan as *lightning* fall from heaven."
 Matt. 28. 3. "His countenance was like *lightning*."

From the Old Testament.

- Deut. 32. 41. "If I whet my *glittering* sword."
 Dan. 10. 6. "His face as the appearance of *lightning*."
 Hab. 3. 11. "At the shining of thy *glittering* spear."

From the Apocrypha.

- Wisd. 11. 18. "Wild beasts . . . shooting horrible *sparkles* out of their eyes."
 4 Macc. 4. 10. "There appeared from heaven angels riding on horseback *all radiant* in armour."

These examples go to show that "lightning" is not necessarily the meaning of the word in Matt. 24. 27. Jesus apparently referred to a noteworthy radiance or shining of light that was known to emerge from the east and cover the sky to the west. The rising of the sun is, of course, immediately suggested, but it is only when the nature of a Palestinian sunrise is appreciated that the force of the allusion can be perceived. The gradualness of an English sunrise would not meet the sense of the Greek "*astrape*". The farther one proceeds towards the tropics the more rapid is the transition from total darkness to full daylight. To appreciate the meaning of Jesus' words, therefore, we must visualise to ourselves a Palestinian dawn.

The sun comes up suddenly, and a few minutes

suffices to transform the velvety blackness of tropical night into the full brilliance of the day. It is for this reason that very few inhabitants of the land actually witness the sun's rising, for their sleep is broken only by its dazzling beams as they encircle the earth. There is no long and gradual dawn as in more temperate countries. The first sign of approaching day is a greyness in the eastern sky, a greyness for which—in Jerusalem at least—both city watchmen and the priests in the Temple were waiting and watching; the watchmen, because it indicated the end of their period of service, and the priests, because as soon as light had flooded the land it was their duty to offer the morning sacrifice. Hence the constant Scriptural association of the coming day with the "watchers", and the meaning of that cryptic message, "Watchman, what of the night? . . . The morning cometh, BUT IT IS YET DARK" (Isa. 21. 11-12 French version). Within a few minutes the greyness is streaked with shafts of pink, and then, so rapidly as almost to bewilder the unaccustomed observer, a glorious golden light spreads from the east and moves visibly across the sky. Within a few minutes more the full blaze of day is pouring down upon a people quickly arising from sleep and betaking themselves to their accustomed tasks.

On this basis, then, it might be concluded that Jesus intended us to understand his *Parousia* as an event to be perceived first by the "watchers", those on the mountain tops, the walls of Jerusalem, pinnacles of the Temple. These would be in no uncertainty, they would know full well what the light in the sky portended, and straightway make proclamation "The Lord is come." Whilst that proclamation was still going forth, the full blaze of his presence would overspread the earth and become evident to all people. The two phases of the Second Advent are adequately included in this metaphor, the first phase, in which the Lord, coming into the space and time framework of our earthly habitation, "as a thief", gathers his own whilst the world is as yet unaware of the fact, and the second phase in which his presence is so patently obvious to all men that no man can deny it. It is from this latter point that his reign over the earth commences and the Kingdom is to date. The assumption of power by Jesus must be a real assumption of power and this cannot be until the kingdoms of this world have actually and literally given place to his Kingdom. That will be after the glorification of the Church and therefore after the first phase of his Advent has been completed.

Prayer pulls the rope below and the great bell rings above in the hearing of God. Some scarcely stir the bell, for they pray so languidly; others give

but an occasional pluck at the rope but he who wins with heaven is the man who grasps the rope boldly and pulls continuously with all his might.

ORIGINAL SIN

A doctrinal thesis

What has been called the "doctrine of original sin" is unfashionable nowadays. "Sin" is an unpopular word. Men who commit immoral or anti-social acts are nowadays said to be mentally unbalanced or psychologically unsound or biologically defective but they are not sinners. If the doctors knew what to do they could be put right. Man being in a state of evolution from some primitive animal species they will be put right eventually. Whether this fond hope can be squared with the current world relapse into every form of barbarism and savagery, of drug-taking and self-destruction, may be thought to be open to question, but even so there must be a rational explanation for it all and there is no such thing as sin. That is the view of some of the wise of this world.

The Bible takes a directly contrary view. All the ills and troubles of this world, crime, disease and death itself are the consequence of sin. Sin is a reality. But the Bible also presents a lighter side to the picture. There will be a time when sin shall be no more. The results of sin will vanish. "*There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away*" (Rev. 21. 4).

So the question has to be asked, is the tendency to sin something inherent in each human heart, something fundamental to human nature which man cannot resist, or is it a factor inherited from the past, passed down from previous ancestors or ancestor? And whichever option is demonstrated to be responsible, by what means will that sin be universally eradicated, as the Scripture definitely declares it will be eradicated?

To answer those questions an enquiry into the past is necessary.

The Bible record goes back to the beginning of history. There are some inherent suggestions that its earliest chapters were first recorded, on whatever kind of writing material which then existed, at least a thousand years before the earliest specimens of writing which have so far been discovered. And those early records, whenever and wherever they were written, contained a full account of the entry into sin into the world and the havoc it caused. The Bible comes down without doubt or dispute on the side of original sin.

Men of ancient times had no doubt as to its reality. Here is a plea, recorded on a tablet still in existence, of a man who lived more than four thousand years ago, obsessed with the consciousness of his sinful state and beseeching God to free him from its bondage. Be it noted, too, that the God he besought was not one of the gods of paganism. In his day only the God of Heaven, the Most High, was known and worshipped. Researches over the

past half century have confirmed what some scholars have asserted for a century previously, that paganism was an invention of men's minds; primitive man knew and worshipped the one God.

"O my God, my transgressions are very great, very great my sins. I transgress and know it not. I sin and know it not. I wander on wrong paths, and I know it not. I lie on the ground and none reaches a hand to me. I am silent, and in tears, and none takes me by the hand. I cry out, and there is none that hears me. I am exhausted, and oppressed, and none releases me. My God, who knowest the unknown, be merciful. Lord, thou wilt not repulse thy servant. In the midst of the stormy waters, come to my assistance, take me by the hand. I commit sins—turn them into blessedness. I commit transgressions—let the wind sweep them away. My blasphemies are very many—rend them like a garment. God, who knowest I knew not, my sins are seven times seven—forgive my sins".

Long before Moses; long before Abraham; that man poured out his heart to God. He knew there was such a thing as sin.

And how did sin enter the world?

The story of the Garden of Eden yields the answer—not that surface acceptance of the terms used in the story which have so often given rise to misunderstanding, but the reality which the story enshrines. Man was created by God; that is an essential pre-requisite. He was not the product of blind chance or natural forces, of evolution from a fortuitous combination of chemical elements. And man was created perfect, sinless, able to live an eternal life by reason of the sustaining Divine life infused into his organism. Then man sinned, and the source of life from above was interrupted—cut off. The man who ceases to remain in living communion with God who alone is the Author and continual provider of life cuts himself off from life and eventually he dies; there is no alternative. So Adam died. And because the whole of his posterity were conceived and born while he was in that dying state they too have not that Divine sustaining life in them and they too die in their turn. The Bible is positive about this. "*In Adam all die—in Christ shall all be made alive*" (1 Cor. 15. 22). "*By man came death*" (1 Cor. 15. 22). "*By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men*" (Rom. 5. 12). "*Thy first father hath sinned*" (Isa. 43. 27). "*This only have I found, that God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many villainies*" (Eccl. 7. 29).

What then was the nature of that primal sin which brought such consequences upon the emergent human race. Granted that the Eden story is factually correct, that one human pair was created at the first to become parents of the entire human

race, what was the act which brought upon them the sentence of death, a sentence which was to involve the whole of their descendants, as yet unborn. The story depicts it as the picking and eating of the fruit of a forbidden tree—but was it really as simple as all that? Not a very sinful act by ordinary standards; neither immoral nor degrading. It is sometimes suggested that the prohibition was a test of obedience and the sin was that of disobedience; against this it could be argued that the Lord has always been reasonable in his ways and demands and the death sentence for so apparently trivial an act does not match up very well with his character as revealed in the Bible. Perhaps this aspect of the story needs a little closer examination.

Says the narrative "*When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat*" (Gen. 3. 6).

Now there is a very similar position arising in later times alluded to by the Lord, speaking to Israel through the prophet Ezekiel (16. 49). "*This was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness. . . . therefore I took them away as I saw good*". Good for food—fulness of bread. Pleasant to the eyes—abundance of idleness. To make one wise—pride. The Sodomites enjoyed the munificence of Nature in their fertile domain, somewhat analogous to the Garden of Eden, but they sinned against the Lord to a degree which has made the very name a byword to this day. And the Apostle John has a word which enshrines a faint echo of the Eden story. "*The desire of the flesh, and the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world*" (1 John 2. 16). Is it that the story of the forbidden fruit enshrines the perpetration of an act, or series of acts, involving the use of God-given powers and the resources of man's environment for purposes pleasing to the flesh but inimical to the orderly conduct of life and to the detriment of spiritual communion with God. Was the sin, not merely disobedience in a minor matter, but disloyalty in a major matter?

There is an epic ancient legend, current in Abraham's day in his own native land, the existing copy of which dates only from some three centuries after Abraham but is evidently derived from older records of much earlier date, which speaks of a garden in which were two temples, one the "*temple of the plant of life*" and the other the "*temple of the pleasant fruits*". A man, placed in the garden to tend it, worshipped at the first temple. Drawn by curiosity he approached the second temple and heard a voice "*I will give thee the knowledge of a*

god". Knowing it to be unlawful he entered in to worship and in the outcome found that he was doomed to lose his life. The origin of the legend is unknown but its resemblance to the story of Eden is intriguing—the fact of trees on the one hand and temples on the other opens up an interesting train of thought. The ancients often worshipped under certain trees which they held as sacred. In Sumer it was the date palm; later on in Canaan the oak tree; different nations adopted different local trees but always the impulse was to associate a tree with worship and this is believed to go back into pre-history.

Is there something of this in the Eden story? Did our first parents stand before the Tree of Life, with its fruit of life, and regard it as a symbol of the life-giving power of God to whom they owed life and being, and there avow their loyalty to him. That would be the first place of worship upon earth and the eating of the fruit a ceremonial act just as truly as is the partaking of bread and wine in the Memorial Service or Holy Communion in much later days. And if that be conceded, might not the partaking of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, whatever it was, under the enticement of the Evil One, become an equally ceremonial act of a change of loyalty, loyalty now to the one who in the Scripture is the enemy of God and man? In which case the sin lay not in the actual eating of the fruit—if the story is to be understood as literally as that—but in what the action signified. They had renounced their loyalty to God and entered the service of the Evil One, finding, too late, that they had been grievously deceived.

Disloyalty—rebellion—faithlessness; was that the original sin which separated man from God and interrupted the flow of continuing life from God. In consequence man could only carry on with what could be described as his reserve of vitality and when that was exhausted he died. All he could pass on to his descendants was a subnormal life which can only survive a limited term of years and then end in death. So all men die because of original sin.

But the Father in heaven has provided a remedy. It is true that "*in Adam all die*" but equally and gloriously true that "*in Christ shall all be made alive*". Not by glossing over the sin as if it had never happened, but by means of the "*Ransom for All*" calling all men back from the grave that under the administration of our Lord's Millennial Kingdom they will so learn the principles of righteousness in contrast to their lives' experience of this world of sin and death that they will of full free-will and understanding accept Christ as Saviour and so become "*children of the living God*". It is not without reason that in the final chapter of the Bible the Tree of Life reappears, its fruit for the life of the nations—but the other tree is there no more.

BRIEF VIEW OF REVELATION

The Book of Revelation has long been the subject of controversy among students of the Bible. A book of symbols, it is variously interpreted, a fertile field for disputes between exponents of interpretations labelled "præterist", "futurist" or "historical". Some, mystified by the strange events which John records, have given up the task of understanding them. Others have applied themselves diligently to discovering some event in history, however insignificant, which will correspond to each detail of the narrative. It is not an easy book, but it is an intriguing one. A Bible class which embarks upon its study will toil through it long and painfully. The leader of such a study may feel he needs a complete knowledge not only of Old Testament prophecy but of two thousand years of secular and church history; and together with this a sense of proportion and an appreciation of spiritual values.

Yet, the fact remains that the book is intended as a revelation. One scholar puts it, "*The writer obviously expects that his meaning, so far from being obscured by the strange figures of speech and symbols which he employs, will be thereby illustrated, enforced, and brought home to the mind with greater than ordinary power.*" It would be hard to believe that this revelation, given by Jesus Christ, was intended only for scholars.

The book is a prophecy of things which, when it was written, were yet future. Those who first read it must have been as perplexed as those today who come to it lacking a knowledge of history—if indeed it be that many of the prophecies of the book have been fulfilled. To the first readers the book must have seemed a vast drama, with heaven and earth for a stage, in which move the kings of the earth, the angels of heaven, the powers of darkness and the messengers of light. As the apostle John unfolds his vision they recognise themselves, persecuted and oppressed, as the souls under the altar or the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem. They, are spectators of the great drama of history, played before the King of Kings, in which the hero, the slain Lamb, becomes the Victor. As the dark symbols follow one another they rejoice to find that God is to be vindicated in his dealings with men: and the voices which speak to them in strains as of poetry tell plainly the foundation truths of the Gospel.

The modern reader, poring over various translations notices passages which Weymouth, Moffatt and the R.S.V. have rendered in verse. It is interesting to look at them. Often it is the four and twenty elders of the throne scene whose words the translators put in verse. These elders speak to praise God. Their continual song, night and day, is

to ascribe to God glory and honour and power. Why? Because He is the Creator of all things, and because it is by his will that the universe has come into existence. We may well echo these praises, for it is God the ever living One who through the ages has fashioned the world in which we live according to laws which only now are scientists beginning to understand. As Paul said upon Mars Hill, it is in him that we live and move and have our being. It is fitting that the Gospel should commence with the fact that our God is Creator of heaven and earth; and right that we in our praises should give thanks on this account.

In chapter five the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sing a new song. The ages have rolled on. The world has long been established, and now the race of beings that inhabits it has been redeemed by Jesus. But what is to follow? The prayers of Christians come before the God of heaven. The elders rejoice, for that same Jesus is found worthy to open the book of the future, to control the destinies of this world. He has ransomed men from every tribe and nation, a body who will reign over the earth as priests. Thus a second great fact emerges: that the Gospel Age is a time in which Christ's ransom sacrifice is applied to a company, for whom God has a special work. If we are among those who thus have been redeemed, we can join with their song,

"Worthy the Lamb that died, they cry,

To be exalted thus!

Worthy the Lamb! our hearts reply,

For He was slain for us."

It is not till chapter seven that we find the elders once more burst forth in praise. The sight that inspires them is a numberless host of men, justified and victorious, from every nation. Their great tribulation is past: they are to suffer no more, but under God's protection are to serve him. Irrespective of any question what "class" this multitude represents, is it not a comfort to know that the future is to hold life, with the privilege of his service and protection, to *any* one who is under "the robe of Christ's righteousness".

The theme of the elders is more awesome in chapter eleven. If the mercy of God is to be praised, so also is his judgment. It has been the lot of Christians in the Gospel Age to live in a time of darkness, when the light of the Gospel has only partly illumined the world. There is light enough to see by for those whose eyes are open to the message of salvation; but for the rest of mankind the world is dim, full of half truths, with any course of action a choice between two evils. Men dimly perceive what is good, but lack the courage to endure that measure of suffering which right action

entails. While there are men upon earth to take selfish advantage, Christian meekness will bear this reward of suffering. So the nations are not meek but angry; and God's wrath comes upon them. Wrath upon the spirit of self, wrath upon those who destroy, wrath upon all those things which work, not creatively in the spirit of the Creator, but to disrupt, antagonise and embitter. Just as the dentist drills away the rotten part of a tooth in order to preserve the good remainder, so all that is antagonistic to the very life of God's kingdom must be removed. Christ's rule will be one of mercy and equity; but what He sees fit eventually to destroy must indeed be worthy of destruction. God's judgment is a cause for rejoicing, for we long to see vindicated that spirit of love which now shows so little in outward results. We long for God to reveal himself in power and righteousness, to show his majesty, to embrace mankind in his love, to make it once and for all evident that the scorned and rejected gospel of Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Truth. As the twenty-four elders say, when they fall down and worship God, "We give thanks to thee, Lord God almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign". If we are conquerors, we too may sing

*"Great and wonderful are thy deeds,
O Lord God the almighty!
Just and true are thy ways,
O King of the ages!
Who shall not fear and glorify thy name,
O Lord?
For thou alone art holy.
All nations shall come and worship thee,
For thy judgments have been revealed."*

The chapters which follow are full of the judgments of God. False religion, the lust for worldly power, infatuation with the good things of this life, hypocrisy under the garb of godliness, all these things come under sentence together with the Dragon—the Adversary—that inspires them. All is summed up in Babylon, that city into which is drawn all the wealth and pride of life. In it there is gaiety, finery, all those external things which delight the senses but without godliness are a delusion. Babylon is the epitome of the kingdoms of this world: its inhabitants live for self; they have a worldly allegiance. Their conduct stands condemned, for it results in the blood of innocent men, of men made holy by their relationship with

God.

It is small wonder that Babylon's fall is heralded in the language of poetry. It is small wonder that the adjuration is "Come out of her, my people". We must beware of the spirit of Babylon, whatever our surroundings and with whoever we meet. Only by a personal guard over our lips and our ways, by a perpetual watchfulness in prayer, shall we ensure that we are free of the trammels of the world. Let us beware lest our conduct betray our heavenly city or dishonour our heavenly King. It is so easy to peddle between two masters.

After the judgment of Babylon goes up the cry of the hosts in heaven, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just". The earth is rid of an evil thing, and by contrast we see the Bride of the Lamb, made ready to be joined to her Lord. From the vision of the faithless we turn to the faithful: our Lord comes into his own, and his chosen ones with him. Babylon is doomed: the new Jerusalem rises in its stead.

As the book draws to a close, there comes a voice from the throne itself:

*"God's dwelling place is among men
And He will dwell among them
And they shall be his people.
He will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death shall be no more;
Nor sorrow, nor wail of woe, nor pain;
For the first things have passed away."*

This is the consummation of God's purpose, a new order which follows the time of tempest and judgment. The waters of life flow there, and the nations, purged of sin, bring their glories to God's feet. The broad picture is clear. God's purpose looks beyond the suffering of the present hour, and God's ultimate design removes pain and death from human kind. The heart thrills as his designs are made manifest. Just as Christians of the First Century longed for their final accomplishment, so do we. If, after nineteen hundred years of history, we can identify our position in time among the symbols of the book, well and good. But even if our minds are not capable of grasping the details, we may rejoice in the one great hope, join with the four and twenty elders around the throne as they cry,

*"Worthy art thou, O Lord God! . . ."
Worthy is the Lamb!"*

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

Thanks to God should nor prevent our giving thanks to one another for benefits received through human agents. In fact, if we are not thankful to the human giver, how can we be thankful to the heavenly?

RIOT IN THE TEMPLE

No. 15 in a series of
stories of St. Paul

There was a long silence in the room after James had finished speaking. The faces of his colleagues, elders of the Jerusalem church, revealed their satisfaction with the manner in which he had put their proposal. Paul and his companions, men of Asia and of Greece, sat with grave countenances. They had not expected this fundamental difference of outlook between Jew and Gentile, the question of observing or not observing the Mosaic law, to be introduced so soon after their coming together, but introduced it had been and now they had to face it and come to a decision.

The Asiatic and Greek churches had been collecting a money gift for the benefit of the hard-hit believers in Jerusalem for a number of years past. Now Paul was in the city, together with eight representatives of those churches, formally to hand over the money. As an evidence of Christian love and good fellowship this gesture ranks high; there had been no contact, or at least very little, between the Gentile assemblies and the native Church at Jerusalem and the spirit which inspired the gift reveals an intense awareness, on the part of the Gentile believers, of the essential unity of all believers in Christ, transcending differences of race or nation, of culture or of doctrine. These Judean disciples were in dire need and the newly-formed Gentile communities in the first flush of their Christian experience were doing what they could to relieve that need. The importance they attached to their gesture is high-lighted by the fact that in addition to Paul's personal co-workers, Luke and Timothy, six others had made the long journey with him to Judea to testify to the Jerusalem disciples by their presence how real was the concern of the Gentile churches for the distressful condition of their fellow-believers in Jerusalem.

It is rather puzzling that the account of the meeting in Acts 21 says not one word about the actual presentation of the gift. The stern ascetic James, a natural half-brother of Jesus, was the acknowledged leader of the Church, and all the elders, it is said, were present. It is hard to resist the idea that the travellers were somewhat disappointed in their reception. All that Luke saw fit to record was that Paul gave a detailed account of the work he and his fellow-labourers had carried out in Asia and Greece and the results they had achieved in terms of conversions and assemblies established. The response from their hosts seems almost perfunctory: "*and when they heard it, they glorified the Lord*", and they immediately plunged into discussion of a totally different and purely local interest, the manner in which suspicion of Paul's orthodoxy in matters relating to the Mosaic Law might be

allayed whilst he was in their midst. It seems almost as if that subject was of infinitely greater moment to them at that time than the gift and the loving spirit which had prompted so many believers in so many churches to make sacrifices for the well-being of these brethren whom they had never seen. It might well be that Luke, himself a Greek, and probably having little patience with these pettifogging arguments about the detail and ceremonial of the Mosaic Covenant, felt too sick at heart to record anything more about the gift which he and his had carried with such pride as emissaries of their home churches.

All faces now were turned to Paul, for his was to be the decision. The proposal put forward by James was clearcut enough. The Jerusalem Christians still observed the Mosaic Law, including the rite of circumcision, the distinction between clean and unclean foods, and the observance of the great feasts. To what extent they realised that the coming and the death of Christ, and the new message which He taught, had abrogated all these things, is not now known, but they did certainly continue to observe all the outward ceremonial. Paul they knew as the man who proclaimed in no uncertain voice that "*Christ is the end of the Law to everyone that believeth*", that nothing of all the ceremonial and restrictions associated with the Mosaic Covenant was of any validity or value to the Christian. They also knew that he refused to draw any distinction between Jew and Gentile, saying that God himself had broken down the wall of partition between them, that in Christ there was neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian or Scythian, but that all were one in Christ. Their own Christianity was not yet mature enough to prevent them resenting these sentiments with all their native Jewish pride and insularity. Matters were not helped by the accession of a great number of priests and Pharisees to the Church—according to James at this time there were "many thousands which believe" (the Greek word is *myriados* which, literally meaning tens of thousands, was used colloquially to indicate a multitude that was well-nigh uncountable). It is probably true that the Christian Church in Jerusalem was in real danger of becoming merely a sect of Judaism, and it was only the catastrophic ending of the entire Jewish polity a few years later that destroyed its Judaistic leanings and transformed it into a true Christian community.

In the light of this position James made his suggestion. He wanted Paul to indicate his personal orthodoxy in things Mosaic by participating in a Temple ceremony. Four of the local Christians had taken the Nazarite vow—to abstain from strong drink and allow their hair to grow uncut—and the

time of their ceremonial release was at hand. This involved an elaborate seven day ritual at the Temple, where alone this release could be effected, and the priesthood had seen to it that the procedure cost money. It was the custom for wealthy Jews, as an act of piety, to pay these costs on behalf of men too poor to meet them themselves, and this involved association in the relevant ceremonies. If, suggested James, Paul would thus associate himself with these four men and spend the necessary week in the Temple, all concerned would see that he was still a loyal son of Israel conforming at least to the outward trappings of the Law of Moses.

Although James' purpose was to allay criticism of Paul's reputed views regarding the Law, there was nothing in the course suggested to which Paul could logically take exception. The Nazarite vow was a formal means of declaring in public the intensity of personal dedication or consecration to the service of God. As a ceremonial it had been regulated by definite provisions in the Law of Moses but there is reason to think that the practice existed long before the Law. The term "Nazarite" itself comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to be separated" (it has no connection with the town Nazareth or the term Nazarene applied to the early Christians). A man desiring to express in symbol, for the edification of his fellows, the fact of his dedication to God, took the Nazarite vow, which involved abstaining from strong drink in symbol of keeping the mental faculties clear and vital for Divine worship, and allowing the hair to grow long—the ancient idea was that physical strength resided in the hair—to picture the preservation of the physical powers for Divine service. The vow was for a period at the end of which the hair was cut and offered to God by the priest with an appropriate ritual. The full law on the matter appears in Numbers, chapter 6; several instances of its application are found in the Old Testament, Hannah and Samson being noteworthy examples. The ceremony was equally appropriate to Christian and Jew; Paul himself took the vow on one occasion (Acts 18.18) so that he was violating no principle of conduct in assenting to the proposal. The only question was whether his presence in the Temple for an entire week at the time of the feast—for this was Pentecost and the city was full of pilgrims from all parts of the world—might spark off trouble with some of his inveterate enemies. Perhaps he reassured himself with the thought that only a few years earlier, at the end of his second missionary journey, he had undergone the same seven days ceremonial in the Temple on his own account when he himself had taken the vow, and no untoward circumstance occurred. At any rate, he assented.

But this time the outcome was different. Five or

six of the days had passed. The priests were conducting the ancient ceremonial in their usual perfunctory unhurried fashion, offering the unleavened bread, and the meat offering, and the drink offering, and the peace offering. Paul and his four companions were standing in their allotted places, carrying out their part of the ritual in harmony with the movements of the priests. At a respectful distance around them clustered a crowd of spectators, curious pilgrims whose own sacrifices had been presented and who now were going round gazing with wide-open eyes at every new spectacle this wonderful Temple could furnish. The offerings passed from hand to hand; the droning voices of the priests went on

There came a sudden interruption. "*Men of Israel, help. This is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the Law, and this place; and further brought Greeks into the temple and hath polluted this holy place*". The stentorian voice roared over the quiet court. A group of men—provincial Jews, Asiatics by their dress—had rudely broken into the circle of priests and laid violent hands on Paul, shouting to the crowd as they did so. In an instant all was confusion. The mere mention of Greeks in the sacred precincts was enough to rouse the entire concourse to raging fury. Paul was surrounded by an angry mob and hustled out of the "Court of the Women" where the ceremony was taking place, down the fifteen steps of the Gate Beautiful into the Court of the Strangers where there was more space and less sanctity. As they did so the priests hurriedly closed the ponderous gates to avoid risk of bloodshed in the sacred court. What happened in the Court of the Strangers was not so important and not so much their concern.

Somebody else, however, was concerned. At the north-west corner of the Temple area stood the Tower of Antonia, headquarters of the Roman garrison, specially built so as to overlook the Temple because so many riots had their beginning within its courts. A flight of steps had been built by the Romans, leading down from the castle directly into the Temple outer court to facilitate the rapid descent of troops when necessary. The Romans had found by experience that it was frequently necessary. Now the centurion on duty looked down upon the melee below, saw the ruffraff of the streets hurrying in to take part in whatever was afoot, and without more ado sent urgent report to his commander that another riot had started in the Temple and "*all Jerusalem was in an uproar*". That long-suffering functionary, Claudius Lysias, dropped what he was doing, doubtless with a muttered imprecation upon these turbulent Jews who would never let him rest in peace, called up a detachment of soldiers and centurions, and dashed down the stairs into the Court.

At the well-known sound of clashing Roman weapons the tumult momentarily lessened; there was probably a bit of a stampede to get out of the Gate and into the street. Citizens of Jerusalem knew what it meant when Roman soldiers sailed in to stop a fight. Even the Asiatic Jews who had started it all and were in process of beating Paul to death desisted when they saw the stalwart mail-clad soldiers forcing their way with scant ceremony through the crowd to get to them. In a moment, with typical Roman efficiency, the central figure was picked up from the ground and shackled to two soldiers. The remainder pushed the crowd back a little and then Lysias demanded to know what the trouble was all about. Immediately a babble of voices broke out mingled with abuse and threats aimed at Paul, standing silent in the midst of the soldiers. With a gesture of contempt the commander turned from the crowd; at a curt word of command Paul's custodians began to march him toward the stairs. Seeing themselves being balked of their prey, the crowd broke through the barriers and surrounded the little party, yelling like wild beasts. Quickly the soldiers formed a tight ring to push back the mob while several of them hoisted Paul up bodily and carried him up the stairs, their comrades holding back the crowd meanwhile. Once at the top the emergency was over for no Jew would dare to follow on to the garrison ramparts.

It seems from the record in Acts that Lysias had formed the impression that his prisoner was a certain Egyptian false Messiah who only a few months previously had led four thousand deluded followers up the Mount of Olives under a promise that the walls of Jerusalem would fall before them and the Roman power be destroyed. Felix, the Roman governor of Judea, had acted promptly and quelled the insurrection, slaying many and taking other prisoners to be sent into slavery, and the false Messiah himself had escaped and was never heard of again. Lysias seemed rather astonished to find that he had on his hands instead an apparently respectable, educated Asiatic Jew, and he, perhaps rather reluctantly, assented to Paul's request that he be allowed to address the multitude from the top of the stairs.

Standing there in full view of the people, Paul raised his hand in token of silence. The shouting died away; with a swift reversal of feeling the mob which a moment ago had been crying out for his blood was now curious to hear what he had to say. "And when there was made a great silence he spake unto them." Paul spoke in Aramaic, the native language of the people. That one fact alone must have contributed to the attention they gave him. Greek was the official language, that of the Romans, of the highly placed, the rich and influential, but Aramaic was the tongue of the common people, the tongue of their ancestors. And many of them

would be maliciously conscious that most of the Roman soldiers listening would not understand a word of what was being said, so they gave Paul their close attention.

It was a masterly discourse. "Men, brethren and fathers" was his introductory mode of address, conciliatory and giving due deference to the men of authority amongst them. He told them of his credentials as a Jew, his education under Rabbi Gamaliel, the famous Pharisee whose name was even then, in his own generation, famous throughout Israel. He described how as a zealous Pharisee himself he had "persecuted this way unto the death" and told of his conversion on the Damascus road when his eyes beheld the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth. He related the details of his commission to preach that same Jesus and how he obeyed. To all this his hearers gave respectful attention, for nothing he had said transgressed Jewish national or religious feeling. But then he came to the historic occasion when in this very Temple he had seen a vision of Jesus saying to him "Depart; for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles". At mention of the hated name and Paul's bold assertion that God intended his salvation to be offered to the Gentiles, the entire assembly erupted in uncontrollable anger. "Away with such a fellow from the earth" they cried, "for it is not fit that he should live". They tore their clothes, threw dust into the air, and probably made an involuntary dash to the stairs as if to drag Paul down into their midst again.

Lysias had had enough. He probably did not understand Aramaic and had become increasingly impatient as he stood by listening to Paul's oration. Now he intended to get to the root of the matter. He told his soldiers to take Paul inside for interrogation and to preface the examination with a severe scourging, which was the accepted way of getting the truth out of an unwilling prisoner. Paul had been in this position before and knew his rights. He quietly reminded the centurion of the illegality of scourging a Roman citizen. The centurion was startled; it was unusual but not unknown for Jews to hold the privilege of Roman citizenship and he knew the severity with which any breach of the law in this respect was treated. He suspended the proceedings for the time being and went straight to his commander. Lysias came down in what was probably a state of near panic to verify the fact for himself. He seemed doubtful at first. He himself, he said, had obtained his citizenship at considerable monetary expense. He was probably a Greek or an Asiatic who had spent his life as a professional soldier and acquired citizenship as a reward for some contribution made to State interests or even, not improbably, by bribery. "But I," said Paul, "was free born"—born a citizen. That meant that his father or grandfather must have held Roman citizenship before him.

Lysias could doubt no longer; the penalty for falsely claiming to be a Roman citizen was death, and he was convinced. He was also very worried, for in merely binding Paul preparatory to the scourging he had laid himself open to severe punishment should his prisoner make an official complaint to the governor Felix at Caesarea. It is very probable that Paul spent that night, not as a prisoner, but as the guest of Claudius Lysias in the latter's private apartments. The next morning the members of the Sanhedrin—who had not been involved in the riot of the previous day anyway—received a peremptory summons to arrange a

session at which Paul, under Roman surveillance, should appear and have the matters in dispute settled once and for all.

So, at last, the wheel had turned full circle. Some twenty-five years previously Paul himself, as a member of that same Sanhedrin, had seen Stephen arraigned and condemned to death for blasphemy. He himself had given his vote for the death sentence. Now he, in his own turn, was to stand before the same judicial body to defend his advocacy of the identical principles for which Stephen had given his life.

(To be continued)

SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

"And there shall be with thee for all manner of workmanship every willing skilful man, for any manner of service . . . and who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?" (1 Chron. 28. 21 & 29. 5).

The great Temple of Solomon, classed by the ancients as one of the Seven Wonders of the World, was made possible and built by voluntary service, by men imbued with an ideal. King David knew that this, the dream of his life, would not be achieved by himself; in these words he told his son the Crown Prince Solomon that there would be an army of voluntary workers at his disposal: turning then to his counsellors and elder statesmen he appealed through them to all Israel to give of themselves and their property to help forward this great work.

This materialistic age looks with some scorn upon people who render voluntary service. The whole idea is out of date. If Solomon's Temple was to be built to-day there would be half-a-dozen big "property development" concerns scrambling for the contract, and no matter which one got it the price would be pretty high. Solomon's Temple was a marvellously ambitious structure. It has been calculated that with the gold and silver, copper and iron, rare woods and hewn stone used in its construction it must have cost the Israelitish king the equivalent of a hundred and fifty million pounds (over two hundred and fifty million dollars) of today's money for material alone. And the labour at to-day's trade union rates would have set him back another hundred millions. Then there would have to be the contractors' profit and the architect's fees and compensation for all sorts of people whose real or imagined rights could be shown by their legal representatives to have been infringed by the project, and of course those same legal men's expenses and some associated court costs. Solomon in later life did most regrettably inflict some heavy taxa-

tion on his people but had the Temple been built by modern methods he would probably have had to extract some four hundred millions from those same long-suffering subjects on the Temple project alone before the contractors would hand over the key. King David knew a better way. "Every willing skilful man . . . for every manner of service . . . willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord". That was how the most magnificent place of worship the world has ever known—with the possible exception of Herod's Temple, later erected on the same site—was built.

Even among many Christian communities the ideal of voluntary service for the Lord is not exemplified as it should be. How many churches and chapels there are surrounded by a tangled mass of grass, weeds and overgrown shrubs which by the efforts of a dedicated band of amateur gardeners from the congregation could be turned into little oases of beauty in what are only too often drab and unprepossessing surroundings! How many ministers and pastors could intensify their powers for good tenfold with the aid of a small group of helpers devoted to taking the more mundane tasks of his ministry off his shoulders! If the local place of worship is an earthly outpost of the Kingdom of Heaven—and it should be—then surely even physically it should reflect some of that beauty which is an attribute of the Kingdom of Heaven. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" was the Apostle's admonition. Many of our readers are members of minor groups where some of these ideals are put into practice—there is room for much extension of this among Christian bodies. The outside world might even take notice at last and wonder if, after all, there might not be something in the idea of doing something for nothing. The pulpit is not the only platform from which sermons are preached.

THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

Part 3 of a three-part series
on Prov. 31. 10-31

"She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant" (Vs. 24).

Samech A prop or support. A measure of the love for her husband is the total support she rejoices to give. Support for his work, the upholding of his word, defence of his good character, his "pillar of strength".

The seal of a saint is the influence of the life. Her Lord is known for his love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity. She is his partner on earth. She is the salt of the earth. Together the title is shared; "Light of the world". His influence is within her, her life in the flesh a manifestation of the life of Jesus Christ. Salt by its very nature purifies; its constant influence is against corruption. It adds relish, makes more desirable what it touches. The woman makes fine linen to clothe others. Righteous acts of saintly souls may seem to have little influence in this dark world, yet it is a holding forth of the Word of life, an innocent shining forth of the light that glows within her being. Little do we know what is noticed by those who pass by. May anything they recall of us enable them to glorify our God.

Not only does she become skilful in her perceptive appreciation of righteousness, and the qualities of service which distinguish between human and Divine, but her wearing of these adornments so fitly and with such grace models them for the world around. People tend to want what they can see, to bring satisfaction and happiness to those who already have. The great invitation to "come and buy" of Isa. 55.1 that opens the sluice gates of blessing in the Age almost upon us, is to be the special privilege of the Spirit and the Bride. What they are learning now they will teach then and turn the tide of human misery. The Lord's jewels, those whose character reveals the beauty of light and truth, whose influence is to turn men to righteousness, will shine as the sun, and as the stars forever. The Divine standards of the reeds of gold, their daily delight, will be used by their Lord to measure out to all men the blessed fruits of righteous service.

"Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come" (Vs. 25).

Ayin An eye, hence vision, sight, that which is in view. By analogy something in the centre of a view or landscape, as a fountain or wall. In Gen. 24 the word is used seven times for the well at which Rebecca and Eliezer met; Rebecca's eye for the water of life, Ruth's eye for the grains of corn brought each before the eye of the Lord and his servants.

She lives in the sight of that Lord who seeth not as man seeth. She glories not in appearance, but in

view of those holy eyes of Divine compassion and tender understanding of the materials in which He works. He knows her frame, knows his power and how to use the weakness of the one to exhibit the sufficiency and glory of the other. It is this blessed reality that forms the ground of her assurance. In vain will her accuser point the finger of guilt at sins that are past. With the blood of the Lamb on the mercy seat who is he that can condemn? He who died for her will not now say that it was all in vain. She has full assurance of understanding, of hope, of faith. Her strength is not of the flesh but of a mind at rest in God. She is clothed with that calm serenity and poise of a child of God.

Rebecca has an eye to the journey's end. Forgetting the things behind, she reaches forth to what lies before, where Christ is waiting at God's right hand. The N.A. version says "*She smiles at the future*". When a saint smiles, and there is no one there, a moment of translation may be suspected. Hope is bringing forward the joy by anticipation. It is laying hold *now* on the blessings of *then*. Rebecca's fond anticipations are shared by the One awaiting that same hour. Her smile is his smile too. His very name means "laughter" and in it lies the joy of countless ages. She cannot yet measure those Divine immeasurables nor yet know the boundaries of the love of Christ, nor comprehend that joy unspeakable so full of glory, but her eye is on that goal.

"She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness" (Vs. 26).

Pe A mouth, linked with speech. Means of expression of thought, hence important member of the consecrated, not easily controlled. In some passages represents the mouth or edge of a sword. Personal expression of the will or mind. "*We will call the damsel and enquire at her mouth*" (Gen. 24.57).

Her prayer, that the hand of the Lord be upon her that she open not her lips save when prompted and empowered by the Lord. She knows well the frailty of this member; by nature her lips are unclean. Yet she dwells in the presence of One whose name is Holy. The Lord understands her plight. It is He who directs the seraphim to take live coal from the holy altar of God to touch human lips. Those lips now are his, part of the acceptable offering of love. The source of cleansing becomes the source of utterance. He is made unto her Wisdom. Wisdom from above, of a source beyond human thought, now graces her mouth, the words not hers, but his. Nor words alone, but the very spirit of the Mind that brings them forth uses her tongue, enriching her speech. The message is heavenly. She has sought that wisdom, searched diligently

for it as for hid treasure, cried after it in deep and godly reverence. And the Lord who answered the prayer of Solomon answers hers.

What is of herself has little worth. What is of God has great worth. Divine oracles are nuggets of gold. They are imperishable, and cannot fail. But He desires more than knowledge; truth in the inward parts. Light is for the righteous, and its gladness for the upright in heart. The pure wisdom from above is peacable and approachable. It is spoken in love, full of mercy and good fruits. It opens up new vistas of understanding all things. The intimate knowing of him who renews and regenerates after the image of him that creates this new and holy thing.

"She looketh well to the ways of her household; and eateth not the bread of idleness" (Vs. 27).

Tzade To lean forward, to pay close attention, to peer into the future. Here the diligent interest and close care of the woman in the affairs of the household, her watchfulness and concern.

So in Micah 4.8 is Jerusalem described from which the King and Shepherd observes and guards his flock. While the Lord has used special watchmen over his people, watchfulness over the spiritual welfare of self and of our brethren of the Household is the privilege and responsibility of all saints. She eats not the bread of idleness, tittle-tattle and tale-bearing to the detriment of others. Her deep love for her Lord demands expression, and this she finds in uncounted ways of selfless laying down of her life in their interest.

The ultimate attainment of those dear brethren in Christ is her earnest prayer. Their crown will be her crown, and their joy. If she could know that in so wonderful work of God as the preparation of his jewels her Lord used her, even in the smallest way, in the process of that blessed design and purpose, what satisfaction, what sacred privilege. She washes the feet of the saints, pours out the precious ointment intended for his head upon the humble members of his Body. The house of God is a house of love. Each member breaks the seal of love's outpouring till the house is filled with the sweet savour of Christ. There the law of Christ is fulfilled in the bearing of mutual burdens and the sharing of mutual joys. The earnestness of every saint, the watchfulness one of each other, the silent moments of deep feeling, heart reaching out to heart; we are surrounded by so much love. And the response within tells us we have passed from death unto life.

"Her children rise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her" (Vs. 28).

Koph The hole of axe; something which needs perfectly to fit that the function of the whole may be improved. The Father has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, each vessel meet for the Master's use (2 Tim. 2.21).

Her children here are her fruit, the harvest

produced, result of the work of grace within. Her fruits reveal her for what she is. What is now reaped is that which with care and patience she has sown and watered, nurtured with tenderness. Upon this fruit now depends her fitness for that future ministry of glory.

Reflected in her life the holy place of her abode, and his. Planted in the house of the Lord she flourishes in his courts. His is the glory, hers the delight. The fruit she brings forth in its due season is what she has drawn from that river of life whose banks receive her roots. The words "in Christ" have opened up to her their blessed secrets of unsearchable riches. The hour approaches. That hidden life in him will then be manifest in all the beauty of an express image.

Then what wonders yet will fill this earth with children of the Kingdom. Hers the precious privilege of bearing and nurturing that family of his love. His Spirit and his Bride await the hour of his command that shatters every tomb and brings forth new life upon this earth, eternal youth in glorious liberty, the whole earth filled with fruit. And He will see and be satisfied, and so will she. Sarah bore her child at ninety; this woman will still be bearing fruit at nine hundred! To each child she will be mother. With each new life her part will weave that deep special relationship of love, and an eternal bond of peace, harmony, unity, oneness. Such is the fruit of love, abounding and abiding. Each one a blessing. Sweetest of all, that warm approving, husbandly embrace.

"Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all" (Vs. 29).

Resh The head. The words of this verse are the words of Christ her head. There is no better judge of excellence, nor more tender heart to be touched with broken reed, smoking flax or those two tiny mites in the Temple treasury.

In his sight virtuous women of other ages have graced the pages of history. Theirs was not the privilege of the race we are called to run, but there they stand, those many testimonies of obedient faith and great zeal, to shout encouragement and urge us to that supreme devotion which alone will win the prize. There stands Miriam with timbrel in her hand leading out all the women of Israel to join her with timbrel and dance crying "*Sing unto the Lord for his glorious triumph*" (Exod. 15.20-21). Does my zeal excel hers? Deborah too; all Israel came to her for counsel, looked to her for leading in the battle against the foe, and her song of victory in my ears caused me, like them, gladly to yield myself an offering to his praise. Can I excel? They wave Ruth, and Hannah, and there the Shunamite who sheltered the servant of God, and Esther who saved the seed of Israel. Do they all call out to me?

The difference between the greatest of them and

the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is not in quality of faith or love or zeal, but the difference of privilege and of hope. In this does the woman of this Age excel. Hers is a higher calling. The prize of all ages was reserved. He offered not to angels or to many righteous hearts of those who patiently endured great fights of affliction. Yet He offers it now to me. Their joy was fulfilled in that for which He was preparing them. How they will shine, those righteous of past ages, in their kingdom role. But the glory that excelleth—that He has reserved for his Bride. Such unspeakable honour is bestowed, and this she knows. Her life reveals it; "one thing" she does, with arms outstretched for the goal she not only runs but runs so that she might obtain.

"Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised" (Vs. 30).

Shin or Schin This begins the first word of the verse; "*sheqer*", which means false, untrue, a lie, a denial of what is truth. Used in many contexts it is never condoned by the God of truth.

As the scales from her eyes, all superficial concepts of holiness fall away. The fleshly pursuit of holiness, once her glory, she now sees as a hindrance rather than a gain. The "Esau" so pleasing to natural senses of propriety had to be supplanted by that with which the Lord could wrestle until the blessing was obtained. This was a straight way of hard experience until the power of God within the soul had overcome the power of the flesh. He needed that changed direction in my heart that He could bless with the realisation of the promises in my life. Only by the slow but sure release of the exceeding greatness of their preciousness into my being could the change of nature be achieved. The straight street was to become a straight path leading to the goal. The way of true holiness is a street of gold producing the transparent character as glorious within as without.

One blinding flash of Truth enough, one glimpsing of his face, and persecution turns to praise, and works of flesh to grace. It cometh not with outward show, and yet it is expressed like truest love deep from the heart, in all things manifest. There is no point in breaking the box, but to pour out the contents from within. What if the box had been empty? Empty then the act remains, a drawing near of outward appearance, a form, an outer shell of godliness without its power. That inner content

of her heart, how precious to her Lord, that blush that told her love, those tears that touched the chord so deep within his soul. So shall our King with great desire that inner beauty prize, were He doth reign a burning flame reflecting from his eyes love deep within his soul.

"Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates" (Vs. 31).

Tau A sign or mark, like that upon a seal, upon the forehead of the elect—their Father's name. This final verse looks beyond the present signs of Divine favour and love, to that ultimate sign when at the end she receives his "Well done" and the abundant entrance.

These are his words, not ours. They follow love's outpouring through the life. The empty broken box is laid aside, and all that then remains, the savour clinging in the house, the views of men upon our wasted work, for so in their eyes must it seem, will soon forever be forgotten. But then it is the Master who speaks such gracious words. Love's labour cannot be in vain, not when it is in the Lord. It seemed so little she could do, so small a portion of so great a need. Yet in that little He beholds her all, and makes immortal that unworthy deed. She hath done what she could, all that lay within her power to do, with all the courage that his love could give. It shall be told: that simple act of love that was her life shall be immortalised forever.

The love of the woman is linked with the love of the Lamb. Wherever the one shall be told so will the other. He the light of her life, she the crown of his glory. The moment has arrived, that blissful hour when toil must cease. She now is clothed in the raiment on which her hands have worked, each stitch motivated by love for him and worked in the strength of his assisted grace. It is the product of his preciousness for which she claims no praise, save that depth of understanding in his eyes. Therein lies all the treasure she has laid up in that heavenly home, in that gentle smile that tells her all, the first sight of her beloved's face, the look of great desire, that she might win Christ. That is her joy unspeakable, her prize of glory, the great gain wrought each day a little more in prospect. Now it has become the living bright reality of faith, when life has turned to love. Now at the gates she meets him face to face, and on his arm again she leans to make her abundant entrance.

*Hark! hark, my soul, angelic songs are swelling:
The voice of Jesus calls his people home.
Saints of this Age this blessed hour forth-telling,
Now at his shout of joy together come.*

*Onward we go, for still we hear them singing:
The Master now is come, and calls for thee.
And those who slept the Father's love is bringing
Forth with that worthy Lamb who died for me.*

*Once far away, like bells at evening pealing,
The distant sounds of glory moved the heart.
Now all around me wondrous signs revealing,
So near the hour to see thee as thou art.*

*Through parting Vail celestial light now streaming
Forth from that One who sits on mercy's throne
Enters my soul. The source of Love's redeeming
Sets in his crown the jewels made his own.*

PARABLE OF THE HUSBANDMEN

Matt. 21. 33-44

It was within a few days of his crucifixion that Jesus spoke this parable. There is not much doubt that He intended it to be prophetic—prophetic of his own death and prophetic of the Divine condemnation soon to fall upon those responsible for his death. But behind that there was a deeper purpose. Not many days hence a good many would be saying, sadly, to themselves what in fact two disciples did say aloud to the supposed stranger on the road to Emmaus *"We trusted that it had been he that should have redeemed Israel"*. Jesus meant to leave, in this parable, an explanation of the event soon to be consummated which would take the discouraged believers back to their own Scriptures, the books of the prophets, and to their own national history, and reveal to them that all this had been known and foreseen beforehand; that no other outcome was possible; that so far from being an irretrievable disaster, this crushing anti-climax to all their hopes was in fact the only manner in which those hopes would ever be fulfilled. So Jesus gave them the parable of the wicked husbandmen.

A familiar picture, this. A vineyard, leased by its owner to a group of men who would render him an agreed proportion of the fruits by way of rent. This was a common practice in Israel and usually worked very satisfactorily. In this instance the results were not so satisfactory. When the owner's servants came to collect the expected harvest they met with a hostile reception, were beaten, stoned and killed. The owner might have been justifiably incensed but it seems he was a man of long patience, not easily moved to anger. He sent more servants, giving the husbandmen another chance. Those servants were treated in similar manner to the first. So he sent his son saying, so the story goes, *"they will reverence my son"*. But when the son appeared at the entrance to the vineyard and announced his mission, the husbandmen conspired together and killed him, so that they could seize the vineyard for themselves.

So far the little company around Jesus had listened with close attention, as every Eastern crowd will do when a story is being told. Swiftly Jesus threw out the question among them *"When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?"* Some of them at least must have had a glimmering of what lay behind this everyday story, but even so, common honesty demanded the obvious and only reply. *"He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons."* And in so saying they condemned themselves out of their own mouths and gave opportunity for one of the most scathing denunciations ever to fall from the Master's lips.

Rightly to understand the force of that denunciation it is necessary to go back to the beginning of the story and look at it through Jewish eyes—and eyes of the Jews of the First Advent at that, when national feeling was at its zenith and national pride had not been crushed by centuries of Gentile oppression. *"There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen."* As the simple yet vivid description fell from the lips of Jesus the minds of his hearers must inevitably have gone back to God's words to their fathers through the prophet Isaiah (5. 1-7) *"My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein . . . he looked that it brought forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes . . . for the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant, and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry."* Right at the beginning of the story Jesus' listeners realised that He was talking about them. They knew full well that their nation was symbolised by a vine or a vineyard in prophetic lore, and they must have listened with an added intensity to discern what the story was to unfold of good or ill for Israel.

Now the time of the vintage was come. The vineyard had been well planted with good vines, it was furnished with a winepress; there should be a good return for the owner. He had made rich provision for his tenants and could reasonably expect his due. He met instead with disloyalty, ingratitude and rebellion. That is how it was with Israel, not only in the days of Jesus but almost all through their history. Brought out of Egypt by the mighty power of God, constituted a nation at Sinai under the terms of a Covenant which made them not only the chosen people of God but also custodians of a destiny which was to make them a light to the nations to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth, they nevertheless miserably failed to live up to their calling. When God sent his servants the prophets to recall them to a sense of their duty and their destiny, they ignored and persecuted and slew them. *"Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?"* demanded Stephen of the Sanhedrin before which he was on trial for his own life *"and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One"* (Acts 7. 52). *"The Lord hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear"* declared Jeremiah (Jer. 25. 4). *"They were stoned,*

they were sawn asunder, were tried, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth". So runs the damning indictment of the writer to the Hebrews (Heb. 11. 37-38). Surely the wicked husbandmen did indeed beat, and stone, and kill the servants sent to them to collect the fruits of the vineyard.

But, said the householder, they will reverence my son—my beloved son, Luke's account of this parable has it (Luke 20. 13). So the Son of God came to earth. God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life. He came to his own—but his own received him not. (John 1. 11). They looked upon him and they said "*This is the heir; let us kill him and the inheritance will be ours*". There is a terrible truth underlying those words. The Messiah had come to claim his right, the kingship of the nation, to lead them into the light and life of the Kingdom of Heaven. The entrenched forces of priestly and aristocratic power were determined to preserve the traditional framework of Rabbinic theology which held the nation in bondage. Like the citizens in another parable they said "*We will not have this man to reign over us*", and so they resolved on the most desperate act of their desperate course—they resolved to get him out of the way by putting him to death. None of the prophets of old, not even Moses whom they professed to obey, had ever come back from the dead to denounce their apostasy. No reason existed to think that this one, even though the most influential of all the prophets, would survive where Moses had failed. "*Let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.*" So it came about then, in Peter's biting words, "*him ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain*".

Now comes judgment. In Matthew's account Jesus makes his listeners pass judgment upon themselves. "*He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons*" (Matt. 21. 41). There could not be any doubt as to the outcome, either in the story or in the application. The fearful words of Moses in Leviticus 26 detailing their fate if they apostasised from their covenant with God is enough for that; no man of Israel was ignorant of the prediction, but most men of Israel trusted that by payment of formal lip-service to the name of Moses they could escape the threatened retribution. But now they are brought face to face with reality. There was to be no escape. Sin merited judgment, and judgment must inevitably come. And when they realised that, some must have cried out, as Luke says they did, "*God forbid*".

Jesus was talking still, talking with an earnest vehemence which compelled attention. "*Did ye never read in the Scriptures, the stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the headstone of the corner; this is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes?*" They knew that quotation well enough. So often had they heard Psalm 118 sung and chanted in the Temple service and their teachers expounding it as a song of rejected Israel's eventual triumph over the Gentiles. This was a new slant on an old theme. They were the builders and the stone was one which they had rejected. Uneasily they remembered the burning words of Isaiah, denouncing the arrogant men who ruled Jerusalem in certainty that the refuge of lies and falsehood they had erected would always protect them: how God had laid in Zion a tried and choice corner stone on which he who believed could rely. (Isa. 28. 15-16). They thought of Zechariah's vision of the unfaithful shepherds who were to be cut off and replaced by governors of Judah ruling in Jerusalem in the strength of the Lord their God (Zech. 11. 12), and they shivered and once again they muttered "*God forbid*".

The compelling voice went on, and now it was inexorable in its cadences of judgment. "*Therefore I say unto you, the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.*" That nation is the Church of Christ, called out from among all nations to be a people for God's purpose. There can be no doubt whatever that there was an opportunity extended to Israel at the First Advent which, had it been accepted, would have changed the whole course of human history. Whether God, in his incomprehensible omnipotence, foreknew that they would reject and had planned accordingly, is quite beside the point. The opportunity was theirs, but they rejected the Prince of Life and desired a murderer to be granted unto them, and the opportunity passed them by for ever. Within a very few weeks the faithful few who did accept Christ were being given their commission to be his witnesses not only in Jerusalem and all Judea, but to the uttermost parts of the earth; that work of witness has progressed ever since and resulted in the development of a nation which has brought and is bringing forth the fruits thereof.

St. Paul puts all this into theological language in Romans 11 when he likens Israel to the unfruitful olive branches which "*because of unbelief*" were "*broken off*" and Gentile Christians, being wild olive branches, grafted on in their place. But he goes on to show that the original branches, "*if they abide not still in unbelief*" shall be grafted in again, "*and so all Israel shall be saved*". That can only mean that in a then far future day, after God's work with the Christian Church is complete, He will turn again to the once apostate people of Israel and find them in chastened and repentant mood,

and so receive them again, that they might, at the last, find their place in the administration of the Divine purpose. "For," says Paul in Romans 11 "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance". That then far future day can only be the day of the Second Advent, when the eyes of Israel are opened, and they look upon him whom they have pierced, and mourn for him as for an only son (Zech. 12. 10). So we are presented, at the last, with the picture of the glorified Church of this Age, "changed" to be with Christ, resplendent in the heavens, and purified Israel, waiting before God, both being agents in God's hand for the extension of the knowledge of his glory over the earth just as the waters cover the sea. James saw this vividly when at the memorable conference at Jerusalem which is recorded in Acts 15 he declared that God was first visiting the nations to take out of them a people for his name—the Christian Church;—after that He would rebuild the dwelling place of Jacob—Israel—and re-establish it; all this in order that the residue of men,—all mankind as yet unreconciled to God—might seek after the Lord. Here is world conversion in very truth, to be undertaken

and effected after, and not before, the salvation of the Church has been achieved and the purified nation of Israel has been made ready.

But the priests and Pharisees listening to Jesus knew nothing of all this. They heard only the solemn words of doom, "*Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, and on whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder*", and they were coldly furious. Arrogant in their fancied security and determined to maintain their privileged position, they sought means to lay hold on him, plotting to get rid of him and the annoyance and inconvenience of his words. They scorned his warnings and predictions, little knowing that within forty years more their own folly would have brought the armed might of Rome against them, sweeping away their city and their polity, and driving them captive among all nations until the Times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled. The words of the parable came terribly true. "*He shall miserably destroy those wicked men, and shall let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.*"

George Muller on world conversation

"Sin is not, as some suppose, a comparatively little thing. It is a deadly spiritual disease, as the Word of God declares it to be; and no progress in education, no mental culture, can eradicate it from the heart, nor change deprived human nature. For, notwithstanding every effort at improvement, the heart remains 'deceitful above all things and desperately wicked'. Until the return of the Lord Jesus, therefore, the present state of things will continue, and, as we shall see presently from the Word of God, will become worse and worse.

"The Gospel, indeed, was to be preached 'for a witness unto all nations', but it was not to be the means of the conversion of the world (Matt. 24.14). Moreover, from Acts 15.14 we learn the character of the present dispensation, which is, that God takes out from among the Gentiles 'a people for his Name', but does not convert all nations. This is confirmed by the parable of the wheat and the tares; for if the whole world were to be converted before the return of the Lord Jesus, there would be no truth in the explanation given of it by our Lord himself. He tells us that the tares (the children of the Wicked One) were to grow together with the wheat (the children of the Kingdom) until the end of the Age, namely, up to the time of his return. This, therefore, the word of the Lord Jesus, is in direct opposition to the common

notion that the world will be converted previous to his coming again.

"As assuredly as the practical character of the Lord's second coming is really apprehended in the power of it, the most blessed effects upon the life and deportment of Christians will follow. By means of it we are taught what awaits the worldly, lying in the Wicked One, and what will be the end of all this world's glory, pride and pomp. The future destiny of the children of God is also unfolded to us, even that we shall be perfectly conformed to the image of our risen Lord, both in soul and body, when we shall see him as He is. Then shall we enter upon the possession of our inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away; and shall be seated with Jesus upon his throne (Rev. 3.21) to judge the world in union with him, and to spend a happy eternity together with our Lord in glory. '*Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man as his work shall be*' (Rev. 22.12)."

(George Muller, 1805-98)

* * *

(George Muller of Bristol is famous for the children's Homes he founded and conducted during a great part of his life, and his unswerving faith which carried him through many a crisis in that connection.)



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

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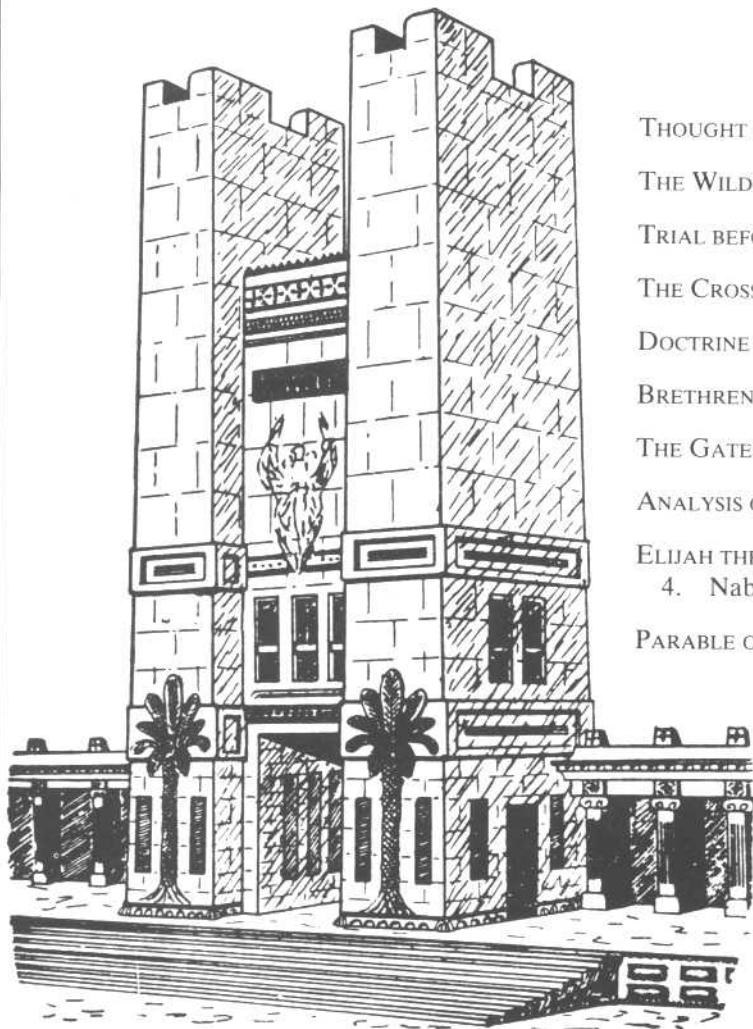
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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Thought for the Month

"We are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow" (Job 8. 9).

Nothing is known of Bildad the Shuhite beyond the fact that he was a friend of the patriarch Job and probably descended from Abraham through Keturah, so was of the Arab race. But his perception of the position of man relative to the universe puts to shame many moderns who think that because of to-day's discoveries man is well-nigh lord of the universe and can do as he wills. Learned professors dilate on the wonders of man's evolutionary climb from the humble beginnings of primitive single-celled algae and the power that he now possesses over his environment; enthusiastic graduates fresh from university talk of the conquest of space upon which they will presently embark and picture the extension of the works of humanity to the distant stars as though nothing else has ever been so grand and great as twentieth century man, nor could be. A serious shortcoming of present-day education is its failure to tell the generations of to-day that men just as intellectual, just as knowledgeable, as themselves lived thousands of years ago and that there is nothing really new under the sun. *"Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time which was before us"* said the Preacher (Eccl. 1. 10). So that reflective Arab, sitting quietly in the desert back there when the world was young, voiced a truth we all do well to consider. Despite our fantastic achievements, our wondrous inventions, our moon shots and space flights and radio controls and ability to make edible foodstuffs out of natural gas, it is still true that we are but of yesterday and know nothing, and our time on earth is but as a fleeting shadow. God is dead, say the clever ones; then we come from the dark, and go into the dark, and all our achievements are dust.

Bildad knew better; if, says he, we put our hand into God's hand and go with him, then, *"though thy beginnings are small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase"*. That is a profound truth. This present life is only a beginning; like everything else in Nature, we are destined to grow. *"First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear"* said Jesus. And when we consider the wonder of man's life, the marvellous potential there is in the human brain, how illogical to think that death ends all this and forbids any further achievement. The theology of the Middle Ages—still largely accepted to-day—pictured Heaven as a state of perpetual idleness; the idea of continued increase of knowledge and endeavour and achievement had not dawned. But how obvious that this is as it must be. As God is eternally Creator, so, in a sense, must be man. Bildad knew that; he knew of a destiny for man greater than anyone can visualise even now, but it is there, and we shall comprehend it when the shadows have passed and day has fully dawned.

Gone from us



Sis. E. Henderson (Coventry)

Sis. A. M. Wells Sr. (Sevenoaks)



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

THE WILDERNESS TEMPTATION

A Story
of Jesus

"Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."

The baptism of Jesus was not the result of a sudden decision. He came to Jordan with his mind already set on the mission before him. He had for many years been studying the Old Testament Scriptures, perceiving ever more and more clearly what his life-work was to be. He came to John at just the right time, when he was thirty years old and therefore "of age" under the Jewish law. The same Holy Spirit of God that had supervised and guided his every action since childhood had opened his mind to the meaning of the Scriptures, and drawn him to Bethabara where John was baptising, and now, that step taken, was leading him—Mark says *driving* him—to the next phase of his experience, the sober consideration of how and in what way He was to carry out his mission of saving the world. It was inevitable that the temptations should come, and in the very nature of things that they should come right at the beginning of his ministry, when, conscious of his Divine power, He would very quickly realise the possibilities.

"And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred."

He had gone into the wilderness "in the spirit"—a condition of mind something like that of John the Revelator, when he was "in the spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1. 10) or of Ezekiel when the Spirit lifted him up by the river of Chebar, and he saw visions of God (Ezek. 7. 3). In such a condition of mind Jesus would be more than usually insensible to his surroundings and his bodily needs. His mind, fully occupied during those forty days and nights with the prospect before him, going over all the details of the mission He was setting out to accomplish, would give but little heed to the claims of the body. It is not likely that He ate nothing at all during that time, but that He spared time from his rapt condition of mind only to take the barest sustenance, so when at last He began again to become conscious of his environment the claims of hunger asserted themselves.

"And when the tempter came to him."

In this story of the temptations the whole idea conveyed is that of a personal being with whom our Lord held converse. This was certainly the general belief in our Lord's own day. The Book of Wisdom, which was written within fifty years of the time of Christ, is an accurate reflection of Jewish thought at the time of the First Advent and in Wisdom 2. 24 it is indicated that the devil (*diabolos*) is the one through whom death came into the world at the beginning, as related in the third chapter of Genesis. It is important also to remember that the story as we have it must have

come from our Lord's own lips, for no human being was witness of his temptation. He was alone in the wilderness. Therefore Jesus must have told these things to his disciples in later days; and there is an interesting fragment in the so-called "*Gospel of the Ebionites*" which asserts this much: "*The Lord told us that for forty days the Devil spoke with him and tempted him*".

It might be said of course that the account could have been given to the Evangelists by direct inspiration, but in that case the accounts would surely have been in the same order. That they differ as much as they do points to their having been written from the recollections of the disciples as to what Jesus did say actually to them, even although without doubt they were guided in their writing by the Holy Spirit.

We can picture Jesus, sitting with his disciples on a grassy bank, or walking with them through the fields, suddenly making some allusion to that time which was the preface to his ministry, and telling them of the insidious suggestions that came into his mind, and the replies with which He countered them, when for forty days and forty nights He was alone with Satan.

This temptation of Jesus is the preface to his life and work, just as the temptation of the first Adam was the preface to the life and work of man. The first Adam failed under temptation; the second triumphed. There is a striking analogy between the first and second temptations. The tree of Gen. 3. 6 was good for food; in Matt. 4 Jesus is invited to make the stones into bread. The tree was pleasant to the eyes; Jesus is urged to create a magnificent spectacle by casting himself down from the Temple. The tree was "greatly to be desired to make one wise"; all the power, wealth, and honour of this world is offered to our Lord.

Mark puts in a detail which has escaped the other Evangelists. He says that Jesus "was with the wild beasts". A strange phrase; connected with it perhaps is the old Christian tradition that when Jesus spent those forty days in the wilderness all the wild beasts of the world came before him to pay homage. Perhaps there is a profound truth behind the tradition and behind Mark's statement. Perfect man possessed powers of control over the lower creation which were lost at the Fall. Jesus must have possessed those powers and doubtless exercised them in the wilderness. Leopards, wolves, hyenas and jackals infested that same wilderness in the Lord's day, and there may even have been an occasional lion, for they were plentiful there in earlier days. Wolves have been shot there even within this present century. The Lord may well have told his disciples of his exercise of such power and Mark

records the bare kernel of what He said.

"If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."

Not that Jesus might allay his hunger; the suggestion was more subtle than that. It was nothing less than that He use his powers to satisfy the material needs of men there and then. Jesus had come that men might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. Here was a short cut to that glorious fulness of human life to which Jesus intends eventually to draw "whosoever will". Why not do that at once, without waiting for the much longer outworking of the Divine Plan. It would be so easy to transform the economic system of the country, to drive out the Roman soldiers and the tax-gatherers and all those who fattened upon the misery of the people, to make the barren land fruitful and productive, and the vineyards and olive-groves yield tenfold their former fruitage. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose." It would be so easy to bring about literal fulfilment of those old prophecies, and to bring in the Times of Restitution at once, instead of waiting God's own time.

But it would have deprived man of needed experience, and it would have deprived God of that "people for his Name" to the calling and selection of which this Gospel Age is being devoted. There would have been no eternal Church in the heavens, and no reconciled human race on earth, for death would still continue even though man's lot had been immeasurably improved. Jesus knew that the life is more than meat, and the body more than raiment, and He knew too that there could be only one possible answer to the suggestion. "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'"

"Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, 'If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down'; for it is written 'He shall give his angels charge concerning thee . . .'"

This "pinnacle of the temple" was probably the parapet of the portico of Herod, overlooking the valley of Jehoshaphat seven hundred feet below. It was not literally, but spiritually, that Jesus stood on that parapet and heard the insidious voice suggesting that by some such spectacular feat He could attract the notice of all men to his mission. Perhaps He remembered the tradition, current in his own day amongst the Jews, that the Messiah would appear suddenly from Heaven descending upon the crowd of worshippers in the Temple court.

But there was more in the temptation than that. Judas in later days was beset by the same temptation, and fell under it. Jesus, standing in spirit on the pinnacle of the temple, realised all that the sacred edifice stood for to the patriotic Jew. Two parties at least, the Pharisees and the Zealots, longed desperately for the day when the alien usurper would be driven out from Judah's land and the people of God enter into their inheritance again. To all such the Temple became the symbol of their hopes and their cause. Jesus must have thought how easy it would be to assume the headship of those political parties and from the pinnacle of that power gather every element in the country to a swift descent upon the Roman authority, driving it far beyond the boundaries of Judea and establishing the mountain of the Lord's house in the top of the mountains.

But that would be setting up the Kingdom of love and peace by means of the sword, and Jesus knew that "they that take the sword must perish with the sword". Hezekiah the Zealot had tried it, and failed. His son Judas the Galilean nearly won through, but he failed. In the year A.D. 70 the entire nation, driven to desperation, tried again, and failed so utterly that they lost all, and were scattered among the nations. Jesus turned away from the alluring prospect, knowing that this was not the way of God.

"The devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and saith unto him, 'All these things I will give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me'."

Luke says that the Devil showed him all these kingdoms and their glory "in a moment of time". John Bunyan's scornful comment on that observation was "it did not take the devil long to show all that he had". As Jesus thought of the great panoply of human might represented in the kingdoms of this world, He might well have pondered on the manner in which He himself would eventually succeed to the throne of the world. Instead of confining his mission and work to the land and people of Israel, why not reach out to the lands beyond, to Egypt and Greece, and to Parthia, Rome's great rival in the East. Why not wrest the rule of Rome itself from the feeble fingers of the ageing Tiberius Caesar, and from that great city rule in righteousness. Jesus rejected the short cut, the easy way, the course that could lead only to temporary alleviation of human misery and none at all of human sin, and re-affirmed his determination to follow, at all costs, the pathway marked out for him by his Father. He answered all the suggestions with "It is written", and the Devil, baffled, left him for a season.

TRIAL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

No. 17 in a series of
stories of St. Paul

The seventy robed figures watched impassively as the mail-clad soldiery marched their prisoner down the steps into the arena, and with a clash of arms left him there, tramping stolidly up again to the rear wall of the building, where they stood, indifferent spectators of the drama which was about to be enacted. Opposite to them there rose the successive tiers of seats forming a great semi-circle, filled now with the members of the Sanhedrin, the supreme religious court of Jewry. On the one side sat the Pharisees, on the other the Sadducees, members of the two great parties into which Judaism was divided. The Pharisees stood for the old fundamentalist faith and the traditional separation of Israel from the rest of the world; they accepted the rule of Rome only under protest and would willingly rise in rebellion if there was any good chance of success. The Sadducees were the modernists, just as rigid in their observance of the Mosaic Law but interpreting the ancient Scriptures on a rationalistic basis with rejection of the miraculous and the supernatural. They stood for co-operation with Rome and the maintenance of the established order. In the centre sat Ananias the reigning High Priest, himself a Sadducee, his dark, lowering countenance expressive of the avarice and malevolence for which he was notorious. Now he glared at the prisoner who had dared to challenge the system he upheld and from which he extracted so rich a store of illicit profit. He looked round as if seeking an accuser and motioned impatiently for the proceedings to begin.

There was an uneasy silence, broken at last by the accused man, Paul. He knew that the Sanhedrin had no formal charge ready to bring against him. They had been ordered by Lysias, the Roman commander, to assemble and sift this thing to the bottom. Lysias wanted to know what offence against Jewish religious law, if any, had been committed by this Roman citizen whom Fate had most unceremoniously thrust into his hands. The riot of the previous day had told him nothing; if he let the man go he might find himself in trouble, and if he continued to detain him he might find he had done the wrong thing and still find himself in trouble. He stood on the raised vestibule at the back with his men and mentally invoked the wrath of all the gods of Rome upon these pestiferous Jews.

"Men and brethren" he heard Paul say with urbane courtesy "*I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day . . .*" "*Smite the blasphemer on the mouth*" interrupted Ananias from his seat halfway up the benches. Paul swung round to face the direction from which the voice had come. At the distance at which he stood, with his known defective sight, he probably could not

discern individuals clearly, only a rather vague assembly of white-clad figures, and he could well have been unable to know which of his judges had spoken. But he was indignant at the injustice of the remark. "*God shall smite thee, thou whited wall!*" he retorted, "*for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?*"

A ripple of anger went round the crowded assembly. "*Revilest thou God's High Priest?*" someone called out, and Paul was immediately apologetic. "*I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest*" he explained. He knew, none better, that it was also against the Law to abuse the leaders of the nation and even though Ananias was a notorious evil-doer, and despite the fact that he held his high office not by right of descent from the Levitical family of Aaron but by appointment of the Romans, Paul knew that it was proper to observe the reverence due to the exalted position of High Priest of Israel. So he apologised and admitted his knowledge of the Law. The expression in ch. 23. 1 "*earnestly beholding the council*" where "earnestly" has the meaning of looking with strained attention or great concentration seems to support the conclusion that Paul was having difficulty in perceiving the identity of his interlocutors.

There was another pause. Somewhat mollified at the Apostle's ready apology, the Sanhedrin still seemed unable to commence the proceedings with a definite charge. Lysias began to get impatient. If the Sanhedrin, of all authorities in Israel, did not know where to begin he might as well turn Paul into the street and wash his hands of the whole affair.

The Apostle resolved the impasse and in so doing not only precipitated an immediate outcry but also started a two thousand years' old argument as to whether his tactics were justified. Looking round the circle he perceived that the assembly was composed in roughly equal parts of Pharisees and Sadducees. He had sat in enough assemblies of the Sanhedrin himself in earlier years to know all the signs and indications. And he seems to have decided there and then that if no one was ready with a formal charge of profaning the Temple—which false allegation was the cause of the riot on the previous day—then he would make a clear statement of his personal theological position and have the issue determined on that basis. In making this decision Paul was conscious that much of what he would say would be endorsed by the Pharisee party because in fact there was little in the theological position of the Christian faith with which they would differ. The Pharisees believed in the coming of a Messianic Kingdom when both the just and the

unjust would be raised from the dead to receive according to their works; they looked for Messiah to come in glory to exalt his faithful ones with him and overthrow all the powers of evil. They expected Messiah to expel the Romans and raise faithful Israel to a leading position in the world to be God's ministers to the ends of the earth. Many of them could only see Messiah coming as a military conqueror in power and great glory, but a not inconsiderable number did perceive something of the prophecies relating to his coming first in humiliation and suffering and death. According to Acts 6. 7 a considerable number of the priests had accepted the faith and these were almost certainly mostly Pharisees. Paul must have felt very sincerely that he was much more likely to have a sympathetic hearing this day from the Pharisees than from the Sadducees in this Sanhedrin. He broke the silence. "Men and brethren" he cried, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. Of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question".

There has been severe criticism of Paul through the centuries on account of this statement. It has been argued that Paul, as a Christian, could no longer lawfully call himself a Pharisee and that he was seeking by a subterfuge to create dissension between the two parties on the Sanhedrin. It has also been said that his claim that the question at issue was his doctrine of the resurrection was also untrue; that the Jewish leaders' complaint against him was his teaching of the equality of Jew and Gentile in the sight of God. Commentators have shaken hoary heads and preachers have delivered sorrowful homilies over this regrettable lapse on the part of the great Apostle. But a more careful consideration of the circumstances could lead to a different conclusion.

Paul found himself, quite unexpectedly, standing before the supreme religious authority of his nation and faced with a unique opportunity of testifying to them the whole gospel of Jesus Christ. It was evident to him, as it was to the watching Roman commander, that the High Priest and his supporters had no formal charge to make and no idea of what crime to accuse him. They had been compelled by Lysias to convene this session at short notice; it is obvious from the account that they were unready and uncertain how to proceed. It is a fact that Paul's enemies were the Sadducees, and the Pharisee contingent was only present because of compulsion and in any case were much more moderate than their opponents. To suggest that Paul's Christianity involved the disavowal of his standing as a Pharisee betokens a misapprehension of the position. Paul could only repudiate his old status by denying the theological and moral basis of Pharisaism, and this he could not do without equally denying his Christianity. The fact that many of the Pharisees of our Lord's day and of

Paul's day were hypocrites and enemies of the ethics of Christ makes no more difference to that fact than the hypocrisy and worldliness of many professing Christians does to the use of the name Christian by sincere believers. Paul was therefore perfectly justified in claiming that he was still a Pharisee as he stood before the Sanhedrin.

It is highly probable that he was interrupted in mid-sentence. In saying that it was of the hope and resurrection of the dead that he was being called in question he seems very clearly to be leading up to the central feature of Pauline theology, the fact that Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, died for all men and by his death ensured all men a full and adequate opportunity both to hear Christ preached, and to accept him, and so become reconciled to God and enter into eternal life, before the Divine purpose with humanity is brought to its climax. This is what in later days has been called Paul's universalism. He does not claim that all men must eventually be saved but he does assert that all men must have an opportunity. And above all things he does insist that all men, Jew and Gentile alike, must share in the resurrection from the dead and receive the benefits of the Messianic era, when Christ will reign until He hath put all enemies, including the last enemy of all, death, under his feet. The Divine purpose in the resurrection of the dead was a recurring theme in Paul's discourses and it looks very much as though, before the Sanhedrin, he was going to develop this theme and shew the Pharisaic party at least that the faith he proclaimed was that which they had endorsed and defended for so many generations, and that Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfilment of their professed expectations.

He did not get so far. His mention of the resurrection from the dead immediately provoked discussion in the meeting. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection or in anything else of an apparently supernatural nature. There is no need to think, as is so often thought, that at this moment the assembly developed into a riot. There was dissension, we are told, "and the multitude was divided". Probably there arose a babble of voices as individuals or little groups of the two factions began arguing among themselves. As the discussion grew more heated, the central figure, standing alone below them, was forgotten. Finally some of the Pharisee persuasion managed to "catch the Speaker's eye" and were able to make their generally agreed view made known. It was to the effect that they saw no cause for an accusation of any kind against Paul; that they must allow for the possibility of his having received a Divine revelation and in such case must take care lest they be found to be fighting against God. Such an arrant taunt to the Sadducees, who would not admit the possibility of supernatural revelations, and the crass

defection of the Pharisees from the plot to get rid of Paul, which ranged probably half the Sanhedrin on his side, provoked the fury of the Sadducees and this time "*there arose a great dissension*". This quite evidently was a near riot, the venerable members behaving in a most undignified fashion toward each other, with not improbably the impetuous rush of a few in the direction of the prisoner with a view to settling the matter there and then. Claudius Lysias, at any rate, "*fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them*", considered things had gone far enough. At a curt word of command the stalwart legionaries ran down the stairs and plunged into what was apparently quickly degenerating into a "free for all" and emerged with their usual efficiency, escorting Paul safely back into the garrison of Antonia. The unfortunate commander was no nearer the solution of his problem than before.

That night, safe in the castle but still a prisoner, the Apostle saw a vision—it might have been a dream; it matters not;—he saw his Lord standing beside his bed. "*Be of good cheer, Paul*" he heard him say "*for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*" This was the third of the four occasions on which Paul testifies that he saw the resurrected Christ. In what form he saw him we know not; only that each appearance came at a time of unusually intense mental and spiritual stress, and each time he received an intimation of his future course which was later realised in fact. This vision, or dream, or whatever kind of revelation it was, must have been a source of comfort and peace of mind to the Apostle. It was his dearest wish to preach Christ in Rome before he died; now he had the assurance that by some means not yet apparent he would indeed do so.

The unfortunate Lysias was to have no peace of mind, however. During the following afternoon one of his centurions came to see him, leading a Jewish youth. The youth, he explained, had come into the barracks with a request to see Paul, a request which was apparently granted without demur, and Paul had now asked that he be brought to Lysias with a message for his private ear. At mention of Paul's name Lysias might well have murmured resignedly "Oh no, not again!" but so far as can be discerned from the narrative he seems to have been a very even-tempered kind of man, for he readily took the lad aside out of earshot, and asked him what he had to say. Ch. 23. 19 has a very human and very real touch, the kind of thing that could only be noticed if the narrative is a truthful record of an actual happening, when it says that "*the chief captain took him by the hand and went with him aside privately*". Some commentators suggest that Lysias, sympathetic with the lad's nervousness at being in the presence of so impor-

tant a representative of Roman power, took his hand as a gesture to put him at ease. Nothing of the sort. Claudius Lysias had attained his present position of command by avoiding such mistakes as bring a soldier's life to a premature close. One such mistake was being left alone with a stranger when that stranger had a knife concealed on his person. This lad looked innocent enough, but a wise man always provided for such eventualities by taking hold of the stranger's right hand with his own left hand whilst they talked. Thus the stranger only had his left hand available whilst the other, Lysias in this case, could be ready with his right if necessary. (The third chapter of Judges records a case where the system failed, to the disadvantage of Eglon, king of Moab. His visitor, with the knife, was Ehud the Benjamite, intent on delivering Israel from Eglon's oppression, and Ehud was left-handed!) The youth turned out to be Paul's nephew—neither he nor his mother, Paul's sister, are mentioned again and it is not known whether they were or were not Christians, or even permanent residents in Jerusalem, although the latter is more likely than the former—and he had come to bring news of a plot against Paul's life which he wanted now to recount to Lysias.

It seems some forty Jews had taken a solemn oath not to eat and drink until they had killed Paul. The plot was for the High Priest to request that Lysias bring the prisoner before the Sanhedrin once more in order to clarify some point or other of his defence. This, incidentally, makes it appear as though Paul had actually been able to say a lot more to the Sanhedrin than is recorded in Acts 23. Whilst thus engaged the conspirators would crowd around and assassinate him. A riot could be staged at the crucial moment, and when it was all over and the Romans had cleared the scene it would be found that most regretably their prisoner had met with a fatal accident.

The commander's features hardened as he listened. He was beginning to realise the depth of hatred which pursued Paul. This matter was altogether more serious than he had supposed. He must have reflected too, that if the plot had succeeded he himself would have been in trouble for losing a prisoner, and might even have been accused by his superiors of collaboration with the Jews. Bribery was by no means a thing unknown. It did not take Lysias very long to come to a decision. This prisoner was too hot to hold; it was high time the whole matter was referred to higher hands. He dismissed Paul's nephew with an injunction—for the young man's own sake as much as anything—not to tell anyone that he had revealed the plot. He then called to his side two of his centurions and instructed them to collect a force of two hundred light infantry, two hundred spearmen, and seventy mounted cavalry, to set out at nine o'clock that

evening and take Paul to the Governor of Judea, Antonius Felix, at Caesarea sixty miles away. While his men hurried away to implement his orders, he himself repaired to his own apartments to write a letter.

This letter from the military commander of the Jerusalem garrison to the Roman Governor of Judea at his official residence in Caesarea is a model of conciseness and efficiency. It is evident that somehow or other St. Luke obtained a copy or saw the original; how he had access to official documents is not revealed, but he certainly shews throughout the Book of Acts a genius for ferreting out original information which would have placed him in the forefront of Press reporters today. He seems to have reproduced the letter in full.

"Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix, greeting.

This man was taken of the Jews and should have been killed of them; then came I with an armed force and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their Sanhedrin; and I perceived him to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of imprisonment. And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent him immediately to thee, and commanded his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him.

Farewell."

It is impossible not to admire the resolution and decisiveness with which this probably hard-bitten soldier went about his business. Everything in the story depicts Claudius Lysias as a level-headed, fair-minded, quickthinking man who feared no one and would be brow-beaten by no one. One is led to contrast his behaviour on this occasion with the weak, vacillating Pontius Pilate thirty years earlier when faced with a very similar situation. Lysias must have been fully aware that the powerful Sadducean priesthood might very easily misrepresent his own conduct in the matter to the Governor in outwitting them, but he despised the risk. To this stalwart upholder of the *Pax Romana*, right was right and Roman law was Roman law. Convinced himself of Paul's innocence he could legally have set him free at once, but he was tolerably certain that would only result in Paul's death at the hands of Ananias' hired thugs, and Paul was

a Roman citizen, so that it was Lysias' bounden duty to protect him. So he decided to send him to Caesarea.

There is a typical "old soldier" touch in the letter where Lysias tells his superior that he went to Paul's rescue in the riot "*having understood that he was a Roman*" (i.e. Roman citizen). Actually, of course, he was not apprised of that fact until after Paul had been taken and bound for scourging. It would be highly undesirable for that particular part of the story ever to come to the ears of Felix; in all probability Lysias had got to know Paul well enough to feel confident of his silence on that matter and so could not resist the opportunity of putting up the best case he could for himself.

A vivid side-light on the ferocity with which the militant Jews prosecuted their ends, even under Roman rule, is shown by the fact that a force of four hundred and seventy men was considered necessary to get Paul safely out of Jerusalem, even at dead of night. One needs to read the pages of Josephus or some of the Roman writers to realise the difficulty of maintaining law and order in what was universally admitted to be the most turbulent and difficult-to-govern State in the Empire.

So, under cover of the friendly darkness, when all good people were in their homes and asleep, the Apostle left Jerusalem for the last time, riding in the middle of a formidable armed force. They took the Roman military road, traces of which still remain, to the garrison town of Antipatris, halfway between Jerusalem and the sea. That was a journey of thirty five miles; it must have been six o'clock the following morning when they arrived. At this point, the danger of interference being past, the foot soldiers left them and Paul was taken by the seventy mounted men the remaining twenty five miles to the Governor's residence in Caesarea.

Felix read his subordinate's letter, enquired as to Paul's particular provincial status, promised him a full hearing when his accusers had arrived, and instructed that in the meantime he be given lodgings in the praetorium. The Governor was apparently going to treat Paul as innocent for the moment so that he was at any rate saved from incarceration in a dungeon. Now, at last, he had time to reflect on the events of the past few days, and was doubtless allowed the company of Luke and other friends.

(To be continued)

We need not trouble to keep diaries of our good deeds or sacrifices, or to write autobiographies with pages of record for the things we have done. We may safely let our life write its own record, or

let Christ be our biographer. He will never forget anything we do, and the judgment day will reveal everything. The lowliest services and the obscurest deeds will then be manifested.

THE CROSSING OF JORDAN

"Within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it." (Josh. 1. 11.)

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

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

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

Obedient to the command of Joshua, the priests were carrying the Ark of the Covenant, swathed in its blue coverings so that it should not be exposed to the gaze of the people, and at a respectful distance, two thousand cubits—a little over half-a-mile—the leaders of the people followed. How they were to cross the river no man knew, but, confident in Joshua and in their God, the priests went steadily forward, and down to the water's edge. With, perhaps, only a moment's natural hesitation, they stepped boldly into the water.

As they did so the wet mud appeared under their soles. They stepped forward again, slowly, into the stream, and again the water had hardly laved their ankles before it receded and the mud appeared. So

they went on, more confidently now, and the water's edge retreated from before them as fast as they stepped into it. The hosts of Israel, higher up on the slope that led down to the river, could see what was happening, and a shout of exultation arose on the still air, a shout that aroused the attention of the Canaanite guards on the other side of the river, and caused them to disappear in haste to warn their superiors of the strange phenomenon that was occurring down there in the bed of Jordan.

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

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

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

The priests had stopped, and turned aside a little, standing in a group, with the Ark in their midst clearly visible as they held it hoisted up upon their shoulders. They stood thus; there was a moving and a jostling of men; and as though animated by one impulse the whole host surged forward, down the slopes to the edge of the bare hard mud, swarming on to the level terraces, dropping by successive steps to the place where the priests were standing, spreading out as they did so until the whole valley as far as eye could reach, in either direction, was filled with the thousands of Israel, walking, running, climbing, to the accompaniment of shouts and cries of triumph and joy, up to the terraces on the Canaanite side, and assembling in the wide meadows beyond which could be seen the walls of the garrison town of Jericho. It was not until the last few stragglers had brought up the rear and made their way up the slope to the Canaanitish side that the priests reformed their little party, and with the Ark still in their midst, moved up in turn, out of Jordan, into the Promised Land. From

behind them, as they did so, came the water. The channel was filling, water was coming down again from the higher reaches, and as the people looked the river began to flow in strength, lapping behind the feet of those slow moving priests until by the time they had gained the topmost level with their burden the swirling flood stretched once more from bank to bank. Moab and Canaan were separated again and no man might go nor come. But the host of Israel was in Canaan.

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

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

The waters "stood, and rose up upon an heap". Where was this heaping of the waters? The "city Adam" is the modern El Damieh, twenty miles up stream from Jericho, and Zaretan is Zarthan, opposite El Damieh, on the eastern bank of the river. At this point the Jordan traverses the narrowest part of its valley; it flows between clay banks ranging from forty to one hundred and fifty feet high. The clay is soft, and landslides into the river occasionally occur. A heavy landslide can dam the river completely and interrupt its flow until the weight of the mounting waters is sufficient to wash away the obstruction and permit the river to resume its normal course.

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

It is known nowadays that the fall of the walls of Jericho, a few days after the Israelites crossed Jordan, was caused by an earthquake, occurring at

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

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

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

At some time during the previous day, when Israel was already gathered on the banks of Jordan in anticipation of the crossing, Joshua had said to them "Sanctify yourselves; for *to-morrow* the Lord will do wonders among you" (ch. 3, vs. 5). He, and they, already knew that by some means or other they were to cross Jordan. Joshua now knew that it was to be the very next day; whether at that time he also knew the means by which the crossing was to be effected does not appear. But that night—early in the morning hours—the Lord spoke to Joshua (vs. 7) "*This day,*" He said "will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel . . . and thou shalt command the priests . . ." etc. This was the day of the crossing; it is probable that the word of the Lord came to Joshua during the silent watches of the night, for it is most unlikely that the day itself with all its excitement would give any time to Joshua for quiet communion with God. And there was a full programme of events to be fitted into twelve short hours. First was Joshua's charge and instructions to the children of Israel, then the selection of twelve men from amongst their number to be responsible for bringing out of the river's bed twelve great stones to be a memorial of the crossing. It was whilst giving these instructions that Joshua revealed his knowledge of how the miracle was to be effected. "*The waters of Jordan*" he said "*shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above, and they shall stand upon an heap*" (vs. 13). This speech must have been delivered not later than eight or nine o'clock in the morning, for it would take the people several hours more before they could be ready for the crossing, and time for, perhaps, two millions of people to cross before sundown had still to be allowed. By eleven o'clock perhaps, the people would begin to

remove from their tents and by midday the priests be venturing into the edge of the rushing flood, and it would be at this time therefore that the first effects of the collapse that had occurred upstream became visible at Jericho in the retreat of the water's edge. Now if this effect became observable at Jericho at midday the disaster at El Damieh must have occurred not more than four hours before; the high velocity of the water in the Jordan would drain the channel between the two places within that time. It must be concluded then that the collapse occurred not earlier than eight o'clock and yet Joshua knew precisely what was going to happen when he rose that morning, and probably earlier, during the small hours.

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

description of the marvel that was to happen in a few more hours' time.

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

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

THE DOCTRINE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In the wisdom of God men could not begin to understand His purpose for humanity until after the lapse of ages they looked back upon the course of history and related that to the revealed intentions of God. Although Abraham was given the Divine promise "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" there was little indication how and in what manner that promise would be fulfilled. It was not until the deepest thinkers of the Hebrew nation began to see for themselves the evil results of human rulership without God that they realised the inevitability of a Divine intrusion into human affairs in terms of a universal Kingdom which would rectify injustice, abolish evil, and bring in everlasting righteousness. That was the modest beginning from which our present understanding of the Kingdom of God has been developed.

The earliest definite view of this coming Kingdom was that of the eighth century B.C., when prophets like Isaiah foresaw a future Golden Age, in which *"a King shall reign in righteousness and princes rule in judgment"* (Isa. 32. 1), *"The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose"* (Isa. 35. 1),

"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb . . . and a little child shall lead them" (Isa. 11. 6), *"Every man shall dwell under his own vine and fig tree, and none shall make them afraid"* (Mic. 4. 4). This transformation of the earth was to be achieved, Isaiah foretold, by the exaltation to power of a righteous people, purified through suffering and aflame with missionary ardour for the conversion of all nations. Two centuries later, Jeremiah and his fellow-seers stressed the need for individual repentance from sin and personal holiness of life as a necessary element in the ideal Divine Kingdom, and so laid the foundation for the much later preaching of Christ. Then during the Babylonian captivity Daniel spoke of a coming kingdom upon earth before which all the powers of this world would vanish away, and the *"people of the saints of the Most High"* would possess the kingdom *"for ever and ever"* (Dan. 7. 18). He pictured a time when Messiah would come, exalt His faithful people to association with Himself, raise the dead of past ages, and destroy all evil in a cataclysm likened to devouring fire.

So far the doctrine of the Kingdom of God had revolved around the chosen nation of Israel and

was confined to the idea of a better and righteous administration of the world as it now is. Although the resurrection of the dead was expected there was no clear understanding of God's purpose in introducing the kingdom upon earth or of its sequel in the extinguishing of sin and death. It was in the two or three centuries immediately preceding Christ's Advent that this deeper significance began to be appreciated, and with it some understanding that the coming Messiah was to be, not merely a political and military leader who would deliver the Jews from their enemies and seat Himself for ever upon the restored throne of David, but a deliverer who was destined to reign until no trace of evil remained in the earth. "*For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*" (Hab. 2. 14). This development in thought was the fruit of that period of intense religious experience through which the Jewish people passed after their return from Babylon, and it culminated at the time of Christ's birth in a very general belief that the time of deliverance was at hand.

In this the Jews were disappointed. The hoped-for kingdom was not established, they were not delivered from the power of the Gentiles, and in fact their own national existence came to an end and they were dispersed among all nations. The age-old hope of Israel seemed doomed to frustration. The message of Jesus, however, opened a new avenue of thought—that the Kingdom, although it must surely eventually come to earth just as was expected, is first of all to be realised in a spiritual sense in the hearts and lives of Christ's own followers, these latter becoming fitted by virtue of their lives' experiences in the Christian way to be God's "ministers of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5. 18-20) to all men when the earthly Kingdom eventually is introduced.

The Advent of Jesus, therefore, cast the hope and expectation of human reconciliation to God in an entirely new light. No longer was the Kingdom thought of as being an exclusively earthly one, and the scope of Divine salvation limited to this planet. Jesus Christ "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1. 10) and added to the age-old hope of an earthly Paradise the Christian realisation of a heavenly counterpart. Therefore in the writings of the New Testament, particularly in the theology of the Apostle Paul, we find that the great hope set before the Christian disciple of Christ is that of a resurrection to spiritual life like to that of Jesus Christ Himself, and eternal association with Him in His future activities, particularly in the education and conversion of the world of men when, at the Second Advent of Christ, the stage is set for world conversion.

This distinction between the heavenly and the earthly aspects of the Kingdom was obscured

during the early centuries of the Christian era by developments of thought leading in other directions. The primitive Church expected that the Second Advent would take place in their own time, and with the recurrent disappointment of this hope, and an increasing realisation that in a spiritual sense the Kingdom of God was already come to the believer ("*The Kingdom of God is within you*" Luke 17. 21; "*God hath translated us into the Kingdom of His Son*" Col. 1. 13), the sharp outline of belief in the material Kingdom upon earth was lost. By the end of the fourth century the influence of philosophy and mystic methods of Scripture interpretation had—within the confines of organised ecclesiastical Christianity at any rate—superseded the old belief in the coming day of God's rising up to purify the earth from sin. The hope of heaven as a means of escape from the earth and all its wickedness was stressed as being the sole purpose of salvation. From this idea arose the now common belief that all probation ends at death and that the unbeliever, dying in his sins, is lost eternally.

At a later date it came to be thought that the Kingdom of God is to be realised in the gradual conversion of worldly powers and institutions to Christian ideals by the missionary endeavour of the Church, and that when this admittedly difficult task shall have been accomplished, the Kingdom will have come. The modern trend of affairs in world government and organised Christianity alike has shaken faith in this dogma, and Christian thought is beginning, slowly but yet surely, to turn again in the direction of the original understanding.

The passage of fifteen centuries has seen a great advance in the perception of Divine principles relating to the Kingdom. The Scriptures teach that God purposes for all men a period of full and unhindered instruction in His way of life, and that all the dead will be restored from the grave to participate in this time of instruction. Under the spiritual administration of Christ and His Church, and the no less effective administration of stalwart men of God upon earth, the practice of evil and injustice toward others will be completely restrained and death—except as the natural and inevitable consequence of incorrigible sin—be no more. This is in fact the "Day of Judgment" of mediæval theology, the judgment (Greek "*krisis*"—crisis) to include a period of instruction and testing as well as the moment of final decision. "*He hath appointed a day*" said Paul to the Athenians "*in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained*" (Acts 17. 31). The Psalmist declares that this day of judgment is to be a time of universal rejoicing (Psa. 96. 11-13). Jesus called the same period "the regeneration" (Matt. 19. 28) and Peter, "times of

restitution" (Acts 3. 21). In both the Old and the New Testaments it is spoken of as a "new heavens and new earth" (Isa. 65. 17, 2 Pet. 3. 13).

This Kingdom will be introduced when human efforts at self-government—without God—have demonstrably failed and the world is facing chaos. There will be a nucleus of people aware of the coming Kingdom and prepared to receive it but the majority of mankind will be unaware or heedless of the impending change. The new administration will call the world to order, and the powers of Heaven—spiritual forces at present unknown and unrecognised amongst men—will restrain the active prosecution of evil practices and set in authority men of unquestioned rectitude and integrity. Under their guidance wise and just measures for the conduct of society will be promulgated and enforced, and widespread educational activities lead men to a knowledge of the principles upon which human society must be based, leading them to face for themselves the issue of conversion to Christ.

It is during this period that the resurrection takes place, and all who have lived will be found again upon earth sharing in the opportunities and amenities of the Kingdom. The progressive elimination of sin from the bodies and minds of men will put an end to human death, for death is the result of sin and where there is no sin there will be no death. Voluntary and sincere acceptance of Jesus Christ and His way of righteousness, and reconciliation to God, will bring in their train perfection of human nature and a state of eternal sinlessness. Only those who intelligently and deliberately refuse to accept this way of life, and who choose sin for sin's sake, will reap the inevitable result of that course, the Divine withdrawal of the life that cannot be used aright.

Those—and there will be many such—who hail with enthusiasm this revolution in world affairs will naturally set to work to persuade and convert their neighbours, and the result will be a period of world-wide missionary endeavour. The planning of the world's resources to meet all needs will become a simple matter when selflessness has replaced selfishness as the dominant motive. Scientific knowledge will be applied to the harnessing of natural forces for the benefit of humankind, and the creative and artistic instincts of men

applied to the beautifying of the earth and everything that is upon it. The willing acceptance, by each citizen, of the obligations and duties properly devolving upon him will make for a peace and order in human society which has not before been known in earthly history.

The whole world will thus be brought into proper relation with God. In Him will all men live, and move, and have their being (Acts 17. 28). Sin will have been vanquished, death will be no more, and man, having entered fully and voluntarily into the full acceptance of God's way of life will not again become subject to sin and that which sin entails. Hence those disciplinary restraints upon the outward practice of evil which are necessary during the time of Christ's kingdom can and will be removed. Men will be perfectly free to order their own lives in their own ways, and there will be no question but that they will do so always in fullest harmony with the principles of love and justice.

Farther than this the Bible does not take us. We have only the bare statement "*Then cometh the end, when He (Christ) shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father. . . that God may be all in all*" (1 Cor. 15. 24). This is after the vanquishing of sin and the destruction of the last enemy—death (1 Cor. 15. 26). We are left with the vision of a dual creation, a spiritual world to which the closest followers of Christ during this present Age have succeeded, and a material world restored to Edenic conditions and inhabited by a race of sinless undying human beings fulfilling to the full all for which their Creator intended them.

A fitting climax to the Bible story—the fall into, and the deliverance from, sin! For the details of those ages of glory that lie beyond the close of Christ's reign over the earth we can well afford to wait.

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away . . . and I heard a voice from heaven, saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and he shall be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away. And He that sitteth on the Throne saith Behold, I make all things new".

Do you know what it is just to bow before God in silent and adoring homage, to hear from him rather than ask petitions of him? I sometimes experience what may be thought the unusual in that a quarter of an hour spent in kneeling before

God without making any request, just recognising the fact that God is, and that I am before him, will bring a fulness of blessing and joy into the soul that no words can tell.

BRETHREN OF "THE WAY" A glimpse early days

The earliest believers in Jesus Christ—before the time that the word "Christian" had been coined—adopted a charming term to describe their fellowship. They called themselves "brethren of 'the way'" and this expression occurs a number of times in the Book of Acts. It was a new way of life into which they had entered, a way that led to the Kingdom, a straight narrow way that nevertheless was broader in its liberty and longer in extent than the bondage of Judaism which they had left. And because they found themselves to be fellow-pilgrims together, travelling as one company through the darkness of this world to the light of that which is to come, and because their Master himself had told them "I am the Way", they took to themselves in utter simplicity and sincerity a word that expressed to the full the spontaneity and happiness of their communion. They were "brethren of 'The Way'."

The first mention of the name as such is in Acts 9. 2, where we are told about Saul, the persecutor of the infant Church, receiving authority that if he "found any of the way", he might "bring them bound to Jerusalem". This was within a few years of Jesus' death, when Saul was still a young man, and the Jerusalem Church under the guidance and teaching of the Apostles was growing rapidly in numbers. This name must have originated right at the beginning.

One wonders who first suggested it. What discussions there must have been in those first days over the question of a distinctive name for the new fellowship! The orthodox Jewish Church had its sects—Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zadokites, and others lesser known. The political parties, Herodians, and Zealots, had a quasi-religious connection and might almost be counted as sects, too. The disciples had been known popularly as Nazarenes, but quite evidently they would not accept that name willingly themselves. And in the probably oft-times excited babble of discussion it might well have been the reflective, loving mind of John which inspired a suggestion winning immediate acceptance. "The Master said 'I am the Way'. Let us call ourselves 'brethren of the Way'."

The name evidently became known very quickly. When Paul arrived at Ephesus he found

that "divers were hardened and believed not, but spake evil of the way" (Acts 19. 9), and a little later Demetrius the silversmith called his fellow craftsmen together and "there arose no small stir about the Way" (Acts 19. 23). (Incidentally, it should be noted that in every case where the expression occurs, except in Acts 22. 4, it should be read "the way", not "that way". In the Greek the definite article, not the demonstrative, is employed). The persecution of "the Way" which arose at Ephesus was only one of many, and when Paul returned to Jerusalem he found the same bitter prejudice against the Christian community. When the riot which led to his arrest was at its height, he stood on the castle steps and made his defence to the people. "I persecuted this Way unto the death", he cried (Acts 22. 4), speaking of his actions at the time before his conversion. And later on still, we find that Felix, the Roman governor, had "more perfect knowledge of 'the Way'" than had his predecessor, (Acts 24. 22).

The term died out eventually, being replaced by the more immediately descriptive word "Christian", which, we are told, originated in Antioch (Acts 11. 26). Perhaps there was a loss in the passing of the phrase. It was such a simple, refreshingly naive answer to give enquirers. "Who are you?" "We are brethren of 'the Way'." And it was in the simplicity of that bond that the early Church formed its first communal fellowship, having all things in common and parting to each as they had need; and so prospered in spiritual things.

In this our day some circles have followed a similar impulse and coined the expression "brethren of the Truth" and referred to themselves as "being in the Truth". More than one Christian group has used this term. Perhaps it is a right impulse. Said Jesus "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14. 6). There is surely a fitness here. Brethren of the Way at the beginning of the Age; brethren of the Truth at the end of the Age; both together, with all who have lived during the intervening centuries, "brethren of the Life", in the Age which is to come, when the "faithful in Christ Jesus" will be ushered into the presence of the Father with exceeding joy.

We have taken the first step of belief; we have taken the second step of response, and have agreed to do these things; the important question with each one of us, therefore, must be—Am I obedient to him from heaven who speaketh? Am I doing whatsoever he says?

Christianity has too often been associated with gloom, both in our places of worship and in the lives of its adherents. When filled up with the Spirit of God, we shall be delivered from our icy coldness to the life exuberant, cordial and infectiously happy.

THE GATES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

"Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord—this gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter—I will praise thee; for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation." (Psa. 118, 19-21).

Upon many an occasion whilst the Temple at Jerusalem was standing those words were sung by the priests and worshippers at the great festivals. Israelitish worship was essentially a worship of praise, of song and of music, and this is but one of the many examples of the songs they sang and which have been preserved for us in the Book of Psalms. We do well to consider something of this aspect of the Psalms, for an understanding of Israelitish methods and outlook respecting Divine worship cannot fail to be of assistance to us in our own attempt to relate the outward forms and ceremonies of worship to the inwardly felt reverence and adoration of our hearts. We know that God seeketh the worship only of those that will worship him in spirit and in truth, but it is also true that our very sincerity and fervour should lead us to worship God in a dignified manner and so far as possible in appropriate surroundings. Some consideration of the ways in which Israel of old waited on God with praise and prayer can help us to trace more clearly the effect of outward forms in promoting the spirit of true worship.

Since the Book of Psalms is really the record of Israel's public worship and contains the songs, chants and prayers which were used in the Temple ceremonies this short study will not go outside the Psalms for its material. Within that Book there is contained a wealth of inspiration for sincerity and purity in worship.

One of the most characteristic praise-prayers is found in Psalm 95. *"O come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us make a joyful noise unto the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods,"* and so on. Notice that the worshippers have commenced their service on a note of praise; more than that, on a note of joyful praise. This is characteristic of Israel's worship; their first impulse upon coming together was toward a lifting up of voices jointly in joy and gladness, and in gratitude of heart for all God's mercies, a gratitude that was not only felt inwardly but expressed outwardly. *"This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it"* (Psa. 118, 24). The very first element of their worship was a full, frank acknowledgment of Divine supremacy over all things and of their gratitude because of that supremacy. The valleys and hills, the seas and land, were made by him and are his by right, and those who are his children have the

privilege of using for their own pleasure and joy the things that He has made, and the obligation of bringing to him for his pleasure and joy the offerings of praise and thanksgiving which such beneficence has inspired.

This leads quite naturally to the second element in worship, a quiet and reverent acknowledgment of that moral responsibility to be conformed to God's laws and to live life in God's way which lies upon every man. One can almost sense the change in tone in verse 6 of Psalm 95. The major key of loud praise has dropped to a minor key of quiet reverence and awe. *"O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand."* It is now that the mind turns away from the outward things of the earth which God has created, the appendages of life, of happiness, of enjoyment, for which praise has just been offered, and diverts its thoughts inward to the heart and soul. God did not only make the hills and valleys, the sea and land; He made *us*, and He made us his people, his flock. He is not only a Creator, He is also a Shepherd and a Father. And the causes of worship, of reverence and of praise that lie within the human frame are greater by far than those that reside in the earth, which is itself but a minister to that same human frame, for God created the earth for man, and not man for the earth. Man is the glory and king of this material creation—or will be when the Divine purpose has been fully achieved. So the joyful ebullient praise that is prompted by the material blessings surrounding man gives place to reverent adoration, a recognition of the spiritual blessings that find their place within a man's heart. Therefore in Psalm 96, 8 the exhortation is *"Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; fear before him, all the earth"* and in Psalm 29 *"Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due to his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."* In all of this there is the realisation that to worship God in holiness is a thing of beauty, that the yearning of the human heart for that which brings beauty into the life and drives out the drab and sordid can be met, and fully met, in joint worship before God.

Is not this worth considering in our fellowship and our worship? We have much that is drab and commonplace in our daily lives. The conditions attendant upon earning a living or managing a home in this present day are oftentimes dull and monotonous to an extreme, and even we who have the knowledge of Divine truth to cheer our way feel the pressure of the times. It cannot possibly be

otherwise. The world feels the same thing and rushes madly from one form of amusement to another in the endeavour to forget. Man was made to be happy and to enjoy the good gifts of God, and now that human selfishness and sin has taken away much of the possibility of happiness humanity is in danger of breaking down. Now the fact that in general we do not desire and could not be content with the amusements which do temporarily satisfy the majority of people does not dispose of this fact, that the drabness and ugliness of life has its effect upon us as on them. We too need something that will counteract these things and show us visions of beauty in which we can rejoice and find satisfaction and rest of heart. That counteracting force is to be found in worship—sincere, selfless worship offered in joint communion with others of like mind in an atmosphere of beauty and peace. Worship that ascends in chariots of praise to the highest heaven, that bears up the worshipper himself as it were on eagles' wings and takes him in the spirit of his mind to the holy place where God is seated upon his Throne, guiding the destinies of the world that He has created.

We need then by all means possible to develop within our fellowship an increasing appreciation of the importance of worship—and, too, of joint fellowship together in worship, of communal worship. And that worship must be a joyful and happy worship—every gathering for worship an holy convocation unto the Lord where expressions of thankfulness and thanksgiving are predominant. Even although there must be other occasions where life is lived to the accompaniment of quieter and more subdued strains, where grief afflicts the heart and tears may not be far away, the time of worship will be a palliative to these things and call forth the happiness and joy that resides in the possession of the "deep things of God". The Psalmist felt like this when he sang of his dark moments, of the contradiction of sinners against himself, of tears by day and by night, and yet "*I had gone with the multitude, I went with them in the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday*" (Psa. 42. 4). He found the comfort his soul desired in going up with his brethren, with praise and song, to worship the Lord in his holy temple.

This brings us to the third very important element in our worship—the place where worship is offered. In natural reaction against the formalism and ceremony of the great Churches there is a tendency to go to the other extreme and eschew all outward aids to beauty in worship. The Psalmist knew as well as do we that God may be worshipped in any place and does not require that the voice of praise ascend acceptably only from marble halls and prayers be offered to the accompaniment of swinging censers. David must have known better

than any man how near God could be when alone on the mountain-tops at night, or lying in the field with the flocks in the heat of a summer day. But the Psalmist knew what inspiration could be given his soul by the mere sight of the Temple buildings on the summit of Mount Moriah, the thrill of heart as the multitudes moved slowly up the wide stairways and assembled in the great court, the awe and reverence that filled the soul as the music of harps and chanting of singers fell upon the ear. That was why he could say with feeling "*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem*". (Psa. 122. 1). The very suggestion of going up to worship the Lord in company with the brethren is one that should induce feelings of gladness and happiness.

After all, just as Jesus at twelve years of age was found in his Father's courts, because that was the natural place in which to be found, so should we always feel as if the place of worship is our rightful spiritual home. It should possess a magnetism and an attraction for us that is possessed by no other place on earth. We should be conscious of an intense, a longing, desire to be there and to commune with our brethren of like faith, and to join with them in praise and prayer, and share with them the consciousness of the overspreading Spirit, come down to bless and fill each worshipper with the grace and truth of the Most High God. The Psalmist felt like that. "*How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!*" he cried, "*My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.*" (Psa. 84. 1-2). When he was away from the Temple he was an exile, a wanderer in strange lands. When he turned his steps towards the Temple he was coming home and as its familiar buildings came into sight he experienced the satisfaction of a spiritual hunger which could be met in no other way.

The word "amiable" in verse 1 really means "beloved". "*How beloved are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!*" The thought of the word is shown very vividly in its other occurrences. "*The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him*" (Deut. 33. 12); "*So he giveth his beloved sleep*" (Psa. 127. 2); "*Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my well-beloved touching his vineyard*" (Isa. 5. 1). This is our worship made complete, when we can look toward the place of our meeting with our brethren, and call it "beloved". Thus may we combine the three-fold aspect of worship; our own personal coming to God in reverence and adoration; our joining with our brethren in united praise and prayer; our love and esteem for the place which is the place of our gathering, the place of our meeting, the place of our fellowship and worship. "*THIS GATE OF THE LORD, INTO WHICH*

THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL ENTER." How fitting are the words of the Psalmist in Psa. 117. 17-19, expressive of this three-fold cord. How the words come down to us in all their majesty and all their music, telling us of saints in olden time who trod this way before us, bidding us follow faithfully in the same way, that we, like them, may one day stand before God in Zion.

"I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord.

"I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people!

"In the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem!

"PRAISE YE THE LORD."

ANALYSIS OF MATT. 28. 19

An investigation into a debated text

"Go forth therefore and make all nations my disciples; baptise men everywhere in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit . . ." (Matt. 28. 19 NEB).

Normally, disputable passages of Scripture fall into two categories. There are those which cause controversy among thinking Christians because they touch on issues vital to our faith and spiritual understanding, and then there are those which, for various reasons, cause only moderate debate and are viewed as less "important". Scriptures such as John 1. 1 and the AV rendering of 1 John 5. 7 would probably fit into the first category. Luke 23. 43 would probably fit into the latter. Occasionally, however, doubts arise over a passage which falls comfortably into neither of these categories. Such passages may be of great importance indeed, and yet debates concerning them may run out of steam, leaving all discussion in the hands of a small circle of clerics and scholars. Such a passage is the traditional rendering of the baptismal formula found in Matthew 28. 19.

In his document *"A Collection of the Evidence For and Against the Traditional Wording of the Baptismal Phrase in Matthew 28. 19"* (pub. 1962), the anonymous author wrote, *"In more than fifty years as a student of the Bible, and an enquirer in the sphere of Biblical knowledge, I have not seen or heard of anything dealing with this question of the authenticity of the text of Ma. 28. 19, apart from articles and letters in periodicals and books, now out of print, and encyclopaedias (inaccessible to most people.)"*

The triune baptismal formula has been utilised extensively as a proof of the veracity of the Trinity doctrine. This in itself makes it of vital importance to both Trinitarian and non-trinitarian Christians alike. Moreover, there are apparent contradictions between the Matthean formula and the baptismal formulae used throughout the rest of the Christian Scriptures.

All of these factors lead us to the question, "Is the text of Matthew 28. 19 in most extant translations correct and harmonious with the original Matthean autograph? The evidence would seem to indicate not, but lest we be in any doubt as to establishing the importance of the matter, the words of

the great scholar F.C. Conybeare should prove pertinent: *"Until the middle of the nineteenth century the text of the 'three witnesses'—1 John 5. 7-8—shared with Ma. 28. 19 the onerous task of furnishing scriptural evidence of the trinity . . . (the words of 1 John 5. 7-8) are now abandoned by all authorities except the Pope of Rome. By consequence the entire weight of proving the Trinity has of late come to rest on Ma. 28. 19."*

Supporters of the traditional text as it appears in the AV and most other versions often point out that two of the oldest manuscripts, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, actually contain the Matthean triune formula. However, it must be remembered that these are 4th century manuscripts. We cannot simply wave away the preceding two hundred years as if they never happened. Many scholars feel that it is during these two centuries that considerable amendments were made to the original New Testament documents—including at least one alteration to Matthew 28. 19. It is curious that two reliable manuscripts from an earlier age—the Ancient Syrian and the Old Latin (African) do not contain the triune formula. Nor can appeal be made to the Sinaitic Syrian or the oldest Latin Manuscript, for both of these have the end of Matthew's gospel missing. As Berensen has remarked, *"Positive manuscript support for the baptismal formula of Matt. 28. 19 is scant and highly disputable."*

However, although we may lack manuscript evidence from a sufficiently early time to enable us to reject the traditional text with certainty, we do possess the Patristic writings.

Eusebius of Caesarea quotes Matt. 28. 19 with almost monotonous regularity in his works written during the first four decades of the fourth century, including his commentaries on Isaiah, the Psalms etc., his *Demonstratio Evangelica*, *Ecclesiastical History* and the *Theophany*. In every instance Eusebius quotes the passage in the following manner: *"Go ye and make disciples of all nations in my name, teaching them to carry out all things I have commanded you."*

Eusebius, we know, inherited his collection of manuscripts from Pamphilus of Caesarea (c. 240-311 AD). Pamphilus was not theologically illiter-

ate. He was a disciple of Origen and was educated at Alexandria, after which he moved to Caesarea and ran his own theological college. Whilst imprisoned under the persecutions of Maximinus Daza he wrote an Apology (for Origen) to which Eusebius himself added a sixth volume. It is also known that Pamphilius amended several errant manuscripts to bring them into line with earlier, more accurate ones. This enables us to say with a very high degree of certainty that Eusebius did not use the triune formula because the manuscripts he inherited from his friend Pamphilius did not contain it. Quite simply, Pamphilius and Eusebius knew—along with others—that the triune formula was a spurious addition to the Matthian text.

Origen: In the Greek rendition of Origen Matt. 28. 19 is quoted three times. However, in every instance the quotation stops at the words “the nations”, leading many scholars to believe that the words “in my name” were edited out at a later date by someone who preferred the triune formula.

Clement of Alexandria: Clement quotes the heretic Theodotus—a Gnostic and follower of Valentinus—as rendering Matthew 28. 19 in this way: “*Going around preach ye and baptise those who believe in the name of Father and of Son and of Holy Spirit*”. Why would Clement make a point of clarifying that these are the words of Theodotus if they were identical to those found within the Matthian text? The conclusion must be that the Matthian text of that time was different at the very place under discussion in this article.

Justin Martyr: Justin believed in the triune baptismal formula, and yet, when pressed to put pen to paper to defend it, he falls back only on the evidence of Apostolic tradition and a theologically disconnected passage from Isaiah. Surely, if the triune formula had appeared in manuscripts of the time Justin would have appealed to them as his greatest and final authority. But he did not. The conclusion must be that the Matthian gospel known to Justin did not contain the triune formula, and that he was in consequence forced to appeal to Apostolic tradition in support of it. Justin Martyr himself, however, seems to have had doubts over the triune formula on occasions. In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin says: “*God has not afflicted yet—nor inflicts—the Judgement, knowing that some, even today, are being made disciples in the name of Christ.*”

In the latter half of the fourth century, “orthodox” Christians condemned the followers of the Bishop of Constantinople, one Macedonius, for refusing to use the triune formula and for denying the “full deity of the Spirit”. It is curious that when Macedonius was condemned in the Canon of Vincent of Lerins, it was argued that Macedonius had been *wrong* to rely on Scripture alone and he was castigated for not giving equal weight to the

authority of the Church. If the dispute over the Matthian formula was inferred here, then it may indicate that Macedonius argued from the standpoint that he would not accept the triune formula because it was not found in the most ancient manuscripts and that if his critics could only appeal to “tradition” then he would not change.

Aphraates: Aphraates was the first of the Syriac church Fathers, and author of the *Demonstrations* (sometimes referred to inaccurately as his *Homilies*). Aphraates paraphrases Matt. 28. 19 by saying, “*Make disciples in my name and they will believe in me.*”

The Doctrina and the Didache: The Didache, one of the earliest non-canonical pieces of Christian literature, contains the triune formula. However, it is now known that the Didache was an extended elaboration (and a poor one at that) of an even earlier document known as the Doctrina. The Doctrina is an excellent document which, perhaps more than any other non-canonical document of its genre, mirrors the essence of primitive Christianity. The Doctrina does *not* contain the triune formula, although it does contain a neo-Pauline benediction.

Internal Evidence: Matthew 28. 18-20 is highly unusual in that Jesus uses the singular first-person pronouns “me” and “I” more frequently than perhaps any other passage of a similar length. The whole section concerns Christ’s authority and power. It seems more than a little strange that after stressing his own authority so intensely—“all authority has been given unto me”—he should then supposedly say, “*therefore . . . baptise them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.*” In this context a triune baptismal formula has no direct connection with the subject matter; namely, Jesus’ authority. However, if the phrase “my name” is substituted, then the logic of the Master’s statement shines through with brilliant clarity: “*I have been given all authority, therefore you must baptise disciples in my name.*”

In 1. Cor. 1. 13 Paul asks “*Were ye baptised in the name of Paul?*” Using a little justifiable sarcasm here, Paul infers that we were of course baptised *not* in his name, but in the name of Jesus Christ. No mention of a triune formula here, and this from the author of the most famous benediction of all, “*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, Amen.*”!

The parallel between water baptism and baptism of the Spirit also highlights the stark ostracism of the triune formula, for in John 14. 26 Jesus promises that baptism by the Spirit would occur *in his name*.

An even stronger argument against the triune formula concerns the fact that it conflicts with the other synoptic gospels.

Luke: "... and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached *in his name* among all nations." (Luke 24. 47).

Mark: "Go ye into the world and preach the gospel unto every creature . . . *In my name* shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues." (Mark 16. 15-17).

The Lucan account directly contradicts the Matthian (traditional) rendering, and the Marcan account does nothing at all to support it. When one considers the stark contrast between the triune formula and the Lucan and Marcan formulae, and then considers further the formulae found in Acts 2.38, 19.5 and 8.16, in which the triune name is never used, but instead the phrase "in the name of Jesus Christ" or similar, it becomes obvious that the traditional Matthian rendering is at best problematical and at worst highly suspect, even spurious. Taken as a whole, the collective evidence has caused the following authorities to speak thus:

Hastings Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics: "The cumulative evidence . . . is thus distinctly against the view that Ma. 28.19 represents the exact words of Christ."

Dr. A. S. Peake: "The command to baptise (sic) into the threefold name is a late doctrinal expansion. Instead of the words "baptising (sic) them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" we should probably read simply—"into my name."

F. Whiteley: "The thoughtful may well ponder, meantime, why one cannot find one single instance, in Acts or Epistles, of the words ever being used at any of the many baptisms recorded . . ."

Black's Bible Dictionary: "The Trinitarian formula was a late addition by some reverent Christian mind."

Prof. Adolf Harnack: "These are certainly no words of the Lord."

Holiness of God

The highest accomplishment of all religious life and experience is to become intensely aware of the holiness of God. This great fact—God's absolute holiness—is the very essence of all revealed Truth, in that it takes us behind all that God does in order to show us what He "is." Behind the whole structure of the Divine Plan of Redemption is the character of that God Who framed it. If, in our Gospel day, we have been permitted to see that Redemptive Plan as a manifestation of unfathomable love, it is because that love existed before the plan was made. If we to-day can talk of Bethlehem, and Calvary, and Olivet, and realise that the coming of a Babe, the dying of a Man, the resurrection and the ascension of the Son of God have made salvation possible for all, then back of all that preparation we must see the yearning heart of One Who, for a time, had lost possession of his earthly

Some modern translators have felt unable to render the Matthian formula in the traditional way without passing a qualifying comment.

Robert Young's Literal Translation: "Having gone, then, disciple all the nations, (baptising them—to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all, whatever I did command you,) and lo, I am with you all the days . . ."

1960 Greek Testament of the British & Foreign Bible Society: This version gives *en to onomati* as an alternative rendering, that is, "in the name of me".

Jerusalem Bible 1966 edition: Footnote to Matt. 28.19 reads: "It may be that this formula . . . is a reflection of the liturgical usage established later in the primitive community. It will be remembered that Acts speaks of baptising in the name of Jesus."

Textually, the triune formula creates immense difficulties, not least of which is the fact that we are asked to baptise in the *name* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That *name* is used in the singular here, whilst supposedly applying to a plurality of persons (as opposed to *names*), denotes a bold trinitarian stance on the part of the author of the words. Secondly, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not names at all, but titles.

Historically the formula has no real support before the latter half of the third century, although it was used—controversially—before that time WITHOUT claim to Matthew's gospel.

The sands of time have now well covered the tracks of the composer of the triune baptismal formula. Was the passage—as seems likely—added to the original Matthian autograph to bolster up the trinity? Or did Matthew, however improbable it may seem, use the words as traditionally rendered but without a trinitarian application? The reader must decide for himself.

sons. If, looking onward down the years, we see a righteous world, where no ill deed is done, and man is free from sin, then behind the whole design we must allow for One who hated sin before that sin began. Behind all precious doctrine, behind all redemptive work, behind each type and shadow, behind the whole Gospel story, there stands the identity of One Who in himself is greater than his works. From his own great heart the love-stream flowed; from his white-hot soul the sin-hatred sprang; and from his unfaltering Will, the drive and power of accomplishment came forth. Effects spring only from adequate causes—Redemption and Restoration must have Redeemer and Restorer, and though others may be chosen to help reach those effects, He only is the First Great Cause.

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

1 Kin. 21. 1-29

4. The still small voice

King Ahab was beginning to feel very pleased with himself. He had just won a decisive battle against the Syrians and concluded a treaty of peace with their king Ben-Hadad—a treaty which, incidentally, the Syrians had no hesitation in breaking a few years later with much less satisfactory results for this wicked Ahab. There had been no more famines and his kingdom was relatively prosperous. Best of all, he had seen nothing of his old adversary Elijah for a long time and he was beginning to hope that he could settle down again with his pagan wife that vicious Queen Jezebel without any more uncomfortable reminders that there was a God of Israel who could not be defied with impunity. For one of the distinguishing marks of the hardened unbeliever is his fixed conviction that even if God is really there he can with good luck succeed in flouting him without incurring serious consequences, at least for the time being. So he conveniently put the memory of the three years' famine and the demonstration of the true God on the top of the Mount Carmel at the back of his mind and hoped that wherever Elijah was, he would stay there and not come back.

In which pleasant frame of mind that wicked King Ahab took a short walk to view a property belonging to a neighbour of his. Adjacent to the gardens of his palace in Jezreel there was a vineyard, and it belonged to one of his subjects, Naboth the Jezreelite. And Ahab wanted that vineyard for himself. It was not that he contemplated going into the vinery business; he was already doing very well living on the labours of his subjects, in addition to a very profitable commercial liaison with his father-in-law, King Ethbaal of the Phoenician merchant nation on the sea coast, but he did covet that vineyard so that he could destroy the vines and create an extension to his palace flower-gardens. He knew that the Law of God given by Moses forbade the disposal or acquiring of family property, that it must remain inviolate through successive generations to prevent the emergence of rich and poor classes in Israel, but after all, he must have reasoned, if he ever did think about the matter, which is in the highest degree unlikely, Moses had been dead a long time and no one gave much heed to those old principles in this modern age and anyway he wanted the land and what was a king for if he could not have his own way with his subjects. So he went down to see Naboth the Jezreelite.

Now right here he encountered a problem. This Naboth turned out to be a man of God, devout and perhaps a bit rigid in his loyalty to the laws of Moses. "*The Lord forbid*" he said, "*the Lord*

forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee". It is true that the king had offered to buy it at a fair price, or to give him another vineyard in exchange; whether he intended to fulfil that bargain once he got possession of the object of his desires is another matter. Rulers of peoples have notoriously short memories. But, attractive bargain or not, Naboth was not selling. And the reason for his not selling was his loyalty to the God of Israel. He had received the vineyard as a family inheritance from his own father; he must pass it on to his own son or sons should he have any. The sequel to the story implies that he had no sons at this time; perhaps he was not yet even married. At any rate, he would not sell.

Now the Authorised Version tells us that in consequence Ahab went home to his palace "*heavy and displeased*" and as is so often the case the Authorised Version translators failed to express the true meaning. What is really said is that Ahab went home to his palace sulky and marose and that gives a much truer picture of his attitude. He had been accustomed for a long time to having his own way; his courtiers and servants fawned upon him and said yes to everything said or wanted, and now that he had come up against someone who said no he was like a little child, and he sulked. Not that Naboth cared one jot about that; he just got on with his vine-dressing.

But someone did take notice. That haughty Queen Jezebel came in and found him stretched upon his bed and refusing to eat and generally manifesting a very anti-social attitude. And being his wife and not usually finding him like this she naturally wanted to know what was the matter. So he told her about the vineyard and Naboth's refusal to sell.

Now it is clear that Queen Jezebel was by far the most strong-minded of the two. This wicked Ahab would have got over his fit of the sulks in time and thought of something else he wanted and forget all about Naboth and his vineyard. But his wife was a different proposition. Who was this Naboth who dared to flout the wishes of the king? And he was a man of God into the bargain! She had already had enough trouble with Elijah, another man of God, and hoped now that she had induced him to leave the country, and no one now had seen him for a long time, and now here was another of the same pestiferous breed talking about the laws of God as superior to the wishes of royalty. Something was going to be done about this and she was the one who was going to do it.

That iniquitous Queen Jezebel looked down

disdainfully at her husband lying crying on the bed. "Do you govern the kingdom of Israel?" she queried scornfully. "Rise up, eat bread and be merry. I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite". And in her evil heart she already knew what she was going to do.

So Ahab got up from his bed, and dressed himself properly, and went down to his throne room where his courtiers and attendants were sitting about with nothing much to do because their master had shut himself up and would see no one; and he began again to attend to affairs of state and perhaps cherish a hope that his wife would succeed where he had failed. And knowing her nature she probably thought within himself that if so he would not enquire too closely into the means whereby he achieved so desirable a solution to the problem. And that evil Queen Jezebel was in her own apartments, busily writing letters to the elders and nobles of the royal city of Jezreel, and those elders and nobles must have been greatly dismayed and perturbed when they read those letters, for this is what she told them they must do.

"Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people; and set two men, worthless and immoral men, to testify and bear witness against him, saying Thou didst blaspheme before God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die".

Now no one knows whether these elders and nobles were sincere worshippers of God and loyal so far as they were able to the Mosaic Covenant, or worshippers of Baal and so apostates from the true faith, or men who retained faith in the God of Israel in their hearts but outwardly served Baal because it was the thing to do with that pagan Queen Jezebel ruling the land. Some of them may have been Naboth's friends and he himself may well have been greatly esteemed in the city. But even if so, all this was of no account against the Queen's commandment. And so, even though some of them mourned, and almost certainly some of them did, they could do naught else but obey. Any disregard of her instructions would only lead to her vengeance and their own consequent death. To save their own lives, Naboth must die.

So the people of the city were called together, and Naboth arrested and brought before his judges, withal protesting his innocence, and two men, worthless men bribed for the purpose, stood up and testified that in their hearing he had blasphemed against God and cursed the king, and these were heinous offences against the Mosaic Law and punishable by death by stoning. And because in that same law the testimony of two witnesses found to agree on all points was necessary to obtain a conviction it was but a little step to accept that testimony without the accused being allowed to proffer a defence and so Naboth was con-

demned and immediately taken out of the city and stoned to death, and his body left where it had fallen to be devoured by the scavenging dogs of the city. And although this episode stands alone in the history of those days there must have been many such cases of flagrant injustice and cruelty during the time that Jezebel was queen over Israel.

Now it is possible that this wicked king Ahab was not altogether easy in his mind as he went down to take possession of his newly-acquired vineyard. It was not that he was particularly concerned about the unjust death of Naboth; such things were always going on in Israel and he could not be expected to concern himself unduly about one individual case. But he could be, and perhaps was, concerned that the possession he had expected to be bought for money had been acquired at the price of blood. Nevertheless, and after all, it was not really his fault that Naboth had been unjustly accused and was dead; it was his wife who had concocted the plot and made all the arrangements without telling him; he could not really be held responsible for that, and now here was the vineyard without an owner and it was next door to his own property and it might as well be his as anybody's and anyway he was the king and in all the circumstances he had as much right to it, or even more, as anybody. In which self-justifying frame of mind he walked through the gateway into the vineyard and stopped short in his tracks. Standing facing him, and blocking further entry, was that giant of a man, goatskin clad, massive hands grasping a stout staff, burning eyes looking into his own with a fierce intensity he could not evade. The last man on earth he wanted to see, especially at this juncture. He closed his eyes momentarily and opened them again, just to make sure. But Elijah was still there, making no movement, saying no word; just those eyes.

Desperately Ahab tried to remind himself that he was the king. He must brazen this out. If it was to be a battle of wits he must come out on top. Something of the old arrogance came back. He would have the first word.

"Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"

Swift as an arrow came the reply; those burning eyes never left the king's own eyes.

"I have found thee"

A pause, then the voice of judgment.

"Because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord, thus saith the Lord. In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will cut off thy posterity, young and old, and destroy thy house as I did those of thy predecessors, in that thou hast provoked me and made Israel to sin".

Now see this wicked king Ahab. His face is pale and his knees shaking. Idolator that he was, he was

yet of Israelite stock, and something within him from his ancestors tells him that the word is true and would surely be fulfilled. He waits, tense and silent.

There was more to come.

"And the Lord has spoken saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel".

Then he was gone. Ahab saw not his movement nor where he went, but the way into the vineyard was open. But did Ahab the fearful go in to joy over his new possession? He did not. He went home, silent and thoughtful, and presently he divested himself of his royal robes and put on sackcloth, and fasted, and thought more seriously than he had ever done since the day he took that evil woman Jezebel to be his wife. And the consequence of his thoughts and his fasting and his sackcloth was that he came a little nearer to repentance for his misdeeds and prostrated himself before the Lord but just how sincere was that repentance only the Lord knew. Nevertheless He did not fail to respond immediately as He always does when there is the slightest indication of the sinner turning from the error of his way. So the Lord sent another word to Elijah to say that

because of Ahab's seeming change of heart He would defer the destruction of his dynasty and his descendants until after his death; he was to be spared the anguish of that event. But see here that the manner of his own death and that of his wife was not included in this concession. Perhaps the Lord in his wisdom knew that the repentance was not going to last, and in fact it did not last, for less than three years later he went to war with Syria in the strength of and reliance upon Baal and when Micaiah the prophet of the Lord reproved him and foretold his death he refused to believe and consigned him to prison. And in the ensuing battle he was mortally wounded and died in his chariot, with his blood running out of his wounds. And when, later on, men washed the chariot the scavenging dogs licked up his blood and so the word of Elijah was fulfilled.

But that strange man was nowhere to be found. Only the Lord knew where he was. And Israel had not yet seen the last of him. Another unbelieving King of Israel was to feel the whiplash of his tongue and realise to his cost that the God of Elijah, He is God.

To be continued

THE DAYS OF HIS COMING

"The Bible speaks of our Lord's presence, i.e. the days of the Son of Man, as a period of time as distinct from 'a coming' or 'an arrival', and during this time He performs a work amongst his waiting and watching brethren. Faced with every kind of opposition to the Truth, the faithful few are in daily need of Divine strength if they are not to faint and fall by the wayside. Multiplied many times over, our Lord found himself in exactly the same position when, at his First Advent "being in agony", *"there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him"* (Luke 22. 43). Thus, we need him at our side in these days of spiritual darkness wherein one is assailed on every hand by opponents of Truth, Love and Peace.

"Therefore, speaking of his return from the wedding feast (Luke 12. 36) which was reflected in the earth by the pre-1914 witness and the midnight cry (Matt. 25. 1-13), He said of his watching brethren *"Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that He shall gird himself (as a servant) and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them"*. Better, "and as He passes on will minister unto them". The Greek verb, says one authority, expresses not the 'coming out' as from another chamber, but the passing from one to another, as when He washed the disciples feet, in John 13.5.

"Dr. Young translates this same passage,

"Happy those servants whom the Lord, having come, shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that He will gird himself, and will cause them to recline (at meat), and having come near, will minister to them".

"Observe that the Lord is showing us here that He will be present with his brethren although unseen by them. It is in this context that the Lord urges his brethren to wait and watch for him and to open unto him immediately He knocks. He communicates his presence to them as He ministers unto them. Is this not as one would expect? How else could He impart the wisdom of the Word other than being with them?

"Further, the Bible says *"and if He shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants"* (Luke 12. 37-38). If we can say that the Lord is indeed ministering unto us as never before, e.g. if it can be said that Daniel's prophecies have, in recent years, become more intelligible, and rather than being closed up and sealed, have, in fact, had the seal to their understanding broken and the wisdom of the Word revealed, then we must unreservedly declare that our Lord is present with us in fulfilment of the Father's promise that the wise would understand and that He himself would impart the understanding! This work, He said, would be carried out during the dark watches of this present evil world's night!

"New Jerusalem Fellowship"

THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD Luke 16, 1-12

"There was a certain man," said Jesus one day, "which had a steward." By no means an unusual statement to make; all rich men had stewards, servants who had been with the family for many years and could be trusted with the duties of the position. The office dated back to very early times, for Abraham himself had a steward, "Eliezer of Damascus" (Gen. 15, 2), and to that steward was entrusted the task of going five hundred miles into Aram-Naharaim to seek a suitable bride for Isaac, the son of Abraham. The responsibilities of the steward were heavy; he administered the whole of his master's estate, saw to his business matters, controlled the routine of the house, supervised the other servants, and had charge of the children until they came of age. (This latter fact is alluded to by Paul when he says in Gal. 4, 1-2: "*The heir as long as he is a child . . . is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.*") The word "governors" is the one used elsewhere in the New Testament for "stewards"—*oikonomos*).

But this particular steward, continued Jesus, was dishonest. He neglected his lord's interests and wasted his resources, so that at last he was required to make up his accounts and relinquish his position. And the unjust steward was afraid, afraid for the future. He had made no friends, none to whom he could turn in his hour of adversity; he had lived a life of ease and self-indulgence and forgotten how to labour that he might sustain himself. He had been proud and haughty and now was appalled at the thought of living as a dependent upon the charity of others. "What shall I do?" he asked himself despairingly. "I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed." And in searching for a way out of his plight the baseness of his nature came to the top and he saw a way of making himself friends at the eleventh hour, friends who by reason of the obligation under which he would place them might at least give him food and shelter.

In order to understand the story aright we must examine its background. The setting is an agricultural one. The "debtors" who owed oil and wheat were evidently tenants of the lord's land and, as was the custom, paid their rent in kind—an agreed amount of the produce of the land. The previous expression of the steward, "I cannot dig," indicates the same thing; apparently the only manual work which was open to him in the particular community was agricultural. The scene of the story is in the country and not in the city. It would have been the steward's duty to adjudge equitable rents to the tenant farmers who leased the land, and the "hundred measures of oil" and "hundred measures of wheat" probably represented the yearly amount due. (In English measure these equalled approxi-

mately 750 gallons of olive oil and one thousand bushels of wheat.) It is sometimes suggested that the steward was executing a good stroke of business for his lord in that he secured payment of some apparently hopeless debts by offering a liberal discount for immediate settlement. Nothing of the kind! The steward, knowing he was shortly to leave his lord's service, was deliberately reducing the tenants' rents and altering the legal documents, the "leases", which stipulated the annual amount to be paid. The word rendered "bill" in "take thy bill, and write fifty" and again in verse 7, refers to such legal contracts which were usual in Jesus' day, as in our own. There is no doubt that the steward had the legal right to adjust the rents when his lord's interests demanded it; but in this instance his action was dictated by his own interests and to his lord's hurt. It may have been legally permissible, but was morally unjustifiable. In this way he hoped to place these tenants under an obligation to him so that he might reasonably expect some consideration at their hands when his stewardship terminated. He evidently did not intend to work for his living if he could find someone to give him hospitality in return for services rendered.

"And the lord" (the steward's master) "*commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely*"—shrewdly, according to Weymouth and the Twentieth Century versions—"for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." The master was broad-minded enough and sufficient of a "business man" himself, to admit that the unjust steward had shown his own self quite capable of sharp business deals when his own interests were involved. There is no indication that the notice of dismissal was rescinded; he was a rogue, albeit a clever rogue, and he had to go; but the master did at least commend him for his shrewdness as he went.

But Jesus did not commend the man. To think that He did so is completely to misunderstand the parable, and waste a lot of time and ingenuity attempting to demonstrate that the steward was doing a legitimate and right thing. Jesus called him "the unjust steward", and Jesus, by his silence as much as by his sequel to the parable, pronounced his own condemnation upon this and all similar actions which are so often justified by the glib saying "business is business".

The story was ended. Turning now upon his disciples with a swift transition of thought, He said, perhaps with a vehemence greater than was his wont, "And yet I say unto you, make friends for yourselves out of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when it fails, those friends may receive you into everlasting habitations". The verse has been

paraphrased a little in order to bring out its meaning. Jesus probably spoke in Aramaic, the language of Galilee—at any rate, “mammon” is an Aramaic word—and the account was written by Luke in Greek. This verse has suffered a little in the process and is not altogether easy to follow in the Authorised Version. The conjunction “and” (*kai* in Greek) often has the meaning of “and yet” and “and so” when rhetorical emphasis is involved, as in this case, and “of” is *ek*, “out of”. “Mammon” is a word indicating worldly wealth or riches of any kind, and the expression “when ye fail” is more correctly rendered “when it (i.e. the mammon of unrighteousness) fails”.

The disciples, then, were to do, not what the steward *had* done, but what he had not done. He had the “mammon of unrighteousness”, worldly riches, power, and opportunity, entrusted to him, but he had not used it to make for himself true friends who could be relied upon to stand by him in the day of adversity. He had used it for his own selfish ends instead. Then when the day that it failed him came, he was compelled to resort to very questionable tactics to ensure his future comfort, with no real guarantee even then that his end would be achieved. Now that, said Jesus in effect, may be all very well for the world. They order their daily lives in that way and they fully expect to do such things or have such things done to them and they call it “business”. In their own day and generation they are shrewder than the children of light; but it is a shrewdness that will avail them nothing in the day when this world, and the fashion of it, passes away. But *I say to you*, you whose lives are given over to a higher and a holier purpose, use the possessions, influence or worldly opportunities you may have in such fashion as to win for yourselves friends in the heavens, so that when the worldly mammon fails, as fail it must at last, you will be welcomed with joy into an everlasting home.

Whilst the disciples were thinking that out, Jesus drove home the principle which his story was intended to illustrate. “*He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much*” (vs. 10). The extent of our faithfulness to the exceeding great privileges and responsibilities which God intends his consecrated children to hold and administer in the coming Age when the saints “reign with Christ” is measured by the degree of their faithfulness toward God in the administration of such worldly “mammon” as we may be possessed of now. If we have not placed it all on the altar and henceforth used it in the interests of God and his Kingdom, then we are not likely to be any more faithful when the day for “greater works” has

dawned. “*If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?*” How could we expect God to do so in such case?

“It is required of stewards”, says Paul in 1 Cor. 4, 2, “that a man be found faithful”. He was thinking of the stewards of his own day—perhaps even of this very parable, which must have been quite well known to him. We, the disciples of Jesus, are all stewards, and it is required of us all that we make good use of our stewardship while we have the opportunity, and not wait until the end of the day of grace before we commence thinking about it. The Parable of the Talents tells us that, as also the story of the rich young ruler who wanted to gain eternal life but not in a fashion that was going to cost him anything. And that story is repeated so often in these latter days. It is so easy to spend a few years in the first flush of enthusiasm for “the Truth”, learning the doctrines of the faith and becoming familiar with the Holy Scriptures, accustomed to the routine of regular meetings and even perhaps the discharge of our duties falling to elders in the church, and then, having attained that stage, begin to devote increasing attention to a “career”—as if any earthly career matters to the child of God—or to success in business—as if any earthly business counts for aught in the sight of the Great King—or to any other of the hundred and one earthly interests which the Devil is always so industriously placing in the pathway of the consecrated. Jesus, knowing all this, told his disciples “the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts (desires) of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful” (Mark 4, 19). How true are those words, exemplified in the lives of Christians who for a time did “run well” but failed at the last.

To-day more than ever we need to take this parable to heart. There has been so much disappointment and disillusionment. So many things expected have not come to pass. As with Peter and the others after the Crucifixion, there is a tendency to go back to the fishing-nets and make the best of the world as it now is, hoping as we do so that we can fit into our place in the Kingdom when at length it does come.

And of course—we cannot. Unless we have been constantly and tirelessly faithful in all respects to the unseen things whilst they remain unseen, we shall not see them when at length they become revealed to the watching ones, and faith is swallowed up in sight. If we do not make heavenly friends *now* by our use of the earthly mammon, we shall not be of those who, when *it* fails, will be received with joy into the everlasting habitations.



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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

"Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsel and knowledge, that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth, that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?" (Prov. 22. 20-21).

Here is excellent counsel, not only for the active Christian, but for every man in every walk of life. The man who is teachable enough patiently to receive knowledge from a teacher who knows is the man who in his turn finds himself able to teach others. And what is true of the mundane secular sciences is trebly true of the "wisdom which cometh from above" which the Christian needs if he is to be like those "scribes instructed unto the kingdom of heaven" who, Jesus said, "bring forth out of their treasures things new and old". Too many of us, starting out in the way, think that all we have to do is announce our faith and belief in Jesus, and the knowledge of his ways will come. It will not. Said Jesus, "Learn of me" and learning is a process. "Study to show thyself approved" said Paul "rightly dividing the word of truth". The effect of the emotional appeal of a revivalist is too often dissipated and lost when the revivalist has gone; the man who can expound a reasoned and logical presentation of the character of God, of the principles of his laws, of the elements of his unfolding purpose, of his planned destiny for humanity, is the man whose words will linger and give enlightenment to the sincere enquirer and new faith to one who is endeavouring to find the way. One is reminded of the old couplet:

*He who knows not, and knows not that he knows not, is a fool; shun him.
He who knows not, and knows that he knows not, is a child; teach him.
He who knows, and knows not that he knows, is asleep; wake him.
He who knows, and knows that he knows, is wise; follow him.*

NOTICES

Jacob's Trouble. From time to time reference has been made to our booklet under this title which deals in considerable detail with the Bible outline of the events surrounding the experience of Israel at the extreme end of this Age—the "invasion of Gog and Magog" so eloquently described in Ezekiel's foreview (chaps. 38-39). The booklet stresses that Israel will only experience Divine deliverance from the world's hostility when she has renounced all defence by man-made military weapons and trusted herself to the saving power of God, as in certain historic episodes of old. This fact is important when compared with the present position in Israel. Copies of the booklet will be sent free of charge on request accompanied by postage stamps as follows:

	UK	Overseas
Single copy	22p	—
2 copies	32p	One dollar
4 copies	59p	Two dollars

The Spirit of Prophecy. This 50-page booklet deals with the principles governing the Biblical prophetic field, views and descriptions of events yet future, particularly those relating to the end of the Age, suggesting a sane and reasoned method of viewing these passages of Scripture. The successive chapters are: First Principles; Prophetic Foresight; Visions and Dreams; Prediction and Revelation; Avenues of Time. Free for postage as follows:

	UK	Overseas
Single copy	14p	—
2 copies	22p	—
4 copies	32p	One dollar

Important—Overseas readers in the 9000 series. There are a number of readers having serial numbers in the 9000 series from whom we have not heard since 1987. Will all such please be sure to return the pink renewal slip expressing their desire for continuance immediately this issue reaches them; whilst we are always happy to send the Monthly whether or not a money gift is sent—and in many parts, such as Africa and India, the sending of money is difficult or impossible—we do not wish to send where it is not desired. If in such cases no request is received by the end of 1989 we will assume the journal is no longer desired and will cease to send it.

Gone from us

— ❁ —
Bro. F. Shuttleworth (Thirsk)

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

PAUL BEFORE FELIX

No. 17 in a series of
stories of St. Paul

The Roman looked down from his seat of judgment with a barely concealed sneer as the High Priest moved arrogantly across the hall and took his place in the position reserved for complainants, a group of fellow priests surrounding him, and in the forefront a smoothly shaven Greek, Tertullus, a professional advocate who had been engaged to present their case in the fashion customary at a Roman trial. Opposite to them stood the accused, Paul, guarded by two stalwart Roman legionaries, for this was a civil trial and he was appearing before the representative of Cæsar, to be judged according to the laws of Rome.

A nod from Antonius Felix and the trial opened. Tertullus stepped forward, went through the customary formalities of respect to Cæsar and acknowledged the authority of Felix by a subservient inclination of the head. He paused a moment, as though for dramatic effect, and with an expression of self-deprecating subservience addressed the watching Roman. "Seeing that by thee" he began, "we enjoy great quietness and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness".

An expression of grim humour flickered across the eyes of the usually impassive Roman guards. There was not a man in the hall, Roman or Jew, who was not fully aware of the flagrant insincerity of Tertullus' fulsome words, for Antonius Felix was one of the worst governors Judea ever had. By birth a slave, he had been able in company with his brother Pallas to worm himself into the court of Claudius Cæsar, and while Pallas remained as the Emperor's Court favourite, Felix had embarked on a career of provincial administration by which he had handsomely enriched himself. Two years as governor of Samaria had been followed by six years in his present position in Judea, which he ruled, says one historian, "with the authority of a king and the disposition of a slave." Relying on the power of his brother at the Imperial Court, he committed every type of crime without restraint. On the one hand he sent his soldiers against the bandits who infested the country and on the other accepted bribes from them to condone their excesses. The High Priest, Jonathan, one of the few upright and God-fearing High Priests of that troubled period, who had reproved and reasoned with Felix on account of his conduct, was treacherously murdered at his instigation. Felix himself, already married twice, had seduced Drusilla, the young sister of King Agrippa, from her husband and married her. Corruption in high places and flagrant disregard for justice, manifested by this unworthy representative of Empire, was reflected in every

kind of violence in the land. Josephus says that it was at this time God turned away from his people because of their wickedness and left them to the fate which befell them ten years later, when Titus destroyed their cities and scattered the nation. Small wonder if the listening soldiers smiled ironically and the Jewish priests writhed inwardly as Felix accepted the undeserved compliments with a complacent smile. Ananias himself, who had seized the High Priesthood illegally after the death of Jonathan, must have remembered for a moment how his predecessor had been murdered by this man now sitting on the seat of judgment, and realised how insecure he himself might be. But his hatred of Paul overshadowed all other considerations and he turned his attention again to what Tertullus had to say.

"Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee" the suave voice went on "I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words". It is possible that at this point Tertullus detected a trace of impatience in the Governor's attitude and decided that the courtesies had been sufficiently observed. He plunged forthwith into the accusation. The charge was threefold, to wit, that the prisoner was, first, an inciter to sedition amongst the Jews, second, a ringleader of the Nazarene sect, third, a profaner of the Temple. He disowned responsibility for the matter being obtruded upon Felix' august attention; they would have dealt with the offender themselves had not the *chiliarch*—commander—Lysias "with great violence" taken Paul out of their hands and sent him to Felix, but now the matter had thus become the subject of an official investigation, well, Felix could examine the prisoner himself and realise the truth of all that Tertullus had been saying.

The next step in the Roman judicial code was the production of witnesses and the hearing of their statements. Felix waited. The ensuing pause must have constituted something of an anti-climax to Tertullus' noble effort on behalf of his employers. Most regrettably, there were no witnesses. Ananias and his fellow priests had not been present at the time of the riot in the Temple. The Asiatic Jews who caused all the trouble and were the only ones who could offer any evidence had long since gone home and by now were well on their way to Ephesus or Lystra or Iconium and had probably lost all interest in the matter. The only possible witness now available was the Jerusalem garrison commander Claudius Lysias, and he was not likely to be helpful to their side of the case. So after a moment of silence a babble of priestly voices rang out, assuring the governor that all Tertullus had said was true and the prisoner could be

condemned and sentenced without further ado.

Felix regarded them with sardonic disdain. He knew these Jews—he ought to, having governed them long enough. He had no illusions and probably saw through them at once. He looked now at the prisoner and made a peremptory sign with his hand. Paul had permission to speak.

Of course Paul also knew the character of the governor but quite evidently had no intention of trying to placate him by flattery nor shew resentment at being arraigned before him. He treated him simply and solely as the rightful representative of law and order and the man authorised to hear the case and pronounce the verdict. His opening statement is a masterpiece of respectful courtesy without servility. *"Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself"*. It is very likely that his evident respect for Felix' position, coupled with the total absence of either fear or flattery, evoked the governor's interest as no other attitude would have done. He was not used to men who neither cringed before him nor sought to propitiate him. The length of Paul's recorded defence compared with the brevity of Tertullus' accusation indicates that Felix must have given serious attention to the Apostle's words, any trace of possible former impatience gone. The impatience now would have been among Ananias and his fellows.

In quiet and logical fashion Paul met the three accusations with a calm and unequivocal denial. He refuted the charge of sedition by reminding Felix that from his own knowledge of Jewish custom he would know that Pentecost was only twelve days in the past; Paul had arrived in the country just in time to attend the feast and one could not preach much sedition in twelve days. As to the question of profaning the Temple, he flatly denied it and declared that they could not point to any possible action on his part which could be so construed. The third accusation, that he was a ringleader of the sect of Nazarenes, needed no defence, for that was no crime in the eyes of Rome. Christianity was, at that time, just as legal a religion as Judaism. Tertullus, for all his professional acumen, had slipped up when he included this particular charge at a Roman trial. *"But"* said Paul, *"this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers . . . and have hope . . . that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust"*. Here is Paul back on his main theme, the purpose of God in relation to the destiny of man; but this time he was preaching, not to the Jews who had already rejected the testimony, but to one man, the guilt-laden judge who occupied the bench above him. So he desisted from further explanation of his mission

and explained the circumstances of his coming to Judea, how he came to bring alms to his fellow Jews and to undergo purification rites in the Temple and concluded by claiming, what the governor was probably already thinking inwardly, that the people who raised the original riot should have been present to accuse him if they had anything against him.

Felix made up his mind. He must have already given weight to his subordinate's estimation of the prisoner's innocence and saw no reason to differ from Lysias' conclusions. And there was probably another factor also. Luke says that when Felix heard these things, *"having more perfect knowledge of that Way"* he ended the proceedings. *"The Way"* was the expression used in those early days for the incipient Christian community everywhere. *"Brethren of the Way"* they called themselves and were so known by others. Somehow, in some manner, Felix had acquired a knowledge of the distinctive features of the faith that Paul was now proclaiming before him. He saw, more clearly than Ananias had given him credit for, the real reason for their hostility to the prisoner, and he was not prepared to hand Paul over to his enemies. At the same time he saw no reason why he should offend the Jewish priestly hierarchy unnecessarily. He closed the proceedings by saying that he would defer his decision until Lysias should have occasion to visit Caesarea and until then the prisoner would be kept in custody. Baulked again of their prey, Ananias and his fellows had to return to Jerusalem, sullenly furious at their lack of success and doubtless reflecting on the improbability of Felix doing much more about the matter. In that they were right, for Paul was not brought to trial again during Felix' term of office.

For the next two years Paul was held in a kind of preventive custody which shielded him from physical danger but gave him full liberty of intercourse with his friends. It is tolerably certain that Luke remained with him and in fact there is every probability that it was during this time Luke gathered the materials for his Gospel, which was yet to be written. So far as is known this was his only visit to Judea; he would have ample opportunity to visit the scenes of Jesus' earthly life and to talk with those who had seen and known him. The intimate details of our Lord's birth, so carefully recorded, could only have been gathered in personal conversation with his mother Mary, and it is very probable that the Gospel according to St. Luke was actually written during this two years of Paul's imprisonment.

This chapter in the Apostle's life was not to be closed without shewing up in sharp relief the tragedy of a man who caught the vision of eternity but could not bring himself to break from his own

base vices in order to embrace it. Luke tells how Felix and his wife Drusilla had frequent conversations with Paul "concerning the faith in Christ". There must have been some remnant of primitive nobility in this man, corrupted as he was by riches and power and self-indulgence, which responded to the shining faith of his prisoner and he wanted to know more about it. But he could not face the implications. As Paul "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled and answered, 'Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season I will call for thee' ". He thought of his own misdeeds, the grasping cupidity which had made him rich by extortion and theft, of his hands stained with the blood of innocent men. He looked upon the woman at his side whom he had stolen from her lawful husband, and he shrank from the implications of the Apostle's measured words. He half believed in the truth of Paul's declaration that every man must one day render an account of the deeds done in the body and he perhaps understood in measure the logic of Paul's insistence that God is working for the ultimate good of all creation but that every man himself has a part to play; but he thought of his immediate tastes and desires and he could not forego them. He trembled when he reflected on the possibility of judgment to come and there may have awakened in his dark nature some feeble desire for the peace and happiness that righteousness and temperance can bring, but again the pull of the present dragged him back and he turned away from the shining vision. And as he returned to the darkness his habitual cupidity reasserted itself and he began to cherish the hope that Paul or Paul's friends might offer a money bribe for the Apostle's release. So he kept up the conversations but all the time was receding farther away from the gleam of light he had but barely seen. And there was no money forthcoming. Paul would have scorned such a

method of securing his release, and both the official and personal life of Felix went on as before.

But judgment came, as Paul had declared, and sooner perhaps than either of them expected. "After two years" says Luke briefly "Porcius Festus came into Felix' room". He offers no explanation, but history tells all. Felix, at last, had gone too far. There was always jealousy and strife between the Jews and the Greeks of Caesarea and riots were not uncommon. Toward the end of that two years a more than usually serious riot developed and Felix used this as an excuse for throwing his troops in, on the side of the Greeks, with tacit permission to plunder the houses of the wealthier Jews. He himself, of course, stood to receive a considerable portion of the loot. In despair at this latest example of the governor's rapacity, a deputation of leading Jerusalem Jews set sail for Rome to protest to the Emperor. Claudius, under whom Felix had originally risen to power, had been dead for some years and Nero was Emperor. Felix was peremptorily recalled to Rome to stand trial and Porcius Festus sent to Judea as his successor. Not many months before Paul himself set out for Rome, Felix with his wife, Drusilla, and their young son, left Judea in disgrace to face the Emperor's anger. It seems that he escaped with his life but was stripped of all office and made to disgorge his ill-gotten gains. After that nothing is known about the couple and they evidently died in obscurity.

In what was perhaps a last unavailing attempt to placate the Jews, Felix, on his departure, "willing to shew the Jews a pleasure" for perhaps the first time in his life, "left Paul bound". Thus it was that a man of very different stamp, upright, just, and a firm administrator of Roman justice, Porcius Festus, landing at Caesarea to take up his duties as Governor of Judea, found a prisoner waiting for him and a civil trial on his hands.

(To be continued)

Faith on trial

The trial of our faith, to which the Lord and the Apostles refer, is a trial, not only of our intellectual recognition of Divine Truth, but also our heart reliance upon God. In both respects every true child of God will find his faith severely tried. As a soldier of Christ let him not fail to be armed for the conflict. If an attack is made upon the intellectual foundation of our faith we should see to it that we have a "thus saith the Lord" for every item of our belief. If the foundations of faith become unsettled, the superstructure cannot stand when the winds and floods of adversity and temptation beat against it. It is your faith that is on trial now. In the

calmer days when the sun of favour shone brightly upon you, you were quietly laying the foundation of a knowledge of the truth, and rearing the superstructure of Christian character. Now you are in the furnace to be proved: summon therefore all your courage; fortify your patience; nerve yourself to endurance; hold fast to your hope; call to mind the promises, they are still yours; and cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him," and faith has gained her victory.

GOOD-TIME CHRISTIANS

"The king made a feast . . . in the court of the garden of the king's palace; where were white, green and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble; the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black, marble." (Esth. 1. 5-6.)

Words of ease and comfort! What a pleasant place must have been that Persian court in which the Jewish maiden found herself reigning as Queen! Life must have been very comfortable and the ugly things of the world kept at a safe distance—until Haman brought her face to face with reality.

That is the position of the good-time Christian. There are so many fellowships and groups which have rendered Christian service in past years which now stand in grave danger of degeneration into a community of such. The world is becoming such an ugly and unsympathetic kind of place that the temptation for us to withdraw into our own circle and enjoy ourselves in our own way was never stronger. And it seems so obvious a way of being "in the world but not of it", especially when we are getting on in years and continued disappointments and disillusionments remind us that the placid backwaters of study and meditation on the river of Divine Truth do not rock the boat so much as the turbulent main stream of evangelism and witness. After all, we reason, we are older than we were twenty, thirty, or forty years ago. The Devil is always very solicitous about our advancing years and counsels us not to strain our failing powers too much. And so there are meetings at which the faithful gather together to listen to "a very lovely song of one that hath a very pleasant voice, and that can play well upon an instrument" (see Ezek. 33. 32) and after the service to shake hands and congratulate one another on the good time they have had. The pity of it all is that there is such sincerity and real love for the Lord manifested in this; there is no denying the thoroughness of the consecration to God and the desire to be true copy-likenesses of his Son. That is not the issue at all. The real trouble is that having secured our own assurance of heavenly glory we fail to remain imbued with the passionate longing to bring others into the same happy condition. It is essential that we have our conventions, our gatherings, our Bible studies and our fellowship. These things are the breath of life

to us and they play an important part in our spiritual development. But do not let us use them as a means of escape from the obligations resting upon us of being lights in the world. Do not let the wealth of good things that we enjoy at the Lord's table so dull our senses that we do not realise our responsibility of ministering these same things to others outside. The Christian faith is a missionary faith; the Christian group that ceases to evangelise eventually ceases to exist. Whilst it can be argued that such must be the ultimate fate of the Church in the end of this Age, it must also be pointed out that our Master has not entrusted us with the task of ending the Church's earthly career. A soldier is expected to be prepared to die for his country if and when necessary, but his true duty is to avoid death as long as possible and keep himself in such condition that he can inflict the maximum of damage upon the enemy before he does have to yield up his life. And is it so very different in the Christian Church? Is not our Lord best pleased with those who are constantly on the alert for the first appearance of the enemy that they might be ready to leap up and engage him in mortal combat? Else why are we bidden to emulate the Roman soldier and stand, arrayed in the complete armour of God, ready to suffer hardship and sacrifice, that we may please him who hath called us—to be a soldier?

It is in that spirit we can make a sober appraisal of our position and resolve that we will by our lives and our works give a good witness to the world in which we live, a world which is rapidly going to pieces before our eyes, a world which contains men and women—millions of them—who sadly need the oil of joy and the garments of praise which we can give them? Let us take strength from our fellowship and studies together and give that strength to those around us, that we may prepare, even though in only slight degree, for the Kingdom that is to come. Let us take an intelligent interest in our fellow-beings, Christians and non-Christians, the converted and the non-converted, taking to each the message that is most appropriate in the particular case, according to the opportunities we have or can make. Let us resolve that we shall not rest until we find work to do for the Master that is going to cost us something in labour and sacrifice and vitality. We are destined to deal with all men in the Millennial Age so near at hand; a little practice now will not come amiss.

Do we begin to wonder why it is that no man yet knoweth "the day and the hour?" Let us then remember that the same all-wise Father Who for

our encouragement and strength has given us the signs of the times has by that same wisdom withholden the times of the signs.

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE1 Kin. 22
2 Kin. 1**5. The Captains of Fifty**

And now for something like six years that mysterious man was nowhere to be found. Mark how he had denounced that wicked King Ahab over the affair of Naboth's vineyard and predicted his violent end, and too, of that evil Queen Jezebel. Then he had vanished, just as he had done on previous occasions, and nobody knew where he was. And although for three years there was peace between Israel and Syria and that wicked Ahab probably flattered himself that the danger was past and he could relax at ease with his ill-gotten gains yet the judgments of God cannot be thwarted and at the end of the three years he persuaded good king Jehoshaphat of Judah to join him in an offensive against the Syrians to recover the district of Ramoth-gilead which he had lost to them many years before. And this was his undoing for in the battle he lost his life and the prediction of Elijah that the pariah dogs of the city would one day lick his blood in the place where the innocent Naboth was stoned to death came true. So that wicked Ahab came to his foretold end and his eldest son Ahaziah reigned in his stead.

Now Ahaziah was as godless a man as had been his father and he had his mother that evil Queen Jezebel by his side to abet him in his wickedness. Neither did he learn by the fate of his father that the God of Israel cannot be defied with impunity. He must have known of the affair of Naboth's vineyard but he would have been a lad of ten years of age or less at the time of the three years' famine and the demonstration of the true God on Mount Carmel and so he probably either never gave that story thought or if he did, dismissed it as a fable. And so the chronicler says he walked in the way of his father and mother and like them made Israel to sin.

Now the judgments of God come in different ways and sometimes unexpected. This godless Ahaziah had been king for less than two years when he fell out of an upstairs window of his palace in Samaria, and was picked up badly injured. Did he in this extremity remember that the Lord God of Israel would heal those who placed their faith in him and were loyal to his Covenant. He did not; or if he did he placed no faith in the promise. He sent messengers instead to the Philistine town of Ekron in the south, seventy miles away, to enquire and supplicate at the shrine of Ekron's pagan god Baal-zebub for recovery. And whether the messengers believed in their hearts that Baal-zebub would do anything about it or even whether he could, they set out because it was the king's command.

And as they went, they came face to face with a terrifying apparition, a giant of a man, goatskin

clad, muscular hands grasping a stout staff, penetrating eyes that burned into their very souls, and as they stood they realised they were facing that man who had been such a plague to their former king, that wicked Ahab, the man no one had seen for six years past and no one knew whether he was alive or dead. Now here he was, and very much alive. They stood, and feared, and waited.

"Go, turn again to the king that sent you, and say unto him, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that thou sendest to enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? Therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou hast gone up, but shalt surely die'".

Then he was gone. Adroitly, so swiftly that the eye could scarcely follow, that awesome figure had moved off the highway into the bushes and trees which lined its sides, and they saw him no more. The road to the south lay open before them. But see now those scared and somewhat thoughtful men. They had received the answer they sought, but not from the source they expected. Some of them began to remember how the past predictions of this same Elijah had come true, and the more they thought about the matter the less they liked it until with one accord they turned themselves and retracted their steps to tell the king what had happened.

Now see this godless king as he listens. Imagine his brows contracting as he regards his messengers. *"What manner of man was he which came up to meet you?"* he demands. They tell him. A look of incredulity, and then of realisation, passes over his face. *"It is Elijah the Tishbite!"*

Those few words, set out in cold print in the story, cannot convey the tone in which that godless Ahaziah spoke. Was it of fear? Was it of scorn? Was it of enmity? It might have been any one of these. And his inner thoughts at that moment may hold the key to the rest of the story. At any rate, he sent a detachment of fifty men with their captain to command Elijah to appear before him. *"And behold, he sat upon the top of an hill. And (the captain) spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down".* And Elijah looked at him and he said *"If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty".* And fire came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. Now that was a very strange and incomprehensible thing for Elijah to do, and quite out of keeping with his character, and it will take some explaining. Especially since when that godless king heard what had happened he quite casually sent another fifty men and they suffered the same fate and then he sent fifty more. And

the third time Elijah did come down.

Now it is not reasonable to think that God would destroy a hundred men wantonly and casually when they were only doing their duty to their king. There is something in this story which does not appear in the recorded narrative and that something has to be found by looking for clues. And there are two clues. One is that this godless king, knowing as he must have done of the power of this Elijah and the terror he inspired in his father Ahab, would be most unlikely to summon him into his own presence only to hear the words of judgment he would surely pronounce. He may have, and did, tell his men to bring Elijah to him but there could be something in the story which implied that he did not expect to see him. The other is that cryptic word the angel of the Lord said to Elijah respecting the third fifty with their captain, who pleaded for his life. *"Go down with him; be not afraid of him"*. Why should Elijah be less afraid of this one than of his predecessors?

Was this godless Ahaziah repeating what his mother Jezebel had done when she sent messengers to Elijah threatening his life after the scene on Mount Carmel many years before? Is it possible that Ahaziah indicated to the captains that if Elijah did consent to come and if he should most inexplicably meet with a fatal accident whilst in their care so that the king would never see him face to face, then the king would not blame them in any way but just regard the whole thing as a regrettable accident. And if it was that these captains and warriors were themselves Baal worshippers as was their king they too might have no objection to such a removal of a disturbing prophet from their midst! After all, why send fifty men when one single messenger would have been sufficient, and if the third captain was sent with the same hint but he happened to be an adherent of the God of Israel and determined that he would have no part in such a scheme but would deliver Elijah safe and sound to the king and leave him to sort things out in his own way, then there could be an explanation of why Elijah was told he had nothing to fear from the third captain where by implication he did have something to fear from the others.

Now if this was indeed the position then these unfortunate men only suffered the same fate as the four hundred priests of Baal at the time of the Mount Carmel incident, and for the same reason, their adoption of Baal worship with all its degrading practices. And after all, when one comes to think of it, what is the difference between their fate and that of those in our own day and age who adopt the same practices and die of a foul disease in consequence? Why blame the Lord for a fate one willingly brings upon oneself? And whether that fate be by the agency of a lightning flash—which is the meaning of the "fire from heaven" in the story—or by the ravages of disease, does not make any essen-

tial difference, except that the lightning flash is quicker and to that extent more merciful.

So Elijah went down with the third captain knowing that he would certainly be conducted in safety and stand before that godless king Ahaziah. And so he did. And Ahaziah must have cringed when he saw him come in, for he knew what he was going to say.

"Thus saith the Lord: Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron, is it because there is no God in Israel to enquire of his word? Therefore thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shall surely die".

Then he was gone, and no man stayed his going. And, says the chronicler *"so he died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken"*.

Just one more declaration of judgment upon the guilty, and Elijah's work was done. And this time it was not a king of Israel, but one of Judah, the nation which on the whole did remain more faithful to God than their kinsmen of the Ten Tribes. But now some thirteen years had passed, and good king Jehoshaphat had gone to his fathers, and his son Jehoram reigned over Judah, and he did not follow the ways of his father, but *"walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab, for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife; and he wrought that which was evil in the sight of the Lord"*. And so the people of Judah, following the example of their king and queen, became as was the nation of Israel under Ahab and Jezebel. And the Lord declared that the penalty of the violated Covenant must come.

So, one day, King Jehoram received a letter. It was from Elijah the prophet, hidden away somewhere in the northern mountains of Israel. *"Thus saith the Lord"* it said, *"Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, but hast walked in the ways of the kings of Israel . . . behold, with a great plague will the Lord smite thy people . . . and thou shalt have great sickness by disease . . ."* And the plagues came, and the disease, for the Philistines and the Arabians and the Ethiopians invaded his land, and took away all the treasures of the palace, and his wives, and all his sons save one, *"and after all this the Lord smote him with an incurable disease"*.

"And it came to pass, that in process of time, after two years . . . he died of sore diseases . . . and he departed without being desired".

For some thirty years, Elijah the Tishbite had been the scourge of kings, reproving them for their faithlessness and declaring judgment soon to come. Now the time was near at hand when, to quote words to be created eight centuries after he was to sleep with his fathers, he was to rest from his labours, but his works continue. *To be concluded.*

THE TEN PLAGUES OF EGYPT

A two-part series

Part I Nine Plagues

In the seventh year of the reign of Amenhotep II, Pharaoh of all Egypt, the empire having attained a pinnacle of power and glory that had not been known before, the land being adorned with palaces and temples, monuments and works of architecture the admiration of all nations, there occurred a succession of unparalleled disasters which humbled the pride of Egypt to the dust and left the nation stunned and sorrowing. With a mighty hand and stretched out arm the Almighty, the Eternal, delivered the children of Israel from bondage that as a dedicated people they might serve him without restraint or hindrance in a land of their own.

The Ten Plagues of Egypt stand as one of the spectacular events of Old Testament history. The extent to which the fearful calamities described in Exodus were freaks of Nature or miraculous interventions of God has been a subject of debate for centuries but there is no denying the reality of the happenings. The fame of them spread to the nations round about. Israel never forgot them; they formed the subject of triumphal song and poetry for generations after the events. Two of the Psalms of David, Psalms 78 and 105, memorialise the Ten Plagues as examples of the irresistible judgments of God. The Philistines, four centuries afterwards, when faced with the spectacle of the Ark of God brought into battle against them, told each other that here were the gods which smote the Egyptians with Plagues that long time ago. (1 Sam. 4. 8). Such was the impression left upon the minds of men by those unprecedented disasters, the cumulative effect of which finally persuaded Pharaoh to let Israel go.

The difference between these plagues being natural events or their being direct acts of God is not so marked when it is realised that "miracles" can only be such in the eyes of those who do not understand the processes involved. The dictionary definition of "miracle" is a wonder or marvel or supernatural event. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a supernatural event unless the term is used in the sense of that which is not of this terrestrial world. All the processes of Nature are controlled in the last place by God and the fact that men may not understand the whole of those processes does not make them any the less natural. The ancients credited any happening they did not understand to the intervention of God but many of such are well understood to-day and no longer require direct supernormal Divine intervention to account for them. The word "miracle" in the Old Testament means merely a sign or a wonder; in the New Testament it is the translation of two words

one of which means a sign and the other an act of power. It is only necessary therefore to accept the fact that the Most High, in his administration of the affairs of his creation, orders and exerts natural forces to accomplish his special designs at any particular moment in time. The plagues on Egypt may very well have been manifestations of phenomena, on an unusual scale, already known to the Egyptians; the super-normal aspect lay in the timing of the events whereby they came at the moment necessary to effect a desired result and this timing constituted a direct intervention. The fact that any remarkable incident recorded in the Scripture as caused or directed by God for a definite purpose can often be shown as a relatively natural phenomenon does not detract in the slightest from its "miraculous" nature. It is a sign, a wonder, occurring at a particular moment, to bring about some desired result in connection with the Divine Plan.

It is probable that Moses came away from his second interview with Pharaoh with this impression on his mind. God would now exert his mighty power to deliver Israel; Moses was sure of that. He would do it by the powers of Nature let loose in much more than their usual intensity, until Pharaoh would give the people their freedom. Moses was sure of that too. He did not know, as yet, just how the great event was to be brought about, but he did know that in times gone past God had sent his judgment upon the earth by a flood of waters, and again by a holocaust of fire, and he was ready now for whatever might betide.

So there came a morning when Pharaoh with his court went down to the brink of the river and found Moses and Aaron waiting for him. The prophets sternly reminded the monarch of his refusal to acknowledge the Lord and release his people and told him that in consequence the waters of the river were to be turned into blood. Aaron stretched his staff over the water, and "*all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood, and the fish that was in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river.*" (7. 21-22).

If the plagues were in fact amplifications of natural customary happenings, the sequence of events can best be understood if it is considered that this first act of Moses took place in the June before the Exodus. At this time of year the Nile is normally in full flood, and in ancient times inundated the land, to the satisfaction of the population, who depended upon this annual inundation for the growth of their crops. In recognition of this vital part played by the river in the country's welfare an

annual ceremony, the "festival of the Nile", in which Pharaoh took a leading part, was conducted at the riverside on 12th June, and worship was offered to the Nile-god. It might well be that the statement in 7. 15 "Get thee unto Pharaoh in the morning, lo, he goeth out unto the water; and thou shalt stand by the river's brink . . ." is a reference to this festival, and if so this definitely fixes the time of the first plague as June.

It is only necessary to understand the narrative to imply that the waters took on a blood-red colour, not that the whole mighty river and its streams and canals were literally transformed into actual blood. This conclusion is evidenced by verse 24 which states that the Egyptians "digged round about the river for water to drink; for they could not drink of the water of the river." Whatever it was that made the water objectionable was filtered out as it percolated through the soil along the river's margin so that the people, digging, found drinkable water. Had it been literal blood it would of course still have been blood even after passing through the soil. It is said by observers of Egyptian natural phenomena, with minor variations of detail, that the Nile has a greenish tint before the annual inundation; as the waters rise it becomes clear, and then for about three weeks or so it takes on a reddish tinge due to the presence of vast quantities of minute plant life of a red colour, originating from the tropical regions from which the river comes. In extreme cases these masses of algae cause the river to take on a deep blood-red colour and on such occasions the water has an offensive smell. If this be a fact then the first plague was simply a most extreme case of a happening which was familiar to the Egyptians; the rapidity with which it occurred at the raising of Aaron's rod, and perhaps the unusually widespread extent of the red water, "upon their streams" (rivers) "upon their rivers" (canals) "and upon their ponds" (cisterns) "and upon all their pools" (reservoirs) marked the occurrence as a visitation from God. Perhaps because the affliction was recognised as no more than an extreme and very inconvenient case of a common occurrence it does not seem to have worried Pharaoh a great deal; he probably reasoned that it would soon pass anyway. In the meantime the magicians were called in to see what they could do to help matters.

It is commonly assumed that the expression in 7. 22 "And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments" means that they mimicked Moses by also turning water into blood. How they could do so when all the rivers, streams, canals and reservoirs in Egypt had already been thus treated is not explained. In fact what the magicians really tried to do was to reverse the process and make Moses' act of no effect. The word translated "did so" is

"*lahatim*" which comes from "*lahat*", to burn or set on fire. The meaning is that the magicians carried out ceremonies and incantations involving the use of lustral fires and burning incense, in supplication to their gods to have the affliction removed. To use a modern slang phrase which nevertheless accurately expresses the meaning of the original, the magicians "did their stuff". It is not stated either that they succeeded or failed, but the fact that verse 25 volunteers the information that the river remained in this condition for seven days appears to point to the latter.

It should be noticed here that in the first three plagues the magicians appeared, and in each case it will be seen that they endeavoured to counteract the plague, and failed. At the third attempt they declared that the hand of God was in the thing and withdrew; they are mentioned no more. The first three plagues affected Israel in common with Egypt; after that Israel was immune from the remaining plagues. It seems as though the early plagues partook largely of the nature of natural events which in lesser measure had often afflicted the land previously, but as the series progressed so the supernatural element became more and more marked, the hand of God becoming increasingly manifest until in the final blow, the simultaneous death of the firstborn, there could be no natural explanation whatever.

A month or so passed by before the second plague. As the Nile inundation reaches its maximum the frogs become evident and the people normally take but little notice of them. This time they did. Perhaps because of the unusual conditions, the river choked up with vegetable organisms left over from the first plague, the quantities of dead fish involved as remarked in 7. 21, and the abnormal climatic conditions which had brought this condition about originally, the frogs were breeding in enormous and unheard of quantities. The Hebrew word in 8. 3 "bring forth (frogs) abundantly" is *sharats*, which means to swarm as though in uncontrolled numbers. This was the immediate visible consequence of Aaron's rod being stretched for the second time over the river. The frogs "came up" and covered the land, entering into the houses and even into the ovens and domestic utensils. Again were the magicians summoned; they "did so" with their enchantments, tried everything in the rules of their art to overcome the plague, but nothing they did had any effect; the waves of little creatures came steadily on.

This time Pharaoh did take notice. "Entreat the Lord, that he may take away the frogs from me, and from my people; and I will let the people go" (8. 8). Moses wanted to establish beyond all dispute that the removal of the frogs would be due to God and

not just in the natural course of things and so he bade Pharaoh name his own time for the act to be performed. "Tomorrow" said Pharaoh. Moses prayed to the Lord and on the morrow the frogs died out everywhere except in their natural habitat, the river. "And they gathered them together upon heaps; and the land stank". The coming of the frogs may well have been an extension of the customary natural process; the manner of their going was assuredly an act of Divine intervention.

But Pharaoh changed his mind and would not let the people go.

October had dawned before the third plague struck. The account does not tell of further interviews with Pharaoh, but it is probable that the onset of each plague was preceded by a formal demand to Pharaoh, a demand which was brusquely refused. Perhaps six or eight weeks had passed since the frogs had been cleared from the land; now the well known form of Aaron was seen extending his rod, not this time over the river, but over the fields, and presently with a swift, decisive movement, striking downward to the earth. And from that earth there began to arise clouds of minute insects—lice in the A.V.—insects which multiplied and filled the air to such an extent that it seemed as if the very dust of the earth was itself being transformed into those masses of tiny flying creatures. So the plague of the lice upon the Egyptians was very great.

The account says that it was the dust of the earth which produced the lice; "all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt." (8. 17). It is said that as the rising Nile waters, toward the end of the inundation, begin to flood over the agricultural lands millions of insect pupa—flies and midges of all kinds—which have been deposited in the soft soil during the dry weather come forth into life and take to the air; it is almost as if the dust is bringing forth. The plague of lice might well therefore be another well-known happening distinguished only by the enormous scale on which it occurred on this occasion. Never before, the Egyptians might have thought, had the country known so tremendous a visitation of flying insects.

"And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not; so there were lice upon man and upon beast. Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, *This is the finger of God.*" (8. 18-19). Once more the familiar ceremonies and rituals were performed but to no better avail than before. The A.V. reads as though they tried to emulate Aaron and themselves "bring forth" lice, but this is the exact opposite of the real meaning. "Bring forth" here is *hatsa*, which means to send away, to cause an exit, to bring out or draw forth, and means that the magicians tried to cast the lice out or send them away. They failed, and, says the

narrator, "so there were lice upon man and upon beast". Despite all that the magicians could do, the lice remained. Incidentally notice should be taken of the difference in meaning of "bring forth" in 8. 3 which as noted above is *sharats*, to swarm, and "bring forth", *hatsa*, in the verse now under review.

The magicians gave up. "This is the finger of God" they told Pharaoh. Three attempts to counteract the power of Aaron had all failed and they had had enough. They took no further part in the proceedings. Nevertheless Pharaoh still refused to let the people go.

There now comes a significant development. The remaining plagues did not affect the land of Goshen, which was inhabited mainly by Israelites. The natural aspect of these visitations was becoming more and more overshadowed by signs of direct Divine intervention. This, declared Moses, was an evidence of the power of God, making a distinction between Egypt and Israel. From now on Egypt was to be driven more and more into a corner from which there could be no escape. From now on, following the defection of the magicians, Pharaoh was probably losing the support of his councillors, his nobles and his people to an increasing degree. But he was not ready to give in yet.

One hundred and twenty days after the 12th of June—four months—it was the custom to hold what was called the second festival of the Nile, to celebrate the successful culmination of the inundation. From now on the waters would cease to rise and presently, as they receded, the peasants would rejoicingly commence sowing crops in the rich sediment left on their land by the departing waters. It is almost certain that it is this second festival to which reference is made in 8. 20, in which, after the third plague, the Lord says to Moses "Rise up early in the morning, stand before Pharaoh. Lo, he cometh forth to the water; and say unto him . . ." In the ordinary way this day was a great national holiday with Pharaoh as the chief figure giving public thanks to the Nile-god for his beneficent work for the year. It must have been with considerable chagrin on this November morning that Amenhotep, surrounded by his court, came down to the river and found Moses waiting for him again.

Once more the demand: "Let my people go . . . else, if thou wilt not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies upon thee . . ." So the fourth plague came, and all the houses of the Egyptians were filled with what has been variously considered either a particularly virulent species of dog-fly, or else the flying beetle, the scarab beetle which to the Egyptians was the symbol of life. Pharaoh showed the first sign of cracking; he offered to let the people go and sacrifice to the Lord in the wilderness provided they did not go very far away.

The plague was lifted, and Pharaoh broke his promise.

Inevitably there came the fifth plague. In December or perhaps early January a widespread epidemic of disease decimated the Egyptians' cattle. "*But of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one*". The effect of previous plagues probably contributed to the inability of the cattle to withstand disease. The expression in 9. 6 "*all the cattle of Egypt died*" need not be interpreted too strictly; in vs. 19 they still had some left. The intention clearly is to indicate that by far the larger proportion succumbed; Egypt was left virtually without cattle.

The pestilence raged for perhaps a month, and was then superseded by a greater horror, an epidemic of eruptive boils breaking forth upon man as well as beast. Perhaps the very magnitude of the calamity made effective medical treatment for any but a very few of the population impossible; men and women suffered without hope.

And now the pace of events is noticeably quickening. The boils on men followed hard on the pestilence among the cattle. Before the people could begin to find measure of relief there fell upon them the seventh plague, a fearful succession of violent storms of thunder and lightning, with torrential hailstones which flattened the young growing crops and broke down the trees. Egypt normally has very little rain; storms such as this must have been quite unknown. In fact the chronicler declares (9. 24) there had been nothing like it since Egypt became a nation. The time of year is clearly indicated, for the barley was in the ear, the flax was in blossom, and the wheat and rye were not yet grown, (31-32), which points to mid-February or early March. It is likely therefore that these three plagues, pestilence, boils and storms finished up with all three afflicting Egypt more or less simultaneously, for there is no indication of any of the three being lifted as with earlier ones. Pharaoh's nerve really began to give way under this crushing burden. He "*sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time*"—a masterly understatement—"the Lord is righteous and I and my people are wicked. *Entreat the Lord, (for it is enough) that there be no more mighty thunders and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer.*" (9. 27, 28). And Moses besought the Lord, and the Lord removed the plagues, and when Pharaoh had received of the goodness of the Lord, his heart hardened itself yet more, and he would not let Israel go.

Within a fortnight, by the middle of March at latest, the locusts came. Locusts have always been a plague to Eastern lands. Even to-day they are a grave menace and the most modern extermination methods are often powerless against them. In all

Old Testament imagery nothing is more descriptive of universal utter destruction than the coming of locusts. The Egyptians had no illusions as to what such a visitation meant, and when Moses stood before Pharaoh and declared that if he still refused to let Israel go the Lord would send locusts so numerous that men would no longer be able to see the ground under their feet, and everything that the previous plagues had left they would eat up and strip the land bare, Pharaoh's servants were stricken with terror. "*How long shall this man be a snare to us?*" they cried to the obstinate monarch. "*Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God: knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?*" (10.7). It is obvious that popular support for Pharaoh's policy was by now non-existent; the people of Egypt wanted nothing else but to see the last of the Israelites and the wrath of their powerful God. Pharaoh himself was apprehensive; he sent for Moses and Aaron and tried to negotiate terms. Moses was not prepared to negotiate. Unconditional surrender to his demands was the only thing he would accept and his opponent, furious, had them driven from his presence.

By the time the locusts had finished, Egypt was destroyed. "*There remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt*" (10. 15). Such of the growing crops as had escaped the hail had now been consumed by the locusts and there was no food either for man or beast. Without doubt the year of the Exodus was a famine year for Egypt and in fact it must have been many years before the losses suffered in the Plagues were made good. Pharaoh, horrified, besought Moses in haste; "*entreat the Lord your God that he may take away from me this death only*" but it is to be feared he was only concerned with the immediate calamity, for directly the west wind blew and carried all the locusts away into the sea he reverted to his old intransigence, "*he would not let the children of Israel go*". Though his empire crash in ruins around his feet and his subjects perish, the proud Amen-hotep refused to bow the knee to this despised Hebrew.

Reaction was swift. The day of deliverance was very near in the Divine calendar, perhaps not more than a week or so away. Nothing can stay the execution of God's decree once his clock strikes the hour. The locusts had hardly been swept clear of Egypt when the stupefying darkness which was the ninth plague spread over the land, a darkness so profound that "*they saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days; but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings*" (10. 23).

It was probably the same west wind that expelled the locusts which brought the darkness. Round about March each year there is frequently a strong

south-west wind from the deserts bringing clouds of fine sand, blowing in spells of two to three days at a time. The sandstorms are so dense that on occasion they blot out the sun and it is quite conceivable that a particularly thick and sufficiently widespread sandstorm could produce the total darkness upon the earth which is stated of this plague. The fact that the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were, was unaffected, strengthens the case for thinking this was the cause of the darkness. Goshen lay farthest away from the western deserts and would be least likely in the natural order to suffer from such visitations.

Once more Moses and Aaron trod the familiar road to the palace, both of them more confident

than ever, Pharaoh more edgy and apprehensive than ever. He was ready to concede all their demands but one; they must leave their flocks and herds behind. To do that would have been a virtual death sentence on the host; their flocks and herds were essential to their sustenance whilst in the wilderness and Moses rejected the proposal with scorn.

"*There shalt not an hoof be left behind*" he asserted flatly and at that Pharaoh lost his temper and ordered Moses to see his face no more "*for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die*".

"*Thou hast spoken well*" said Moses curtly. "*I will see thy face again no more.*"

(*To be concluded*)

CHANGED INTO HIS LIKENESS

An exhortation

Jesus Christ was born a Jew; the vehicle of his earthly life was that of a Jew, subject to the national and hereditary characteristics of the race, but having the spirit of his Father within. There must have been, as He grew, a certain adjustment, a development towards a perfect balance, a perfect sensitive obedience to the Father. It could not have been easy, living in this world of very "human" beings. There must have been many ways in which He "learned obedience" before He came to the age of thirty and took upon himself his great work of ministry and the witness to the world which was in every part faultless.

As the natural man develops he is anxious to prove himself, to shew that he is not only a good fellow at heart, but also an individual, with a personality. Through his personality his life finds expression. To a greater or lesser extent he is resentful of any restraint or overriding of his personal actions and reactions, his life's expression. There is even a fear of losing identity, of becoming a nonentity among men. When he hears the Gospel and comes to Christ Jesus he sheds some of his resentment and makes an effort towards greater forbearance and tolerance toward his fellow-creatures. He begins to feel that he has found the secret of living. The effects of his Christian efforts bring encouraging responses from others; where they reveal un-Christian responses he is still able to console himself in his faith. Perhaps at this point he may say "God is working in me, and I am working with him". He may then spoil it all by saying "He chose me because He knew my heart condition was right. Many are called, but they have not all got the right heart condition". Back again to self assertion! Are the foolish, weak, ignoble things of this world the only ones who are in the right heart condition? "*For behold your invitation, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many powerful, not many noble—but GOD SELECTED the*

foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world, that He may shame the powerful and the ignoble things of the world, and the things despised, God selected . . ." (1 Cor. 1. 27-28). This selection is as "foolishness", as "weakness", (1 Cor. 1. 25), but in it lies the greatest vindication of God's name and power, the greatest witness of Jesus being "all in all" with the Father. These, having the Father's love set upon them, and accepted by Christ, are through the Lord being made a new creation, to be with Christ where He is, in due time, and be made like him, a cross section, as it were, of mankind, transferred to the highest position of all God's creatures. What "heart condition" ever merited that? This is God's work, a witness to both men and angels. There are three passages setting out God's purposes in the Church . . . "*in order that we might be to the praise of his glory, who had a prior hope in the Anointed One*" (Eph. 1. 12). "*. . . in order that he might exhibit in those ages which are approaching, the surpassing wealth of his favour by kindness towards us in Christ Jesus*" (Eph. 2. 7). "*. . . in order that NOW may be made known to the governments and authorities in the heavens, the much diversified wisdom of God*" (Eph. 3. 10).

So the Christian must go farther; sink a little more of his personality in the purposes of God. Maybe he will begin to wonder whether there will be *anything* left after God has "pruned" him! Yet going on, he sees "still more beauties" in God's word and "still increasing light". The more he sees, the more he realises there is to see. Awed, by the magnitude of the work of God, always so exact and completely comprehensive in every part and purpose, lost in wonder, love and praise, his concern for himself is left behind, unnoticed—like a sloughed skin. Now he is anxious to be part of that great plan. He waits upon the Lord, bringing all his life to the Master in prayer. He grows in grace and

knowledge; his personality loses its complications and becomes simpler, more sincere, as that of a child. He finds that the Lord's yoke *is* easy and his burden, light. So many things, cumbersome things, he has lost. He has learned in looking to Jesus to reflect the Word of Truth himself, as far as he has attained and to leave the responsibility for the work of salvation to God, Who gives the increase. He is giving out the message with all the wisdom he can command, and all the love and patience too, but *he* is not bringing in the Church, nor converting the world; he is merely keeping himself in the love of Christ.

In earthly matters also he "seeketh not his own" but "doing all things as unto the Lord" he gives a practical witness to others and loses the desire for many things after which he once hankered. Learning that "godliness with contentment is great gain" the "wants" he had drop off like the sloughed skin and he rejoices with his brethren in St. Paul's assurance "*my God will fully supply all your need according to his glorious wealth by Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 4. 19). He is a son of God, on the way home, the home he has never seen, but about which he has learned. There, Wisdom, Justice, Love and Power in righteousness exist, and no bad thing. He knows that when the time comes he will be ready to go in. That is part of the Father's promise. He will be "changed" into Christ's glorious likeness. The

wonder of this thought makes him lift up his head—there is already a likeness—he has the "*same mind that is in Christ Jesus*" (1 Cor. 2. 16). He yearns for a fuller obedience—a more complete identification with God. The teaching of the Holy Spirit, lighting up so many Scriptures and continuing so to do changes his heart and mind. Each verse and each chapter that springs to light and life within him strengthens and confirms his likeness to the Master. He longs to have done with the shadows, with dealing with the imperfect, impermanent things. He longs to go where he truly belongs, to be with the Lord, and with his brethren. The work of the Holy Spirit has made him "all glorious within"; now with all the church he waits for the completion, the fulfilling of that one hope, the "change", presenting him with all his brethren as a finished work. This is a New Creation indeed, without spot or blemish or any such thing, complete, all in all with God. Thus he is ready to bless the world with the same guidance, correction and healing that he has so well learned, yet, in that time, unhindered by the spiritual forces of wickedness, the usurpers of God's world, now existing. Those forces will be bound, and their place taken by that wonderful, miraculous vindication of God's name, the first fruits, his New Creation, changed into his likeness.

Dr. Lockyer on Second Advent

Dr. Herbert Lockyer's book "*The Rapture of Saints*" contains (page 13) an interesting illustration of the two phases of the Second Advent, the *parousia* and the *epiphaneia* (the presence and the forthshining). "*One writer has reminded us that we have a forceful analogy of these two parts of the one Advent in the return of Charles II after his exile. The two stages of his return were as follows; the first concerned his loyal supporters, who were called across to France to meet him. They spent some time there with him, discussing his plan of campaign, and receiving orders and appointments. Then came the second stage, when Charles came back with them, and was revealed to the nation as a returning King, accepted the homage of his subjects, and was enthroned; after which came the judgment and the trial of the leading rebels.*"

The coming of the Lord for his Church, which is an important factor in the *parousia*, will be unseen by the world at large says Dr. Lockyer. "*Apart from his own, none will be aware of such a great*

event and Advent". He comes with the voice of the Archangel, but "*the accents of his majestic voice will not be detected by a deaf world*" (pages 18 and 20). Many Christians are coming more and more to the conviction that the revelation of the Lord from heaven, which is to signal the commencement of his reign over the nations and the inauguration of the Millennium, will be preceded by an unseen phase of his Advent during which his own, the Christian Church of this Age, believers who have been "buried with him by baptism into his death," will be raised from the dead by resurrection, or if still living will be "changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15. 52), to be joined to him in the celestial world. It is this to which I Thess. 4. 14-18 refers in vivid poetic language. The revelation of the Lord, with his Church, to all the world, and the assumption of kingly authority, the setting up of that Messianic kingdom which is to be "the desire of all nations" (Hag. 2. 7), comes later (Rev. 20, 4).

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16. 19).

Strange words, seemingly giving to Peter greater power than has ever at any time been given to any other man! What was it that Jesus saw in this simple fisherman which led Him to repose such confidence in him? What was the nature of that commission whose terms extend beyond this earth and its span of time into the heavens and into eternity?

There is evidently some connection between these words and those given by the resurrected Jesus to John on the island of Patmos. *"These things saith he that hath the key of David; he that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth."* (Rev. 3. 7). There is an air of finality about these words which marks them as having reference to some very decisive aspect of the Divine Plan, and that the kingly power of Jesus is involved is very evident. Fully to understand the allusion, however, it is necessary to go back to the Old Testament, and it is in the eloquent words of Isaiah that we find the source of this theme.

In Isaiah's twenty-second chapter the prophet speaks of one Shebna, who is treasurer over the royal house and therefore responsible to the king for the welfare of the nation. He is an unfaithful steward, for he has sought his own advantage, and that of his personal friends, to the detriment of the people and the national welfare. On this account the prophet is commissioned to pronounce Divine judgment upon him. His office is to be taken away and given to Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who will be a true father to Jerusalem and Judah, and discharge the duties of the office faithfully. On the shoulder of this man is to be laid the key of the house of David, so that he shall open, and none shut, and he shut, and none open. Here is the prophecy which gave inspiration for our Lord's words to Peter and those concerning himself.

Shebna and Eliakim are known only as Court officials in the time of King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18. 18-37). They were probably men of some note during Isaiah's life but their only place in Divine revelation was that of actors in a drama which was to be a foreview of a greater thing. One chapter in Isaiah's writings tells us all we need to know about them. Six verses of that chapter are sufficient for our immediate purpose *"And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: and I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a*

father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David I will lay upon his shoulder: so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place: and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall the nail that is fastened in the sure place be removed, and be cut down, and fall, and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off; for the Lord hath spoken it." (Isa. 22. 20-25).

The "key of the house of David" is obviously the Divine authority vested in the royal line of David. The Davidic dynasty was the only one recognised by God as enjoying the right to rule on the "throne of the Lord" in Jerusalem over Israel. David was promised that he would "never want a man to rule over Israel"; i.e., the Davidic line would never become extinct and God would never recognise a king of any other line. True to this, Jesus Christ, who is to be King of all the earth during the Millennial Age, was of the line of David. And Israel was the chosen people of God, made so they might be his missionaries to all nations when the time comes. Hence the man upon whose shoulders was placed the "key of David" occupied a most honourable and responsible position. He was in a very real sense the Executor of the Divine Plans, and in the days of natural Israel such a man, more than any other, could haste or hinder the accomplishment of God's purposes.

Shebna was an enemy of God, and God removed him. He was *"tossed like a ball into a large country"* (Isa. 22. 18), that is, he was stripped of all his glory and honour, his ill-gotten gains and robes of office, and flung out into the wilderness to perish. He, previously to Eliakim, had held the key of David. He, previously to Eliakim, had been a "nail in a sure place" upon which everything in the house depended. But now the Divine decree had gone forth and that nail which had been fastened in a sure place had fallen, and the burden that had been upon it had been cut off, *"for the Lord hath spoken it"* (vs. 25). The rule of Shebna had given place to the rule of Eliakim, and all the glory of the house of David was to find its focus and its centre in the person of this, the Lord's anointed.

There is only one time in history to which this language respecting the glory of the house of David can be applied in symbol, and that is at the setting up of Christ's Kingdom, when the Lord Jesus Christ, as the personal representative of the Father, will rule the world in justice and equity

(Isa. 11. 4) and all things will depend upon him, things small and great, "vessels of cups to vessels of flagons" (vs. 24). Jesus himself knew that He was the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy and therefore He could say with truth that He had the key of David. Upon him is to depend "all the offspring and issue" (vs. 24) for all who enter into life during the Millennial Age will receive it from him. "He shall see his seed" (Isa. 53. 10). "I am come that they might have life" (John 10. 10). "His name shall be called . . . the Everlasting Father" (Isa. 9. 6). And that glorious "throne to his father's house" spoken of in vs. 23 finds its reality in the Great White Throne of the Millennial Age (Rev. 20. 11), before which all the nations of the world, dead and living, will be arrayed to receive judgment, and, if they will, blessing and everlasting life.

The robe and the girdle of vs. 21 are terms associated with the priesthood. There is more than a hint here that the One whom Eliakim prefigured is both a priest and a King, a priest upon his throne (Gen. 14. 18). The 11th chapter of Isaiah describes the kingly work of Christ during the Millennium. "Of the increase of his kingdom and government there shall be no end" and the noble words of Psa. 110 come to mind, "The Lord said unto my lord, sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool". The rule of Christ during that Age is one that will bring blessings of health and everlasting life to those who are truly converted to him, but at the same time will firmly repress evil and all attempts to commit evil. Hence it will be true that earth's new King will "open, and none shall shut" and "shut, and none shall open". Those who willingly come into harmony with the laws of the Kingdom will enter into life, and none will be able to take away from them that life; those who persist still in attempts to do evil, and will not come to him that they might have life (John 5. 40) will eventually reap the inevitable result of wilful sin, and no one will be able to deliver them from that death.

Now these are the thoughts that Jesus must have had in mind when He spoke to Peter. Just as He himself had received the "key of David" and had thus become the representative of the Heavenly Father in the execution of his Plan; just as to him had been entrusted the oversight and control of all mankind and of all the earth for the purpose of bringing both them and it into full conformity with the Divine intentions, so Jesus was now appointing Peter as his representative to take the lead in initiating the work which was to commence at Pentecost and continue for two thousand years,

until the Lord should come again. That the disciples understood it this way is shown by the fact that Peter remained the acknowledged head of the little band through all those early years when the Church was gaining its foothold in the earth. It was Peter who at Pentecost preached the first Gospel sermon. It was Peter who received the first Gentile convert—Cornelius—into the Church. It was Peter with whom Paul, the next great leader given to the Church, conferred preparatory to taking up his own place in the ministry. The whole of the work and fellowship of the Jewish Church of the generation that knew Jesus in the flesh bears the impress of Peter's mind, just as that of the Gentile Church of a little later is characterised by that of Paul. Peter was given the keys of the Kingdom, that Kingdom which his Master had preached, and Peter opened the door through which others, Paul included, were to follow when their time of service had come.

So we can picture this grand disciple laying down the standards of the Kingdom just as he had received them from his Master. His mind was clear now; there would be no further hesitation or denying. As the years went by he became more and more confident, so that he could say at last "we have not followed cunningly devised fables, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1. 16). The truths that Peter taught were the truths of heaven; the things that he promised were things that must surely come to pass, and therefore it was that whatever he bound on earth was bound in heaven; whatever he loosed on earth was loosed in heaven, for no man could gainsay or set aside what he said or taught. Heaven's confirmation was upon his work, and in the power of that authority he was able to go forth and do mightily in the service of his Lord.

Paul was the theologian, but Peter was the man of faith. In the long run it is faith rather than theology that will gain us the Kingdom, and hence it is that Jesus' words are still true. The stirring exhortations to Christian living and steadfast faith which form so large a part of Peter's epistles still define the way by which we must walk to be overcomers. "By these," says Peter, "ye may become partakers of the Divine nature . . ." There is no other way; and what Peter has bound for us, and loosed for us, in the teachings he has bequeathed to us, are recorded as bound, and loosed, in the archives of Heaven, and stand for all time as the gate through which we may gain access to the Heavenly City.

When Christ would put peculiar honour upon his servants He often suffers them to be brought low in the sight of men. If the saints are favoured to suffer reproach for Christ's sake, then they will own the honour put upon them to be thus con-

formed to their Master. Christ never allows any servant of his to suffer loss but He turns that loss to gain. He honours faithful servants, He comforts persecuted ones.

GOOD WORKS

"Let your light so shine before men," said Jesus, "that they may see your good works" (Matt. 5. 16). There was no doubt in his heart that good works would accompany the reception of his teachings, and no doubt either that the light of the Gospel would be manifested, not only by word of mouth, but also by practical deeds of love and sympathy toward the "groaning creation". The Early Church grasped this truth more clearly than did any later generation, and the records of their times are replete with examples of the manner in which they carried out this very practical aspect of their Master's teaching. There has been no other time when the Church on earth has so completely manifested the Master's ideal. He founded a community which was to be as a family, its members closely knit by the ties of sympathetic and understanding love, a family which would exemplify the characteristics of the Kingdom it preached by doing good to all men as it had opportunity.

The miracles of Jesus, outside our power to reproduce, tend to obscure the fact that He set the example in good works of other kinds which are within the range of our abilities. It may be a new thought to some that Jesus, from his scanty store, did on occasion give money to the poor. The Holy Spirit has caused the evidence to be recorded that we may be in no doubt upon the subject. In the account of our Lord's words to Judas at the Last Supper, John says (chapter 13. 29): "some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor". The seeming casual allusion indicates clearly that the giving of alms to the poor was a customary action of Jesus—so much so that the departure of Judas at a word from the Lord was tacitly assumed by the disciples to be for some such purpose. We must commence our consideration of "good works", therefore, by realising that Jesus did not content himself with telling folk that there was a good time coming, nor that his mission on earth was confined to preparation for his future Millennial work. He did something there and then to relieve the material distresses of suffering humanity in a way that would be possible later on to many of his followers.

It might have been this attitude of Jesus which led his natural half-brother, James, the first Christian Bishop of Jerusalem, to stress in his epistle the importance of practical Christianity. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this" he says, "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1. 27). James meant much more than a mere calling upon a widow to offer sympathy

condolence. The plight of orphans and widows in the First Century was desperate indeed, and the words of James have no meaning unless they imply the rendering of practical assistance to those thus bereaved. The beloved disciple John took up the same theme and drove the implication directly home when he said, "Whoso hath this world's goods and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word or tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3. 17-18). John could not tell us in better language that the sharing of material goods with others in need is a concrete evidence of indwelling love. The Divine recognition of Cornelius' prayers is another case in point. Cornelius was a Gentile, a Roman centurion, a man noteworthy for two things: he "feared God with all his house" and "gave much alms to the people" (Acts 10. 2). When the angel appeared to him, he was told that his prayers and his alms had come for a memorial before God (v. 4). There was value, in God's sight, in this outward evidence of a heart sincerely afflicted with the sorrows of humanity.

The opportunity and duty of almsgiving must have featured very prominently in the life of the early Church—much more so than in our own day, because of the frightful conditions under which the poor lived. There was no system of relief such as does function, though imperfectly, in our country to-day. No one—very nearly no one—cared whether the very poor lived or died. The old, the infirm, the diseased, unable to labour for their living, turned out of their homes by children or relatives, wandered hopelessly about the towns and countryside, begging for alms wherewith to buy food sufficient to keep them alive. To Jesus, and to those who embraced his teaching, it must have been an intolerable sight, and to us in these days, despite all we know of State provision for such unfortunates, it should be no less tolerable.

The primitive Church accepted this problem of poverty as a challenge to their newfound faith. Within their own circle they did not tolerate it at all. There was no such thing as unsatisfied need in the churches at Jerusalem, at Antioch, at Rome. At the very outset the Church adopted the family relationship and to an appreciable degree the communal life. To describe this as communism may convey a wrong thought. Acts 2. 44-46 plainly states that those who believed were "together, and had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need". This was the secret of their power; in the joy and zeal of their conversion they counted not their goods as their own but as held in trust for

their Lord and to be used for the general good. Thus, while there is no evidence of an equal division of possessions such as is generally implied by the word "communism", there was undoubtedly diligence to see that every case of need was satisfied from the store of those who possessed abundance.

One allusion to this family life is found in Acts 6. 1-4, where the election of the first seven deacons is described. There was apparently a tendency to neglect the Grecian-Jewish widows in favour of the native Jewish in the administration of this relief. The Church had grown greatly in numbers, and the problem was evidently assuming large proportions; nevertheless, the account reads as though there was absolute unanimity on the method adopted to remedy the defect. The impression of a spontaneously happy family is maintained throughout.

Such enthusiastic love for suffering humanity could not be kept within narrow bounds, and it was not long before the growing Church was reaching out to do good to all men irrespective of their standing inside or outside the Church. Paul's own exhortation must have been ever in their minds, as it is in ours. "*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith*" (Gal. 6. 30). The stress laid upon the latter clause does not release us from the obligation of the former one. And to such an extent did the early Christians exploit this outlet for loving service on behalf of their fellow men that in the fourth century the Roman Emperor Julian (the notorious "Julian the Apostate") declared that "*the godless Galileans support not only their own poor, but our poor also*". In the year A.D. 250 it was recorded that the Church in Rome—never a big church in those early days—regularly maintained no less than fifteen hundred destitute pagans.

Much could be said of the record of the Christian society through the centuries. Hospitals, universal education, abolition of child labour, organised

poor relief, all these things which are taken for granted to-day had their origin in the efforts of Christian individuals or groups, and all in the name of Christ. Names like Dr. Barnardo, George Muller, William Booth, are household words; the works they started live after them but what they did was done because they were convinced Christians and interpreted the obligations of their faith in the practical application of Christ's words.

The problem of the poor does not really differ from the problem of the world as a whole. The world is in need—desperate need—and our mission in life, the whole object and purpose of our consecrated walk before God, is to fill that need. We know that the Millennial Age has been set apart by God for the full accomplishment of that work, and that God is now selecting from amongst men those who can be fitted to carry out that work. He chooses only volunteers, those whose hearts are in this work and who would be engaged in it even now, if they had the power, and the time was right. And the extent to which we use the power and the time we *do* possess is the gauge by which God measures the sincerity of our professed desire to do that great work *then*.

"Charge them that are rich in this world," says Paul to Timothy (1 Tim. 6. 17-19). ". . . that they do good, that they be rich in good works . . . willing to communicate, *laying up in store for themselves a good foundation for the time to come that they may lay hold on eternal life*". How clear it is that the good works, faithfully performed as we find opportunity, are of themselves contributing to our preparation for the future day when all power shall be ours. Works of mercy and sympathy, deeds of kindness and compassion, efforts to ameliorate the lot of some unhappy one or to infuse a little sunshine into a drab life—all these things, quite apart from the temporary relief they may bring to some afflicted son or daughter of Adam, are building into the fabric of our characters something that will endure to all eternity.

What manner of persons

We are told by the Apostle Paul that the things which were written of the servants of the Lord in past dispensations were written for *our* admonition and instruction and comfort, "upon whom the ends of the Ages are come" (1 Cor. 10. 11). Seeing all these things, dearly beloved, "*What manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness?*" How earnestly, with what painstaking care, should we give heed to the Word spoken unto

us! Let us be faithful in proclaiming the Message of our Lord, now due. Let us tell forth the words which He has put into our mouths, whether others hear or whether they forbear—whether our faithfulness bring us the favour or disfavour of the world and of nominal Spiritual Israel. But let us speak his word in meekness and love, leaving the results with our great Chief Reaper. "*The Day is at hand!*"

THE PARABLE OF THE WINESKINS Luke 5, 31-37

Matthew Levi the tax collector was a proud man and a happy one this day. This was not the first time he had entertained his fellow collectors and his other friends to a feast in his house, but it was unusual for his regular guests to find themselves seated in the same room with members of a totally dissimilar social class, the Scribes and the Pharisees. And they were rather intrigued by the purpose for which they had assembled. They were there to do honour to the new prophet who had arisen in Israel. Tax collectors usually had no time for prophets; they left that department of life to the men whose business it was, the priests and the doctors of the Law. The business of a tax-collector in Israel did not usually permit of much else than observing one's financial obligations to the Roman government in paying all accounts promptly, and taking care to extract enough from the unwilling taxpayers to keep the business out of the red, with a suitable profit left over to make it all worth while. A tax-collector had to be a practical man and must not concern himself too closely with religion.

Apparently though their highly respected colleague was not keeping to tradition. His business was sound enough, sufficiently so to maintain his known standard of entertainment and hospitality, yet most inexplicably he had avowed himself a follower of the Nazarene prophet, closed down his business, settled his account with the Roman Chancellor of the Exchequer, and invited his erstwhile business associates to this feast where they were to meet his new Master. It might not have been so bad had they found themselves seated at the table only with this new young visionary and his personal disciples. They were all fishermen and peasantry and there would be no feeling of constraint with them. The real trouble was that Matthew had also invited some of the respectable religious fraternity, who in business life customarily suffered much at the hands of these same tax collectors, and in any case heartily despised them as willing tools of Rome. Both groups had come with equal curiosity to see and hear this new prophet about whom so much was being said, but there was a coolness between the two parties which led the respectable ones at length to voice their irritation in a question to the guest of honour which exceeded all the bounds of breeding and good taste in view of the fact that they were there as the guests of a tax collector. "Why" they demanded of Jesus "do ye eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus regarded them gravely. He knew the sense of outrage that filled their hearts. For four hundred years past the Pharisees had preserved the ancient traditions of Israel and maintained that standard of

rigid righteousness which had to be preserved if Israel was to remain separate and undefiled from Roman influence, and so be fit to receive Messiah when He should appear. The tax-collectors, having no regard for God or Moses, traitors to their own nation and its national destiny, made their bargains with Rome for the privilege of extracting what they could of taxation from their own countrymen. They were universally despised and hated. Yet Jesus and his disciples, ignoring all this, were content to accept their hospitality and treat them as though they stood on the same level in the sight of God as the Scribes and Pharisees themselves, when all Israel knew the latter to be the favoured ones in God's sight. Jesus looked into those eyes of outraged righteousness with his own eyes of infinite understanding, and smiled. He gave them his answer. It was a totally unexpected answer too. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

This was a poser. Some faces were thoughtful, others angry and frustrated. They could not dispute the reply without denying their own claim to righteousness. Jesus had put them in a position from which they could not extricate themselves. They ate in silence whilst they digested the implication of his words.

Some of those at table had been disciples of John the Baptist. They had much in common with the better minded of the Pharisees—it may be, were Pharisees themselves. Perhaps to tide over an awkward moment they put a question of their own; a little more sincerity in this one, and no suspicion of bad taste. "We, as John's disciples, are ascetics—so are the Pharisees; we, and they, lead pious lives and keep aloof from the common man. Your disciples are not ascetics; they eat and drink in the same manner as all men and generally mix with all men irrespective of class or creed, careless of possible defilement or contagion. Why?" That is a fair paraphrase of their question. Jesus looked at their earnest faces with eyes of quiet gravity. "If you go to the wedding of one of your number", He said, "you who are the friends of the bridegroom do not abstain from food and drink and merrymaking while you are in his presence and the feast is proceeding. You enjoy to the full all that is provided. It is later, when the feast is over and the bridegroom has departed, and you yourselves are back in your customary place, that you resume the self-denial and asceticism of your normal life." Perhaps there was a gentle reminder here that despite their claim of asceticism and fasting, in contrast with Jesus' disciples, they were in fact doing themselves very well indeed at that moment in a manner far

removed from fasting. Luke says that Matthew had provided a "great feast" and that a "great company" sat down to it. Fasting or no fasting, these Scribes and Pharisees and disciples of John were disposing of Matthew's best viands and choicest wines at an appreciable rate and enjoying themselves hugely in the process. They had probably, for so many years, taken themselves so seriously that the absurdity of asking such a question in the present situation did not occur to them.

But Jesus saw the absurdity and in the silence which followed his second reply He channelled their thoughts into position for receiving the principle He wanted to inculcate, a principle which is just as important to us to-day as it was to them, for we often fall short in precisely the same respect. "No man" He said, "*putteth new wine into old bottles, else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottle will perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved. No man having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for he saith, the old is better*". His gaze must have fallen upon the wineskins stacked in the outer room, waiting their turn for use at the feast, and his hearers must have looked at them too and begun to sense a glimmer of the truth He was about to expound.

The most common receptacle for wines and oils in Jesus' day was a suitably dressed and prepared goatskin. The rich possessed store jars, large earthenware containers with a wide neck, but although these were ideal for dry goods such as grain or dried fruits they were not so useful for wine which needed to be kept closely sealed. A goatskin, open only at the neck, could be filled with wine and the opening tied up tightly. Thus contained, the wine could be equally conveniently transported on donkey or camel back or hung up in the store room until required. One precaution was necessary. Until the wine was matured and old, the pressure inside the skin was likely to increase. With a new goatskin this was nothing to be concerned about; the skin itself was resilient and to a certain extent elastic, and would stretch and accommodate itself to the increased pressure. A skin which had already done appreciable service, however, would eventually reach the limit of its stretch, and if then used again for new wine would be liable to rupture and lose its contents. Such a skin would however be quite suitable for wine which had already matured. The allusion was one which would be readily understood by all those present at the feast, and those among them who were sincerely desirous of giving heed to Jesus' words would immediately start casting around in their minds for a clue to his object in giving such an illustration. What did Jesus mean. What was his object in speaking thus?

The Scribes and Pharisees there present were men who had spent the whole of their lives in the study of a systematic theology which was already completely documented and defined before they commenced. Judaism comprised a rigid and dogmatic presentation of Divine Truth which, based upon the Mosaic Covenant and every revealed word of God recorded from ancient times, had been overlaid by a mass of Rabbinic interpretation and exposition. With all its faults, its shortcomings, and its insufficiency, it was, nevertheless, the Truth in which they had been brought up. It had sufficed for them. In that faith they had been born and in that faith they were prepared to die. It was old wine, and it was very comfortably contained in old bottles.

Now Jesus came with something new and revolutionary. True, He had said, "*Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil*" (Matt. 5. 17) but in that process of fulfilment He must of necessity cast a new light upon many old and long-cherished beliefs. He must needs show himself as the reality of which much that had gone before was the shadow. He was very definitely going to remove "*the handwriting of ordinances, nailing it to his cross*" (Col. 2. 14) even although in so doing, He would in fact "*magnify the law and make it honourable*" (Isa. 42. 21). Some at least of those Pharisees were sincere men; they wanted to know and do the will of God; but how so to present the unfolding purpose of God to their dubious minds as rightly to convince them of its truth? Jesus knew that He had come in humiliation to die as a malefactor on the Cross; they were expecting a victorious military leader who would expel the Romans and establish his throne in Jerusalem. Jesus knew that a long, long time must elapse before God's visible kingdom on earth would come; they expected it there and then. Jesus knew that Israel as a nation would reject him, and his call to discipleship would go out to all the nations to draw out a spiritual people for God's Name, a Church whose members would at the last be exalted to be with him in the celestial sphere; they expected to see Israel exalted forever upon earth above all the Gentiles and thus to rule all the peoples everlastingly with an autocratic even though righteous rule. How were they ever going to be persuaded that a new light was now to be shed upon the Divine purpose and those who would be God's ministers must be ready to advance in the light?

The Master knew that, in the main, they would not. The introduction of the new wine of his teachings into the old bottles of Judaism would, in almost every case, wreck the bottles and waste the wine. The message He preached was received, in

the main, by the younger and fresher minds who were themselves more resilient and less hide-bound—fitting word—in the old traditions. Even though they must themselves become, in the course of time, as it were “old bottles”, they were for the present fitting bottles for the Master’s use. Some there were, old in years but new bottles in spirit, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Simeon, Anna, who did receive and retain the new wine without disaster. In every generation there are those to whom advancing years proves no handicap to progress in increasing light. There are always those who can weld the revelation of the present to the knowledge of the past and in that fusion perceive a clear vision of the outworking purpose of God. But in the main the old wine must remain in the old bottles and new bottles must be found for the new wine.

Perhaps all this is part of the tenderness and compassion of God for his servants. “*He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are but dust*”. A faithful disciple has served his God to the limit of the light he had, throughout the span of a long life; why should his failing powers at the last be called upon to receive and assimilate conceptions and definitions of truth which, however superior to the older definitions they may be in the light of more modern knowledge and understanding, might seem to him, in comparison with the things he was taught of old, the rankest heresy. It is not as though there is any finality to truth in this life, for the new wine of to-day becomes the old wine of to-morrow. He was a farsighted man who coined the oft-quoted phrase “*the heresy of to-day is the orthodoxy of tomorrow*”. And no single vessel can contain the whole of Divine truth; as soon seek to scoop up the entire ocean in one little panner.

Whenever Jesus talked like this He included a special word for the “hearing ear”. This time was

no exception. He left on record his own knowledge of the conflict which must take place in the minds of some before they can accept him and his claims and his message. “*No man,*” He said “*having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for, he saith, the old is better.*” The determining word there, the one that implies so much, is “straightway”. Many there are who come into contact with some striking advance in the progressive unfolding of the Divine purpose who will not have it at any price. “The old” they say “is better”. Later on, when the force of the new presentation has begun to make itself felt, they look upon the new with a less unfriendly eye. Saul of Tarsus was one such. He would not accept the new wine straightway. He kicked, at first, against the ox-goad. But the New Testament abundantly manifests how completely the new wine of Christianity did fill that chosen vessel to the Lord, rigid and hard as it may originally have been in the unyielding mould of Judaism.

That is how the parable affects individuals, now as well as then. There is no doubt that Jesus meant it to have a dispensational application also. He knew that Israel would not accept his message, that the rulers would put him to death that the old order might remain. He was yet to pass upon them that irrevocable sentence “*The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*” (Matt. 21. 43). He knew that new bottles, those disciples who in after ages, even to this present, would constitute the Christian Church, must be selected to receive and contain the new wine of his teachings and his mission. So it has been, and so it must be, for it is that same new wine which, preserved in those new wineskins, is to be brought forth in the greatest feast of all, that all mankind may partake, at the end.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

One of the most tremendous statements in the New Testament is that in 2 Pet. 1. 4 where the Apostle Peter holds before his readers the prospect of becoming “*partakers of the Divine Nature*”. The very idea of the creature sharing the nature of the Creator must appear at first sight so presumptuous that some careful consideration of Peter’s words would seem to be very desirable. There comes readily to mind the vivid Biblical contrast between the ambition of Lucifer who aspired to “*be like the Most High*” (Isa. 14. 14) and the serene humility of One who, in taking upon himself human nature, “*did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped*” (Phil. 2. 6 RSV) and there ought to be a very natural reluctance on our part to read anything into Peter’s words which is alien to

the relationship which must always exist between the created being and the One who both gives and sustains the continued life of that being.

Nevertheless the words do stand and must be accepted. The word “partaker” here means to share a thing in common, to be, as we would say, joint-participants. Thus it is used in 1 Pet. 4. 13 of those who are “*partakers in Christ’s sufferings*” and 1 Pet. 5. 1 “*a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed*”. Again it is rendered “*communion*” in Paul’s words relating to the celebration of the Last Supper “*the bread which we break is it not the communion*” (participation in) “*of the body of Christ*” (1 Cor. 10. 16). Exalted therefore as the idea may be, there is already something here which the triumphant Christian in the resurrection life

does share with God.

It remains therefore to determine just what Peter meant by the expression "Divine nature". Scripture usage does not help a lot, for the word here rendered "divine" occurs only three times (the others being "divine power" in Pet. 1.3, and, as a noun, "the Godhead" in Acts 17. 29). Like a good many New Testament expressions, the word came from Greek religious thought and was already in everyday use long before Peter used it. "Divine" and "divinity" were terms applied to the attributes of the gods and goddesses of Greece a thousand years before Peter was born. Therefore to every Christian in his day the power of God, however and wherever exercised, was Divine power; the providence of God was Divine providence; the wisdom, the justice, the love, of God, because they were of God, were Divine. And the nature of God was Divine—the Divine nature.

What then is meant, in this connection, by the nature of God? This word *phusis* occurs quite a few times and is used in the same sense as we refer to a person's nature—good, bad, kindly, mischievous—today. It defines the attributes and actions characteristic of a person. Thus we have Rom. 2. 14 "when the Gentiles do by *nature* the things contained in the Law"; Rom. 1. 27 "the men, leaving the *natural* use of the woman"; Eph. 2. 3. "we . . . were by *nature* the children of wrath even as others"; Gal. 4. 8. "Ye did service unto them which by *nature* were no gods." Thus the Divine nature in this text refers to the elements of God's character, which are all benevolent and beneficent, goodness, righteousness, mercy, forbearance, patience, and, we must not forget, the active characteristics of creativeness, integrity, consistency, far-sightedness, and so on. When Peter holds out before us the prospect of becoming joint-participants in the Divine nature he is telling us that we shall, in all these and many more, be like God. We shall be so much like him that it can be truly said that we have entered into full communion—common-union—with him.

Logically therefore Peter goes on in the next verse to encourage his readers to cultivate these elements of character. "For this very reason" he says ("and beside this" in the A. V. is a definite mistranslation) "make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, . . . self-control . . . love" and so on. Only thus will the believer experience the "abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom" which is his attainment of participation in the Divine nature. Something like this was in the mind of Paul when he told the Colossians "In him" (Christ) "the whole fulness of Deity dwells bodily,

and you have come to fulness of life in him who is the head of all rule and authority" (Col. 2. 9-10 RSV). Fulness of life; that can only be realised when the whole being is given up to complete allegiance to God and spiritual union with him, through Christ. "Ye are dead" said Paul "and your life is hid, with Christ, in God" (Col. 3. 3). During our Lord's communion with the Father on the eve of his death He prayed for his followers "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us . . . I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one" (Jno. 17. 20-23). It is this one-ness of the Church with her Lord and with the Father which constitutes the joint-participation in the Divine nature of which Peter is speaking.

Our Lord was always in this position. "I do always those things that please him" He said "I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I from myself, but he sent me". "As the Father knoweth me, even so I know the Father" and perhaps the most momentous of his statements "I and my Father are one" (Jno. 8. 28 & 42; 10. 15 & 30). In all these conversations, and many more, He stressed his absolute union with the Father, even to the extent that the Father and the Son could not be thought of as acting independently; the will and the thought of the Son was always in full harmony and union with that of the Father. It is the hope and ideal of every member of the Church eventually to partake of the Divine nature; the Church's Lord always did so partake. As such He becomes the pattern and exemplar for all who follow in his steps. When Philip, slow to believe all, said to Jesus "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied", He received the sublime answer "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, Show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?" (Jno. 14. 8-10). Jesus was able to stand before Philip as the manifestation of the Father just because He was in this condition of union with him. Philip, looking upon Jesus, hearing his words, saw, heard, and realised the Father in the only possible way mortal man could do.

So with us. We can learn of the Father only as we see him reflected to us through the Son. We become like God by becoming like Jesus. When the Man of Nazareth said "Learn of me, . . . and ye shall find rest to your souls", it was to say that if we are transformed into his likeness by the "renewing of our minds" and by continued loyalty to the end of our days, we shall have become "partakers of the Divine nature".

All things are possible to him who believes; they are more easy to him who loves, and still more easy

to him who perseveres in the practice of these three virtues.

“THINE . . . MINE”

*A discourse based on
Jno. 17. 10*

The adjustment of the relationship of “mine” and “thine” is one of the major problems of this sad old earth. Some men possess much, others have very little. Some nations control large territories, others have not enough for their needs. Cynics classify the two conditions as “the haves” and “the have-nots”. National laws exist which establish to “the haves” a “right-in-law” to hold and enjoy what they possess. International agreements, considered to have the force of law, exist which accord to the holders the right to hold and exploit the territories they control. Inequality of division often prompts the “have-nots” to ignore the law and adopt violent and unconstitutional means to level up the disparity. The thief breaks in, and steals—decreasing what is “thine”, increasing what is “mine”. Aggressive nations violate the agreed conventions, and by force majeure seize with violence a neighbour’s land. Many say you have too much; few will say I have enough. “Thine” is usually in excess; “mine” is mostly “a deficiency”. And so the old world blunders on from “incident” to “incident”, grabbing, grasping, pushing and fighting—a sordid scramble on an earth that produces more than enough for all, and where, but for the innate selfishness in the heart of man, the peace that goes with plenty need never be disturbed. May God be praised for that coming day when Kingdom grace shall bring “thine” into even balance with “mine”, and the neighbour shall be loved as one’s self is loved.

There is no disparity between “Mine” and “Thine” in the heavenly realms. The heavenly hosts have all they need, but “possess” nothing at all. Whatever their higher constitutions need for sustenance, they receive from a bounteous Provider’s store. There is no rivalry, there, between mine and thine. All needs are satisfied, and so peace reigns undisturbed—a peace within, with fellow-messengers, and with God. “To each according to his needs, from each according to his ability” is thus a modern expression of an equitable and universal law.

It is in the relationship between our beloved Lord and his gracious Father that the perfect balance between “Mine” and “Thine” is seen. In that great “Committal Prayer” on his last night of human life, the perfect expression of “mutual possession” in “unity of purpose” was uttered by our suffering Lord. *“I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: Thine they were and thou gavest them me, and they have kept thy word. . . . I pray for them. . . . which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine; and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them”*.

What profound relationships and what sublime

truths are embodied in these words. Is there anything else in the life of man equal to being possessed by God? Is there any message that can fall on the ear that compares with the statement that we are possessed by God? To be owned by the Most High God, and to be told so by him or by his most faithful messenger, is to experience the sum of all delights. To be cherished and loved, and appreciated by the highest standard of worth himself, and priced higher than rubies or gold, or cattle on a thousand hills, is to learn that moral values out-scale all material wealth, and that humble hearts, adorned with the graces of God’s good Spirit, have value in the Heavenly courts which no product of mine or field can equal.

As Creator original, Almighty God possesses all the earth, with its wealth beneath, and its beauty above. He possesses the sun, and all the suns, with all their planets around them. They are his workmanship and he owns them all. He framed their laws, and they obey his will. To these He does not say “Ye are mine”.

As Creator bountiful He clothes the fields in living green. He paints the lily and the rose, and every lovely flower that grows. He fills the fields with ripened corn and shapely root. He decks the trees with luscious fruit, delectable to both sight and taste. Even to these He does not say “Ye are all mine”. All these are his, yet He does not proclaim them so. He owns them all, but has no need to stake his claim. To nothing other than obedient hearts does He utter the assurance, “Ye are mine—and in you is my delight”.

How utterly unique then, is the humble human heart in his sight. He can survey the mighty machinery of the infinities, obeying his commands, and need not speak a word. But when a broken, contrite heart bows humbly at his feet, and sends aloft its plea or praise, “Abba Father” looks down from his exalted throne, and says with touching tenderness, “My child—my own dear child”. When the conflict in the human heart is fought against fearful odds, He looks down from his Heavenly estate. Or when the outer foes maltreat and persecute and do his beloved ones to death, our Lord hears the groan or expiring sigh, and when they cry “Lord Jesus, receive. . . .” He rises to accept the charge committed to his care and says with compassion infinite, “My brother—my very own dear brother!”. Depths of relationship such as these, with more and more besides, lie embosomed in the Redeemer’s words, “Thine, mine”. And these relationships are real and true, are based upon the foundation-rock of very truth, and are more real than any object whose image strikes the eye.

Back there in pre-Christian days before Jesus

came down to earth, faithful men sought God when search was difficult indeed. The vaster crowd coming to Jerusalem to appear before their God were satisfied when they had brought their lamb or paid their "temple toll". Attendance on the ceremonial ordinance was enough for them. To feed the altar-flame or subscribe the Temple dues was all they thought they owed to God. Complying thus, the formalistic mind could turn away, and, at need, forget his nation's God. His puny mind, thus satisfied, would deem his tawdry ritual was satisfactory to God. Had he not offered up his lamb and had he not paid all he owed? What more could God require?

But some there were—in comparison but few—who wanted more than this. Not all the cattle on a thousand hills were sacrifice enough for these. They came to seek and find, not merely to present and pay. The deeper movings of their hearts found no delight in spate of blood, or reek of burning flesh. Even their presence, in itself, in the city of God gave but little pleasure to their souls. They did not forget Jerusalem, but sacred stones and venerable rites did not satisfy the deep springs that lay within. They wanted God; living contact with the living God. They wanted God at hand, not merely a God who dwelt afar. They yearned for an immediate touch, where soul could commune with soul. The "intermediate" contact had a ceremonial priest between, and the energising power could not pass. They wanted to see him who is invisible with the eyes of their hearts. They desired a higher plane, a plane of faith and confidence and not a plane of dead or ceremonial works.

But it was too soon for that. The day of reformation had not come. The better sacrifices with their better way of approach had not begun. When the eyes of the Lord ran through the land He saw the yearnings of their hearts, and heard the deep groanings of their deeper selves. *"The Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name"* (Mal. 3. 16). And a great promise was registered on their behalf. *"They shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels (My special treasure), and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him"*. A great day of searching severity would afford discernment between the righteous and the wicked, between those that served the Lord and those that served him not, and when the ritual-hardened nation fell, and lost both its Temple and its Priest, they who had thought upon his name were spared the pains and dangers of the fall, because a loving Father spared them as sons that served him well. *"They shall be mine"*, saith the Most High. *"Thine they were,"* said the beloved Lord, *"thou gavest them to me"*. *"Those that thou gavest me I have kept"*—

"I have kept them in thy Name", *"and none of them is lost, but . . ."*. Thus the faithful Shepherd delivers up, for a moment, his charge to the owner of the flock. The Shepherd was about to die, that the flock might know a fuller life. Meantime, *"Holy Father, keep through thine own Name those whom thou hast given me, that they may become one with us!"*

He had indeed been no "Good Shepherd" had He lost the members of his flock; conversely, He could not claim Good-Shepherd attributes were there no dangers to his flock. It were safe-keeping amid dangers manifold that warranted the Shepherd's right to claim the virtues of being a good shepherd. If Jesus had not watched them with a good Shepherd's care, why then did He ward and comfort one among his flock by making special prayer on his account. Foreseeing risk and danger in the approaching dark hour, Jesus said *"I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not"*. *"That thy faith fail not!"* Then, surely, here was risk to faith, and if faith should fail, then surely all were lost. *"I have prayed for thee"* was true good-Shepherd care, and, though Peter for the instant fell, prayer and warning served him well. One little service more the Shepherd gave this peril-infested sheep—a searching look—and from that look Peter went forth in his shame to weep and turn again.

The inmates of the sheepfold have greatly grown since that night of prayer. The circle of "Mine" and "Thine" has widened throughout the earth. Those that believe on him "through their words" have increased through the years, until today, we share their privilege and fellowship. The Shepherd can still say *"All thine are mine"*; *all mine are thine"*. The Shepherd's care still "keeps" the flock when dangers are around. The Shepherd still claims the Good Shepherd's prerogative in that He loses none who truly are his Father's sheep. Wayward goats He does not make claim to keep. Wolves in sheep's clothing He does not attempt to keep. But sheep of his Father's pastures are his full and constant care, and of these He will lose none. Not that they cannot fall, but because, being sheep, they will hear him and heed his voice, and walk in his chosen path.

Beloved in the Lord, will you not weigh those words, "Thine—Mine", and let their binding cords hold you fast when risk abounds, and when worldly charms exert their magnet power to draw you from his care. Will you not also say *"Thou art mine and I am thine"*? Will you not say to God, *"Thou art my Father, and I am thy child"*? Will you not say to Jesus, *"Thou art my Lord, and I am thy slave"*? Then shall we know that we are one with them in the blessedness of possessing each other, and can say by night or day *"Mine—Thine"*, from the bottom of our hearts.



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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

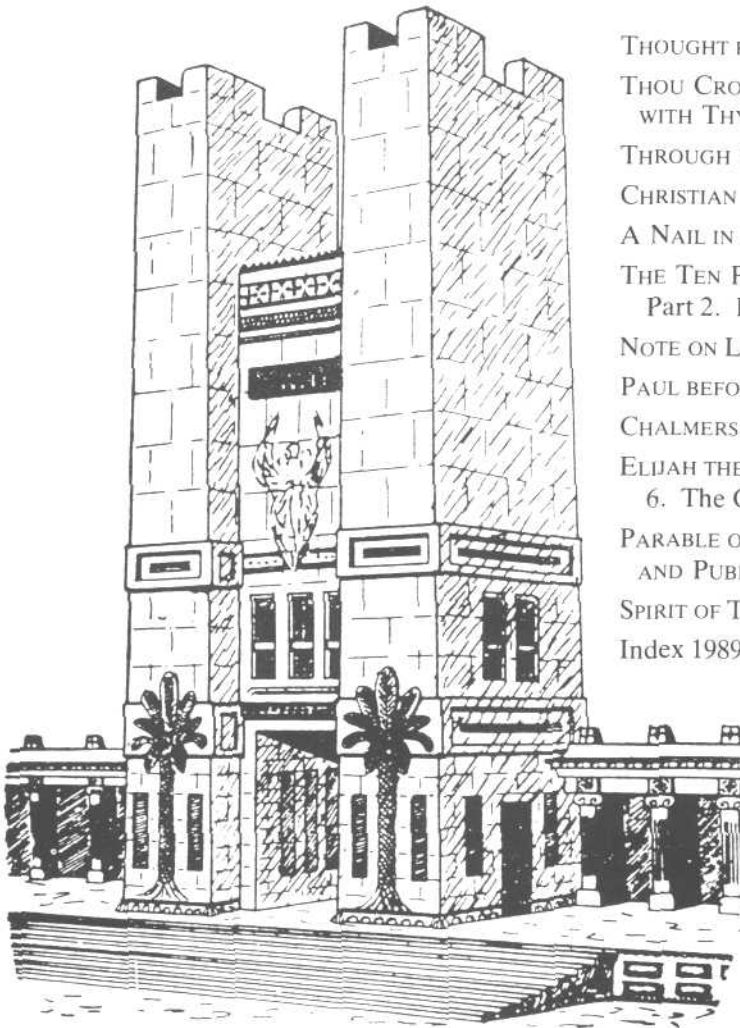
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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Thought for the Month

"When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what gain has their owner but to see them with his eyes?" (Eccl. 5. 11).

That comment seems to be an example of an early "Parkinson's Law" long before Professor Parkinson began issuing his series of famous dictums. There is at any rate a very modern ring in these words written down by Solomon many centuries ago. The Western world of to-day is enjoying a rising standard of living and the benefit of multifarious amenities of life, from fast cars to electrically-driven toothbrushes, the real utility of many of which is questionable but all of which bring handsome profits to the makers and distributors. The owners and users of these things rarely stop to reflect that they are working doubly hard to earn the money necessary to acquire them so that in the end there is little real gain, only the dubious satisfaction of possession. Whilst there is no denying that modern technology has given mankind many things of tremendous value in life, it has also produced much that is trashy and puerile and detracts from rather than adds to the full life which man ought to enjoy and would enjoy if he was more in line with the natural order ordained by God. Solomon's next remark points to the real values—the merits of honest labour and sharing in the world's work irrespective of relative reward. *"Sweet is the sleep of a labourer, whether he eats little or much, but the surfeit of the rich will not let him sleep."* There is a New Testament equivalent to this maxim in Paul's words to Timothy *"Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content"*. (1 Tim. 6. 6-8). All the labour-saving devices and mechanised entertainment and instruments of pleasurable self-indulgence in the world are useless and worse than useless if contentment and peace of mind are missing and that is so often the case nowadays. There can be little doubt

that the Messianic Age which is to supersede this present very unsatisfactory Age of human self-will is going to witness a widespread return to real values in life and a rejection of the shallow and the superficial. Deeper and more serious thinking, and above all a greater consciousness of the place of God in daily life, will spell the end of much that is considered essential in our present civilisation, but *contributes little or nothing to the exaltation of the human spirit*. The products of the arts and sciences will rise to levels more consonant with the Divine ideal for the dignity of human nature.

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Bro. J. Rutherford (*Harpenden*)



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

“THOU CROWNEST THE YEAR WITH THY GOODNESS”

A reflection and an anticipation

(Psa. 65. 11)

Christmas comes at the end of the year, after the harvest has been gathered in and men's labours have measurably ceased, after all the activities of summer days, all the out-workings of plans and schemes, all the planting and building, have reached their climax and attained their object. Christmas is a time for casting the mind back upon the events and achievements of twelve months, and for rejoicing in that which has been done. The work of the year is complete, and Christmas crowns that work.

The Israelites began their civil New Year in the Autumn, after the fruits of their labours had been gathered in and sowing for next year's crops was about to commence. It was then that they observed their Feast of Tabernacles, and in the fiftieth year sounded the Trumpet of Jubilee which proclaimed liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that were bound, calling every man to enter once more upon his inheritance, an inheritance which, perchance, he had lost many years before by reason of sin or misfortune. The Feast of Tabernacles was to Israel what Christmas is to us—the glory of achievement for one year's work, the anticipation of another year of sowing and reaping and building and sitting down under the vine and fig tree. Small wonder that it was a time of rejoicing. Small wonder that our God, in his wisdom, chose this season of the year for the coming to earth of his Son—for Christmas, the traditional birthday of Jesus, was not actually the time of that event. It was Autumn when He came, Autumn, the time of the beginning again, the time for a fresh start in the things of men and the things of God. But because we in our day are more accustomed to think of the turn of the sun to longer and brighter days as being the beginning of better things; because we look longingly for the “shortest day” and then say one to another “the evenings will soon be drawing out again”, it is appropriate that we look upon Christmas as did Israel upon the Feast of Tabernacles, and celebrate with our friends and neighbours the birth of Jesus, the dawn of new hope for the world, and a guarantee that there shall be a beginning again.

But the people of the world in general do not see that dawn of hope. The statesmen of the world still grope their way unseeingly, feeling for peace, and finding it not, because the way of peace is not in their hearts. The shadow of war still hangs over us. The menace of rivalry between great world powers glowers at us from the darkness. Distrust is rampant everywhere. Food shortage and housing shortage is world-wide. There seems, on the sur-

face, little enough reason for man to look up to God and say “Thou crownest the year with thy goodness”.

And the reason is not far to seek. It is because the shadow of sin still lies over mankind. There is to be a day when God will “*destroy the covering that is cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations*” (Isa. 25. 7) but that day is not yet. We look for the coming of a Kingdom that will remove sin from the hearts of men and then all these evils from which the world now suffers will take flight and be gone, but that Kingdom is not yet here, and we must take heed of the present. It is a great and glorious part of our commission to tell men of the coming Age with its rule of righteousness and its opportunities of blessing and advancement toward human perfection. It is good that we comfort weary hearts with the golden promises of the golden future, with its shimmering vistas of a world at peace, a world in which disease and pain, sorrow and crying are done away. All this is part of the Christian gospel. But there is another part which is terribly important because it is related so closely to things that are around us every day. It speaks, not of health, but of pain; not of peace, but of war; not of good, but of evil, and it points to the fact that the cause of all these things is sin and that sin must be removed and that sin cannot be removed until there is first repentance, and conversion, and a coming to Jesus in full surrender of life to be moulded by him into the fashion of that new life of the future Age. And although it is true that the great day of this work is the future day, the Millennial Age, it is also true that the gospel we preach now is the same gospel that will be preached then, and we too, in this our day, must call men, as Peter called men two thousand years ago, to repentance and conversion, before they can properly appreciate the glorious promises of the Age.

We tend to come short in this. We are too apt to assume a Christian standing in those to whom we witness, and endeavour to convert them to our own understanding of the Divine Plan before we are sure that they are already converted to Christ. We think, perhaps, rather too much in terms of adding adherents to a fellowship and not enough of adding believers to Christ. Do we, one wonders, need to take to heart more seriously than we have done, the words of Jesus “*Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and . . .*”? In this dark day of the world's distress surely we need above all things to establish the faith of men in Christ the Lord, and on that basis begin to instruct them in things

concerning his Kingdom.

Another thing we tend to forget is that we cannot convert others until we have converted ourselves. We cannot lead other men into a Kingdom into which we ourselves have not yet entered. And there is a very real sense in which we, who have "come in" to Christ, are called to enter his Kingdom here and now. Have we done so? Is it true of us that *"the Kingdom of God is within you"*? Have we *"entered into rest"* (Heb. 4. 3) or are we like those of old who failed to enter in *"because of unbelief"*? Men will ask us concerning our faith and hope for the future, and the way of life which we declare that men will be called upon to follow in that day, "Does it work?" Unless we can show that it *does* work, and *has* worked, in our own lives now, how can we expect them to heed our witness regarding the future? There is danger of spiritual complacency. We are so sure of our own personal salvation—and it is a good thing to be sure—but that very certainty tends to beget a carelessness with regard to others, and when, as at the present time, men are generally indifferent to the message there is a tendency to leave the world to its sin and unbelief and take refuge in the consciousness of personal acceptance with the Lord. Evangelical fervour is dulled by apathy, and the final result is seen in those little companies who have frankly and avowedly abandoned the Christian commission to preach the gospel and are waiting in quietude and seclusion until they are carried away to heavenly glory.

And all of this is because we have been unable to *"endure to the end"*. It is only when the end has come that we can expect to see the fruition of our work, and only by patient continuance in well-doing that we shall receive the prize of immortality (Rom. 2. 7). It is noteworthy how often the Scripture stresses this fact. "The Gospel shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come." (Matt. 24. 14). "Go thou thy way till the end be" (Dan. 12. 13). "Receiving the end of your faith" (1 Pet. 1. 9) "At the end it shall speak, and not lie" (Hab. 2. 3). "Then cometh the end, when He . . . shall have put down all rule and all authority and power" (1 Cor. 15. 24). It is at the end that we shall realise the fruitage of our sowing and reaping.

We can, therefore, read a new meaning into the Psalmist's words, putting emphasis on "crownest" instead of on "goodness". "Thou crownest the year with thy goodness!" It is not until the end of things that God as it were puts the topstone on his structure and his goodness stands revealed to all men. It is not until the end of this present world that the light of the glory of the Kingdom shines to all men; not until the end of the Church's career in the flesh that she shines forth *"as the sun"* in the Kingdom of

the Father (Matt. 13. 43).

So Christmas becomes a symbol and an earnest of the end that shall come, even though the past and present be dark and discouraging. We enter upon its familiar customs with knowledge that a greater and more glorious time of festivity and gladness awaits the world *"at the time of the end"*. The short passage in Psa. 65 in which this phrase occurs is quite evidently framed to fit Millennial conditions. If not a direct prophecy of the coming Age, it certainly is a wonderful illustration and the "crowning" of that Age with God's goodness the natural climax. "They that dwell in the uttermost parts of the earth are afraid at thy tokens" (signs—Heb.) says the Psalmist in verse 8. Surely he here takes his stand during the great Time of Trouble which is concluding this present Age. Men are admittedly afraid at his signs—the signs of the long-promised *parousia* of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Men's hearts failing them for fear". "They shall seek the dens and caves of the rocks." We are quite familiar with many such Scriptures and their manifest fulfilment in this our day. "Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice." The "outgoing of the morning" is the sunrising, and that of the evening the moonrising. Both these signs are to be witnessed at this time, the dawn of the Millennial Age. The sunrising is the manifestation of Jesus at his Second Advent—"as the bright shining, (the sunrise), cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the presence of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24. 27). "The sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings" (Mal. 4. 2). And the moonrising is the restoration of God's ancient people Israel to their own land, to be a missionary people and to declare his salvation to the end of the earth (Isa. 49. 6). "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" (Isa. 60. 1). Here the sunrise is associated with the moonrise which shines by reflected glory from the sun. So Israel in that day will reflect the glory of the returned Lord to mankind. "Thou visiteth the earth, and waterest it. Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water." That river of God is the Church, complete and ready for her task of bringing life to the nations; "full of water". "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God." (Psa. 46. 4). "Thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it." All things being ready, the pure sustenance of Millennial teaching, of missionary endeavour, of "life from the dead" is prepared for and offered to mankind, "corn" that will give them everlasting life. "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6. 51). "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12. 24). "Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly. Thou

makest it soft with showers. Thou blessest the springing thereof." Could language better describe the work of God with man during the next Age? "*As the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations*" (Isa. 61. 11). So we come to the climax of that glorious Age when "*thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy paths drop fatness*". "In this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat

things, full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." (Isa. 25. 6).

This is the hope for mankind. Surely at this Christmas season we can take fresh heart of courage, remembering that there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, and that just as now we look forward to the ending of this year and the hope of better things in the next, so in this end of this present world, dark and fearsome though it may be, there is the sure and certain knowledge of a new and better world "*wherein dwelleth righteousness*".

THROUGH GATES OF DEATH

"His breath goeth forth; he returneth to his earth. In that very day his thoughts perish." (Psa. 146. 4).

As a concise definition of death that brief statement of the Psalmist is probably unequalled. Throughout the Bible the cessation of breathing, absence of movement, and apparent unconsciousness has been the accepted evidence of death; whatever the fate of the one thus affected he is no longer of this world. Thus the expression so frequently met with; "giving up the spirit", the antithesis of the original bestowing of the spirit of life when the individual began to live. The breath has always been presented as synonymous with the spirit of life; when the one ceases, the other has gone, as the Wise Man said "to God who gave it".

Modern progress in the medical world has presented an apparent challenge to this position. With the advent of cardiac machines and automatic respirators, electrical pacemakers which take place of the heart, external heart massage, and so on, cases arise every so often when a person who has ceased to breathe and whose heart has stopped, and is therefore dead by conventional standards, is "brought to life" again after a short period. It is inevitable that the question is then posed to orthodox Christian theology; where was the "dead" person in the meantime? Did the soul leave the body and come back? Was there a resurrection? Can it be said that, even to this limited degree, man can "raise the dead"?

To some extent an answer is being discerned in the progress that is being made in knowledge of the brain and its working. It is known, now, that all consciousness, all thought and perception and action, is dependent upon the continued activity of the cells of the brain—ten thousand millions of them. These cells depend for their continued operation on supplies of oxygen, which come from the lungs, and of raw materials carried by the blood from the food we eat. This generates electrical energy in the brain cells and it is this electrical energy, transmitted throughout the nervous system and into the muscles, which enables us to

see and hear and act as we do.

The electrical activity of the brain can now be detected by a suitable device and recorded on a chart, appearing thereon as an undulating line which varies its characteristics according to the nature of thought or activity subsisting at the time. When the line becomes flat and straight, thought and feeling have ceased and death is not far off unless the electrical activity can be restored. If the condition is due to cessation of heart and breathing, within five or ten minutes the brain cells will have suffered irreparable damage, and nothing can restore life. If within this time heart and breathing can be restored by means of mechanical devices there is a chance that after a time, limited to a few hours, brain activity will recommence, and the patient "comes to life". These are the cases that are reported.

From these and other related factors it is being concluded by the medical profession that the true definition of death must lie, not in the cessation of breathing and heart beat, but in that of the activity of the brain which under normal conditions ceases within a few minutes thereafter. It is noteworthy that this is exactly what the Psalmist says in the Scripture above quoted. But be it noted that all this has to do with the physical body. No one has yet solved the mystery of the mind and the life, those two imponderable factors which use the brain cells as a means of relating the individual to his environment. All that science with its knowledge of the physical world can do; all that doctors with their mechanical and electrical devices can do, is to certify that there is no mind and no life operating in the body. It has become the body of a dead man and its constituent atoms will speedily separate and return to the earth from which they came. As the Lord said to Adam in the story of Eden: "*dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*" (Gen. 3. 19). That which lies beyond that point requires not knowledge of physics, nor yet of electronics, but knowledge of God. The ability to discern material things is of no avail in this sphere, but the ability to

discern spiritual things is essential. The evidence of "things not seen" is of a different order from that required in the study of the physical sciences, but it is evidence just as conclusive nevertheless. Therefore the testimony of men through the ages who were capable of understanding the unseen things is of supreme value. The patriarch Job, an Arabian philosopher of nearly four thousand years ago, for example, was in no doubt as to the sequel to death. "I know that my Redeemer liveth" he said "and that he shall stand in the latter day upon the earth. And after I shall awake, though this body be destroyed, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 12. 25-26). That so clear a view of the doctrine of the resurrection should be possible at so early a date has been denied by some of the "advanced" critics, but there are the words and they cannot be ignored. Job knew that his body must turn again to the dust, but he also knew that in a day yet to come he would realise life and consciousness in a new flesh, and in that flesh he would behold God as he had never beheld him before. The body—dust; the mind and the life—safe in the keeping of God; until in the resurrection that mind and that life is "clothed upon" with an organism suited to the environment in which they must henceforth exist.

The Apostle Paul at the other end of the time scale says exactly the same thing, but whereas Job seems to imply that he expected to experience life again in a terrestrial body suited to this earth, the Apostle is talking to Christian believers about a resurrection life in a celestial body suited to another order of being, the celestial. "There are celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial" he says. "The glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another . . . so is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a natural (physical, terrestrial) body; it is raised a spiritual (celestial) body . . . If our earthly house were dissolved, we have a building of God, eternal in the heavens". (1 Cor. 15. 40-44; 2 Cor. 5. 1-4). We earnestly desire, he goes on, to be "clothed upon" with our "house which is from heaven". In no clearer terms could he have expressed the basic truth that the body of any living being is the means whereby the mind and the life can make contact with its environment, the world in which it lives, knows itself and expresses itself. The body is an essential part of a living being, which is why Genesis says of the first creation "Man became a living soul" (Gen. 2. 7) but because mind and life is of God and in a manner we as men cannot comprehend, is always held, so to speak, in the mind of God, the dissolution of the terrestrial body is not the end of all things to the individual. Though the cessation of terrestrial life for the time being, the Christian doctrine of the resurrection declares that in God's own time life and thought and action will be resumed in another body;

whether it is terrestrial on this earth or celestial in a different sphere of being does not affect the principle and the fact.

The time element is involved here, for the teaching of the Old and the New Testaments, echoed by Christian theology through the centuries, is that the resurrection takes place at the "Last Day" i.e. the day that the Messianic Kingdom takes control of affairs on earth for the elimination of evil and the conversion of mankind to God and his ways. Martha put that understanding very succinctly at the tomb of Lazarus when our Lord said to her "Thy brother shall rise again", and she responded "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (Jno. 11. 23-24). Many an endeavour has been made to postulate the position of the life or the spirit during that intervening time—as men know time—between death and resurrection, but none of the so-called "intermediate states" provide satisfactory definitions. The ancients, viewing the "Last Day" as almost inconceivably remote from their own times, likened the pre-resurrection state of the dead to a time of sleep in which the dead, quietly waiting their call, were oblivious to the passage of time. Thus the many expressions of this nature describing the place of the dead. "In death" says the Psalmist "there is no remembrance of thee" (Psa. 6. 5). Again he describes them as being "in the dark" and "in the land of forgetfulness" (Psa. 88. 12). "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence" (Psa. 115. 17). "The dead know not anything" declares the Wise Man emphatically, "for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave" (Eccl. 9. 5-10). In uttering these sentiments the writers were not denying the resurrection; they all held tenaciously to belief in a future life, but they did assert, just as dogmatically as the experts of today assert, that when the heart is still and the breathing has stopped and the brain no longer responds, the being is dead and there is nothing left but that which resides in the incomprehensible power of God. One day at some unknown future time that power is to be exerted and that being will live again.

Canon R. H. Charles, one of the most knowledgeable theologians of the early 20th Century, put this position very logically in his book "Eschatology" (A. & C. Black, 1913). Commenting on the account of man's creation as given in the second chapter of Genesis, he says that according to that account "the material form when animated by the spirit became a living soul. The soul is the result of the indwelling of the spirit in the material body and has no independent existence of its own. It is really a function of the material when quickened by the spirit. So long as the spirit is present, so long is the soul a living soul, but when the spirit is with-

drawn the vitality of the soul is destroyed and it becomes the soul of a dead man, i.e. a corpse".

The space between death and resurrection may seem long as man measures time—in the case of the ancients it can be truthfully said to be thousands of earth years—but from the Divine standpoint it might be nothing more than an instant of time. It is difficult for us with our human limitations, to realise that many of our everyday conceptions and standards are valid only in the world we know and may appear very different when viewed from the standpoint of eternity. The analogy of sleep so often used by Biblical writers may be more fitting than we realise; to the one who sleeps, his period of sleep is as a moment and he is unaware of the passage of time; the observers around him experience the lapse of maybe several hours, occupied by all the activities applicable to the affairs of this world. Many present day mathematicians and physicists believe that time as we know it only applies to our physical universe, and even within this sphere is capable of what seem to be some strange anomalies. Thus one consequence of Einstein's theory of Relativity is what is known as the "clock paradox" by which it is claimed that if astronauts in a space ship found it possible to travel through space at nearly the speed of light they might be away from the earth for say two years according to their clocks and calendars, and reach home to find that two hundred years had elapsed on earth and all their friends were dead. The arguments upon which this astounding conclusion is based are quite incomprehensible to the ordinary man and it is only fair to say that an equal volume of equally expert opinion declares that the whole idea is a mathematical abstraction which would not happen in the real world. But that such an apparently fantastic conclusion can be reached by responsible physicists does at least suggest the possibility that the passage of time may not mean just the same thing to those who have passed beyond the gates of death as it does to we who still remain. We do not know; all we can say, and say it on the authority of all that the Scripture has to tell us concerning the death state, is that the next event

after death, in individual experience, is resurrection. From then life goes on, into what further revelations of the wonders of Divine creation we do not know. All we do know is that life is unending, leading into eternally widening spheres of experience and activity to those who use their resurrection life to overcome the failures and errors of the past and come fully into harmony with the Divine laws, and take their rightful place in Divine creation. It is for that purpose the Kingdom of Christ upon earth is ordained, that those who so choose may "*inherit the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world*" (Matt. 25. 34).

Therefore death, as the term must of necessity be defined and understood amongst men, is the cessation not only of bodily functions but also of the activity of the brain, and the consequent commencement of the return of the physical body to its dust. The fact that the body may be mummified and preserved from decomposition, as in the case of the ancient Egyptians, makes no difference; the preserved body is just as much a part of the "dust of the earth" despite the fact that decomposition has not taken place, for the spirit has gone, and when the spirit has gone the man is dead. Death is a phenomenon that, so far as man is concerned, is confined entirely to the physical body and to this planet. Even when the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 15 speaks of some in the end of the Age who do not "sleep" like those who died in earlier times but are "changed in a moment" to their heavenly destiny, he does not invalidate this fact. Those who are thus "changed in a moment" die just as truly as the antediluvians who were swept away by the Flood, for the moment of their "change" is the moment the material brain ceases to function and the human body is discarded for ever. That is death—even though it be followed instantaneously by resurrection.

"*What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?*" asked the Psalmist (89. 48). "*Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?*" No; man cannot. But God can—and God will.

"Those who would be in health do not sit still in their houses to breathe such air as may come to them, but they walk abroad and seek out rural and elevated spots that they may inhale the invigorating breezes; and thus those godly souls who would be in a vigorous spiritual state, do not merely think upon such holy doctrine as may come into their minds in the ordinary course of thought, but they

give time to meditation, they walk abroad in the fields of truth, and endeavour to climb the heights of gospel promises. It is said that Enoch WALKED with God: here is not an idle but an active communion. The road to bodily health is said to be a footpath, and the way to spiritual health is to exercise one's self in holy contemplation."

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul . . . The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether" (Psa. 19. 7-9).

There is great concern on the part of certain exponents of the "new theology" to persuade us that the growing disregard for accepted standards of Christian morality is really a good thing because modern man has matured and is able to draw up his own rules of life for himself. The idea that the Christian faith speaks with an authority that must be heeded, it is said, ought to be abandoned because the spirit of the age will not bow before authority anyway. Biblical laws and ethics are relevant to a past age but not to this. And so on.

But there is nothing new under the sun. There was a period in the history of Israel of which it is said *"In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes"* and the calamitous results of that time when men drew up their own rules of life is depicted in the Book of Judges. It was only when Samuel stood up to assert Divine authority and rule according to Divine law that the nation began to make progress. The woolly thinking that characterises so much that is said to-day is well illustrated by a competition organised some years ago by a popular journal to find the best up-to-date definition of the Christian faith. It was won by a woman who submitted *"Our Lord wanted us to be happy and He gave us the Ten Commandments with the liberty to keep them or not as we choose"*!

Of course it is necessary to relate Christian standards to modern conditions. It would be no use quoting Paul's advice respecting the partaking of meat which had been offered to idols or what he had to say about the sisters remaining veiled when in the meetings. All that was relevant to his age but not to ours. But the one dictum may be a useful pointer to the right attitude when someone in all sincerity wishes to donate his football pools winnings to the church funds and the other when there is a question as to proper reverence in the House of God. The Mosaic Law is superseded, for Christians, by the higher law laid down by Christ; nevertheless the prohibition as to coveting one's neighbour's ox or ass can be equally well applied to the family car, and coveting his house to its modern equivalent of "keeping up with the Joneses". There is nothing out of date or impracticable with the faith as it is presented in the Bible; the trouble

is that it has not been tried by many of those who criticise it. One is reminded of Lenin's admonition to Prime Minister George Lansbury when the latter visited the European capitals between the two world wars in the interests of world peace. To each of his hosts the visitor put the claims of Christianity—for Lansbury was an out-and-out Christian—as an integral part of his case. The Russian leader listened attentively and at the end of the interview said quietly "Lansbury, go back and convert your own countrymen to Christianity—then come and see me again".

But as St. Paul asked in another connection "how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Unless a reasoned exposition of the Faith, expressed in the language of to-day and set against the contemporary background, is presented and defended with vigour, it is little wonder that the pseudo-wisdom of the new theologians, dressed up in all the catch-phrases of the day and devised to appeal to the materialistic side of man's nature and understanding, gets the hearing and support it does. The theology of too many Christian groups is several centuries out-of-date, and even among those who were abreast of the times say two generations ago there are many who have made no progress since—and the world has moved a lot in those two generations. The cardinal error, that the Bible is a man-made book built up from the folk-lore and traditions of early times and must be suitably discounted on that account, has been too easily accepted by too many otherwise knowledgeable and earnest disciples. The plain truth is that the Bible as we have it was prepared by men under the overruling power of the Holy Spirit and is the medium of Divine revelation to man in all ages and nations. What is needed to-day is more, much more, Bible ministry based on that fact, expounding its contents not only as a code of ethics by which men may live but also as a definite guide-book to the Creator's purpose for man. For be it remembered that this life is not the only life, and life as it is now lived is nothing more than an embryo state preparatory to that which is to follow. And there is much more to life than is involved in the playing of harps and the blowing of trumpets. A clearer vision of what the Bible has to say on that subject should do much to counter the "new theology".

God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and if we would have this in its fulness, we must seek to know the factors upon which it depends, and apply them to our lives.

Man's province in the Universe is not to create, but by thought and labour to combine and direct the forces that already exist and convert them into different forms for new purposes.

THE NAIL IN A SURE PLACE

"Grace hath been showed us from the Lord our God . . . to give us a nail in his holy place" (Ezra. 9.8).

Much has been written on the workmanship, structure, furniture, and vessels of the Tabernacle. In the Holy of Holies were the Ark of the Covenant, mercy seat, table of the shewbread, lampstand and altar of incense; all speak prophetically and typically to us of the manifold roles of the Lord Jesus in bringing redeemed men into the presence of God so that they might worship Him. The elements themselves are but a shadow of the truths and principles behind the true and spiritual worship promulgated by Christ in the gospel age (Heb. 8. 5). Hidden amongst the gold and richness of the glory of God's dwelling place on earth is an ordinary nail or tent peg. Although easily overlooked it is of supreme importance in the structure of the Tabernacle, and for us as partakers of the new covenant.

This importance is illustrated by a detailed consideration of Isaiah 22: 15-24. The account draws a contrast between two people, Shebna and Eliakim. Analysis of these characters emphasises the gulf between the carnal nature and the spiritual man exemplified by Christ.

The account opens with a picture of Shebna, whose name means "youthfulness". While youth carries connotations of strength and vigour, scripture often refers to its headstrong passions and identifies it as the period of our most wayward inclinations. Paul's advice to Timothy was to "*flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart*" (2 Tim. 2. 22). The Lord spoke to Noah in Gen. 8. 21, saying that "*every inclination in his heart is evil from childhood*". Several Biblical characters, including Job, referred to the sins of their youth. Note in passing here that Jesus lived through all the challenges of physical and emotional development, but never succumbed to the sinful passions of youth.

Shebna was treasurer to Hezekiah; he took charge of palace affairs and was steward of the King's resources. Mankind was originally placed as steward of God's creation. "*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish of the sea . . .*" (Gen. 1. 28). Man lost his position of dominion and responsibility through sin. Shebna speaks to us of fallen man.

As treasurer, Shebna was an educated man. He would have been used to careful and efficient administration, making best possible use of resources, time and energy. Knowing what it was to hold a position of trust and authority, he must have paid care and attention to the disciplines of

investment. From such training, one would expect him to be equally parsimonious in his own affairs.

Isa. 22. 16 reveals, however, that the height of his personal investment was a grave. He marked out and purchased for himself a sepulchre near Jerusalem. He spent money, time and energy in preparation for death. We need to prepare for death, both in ensuring our eternal rest, and in providing for our families (Prov. 13. 22). Shebna's pre-occupation and level of commitment to his grave was dishonourable.

He sited his resting place "*on the height*" (Isa. 22. 16). He chose a lofty place where passers-by would clearly see his sepulchre. In life he held a position above many; even in death he would be of elevated position. In this regard, Shebna shows himself to be a child of Satan; as Lucifer he also aspired to a lofty place (Isa. 14. 13).

Shebna hewed his tomb out of solid rock. It's durability was ensured—generations to come would have to look up to the grave of Shebna. Part of the inscribed lintel from his tomb has been recovered (*Avigad, N., 1953, Israel Exploration Journal, vol. 3, pp. 137-152; Wiseman, D.J., 1958, Illustrations from Biblical Archaeology, p. 59*). In death, his name was assured a lasting monument to his greatness, and would be lifted high (cf. also Absalom's pillar in 2 Sam. 18. 18). His approach to death was one of great pride, and his post-mortem investment was in a high, deeply etched inscription testifying to his importance.

How this contrasts with the attitude of the Lord Jesus! He came to death with no pride at all. Indeed, "*he humbled himself and became obedient unto death even the death of the cross*" (Phil. 2. 8). Far from spending all his energies in preparing a resting place for himself, Jesus was buried in a tomb which was prepared for another man. He took no glory in the grave—he would only require it for 3 days! Rather than spending his efforts toward death, He came to give us life in superabundance (John 10. 10).

Although the resurrection of the dead was a central doctrine, Shebna's expectations of God were very low. If it entered his mind at all, resurrection must have been a very distant horizon. In preparing a rocky tomb, his efforts were for durability and safety for his resting place in death. He was preparing for a long stay!

He prepared for glory in death, yet we are reminded that there is no glory except for that of God. "*Let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me*" (Jer. 9. 24). There can be no glory in death because it is swallowed up in the victory of the resurrection of the sinless Christ. All glory must go to Him who vanquished death. It

is not a tomb that man should labour for and set his ambitions on, but pursuit of God's kingdom and everlasting life.

The focus of Shebna's life was the grave. Jesus taught that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6. 21). Shebna's aspirations were limited to death. He valued the grave and accorded death an opportunity for sustained glory. This is a vastly different view to the perspective of God's children, in which death is merely the wages of sin.

God, speaking through Isaiah, having identified Shebna's sinfulness, impeaches him with the question, "What are you doing here and who gave you permission?" (Is. 22. 16). Hear the righteous indignation in God's voice at the affront to his established order of priorities! The result is the promise of expatriation, disgrace and deposition.

It is to Eliakim that God will look. Eliakim means "My God shall establish" or "my servant". He was son of Hilkaiah—"the portion of Jehovah". These names find their fullest import in the Lord Jesus, the suffering servant who has been established by God in the heavens, having made God his portion whilst on earth. Jesus, the servant of God, came to administer grace to fallen humanity. In a way, he was God's treasurer, the steward of the riches of glory, liberally distributing the King's resources amongst his people—sight for the blind, health for the sick, life for the dead, strength for the weary, hope for the hopeless, and redemption for the fallen.

Jesus is, in a sense "a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the house of Judah" (Isa. 22. 21). Because of his death, resurrection and exaltation, praises ring in the house of Judah (literally, house of praise), and the very centre of the Kingdom of God. In Jesus came the spiritual fulfilment of all the natural order. God's nation on earth pointed to the spiritual Israel, and the hope of a new Jerusalem with Jesus its creator and sustainer. Further, the mission of Jesus fathered "many sons to glory" (Heb. 2. 10). His response to his Father would be to "declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises" (Heb. 2. 12, quoting Ps. 22. 22).

"I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no-one can shut, and what he shuts no-one can open" (Isa. 22. 22). The form of this promise to Eliakim recalls those to Jesus, "great David's greater Son". He holds the keys to the kingdoms of death and Hades (Rev. 1. 18), and delivered the keys of Heaven to the Church via Peter (Matt. 16. 19). His also are the keys to the 7-sealed scroll (Rev. 6:1) whose opening releases the 4 horsemen, the souls of the testifying saints beneath the altar, the earthquake and its attendant signs followed by the sealing of the 144,000, and

the great silence followed by the destruction of one third of the earth. The authority of Jesus for binding and loosing is unique and unassailable.

"I will drive him like a peg into a firm place" (Isa. 22. 23). There is no word for "like" in the Hebrew, it being inserted to improve syntax. The implication in the original is that Eliakim himself would be the peg or nail. Bearing in mind the pointers to Jesus, this refers back to our text in Ezra 9. 8, that God would provide a nail in his holy place. The prophecy in Zech. 10. 4 is also relevant here. "From Judah will come the cornerstone of his Kingdom (Isa. 28. 16; Luke 20. 17; Acts 4. 11; 1 Peter 2. 7 etc.); in Rev. 6. 2 the conqueror on the white horse was released as the Lamb of God opened the first of the 7 seals, and a battle bow (Gk. *Toxon*) was in his hand. Thus, it is not surprising to see Christ represented as the nail or peg in this verse.

Our nail is Jesus, and he is in "his holy place". By referring back to Exod. 27. 19 and Exod. 38. 20, we understand that the pins, nails or tent-pegs (depending on the translation) of the tabernacle were to be made of brass. They were placed in brass sockets and served to secure the tabernacle to the ground in the wilderness. The tabernacle housed the very presence of God. There is a pin which holds the transcendent spiritual glory of the God of Heaven in the proximity of love to His creation. The peg that can hold heaven to earth is Jesus Christ. He is the only means of access from earth to heaven, the one mediator between God and man.

Just as the peg was needed to secure the tabernacle in times of storm, flood and desert wind, so Jesus Christ is needed as the pinion of heavenly glory in the Church to stabilise against the fierce attacks of the tempter, and the storms of God's wrath upon man's sin as laid upon him (cf. Ps. 55. 1-8). How could God in all his glory become allied to man with all his shifting sands of mortality, selfishness, changeable loyalties, and sinful pride? Man lacks the integrity and stability for occupation by the God of the universe. Only the stake of Jesus is sufficient to anchor God and allow his filling of peoples lives, making them temples of the Holy Spirit.

The brass nature of the pegs speaks of judgment (Num. 21. 9; Deut. 28. 23; Judges 16. 21 etc.); brass is a mixture of copper and zinc forged at high temperatures. Only in the perfect man Jesus is there an alloy of earth and heaven fired under the judgment of the Father; only in him are met all the necessary ingredients for the forging of a nail to be placed in the holy of holies.

The Hebrew word for "firm" or "sure" place is *aman*, a derivative of *Amen*. "For all the promises of God in him are Yea and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (2 Cor. 1. 20). Jesus is sole

means for communicating the fulfilment of God's promise, spoken from his holy place, to us.

"He will be a throne of honour for the house of his father" (Isa. 22. 23). God has given Jesus the throne of his earthly ancestral father David (Luke 1. 32-33; Acts 2. 30; Heb. 8. 1; Rev. 22. 3 etc.) and has him rule over the kingdom of his heavenly Father. Honour belongs to the Lamb who sits upon the throne (Rev. 5. 12, 13).

"All the glory of his family will hang on him: its

offspring and offshoots—all its lesser vessels, from the bowls to all the jars" the entirety of his adopted family from the greatest to the smallest vessel, to be hung upon him. Only Jesus can bring the eternal weight (kabod) of the glory of heaven and sinful man together in stable union.

"We have . . . an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf" (Heb. 6. 19).

THE TEN PLAGUES OF EGYPT

A two-part series

Part 2 Death of the First-Born.

The tenth chapter closes whilst Moses is in audience with Pharaoh over the matter of the ninth plague, the visitation of darkness. Pharaoh had just told Moses to leave the audience-chamber and not come back. "See my face no more" he said "for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die." "Thou hast spoken well" retorted Moses "I will see thy face again no more". The eleventh chapter, if read as continuing the narrative in consecutive order of events, introduces the apparent contradiction of a subsequent interview with Pharaoh following the one at which those words were spoken. There was in fact no further interview; verses 1-3 of chapter 11 constitute a parenthesis in the narrative and refer to something that occurred before the ninth plague. Verse 1 should properly be rendered "Now the Lord had said unto Moses . . ." etc. It was before Moses had gone in to Pharaoh over the ninth plague that God told him about the coming smiting of the first-borns and its consequences, the deliverance of Israel. At the same time Moses was told to instruct the people that they ask of their Egyptian neighbours gifts of gold and silver. The words for "borrow" and "lend" in the Hebrew are equally applicable to the asking for, and receiving of gifts, and the shade of meaning intended has to be related to the context. It must have been obvious on this occasion that there could be no question of "lending" in the commonly accepted sense of the word since the Egyptians knew perfectly well that the Israelites intended going away and not coming back. Since by this time the Egyptian people generally were terrified of their inconvenient neighbours and wished nothing so much as to see the last of them, favours of this kind would doubtless be granted with alacrity and the Israelites were probably well loaded with the treasures of Egypt by the time they did leave the country. The suggestion sometimes made to the effect that this "borrowing" was a bit of sharp practice on the part of Israel can hardly be sustained; such valuables as they did acquire must be held to have been gifts—almost bribes, maybe; anything to placate

these people who had so powerful a God and to get them out of the country.

The rest of chapter 11 is then, logically, a continuation of the interview with Pharaoh. "I will see thy face again no more," Moses had said, but that was not his last word. Standing stern-faced and resolute before the angry monarch, he pronounced the dread sentence the Lord had previously authorised him to pass. "Thus saith the Lord, 'About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh . . . and all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and shall bow themselves to me, saying, 'Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee'; and after that I will go out'."

That did end the interview. What Pharaoh said in reply, if he said anything at all, is not recorded. It seems from verse 8 that he did not get the chance. According to that verse, as soon as Moses had spoken, "he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger". And true to his word, he never saw the face of Pharaoh again. The die was cast, the obduracy of Pharaoh had made the last dread tragedy inevitable, and Moses was finished with him.

Why did Moses manifest "great anger", so unlike his usual peacable and unruffled disposition, at this particular time? There is nothing like it recorded in any of the eight previous occasions. It could not have been on account of Israel for he knew that the deliverance was now nigh at hand. There was no question of frustration or disappointment over the progress of events. The matter was out of his hands now and in the hand of God. He had only to deliver the final message and walk out, knowing that his work was almost immediately to be crowned with success and the Exodus become a reality. His anger could not have had anything to do with that. Was it then because Moses knew now that nothing could save all those firstborn sons of the Egyptians from sudden death and he was sick at heart at the prospect. The people of Egypt, the nobility and officials at the royal court, were

already anxious to let the Israelites go and had in fact been urging Pharaoh to give way. That is evident from chap. 10 vs. 7. Only the obstinacy of one man stood in the way, and because of that, all Egypt must suffer this cruel affliction. The character of Moses is revealed in the Pentateuch as that of an essentially kindly and tolerant man, albeit stern and even ruthless where the enemies of his God or the nation he was creating were concerned. Many of those Egyptian parents who were to lose their firstborns had been his own personal friends in days of youth forty years earlier, when as the adopted son of the Pharaoh Queen Hatshepsut he had moved freely among them. He thought of the tragic times when the newborn sons of his own people were destroyed at birth by the cruelty of his Pharaoh's grandfather, the renowned Thothmes I, and felt quick concern for all those Egyptians who were to suffer the same way. In a violent upsurge of emotion at what he now knew must come he turned his back upon his callous opponent and "*went out from Pharaoh in a great anger*".

The stroke did not fall at once. The expression in ch. 11, 4 "*About midnight will I go out . . .*" does not mean that the Angel of Death was to visit Egypt that same night; only that the visitation would occur at midnight. Chapter 12 makes it clear that several days, at least a week, elapsed while the people were receiving instructions and making preparations for the great event. It was now April, the tenth month of the Egyptian year and the seventh month, Nisan, according to the Hebrew method of reckoning. Now there was to be a change; the month in which the Exodus took place was to be accounted the first month of the year. That was the first instruction Moses gave them. (Ch. 12, 2). For ever after, Israel counted Nisan the beginning of the year for all religious matters and retained Tisri, (October) the original first month, for secular considerations. On the tenth day of this month Nisan, said Moses, each family was to select a choice year-old lamb or kid from the flocks and care for it until the fourteenth day. On the evening of that day they were to kill the lamb, smear its blood on the doorposts and "lintels"—properly a small look-out port above the doorway of Egyptian houses of the period—and partake together of the flesh, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, in a solemn ceremonial feast. They were to partake attired as if ready for a journey and they were to remain inside their houses all night, for during that night the Angel of Death would come down upon Egypt and in every house except those marked with the blood the firstborn son would die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh to the firstborn of his humblest subject. But the angel would pass over those houses bearing the sign of the blood, without harming any within.

Thus was born the ceremony of the Passover, an observance which made Israel unique among the nations and subsists to-day, a living testimony to the reality of those events so long ago transpiring. No existing national ceremonial or memorial in any other nation is so old as the Passover; for more than three thousand years it has been repeated annually in every part of the world where the descendants of the people of Israel are to be found. The absolute truth of the Exodus from Egypt is evidenced by the continued existence of this ceremony; there is no doubt that the events which gave it birth must have happened as related.

The 12th chapter recounts in full the Lord's instruction to Moses and Aaron respecting the detail of the Passover ceremony. The command to keep it as an ordinance for ever was included and that command has been faithfully obeyed. The reference in vs. 7-20 to the "seven days of unleavened bread" following the feast, during which no leaven might be used in their food, the first and seventh days additionally to be marked by cessation of all labour and made holy to the Lord, is interesting as probably marking the introduction to Israel of a seven-day week with one day, the Sabbath, a rest day. The Egyptian calendar at that time was based on a ten day week and no rest day at all. It is likely that this part of the instruction was intended for future Passovers; its implementation at the moment of the Exodus would not have been very practicable. Further stipulations (vs. 24-27, 43-49) required the people to instruct their children in the meaning of the ceremony and the details of their escape from Egypt—to this day at each Passover a lad formally asks why they keep this feast and is answered by one of his elders in traditional words—and provided for the position of non-Israelites among them. Such could become adopted into the commonwealth of Israel by undergoing the rite of circumcision and were then entitled to partake; otherwise no foreigner or stranger was allowed to share in the ceremony.

The instruction given, "*the people bowed the head, and worshipped. And the children of Israel went away, and did as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron; so did they.*" (ch. 12, 27-28). It is evident that the entire community was now fully persuaded that the promise was to be fulfilled and their deliverance effected. There were no objections and no doubts. A few days must have elapsed whilst word was passed throughout Goshen to everyone of the two to three million Israelites involved and very busy days they must have been. It says much for the organising skill of Moses and his lieutenants that so great a number of people at so short a notice should, on the evening of the fourteenth day of Nisan, the April moon being at the full, in the year now dated 1440 B.C., be quietly

gathered in their houses attired as for a journey, the slain lambs on the tables before them and the doors marked with the blood, awaiting the tremendous event prophesied more than four centuries earlier to Abraham. *"Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs . . . that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge, and they shall come out with great substance . . . in the fourth generation they shall come hither again."* (Gen. 15: 13-16). In many a shuttered and bolted house those words must have been recited, and prayers for deliverance ascend to God, as they waited in faith for the Lord to come down.

"And it came to pass that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon. And Pharaoh rose up in the night . . . and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead." (ch. 12: 30).

Perhaps Pharaoh had not really believed that this would happen. Blinded, maybe, by his own egotism and arrogance he might have reasoned that every one of the nine plagues had been lifted; the damage they had done was grievous, but not irremediable. The God of Moses had shown himself possessed of marvellous powers in the world of Nature and had used those powers considerably to increase the magnitude of visitations which on a smaller scale were by no means unknown in Egypt. But to single out of all Egypt's multitudes the firstborn son of each family and encompass the sudden death of all such simultaneously on the stroke of midnight: Pharaoh knew of no gods having such power and he had dismissed Moses' final denunciation, a little uneasy perhaps but dismissed it nevertheless, as the despairing defiance of a defeated man. Now he knew better, and it was too late!

The literal historicity of the death of the firstborns is the only explanation of the existence of the Passover feast. The very centre and core of the whole arrangement, and of much of Israel's religious organisation in after years, rests upon the fact that all the firstborns of Egypt did die under the hand of God on that fateful night. Without that dread happening the Passover could have had no meaning and would never have been repeated. However inexplicable the proceeding—and the singular nature of the selection, firstborn only in every house except those marked with the blood, rules out every explanation save direct action by Divine intervention—it must have happened in the fashion described.

Egyptian history is silent on this event and the name of Pharaoh's firstborn son is not known. But there is one significant fact. The son who did succeed him was Thothmes IV, and he is well known

in history. In 1886 the Egyptologist Maspero, engaged in clearing the sand which buried the lower half of the Sphinx, the huge half man, half animal monument situated near the Great Pyramid of Ghizeh, discovered between the great paws of the figure a small altar with an inscribed tablet, hitherto unknown. When deciphered, the tablet was found to be the record of a remarkable dream experienced by Thothmes IV when a youth, before his accession. It seems that the lad had been out hunting with his servants, lain down in the shadow of the Sphinx to rest, and fallen asleep. In his dream the Sphinx-god spoke to him and promised that if he would clear away the sand which even then partially buried the monument then he should one day become Pharaoh of Egypt. Upon awaking, Thothmes was so impressed that he carried out his part of the bargain; when he did succeed to the throne he erected the tablet in the place where he had slept. The significant thing about this is that Thothmes was evidently not the eldest son of Amen-hotep or there had been no need to make this bargain to ensure his succession. In Egypt the eldest son invariably succeeded his father as Pharaoh. The obvious inference is that for a reason not stated in Egyptian history the eldest son of Amen-hotep died before his father so that the younger one succeeded. That is strong supporting evidence for the truth of the Biblical account.

How does this wholesale destruction of firstborn, with all the anguish and mental suffering it must have involved, appear in relation to the Divine character? God is love and these slain firstborns were the creation of his hands. He had given them life; now in a moment He deprived them of life. Was it not possible for God, who has all power, to deliver his people without involving the sudden death of probably several hundred thousand innocent firstborns? The answer to such questions is not easy; it involves the whole philosophy of the permission of evil. To say that God is the giver of life and has every right to withdraw life at his pleasure is not a complete nor a satisfactory answer. It is true that in past times God had visited whole peoples with judgment on account of their depravity—the antediluvians, the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, and so on—but there is no evidence that all the slain firstborns were depraved. And what then of their eternal future? The situation is only tolerable when it is understood that this life is only one phase of man's development into the Divine ideal. The death of the firstborns was not an irreparable loss; they did not die without hope; there is more yet to come. In the words of a famous theologian, Dr. Farrar, Archdeacon of Westminster, *"man's destiny stops not at the grave; many who knew not Christ here will know him there. In some way or other, before the final judg-*

ment, God's mercy may reach them and the benefits of Christ's atonement be extended to them beyond the grave." And it might well be that necessity existed to demonstrate at this time the fact that all men are members one of another, that for reasons which are too deep for the human mind to grasp the evil of one man cannot but have its repercussion upon others. The death of the firstborn was primarily the consequence of Pharaoh's hardness of heart. Was this terrible outcome a measure of the fearful gulf which Pharaoh had created between himself and every right thought and action. As Dr. Farrar said again in another place "It is impossible for us to estimate the hardening effect of obstinate persistence in evil, and the power of the human will to resist the law and reject the love of God."

Pharaoh gave in. Before morning dawned he had sent messengers to Moses and Aaron and bidden them muster all Israel and get out of Egypt. It is not necessary to read vs. 31 to imply that he spoke personally to Moses. He had already seen the prophet for the last time. Probably his officials went post haste to Moses' residence with the royal mandate. According to vs. 33 they were anxious to expedite the people's departure, fearing yet further visitations of Israel's God. "We be all dead men" they said. The sooner Pharaoh's edict was acted upon the better.

The implication of ch. 12. vs. 34, 39, 42 and 51 is that the great migration commenced that same night. The people had no time even to prepare

food for the journey before leaving their homes. The smiting of the firstborns occurred at midnight; affairs must have moved fast if the people or even a proportion of them were on the move by 6.0 a.m. and this is what the account implies. It is certain that every detail of the move had been organised beforehand. Even so it was not humanly possible for the command to be transmitted throughout the land of Goshen, more than a hundred miles in extent, within an hour or so, unless a system of signalling such as the use of beacon fires had been already arranged. It is evident that all Israel fully believed that this time the word would be given and they were ready. Verse 37 indicates a general gathering at the town of Succoth on the southern border of Goshen preparatory to an organised move toward the Red Sea. The verse states that they journeyed from Rameses to Succoth; it is likely that the Israelites in and around the capital city of Rameses had the news first and were early on the move. Those scattered throughout the country districts would be informed a little later and then join the travelling bands. It might have been several days or even weeks before all Israel was congregated together at Succoth and the real journey into the wilderness began. But to Moses the moment for which he had planned and laboured these forty years past came when the Egyptian messengers stood before him in the darkness of that Passover night with their royal master's urgent plea "Rise up . . . get you forth . . . and go."

concluded

A Note on Lot's daughters

The expedient by which Lot's daughters each became the mother of a son by their own father is not always rightly appraised. The normal reaction is to quote this sequel to the story as an evidence of the extent to which the low moral standards of Sodom had permeated the household of Lot, but this is not necessarily justified. It has been suggested that the elder girl's remark "there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth" indicates that they believed the cataclysm had destroyed all mankind and that the survival of the human race depended upon their father and themselves alone. That is not likely. They must have known at least that men and women still lived in Zoar, the town they had just left. From their cave on the mountain, five thousand feet above the level of the sea, they would be able to look down, not only over the whole extent of the ruined valley, but right across it to the opposite mountains rising up to Hebron fifty miles away. They knew that their kinsman Abraham lived there with his household, surrounded by the Amorites and Hittites, and they could easily see for themselves that the highlands of Canaan had been untouched by the disaster.

The more likely supposition rests upon the strong feeling, is common to all Semitic peoples, that dishonour attached to the man who failed to perpetuate his seed in the male line. The daughters' justification for their act was "that we may preserve seed of our father". They evidently saw no prospect of linking up with any other community of men, and held the abnormal circumstances to justify the expedient. In the days of Sodom the world was younger than it is now, and some present-day restrictions on inter-marriage did not exist; continuing degeneration of the race which has made such necessary had not then progressed so far. Abraham and his brother Nahor both married their own nieces; this was by no means an unusual relationship at that time. The marriage of full brother and sister was common among the Pharaohs of Egypt centuries later. 2 Sam. 3. 13 shows that a union between Amnon and his half-sister Tamar would have had the blessing of King David their father, and that was nearly a thousand years later.

The two sons, we are told became the progenitors of the twin nations of Moab and Ammon.

PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA

No. 18 in a series of stories of St. Paul

Paul's defence before Agrippa ranks as one of the highlights of the Book of Acts. In masterly style he presented the case for Christianity as the logical development of Judaism to a man high in authority in Jewry, one qualified by birth, education and experience to understand the force of the argument. Perhaps, if only we knew, he came within an ace of persuading his listener. No one has ever really understood what lay behind Agrippa's cryptic remark "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian".

The new governor of Judea, Porcius Festus, was an upright and resolute man and not one to let the grass grow under his feet. He had been appointed to succeed Felix, following the latter's disgrace and recall to Rome, and he took up his duties with the intention of stamping out the corruption and lawlessness which had flourished under his predecessor. Had he lived longer history might have been different; he died in A.D. 61 only a year after assuming office, and his successors did nothing to arrest the mounting lawlessness which culminated ten years later in the horrors of the Jewish War and the dispersion of the Jews among all nations.

Within a few days of Paul's appeal to Cæsar and the consequent decision of Festus to send his prisoner to Rome, the new governor received a courtesy visit from the highest Jewish dignitary in the land, no less a person than King Herod Agrippa II. Agrippa was a king in name only, his title being a courtesy one given him by Rome in recognition of his descent from the Herodian family, and on account of his father's personal friendship with the Emperor Claudius. He exercised no imperial authority of any kind in Judea. He was, however, designated the Protector of the Temple, and this fact, coupled with his very considerable wealth, gave him considerable standing and power with the priestly hierarchy and the ruling classes generally. His great-grandfather, Herod the Great, the slayer of the Innocents soon after Jesus' birth, had been dead for many years and so had his great-uncle, Herod Antipas, who executed John the Baptist. His own father, Herod Agrippa I, by whose orders James the brother of John had been executed (Acts 12. 2) had died sixteen years earlier in this very town of Cæsarea, following the celebrated oration on account of which the listeners had hailed him as a god. Now the last of the Herods was to come face to face with the foremost of those who espoused the Cause against which his own forbears had fought in vain.

So this Jewish nobleman, in all the regalia of his meaningless royalty, accompanied by his sister Bernice who shared his pseudo-imperial state,

came to pay his respects to the representative of Roman rule and with the intention doubtless of establishing a business understanding for the future. Agrippa is known to have been an astute "man of the world" and whilst on the one hand he was a zealous orthodox Jew upholding the State religion and the Law of Moses he also took good care to keep on the right side of the secular power emanating from Rome. It was by this Agrippa's energy and initiative, incidentally, that the magnificent Temple begun by his great-grandfather Herod the Great forty-six years before the time of Jesus (John 2. 20) was at length completed, having taken three quarters of a century to build; ten years later, as Jesus had predicted, it was totally demolished by the Romans under Titus at the siege of Jerusalem.

The Jewish king had no thought of that calamitous ending of his life's work on the day he entered the old Herodian palace at Cæsarea, now the official residence of the Roman governor, to make the acquaintance of Festus. Neither could he have suspected that at this moment, like his forbears before him, he was to be brought into contact with the challenge of Christ, but that unlike them, he was not to fight against it, but in measure to further its interests. There is not much doubt that Agrippa's considered judgment in the matter at issue was a contributory factor to Paul's acquittal when he stood his trial before Nero two years later.

After, doubtless, several days' discussions on matters of State, of Roman policy and Jewish intransigence, Festus brought up the matter that was troubling him. He had this prisoner on his hands, Paul the Christian, who after two ineffectual trials had appealed to the tribunal of Cæsar and must now be sent to Rome. Festus' problem was that he had no idea of what crime under Roman law Paul was to be accused. It was quite obvious that Festus, like Felix and the commander Claudius Lysias, believed Paul innocent of any crime, but the insistence of the Jews that he was worthy of death made it necessary to get to the root of the matter. Had it been a matter of transgression against the ordinary civil law Festus would have known where he was, but realising his ignorance of matters Jewish, and finding, as he said rather helplessly to Agrippa, that the accusations related to "*questions of their own religion, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive*" he felt at a loss. He rather welcomed the opportunity of getting the advice of so acknowledged an expert as Agrippa.

The king probably beamed expansively. He would be only too happy to assist his new friend.

There might have been another factor. He could not but have been well aware of Paul's name and reputation. Secretly, perhaps, he would long since have liked to meet and hear him but the dignity of his position forbade. Here was a golden opportunity. "I would also hear the man myself" he remarked. "Tomorrow" promised a greatly relieved Festus "thou shalt hear him". The ensuing proceedings were probably the most elaborate of any at which the Apostle had been the central figure. Festus did not do anything by halves. When Paul was ushered into the council chamber he found himself facing all the exotic pageantry of an Eastern king. Agrippa sat in royal state with his consort Bernice and their retinue, gorgeously arrayed in a blaze of colour and ornament, in addition to which there was the armed might of Rome, commanders and centurions with their men in gleaming armour, and the civic leaders of the city in their robes of office. Everybody who was anybody in Cæsarea was present, and it is to be hoped that Agrippa was suitably impressed by the organising ability of Festus and his efforts to make this a memorable occasion.

"And Festus said, King Agrippa and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O King Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write, for it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him". (ch. 25. 24-27).

This was not a trial, as were the two previous occasions. Having appealed to Cæsar, Paul had taken his case completely out of the hands of provincial officials. This function was an invitation to Paul to state his own position before a leading representative of his own nation who could be relied upon for a true appraisal of the position and advise the Governor accurately. Paul himself understood this and was ready accordingly. Agrippa looked down upon him from his seat and invited him to say what was on his mind. "Thou art permitted to speak for thyself" he said urbanely.

"I think myself happy, King Agrippa" Paul responded, "because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all things whereof I am accused of the Jews, especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews". This was not fulsome flattery. There was probably no living Jew better qualified

to weigh up the logic of the arguments whereby Paul would seek to prove that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled in his person and life all that the Old Testament, the Jewish Scriptures, had foretold concerning the suffering Messiah and his relation to the out-working purpose of God. Agrippa was an educated man and thoroughly conversant with the literature and the history of his nation. He was not a religious fanatic, and he was not biased in favour of the priestly hierarchy of his people. All the evidence goes to show that he took Paul and all he had to say very seriously and judged the entire matter on its merits.

Paul was now well launched on his favourite theme. He knew that the man before him was well able to understand the thesis he had to propound. He commenced on the basis of the age-old hope of Israel, that it might be the Divine instrument for the conversion of the world under the leadership of the Messiah in God's good time. "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers". From this he swung quickly into the connecting link between that promise and its claimed fulfilment in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" Gentiles might doubt such a thing, but never Jews. In all the fierce conflicts that Jews had, first with the Greeks and afterwards with the Romans, during the troubled two centuries before Christ, the fixed belief of every Jew faced with death at enemy hands was that God would raise him from the dead. One of the fundamental doctrines of Judaism was that at the Last Day there would be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust, and that rewards and punishments would then be distributed. It is true that, in general, Jewish thought equated the just with the Jews and the unjust with the Gentiles, and looked forward to sanguinary vengeance upon all their opponents when the day of the Messiah should dawn, but in this they have not been so very much different from many of their Christian successors. The only real points of difference in Paul's theology were that Jesus of Nazareth was that promised Messiah and that Gentiles as well as Jews had part and lot in the Divine purpose; to neither of these propositions would orthodox Jewry give assent. Agrippa, however, was a man of broad mind and liberal education and he probably saw the force of Paul's argument much more clearly than has usually been supposed.

The Apostle proceeded, describing the circumstances of his conversion to Christ on the Damascus road, his sudden change from being a persecutor of the disciples to an adherent of their cause, his call to preach Christianity to the nations outside Israel and his implementation of that com-

mission, his visions of Christ and messages from heavenly sources, his realisation that the prophetic teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures converged on the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who lived, and suffered, and died, and was the first to rise from the dead—and at that, Festus, who had been listening with growing incomprehension and amazement to themes which were totally new to him, could contain himself no longer and broke in with a loud exclamation “Paul, you are mad; your great learning is turning you mad” (ch. 26, 24 R.S.V.). With exquisite courtesy the Apostle turned to him, “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner”. Swinging round again to face the Jewish monarch, his voice rang out with that stentorian challenge which was the dramatic climax to this dramatic scene. “King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest!”

Agrippa's historic answer, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian”, as rendered in the A.V., has been hailed as an intimation that the king was within an ace of being converted to the faith. On the other hand, many scholars have criticised this rendering of the Greek phrase in Acts and averred that the king really passed a somewhat sarcastic remark to the effect that Paul expected to convert him much too easily. There is a certain difficulty in translating the expression and room for some difference of opinion. It does not seem likely, however, that Agrippa was being sarcastic or treating the matter lightly; the narrative goes on to show that he did in fact take Paul's words very seriously in his subsequent discussion with Festus. The word translated “Almost” has the sense of

something little in respect of size, few in respect of number, brief in respect of time, and so on. There is no evidence that the remark was a question; Agrippa did not say, as some have suggested, “Do you expect so easily to make me a Christian?” It is to be feared that popular exegesis of this verse has been somewhat influenced by a refusal to believe that Agrippa was in any way whatever influenced by Paul's appeal, but this is both unjustified and unworthy. It is quite possible that the sense of his reply, expressed in present day idiom, was something like “with a little effort you will persuade me to become a Christian” as though not much more was needed to turn the scale. It is not likely that Agrippa was really on the point of conversion, but it is possible that his thoughtful mind had perceived the logic of Paul's presentation and was more than half inclined to accept the intellectual premise on which it was based. His use of the term “Christian”, which was not as yet a widely used term, shows that he already had some knowledge of the progress of the new faith.

The hearing was concluded. Agrippa rose from his seat in sign that he had heard enough. Taking Festus and a few high officials aside, he conferred with them in private. Paul was guilty of no crime against the law; “this man might have been set at liberty” was Agrippa's judgment “if he had not appealed unto Cæsar”. Without much doubt the king helped Festus draft the document which was to go to Rome in explanation of Paul's despatch to the Imperial tribunal; it is quite likely that the opinion of Agrippa as to Paul's innocence was added to the letter and that opinion must have carried weight when the trial took place. After two long year's inactivity in Cæsaræa Paul's heart must have beat faster in anticipation of the imminent attainment of his great ambition—to see Rome.

(To be continued)

Diversity in ministration

“The Scriptures admit of diversities of operations and administrations in the Household of Faith; and this admission is rendered with perfect compatibility with the declared catholicity and unity of the church. (1. Cor. 12. 4). In essentials firm; in circumstantialia moderate; is our safest way. The several departments of the one universal church may differ as appropriately and beautifully, in opinion and ceremony, as the varying foliage and flowers of the several portions of the earth; all, in harmony, can send up one commingled perfume to the Master Spirit that creates, sustains and governs all. The moral universe, like the natural world, is variety in harmony, and diversity in unity.

Christ is the Sun and centre of all minds unfallen and redeemed, and it will matter little what shades of difference may prevail among them if all do but drink in his beams, and rise in the odour of devout affection to circulate eternally around his Throne. We contend not, however, for diversified name and sect among men; this is rather to be deprecated; but when a Peter needed a Paul's rebuke surely we should beware of the plausibility of those who should retain or cherish error for unity's sake, sooner than contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, at the sacrifice of what is only apparent harmony in the guise of destructive falsehood.”

Rev. W. Mudge, 1843

Chalmers on the Millennium

*A word from
the past*

Dr. Thomas Chalmers, 1780-1847, noted Scottish preacher and theologian. Founder and first Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland (1843). Well versed in scientific thought of his day, an upholder of the integrity of the Bible, he was a convinced believer in the coming Millennial Kingdom.

* * *

"It has been our careful endeavour in all that we have said, to keep within the limits of the record, and to offer no other remarks than those which may fitly be suggested by the circumstances, that a new earth is to be created, as well as a new heaven, for the future accommodation of the righteous.

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

"In the new economy, which is to be reared for the accommodation of the blessed, there will be *materialism*; not merely new heavens, but also a *NEW EARTH*. And, as distinguished from the present, which is an abode of rebellion, it will be an abode of righteousness. It holds out a warmer and a more alluring picture of the Elysium that awaits us, when told that there will be a beauty to delight the eye; music to regale the ear; and the comfort that springs from all the charities of intercourse between man and man, holding converse as they do on earth, and gladdening each other with the benignant smiles that play on the human countenance, or the accents of kindness that fall in soft and soothing melody from the human voice. There is much of the innocent and much of the inspiring, and much to affect and elevate the heart, in the scenes and contemplations of materialism—and we do hail the information of our text, that after the dissolution of the earth's present framework, it will again be varied and decked out anew in all the

graces of its unfading verdure, and of its unbounded variety—that when He comes down to tabernacle with men, we shall also have the reflection of him in a lovely mirror of his own workmanship—and that we shall walk for ever in a land replenished with those sensible delights, and those sensible glories, which, we doubt not, will lie most profusely scattered over the "new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness".

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

Dr. Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847)

* * *

Ed. Note:—There was not, in Dr. Chalmers's day, so clear an understanding of the difference between the celestial nature of the Church and the terrestrial of mankind in general, in the Millennial Age, as is possessed to-day. We know, now, that the faithful in Christ of this Age will, "in that day", although intimately connected with affairs on earth, themselves be citizens of another transcendently glorious world, the celestial.

It is not necessary to be always audibly speaking to God in prayer, or always to be hearing from God by the ministry of his Word to have communion with him. There is an inarticulate fellowship more sweet than words. The little child can sit all day long beside its busy mother, and, although few

words are spoken on either side, both being busy, the one in his absorbing play, the other in her engrossing work, yet both are in perfect fellowship. The child knows that mother is there, mother knows that the child is all right.

Whoever helps us to think kindly of another aids the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven.

One of the greatest lessons of life is to learn not to do what one likes, but to like what one does.

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE 2 Kin. 2

6. The Chariot of Fire

And now Elijah's work was done. The time had come for him to sleep with his fathers and leave another to carry on the work he had commenced. The Lord at Sinai had told him to take Elisha as his follower and successor and Elisha had willingly accepted the call and was ready now for all that it involved. And as the story goes on in the sacred record it seems that Elisha executed even greater works than had his leader, but that may only be because, maybe, all that Elijah did do has not been recorded, at least upon earth. And if that should be so, it would not be altogether a strange thing, for many of the Lord's followers in later days have performed great works of faith and expended all their efforts in fully dedicated lives without anyone to record in writing what they have done, and when at last they have come to the end of the way and all their own generation who knew them and knew of their works have done likewise there are none to remember and recall. All that they have done is forgotten and is as though it had never been. At least that is how it is amongst men; but in the records of Heaven their deeds are recorded in letters of gold and will remain for ever. And perhaps in the Age to come, the day of Christ's kingdom upon earth when all men will learn of the things of God, those records will indeed be made known and be a help and inspiration to all who are walking the Highway of Holiness to reconciliation with God and to eternal life.

So Elijah set out on his last journey, and his faithful follower Elisha went with him. So simple a story it is, bereft of any incident until the final scene when a fiery chariot separated them and Elijah was carried up into heaven; at least that is what is so often assumed and all kinds of elaborate theories have been woven around that expression, that Elijah was translated into Heaven without dying even although the Scripture says "*what man is he that liveth and shall not see death*" and none can enter Heaven before Christ at his Ascension and that was many years later. But we have not got to that point yet. Here Elijah is setting out from Gilgal to go to Bethel because the Lord had sent him there but nothing is said as to why he had to go and what he did when he got there and this part of the story seems rather pointless and so does the next part when the Lord sent him onward to Jericho and again nothing is said why he had to go or what he was to do when he got there.

Now all this leads one to consider whether these apparently pointless journeyings of the prophet were not to have significance for his own time at all, but to possess meaning for a much later time

for those who think about these things. After all, was it not true that four centuries later Malachi, the last of the Hebrew prophets, predicted that God would send Elijah the prophet back to his people Israel at the Last Day to convert them again to the true God and Israel ever after has looked for the Tishbite to reappear unexpectedly as the herald of that Day and of the appearance of their Messiah to take the lead among his people. To none other of the Hebrew prophets was that honour accorded. And when Jesus' disciples asked him about this He told them that so far as they were concerned in that day, John the Baptist was the fulfilment of that prediction speaking and acting "*in the spirit and power of Elijah*". And recognising, as we do, that although the disciples then thought that they were living in that Last Day but later found that was true in only a limited sense, and the true Last Day awaits the Second Advent of our Lord and the greatest fulfilment of the prediction, the same question has to be asked now. Then the answer is the same, but in a correspondingly greater sense. Here, in these last days of this "present evil world", to use St. Peter's phrase, there arises a herald, a witness, to make known the truth of the unfolding Plan of God and the imminence of the Messianic kingdom. Not one man this time, but a company, a body of disciples who have been enlightened and empowered, as was John the Baptist, to declare to all the world with conviction and emphasis, "*the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*".

And has not that witness been given? The "Harvest of the Age" it has been called; what a harvest it was! The latter part of last century, following the rise of the great Bible societies, and the early part of this, saw the proclamation and heralding of the coming of our Lord on a scale never before seen, a proclamation which reached the ends of the earth. Truly Elijah has come, and has restored the true understanding of the character and the purpose of that God who is God of Israel and of the whole world.

Is this why Elijah was sent on that apparently purposeless journey to Sinai where he saw the signs of the raging wind, the earthquake, the fire, and finally the "still, small voice"? These wonders could have meant little to Israel in those far-off days; it is doubtful if any of those Israelites even heard about them. Suppose these signs were really intended for us in our day? The tempestuous wind, breaking in pieces the rocks of the mountains, symbol of war, the first great world war which signalled the beginning of the end of the "Times of the

Gentiles". The earthquake, indicative of the following social revolution which toppled kings from their thrones and brought the power of the masses to the top. The fire, the destroying world anarchy which is even now hastening the present world order to its fall. Is it that the modern Elijah, the believers who know what these things portend, must needs live through them as witnesses just as Elijah had to witness the signs on Mount Sinai, and then, like him, wait to hear the still small voice that afterward will speak peace to the nations.

Now if all this should be so, is it not possible that Elijah's last journey, from Gilgal to Bethel and Jericho and Jordan and finally into the unknown, is intended to picture the last journey of the Lord's heralds at this end of the Age, during the time called by Jesus "*the days of the Son of Man*", the time of his unseen presence supervising the winding-up of the affairs of this world, and gathering his saints to himself on the other side, whilst the wind, the earthquake, the fire, are running their course. After all, the very name "Gilgal", the place where Elijah started his last journey, meaning "a circle" denoted a circle of erect stones having a sacred significance. There were several such stone circles in Israel, each bearing the name, each reminiscent of the first Gilgal in the plain of Jordan near Jericho, where Israel erected the Tabernacle after they had crossed Jordan and entered the Promised Land. It is not likely that it was from that Gilgal that Elijah commenced his journey, for verse 2 of 2 Kings 1, says that he and his attendant Elisha went down to Bethel, which was up in the mountains whereas the original Gilgal was *down* in the plain. This Gilgal was in Samaria a little to the north of Bethel and does not figure in Israel's history. It seems to have been no more than a centre where its stone circle marked it as a place holy to God, unlike so many other centres which had started in the same way but had now relapsed into idolatry.

Now if this were indeed so, then Elijah started his last journey from a place of holiness and communion with God and went thence to Bethel, itself once a place of God—for the name means "house of God"—but had now for many years been controlled by a decadent and idolatrous priesthood. And there he found a few, the "sons of the prophets", who retained their faith in God. If it be granted that here is a picture of the last journey of the "Elijah company" at this end of the Age then we have a time when the modern heralds of the Kingdom, today's John the Baptist, have come out from the presence of God at Gilgal and found in today's Bethel a state of unbelief and indifference where beforehand there had been faith and zeal. That was the state of things in the early years of the "Harvest of the Age". Some there were, the "sons

of the prophets", who did believe—and because they believed, they knew that the Age was hastening to its end and the time of the heralds was short. "*Knowest thou the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today?*" And they saw him go, knowing they would see him no more in this world.

So Elijah went on to Jericho, at the bidding of the Lord. And Jericho was a secular town, living by the trade between Israel and Moab across the river, giving no heed whatever to the things of God, whereas nothing is recorded of Jericho from the time it was rebuilt by Hiel the Bethelite in defiance of the Lord's interdiction not many years previously until the days of Jesus in the New Testament. And so the modern Elijah came to the modern Jericho in the latter part of the Harvest period in which commercialism has become predominant and true faith in God is almost non-existent. But even here there were some who cared, some "sons of the prophets" who accepted the Herald's message and still believed that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand; but they too knew that the day of the herald was nearly done and they sent him on his way knowing that they would see him no more.

Again, at the Lord's behest, Elijah went on to Jordan still accompanied by his faithful disciple Elisha. Always in Christian symbolism Jordan is the transition from death of a human to life in the spirit. In Bunyan's famous allegory, Mr. Standfast came to the brink of Jordan, and, "*so he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side*". So did Elijah pass over, and so do those Heralds at this latter day when the Harvest is ended and the proclamation complete. "*In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump*".

But the final picture has to be fully sketched in.

See now this terrible apparition, a chariot and horsemen of fire, bearing down upon them. As they moved instinctively to opposite sides of the track, it came between them and parted them. And in its wake a roaring hurricane—not a whirlwind as says the Authorised Version—a tornado, an irresistible force which picked up Elijah and carried him away in the heavens, and Elisha saw him no more. And he cried out in his grief "*My father, my father, the chariot of Israel*". And he mourned, because he too knew that he would see Elijah no more in this life.

That chariot of fire, what was it? Only Elisha returned to tell the story of what he had seen and in his excited state who knows how his mind interpreted the ocular sight which was before his eyes. But that chariot of fire must have deep significance. God, coming forth to judgment, is depicted as coming in just such a way. Isaiah, talking about the final events of this end of the Age, when the kingdoms of this world are about to give way to the

Kingdom of our God, saw just such a sight in vision as Elisha saw in that desolate land beyond Jordan. *"Behold the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by sword will the Lord plead with all flesh"* (Isa. 66. 15-16). And immediately after that the prophet saw the Lord sending the ambassadors of Israel to the nations which have incurred that judgment *"to the coastland afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations"*. Is that why Elisha cried out when he saw that chariot *"My father, my father, the chariot of Israel"* sensing perhaps in prophetic vision by the Spirit that which Isaiah in turn saw a century or so later. Was that chariot of fire and that hurricane wind which carried Elijah away a picture of the "catching away" of the last members of the Church on earth amid the fire and stormwind, the wars, and revolutions and anarchy, of the last days of this present Age. And if so, how apt the picture, for the sons of the prophets searched three days in the mountains for Elijah, and found him not. Like Moses he had disappeared from among men, and *"no man knoweth*

of his sepulchre until this day". Like the Church of this Age, the Lord had taken him to himself.

Elijah's life had come to an end, but Elisha carried on his work and to a vastly greater extent in that he purified the poisoned water, he multiplied scanty food, he healed the lepers, he raised the dead—all pictures of Millennial work. John the Baptist laid down his life; he was followed by the Lord Jesus who *"brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel"*, and introduced this present Age during which the Church is to be developed to be a "ministry of reconciliation" in the work of the next. That Church is taken to heavenly conditions at the last, the last members completing their course amid the fires and storms of what Jesus described as a *"time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation"*, only to be followed by the revelation of the Lord from heaven with his Church for the salvation of the world, for *"whosoever will"*. That sturdy man of Gilead in the experiences of his life and death left behind an allegory which reaches down the ages to our own time and takes us beyond to the final scenes which are yet to be displayed.

The End

THE IMAGE OF CHRIST

The image of Christ, drawn by the pencil of the Spirit, to which the Scripture directs our aim, is painted in such colours that it is impossible often to contemplate it without its irresistibly affecting the heart. As the bodily eye that has looked long at the sun retains a bright image of it, so the spiritual eye that gazes steadfastly on the face of Christ is filled with light. We carry this image with us wherever we go, and it blends with all our thoughts and actions. It never ceases to be a study to us, ever growing more bright and beautiful as we gaze upon it, revealing in contrast, more and more, every darkness of our own hearts. It is with us at conversion as it is in spring, when the sun melts the snow in the fields and on the mountain side; but upon the highest peaks, and in the deepest valleys, patches of it still remain. So the rays of the spiritual sun may penetrate our souls, and still there remains in each heart heights and depths where yet all is cold and hard. How much must yet be melted away, he is first aware who conscientiously yields himself up to the discipline of Scripture. The longer we con-

template Christ, the more do we discover how unlike him we are, how selfishness has penetrated our inmost nature, how poor we are in humanity, in love. When we enter this school of discipline, it does not seem so. This beholding ourselves in the image of Christ has the peculiarity, that whilst we more and more discover the darkness in us, upon us all the while unconscious, it is pouring its light. Paul has expressed this in a particularly rich passage in his letter to the Corinthians. He says: *"But we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."* A wonderfully rich saying indeed. Just as when we behold ourselves in a mirror, he would say, it spreads over us its own effulgence; so we Christians, looking with unveiled face at Christ, as into the mirror of humanity, are adorned with his light, made partakers of his Spirit, changed as from glory to glory, into the same resplendent image.

(Selected)

Our word *strength* comes from a word signifying twisted together. "The Lord is the strength of my life" "God is the strength of my soul" then my life is twisted together with the Lord. God and my soul

are as two strands twisted together. We may have no strength at all, but while twisted together with one who is infinite, the weakest shall not fail.

THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN

Luke 18, 9-14

There were some in that day who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others"; to them Jesus addressed this parable, and not to them only, for self-righteousness is still rife among those who claim to be his true followers, and the lesson is as important as ever. The rigid, bigoted Pharisee of the story has had his counterparts in every generation since that day and has them still. The parable of the Pharisee and publican has a very topical application to us to-day.

Both men went up to the Temple to pray. They both acknowledged the same Law, at least outwardly, but that is about as far as the similarity went. The Pharisee, accustomed to the respect of men and sure of his standing before God, returned thanks that he was the man he was. He could think of no element in his life capable of change for the better. He already was all that God could possibly want him to be. And he preened himself in the pride of that knowledge. The publican—tax-gatherer—came conscious only of one thing, his inadequacy in the sight of God. He had come short of the Divine glory; he knew that. He needed forgiveness; he knew that too, and in an agony of self-abasement he pleaded for Divine mercy.

The Pharisee was probably a very good man. There is nothing in the account to say he was not, and the brief picture given us is at least sufficient to show that Jesus intended his hearers to picture the typical orthodox Pharisee—zealous for righteousness and the observance of the Mosaic law; bigoted almost to the point of fanaticism in his allegiance to the "traditions of the fathers", punctilious in the discharge of every duty which custom and ordinance required of a son of Abraham. He duly fasted on the third and fifth day of every week, and took care that his neighbours and business associates knew about it. He rendered the tenth of his income to the things of God as the Law required—verse 12 should read "*I give tithes of all that I acquire*" not "*possess*"; he tithed his income, not his capital. Like the rich young ruler on another occasion, he could say, referring to the Divine Law, "all these things have I kept from my youth up" but unlike that young ruler he did not add "what lack I yet?" for in his own mind he had no idea that anything was lacking. He had done all that God had required of him and now he looked to God to do the handsome thing and acknowledge the fact.

"*The Pharisee stood, and prayed thus with himself.*" There is more than a suspicion here that the man was praying to himself, at any rate God does not appear to be much more than an equal partner in the matter. There is no plea for forgiveness, no

acknowledgment of the superior position of the Most High, no supplication for help in leading a better life, or guidance in approaching more nearly to the Throne of God's holiness. In fact it hardly seems a prayer at all, more of a boastful statement of the position. "*I thank thee, that I am not as other men are*". He wanted to say out loud in the hearing of his fellows that thing which he liked to believe his fellows thought of him. As a Pharisee he was one of God's chosen ones and all others were inferior. One day when Messiah came and the Romans were expelled his superiority would be manifest even more than now, for then he would advance from his present position of moral leadership to actual political leadership and not only Israel but all the Gentiles would bow down before him. After all, he and his brother Pharisees were the present successors of the tradition established in the days of Ezra when the first Pharisees stood in the breach to defend the nation against prevalent indifference to the things of God, and preserved the Law and all that it implied for future generations. It was only right that God should acknowledge the services he and his had rendered him and honour him accordingly.

Whilst thus he stood and congratulated himself the publican came into the Temple court. He was under no illusion; he knew himself to be unclean in God's sight. He came with nothing in his hands and with nothing wherewith to commend himself in God's sight. His prayer was brief and eloquent in its simplicity. "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" The Greek has the definite article, *the* sinner, as though he counted himself a greater sinner than other men, just as the Pharisee had counted himself greater in his righteousness than other men. He asked nothing of God; he came in repentance and threw himself on God's mercy.

And God looked down from Heaven and saw those two men standing there.

"*I tell you*" said Jesus "*this man*"—the publican—"*went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*". We hardly need the comment for ourselves as we read the story, for it seems so obvious. How could anyone justify the Pharisee in his arrogance and count him as more worthy in God's sight than the publican?

And yet, it happens so often among Christians. There is a type of mind which, whilst thoroughly loyal to God, takes pride in its exclusiveness and separation from "the world" and not infrequently from fellow-Christians who do not share the same outlook on the faith or the same conception of Christian service. "Spiritual pride" is a very real

thing and an ever present danger to the disciples of Christ, for the very love and zeal for him which leads us to him at the first is liable to drive us into an excess of devotion which can bear fruit at the end in an unreasoning and unseeing bigotry which of itself stultifies our further efforts to do him service. We all do well to remember our Lord's own injunction, "*—when ye have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do*" (Luke 17. 10). The difference between the best of us and the worst of us, great though it

may seem in our sight, is very little in God's sight. Repentance and devotion mean much more to him than mighty works and lavish gifts. Jesus commended the scribe who said "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices". (Mark 21. 33). "*Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God*" Jesus told that man. The publican in this parable was not far from the Kingdom of God; the Pharisee had not even realised his need of that Kingdom.

THE SPIRIT OF TRUE REFORM

"There is nothing more essential to the success of any work of reform than that it be conducted in a manner which will recommend it to those whom it is seeking to influence. In other words, those who engage in such a work must do so with a proper spirit, in order to reap the result which is desired. This consideration is an important one, and especially so to us, engaged as we are in a great reform work which so vitally concerns the welfare of the human race.

"What should be the spirit which should accompany the efforts of those engaged in the promulgation of the truths of the Plan of the Ages? From the nature of things, this work involves one in perpetual controversy with the ideas and forms of the theological world around him. It requires some discrimination and forbearance to confine the controversy to the ideas, and prevent its involving persons who hold them. There is a strong tendency to forget that we are not combating persons but the false beliefs which they teach. How easy under such circumstances to be led by the natural promptings of human nature, and fall into the error of the two disciples who wished to call down fire upon the ungrateful Samaritans, and to whom Christ rebukingly said, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of".

"The true reform spirit is never anything but a Christian spirit, leading its possessor ever to take an inoffensive attitude towards those whose erroneous opinions he feels called upon to oppose. It does not lead him to make use of ridicule and contempt, or to indulge in sharp drives at an opponent for the mere sake of showing his acuteness. It never leads him to show a lack of respect for those in positions of authority, albeit their characters may not be of the best, nor to forget that degree of deference which is due to those in every position of eminence; but with all men to render "honour to whom honour is due". Firm and un-

compromising in its zeal for the truth, it combines with this a proper humility of self, and charity toward all. It is, in short, that spirit the possession of which will lead one to manifest "the fruits of the Spirit," among which are, long-suffering, gentleness, . . . meekness".

"It is a mistake to suppose, as many people evidently do, that absence of moral principle in an individual, however conspicuous and fraught with evil results, renders him a proper subject of hatred, ridicule and contempt. There is a certain respect which is due to all in positions of earthly eminence, regardless even of character. Just as "*Michael the archangel, when contending with the Devil he disputed concerning the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke thee,'*" so with us. It cannot be proper to bring any railing accusation against an earthly opponent, whose motives we cannot judge, and with whom we stand upon a level as the recipients of God's unmerited favour. Such a course is not in keeping with Christian dignity and integrity of character, and the cause of truth has no need of such doubtful aids to its advancement.

"The study of the spirit and methods of the Lord and the Apostles is profitable to those who are actively engaged in an important work of reform at the present time. In their forbearance under great provocations and persecution, the moderate and respectful language in which they addressed those in positions of authority, their strict regard for the truth, and their carefulness against giving needless offence, they have left an example worthy of our imitation. With an uncompromising zeal for the truth they combined that Christian charity which led them to abstain from judging the characters and motives even of their bitterest opponents. It is by such a spirit and by such methods that the truth can be best commended to thinking minds."

(source unknown)

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