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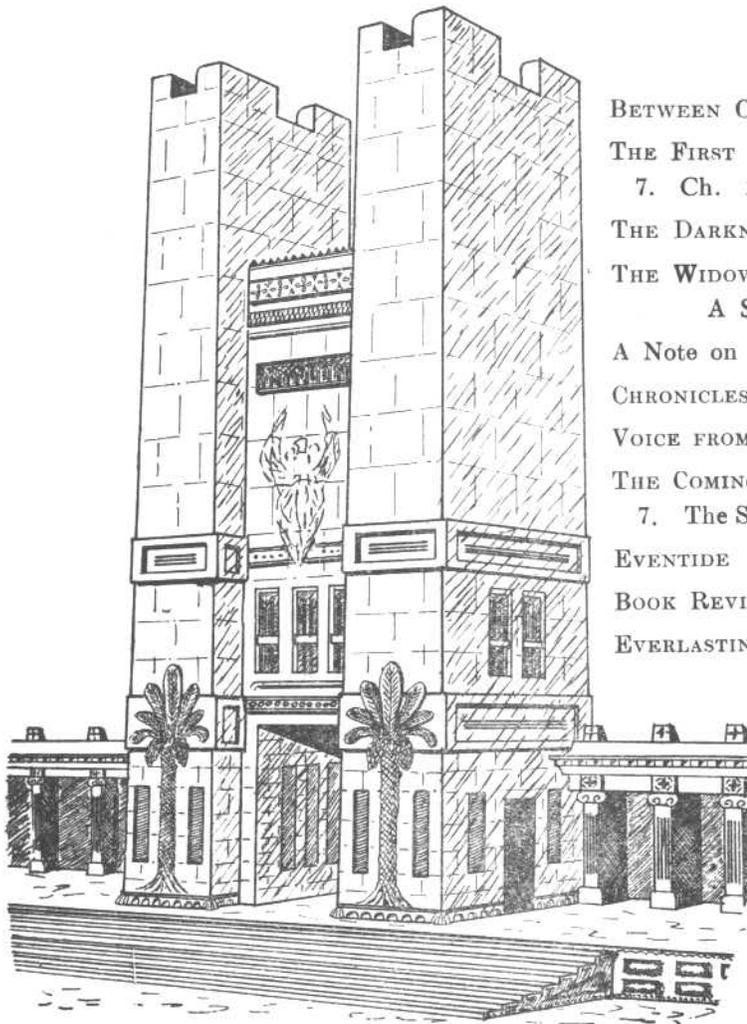
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
Soldier of Jesus Christ

Published January 1st

Next issue March 1st

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

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This Journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge and the furtherance of the Gospel of the Kingdom, its circulation being largely among independent Bible fellowships and study circles which share in varying degree the viewpoint of the Divine Plan herein set forth.

It is supported entirely by the gifts of well-wishers, and all such gifts are sincerely appreciated. Enquiries are welcomed, and all who are genuinely interested may have the journal sent regularly upon request.

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Between Ourselves

The following 12 or 16 page pamphlets are or shortly will be available in single copies or small quantities on the same terms as the "Monthly", i.e., sent free of charge upon request but gifts toward the cost of printing and postage sincerely appreciated as an aid towards continuing supplies. Friends are invited to write in for these at any time; it may be that during the first month or so of the year certain numbers may not be ready but in such case the request will be recorded and they will be sent directly they do become available.

- No. 31 *The Bible—the Book for To-day.*
- 32 *World Conversion—When?*
- 33 *The Divine Permission of Evil.*
- 34 *Everlasting Punishment.*
- 35 *Conversion in the After-life.*
- 36 *The Resurrection of the Dead.*
- 37 *The Second Advent—its Nature and Purpose.*

One of these articles appeared in the last issue of the "Monthly" and another appears in this; an idea of their nature can be gathered from these appearances.

* * *

One of our overseas readers is very desirous of obtaining two books which are now out of print to wit: "*The life and letters of Rev. F. W. Robertson*" (Stopford A. Brookes) and "*The life and diary of David Brainard*". If any other reader is able to help please communicate directly with Mrs. E. Bradwell, 17 Wha Street, Claudelands, Hamilton, New Zealand.

* * *

Another overseas reader evidently failed to receive the September issue of the "Monthly"; it was returned to us after two months as unaddressed. The address label had become detached in transit, apparently after the copy had arrived in the country concerned. If the

reader concerned will advise us, we will gladly forward a replacement copy.

* * *

The United States Post Office is insisting, we understand, that as from January 1st, 1967, mail not bearing the "ZIP" code in the address will be charged first class rates on delivery. With our September issue we included a notice to all U.S.A. readers who had never given us their Zip code, asking them to notify same at once. To the end of November less than half such readers had complied. Where the Zip code has been notified we are taking care to include it in the address, but in cases where friends have not advised the number it is possible that additional postage may be demanded by the postal officials on delivery. There is nothing that we can do about this and no means whereby we may know whether or not the mail is even delivered. We suggest that those who have not yet notified us their code number do so at once so that any future inconvenience may be avoided.

* * *

In the past we have sent receipts for all gifts no matter how small. Increasing postal charges for such receipts is becoming quite an appreciable proportion of the value of small gifts, and we do not think those who thus contribute as they are able would wish such portion dissipated on postage. As from now therefore we shall not send receipts for amounts under 5/- and feel that everyone will agree with our thought in this matter.

Gone from us

- Sis F. Crossland (Leigh, Lancs.)
- Bro. J. W. Halton (Ashton-u-Lyne)
- Bro. T. Holmes (Nottingham)
- Bro. G. Wilson (Guildford)

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

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 7 I John 2. 12-17

"I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.

"I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.

"I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.

"I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father." (John 2. 12-14).

This is the commencement of the second part of John's letter; it really ought to have been the beginning of chapter two. At this point John passes from the realm of warning to that of exhortation, and although he will still have a great deal to say about the snares that beset the Christian's path, he will infuse into his words much that is pure encouragement and stimulation of hope. Even though Antichrist shall come and seduce any who are unstable, there is an anointing which remains upon those who are Christ's indeed, an anointing that guarantees the operation of saving power during this dark time of earth's history and imparts a confidence that will not desert those who look for their Lord's appearing. So he writes, addressing all who are of the Divine family, mature elders and babes in Christ alike, knowing that all have come under the same spirit of anointing and will one day be presented before the presence of the Father's glory with exceeding joy.

These three verses, twelve to fourteen, have caused the commentators some concern because of the evident repetition of thought. John says, first, that he *writes* to the little children, the fathers, the young men, and then again to the little children. Immediately thereafter he declares that he *has written* to the fathers and the young men. A possible explanation is that the apparent repetition was never intended by the beloved Apostle himself. It might well be that verse fourteen represents a slightly variant rendering, in some ancient manuscripts of John's epistle, to that which appears in other manuscripts as verses 12-13, and that at some time prior to the compilation of the version upon which our New Testament is based, both renderings were incorporated, the one after the other, by a copyist who was unable to decide which was the more correct, and so included both. It does seem that verse 14 adds nothing to what has already been said in verses 12-13, and it is certainly true that the exhortation of verse 15

"Love not the world" follows quite naturally after 13.

We must go back to the Greek if we are going to appreciate the full meaning of John's appeal. The "little children" of verse 12 does not mean the same as the "little children" of verse 13. In the first instance the word is one that is used very often to describe disciples or pupils of a teacher, beloved followers of a master. In the other case it is a word that does only indicate a young child. We have, therefore, John writing first to his beloved pupils, the brethren in general, next to the fathers in the faith, the mature believers who were the strength and stay of the churches, after that to the young men, the stalwart and active workers who prosecuted the missionary work of the community with unflagging zeal, and finally the "babes in Christ" who as yet were only just taking first steps in the way. John well knew that every member of the body, whether possessing abundant comeliness or not so abundant comeliness, whether eye, ear, or hand, whether in the "milk" or "strong meat" stage (Heb. 5. 13-14) was equally the subject of God's loving care, and stood in need of his own devoted ministry. Therefore his writing was addressed to all of them and he called each class, as it were, by name.

The mission of the writer occupies a very honoured place in the Word of God. John is by no means the first whose service in this direction has been blessed of God. Not so many years before, Luke the Evangelist, writing to his friend Theophilus, left a priceless legacy to all future generations in the two books accredited to him, the Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. In Old Testament days the saintly Daniel was one who wrote down the visions he had seen and the revelation he had heard at the lips of angels, a wonderful guide to the onward progress of the Divine Plan through the ages. Habakkuk, whose tongue and hand alike were touched with fire, hastened to write down the vision and make it plain upon tablets that he might run who reads. John himself, an exile in the penal colony of the Isle of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, committed to parchment the vivid sights that passed before his eyes, and set the seal upon God's revelation of the ultimate triumph of all His faithful servants. It must have been with a sovereign sense of the

vast potentiality for good contained in the closely written scroll that lay outspread before him that John penned those simple yet tremendously significant words "I write unto you".

There is an appealing fitness in the several commendations which John addresses to each of these classes of brethren in the church. It is almost as if he is showing them how deeply and intimately he knows their hearts and their characteristics and their position in the race for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. His first word goes right to the basis of all that we enjoy and possess in the family of God. "*I write unto you, beloved pupils*"—for that is what this first "little children" means—"because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake". Forgiveness of sin consequent upon repentance and faith in Christ is the foundation of our whole standing before God. Without that we cannot even enter the Narrow Way, cannot even make a start on the road that leads to the presence of God and the Kingdom. This is one standing which all the Lord's people, young and old, mature and babes, must possess in common and retain to life's end. It is this knowledge, that our sins are forgiven for His Name's sake, that gives us fresh confidence after every stumbling and every giving way to some weakness of the flesh. That forgiveness stands, all the while that we are truly repentant, and in the power of that forgiveness we grow stronger after every fall, even though we may offend "seventy times seven".

From that general exhortation John turns to the fathers, the mature brothers and sisters of long service for the Lord, men and women with whom he himself had borne the heat and burden of many a strenuous day. With some of these whom he addresses as "fathers" he could probably claim twenty, thirty, perhaps even forty years of service. Although we do not know just when John first took up his ministry at Ephesus, it might have very reasonably been after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 when the armies of Titus captured the city. But others of the Jerusalem Christians may have come into Asia with him—most of them were scattered abroad after that great disaster to their native land. Some of these "fathers" may have known the early days immediately after Pentecost, and be able to look back upon fifty or more years in the way of the Lord. Whatever the truth about this, John writes to them, saying "*I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him from the beginning*". (The two words "that

is" have been supplied by the translators and are better omitted.) Of all the brethren gathered together in fellowship, one would have thought these mature and experienced old stalwarts to stand the least in need of such exhortation from the Apostle: but the very thing that did distinguish them from the others, the fact that they had known Christ "from the beginning" is the very reason John has for writing to them. The purport of his writing is to be found in verse 15 "love not the world" and so on, and this exhortation and warning is the same for all three classes of believers. Even although these "fathers in the faith" had known the Truth so long a time and were evidently so well advanced in the Christian way, there was still need to warn them "love not the world".

How true that is to-day as well! Those whose love waxed cold are not drawn solely from the immature, who have been but a short time in the way. It is by no means an unheard-of thing to find one who has passed a long and busy life in the service of the Lord, the Truth and the brethren, and given every evidence of sincere and whole-hearted consecration, to leave it all quite late in life and go back to what Paul called the "beggarly elements" of this world. Increasing material prosperity, perhaps, or the opportunity of greater leisure after the close of business life, give opportunity for the indulging in material interests that would have been quickly rejected before. John knew how subtle are the snares of the Evil One and even although these "fathers" had known their Lord from the beginning, John had the same word for them that he had for the newer and younger believers.

"*I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.*" In what is perhaps the alternative version of this message, John says "*because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one*". It is impossible not to notice how John stresses the very qualities in which the disciples might well take pride as being those by means of which they might easily fall. These young men, the zealous and active workers, missionaries, of the community, on whose shoulders the bulk of the labours of the Church must be borne, were strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. That very strength could become a source of spiritual pride! In their strength they came in contact with the world, in their preaching and their evangelising, in the care of the poor, in the many ways by which a

vigorous and active Christian community does come in contact with the world, even whilst remaining not "of the world". In that intimacy of contact the injunction "love not the world" was very necessary. The garment must be kept unspotted. Christ hath no concord with Belial. Their very consciousness that in the power of Christ they had overcome the wicked one could tend to make them less vigilant and less watchful, and they be overtaken unawares by that same wicked one from whose power they had formerly escaped. We do well to remember that it is more often in our fancied strong points that the Adversary takes us than in our weak points. We usually watch our weak points closely; the strong ones may easily be ignored.

Finally John comes to those for whom he must have had a very special affection, the "babes in Christ", the newly converted ones and the young in years, just setting out on the journey that is to lead them to the promised land. "I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father." That is all he can say to them at this early stage. That is all to which they have attained as yet, to "know the Father". With the knowledge of that wonder still fresh in their minds they are being encouraged to follow out the implications of their knowledge without faltering. To know the Father is a progressive thing; we pass on from stage to stage of knowledge, entering into a deeper and even deeper intimacy with Him as the years follow one another. But only if we "love not the world"! This knowledge of the Father can come to us only in consequence of our consecration to Him; and more than that, in consequence of a consecration that is ever fresh and living, ever zealous and sincere, and that counts all things well lost if only Christ be won and life lived in Him. The warning "love not the world" was necessary to the old and the young, the fathers and the children, in John's day; it is no less necessary to us in ours.

So John comes at last to the exhortation toward which he has been leading all this time. He is so earnest about this, for it is so important a thing. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (vs. 15). The meaning of these words ought to be very plain to us. They certainly do not imply that we are to turn away from all things material in disgust and disdain, and count the lovely things of this earth as things unclean. The mediæval church made a sad mistake in that direction and their theolog-

ians and priests taught them that all that is fleshly, material, of human nature and of the earth, earthly, is inherently corrupt and evil and that they would do well to dissociate themselves from it. That view is a blasphemy and a libel against God. He made the earth, beautiful and fruitful, capable of giving not only life and sustenance, but also pleasure and happiness, to the men whom He created. When God had finished His work, He looked upon it, and, behold, it was good! We also, as intelligent and loyal disciples of our Master and reverent worshippers of God, ought to take pleasure in this creation which gave God pleasure; we ought to esteem and appreciate all the beautiful things of the earth and all the lovely things of life. Even although some of them we ourselves have given up "for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake" we should not do else than look on them with pleasure, because God made or instituted them. In that sense, at any rate, we *should* "love the world". But that is not what John meant.

We all know perfectly well what he did mean. We are not to love the world and the things of the world in the manner that would involve placing them before God and the higher interests of our consecration. We may use the world and its good things, assuredly, but only in such fashion as to bring glory to our God and in the interests of His Plan, and we are at all times to "seek first the Kingdom of God". We may accept and use our material gifts and possessions and joys and opportunities in the outworking of our Christian lives, and give God thanks for them, but we are not to love them in such a way that they take first place and God and His Truth take second. If we do give way in that fashion, it is evident that our consecration is not sincere and not whole-hearted; as John says, in such case the love of the Father is not in us. And to point the danger of such a position he tells us just what is involved in the course of the man who does love the world and the things that are in the world more than he loves the Father and the things that are in the Kingdom of Heaven. He tells us that such an one becomes hopelessly entangled in the fate of a world that is passing away, and that he will eventually find himself bereft of those things in which he trusted and bereft also of the prize of the high calling from which he had allowed himself to be diverted.

"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust

thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (vs. 16-17).

"The proud glory of life" Moffatt calls it, and it is an expressive phrase that he has chosen. The desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the proud glory of life, these represent the inordinate use of things that are good within themselves but bad when carried to excess, or even to a degree which may be quite all right for men and women who have not given themselves in consecration to God but will assuredly militate against the highest interests of those who have. There are so many things in life, good and right in themselves, that can become subtle snares to the "sanctified in Christ Jesus" purely because those sanctified ones do not impose upon themselves the necessary degree of self-discipline in their handling or use of those things. John does not mean in this verse that because these things are "of the world" they are necessarily bad things. The word "lust" has changed its meaning in the four centuries since the Authorised Version was translated and we do well to substitute the word "desire" which to-day much more nearly expresses the idea behind the Greek. There are many things that the flesh and the eyes may legitimately desire; and much in life that may give a justifiable ground for proud glory; but the important thing for us to remember is

that no matter how good and right these things may be, so far as we are concerned they are of this world and will pass away with this world. Even although the good things and the right things and the beautiful things of this material earth will persist and come forth in renewed and more excellent glory in the next, they still are not for us, for God hath prepared even greater glories for those who in this Age love Him in sincerity and truth. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him."

Therefore, in the First Resurrection, nothing will remain save the building of one who has done the will of God. In the universal destruction of all the works of man it is he that doeth the will of God who will abide for ever. God grant that we, all of us, may so take to heart the lesson of this verse that we shall not be attracted for one moment by the glitter and sparkle of the attractions of this world, but soberly appraising them at their true value, and knowing that they are doomed, turn instead with the greater determination to have the will of God done in our mortal bodies that we may be that part of God's workmanship which shall stand the fires of proving and so abide for ever.

(To be continued)

THE DARKNESS AT THE CRUCIFIXION

A historical study

The darkness which Matthew, Mark and Luke all record as enshrouding the land from the sixth hour to the ninth—noon to 3.0 p.m.—is often assumed to be the result of an eclipse of the sun. In fact, the N.E.B., Dr. Moffatt and the 20th Century N.T. use this term. In so doing they have all fallen into what ought to have been a fairly obvious error. The Crucifixion was at the time of the Passover, when the moon is of necessity at the full, and there cannot be an eclipse of the sun at full moon. Furthermore, the darkness is said to have continued for the space of three hours whereas the longest time that an eclipse of the sun can persist at any one place is seven minutes. Whatever the nature of this rather mysterious darkness, it certainly was not an eclipse.

The happening is mentioned in Matt. 27. 45, Mark 15. 33 and Luke 23. 44-45. Matthew and Mark would have been eye-witnesses; Luke

got his information from someone who had been an eye-witness. Matthew says that there was an earthquake at the same time; the others say nothing about this. Apart from that remark, the three accounts are identical in detail and this points to a very clear and undisputed recollection of what actually took place. Throughout all time since the event, this darkness has been accepted as having actually occurred and generally taken as a sign of Divine displeasure with those then guilty of the condemnation of the Lord. Matthew's statement that the Veil of the Temple was rent in twain, throwing the sacred Mosaic Holy open to public view at this time, is taken as pointing to the same conclusion.

Confirming evidence that this darkness did in fact occur is extant from a secular source. Phlegon Trallianus, a Greek historian who was born not long after the Crucifixion and died in the middle of the Second Century,

wrote a history of the times from 776 B.C. to his own day, and in this had this to say:

"In the Fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad there was a great eclipse of the sun, greater than had ever been known before; for at the sixth hour the day was changed into night and the stars were seen in the heavens. An earthquake occurred in Bithynia and overthrew a great part of the city of Nicæa."

Although existing copies of Phlegon's statement use the word *ekleipsis*, from which our technical word "eclipse" is derived, it is not implied that he intended the modern meaning since the word in his day was used to denote darkening of the heavens from whatever cause. Of greater importance is the relation of the date given to that of the Crucifixion.

Dates in Greece at the time of the First Advent were denoted by Olympiads, four-year periods starting from the institution of the Olympic games in Greece in the midsummer of 776 B.C. Thus summer 776 B.C. to summer 775 B.C. was the First year of the First Olympiad, and this system of dating continued until A.D. 394. On this basis the Fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad would commence in July A.D. 32 and finish in June A.D. 33. At some time during that twelve months occurred the darkness over Asia—in which lay Bithynia and Nicæa—to which Phlegon refers. It is astronomically established that during that year there was no eclipse of the sun visible from the territory in question.

The date of our Lord's death is generally agreed nowadays, in the light of modern knowledge of relevant history, to have been in the spring of A.D. 33 and of course at the time of the Jewish Passover, on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish year, Nisan. One of the essentials in this matter is that 14 Nisan in the year of the Crucifixion must have fallen on a Friday. There are only two years in the relevant period when this was the case. In A.D. 30 the 14th Nisan fell on Friday 7 April (Julian) and in A.D. 33 on Friday 3 April (commencing of course at 6.0 p.m. on the evening of 2nd April in accordance with Jewish custom). Phlegon makes no mention of the happening as affecting Judea; it is doubtful if he ever heard of Jesus of Nazareth, and Bithynia is six hundred miles from Jerusalem. The fact that the year he specifies is the same as the year of the Crucifixion is presumptive evidence that Phlegon records the same darkness and the same earthquake as do the three Gospels; that it extended over

the entire Middle East from Bithynia on the shores of the Black Sea, across Greek Asia and Syria into Galilee and Judea. Thallus, a Syrian historian contemporary with Phlegon, is credited with recording a similar day of darkness without, however, giving the date of the occurrence, which does at least give some ground for thinking that it was also observed in Syria.

The cause of the darkness—apart from being an act of God—remains a mystery. The apparent area affected precludes its being the effect of low-lying clouds blotting out sunlight, such as does occur sometimes over valleys when by a vagary of the wind dense cloud masses build up and remain stationary over a relatively small area and block all light. Volcanic dust from an eruption has been known to produce the same effect, but always in the vicinity of volcanoes and there are no volcanoes anywhere near Judea.

A rather interesting parallel to this darkening at the Crucifixion is the celebrated "Dark Day of 1780". This happening is so near to our own time that it is fully authenticated, although, despite investigation by the best scientific minds of the time, the cause has never been established. It does seem, however, to have been a similar phenomenon—from the physical point of view—to that associated with the death of Jesus.

May 19, 1780, dawned on the eastern coast of North America without incident and the customary daily routine of the citizens of New York State, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont and New Hampshire was soon under way. But at 10 a.m. the sunlight began inexplicably to fail from the sky and by 11 o'clock an area of some six hundred and fifty miles in each direction was completely dark. Work ceased and workers returned to their homes, where lights burned as at night. The Connecticut Legislature, in session at the time, adjourned its proceedings and noted the phenomenon in the Journal of the Senate. A few hours later, discovering that an impression was gaining ground to the effect that the Last Day had come and the Judgment was at hand, the members returned to the House that they might be found doing their duty should the Lord return unexpectedly. The darkness continued until about 2.0 a.m. the following morning, although the moon was in full at the time; the disturbance, whatever it was, affected sunlight and moonlight equally. By 4.0 a.m. on the morning of the 20th normal conditions were restored everywhere.

No explanation has ever been found. Sir

William Herschel, the celebrated British astronomer, who lived at the time, said "the dark day in Northern America was one of those wonderful phenomena of Nature which will always be read of with interest, but which philosophy is at a loss to explain". A New Hampshire eye-witness, Judge Tenney, writing on the subject five years later, said "I could not help conceiving at the time, that if every luminous body in the Universe had been shrouded in impenetrable darkness, or struck out of existence, the darkness could not have been more complete. A sheet of white paper held within a few inches of the eye was equally invisible with the blackest velvet". Another eye-witness, Rev. Elam Potter, expressed himself in a sermon nine days after the happening "Specially I mention that wonderful darkness on the 19th of May last. Then, as in our text, the sun was darkened; such a darkness as was probably never known since the crucifixion of our Lord. People left their work in the house and in the field; travellers stopped; schools broke up at 11 o'clock; people lighted candles at noon-day and the fire shone as at night. Some people, I am told, were in dismay, and thought whether the Day of Judgment was not drawing on. A great part of the following night also was singularly dark. The moon, though in the full, gave no light, as in our text. . . ."

The minister was, of course, referring to Biblical references associated with the Second Advent such as Joel 3. 15 "The sun and the moon shall be darkened and the stars shall withdraw their shining" and Matt. 24. 29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven". It is not surprising that some sections of the Christian world

hailed this strange happening as the fulfilment of such predictions, a physical sign that the time of the Second Advent was at hand. Who shall say that they were not justified, even although these texts are primarily symbols of realities greater by far than a transient darkness over a small patch of earth's surface on a particular day. As a literal sign, repeating that given at the Crucifixion, incomprehensible to men and incapable of explanation by the then state of human knowledge, there is much to recommend the conclusion.

One other related point is of interest. If Phlegon's record is accepted as factual, the area covered by the darkness in our Lord's day must have been almost identical with that known to have been covered in 1780. From Bithynia to Jerusalem is about the same distance as that across the extremities of the dark area in North America. The two incidents appear to be of one and the same nature, and both inexplicable to human scientific knowledge. Is this an indication that God does from time to time in the course of human history interject an occasional reminder that there are things outside not only the understanding but the control of man, by means of which all humanity's boasted powers and achievements could be rendered impotent in a matter of time. Suppose there was a third such inexplicable darkness, not of three hours this time, nor yet of fifteen hours, but, say, of fifteen days or fifteen weeks; not limited to Judea or to a few American States, but over all the world! And all life on earth depends on sunlight; without the sun we perish! How easily God can cry "Halt!" to human self-will when in His wisdom He sees the time is ripe, and that without necessarily losing a single human life. Just by taking the light away for a short while, for example.

"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)

* * *

To follow faithfully one's highest ideals, even when these are at variance with accepted notions and practices, is the way to enter large and true life. There is no other failure comparable with a failure to obey the inner voice.

THE WIDOW'S CRUSE

A story of
Elijah the Tishbite

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 sheeps' 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 command-

ed 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 locked 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.

A NOTE ON JAS 4. 5

"Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?" (Jas. 4. 5).

This is a rather difficult text; there is no such statement in the Old Testament and the source of James' allusion here is unknown. The Revised Standard Version together with Dr. Moffatt have adopted a variant reading having some authority which certainly fits the context much better: *"Do you suppose it is in vain that the Scripture says 'He yearns jealously over the spirit which he has made to dwell in us?'"* This verse then forms a logical connecting link between the first four verses, in which James describes the carnality of so many among the believers, and then after alluding here in vs. 5 to God's watch-care over the spirit He has put in man, which spirit is capable of lifting man to higher things, goes on to say in vs. 6 that God gives grace to attain that higher state. In the succeeding verses he exhorts to effort in thus drawing nigh to God and resisting the Devil. Thus the central point in the argument is that because God is "yearning jealously" over the spirit He has put in man it is possible for man to turn away from the lower things of the carnal life, and, by His grace,

attain to the loftiness of a life lived in the things of God.

The origin of the quotation is still a puzzle. Even the revised rendering has no apparent counterpart in the O.T. When in the succeeding verse James again quotes Scripture *"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble"* he is quoting the Septuagint rendering of Prov. 3. 34. It is possible that in verse 5 James was quoting from some now unknown apocryphal work—for the term "scripture" only means a writing or a book and does not necessarily refer solely to the books of the Bible—or it may be that he was paraphrasing the sentiments of some Old Testament passage without repeating the precise words. Job 32. 8, for example, declares *"there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration"* (breath, inbreathing) *"of the Almighty giveth them understanding"*. The basic idea here is the same as in James, that God has put the spirit of man in him, has done so for a purpose, and is watching over him to achieve that purpose. Something like this may have been in James' mind so that he was expressing the general sentiment of Scripture rather than referring to a particular text.

"Don't keep the alabaster boxes of your love and tenderness sealed up until your friends are dead. Fill their lives with gladness, speak approving, cheering words while their hearts can be thrilled and made happier by them. The kind words you mean to say when they are gone, say before they go. The flowers you mean to send for their coffins, send to brighten and sweeten their homes before they leave them. If my friends have alabaster boxes laid away, full of fragrant perfumes of sympathy and affection, which they intend to break over my dead body, I

would rather they would bring them out in my weary and troubled hours, and open them, that I may be refreshed and cheered by them, while I need them. I would rather have a plain coffin without a flower, a funeral without a sermon than a life without the sweetness of love and sympathy. Let us all learn to anoint our friends before-hand for their burial. Post mortem kindness does not cheer the burdened spirit. Flowers on a coffin cast no fragrance backward over the weary way."

(Selected)

CHRONICLES — NEWS OF THE PAST

A most unusual and interesting production, first published on the occasion of the State of Israel's Tenth anniversary, has now become available from the Arrow Company of 6 Wedgewood Street, Jerusalem, Israel, in a new edition designed for world-wide circulation. Its nature renders it of especial interest to readers of the "Bible Study Monthly" and in fact to all who perceive Divine leading in the national history of the people of Israel and expect great things yet in that land relative to the purpose of the Most High for mankind. The importance and possible value of this work as a means of furthering general knowledge of Bible history and the people of the Bible is such that it is felt an extended description of the book will be welcomed by our readers, some of whom will doubtless find means whereby a copy in their own possession could be put to good use in a variety of ways.

* * *

The idea behind "Chronicles—News of the Past" is to present some of the most vivid stories of the Old Testament, together with much of the history of "Bible peoples", in the form of a series of newspapers written and arranged in the up-to-date journalistic style of to-day. The complete work thus consists of twenty-six newspaper "issues", each four-page, of normal newspaper size—but printed on durable book type paper—bound and made to fold between stout cloth covers so that the resultant publication is substantial and durable. The Reubeni Foundation of Jerusalem, which sponsored the project, built up a team of professional journalists and experts so that the "Chronicles" present the style and appearance of a responsible modern newspaper and the contents are authoritative. To quote from the introduction to the work, "Chronicles is history come alive. Using the vehicle of modern journalism, the publishers and editors of Chronicles have endeavoured to draw, in vibrant, living terms, a composite picture of the life of our forefathers as they lived it, in all its drama and all its simplicity . . . Much was different in those days, and much was the same . . . human nature has not altered through the ages . . . still the basic human instincts and emotions that govern men's actions".

The general format is that of a daily newspaper, with main and minor headlines, 7-



column pages, "press" photographs, maps and diagrams. Each issue has its "editorial" in which the main news of the day is discussed by the Editor; there are "letters to the Editor", special reports from "our correspondent in . . ." and even advertisements, public notices and, of course war reports from correspondents at the front—as, for example, in the issue for 6 Nisan 2770 where the front page splashes the headlines "King David victorious on all fronts"; "Philistine army put to flight"; "Ancient menace to Israeli ended", with a map illustrating the campaign and a scholarly editorial on page 2 talking of the "peace and construction" which the King proposes to inaugurate now that the land has been saved from its enemies.

But this issue is as nothing compared with some of the earlier reports of stirring events in the history of ancient times. "Sodom and Gomorrah wiped out in worst disaster since Flood" shouts the front page of 12 Nisan 2000 "Mysterious blaze-quake sweeps Valley of Siddim"; "Burning sulphur, violent blasts, flames shooting up to sky" cry the sub-titles. Then the news, "Hebron, 11 Nisan. — Nature's four basic elements, earth, fire, wind and water combined to-day to bring terror and death to the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in the worst catastrophe the world has seen since the Great Flood . . ." Another reporter sends in the news that a fugitive from

Zoar has arrived at Hebron with the information that Lot and his daughters are saved. The Editor talks about the lesson of the catastrophe, that evil does not go unpunished, and a leader writer takes advantage of the opportunity to recall the story of ten years previously when Abraham the Hebrew defeated Chedorlaomer the invader and rescued Lot, but refused to take any bounty from the King of Sodom or to have anything to do with him. The death of Joseph is front page news on another issue, with sorrow and esteem expressed by Hebrews and Egyptians alike and a feature from the "Pharaonic News Agency" in Thebes suggesting that the Hebrews may now wish to leave Egypt. Naturally the issue for the day of the Exodus ranks as first-class news. "WE QUIT EGYPT TODAY" in the heaviest of heavy letters. "Pharaoh gives in to Moses as tenth plague wipes out kingdom's first-born". There are the instructions to Israel to assemble at Succoth; stories of the effect of the plagues on the Egyptians. Some unfortunate Hebrew mother has lost her small son in the confusion of the assembling and advertises for news of his whereabouts. "On this great day" says the Editor "as we leave servitude behind us and look ahead to freedom, our hearts are full to overflowing . . . Moses, man of God, make us into a nation, give us the Law, guide our steps . . . we are ready . . . one people, descended from one ancestor, and believing in one God." Bezaleel takes advantage of a spare corner of the paper to put in an advertisement for the gold and silver they procured from the Egyptians, for his coming construction of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness; this is only one of many points where a little harmless licence has been taken with the time features. So far as the O.T. is concerned Bezaleel could not have known about his coming appointment as master craftsman for another six months or more.

The issue for 8 Adar 2560 comes as a shattering blow, almost no less now than it would have been had such a newspaper actually appeared all those thousands of years ago. Surrounded by a black border of mourning, two giant words stand astride the page — "MOSES DEAD". "Ends glorious career on threshold of Holy Land" says one column. "Joshua takes over" another. "Burial place a secret" yet another. And the Editor's tribute — "How shall we say it? How are we to find words big enough, warm enough, sad enough, to express that which fills our hearts to overflowing? How are we to face up to the death

of this great man? Moses is gone . . ."

The wars of Joshua, of Barak and Deborah, of Gideon, follow each other in succession; the judgeships of Samson and Samuel; the kingships of Saul, David, Solomon, their accessions and their deaths. The visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon is, of course, great news, and a "staff writer" discourses learnedly on the hypothesis that the real object of her visit is the conclusion of a commercial trading agreement with Solomon now that he and his people are serious competitors in the world of commerce — and that theory might well be right! This has to be illustrated by a map showing Israel's sea routes to India and Ophir just as a modern writer would do. There are in fact numerous maps and diagrams throughout the series which convey a knowledge of Israel's national interests and connections more clearly than by any other means and these should appeal especially to younger Christians trained to acquire information in such ways. Under "Commercial Notes" from an issue during Rehoboam's reign, "economic experts" are fearing that the divided kingdom—two tribes and ten tribes—following Solomon's death will have an adverse effect on Israel's trading activities and precipitate an "economic crisis". This is the kind of thing that, whilst not specifically mentioned in the O.T., must obviously have taken place, and represents the type of side illumination upon Bible history which this excellently written production affords.

So the "news" goes on. Elijah and the priests of Baal; Uzziah and his leprosy; Jonah and Nineveh; the Assyrian invasions, Sennacherib's defeat at Jerusalem, Isaiah, Hezekiah, Jeremiah, Nebuchadnezzar; the Babylonian Captivity with street map of Babylon (evidently based on Koldewey's excavations in 1914) and photographs of the city as Daniel knew it (also based on the results of modern excavations) interspersed with items of news from Egypt, Syria, Greece, Persia, all historically correct and given just as they would have been given had such a newspaper been in existence at the time.

The story ends with Nehemiah and his reforms. Here the Old Testament comes to an end, but Israel lives on. One might hope that a second series might one day see the light, covering the stirring scenes of Israel's history during the period between the Old and New Testaments, which, because they do occupy that interim, are usually so little known to Christians. But for the present this produc-

tion offers much of intense interest.

It must be read in the spirit in which it is written and with its purpose in mind. Some might be a little startled at seeing the advertisement of Menahem the Wonder healer, who specialises in the cure of snake bites and holds consultations daily at his surgery at the Fish Gate in Jerusalem, but even though his name may not have been Menahem, there was surely someone in Jerusalem at the time who did have some skill in the treatment of snake-bites. The O.T. does mention a lot of medicine men at various times whose claims appear from the sacred text to have been considerably less justified than those of the perhaps mythical Menahem. Jozabad the herbalist in King Saul's reign points out that witchcraft has recently been made illegal but that he, as a Nature cure specialist, is ready to place his art at the public disposal. Trans-Desert Pathways, in the days of Solomon, publish their complete time-table of camel caravan journeys to places as far apart as Babylon and Ophir (45 days and four months respectively); slow perhaps compared with modern air travel although doubtless some in those days looked askance at these newfangled methods of speeding up transport and wanted to know what the travellers did with all the time they saved by not going on foot.

There is one striking difference, one element not to be found in the world's Press of to-day. Here the supremacy of God, and His intimate connection with every aspect of daily life, is upheld and stressed. There is no question of doubt or unbelief; He is there and He rules over all. Reporters, editors and readers alike obviously live and have their being in that atmosphere. This is the aspect which makes the whole series so vitally interesting to Christians. Here is depicted the world of men as we know the world and as we know men, but one in which the reality of God is known and accepted. To Christians who believe that the Divine promise to Abraham is yet—and perhaps very soon—to be fulfilled, that Israel is to attain her destiny of becoming a "light to the nations, to declare His salvation to the ends of the earth", that the glory of the Lord is to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, is to be revealed that all flesh may see it together, this venture comes full of suggestion. This is what the newspapers of the future will be like—shorn of the rather frequent reports of wars and bloodshed, for He is to "make wars to cease to the ends of the earth". But the chronicles of the Messianic Kingdom upon earth will have much in

common with these imaginary reports of Israel's early ages.

The book is likely to be of interest to many who know little of the Old Testament and perhaps have not been attracted by normal methods of evangelical approach, if only for the reason that it is written and set out in a form thoroughly familiar to everyman. It does not profess to be an accurate teacher of Bible truths—rather it sets out to give a true impression of daily life in Bible times and in this it undoubtedly succeeds. Teenagers, both Christian and non-Christian, will certainly find it absorbing. It will be of value too for younger children, right down to the earliest reading age, affording them a groundwork of basic O.T. history knowledge that might not be so easily attained in any other way. As a present for such the volume is admirable.

The papers, bound together, fold into stiff cloth covers measuring 13" x 10" x 3/4", embossed gold "Chronicles—News of the Past". The paper is reasonable quality—book paper, not "newsprint" paper—and should withstand normal treatment. It is obtainable by post from the distributors in Great Britain and Ireland as follows:

Norman Passes Ltd
10-12 Wellington Street
LUTON, Beds.

The price 36/7 inclusive of postage but by virtue of a special arrangement, readers of the "Bible Study Monthly" are given a preferential discount of 5/- which makes the cost to readers of this review 31/7. Friends taking advantage of this concession must mention in their order to Messrs Norman Passes that they are readers of the "Bible Study Monthly" and enclose 31/7 only. **ORDERS MUST BE SENT DIRECT TO MESSRS NORMAN PASSES AND NOT TO THE B.F.U. NOR TO HOUNSLOW.**

Readers in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Rhodesia and Zambia should also send for their copies to Messrs Norman Passes. The cost in this case (to BSM readers) is 32/6 to cover the higher overseas postage.

Readers in U.S.A. and Canada are requested to obtain their copies from the United States distributors as follows:

C. Zanziper
870 East New York Avenue
Brooklyn
N.Y. 11203

The price inclusive of postage in U.S.A. and Canada from the above distributor is not yet confirmed to us but may be taken as about \$4.50.

A VOICE FROM THE CATACOMBS

The pagans of Rome often remarked on the strange living hope which transformed the lives of those from among their number who became converts to Christianity. Nowhere is this contrast between the living faith that is Christianity, and the dark despair that characterised paganism, more marked than in the epitaphs set up by pagan and Christian over their dead. The Christian sentiments, of which many examples are found in the Catacombs at Rome, breath a spirit of calm and even joyous confidence for the future. The pagan epitaphs reveal utter hopelessness and resentment against a fate which offered them no recompense for the trials and vicissitudes of life. Here are a few examples, all belonging to times between the year A.D. 74 and the seventh century.

*Petronia, a Deacon's Wife,
The Type of Modesty.*

*In this place I lay my bones.
Spare your tears, dear
Husband and Daughters, and
Believe that it is forbidden
To Weep for One Who Lives
in God.*

*Buried in Peace on the Third
Before the Nones of October
in the Consulate of Festus.*

Another one, much more brief, but how eloquent—

*Victorina,
In Peace,
and in Christ.*

Against this, read a pagan epitaph, brief in its tragedy of a pagan father who has lost a well-beloved daughter, without hope of reunion:

*I, Procope, Lift Up My Hands
Against God, Who Snatched
Me Away Innocent.*

*She Lived Twenty Years.
Proclus Set Up This.*

Not so the Christians who set this brief word on the stone of a pilgrim who had reached the end of the way.

The Dormitory of Elpis.

To us a dormitory is a sleeping-place. To the early Christians the grave was but a dormitory. Our own word "cemetery" is the Greek "koimeterion", meaning the same as "dormitory", a place of sleep. So two loving Christian parents, many centuries ago, laid

their child to rest in a grave far below the streets of Rome and inscribed upon her stone—

*Here Sleeps Porcella in Peace,
She Lived*

3 Years 10 Months 13 Days.

That peace was denied the sorrowing mother who knew nothing but the hopeless creed of paganism, and poured out her heart's anguish in these bitter words—

*Caius Julius Maximus
Aged 11 Years 5 Months
O Relentless Fortune
Who Delightest in Cruel Death.
Why is Maximus So Suddenly
Snatched From Me?*

*He Who Used to Lie Joyfully
On My Bosom.*

*This Stone Now Marks His Tomb.
Behold His Mother.*

How different is the affectionate remembrance and calm submission of these parents, believers in Christ, who inscribed—

*Navarina,
In Peace.
A Sweet Soul,*

Who Lived 16 Years and 5 Months.

A Soul As Sweet As Honey.

This Epitaph Was Made by Her Parents.

Peace, peace: that is the constant refrain of these rejoicing believers as they laid their loved ones to rest. This last example is perhaps the record of a Christian matron, well spoken of for good works and labours of love in the service of the brethren.

*Constantia,
Buried in Peace*

*On The Lord's Day The Sixth
Before The Kalends of July
In The Fifth Consulate of
Honorius Augustus
To The Well-Deserving,
In Peace.*

How well these brethren of ours must have learned the truth contained in Paul's triumphant words: "So then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Truly, we who follow in their steps are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, men and women, who, in their lives and deaths, manifested the reality of that faith which was in them.

THE COMING OF THE KING

7. The Sign of the Son of Man

A series of studies
concerning the
Second Advent

There has to be a point in the succession of events constituting the Second Advent at which the fact becomes universally recognised and accepted. "Lo, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him" is the Revelator's ecstatic outburst (Rev. 1. 7) alluding to the visions of Daniel and Zechariah. The significance of world happenings during the early stages of the Advent is known only to those who have correctly related the contemporary scene to the principles of the Divine Plan as laid down in the Scriptures; a time comes in the progress of those happenings when the outward signs and evidences are so pronounced and unmistakable that men generally can no longer deny that the powers of Heaven have taken control of affairs on earth. Those signs and evidences will have to be very conclusive to convince this modern sophisticated world—in olden times the visible appearance of the glorified Lord in the sky, descending to earth with attendant angels, would have been enough, and the poetic language of the Bible is written in terms of such an expectation, but this scientific world will demand much more. It is only when the phenomena associated with the Advent cannot be understood or explained by men or affected by weapons of man's devising that, like Pharaoh's magicians of old, they will say "this is the finger of God".

It is this phase of the Advent to which our Lord referred in Matt. 24. 30 when He said "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory". This is the second coming as it is seen by all the world; Jesus gave no detail or even hint in explanation of His reference to the "sign" but that it indicates something universally seen and acknowledged is beyond dispute.

The position of this "sign" in the sequence of events is important. The twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew is unanimously agreed to be the "key" description of the Second Advent, a framework provided by our Lord himself into which all other Scripture passages bearing upon the subject are fitted. The chapter takes for its starting-point the Judea of Jesus' own day and the disasters which were

to come upon that people almost immediately. Comparison of the three parallel accounts in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke make it fairly clear that the "great tribulation" was that into which the nation of Israel entered within forty years of the crucifixion and which was to continue until the ending of the "Times of the Gentiles" at the time of the Advent. The first phase of this latter event is shown to be the "astrape", the dawn-light observed only by the "Watchers", indicative of the commencement of the "parousia" or presence of the Son of Man. That is followed very quickly by Divine judgment upon evil institutions of the world—the darkening of the sun and moon, the falling of the stars, the powers of the heavens being shaken. After that, "and then", appears the "sign of the Son of Man", and the question has to be asked; of what nature is this sign and what are those sights or events or considerations which do at last persuade men that the Lord of all the earth has taken to Himself His great power and commenced His reign?

The preceding phenomena, described in Matt. 24. 29, the darkened sun, falling stars and so on, relate to Joel's foreview of Armageddon where the same imagery is employed. (Joel's vision in turn connects with almost every other Scriptural description of the overthrow of world power before the incoming Kingdom of Heaven. In most of these visions the manifestation of God for human deliverance occurs immediately after the destruction of the forces of evil in Armageddon, as in Zech. 14. "His feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives" or Joel 3. 16 "The Lord shall roar out of Zion". The "sign of the Son of Man" therefore, is concurrent in point of time with the actual entry of Divine power upon the world stage to control world affairs. From this point of view the Messianic prophecy in Isa. 11. 15 is significant in that here also the entry of Messiah into world affairs is described as a sign. "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse which shall stand for an ensign" (same word as "sign" in the original) "of the people; to it shall the nations seek". "He shall set up an ensign for the nations and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel . . . from the four corners of the earth" (Isa. 11. 10-12). The latter quotation is significant in that a final gathering of purified Israel

is associated with the "sign", just as in Matt. 24 where, upon the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man, the angels "*gather his elect from the four winds*"; comparison with Matt. 24. 22 would seem to identify that elect with Israel. Isa. 66. 19 supports and amplifies Isa. 11. "*I will set a sign among them and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations . . . and they shall declare my glory among the nations.*"

The words rendered "sign" or "ensign" (Greek *semeion* and Hebrew *oth*) in all these passages have the parallel meanings of signal, token or miracle and are rendered by all these terms elsewhere in the Scriptures. The sense, both in Matthew and Isaiah, is that of a signal. In each case the "sign" heralds a noteworthy event in history—so far as this Age is concerned the most noteworthy event of the entire twenty centuries. The ending of Armageddon is the signal for the manifestation of earth's new King to the world and the "de facto" establishment of His ruling power. The quotations from Isaiah associate this sign or signal with the emergence of evangelists from Israel, the Holy Nation, to declare God's glory, and this poses the question; what does the "sign of the Son of Man" mean to the observers on earth, expressed in concrete terms?

A pointer to the answer is provided by our Lord's words on the same subject to men of his own generation. The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Him on one occasion, desiring him "*that he would shew them a sign from heaven*" (Matt. 16. 1-4) something they could see with their natural eyes to convince them of His Messiahship. Jesus refused. "*A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas . . . Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?*" In this incident Jesus established the principle that the proofs of His authority and His mission resided not in the creation of a visible apparition in the sky, but in an intelligent appraisal of the significance of current events, "*discerning the signs of the times*". There may have been two such occasions during the life of Jesus when such a request was made and received this rebuff; on one occasion Jesus likened Jonah's witness to the men of Nineveh respecting his entombment inside the sea monster, to His own death and subsequent resurrection. In both cases the force of the "sign" resided in the witness that was given afterwards. Jonah's preaching after

his deliverance was a signal to Nineveh that God was coming into their affairs, to judgment; the record says that they repented. The corresponding sign at the First Advent was the Holy Spirit's power with which the Apostles preached Christ in Jerusalem after His resurrection; not until then were fulfilled Jesus' words "*For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation*" (Luke 11. 30). It is fitting therefore that at the Second Advent also the "sign of the Son of Man" should be associated with the commencement of an even greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which is to energise that world evangelism which immediately follows the full end of "this present evil world". "*Except ye see signs and wonders*" said Jesus when he healed the son of the Capernaum nobleman "*ye will not believe*" (John 4. 48). From all of this it is evident that the "sign of the Son of Man in heaven" is not going to be a visible appearance of glory in the sky, but a momentous happening or combination of happenings upon earth, of such a nature that men will have no alternative to accepting the fact that, at last, the Lord Christ has taken to Himself His great power and commenced His reign.

There is really only one prophetic foreview in Scripture which yields sufficient detail to enable some concrete idea of the "sign" to be formulated. The twelfth to fourteenth chapters of Zechariah present a detailed, although highly metaphorical, picture of the events surrounding the transfer of sovereignty from the present earthly holders to the coming powers of Heaven, particularly as they affect regathered and purified Israel in the Holy Land. That particular piece of the earth's surface, set at the meeting place of three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa, and of the three great divisions of mankind, is peculiarly fitted to be the federal capital of the new order of society which comes in with Christ's Kingdom, especially when it is occupied by a people who will then have achieved their long-promised destiny, a holy nation, a people for a purpose. That has never been the case in the past and is not so at present, but in the twelfth chapter of Zechariah we are translated into the time when it will be true. The people that will then hold the land of Israel will be in process of repudiating the policies and standards of this world and in fair way of becoming an instrument in God's hand. The nations round about will have lost none of their old enmity and are threatening a mass attack. At that critical pass, the gov-

ernors of the nation announce their faith and the faith of their people in God, that God will deliver. When the attack takes place God does deliver, and that so mightily that in the outcome the Lord alone is recognised as King over all the earth. These "governors of Judah" are to be "like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about" (Zech. 12. 6). In other words, they are irresistible, and under their Divinely-inspired leadership the land of Israel will become the nucleus of the Kingdom of God upon earth.

Who are these "governors of Judah" so firmly in control of the land at that time? The word does not mean a king or a political ruler in the ordinary sense, but a family or tribal leader, from whence it becomes a guide, a teacher, a benevolent leader. These leaders, from whencesoever they come—and men may find it difficult at first to discern from whence they do come—will differ from all previous human rulers, not only in their inflexible faith in God and claim to be God's ministers, but also in the evident fact that they are backed by Divine power, and it is this latter which renders them irresistible. The nature of the destruction which comes upon their opponents is described as a visitation from the Lord which causes their flesh to waste away while they stand upon their feet, their eyes to consume away in their sockets and their tongues to wither away in their mouths, culminating in a great panic in which they are completely demoralised and scattered. Translated into modern terms it is possible to picture the whole of the world's military might being frustrated and nullified by a power no man can either understand or withstand. It happened in the days of the Exodus; it happened in the days of Sennacherib; it can happen again. And when men realise that all that they can do is powerless against the advancing hosts of Heaven, it might well be said that they are witnessing the "sign of the Son of Man in heaven".

This then, is the "apokalupsis", the revelation of the Lord from heaven to all the world. The fact of His assumption of power is declared by events; the visible presence of His human representatives ruling in Jerusalem, the "city of the great King", and the obvious hopelessness of any further resistance to their beneficent authority, is the signal to all men that the old evil world has ended and the "new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3. 13) has commenced. This is the time spoken of by

Jesus in Matt. 24 when the peoples of the earth shall mourn—the mourning is also alluded to in Zech. 12 where it is shewn to be one of contrition and repentance; the light of the new Day will reveal to many their heedlessness and unbelief and create in them a desire for better things—and from this moment the reconstruction of the world upon a better and an enduring basis will commence.

This is not the end of the Advent. The presence of the King must continue until it becomes true that "all that hath breath shall praise the Lord", and this implies an evangelical work of colossal proportions extending over a considerable span of time. But the bad old days will be days of the past and mankind will look forward to a glorious future. The return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth, a process involving a number of interrelated events occupying an appreciable period of time, as human beings know time, commencing when He first revealed the fact of His presence to His own watchful ones, will now have become reality to all who dwell upon earth. The execution of judgment upon evil world powers will have commenced and progressed and been completed. The opposition of the enemies of righteousness will have been brought to bear upon the incoming influences for goodness and will have been utterly defeated. The Christian society, the Church of Christ upon earth, will have been completed and taken into eternal association with Christ in the heavens, to rule over earth during the entire period of His Presence. The earthly missionaries of the new Age, stalwart in their loyalty to God, will have been gathered from every corner of the earth and established in the Holy Land, centre of the new Administration. All these things will become evident to the sons of men when at the last, when all things are ready, they perceive, by the stern logic of world events and the visible presence of the ambassadors of Christ in accepted control, the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. Then it is that Isaiah's rhapsody will become a reality "it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him and He will save us. This is the Lord. We will rejoice and be glad in His salvation".

(THE END)

There is much more in the Scriptures regarding the Second Advent. From time to time various subsidiary aspects not elaborated upon in the series here concluded will appear as isolated articles, supplementing what has already been said.

EVENTIDE

"So he bringeth them unto their desired haven"

"... and they told him all things, whatsoever they had done and whatsoever they had taught" (Mark 6. 30). It was the "twelve" of whom Mark wrote these familiar words, the twelve who had now returned, two by two, from the mission on which they had been sent to the cities and villages of Israel. What stories they would have to tell as they reported back to him who had sent them forth!

Jesus himself had been out on public witness work, having been round about the villages teaching. (Mark 6. 6). He had returned "into his own country" (vs. 1) after visiting the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, and with the twelve in attendance upon Him, began to teach and preach in their synagogue. But the ministry fell on callous hearts and unheeding ears. They claimed to know him who He was and whence He came. They found cause of offence in him (v. 3) and set his words at naught. Because of that "he could do there no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk and healed them" (v. 5).

It was into an atmosphere charged thus with contempt and scorn that Jesus sent his followers, two by two, to preach that men should repent. (v. 12). To assist them in their ministry He had equipped them with great powers—power to cast out the unclean spirits which afflicted the populace. "They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them." (v. 13).

Witness work in Israel was no gala-day experience. Even He who spake as never man spake found the atmosphere of unbelief too frigid for success. The flow of healing power was checked and hindered in the midst of such frozen apathy, where but a "few" could receive his bounteous gift. Could the disciples hope to have success where the Master failed? Could they thaw the frozen hearts with words of warmth greater than the Master spake?

That they had some success seems evident, for they did cast out some demons, and heal some of the sick—and now they had returned to tell the Master about all they had said and all they had done!

This had been an almost invaluable experience for them, for nothing can test the fibre of the witness-bearing soul like an atmosphere of indifference and apathy. When the words rebound as from the bastion rock they

can have one of two effects. Either they can daunt and stifle the warm enthusiasm of the witness-bearer himself or they can react and feed the flames of that enthusiasm to whiter heat by awaking sympathy for deluded men.

With Jesus that indifferent response led to a deepening of his sympathy towards his unresponsive audience. When men to whom He spake of God's benevolence and love could not heed and accept what He had to say He knew there were sometimes factors other than human choice at work, and for these men his compassion began to flow. Cold callous indifference aroused and intensified in his heart that High Priestly quality that could bear gently with ignorant and erring men, and made him more resolutely determined to see his mission through.

As Jesus sat and listened to the stories of these twelve, we can be sure He knew how to turn this experience to good effect so that they should not be too elated with their meagre success. "Rejoice not because demons are subject unto you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven above", He found need to say to them at another time.

Hence while they had some small success there was another better side. They, along with him, were Heaven's evangelists—God had sent him—He had sent them, and success or no success, they were linked with God in a witness-bearing to a demon-ridden world. It is that that counts.

We also find ourselves sharing the like experience. The testimony of the Most High has never yet been withdrawn—nor can it be till sin has been eliminated from the earth. But in this callous world God has not promised us much success. The product of this entire Age is but a "little flock"—"there's but one here and there". It is the reaction back into our own heart that counts. When after great rebuff we can say with compassionate sympathy "poor deluded suffering world, your day has yet to come" the value of our witness is not lost, it has returned to us with added interest. There has been gain to us, even if to none besides.

But there is something more we can do to bring these desirable effects home to our souls. It is to do as the disciples did. Review the day's experience for the Master's ear in the quiet eventide. Tell him humbly what

we have tried to say and do in his dear Name—it is there that the temperature of heart and soul will reveal itself. You will tell him only what you have sincerely sought to do and say, and as you speak, if only in the deeper chambers of the heart, the fires of devotion to his cause will begin to glow and send out their heat and warmth and you will find your sense of serving him intensified. You will then say,

*“One more day’s work for Jesus
One less of life for me!
But Heaven is nearer
And Christ is dearer,
Than yesterday to me,
His love and light
Fill all my soul tonight.”*

*“O blessed work for Jesus
O rest at Jesus’ feet,
There toil seems pleasure
Fatigue seems leisure,
And pain for him is sweet!
Lord, if I may
I’ll serve another day.”*

If then, this day your voice has rebounded as from the bastion rock; if that little conversation did not turn or end as you desired; if that little tract was later found mud-stained upon the road, never mind: Go and tell Jesus about it all. The witness is not irretrievably lost: it will re-appear in the after years, sometime, somewhere, when an enlightened consciousness counts up the opportunities lost. Seeming defeat with God today can never fail; it is a sure contribution to the final overthrow of the wrong and the untrue.

BOOK REVIEW

NATURAL LAW AND SCIENCE IN THE BIBLE (L. H. Bunker) 18 pp. Stiff covers. Chosen Books, 1966.

This is a “programmed learning” book. A great many people have not yet come across this modern method of systematic teaching but it has been used increasingly in the study of various sciences; it is here being applied to the study of the Bible, which has been described as the “noblest science, the best instruction”. To quote from the explanatory foreword of the book *“This is an interesting way of learning and remembering what has been written by Bible writers on natural law and science. It is really a learning game in which you follow the author’s clues. Because you will be discovering information for yourself you will remember much better what you have learned but you will have to read a little slower than you would an ordinary book.”* The method is particularly adapted to the needs of teenagers and young people and hence useful perhaps to those concerned with

the instruction of such. The book demonstrates that there is no conflict between the Bible and natural science when the standpoint of the Bible writers is correctly understood.

The author is Tutor-in-charge of Programmed Instruction to the Inner London Education Authority (City of Westminster College). He is very willing to assist Christian teachers desiring to make use of this type of teaching. To this end the following arrangements apply:

Normal price post free 4/3 (60c U.S.A. and Canada).

When for use of schools and teachers — Less 25%.

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Do you recall the story of how Napoleon’s army on one occasion was demoralised, and the general ordered the drummer boy to sound the retreat? The little fellow straightened up with pride and said, “Sir, I don’t know how to sound a retreat—I never learned—but I can sound a charge.” He sounded the charge. The army rallied and was victorious. It overcame at last. With Christ on our side the final victory will be ours.

Let us serve Him faithfully as our Master. Let us obey Him loyally as our King. Let us study His teaching as our Prophet. Let us walk diligently after Him as our Example. Let us look anxiously for Him as our coming Redeemer. But above all, let us prize Him as our Sacrifice, and rest our whole weight on His death as an atonement for sin . . . Whatever else we glory in about Christ, let us never fail to glory in His Cross.

EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT

There are laws of rightdoing and equity which cannot be broken without incurring grave consequences. The prospect before men in the life to come is one of constantly widening experience and deepening knowledge of God and His creation, but that life must be conducted in harmony with right principles to be sustained by the Giver of all life. The violation of those principles is called sin by the Bible, and the consequence of continued and incorrigible sin, the Bible declares, is cessation of life. A wise man of Old Testament days expressed this vital law in pithy words "*As righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death*"; "*In the way of righteousness there is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death*" (Prov. 11. 19; 12. 28). St. Paul said that "*the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life*" (Rom. 6. 23). This is the basis upon which is built the Scriptural doctrine of the consequences of sin.

The term "everlasting punishment" appears in the Authorised Version only once, in Matt. 25. 46. Human ideas of "punishment", usually involving an element of revenge, reprisal or retaliation, are not what the New Testament means when it deals with the consequences of sin. A preferable term is penalty, or better still, retribution. The underlying principle is laid down by St. Paul in Gal. 6. 7 "*Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*". A passage in the Epistle of James puts the case very clearly: "*Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death*" (Jas. 1. 14-15 RSV). The penalty must not be looked upon as a kind of arbitrary Divine retaliation against rebels who displease Him, it is rather the logical and inevitable operation of natural law which demands that every disorderly or disruptive element must eventually be eliminated that the purpose of God in creation be realised in the happiness and fulness of life of every living being. The fact that we see not yet this law bringing forth its final results does not deny its truth; humanity is at this moment still in the early stages of that long experience which is at

length to achieve that end. The close of this present life in the death of the body is only an incident in this long process and there is more, much more, to come. Eventually it will be evident that sin bears within itself the seeds of its own destruction and the sinner who will not renounce his rebellion against God signs his own death warrant.

The Bible emphasises that eventually evil and sin will disappear from creation. In the whole wide realm of Divine government there will be no such thing as evil and no such thing as sin. In 1 Cor. 15. 24-28 St. Paul looks forward to a time when the enemies of God have been overthrown, death has become a thing of the past, and in the plenitude of His sovereignty God has become "all in all". Eph. 1. 9-10 (RSV) stresses that God will, at the end, "*unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth*". In what is perhaps one of the grandest flights of eloquence in the New Testament, the Epistle to the Philippians speaks of the time to come when "*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Phil. 2. 9-10). These and other lines of Scripture argument make clear that evil will eventually cease to be.

All life is the gift of God; no created being can continue to live except by the power of God constantly animating his bodily frame and enlivening his mind. "*The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground*" says the Genesis account (Gen. 2. 7), "*and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul*". If that flow of life-power ceases, or if God withdraw it, death results, consciousness ends, and the inert body returns to the elements of which it is composed "ashes to ashes, dust to dust". In a vivid passage relating to the animal creation the Psalmist defines the process; "*thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust*" (Psa. 104. 29). Hope for a man's future life after death rests entirely with God, Who can invest that life with a new body adapted to its new environment, and this is what is involved in the Christian doctrine of the resurrection from the dead. St. Paul in 2 Cor. 5 talks of being "*clothed upon*" with a "*house from heaven*" following the dissolution of "*our earthly house of this*

dwelling-place". The relation between such a resurrection to everlasting life and the contrasting destiny of the obdurately evil is laid down very plainly by our Lord when He said "*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him*" (Jno. 3. 36).

In line with this principle the Scriptures present the ultimate end of the sinner as withdrawal of the gift of life. If, at the end, sin and evil are to be no more, if all intelligent life in every sphere is to bow the knee to Jesus and give praise and worship to Him, then there must come a time when sinners are no more. Says Job "*they that plow iniquity and sow wickedness, reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed*" (Job 4. 8-9). "*He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me love death*" runs Prov. 8. 36. The two prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel unite in the terse declaration "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die*" (Jer. 31. 30. Ezek. 18. 4). David adds his word "*The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth*" (Psa. 34. 14), and puts the responsibility squarely where it belongs in the brief maxim "*Evil shall slay the wicked*" in verse 21 of the same Psalm. These are not just a few casual observations having no particular authority behind them; they are expressions of a fundamental truth which these men, and others like them, being men of God profoundly influenced by His Holy Spirit, fully understood and held tenaciously. These writings form the true basis of Christian theology and must be given due heed on that account; they insist that the penalty for sin is withdrawal of life, the ending of conscious existence.

There are two words in the New Testament which have been productive of much misunderstanding. One is damnation and the other is everlasting. The first, damnation, has a meaning to-day which it did not bear in the seventeenth century when the Authorised Version was produced. At that time it meant, simply and positively, to be condemned; the nature and duration of the condemnation depended upon the circumstances of the case. Thus in Wycliffe's Bible the words of Jesus to the woman taken in adultery are "*Woman, hath no man damned thee?*" Likewise the "*resurrection of damnation*" of Jno. 5. 29 is literally a "*resurrection to judgment*" which at least brings the case of "*those who have*

done evil" before the Judge for consideration. The Greek is rendered "*judgment*" and "*condemnation*" some eighty times and "*damnation*" only fourteen times, and the Revised Version has abandoned "*damnation*" altogether. Thus wherever the word "*damnation*" is found it must not necessarily be assumed that the condemnation is final and irrevocable. It may in some cases be limited in scope, as in Rom. 14. 23 "*He that doubteth is damned if he eat*" where the meaning is that the person partaking of the Lord's supper "*unworthily*" stands condemned or judged in his action but not necessarily doomed.

One of the strangest and most misunderstood statements of Jesus is that in Matt. 25, where the King in the parable says to the unworthy "*Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels . . . and these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal*". "*Punishment*" here is *kolasis*, a word which means, primarily, to cut off or lop the branches of a tree as in pruning, and in general indicated restraint or correction. From this it became a term for the restraint of offenders or criminals to prevent continuance of their misdeeds, and this is the sense in which it is used here. ("*Fear hath torment*" in 1 Jno. 4. 18, where "*torment*" is *kolasis*, is another example where restraint rather than punishment is the obvious meaning). Penal punishment is *timoria*, a totally different word. Here in Matt. 25 the contrast is between the everlasting life of the worthy, who enter into what elsewhere is called "*the glorious liberty of the children of God*" (Rom. 8. 21) and the everlasting restraint from sin of the unworthy. This is the same thing as the everlasting fire of the same passage. Another reference to the same judgment is found in Rev. 20, 11-15 where the King seated on the Great White Throne—the "*throne of his glory*" of the Matt. 25 parable—arrays all people before Him to be judged "*and they were judged every man according to their works*". Here, under a very similar symbol to that employed in Matt. 25, the unworthy are "*cast into the lake of fire*". Earlier in this 20th chapter of Revelation the Devil also has been cast into this lake of fire, a parallel allusion with the fate of the "*devil and his angels*" in Matt. 25. In both passages the picture is one of judgment which proceeds throughout the Messianic Age, the "*Day of Judgment*", and the outcome at its end when the eternal issues, for good or for evil, are

decided for every man. The everlasting fire and the fiery lake are symbols for that utter destruction which overtakes all evil and every incorrigibly evil being. Isaiah saw the same thing when at the close of his vision of the new heavens and new earth he said of those who have right of entry into that eternal world "*they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men who have transgressed against me; for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorring to all flesh*" (Isa. 66. 24). The worm is undying until there is nothing left upon which it can feed; the fire unquenched until it has consumed all there is to burn—just as in Jer. 17. 27 where a fire was to be kindled in Jerusalem that "*shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and it shall not be quenched*".

Passages which speak of sinners destroyed by everlasting fire are metaphors taken sometimes from the story of the destruction of the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire from heaven and sometimes from the known use of the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem for idolatrous human sacrifice by fire in the days of the Hebrew kings, and its later use for continuous burning of the city garbage. "*Gehenna*"—the Greek form of Hinnom—occurs fourteen times in the sayings of Jesus (rendered "Hell" in the A.V.); the idea in each case is that of utter destruction, a destruction as complete as by fire. In Matt. 3. 12 and Luke 3. 17 the chaff which has been separated from the wheat is burnt up with "*unquenchable fire*". In Matt. 9. 43-48 it is better to enter into life maimed than being whole to go into the unquenchable fire, the parallel passage in Matt. 18. 8 calling this the "*everlasting fire*". In the same passages it is shown that Gehenna and the unquenchable fires relate to one and the same thing, and in Matt. 21. 44 the assertion is plainly made that it is possible for God to "*destroy both soul and body*" in Gehenna. This corresponds with declarations such as Psa. 92. 7 "*when all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever*".

Thus understood, the consequence of sin in the face of full light and full opportunity is incurred solely by the individual's own choice and will. It might well be that deliberate continuance in evil-doing can destroy a man's capacity for repentance and conversion to the good life. Perhaps a man is capable of destroying his own soul. Sixty years

ago Dr. Paterson Smyth wrote "*We must believe that through all eternity, if the worst sinner felt touched by the love of God and wanted to turn to Him, that man would be saved. What we dread is that the man may not want, and so may have rendered himself incapable of doing so. We dread not God's will, but the man's own will. Character tends to permanence. Free will is a glorious but a dangerous prerogative. All experience leads towards the belief that a human will may so distort itself as to grow incapable of good*". More recently Prof. Alexander Finlay said "*If life depends upon fellowship with God, the possibility must remain that the time may come when a man, no longer being capable of fellowship with God, shall die and become extinct, simply because there is no life left in him, because his soul is dead*". In a sermon delivered by Dr. Samuel Holmes, a Presbyterian minister of the United States, in 1907, he said "*It is implicit in the teachings of both Jesus and Paul that when a soul, through its persistence in sin, comes to the point where it is morally irrecoverable, it comes also to its final death . . . A living creature remains alive only so long as it conforms to the conditions of living. Shall we think otherwise of the human soul . . . When a man has continued in sin, has gone on dwarfing his moral and spiritual nature until every appeal of God is in vain, is it not in accordance with the analogies of life that extinction is the certain outcome?*" A noted Churchman of the late nineteenth century, Dr. C. A. Row, Prebendary of St. Pauls Cathedral, summed up his book "*Future Retribution*" in the words "*the disease of moral evil, wilfully persisted in, for aught we know to the contrary, may be capable of destroying man as a conscious being . . . Inasmuch as man is destitute of self-existence the length of the period during which he will continue to exist must be dependent on the good pleasure of Him who by his all-powerful energy maintains him in being every moment . . . Evil beings will cease to exist whenever it pleases the All-merciful to cease to exert that energy which alone maintains in existence the evil and the good*".

Eloquent in its brevity is the word of the Psalmist (Psa. 37. 10), a word expressed in literal down-to-earth terms which cannot be misunderstood: "*For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be*".



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

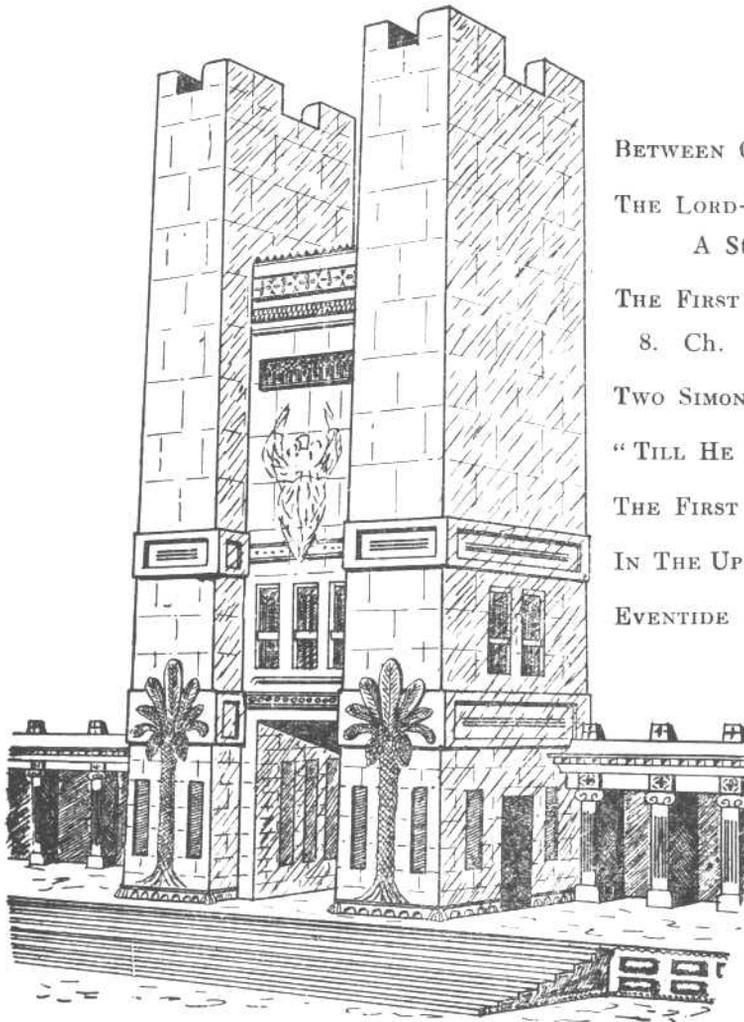
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MAR./APR., 1967

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

Published March 1st

Next issue May 1st



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

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

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Secretary & Treasurer: B. G. DUMONT (Hounslow) Editorial & Publishing: A. O. HUDSON (Welling)

Ministry of Reconciliation

"My flesh I will give for the life of the world!"

Often do we interpret these words in terms of His crucifixion and death. But Jesus did also consciously fulfil the prevision of Isaiah. *"He poured out his life unto death."* For three and a half years the life of Jesus was given, in every possible sense, that the world might have more life. *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."*

This is the call of the Church now, and in this Age. Our mission holds something more than a study of Divine philosophy, a growth in the knowledge of Scripture history and prophecy, a waiting for future glory and felicity. It is to give life that others might have life. It is to offer life *now*, as Jesus offered life *then*. True, we cannot heal diseases by a wave of the hand, produce food from stones wherewith to feed the hungry, drive out demons of hate, fear and all evil by verbal command—but, stay—is it true that we cannot do these things? Is there nothing that we can do for a sick or suffering one that will ease their lot and perchance assist them in their recovery; no power at all to relieve some little part of the hardship on those who suffer physical want in this unfriendly world; no word that can be fitly spoken to lift the mind of someone bound in the "bonds of iniquity" to higher and nobler ideals, and thus at least commence to cast out the demons that possess them? If we can do any of these things, in however little degree, we shall be doing, in our own small way, that to which our Lord Jesus devoted a great part of His life. And we are on safe ground when we find that *"as He was, so are we, in this world"*.

RENEWALS AND ADDRESS CHANGES

When notifying change of address, or requesting renewal for another year but to a new address, please advise the old address as well as the new one. Without this information we are sometimes in a quandary when we have two readers with the same name and initials.

Particularly do we ask U.S.A. friends to maintain consistency in the details of their addresses. It frequently happens that what appears to be an address change is actually the same address expressed in a different fashion and we here have no means of discerning the fact. Please also be sure to include the ZIP number.

* * *

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

The appointments listed below are privately sponsored and outside the responsibility of the B.F.U. Enquiries will be handled, on behalf of the friends responsible for these arrangements, by A. O. Hudson, 24 Darwin Road, Welling, Kent, to whom such enquiries should be sent in the first place. Any Bible class or study group may be included in the plans for future visits by arrangement.

Bro. E. G. ROBERTS

- Mar. 31 Sidmouth
- Apr. 1-2 Parkstone
- 3 Portsmouth
- 4-5 Bexhill
- 6 Chatham
- 7 Welling
- 8 Berkhamsted
- 9-10 Ipswich
- 11 Downham Market
- 12-13 Peterborough
- 14 Kettering
- 15 Gloucester
- 16 Cardiff

Bro. J. D. PARKER

- Apr. 6 Luton
- 7 Leicester
- 8-9 Rugby
- 10 Coventry
- 11 Atherstone
- 12 Holmes Chapel
- 13 Latchford
- 14 Sheffield
- 15-16 Nottingham
- 17 Lincoln
- 18 Greenford
- 19 Welling

THE LORD - HE IS GOD

A story of
Elijah the Tishbite

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 Palestirian 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 good-bye to the widow and her son, doubtless leaving 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 commanded.

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 re-

peated, 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.

Biblical allusions

The following extract from the writings of Rev. James Neil, who was resident in Palestine for a number of years over half a century ago, and familiar with the customs of the people, is a useful comment upon a point that is raised from time to time.

"Consider for a moment the highly damaging objection sometimes urged against Holy Scripture on the ground of the coarseness of the expressions it contains, and the handling of subjects the very mention of which we should account impure. This has been an honest difficulty to many earnest and sensitive minds. Yet a comparatively short residence in Palestine serves to remove it altogether; and indeed no Eastern could possibly see any objection whatever on this score. They still, as in ancient times, use the greatest plainness of speech throughout the Holy Land. At first a Western sense of delicacy is greatly shocked.

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 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.

Things the very mention of which decency forbids amongst us are there spoken of freely before women and children of the highest class, and of the greatest respectability and refinement. As soon as one acquires a knowledge of Arabic, which is virtually but a softer and more copious form of Hebrew, the ear is assailed by a plain speaking on these subjects which is extremely embarrassing until such time as one becomes accustomed to it. This explains, however, at once the perfect naturalness and innocency of the use of expressions and the mention of matters which our translators have softened down in some instances, and public readers have tacitly agreed to omit in others . . . Seeing the Bible purports to be an Eastern book, written in the East, and first—and for long ages only—addressed to Easterns, it could not possibly be genuine if these very matters were absent from its pages."

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 8 I John 2. 18-19

"Little children it is the last time; and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time" (chap. 2. vs. 18).

This consciousness, that the last day is at hand, seems to overshadow all John's thoughts in his epistle and colour his words. But it is not a dark shadow, a gloomy prognostication of doom such as is so often indulged in by fanatics who want to see the destruction of all things terrestrial in a holocaust of fire. It is, rather, a bright cloud of promise illumining the trenchant words with the sunlight of the Divine Presence. John sees the coming of Heaven to the rescue of Earth, not as God rising up from Mount Paran with all the phenomena of storm and earthquake and fire, advancing in terror and wrath across the face of the land, bringing tumult and destruction in his train, but as the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, a beneficent and radiant effulgence that sweeps over the sky and embraces all the earth, with healing in its wings. John knows full well, of course, that the day of the Lord is to bring trouble and distress, that the evil institutions of man will not go down without a struggle, but in the sight of his brethren the Last Day is to be a day of rejoicing rather than of terror, of assured peace rather than anxious apprehension, a day when the oncoming King shall be welcomed rather than shunned. "When ye see these things begin to come to pass, look up, lift up your heads, for your deliverance draweth nigh." That is the spirit in which John uses this expression "*the last time*".

It would come as a very familiar thought to his readers. They, for at least one complete generation, had been accustomed to the thought that the day spoken of by Isaiah, and Joel, and others of the prophets, when God should set His hand to make an end of iniquity and bring in everlasting righteousness, had dawned. The early Christians did not make the rigid distinction between the Gospel and the Millennial Ages, with the great Time of Trouble to mark the transition, that we do. How could they? In their day the vision of the future was still very vague and shadowy. They had only just come to realise, by the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, that God was not going to complete this marvellous work in their own generation. The old

idea had been that Messiah would come but once, and would, at that coming, set up His Kingdom on earth and fulfil the entire Divine Plan there and then. They knew, now, that there was more to it than that. They knew that a period of time, perhaps short, perhaps long, was to elapse and that only at its end would their Lord return and commence His reign, the *chilia*, the thousand years. Dimly they perceived an epoch characterised by wars, famines, pestilences and persecutions, culminating in another Time of Trouble such as that which they then were experiencing, only more intense. Nevertheless they looked upon it all as one Age, the Age which, beginning at Pentecost, marked the turning of God to reconcile men to Himself through Jesus Christ. Peter saw the dispensational aspects of the Plan more clearly; he did differentiate between the time before the Second Advent and the "Times of Restitution of all things" which must wait for that Advent, but even so Peter, alike with John, insisted that he and his were even then living in the "last time". They looked back over the long ages of Old Testament history, telling one long story of the continued descent of men into hopelessness, and they looked forward into one grand age of Jesus Christ, in which, first of all, the Church, the devoted and dedicated disciples of Jesus, would be selected and trained for their future work, and only after that the world as a whole be brought into the purposes of God and receive a full opportunity of everlasting life.

Now John turns to the darker subject of antichrist. His readers already know something about it. "*Ye have heard that antichrist shall come.*" One wonders where or how they heard. Perhaps something of Paul's teaching, recorded in 2 Thess. 2, had reached them, and they already had some idea of the part yet to be played by the "mystery of iniquity" when it should come into the world. Behind any such knowledge, behind Paul's own words, probably, lay the older belief, derived from the book of Daniel, that before the time of the Kingdom could come there would be an "abomination of desolation" that would defile all that is sacred and holy upon earth, and relentlessly persecute God's true people. The Jews indeed looked upon that as having been fulfilled when the heathen king Antiochus

Epiphanes, nearly two centuries before Christ, profaned the Temple and inflicted savage atrocities upon the faithful of Jewry. Paul and John knew, now, that the real fulfilment still lay in the future, and they ceased not to warn their brethren night and day that they might be strong to stand when the day of trial should come.

"Even now is it in the world" said Paul. "*Even now there are many antichrists*" says John. The great persecuting power which was to emerge and be consumed by the spirit of the Lord's mouth and destroyed by the radiance of His presence was not in their day in existence but the forces which were to give rise to it were already in operation. "*The mystery of iniquity doth already work.*" It is necessary for us, as it was necessary for the Christians of the First Century, to be very clear in our minds as to the form in which this Antichrist will appear to us, that we be not taken unawares and ensnared, and so unable to play our part in the great battle between Right and Wrong, Truth and Error, Good and Evil, with which this age is to close.

The essence of Antichrist is that it is a denial of Christ, and that it backs up that denial by means of brute force. It is not content only to deny the truth of Christ and the power of his life and message, but it also denies the right to honour and serve Christ, and restrains Christians in the exercise of their faith. In John's day this was only the beginning, as he says here. There were Judaising brethren who sought to bring Christians into bondage to the Mosaic Law, and Gnostics who sought to impose upon them the mysticism and philosophies of the East, and others who brought in specious heresies pandering to the vices and desires of the flesh under plea that Christians enjoyed a law of liberty and could do as they pleased provided they retained purity of mind, and behind them all the ever-present Roman pagan power insisting on the worship of Cæsar as a god. All these were the "many antichrists" of whom John spake and all these became snares and tests to the infant Church, against which they had to strive with might and main if they were to be accounted faithful. Later in the Age, although the "many antichrists" still persisted in a local sense, the mystery of iniquity became consolidated in the form of a mighty ecclesiastical, pseudo-religious system that arrogated to itself all the rights and privileges belonging to the Christian church and the Christian ministry and claimed to be the only channel of salvation. But it is a mis-

take to suppose that the Antichrist was a purely ecclesiastical institution. It was a temporal power as well. Men were ruled, in secular affairs as well as in religious matters, by an iron hand that demanded absolute and unconditional obedience. Only those who were absolute in their loyalty to God and faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ resisted the demand, and many such suffered persecution or martyrdom in consequence of the stand they took. Here was a power that did indeed "wear out the saints of the Most High", a combination of rulers, temporal and spiritual alike, who both denied the name and power of Christ for themselves and endeavoured by all means within their reach to destroy the true worship of God from the earth.

In our own days the power of that great system has waned, but the spirit of Antichrist lives still. The rulers of the earth are still of a mind to "take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying 'Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us'." Because the people of the world are, in the main, no longer amenable to religious authority, having become unbelievers, and by virtue of the progress of education and general diffusion of scientific knowledge no longer terrified by ecclesiastical threats of judgment to come, the modern manifestation of Antichrist is, and will be, of much more secular a nature than it has been in the past. But it will still be as much a determined denial of Christ and all for which He stands as it was in past days. That is shown very clearly in the visions of Revelation, where the last of all the anti-Christian powers to rise in the world, the "two-horned beast" which in the end leads men back to a worship and obedience identical with that which they previously accorded the "seven-headed beast", causes all men to receive a mark in the right hand or in the forehead; only those who are determined in their faithfulness to Christ fail to receive the mark. We must conclude therefore that in the end of the Age there will be a more potent manifestation of the Antichrist than ever there has been before, a combination of great civil ruling powers into a world system based fully and frankly on materialism, having no place or use for religion except as an aid and adjunct to its own plans and schemes, and demanding of all independent thinking Christians something very much akin to the Cæsar worship of the First Century. If we in our day should see such a thing come to maturity, we may take courage from the reflec-

tion that it is just such a power that is to be consumed by the Lord Jesus when He is revealed in the flaming fire of His judgments, when the Rider on the white horse, and his attendant armies, descend to do battle with the beasts of the earth and their armies—and the forces of evil are overthrown for ever.

Now for a while John restricts his thoughts and his words to the brethren and the church affairs of his own day. Thinking still of those local antichrists, the Judaisers and the Gnostics and the false teachers of one kind and another, who had joined the church and attempted to lead away disciples after them rather than enter into a true and fruitful ministry for Christ, he says "*they went out from us but they were not of us; for had they been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be manifest that they were not of us*".

Christians at all periods in the history of the Church have been familiar with this sad feature of Church life, the coming into their midst of men whose motives are not the edification and upbuilding of the flock and the giving of honour and glory to Jesus Christ, but, on the contrary, their own aggrandisement and self-glory, the receiving honour and power in the Church that they might be counted great in their own eyes. Poor fools!

As if the Lord of all the heavens could be deceived for a moment by such paltry hypocrisy—for these men are not, for the most part, unbelievers. They believe in God, but they conceive of him in their own image and likeness, and even while they deceive the flock as to their true standing, they deceive themselves. "*Deceiving and being deceived*"! What an apt expression it is! Apprehending nothing, or next to nothing, of the true principles of Christianity, they ply their miserable policies and devise their contemptible schemes that they may win a few followers whom they may call their own. Sooner or later they are shown up before the Church in their true light, and they "go out". But what sorrow and heartache that might well have been avoided had the members of the "flock" been more adept in spiritual discernment and more uncompromising with all that gives evidence of not being of the spirit of Christ. We do well to apply these words to ourselves and realise that "even now there are many antichrists" and that everyone who by his actions and teaching is denying the true spirit and the true message of Christ is, whether the sentence seems a harsh one or not, an antichrist.

(To be continued)

TWO SIMONS

The story of
an opportunity

The last few days of Jesus' earthly life were full of mental and physical strain. Luke says (21. 37-38) "*And in the day time He was teaching in the Temple; and at night He went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives. And all the people came early in the morning to Him in the Temple, for to hear Him.*" Following this came the last Passover and a long talk, then the Garden with its anguish and agony. An armed company came to take one defenceless man. He was betrayed by a kiss, bound and led away to trial. Mocked, humiliated, insulted, scourged and crowned with thorns Jesus began His journey to Calvary. He, bearing His Cross for Himself, went forth to die. (John 19. 17, R.V.).

When the journey began Jesus was "led" forth carrying the cross but before the place called Calvary was reached and probably at a point just outside the north gate of the city (for note "*as they came out*" in Matt. 27. 32) it was necessary to transfer the heavy cross

to someone else's shoulders. Moreover whereas at the beginning of the journey He was "led," at the close of it, such was His physical exhaustion, that He was "brought" or "borne along". (Mark 15. 20 and 22). Even His sinless body had its limits of endurance and they were reached that day. For three and a half years He had daily poured out His soul unto death, giving forth His vitality and strength, but like the Psalmist (Psa. 73. 26), He could say, "*My flesh and my heart faileth but God is the strength of My heart and my portion for ever*". His faith never faltered though His steps might.

A passer by was "impressed" by the Centurion in charge, one Simon, a Cyrenian, and he walked behind Jesus bearing the cross. Perhaps he was one of the "scattered abroad" Jews mentioned by Peter, come up to keep the Passover and obliged to lodge himself outside the city. Suddenly he found himself compelled under the law of Rome to carry a burden laid upon him by the Roman soldiers.

The unlooked for happened and he found himself with his day's programme changed, walking in a direction opposite to that he had intended, following a Person with whom he had never thought to be associated and bearing a burden he had never dreamed of carrying! How came it that the moment at which Simon met the procession was the very one at which the Centurion decided that somebody was wanted to carry a cross? If Simon had been a little earlier or later, if he had entered by another gate, if the Centurion's eye had looked in another direction; but there are no *ifs* in the outworking of God's purposes. Behind apparently chance circumstances lies the planning of the wise God, that was why Simon's name that day found a place on the page of Scripture. Nothing happens by chance where God's providences are concerned. It is not likely that Simon welcomed the interruption of his day's programme but it was God's way of bringing him into touch with Jesus.

It must have happened like that in thousands of cases since; some trivial circumstance, some slight incident, some strange turn of event has made all the differences in the life. Sickness, sorrow, loss, the breaking up of a cherished plan, these and a host of other unwelcome happenings have resulted in bringing many into touch with the Lord Jesus.

Peter, the leading Apostle; how was it he was not carrying his Master's cross at that great moment? If he had been as good as his word and had lived up to his boast he would have been so close to Jesus that morning that it would have been impossible for any other to be chosen to carry the cross. A few hours previously Peter had said, "*I am ready to go with Thee, to prison and death*" and when somebody was really needed to go with Him to the place of death Peter was not there. He was afar off hiding his tears and his shame, far off with that last look his Master gave him burning into his tortured mind. The echo of his own denials and curses was still in his ears; so Simon Peter lost the opportunity that could never come back. Never again was the Son of God to walk that sorrowful way of the cross and because Peter was not there he lost the right to carry the cross for his Lord and go step by step with Him to Calvary. Think of it! Their Lord and Master who had shown such willingness to serve them in the most menial of tasks—washing their feet—was needing such a service at such a moment and not one of His own disciples was at hand to render it, so that to a stranger the undying

honour must needs fall.

Simon the Cyrenian in a very real sense took Simon Peter's place that day. How glad we are that the grace of God restored Peter to his place, for he was in peril of losing, not only his opportunity of service in carrying the cross after Jesus but also his crown, "Let no man take thy crown".

The sight of a man carrying his cross was quite familiar in Jerusalem. Our Lord had chosen the figure of a cross bearer as an illustration of a true disciple and added the paradox concerning losing life by saving it and saving life by losing it. Everyone seeing a man carrying his cross saw one whose life here was ended. So it is with one who sets out to carry his cross, he is severing his connection with old pursuits belonging to the old life, and following Christ into the new life. Simon the Cyrenian had this signal honour; alone of all the characters of Scriptures he was the embodiment of our Lord's own illustration of a true disciple—a man carrying a cross after Christ! See him associated with Jesus in His shame, all his strength devoted to the carrying of a cross, walking pace for pace behind the Lord Himself, but with this difference—Simon carried Christ's cross: the disciple carries his own. The disciple's cross is Christ's only in the sense that he bears it voluntarily, gladly, "*for My sake*". (Mark 8. 35). Paul is our example. He was always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 4. 10) and filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ (Col. 1. 24). He counted all things but loss and dross that he might win Christ and be found in Him.

We may suppose that Simon the Cyrenian never forgot that morning's burden carrying nor the after incidents. If the Centurion who laid the cross on him was constrained before the day was out to say "*truly this was the Son of God*", we may believe that Simon's heart was reached.

Simon is mentioned in Mark 15. 21 as being the father of two sons, Alexander and Rufus. These two men were evidently well known Christians at the time Mark's Gospel came to be written, for the evangelist doubtless mentioned them by name because they were known to those Christians to whom he was writing. This in itself is strongly in favour of the assumption that Simon was so moved by his experiences on that eventful day that he became a follower in the deeper and spiritual sense of Him whose cross he bore and trained his boys to do the same.

“TILL HE COME”

A Second Advent theme

“For as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do shew forth the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Cor. 11, 26).

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

In these latter days, when many hold that the Scriptural and dispensational evidences justify the conclusion that the days of the Second Advent have already commenced and that our Lord is already breaking through into human history, an objection is voiced. If it be a fact that men are now living “in the days of the Son of Man” why should Christians still “eat of this bread and drink of this cup” since 1 Cor. 11, 26 appears to limit the appropriateness of this ceremony “till he come”. If He has come, even though as yet unknown to men in general, known only to his watching Church, is not the purpose of the observance at an end? On this account also an examination of the text will perhaps be both appropriate to the Memorial season and helpful in our consideration of the most absorbing Scriptural study we can undertake in this our day—the Second Coming of our Lord.

We turn then to the general purport of St. Paul’s teaching in this chapter and decide what he is talking about, place our text in its proper setting and seek to understand its purpose in his argument. The first thing worthy of notice is that this eleventh chapter of First Corinthians is one of several chapters in which the Apostle is giving counsel and cor-

recting errors in respect to the public Church life of the Corinthian believers. There were many abuses existing among them extending to various kinds of immorality which were definitely unchristian and would inevitably give the Church a bad name among its pagan neighbours. In the chapter under consideration the matters particularly discussed are the behaviour of the sisters in the Church worship meetings, and the behaviour of all the believers in the Church “love-feasts”. We know that it was the custom in those early days for the brethren, rich and poor alike, to assemble together for a communal meal to which all brought contributions, the food and drink thus offered being placed on the table and shared in common. This “agape” or “love-feast” was originally a spontaneous expression of the spirit of equality and brotherliness in the Church, but these Corinthians had degraded it into a function where class distinctions prevailed. The rich, instead of sharing their bounty with their poorer brethren, kept their own good things for themselves and feasted riotously, even to the extent of becoming drunken; the poorer ones, having little to bring, were hungry by comparison.

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

the Age.

Consider that for a moment. In what way is the memory of great historic events or of great men of past times perpetuated through subsequent generations? Always by means of anniversaries! Once every year some celebration or ceremonial reminiscent of the event or individual concerned is enacted, handed down from generation to generation, keeping alive the story that otherwise might easily perish. Take an illustration that might seem a little incongruous but is nevertheless apt and well on the point. In the year 1605, a plot was hatched to blow up the British Houses of Parliament. A dozen well-known men were implicated; their names are now very generally forgotten but the man selected to accomplish the purpose is immortal on the pages of British history, and to the children of every British generation better known than any of the monarchs of England from William the Conqueror to King George VI. Very few people have ever heard of Robert Catesby, Thomas Winter, Sir Everard Digby and Ambrose Rookwood, the chief conspirators. Everybody knows the name of the unfortunate Guido Fawkes—corrupted in the vocabulary of youth to Guy Fawkes—and how he was discovered sitting in the cellar waiting for the moment to apply the match. To this day the fifth of November is marked by the smoke of bonfires ascending all over Britain to the accompaniment of the crackle of many fireworks, the shouting of many children, and the barking of many dogs. The strongest evidence that a man called Guy Fawkes did live as the history books say he did, and that he did try to blow up the Houses of Parliament and was captured, is the fact of that annual celebration which nothing—not even two world wars with their nightly black-outs—has succeeded in abolishing.

That is Paul's point in our text. You Corinthians, he says in effect, are striking at the very basis of our evidence that Christ did live and die for man. Our Church life is a witness and you have corrupted it with your immoralities. Our love-feasts are witnesses and you have debased them with your greed. Our Memorial is a witness and you have nullified it by your repudiation of your communion in Christ—"for" he says *"as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup"* and that is every year, *"ye do shew"*—witness to the world—"the Lord's death till He come". A powerful evidence, to the man who will not accept the Gospels as they stand, that Christ did die and rise again as the Gospels say He

died and rose again lies in the obvious fact that ever since that time there has been an annual commemoration of the event. Such ceremonies do not arise from nothing. This simple ritual, performed all over the world, year by year continually, for nearly two thousand years, commemorating the death of One Who promised to come again, is a continual witness to two great truths. He died for the world, and He promised to come again to the world.

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

There would appear to be no good reason for concluding that St. Paul was thinking of the Advent as other than a single event in this connection. He already knew that it was a long way in the future and his prime purpose was to stress that this observance was to continue as long as the Age should endure "in remembrance of Me" as said our Lord. It is hardly likely that the Apostle would be taking into consideration at that moment anything he may have known respecting the time-scale of the Second Advent; he was here concerned with it only as an event, the event which was to terminate the Age. It follows then that the expression "till he come" is not limited to the coming "for his saints", which is a factor in the initial stage of the Advent, but should be understood in a more comprehensive fashion as including the later stages until at last He is manifested to all men. In the meantime, those of His Church still on earth are bidden to keep this Memorial as a witness to all men of the truth of His eventual coming to all men, until He has thus come. That clearly means that the Memorial must and will be observed until the last members of the Church have been gathered to their Lord, for only after that will He "come" to the world and be revealed to the world in whatever fashion the Son of Man is going to be revealed, with His glorified Church, "in that day".

Just one more illustration to demonstrate that point—another one from English annals. There is somewhere in London a statue to King Charles II, and there are in England just a very few people who regard his descendants as rightful heirs to the British throne. Once every year their representatives lay a tribute

of flowers at the base of the statue in symbol of their faith that one day the throne will be restored to the surviving claimant. The world—and, the police—look on, quite indifferent, faintly amused; but there is the witness to the faith of these few upholders of a lost cause. Now suppose one day—by some of course quite impossible turn of politics—the unlikely should happen and the restoration of the dynasty of Charles becomes an imminent possibility but as yet unknown to the citizens of England, and suppose the true descendant of the King should arrive unobtrusively and “incognito” from across the seas and summon his few faithful supporters for some private conference and instruction preparatory to their taking power. Suppose that time of preparation, while their king was present with them unknown to others, should occupy four or five years. Would they cease from the annual ceremony at the statue at the very time when it was approaching

fulfilment, on the ground that their king had in fact come to them although he had not yet manifested himself in public or taken his power? And if they did so cease, would not the bystanders conclude that the faithful few had lost faith at last and that after all there was nothing in this talk of a new king—just at the time the event was at hand?

So with us. Even if our King has come—to us; even if our personal conviction is that He is present, we are still under the obligation to “shew forth his death” to all who observe our witness “till he come” in whatever sense humanity in general will understand His coming. Then, and only then, when He has been proclaimed and manifested King in the glory of His Kingdom, will the momentous ceremony first observed in the Upper Room outside Jerusalem on that fateful night so many years ago pass away and be lost in the glorious light of the Millennial Kingdom.

THE FIRST PSALM

An Exposition

The First Psalm is in the nature of an introduction to the Book of Psalms. Its subject makes it peculiarly fitted to herald the sublime thoughts of later psalms, for it speaks of righteousness and evil and Divine Law. Around these three themes is built the whole fabric of revealed truth, and a clear understanding of them is an indispensable preliminary to the intelligent consideration and reception of the “deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2. 10).

Although the Psalms are commonly accredited to David, it is clear that he was not the author of them all. Some belong to later times, up to the days of Hezekiah at least, and a few to earlier days, but David was certainly responsible for most of them, and he it was who began the collection, to which others were added from time to time in later days, resulting in the Book of Psalms as we now have it.

There is little internal evidence to suggest who wrote this First Psalm. The occurrence of the word “*luts*” for “scornful”, a word which occurs only once again in the Psalms, but is of frequent occurrence in the Book of Proverbs, is thought to point to the time of Solomon, and the general tone of the Psalm is certainly reminiscent of Solomon’s analytical and intellectual mind more than of the frank devotion and picturesque expressive-

ness of David. The authorship is not of importance, for it is the Psalm itself that is of value.

The purpose of this Psalm is the declaring of the fundamental principle upon which God has designed His creation, viz., that those things which are right, just, in harmony with His own character, shall endure for ever, and that which is evil, unjust, out of harmony with the character of God, although it may subsist for a time, must and will inevitably pass away and out of existence. Divine creation is so ordained that nothing which is inherently evil can subsist indefinitely. It contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction and must eventually come to its end. Hence we have the law propounded by Paul in Rom. 6. 23 “The wages of sin is death”—death being the antithesis of life, the opposite to conscious existence.

The Psalm eulogises the happy state of the righteous man, both now and hereafter, and accredits the maintenance of his righteous state to his observance of Divine Law. Against this it places in contrast the unhappy position of the sinful, and declares in no uncertain terms that the end of that way is desolation, oblivion, non-existence. The fact that God’s whole plan of development for man is based upon law is stressed, and rightly stressed, here. It is when this fact is realised that we find ready to our hands a yardstick

by means of which we can measure the relative values of differing interpretations of Scripture.

"Blessed is the man" says verse 1 "*who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.*" This word "blessed" is capable of deeper shades of meaning than the A.V. suggests. "*How happy the man . . .*" is Rotherham's rendering, and Young is even more emphatic with "*O the happiness of that one who . . .*" It is significant that "happiness" is the first quality to be mentioned in the Psalms; and characteristic of God! His eternal purpose in creation is to the promotion of happiness amongst His creatures, and that happiness is only to be achieved by complete harmony with God. Religion is not a thing to be kept apart from daily life and practised solely on Sundays; every affair and activity of every day can be woven into the fabric of one's personal communion with God and sanctified thereby. "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3. 17). "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8. 28). "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8. 10). This is the normal condition of human life, from which men have fallen away, and only as they come back to this standing of absolute dedication of life and its activities to God can they find true happiness.

"But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night." (vs. 2). Here is the great principle; we must be students of the ways of God and learn to understand the principles upon which He has founded creation. The term "law" here does not confine itself merely to a set of commandments with their negative prohibitions—"Thou shalt not . . ."—but extends to those basic principles of Divine creation which lie at the root of every code of laws. We must learn *why* righteousness is desirable and sin to be abhorred and eschewed; *why* God is dealing now only with the disciples of Christ, the "Church" and will turn to convert the whole world only when the next Age, the Millennial Age, has dawned; *why* there is one call to a spiritual salvation and destiny, and another to an earthly, and every individual perfectly satisfied with his eventual lot, whether in heaven or upon earth. We shall not attain to complete knowledge of these things whilst in the flesh, but we can learn sufficient to make us the efficient servants and ambassadors of our king.

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting

the soul" says the Psalmist in another place (Psalm 19. 7). "O how I love thy law; it is my meditation all the day." "Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them" (Psa. 119. 97 and 165). In more measured cadence the Preacher says "The law of the wise is a fountain of life, that he might depart from the snares of death" (Prov. 13. 14).

"In the night" says the Psalmist (Psa. 42. 8) "his song shall be with me." Who is there among us not familiar with the haunting pathos of Cant. 3. 1 "By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth"? Our faith is not for daytime only; it is a twenty-four hour a day and a seven day a week faith, and oftentimes it is during the silence of the night that our deepest revelations come.

Vs. 3 "*And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.*" In the first Eden there were trees of life and a river that "watered the garden" and so gave it life (Gen. 2. 9-10). In the second Eden there are to be trees of life and a river of water of life (Rev. 22. 1-2; Ezek. 47. 12) and the trees are to be for both food and medicine—sustenance and healing. The Psalmist translates the symbol into reality. Those trees of life of the Millennial Age are none other than the righteous of this Age who have measured up to the standards of the first two verses of this Psalm. *Because* they have thus entered into the Divine way of life they shall become "trees of life" to give both sustenance and healing to the redeemed multitudes who will come back from the grave "in that day". True will it be of these whom Paul elsewhere calls "ministers of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5. 18) that "*whatsoever he doeth shall prosper*" (vs. 3).

There is a peculiar fitness in the association of trees with rivers. In hot countries trees are planted on the banks of rivers and streams in order to screen the water from the solar heat and to check evaporation. The trees thrust down their roots into the moist soil and are themselves sustained by the same waters that they are conserving for the use and benefit of men. "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High" (Psa. 46. 4). Every consecrated follower of the Lord Jesus during this Gospel Age is himself a "tree" nourished by that river which is the knowledge of God revealed through His Word, the holy Scriptures; and each such follower is by his Christian life and devotion helping to conserve that Word

against the coming Millennial Day when its benefits will be made free to all mankind. "The Spirit and the Bride say 'come' . . . and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22. 17).

Now we come to the other side of the picture. "*The ungodly are not so but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.*" (vs. 4). This likening of the wilfully wicked man and the hopelessly evil thing to chaff which is doomed to be scattered and lost is definite in the Scriptures. "Let them be as the chaff before the wind" says the Psalmist in Psa. 35. 5 "and let the angel of the Lord destroy them". "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever" (Isa. 48. 8). "How oft" says Job (21. 17-18) "is the candle of the wicked put out! How oft cometh their destruction upon them! . . . they are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away". David continues in the same strain (Psa. 37. 1-2) "Fret not thyself because of evil doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity; for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb", and again (Psa. 5. 4-5) "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish (properly 'worthless') shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all workers of iniquity". And this, which is said of individuals, is equally true of every evil institution which cumpers the earth, this aspect being seen in vision when Daniel interpreted the king's dream and described how all the might and power of those empires which stand in the way of Messiah's Kingdom will be destroyed by the "stone cut out of the mountain without hands" and how every vestige of them is to be scattered like the "chaff of the summer threshing-floors" (Dan. 2. 35).

Herein is made plain the Divine intention with regard to wilful evildoers. After the full and fair opportunity for life which is to be offered to every man under the reign of Christ in the Millennial Age, the penalty for continued and wilful sin will fall inevitably

upon the sinner; withdrawal of life, the Divine gift of which the individual concerned refuses to make proper use. As final and irrevocable as the dispersing of chaff from the threshing floor, carried by the wind and utterly lost, is this, the logical and inevitable result of wilful and incorrigible sin.

"Therefore" says the inspired writer with conviction "*the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation (assembly) of the righteous.*" (vs. 5). There is a direct link with the New Testament doctrine of the resurrection of mankind during the Millennial Age here, for the word rendered "stand" is one that has the meaning of standing firm or being set up. The New Testament word for resurrection is "*anastasis*" which means a re-standing or standing up again. "There shall be a resurrection (*anastasis*) of the dead" said Paul (Acts 24. 15) "both of the just and unjust". "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment" said Jesus (Luke 11. 31-32) and again "All that are in the grave shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto resurrection to life (*Greek*) and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection to judgment (*eis anastasin kriseus*). This verse in Psalm 1 is clearly a reference to the fact that, although "sinners" will in fact be restored to life in the Millennial Age, no sinner will "stand" in that judgment; he will either cease to be a sinner and so enter into life, or, remaining a sinner, reap the logical consequence of that choice as expressed in the concluding words of the Psalm "*the way of the ungodly shall perish*".

In no finer words could the Most High express His determination to root out and destroy every vestige of sin from the fair earth of His creating, and to usher all mankind—"whosoever will"—into the orderly and glorious life which is the rightful inheritance of all who shall eventually measure up willingly to their Creator's wise and loving designs. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Great Britain would be frozen up each winter, but for the warm waters of the Gulf Stream that flow from the Gulf of Mexico right across the mighty Atlantic Ocean and wash these shores of ours and so make Great Britain the most pleasant country in the world. This is a parable of the Holy Spirit, the Gulf Stream of the love of God.

Gone from us

Bro. T. E. Davies (*Liverpool*)

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

IN THE UPPER ROOM

A glimpse of the
Last Supper

It was very quiet, up there in the cool and the peace of the upper room. A noisy crowd surged and jostled in the street below, sturdy countrymen up in Jerusalem for the feast rubbing shoulders with Greek merchants; truculent Galileans striding past the gentler Judean shepherds with glances of contempt and veiled hostility; ever and anon a party of Roman soldiers stepping smartly along the centre of the highway, Pharisee and beggar alike hastening to give them free passage and combining after their passing to look upon their retreating backs with smouldering animosity. But upstairs, in the upper room, it was quiet and cool. Loving hands had been very busy setting out the table for those who were soon to meet around it in solemn observance of Israel's Passover. The lamb, roast with fire, cut into his pieces, lay in the centre of the festal board. Little piles of unleavened bread—bitter herbs—cups of wine—the dish of *cheroseth*, of fruit and nuts—all stood ready against the time when twelve men and their Master would enter the room and partake together.

In every house in Jerusalem that feast lay spread. In palace and in hovel, in the best room of every inn and within the Temple precincts where dwelt that priestly course whose turn it was that day to conduct the sacred service, the lamb, the bread, the bitter herbs, lay waiting, mute testimony to a night in olden time when the Destroying Angel passed over the land of Egypt, to the first-borns of Egypt a messenger of death, but to those who were under the blood, deliverance—deliverance glorious and complete.

Now the door is opening, and men appear. One by one, until twelve have entered, they take their places around the table, and wait.

A quiet footfall on the threshold. Their Master enters and closes the door, and by that simple action shuts out the world and all its cares and interests. The faint murmur of people rising from the street below dies down and is gone. The world is very far away, and the disciples are with their Master.

Who among them but did not feel the solemnity of this night? Accustomed as they were to the Passover ceremonial, observing it year by year continually, they could not but be conscious that after to-night things would never be the same. Not so, on those two pre-

vious occasions when they had partaken of the Passover with their Master, had this consciousness of impending crisis filled their minds. Something was going to happen; they realised that instinctively, without knowing its nature. But mingled with that apprehension there was a strange triumphant joy as though at last all the perplexities and misunderstandings of the past three years were to be resolved into a clear knowledge of the life which lay before them. That trouble and distress might yet lie beyond the bounds of this Passover evening they knew, but that God was with them in all their ways they were confident. Now the Master's voice broke the silence; tender tones, vibrant with rich feeling, searching their inmost souls and drawing their very hearts to an ecstasy of devotion and surrender.

"With desire have I desired to eat this pass-over with you before I suffer; for I say unto you, I will not eat any more thereof, until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God."

Magic words! The Kingdom of God, so soon to come. The goal of all their hopes, the prayer of every child of Israel. Thrilling words—no more would He eat of the Passover with them until the Kingdom of God should have come. That was what He had said so lately on the summit of Mount Tabor—some of them would not taste of death "until the Kingdom of God should come"; now that they had endured with him in all His trials, surely the day of God's recompense was at hand and Messiah would declare himself . . . Eager thoughts are interrupted; the Master has taken a cup of wine in his right hand and is looking upward to Heaven. His voice breaks the stillness in solemn invocation.

"Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, the King of the universe, who hast created the fruit of the vine."

Silently, reverently, they all drank. The feast had begun. All eyes were turned to the Beloved One at the centre of the table. Again He spoke.

"Hear, ye children of Abraham. This is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses. He sent Moses his servant, and Aaron whom He had chosen. He

brought them forth also with silver and gold, and there was not one feeble person among their tribes. Egypt was glad when they departed, for the fear of them fell upon them. He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light in the night, for He remembered His holy promise, and Abraham his servant. And He brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness, that they might observe his statutes and keep his laws. Therefore are we constrained to confess, to praise, to glorify, to extol, to magnify and to ascribe victory unto him who did unto us and to our fathers all these signs, and who brought us forth from servitude to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from darkness to marvellous light; and we say before him, HALLELUJAH!"

In low tones the word passed from lip to lip, "Hallelujah, Hallelujah", a murmur of reverent praise ascending to Israel's God. Then twelve voices joined in the recitation of familiar words.

"Let the name of the Lord be blessed from this present time and for ever. From the rising of the sun to his setting the name of the Lord is to be praised . . . At the going forth from Egypt the earth trembled, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob." . . .

Once more the Lord's hands are moving over the table, breaking one of the cakes of unleavened bread. His quiet voice rises in the benediction.

"Blessed be thou, O Lord our God, the King of the universe, who bringest forth food out of the earth."

The little cakes passed from man to his neighbour. Reverent hands reached out to the dish upon which lay the lamb roast with fire. They ate hastily, solemnly, as men fulfilling an ancient ritual. The room was very quiet—the flickering lamp cast strange shadows upon the wall behind the Lord. As He raised his arms in blessing his shadow took a strange form, the form of a cross. But no, that could never be, for was He not a King? Had He not just told them in so many words that ere twelve short months had passed they would be reigning with him in kingly power; that He would not eat again of the Passover until He ate it with them in the Kingdom?

And yet . . .

* * *

"This is my body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of me."

They took of the bread, sharing each with other, wondering. The lamp flame flickered low in its vessel and the shadow of the cross

grew longer and seemed to come nearer, bending ever towards them.

* * *

"This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. Drink ye, all, of it."

They drank, a strange, fierce joy pervading their souls as realisation came that they were to be blood brothers indeed to the One whom they served as Lord. To have his blood run in their veins—his words meant nothing less than that. They were to receive life—rich, vital life—from him. The ancient blood-brotherhood covenant of olden time, invoked by this mystic ritual, was theirs. Now and for all time they were to be joined to him they loved, in a relationship that would never be severed, to serve him and be with him for ever. Surely now He would speak plainly and disperse the mystery and misunderstanding which had surrounded their hopes for so long. Surely now He would tell them all.

* * *

"Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me."

They looked at one another fearfully. What horrifying calamity was this? How could any one of them dream of betraying the Master and the Cause they loved so dearly? What did it mean? What dread portent lay behind those unexpected words?

"Is it I?" . . . "Is it I?" . . . "Is it I?" . . .

How could it be?

The question rippled round the table. It came to one whose hunted eyes looked every way for succour—for assurance—for denial. Surely this could not be real; this was not in very truth happening to him? Surely it had all been a nightmare; that visit to the Priests, that shameful bargain, the cynical congratulations of those whom he hated more than he hated any man. *And Jesus knew*; he was sure of that now. Jesus knew all about that night visit, about the thirty pieces of silver, about his own desperate resolve to precipitate a climax to their three years' preaching. *He knew*, and still He did not declare himself . . .

It was true then; He did not intend to act until the last minute. He meant to wait until his enemies had actually arrested him, and hauled him before Pilate for judgment, and then—and then—at last, He would throw off the mask and defy the power of Imperial Rome. There could be no doubt about it; He could dally no longer then, could not possibly postpone his revelation as the long promised Messiah when standing in the very shadow of the Cross. One scornful word from his lips

and that great Temple, centre of idolatry and evil, would collapse in irretrievable ruin, its treasures scattered to the winds, its inner sanctuary opened to the profane gaze. One arm upraised to Heaven and God's artillery, fire and thunderbolt, would pour down upon the proud legions of Rome and annihilate them in an instant. The armies of the angels would descend as in the days of old and crash the stately walls of Jerusalem headlong down the hillside to the valleys below. The earthquake of Uzziah, the hailstones of Joshua, the celestial fire of Elijah, all would bring turmoil and destruction upon the sinful, rebellious generation which had rejected his Leader. Another flood—not of water as in the days of Noah, but of fire, an avalanche of fire to devour God's adversaries, would sweep Judea and Galilee and all the world with a besom of destruction. Jesus had the power—he knew that. He had seen enough of his miracles to be sure of *that*; and He would use it. He could not help it when forced into the position Judas had engineered. And then, at last, would come the moment for which he had waited these many years, the moment for which his whole being craved. Enthroned in regal splendour, a friend of the Messiah, an executor of God's vengeance, he would crush to the earth those proud Pharisees and priests. Men would come to Judas and beg favours, and whom he would he would favour and enrich, and whom he would, he would cast down, despoil, reduce to beggary. Roman procurator, Greek merchant, the honourable and the rich of this world, would come into the presence of Judas of Kerioth with respect and awe. Jesus would do all this for him . . . But would He? . . . *Would He?*

He lifted his eyes in sudden alarm, meeting other eyes across the table, regarding him with a burning intensity that seared his very soul. With a sudden shock he realised that the words his tortured brain had refused to receive those few moments ago had indeed been uttered. "*One of you shall betray me.*" This was no fantasy of the mind. It was dread reality. Jesus knew exactly what He was going to do and He was taking no steps to avoid the outcome. And the others would soon know and his secret would be a secret no longer. Even now the question had circled the assembly and men were looking at him wonderingly, curiously. It was his turn now. His mouth worked strangely.

"Is it I?" . . .

* * *

"Thou hast said."

* * *

The sound of a door, opening, and closing, quietly. Footsteps dying away down the stairway. Silence. Judas the betrayer was gone.

* * *

"Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me, but whither I go, ye cannot come. A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

The soft cadences ceased. They sat silent, knowing now that their golden dreams were after all only dreams. Dimly they visualised a life without their Leader; a continuation of the toil and weariness of constant pilgrimage, no longer illumined by the presence and companionship of the One they loved. Heads were bowed on breasts; they could not meet each others' eyes. He was going away, and they would never see him again.

Peter—a strangely quiet and subdued Peter—broke the silence, a quiver in his voice.

"Lord . . . whither goest thou?"

* * *

"Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you; and I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also . . . Love one another as I have loved you. The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God . . . I came forth from the Father and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father."

They heard the words, but they understood not. Even though He return to the Father, of what avail if all their hopes were gone and there was no deliverance in Israel? They loved him still and would always love him, but He was leaving them and they could not understand why. They could only—trust.

A sign from those dear hands, and eleven men rose to their feet, eyes uplifted to Heaven. Voices joined in the traditional hymn which was to conclude their feast. And when they came to the time-hallowed words,

"I shall not die, but live

*And declare the works of the Lord.
Open to me the gates of righteousness*

*Into which the righteous shall enter,
The stone which the builders refused
Is become the head of the corner.
This is the work of our God
It is marvellous in our eyes,
This is the day which the Lord hath made
We will rejoice and be glad in it."*

hearts were a little lightened and eyes a little brighter. Somewhere in all this was enshrined the ways of God. Israel had waited long

for deliverance, but God is faithful; one day they would understand. The solemn chant rose upon the night air and listening angels wondered at its note of triumph. The lamp burned brightly in its last expiring flicker in the upper room—but the forces of evil were speeding fast away.

And when they had sung that hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.

EVENTIDE

"So he bringeth them unto their desired haven"

"Behold, he prayeth"—is there anything really striking about that? Ought not all lovers of righteousness to pray in times of need and extremity? Ah, yes! but this occasion is different—and extraordinary!

The speaker was the Risen Lord; the hearer, Ananias; the subject, the persecuting Saul; the place Damascus. (Acts 9. 11).

Some few days prior to this episode, Saul had left Jerusalem, armed with Sanhedrin authority, and accompanied by an escort of Temple guards, for Damascus in the far north, to apprehend and conduct in bonds to Jerusalem every follower of the Lord he could lay violent hands upon. Tidings of his coming had preceded him, and the little company of believing saints, knowing what had overtaken brethren in Jerusalem, awaited, with dread, the arrival of this wolf into their midst, knowing there would be neither clemency nor mercy for any whom he might find of that "way".

But as he (and they) rode on expectantly, exultantly, *the thing which a watchful Providence had ordained took place!* The blistering mid-day sun appeared to turn pale as a heavenly radiance stepped across its path! The very tick of time ordained by Providence had come, and He who angled to take this fish came nigh to sweep up His "catch"! The days for "playing out the line" had expired, and One from the Heavenly Throne had come near to wield the net.

How piercingly penetrating the challenge request, intended for no ear but his own! "Why persecutest thou Me" . . . "Who art thou, Lord" . . . "I am Jesus" . . . Then it was true, unquestionably true, what these men in Jerusalem had said about the Nazarene! Oh, the horror of the situation in which he now found himself; he had separated man and wife; he had violently compelled some to blaspheme; he had consented to send one good

man to untimely death. And here, enclotted with more than solar-radiance, was the exalted Lord and Master of the suffering flock!

Gone was the gaiety and self-assurance of the morning hours, as now with blinded eyes and smitten conscience he drags along to make entrance to the city where co-conspirator and victim alike await his coming!

Three days and nights, without food or drink, the inner conflict raged. No former friend or counsellor could be of help in this hour of need. All his past life, particularly the recent past, would rise up before him and taunt him with its futility! Despite intense zeal, he had missed the objects of his soul's desire . . . yet Stephen, a man he could not recall to life, had found all the best it had to give.

Back and forth, from the old things to the new, from the authority of Moses to the exaltation of the Christ, his poor struggling mind would pass, as he attempted to weigh up the values each appeared to possess, until at last *his wearied frame, faint from lack of food, and spent from its internal strain, sank to its knees, and faltering lips and stammering tongue began to pray!*

He had capitulated; the besieging Lord had stormed the fortress of his soul, and was now triumphant there! The battle had been fought and lost . . . and won!

And thus the compassionate and dominating Lord, desirous of assuaging every needless pain, commissions Ananias to "go to the street called Straight, . . . and enquire . . . for a man of Tarsus called Saul, for behold he prayeth". "Behold he prayeth"—not in the ancient city of Jerusalem, not with priest or sacrifice attending him, but here, in his darkened room, in this city of Damascus, and with no comfort or help at hand.

What a prayer that must have been, as all the flood-gates of his soul were broken down,

and all its bitter contents gushed forth in penitence and remorse! How the angels who had watched the long-drawn conflict must have rejoiced at a sinner so sincerely repenting of his former misguided way! And who can tell, or even attempt to tell, what that prostrated form and penitential prayer meant to the supervising Lord?

Never thenceforward throughout his whole life did the memories of those days and nights fade from recollection—they were not intended so to fade—for, first, to himself, and then, through him to countless thousands of a later day, it was intended to teach that “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners” “of whom I am chief, howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me, as chief, might Jesus Christ show forth all His long-suffering for an example of them which should hereafter believe on Him to eternal life”. (1 Tim. 1. 15-16).

Not always has the Lord of life and glory come forth in that majestic way to intercept and turn to Himself those who misguidedly sought the “best” along wrong and improper lines, but that He has providentially intercepted them in His own acceptable way is a truth to which thousands could testify. That there is an act of Providence in the direction of a word, a phrase, a tract, a book, a visit, a journey, or even an illness, is a fact none conversant with His way would dare deny. Thousands on thousands could joyfully say:

“I know not why God’s wondrous grace

To me has been made known,

Or why, unworthy as I am,

He claimed me for His own.”

It is not given to everyone to plumb the depths of the subteranean experience as did our brother Paul, for few could withstand the strain. But unnumbered thousands have learned through him, of a Saviour’s love and long-suffering, ere, in their own waywardness they bent in lowly penitence before Him and prayed their first untutored prayer.

Paul never ceased, throughout life’s little day, to remind himself of that tender love which followed him all those headstrong, wayward days, till at last it broke in upon him and brought him face to face with the stern realities of the situation—and won his heart and soul for ever.

Had he been with us to-day, how joyfully and fervently he would have joined with us in singing:

“I’ve found a friend, O! such a friend,

He loved me ere I knew Him;

He drew me with the cords of love,

And thus He bound me to Him.

*And round my heart still closely
twine*

Those ties which naught can

sever,

For I am His, and He is mine

For ever and for ever.”

“He loved me ere I knew him”—how true that was in Paul’s special case—but no less true in ours too! “He drew me with the cords of love”—who would not have found intense delight in hearing Paul sing that! Ought there to be less when we sing it ourselves?

“I’ve found a friend, O! such a friend,

He gave His life to save me;

And not alone the gift of life,

But His own self He gave me.

Naught that I have my own I call,

I hold it for the Giver;

My heart, my strength, my

life, my all,

Are His, and His for ever.”

“I’ve found a friend, O! such a friend,

So kind and true and tender,

So wise a counsellor and guide

So mighty a defender!

From Him who now doth love me

so,

What power my soul can sever

Shall life or death, or any foe?

NO! I am His for ever!”

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. One may have no strength at all, but while twisted together with one that is infinite, the weakest shall not fail. Then with what confidence we may say “The Lord is the strength of my salvation”.

How few are able to speak of Christ as a living, bright reality, from the overflow of a heart full of unintermitting joy in the Lord! Yet this surely is our portion, and our duty. There is no such thing in nature as an intermitting communication of life—as from the vine to the branch, from the body to the members. Should there be in grace? Does not Christ give us His peace, His joy—Himself—to be our constant life?



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

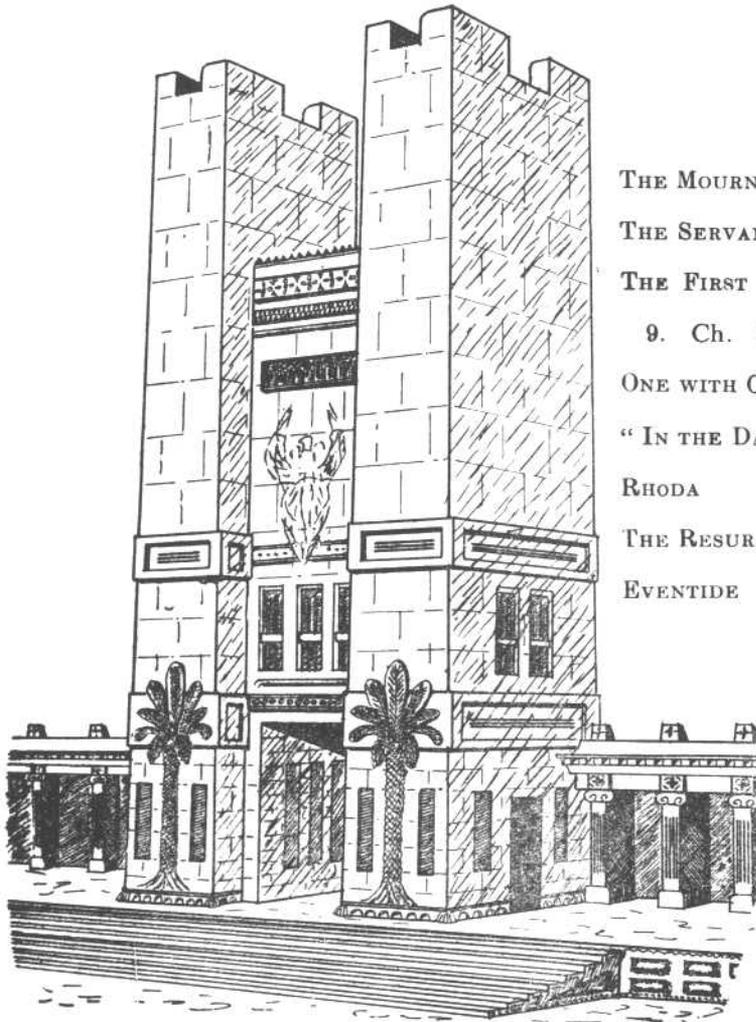
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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COMING CONVENTIONS

MANCHESTER — Sat. & Sun., May 6-7.
Registry Offices Board Room, All-Saints, Manchester. Programmes and details from Bro. H. Chrimes, 2 Cheam Road, Timperley, Altrincham, Ches.

LEICESTER — Sat.-Sun., May 20-21.
The Midlands friends are planning the usual Convention at Leicester. Details will be sent when ready on request lodged with Bro. J. Clarke, 74 Cromwell Road, Rugby.

PORTRUSH — Whitsun, Sat.-Mon., May 27-29.
"Clarmont", Lansdowne Crescent, Portrush. Programme and details from Bro. T. R. Lang, 31 Hawthorn Terrace, Londonderry, N. Ireland or from Miss F. J. Stinson, Port-na-Glas Hotel, Portrush, Co. Antrim, N. Ireland.

LIVERPOOL — Sat. & Sun., June 24-25.
Sat., 6 p.m. at Y.M.C.A., Mount Pleasant; all day Sunday at Tudor Room, Prescott Road. Programmes and details from Mrs. A. Pampling, 6 Clive Road, Oxtou, Birkenhead, Ches.

MARANATHA CONFERENCE — August 5-12.
"High Leigh", Hoddesdon, Herts. Details from Bro. F. B. Quennell, 43 Ackers Road, Stockton Heath, Warrington, Lancs.

LONDON — August 26-28.
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1. Details from Bro. T. A. Webb, 15 Craster Road, Brixton, London, S.W.2.

CARDIFF — September 9-10.
Institute for the Blind, Newport Road, Cardiff. Details from Bro. L. F. Shephard, Bedwbach House, Llanharen Road, Llanharen, Glam.

Bible week-ends at Bethany

Regular monthly gatherings particularly intended for young people are held at "Bethany", Moorwood, Chapel End, Nuneaton (the home of Bro. Gordon Chilvers) commencing soon after midday on Saturday and finishing at lunchtime on Sunday. Anyone interested in attending is invited to communicate with Bro. Chilvers. Imminent dates are:—

May 6-7 Theme "The People of God"
(Heroes of faith. Christians through the Age)

June 10-11 Theme "God is working His purpose out"
(Prophecy, Christian Unity)

A Request. A Variorum Bible, in reasonably good condition, is required. Any reader having one for disposal, or able to locate one, is desired to write Mrs. T. Webb, 15 Craster Road, Brixton, London, S.W.2.

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

Bro. & Sis. F. A. Essler of U.S.A. will be visiting Great Britain during the summer and are available to visit Bible study groups. Applications should be sent to Bro. Gordon Chilvers, "Bethany", Moorwood, Chapel End, Nuneaton. Fixtures at time of going to press as below:

BRO. F. A. ESSLER

May 6-7	Manchester	Aug 6	Hoddesdon
" 20-21	Blaby		(Maranatha)
" 27-29	Portrush	" 26-28	London
Jun 24-25	Liverpool		(Conway Hall)
		Sep 9-10	Cardiff

BRO. E. G. ROBERTS

May 6-7	Manchester	May 18	Dundee
" 13-14	Lincoln	" 19	
" 15	Dewsbury	" 20-21	Glasgow
" 16	Middlesbro'	" 27-29	Portrush

* * *

"Chronicles — News of the Past"

Further to the review of this work which appeared in our January issue, will U.S.A. readers please note that the price to them from the United States distributors, C. Zanziper, 870 East New York Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11203, is \$3.75 post free and not \$4.25 as therein stated.

Gone from us

Bro. W. A. Bagnall (Leicester)
Sis. M. Capps (Chatham)
Bro. T. Davies (Liverpool)
Bro. A. Davis (Blackpool)
Bro. W. G. Lane (Folkestone)
Bro. O. R. Moyle (Wis. U.S.A.)
Bro. W. J. Rew (Darlington)
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"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away"

THE MOURNING OF HADAD RIMMON

A Second Advent
theme

"They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son . . . In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon." (Zech. 12. 10-11).

The twelfth chapter of Zechariah's prophecy embraces, when the allusions are understood, one of the most beautiful visions of the establishment of the Kingdom ever penned. The setting is in that time when Israel's restoration is complete, the Ancient Worthies have returned from the grave and assumed control of affairs, the evilly disposed nations of the earth have ranged themselves to do battle against the Holy Land, and God has come out of His place to deliver His ancient people. The last four verses of the chapter describe a great outpouring of the spirit of grace and of supplication upon the people, their turning to God in repentance, and a great mourning which, likened to that of Hadadrimmon, is the occasion for cleansing from sin.

Verse 10 is often misquoted "they shall look upon *him* whom they have pierced" and used as a "proof-text" that the Lord Jesus Christ at His Second Advent will appear to all men in His pre-crucifixion body, exhibiting the wounds inflicted on the Cross. The careful student will realise at once that this is not the meaning of the passage at all. It is God Who is speaking, Who in this chapter declares His intention of defending His people, and says "They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced". The word for "pierced" is *dakar*, meaning "to thrust through", and alludes to the piercing of the Father's heart by the unfaithfulness and waywardness of His chosen people. "Upon me" is not the happiest translation—"toward me" is much better, the Hebrew word being a preposition signifying motion toward a place, or used of the turning toward a thing. Hence the idea here is that of the people upon whom the spirit of grace and supplication has been poured turning and looking toward the God Whom they had forsaken.

It is true that in John 19. 37 the Apostle quotes this Scripture in reference to the death of Jesus upon the cross; but he is not quoting it as a prophecy of that event, but rather as an application of an appropriate Old Testa-

ment phrase. The word "*him*" does not appear in the Greek. John's words are "*They shall look unto whom they pierced*" which is a correct Greek translation of the Hebrew text of Zech. 12.

It is with this understanding in mind that we consider this "great mourning as for an only son". It should be noted that although the people "look to *me* whom they have pierced", it is said that they "mourn for *him*, as one mourneth for an only son" (vs. 10). The immediate allusion here is to the rejected shepherd of chap. 11, vs. 13-14, who had been valued by Israel at thirty pieces of silver. Now in chap. 12 Israel is pictured as having turned toward God, Whom they had pierced in rejecting His shepherd, and mourning for that shepherd as for an only son, a firstborn. The symbolic application to our Lord Jesus is obvious. It would seem that this entire passage refers to that time when restored Israel turns to God, and accepts Jesus Christ as their Saviour and King.

This is where the "mourning of Hadadrimmon" becomes a picture fraught with spiritual meaning once the import of the allusion is understood. Expositors have had a great deal of trouble with this verse; it is usual to suggest that the reference is to that great mourning which took place in Judah upon the death of good King Josiah at Megiddo nearly two centuries before Zechariah's day (2 Chron. 35. 24-25). It is surmised that Hadadrimmon must have been the name of the precise spot in the valley of Megiddo where the battle took place, but there is no knowledge of any such place and no evidence that any district or village bearing the name of Hadadrimmon ever existed. Rummaneh, near the site of the ancient Jezreel, is pointed to as having a somewhat similar name, but the similarity is more apparent than real. It is the writer's conviction that the allusion to the mourning of Hadadrimmon has reference to something of much more immediate import to Zechariah's people than the events surrounding King Josiah's death several generations previously. It referred, in short, to the annual commemoration, maintained by Semitic peoples for over three thousand years, of the death and resurrection of the pagan god Tammuz or Adonis.

What is called the Tammuz-Adonis myth

goes back to antiquity. Its influence was widespread over Western Asia, and allusions to it are scattered here and there in the Old Testament. Mothers told the story to their babes and fathers to their sons; how that, in the dim long ago, the youthful god Adonis, as he was known in Palestine and Phoenicia, or Tammuz, as he was called in Babylonia, was slain by a wild boar in a dense forest, and went down into the netherworld, cut off in the bloom of his youth. At his going the world went dark; the sun hid itself, the trees and vegetation withered, and flocks and herds dwindled and died. In the face of this calamity, the goddess Ishtar (Venus), who loved Adonis, descended into the underworld to implore permission for the Divine Son to return to earth. Leave being granted, Adonis was raised to life, the earth bloomed and blossomed forth once more in the power of the new life he brought with him, and there was great rejoicing among the sons of men.

Fantastic and meaningless as the story may appear to be, the serious student cannot help but observe how parallel it runs to the story of One Who, at a much later time in history, truly did suffer a violent death, descend into Hades, and was raised again by the Holy Spirit, the Divine power of God, to reappear upon earth bringing new life to men. There is sufficient likeness here to make the subject worthy of exploration.

Once every year, from long before the time of Abraham until the tenth century of our own era—shortly before the time of William the Conqueror—the peoples of Canaan held a great “mourning” to commemorate the death of Adonis. In northern Palestine the native tribes—and, alas, many Israelites also—watched for the time (the springtime), when the waters of the river Adonis ran red, due to the red earth of the mountains being washed down to the sea. That, said they, was the blood of the slain god, and immediately the great mourning was raised. Women, their hair streaming behind them, ran about weeping and crying. Images of the dead god were carried in procession and thrown into rivers or into the sea. The shepherds took up their reed pipes and sang their laments over the departed deity, how that with his passing the fields would dry up and wither and their flocks languish and die. In the towns and within the temples ceremonial mourning was instituted, and all the land was given up to the universal lamentation.

Then came a day—usually the sixth day of the ceremony—when the note was changed.

“Adonis is not dead—he is risen!” That was the cry which resounded through the streets and across the fields. The citizens decorated their houses and took offerings of flowers and fruit to their temples. The reed pipes of the shepherds played joyful strains and even the lambs and kids seemed to share in the general rejoicing. *He is not dead; he is risen; and now new life will come to us all.* That was the note upon which this pagan festival ended, year by year, on the mountains of Lebanon and in the valleys of Galilee and Megiddo.

And that is why the prophet Zechariah, searching for an illustration fitly to picture that great expression of national sorrow for the tragedy of the past, and national joy for the Lord’s resurrection and His return to bring new life to the world, which will arise “in that day”, was guided by the Holy Spirit to liken it to the “mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon”. Hadad is the Aramaic “Adad”—mighty Lord—and Rimmon a local name for Adonis. Reference to this name of the god in this same district is made in the story of Naaman the Syrian, who besought Elisha’s indulgence when he went into “the house of Rimmon” (2 Kings 5. 18). Ezekiel refers to this same commemoration when in his vision he saw the idolatrous women of Israel “weeping for Tammuz” at the north gate of the temple (Ezek. 8. 14).

Jesus, as a youth, must often have witnessed this festival. He had but to wander a few miles from his home in Nazareth, into the mountains northward, to find Himself surrounded by ruins of pagan temples and relics of ancient faiths. There in those wild districts where Israelite, Phoenician and Syrian had lived side by side for centuries, the old shepherds must have told the boy Jesus the story of Adonis, and pointed to the bright red anemones growing in profusion everywhere, telling Him that they were the drops of blood falling from the dying god. The boy Jesus knew these stories for the fables that they were; but in them He might have seen some foreshadowing of a day to come when He Himself was to be taken by wicked hands, crucified and slain (Acts 2. 3) and then, beyond that still, a far-off time when amidst the rejoicings of all, Israel’s Messiah would come in glory and power to bring life eternal to a dying world. And if, in fact, He did one day stand aloof and watch the multitudes wailing and lamenting the death of Adonis, that memory might well have been in His mind when at a later date He said to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus “Ought not Christ to

have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24. 26).

"And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David . . . the house of Nathan . . . the house of Levi . . . the house of Simeon" (see margin) (vs. 12-14). This passage is eloquently expressive of the universal character of this mourning. Every family in the whole land shall mourn, and that nation-wide sorrow, ascending to Heaven, will unlock the doors of Heaven's blessings. The prophet seems to have introduced four well-known names as representative of the nation; David, the symbol of the ruling powers "in that day", leading the lamentation: Nathan, as symbolic of the prophetic fraternity, the seers (Nathan was the prophet of King David's time); Levi, the progenitor of Israel's priesthood, and head of the tribe which throughout Israel's history served in the things of God: Simeon, the materialistic, ruthless man of the world, an apt representative of "the people". King, prophets, priests and people, all will join together in this great mourning which at the last is turned into joy when restored, delivered, converted Israel realises that the long looked for Kingdom has indeed come and that the law of the Lord is about to go forth from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa. 2. 3). It is then that the concluding verse of this vision has its fulfilment (chap. 13. 1). "*In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness.*" That fountain is the beginning of the flowing of the river of water of life (Ezek. 47. 1-12; Rev. 22. 1-2) and its blessings come first to the earthly missionary nation, gathered in the Holy Land, and from

thence stream out into all the earth.

That is the climax of this great mourning. Just as, in the mourning for Adonis, the people cast away their sackcloth, ceased their lamentation, and came together with singing and rejoicing because the time of life had come, so "in that day", will it be true, in the words of Isaiah, that "*the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head; they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away*" (Isa. 51. 11). The day of eternal life shall have come, and "*the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended*". (Isa. 60. 20).

This, then is what Zechariah saw, and was inspired to write. In his day, the fulfilment of the golden words was still in the far distant future; nevertheless he knew that it would surely come. The mourning for Adonis has passed with the worship of Adonis into the place of forgotten things. But the purposes of God are working themselves out, and to-day we can see the beginnings of those events which shall culminate in the spectacle of a nation, conscious of a great peril but conscious also of a great destiny, having its blindness turned away and turning to seek the Lord in sincerity and truth. And in that day there shall be a great mourning in the land, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon, but that mourning shall be turned into joy, and in that joy shall all families of the earth have their share, and, like Israel, come to join themselves unto the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.

THE SERVANT OF THE PRIEST

A Conjecture

"Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus" (John 17. 10).

The occurrence is recorded in detail by all four of the Evangelists; they appear to have invested it with some degree of importance. John even takes care to preserve the servant's name. It seems so irrelevant an addition to the story that one wonders if there is more hidden beneath the surface than appears at first sight. It was in all probability the Temple guard, under the control of the High Priests,

together with a party of Roman soldiers under their own centurion, which set out to arrest Jesus, and without doubt the High Priest's personal representative would accompany them to ensure that all went according to plan. Peter the impulsive would quite naturally pick on this official as the first object of attack in his unavailing defence of his Master. The subsequent action of Jesus is the last of His miracles, of which we have any record, before His death. Malchus was probably the last human being to feel the kindly touch of those life-giving hands and to experience the

thrill of creative vitality run through his body as the healing power flowed into him and made him whole. But would this be the only reason for the prominence given to this apparently quite trivial happening?

Did Malchus become a believer as the result of his experience? Was his name preserved by John because in later years the Christian assemblies had been familiar with the presence of a man who had once gone out to assist at the arrest of Jesus of Nazareth and had ended, like Saul of Tarsus, by becoming a devoted follower? Did the servant of the High Priest transfer his allegiance and become instead a bond-slave of Jesus Christ?

There is a hint in one of the early Christian writings which seems to indicate that the Christians of the First century knew more about this matter than we do to-day. Paul tells us, quietly, in 1 Cor. 15. 7 that our Lord after His resurrection "appeared unto James", His own natural half-brother, the one who became the head of the infant Church at Jerusalem, presided over the historic conference recorded in Acts 15, and wrote the Epistle bearing his name. Paul adds no detail of that appearance; he speaks as though it was a story already well known to his readers, as doubtless it was. But in the document known as the Gospel to the Hebrews, which is thought to have been written about seventy years after the Crucifixion and therefore about forty years after Paul's death, the story then current among the Christians as to Jesus' appearance to James is given in greater detail, and with it a casual allusion which may constitute a link with the story of Malchus.

"Now the Lord, when He had given the linen cloth unto the servant of the priest, went unto James and appeared to him, for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour when he had drunk the Lord's cup until he should see him risen again from among them that sleep . . ."

Who was this "servant of the priest" who, according to Christian tradition, was present at the tomb when the resurrection took place? It is recalled that the first witnesses of the resurrection were the members of the guard, who actually beheld the rolling away of the stone, a feat which was already completed when the women arrived on the scene. (Mark 16. 4). These keepers were not Pilate's soldiers, but were drawn from the Temple guard, as is evident by a comparison of Pilate's reply "Ye have a watch—make it as sure as ye can" (Matt. 27. 65) with the action of the keepers in reporting the sequel to the priests and not

to Pilate (Matt. 28. 11). What more likely then that Malchus, the servant of the High Priest, present at the arrest in Gethsemane, should also be present with—perhaps in charge of—the guard at the tomb? And if this is so, what must have been his feelings, when in the very early hours of that morning, the ground heaved and the rocks shook, the great stone closing the tomb rolled back, and Malchus and his men, confronted with an altogether unexpected and awe-inspiring sight "*did shake and become as dead men*"? (Matt. 28. 4).

Whether Jesus Himself appeared to the keepers before their precipitate flight, and before the women arrived at the tomb, the Gospels do not say; but the incident related in the "Gospel to the Hebrews" may well enshrine a verbal testimony which has not been incorporated in the canonical books. If in fact the "servant of the priest" who suffered at Peter's hands and was miraculously healed by Jesus was also a witness of the resurrection at the moment it occurred, there is a new light thrown on that mysterious "young man in a long white garment" who, according to Mark's account (Mark 16. 2-7) was found by the women very soon afterwards sitting inside the tomb. "*He is not here*" said that young man to them, "*He is risen*". That he was not one of the disciples is evident from his words "*Go ye, and tell his disciples*". It has been conjectured that he was John Mark, the lad who was so close an attendant upon all that Jesus did; it might be, however, that Malchus, present at the tomb, seeing before him the One who had touched him so tenderly a few days before, knowing Him to have died upon the Cross, knew in a flash that He had indeed triumphed over death, and in the wonder of that meeting remained behind to be discovered by the women when the guards had fled.

Who was it that saw the mighty angel, glorious in appearance, roll back the stone? (Matt. 28. 2). Not the women—the stone was already rolled back when they arrived. This particular piece of testimony must have come from one of the guards or from one who was present with them, and whose testimony was afterwards accepted by the infant Church and incorporated into Matthew's Gospel.

Is it the truth of the matter then, that Malchus became a Christian and, although his testimony to the Resurrection is not preserved in the Gospels, something of the wonderful thing that happened to him on that wonderful morning has been preserved in the traditions of the early Church?

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 9 | John 2. 20-29

"But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." (vs. 20).

Coming just after John's stern warnings against Antichrist this word is one of comfort and assurance. We have an anointing—the word "unction" means "anointing"—an anointing of the Holy Spirit, and that anointing is our safeguard and protection against all the assaults of the Adversary. Those who come under the anointing thereby come under the protection of God Himself. *"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty"* (Psa. 91. 1). There is no need to fear the power of Antichrist even at those periods of the Age when his oppressive persecutions bear most hardly upon the faithful Church. We have an unction, an anointing, from the Holy Spirit, and that anointing is all-sufficient and all-powerful for our safety, if we but remain under it. That is a great truth, says John, which we all know, of which we all ought continually to be aware. It is a pity that the A.V. has rendered the phrase "ye know all things", for that distorts the meaning of the entire text and makes it say that our possession of the Holy Spirit's anointing automatically gives us all knowledge. So many of the Lord's little ones, realising their own deficiencies in the matter of knowledge, have puzzled over this verse and wondered if, because they manifestly do not "know all things", they have not really been anointed with the Holy Spirit. We do well to remember that Paul said quite plainly that he and those with him had knowledge only "in part" (1 Cor. 13. 9-12) and would not be complete in knowledge until beyond the Veil. Paul surely was anointed of the Holy Spirit! We are told, too, that it is because of belief that we are sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise (Eph. 1. 13). It is our faith and our consecration, not our knowledge, that ensures our anointing. The text is badly translated. Ancient authorities give it "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye all know", and modern translators put it the same way. What John is really saying is that his readers are all recipients of the Holy Spirit and they all know that they are, and in that knowledge they can rest secure. *"I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth"* he says *"but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth"* (vs. 21). Let no one

think that John has so little confidence in his disciples that he fears their defection from the truth through ignorance. He knows full well how firmly grounded they have been in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and how they are standing fast in the traditions in which they have been taught (2 Thess. 2. 15). He has no fears for their present position; what he does fear is for their future, when he and those of his generation will have passed into death and the disintegrating influence of time made its inroads into the faith and hope of the still waiting believers. He knows that the power of Antichrist will wax stronger in the next generation and stronger still in the generation after that, and he is striving with all his might to impress the minds of his brethren with the necessity not only of receiving and knowing the Truth, but of holding to it tenaciously throughout life despite all the opposition and misrepresentation that will be brought to bear against it.

The Apostle's train of thought carries him now to a fierce denunciation. It is his deep concern for the purity of the faith and the clear understanding of Christian truth so necessary to spiritual life that makes him thus emphatic. *"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son"* (vs. 22). This is a much more serious matter than may appear at first sight. It is serious for believers, much more so than for the world. For an unbelieving Jew to deny that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah of prophecy can be understandable and might even be excusable if the unbelieving one has his mind so saturated and dazzled by the glory of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies that he cannot possibly reconcile their hero with the Man of sorrows Who died upon a cross. Such an attitude is admittedly a refusal or failure to believe in Christ for one's self, but it is not necessarily antichrist. The condemnation passed by John in this verse is against the man who in his denial is deliberately fighting against the cause of Christ, and the setting of the denunciation seems almost to point to the apostasy of some within the Christian community rather than to those who are admittedly outside it. For professing Christians to deny that Jesus is the Christ means in effect

that God, the Father, has not after all revealed Himself to man. It is only through the Person and work of Jesus Christ that God has thus revealed and manifested Himself. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared (manifested) him" (John 1. 18). When Philip desired this same manifestation Jesus had to explain to him "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?" (John 14. 7-9). To the Jews Jesus said "He that seeth me seeth him that sent me" (John 12. 45). If Jesus is not the Messiah, then God has not spoken; and if God has not spoken, then our faith is misplaced and in vain and we are of all men most miserable. John certainly triumphs above all such foreboding but he states quite positively that there can be no Christianity without Christ and moreover without the Christ he preached, the One who is a redeemer from sin and an advocate for the sinner, and Whose death was necessary before man could be released from the sentence of death passed upon the race and an opportunity granted them to become reconciled to God. Any other gospel, says John, is the gospel of antichrist and the preacher thereof a liar.

We need to halt at this point and apply this to our own day. In our own time and generation, more so even than in the Apostle's day, there is this denial of Jesus Christ as a suffering Messiah Who must needs die for the sins of the people before coming in glory to lead them into eternal happiness. The existence of "original sin" is denied and the Bible philosophy of redemption belittled and dismissed as of no importance or consequence to the present generation. The effect of worldly wisdom infiltrating into theological education has been to introduce something which is quite definitely the modern counterpart of what John is condemning here. The person of Jesus of Nazareth is accepted; He is looked upon and worshipped, but the Messianic work and office of the One Who died upon the Cross is either ignored or else openly repudiated. It would be quite wrong and unjust to accuse the Christian clergy as a whole of this fault, happily the pulpits still contain many faithful men of God; but that a considerable body of ecclesiastical opinion does reject Christ as Messiah whilst retaining Him as a distant object of veneration and worship is true, and without any hesitation at all we ought to say, as did John, that those who thus deny that Jesus is the Christ are both liars and anti-

christ.

"Whosoever denieth the Son hath not the Father; but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also" (vs. 23). The second phrase, although appearing in italics in the A.V., rests on good textual authority and should be quoted. It is just one of the many statements which show how deeply and accurately the "beloved disciple" had grasped the truth regarding the relationship existing between Jesus Christ and the Father. The one cannot be accepted or rejected without accepting or rejecting the other. The one cannot be imagined as receiving or possessing anything without the other sharing in the same. Since His resurrection our Lord has been "set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev. 3. 21). The Father has committed judicial power equivalent to His own, to the Son. "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5. 22). There is sometimes a question raised as to whether it is right or proper to offer worship and prayer to the Son as distinct from the Father. The question really need not arise, for it is not possible so to separate them. All the consecration and adoration and heart's best endeavour of all the disciples of Jesus which ascends heavenward into the presence of God is shared by the Father and Son, in that mystic oneness which we try to define but can never hope, in this life, fully to comprehend, neither can hold anything back from other. "I and my Father are one" (John 10. 30). The Trinitarians tried to define that oneness and failed, creating only an incomprehensible jargon that nobody has ever understood. We may try to define it, following more closely the Scriptural terms that are used, but we can never hope while in the flesh to understand it fully. All that we do know is that all our lives, and all we have in life, is yielded up willingly both to Father and Son, and that in their keeping we are safe.

"Let that therefore abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son and in the Father" (vs. 24).

It might almost seem as if there is a somewhat wearisome repetition of thought in John's exhortation. This constant stressing of the need to abide in those things which we have heard from the beginning is a theme that has been worked out to its extreme in later days and in our own day by far less able and spiritual men than John. But it is the true abiding in Christ of which John speaks, and

he knew full well the absolute necessity of stressing that theme time and time again. These two things, the abiding in that which we have heard from the beginning, and the abiding in the Son and the Father, are those things to which we must hold fast throughout our days if we would receive the promise. Appropriately enough therefore, he comes in here with that reminder of a truth we already know full well. *"This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life"* (vs. 25).

It is at this point that we have one of the most charming expressions of confidence in his pupils by a teacher that is found anywhere in the Scriptures. After all this long catalogue of deceptions and snares and enticements that may beset the path of the Christian, and all the grave warnings against being overtaken by the wiles of the Adversary, John expresses his complete confidence in his disciples and tells them of the basis of that confidence. *"These things"* he says *"have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you. But as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him"* (vs. 26-27).

Some have taken this text as an excuse for claiming that they need receive no instruction or help in spiritual things from any man; that the Holy Spirit will teach them inwardly in a kind of mystic supernatural way. They need not and will not that any man shall teach them. It is a dangerous condition of mind to get into—or would be dangerous if our Lord took them seriously. Probably He does not. Probably there are many fanatics of various kinds who name the name of Christ and spend all their lives exploring and practising some fantastic philosophy or theory upon the basis of some such misinterpretation of a text, whom our Lord simply ignores. The thousand years reign will be time enough to deal with them. And it wants plainly to be said that this idea, that God will take an individual and give him special instruction apart from all his fellows and without their proffered help in the Christian way savours of spiritual pride and certainly betokens blindness as respects the Divine method of building up the Church in knowledge and faith. God has set the members in the body as it hath pleased Him and given to each member a place to fill and a duty to perform for the building of the entire body. Neither hand, nor foot, nor any other

member, can escape its obligation to serve to the edification of the whole, nor its need of that help "which every joint supplieth" (Eph. 4. 16). God has set pastors, teachers, ministers of all kinds, in the Church, and empowered them in various ways to minister to every one of His little ones that they might increase and abound in every spiritual gift and every necessary item of knowledge, and as an anointed company eventually attain the "full stature of a man in Christ" (Eph. 4. 13), so becoming fitted for His future purpose.

That which we "have no need that any man teach you" is quite evidently the truth that John had stated in the same breath. The anointing that we have received abides in us. That is a self-evident truth. We have no need that any man teach us *that*. We have the witness of the Spirit within ourselves and no man can ever take that confidence away from us. That is John's faith, and ours.

So he comes to what is perhaps the end of one letter, now appearing as the first two chapters of this his First Epistle. The final verses appear to partake of the nature of a closing exhortation; it may well be that we have more than one letter in the First Epistle of John and that vs. 28-29 represent the closing injunction of the first of such letters. *"And now, little children, abide in him, that, when he may appear, ye may be comforted and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him."*

The abiding, then, is to be until He appears. The hope of the Second Coming burned very brightly in John's heart. He knew it was going to be a long time. That did not trouble him. He was concerned only that his flock should not be confounded or ashamed before the Lord at that great day. Here is a solemn thought for us. How necessary it is that we abide in Him, in His love and manifesting His spirit, that we be not of those who are "ashamed before him at his presence". There were times when the twelve disciples quarrelled between themselves by the wayside, with Jesus perhaps, as they thought, just out of earshot; and He must many a time have gently reproved them for their lack of brotherly love and understanding, and made them feel ashamed of themselves. So it is with us. Whether we believe that our Lord is now present or whether we hold that the time of His arrival is not yet, although imminent, we must realise that in this crisis of the ages we do stand very closely before Him and that He

is very near, and we do well to watch every point of our life's conduct, and particularly our relations with our brethren, lest we so fail to abide that we come short of His standards at the last. If with our fallible human judgment and imperfect reasoning any of us has made a mistake of a few years, one way or the other, regarding the time of our Lord's coming. He is surely not going to attach great importance to that, if we have at any rate continued earnestly waiting for His appearing. But if we have manifested a wrong spirit, have failed to abide in Him, have smitten our fellow-servants, then the case is very differ-

ent. How can we expect our Lord to accept us in such case for His great work of the future? If we cannot manifest His spirit and His standards in our contacts with our own brethren now, how can we expect to do it toward the world then? How can Jesus conscientiously, as it were, present us before the presence of the Father as one who has proved himself worthy of the Father's love? The exhortation comes to us with keen, penetrating force, "abide in him, that, when he shall appear, ye may not be ashamed before him".

(To be continued)

ONE WITH CHRIST AND EACH OTHER

"That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jno. 17. 21).

No doubt it was with rather mixed feelings, dear brother or sister, that you surveyed the world just prior to consecration, counting the cost. Here and there were peaceful, easy-flowing, interesting little streams of life; perhaps yonder you could see a strongly moving river inviting you to plunge in and be taken up with its erratic, eddying progress. But you loved your Lord, because He first loved you, and you sought unity with him in word, deed and character; as you progressed up to higher planes you could see that the little stream led to the strong river, which relentlessly, following out a natural law, flowed down to the sea, a sea in which tempests were imminent, a sea which was now a thunderous, raging maelstrom.

We might frequently be distressed by the fact, although not of the world, we are still very much in it, the natural man being what he is; so we look up with great encouragement as the experiences of to-day tend to make us feel more and more our separateness from the world. At first our allegiance to Christ and the pursuing of his principles of loving self-sacrifice only affected our home and social life; now it is affecting our civil and business life, insofar that in many cases we must choose to plough a comparatively lonely furrow rather than follow the line of least resistance with the crowd. This is separating . . . separating . . . separating . . . and a good thing too. How much more eagerly we turn to the Lord in prayer; how much tighter we grasp his outstretched hand; how much

more we understand and reciprocate the warmth of the brethren's love. And does not the Father rejoice with us as He sees us easing away from the earthly materialism around us? What awe-inspiring wonder there is in our calling! What a high, what a glorious, lofty calling is ours!

So, as we separate from the things that do not matter, we find a wholesome, satisfying peace in our unity with each other and with Jesus. As we, as a Church, gravitate to him as our Head, let us do what we can to draw the bonds of love a little closer round each other. The Apostle Paul, that apt channel of the Holy Spirit, teaches us on this point in Ephesians 4.

"I . . . beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace . . ."

It is not difficult to walk with all lowliness and meekness when we consider the vocation wherewith we are called. The gentle, patient, forbearing brother or sister is an invaluable asset in the preservation of unity between each other. *"Forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace."* Just as Jesus did! How our thoughts rise in leaps and bounds as we remember his forbearance in love, his great, earnest desire for us to be one in him, and the bond of perfect peace which He left us as a legacy.

It is clear from Paul's words that our unity does not find its roots in form, activity or even thought. Our unity is in the body (the Church), spirit, hope, in our Lord, our faith

and our baptism, and in the one omnipotent Father. In fact, the Apostle would seem to show us that our unity as a Church to some extent depends upon each individual fitting in to that part of the Lord's service for which he is most fitted. "*He gave some, apostles . . .*" etc. Let us be frank with ourselves. Am I trying to do too much in activities for which I am not suited? What talents have I? Are any being used in worldly affairs which could be turned to the perfecting of the saints? It is an important matter; it is for the edifying of the body of Christ. We must think very prayerfully and carefully along lines of the Holy Spirit's guidance before we act in such holy service. A sincere prayer for a weak brother is more effective than trying to work out a line of procedure by natural means. Our consecrated time is valuable.

The inspired words of the beloved Apostle teach us to forbear in love, speak the truth in love, unto the edifying of the body in love.

He would have us see that these are all aspects incidental to our "unfeigned love" one to another, and we know in practice that our mutual love is our unity. Our Lord's great love for us, and our devoted love for him, makes our unity, and, as Paul points out in another epistle, what can separate us?

Whilst at a convention once I heard the chairman use the expression "Let us unite in prayer". I was profoundly moved as about a hundred of us quietly and simply united in the one desire to commune with the Father. It meant that all those sincere minds were concentrated on the one high purpose, and coming as it were from a world where man's hand was turned against his neighbour the thought was impressively beautiful. We were children together, at home with each other, speaking reverently to our Father, and the spirit of peace and love prevailed.

This much we gain this side of the Veil. *What of the others?*

"IN THE DAYS OF THESE KINGS"

Enquiry into a well-known text

"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." (Dan. 2. 44).

The dream of the great image and the prophet Daniel's interpretation, as recorded in the second chapter of Daniel, is very familiar to all students of Bible prophecy. This forty-fourth verse is the focal point of the prophecy; the stone cut out of the mountain which first struck the feet of the image and reduced the whole structure to powder, and afterwards became a great mountain that filled the whole earth, is a symbol of the Kingdom of God which first destroys all man-made systems of government and then takes their place as the long-promised earthly kingdom of Messiah under whose beneficent reign the power of evil is finally to be broken and all nations of the earth be blessed.

There is one element in this verse which is sometimes the cause of misunderstanding. "*In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom*" were the words of Daniel, inspired, we may be sure, by the Holy Spirit and therefore words whose veracity and importance cannot be minimised. On the basis of this expression it has been argued by some that before the present age comes to its end,

and whilst the great powers of earth pictured by the four metals of the image are still in active operation, the Kingdom of the next Age will be established in power, in some sense, so that it may be truly said that the Kingdom has been set up and the work of Christ begun while as yet the Kingdoms of this world retain their own power. Since it is perfectly evident that the Millennial kingdom has not been established in an outwardly and physically manifest sense and that Satan is still without any doubt the god of this world the suggestion is made that the Kingdom is set in power in the "heavens"—the sphere of spiritual control—of the earth, and that this meets the requirements of the statement in Dan. 2. 44.

This short note will endeavour to put forward a much more logical and easy-to-grasp explanation. Let it be noted that Daniel did not say the kingdom would be set up in Millennial splendour and power "*in the days of these kings*"; only that it would be "*set up*". In the vision itself the stone did not become a great mountain which filled the whole earth until after it had overthrown the image and scattered the residue until nothing of it was left. The Book of Revelation makes it clear that the enemies of the kingdom must be overthrown before the reign of the saints can commence, and the whole of the New Testa-

ment bears confirmatory witness. There is no sense in which the Church reigns in glory and power whilst still in the flesh, and it is unthinkable to conceive our Lord commencing His reign without His bride by His side. The wedding feast must precede the shining forth of the saints in the Kingdom of their Father.

The key to Daniel's words lies in Matt. 12. 28 "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God is come unto you" and even more definitely in Luke 16. 16 "The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the Kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it". The Kingdom is dual in its nature; it has an earthly aspect and an heavenly aspect. The earthly aspect is not yet established; it will be so when the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ has reached that phase in which it is openly manifest to all men and the rulership of the world has passed into the hands of His representatives. The heavenly aspect commenced at the First Advent, with the preaching of the Kingdom and the "bringing of life and immortality to light through the gospel" which was characteristic of that Advent.

The more spectacular establishment of the earthly Kingdom at the end of the Gospel Age has tended to overshadow the no less important—in fact much more important—introduction of the spiritual aspect of the Kingdom at the beginning of the Age. The burden of the message preached by Jesus and the Apostles was "Repent—for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand". Those who heard and responded were urged to come into the Kingdom there and then. The Apostle Paul in Col. 1. 13 plainly declares that we who are the Lord's consecrated followers have already been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's Son. When the Pharisees in Luke 17. 21 demanded of Jesus a statement on when the Kingdom of God should come—and the kingdom they looked for was of course an outwardly manifest Kingdom of Israel in power over the nations—He told them that the Kingdom was not coming in an outwardly perceptible fashion;

men would not point here, or there, to show their fellows the Kingdom in power, for said Jesus "the Kingdom of God is within you". It is well-known that one translation, the Emphatic Diaglott, renders this phrase "God's royal majesty is among you" in order to avoid the implication that the Kingdom was in being there and then, but the variation is not justified. "Basileia" means kingdom, and never "king" or any substitute implying personality. The words in the A.V. accurately represent the Greek text and what Jesus meant the Pharisees to understand is clearly that in their looking for the Kingdom they were not to expect, then, an outward Kingdom but an inward one, in their own hearts and lives. It was their failure to appreciate His meaning which led them to miss the opportunity for which their whole nation had been trained during the previous fourteen hundred years.

When therefore the writer to the Hebrews exhorts us ". . . wherefore we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably" (Heb. 12. 28), he refers to a Kingdom which was a real thing even although it existed as yet only among the believers and in their hearts. Entrance into the "Covenant by sacrifice" has been entrance into the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God has truly been "set up" "in the days of these kings" in the sense that God has called into His Covenant a body of men and women, the consecrated followers of Christ from Pentecost until now, who have been delivered from the power and authority of the god of this world and constituted members of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is true that each such disciple is in the position of being a kind of advance outpost of the new Kingdom in enemy territory, for we live our lives still in the midst of a world system which is opposed to the things for which we stand and with which we have little in common. But the work of the Kingdom is going on, in the hearts of those whom Jesus called "the children of the Kingdom".

Did our Lord say "If any man would be my disciple let him serve me" or was it "If any man would serve me let him follow me"?

* * *

There is no end to the possibility of a Spirit-filled life, for there is an abundant provision. "Everything shall live whithersoever the river cometh" (see Ezek. 47).

We often think it enough to remove the greater evils, and leave the lesser; but white ants will eat up a carcass faster than a lion.

* * *

All the studying we may do will not make us disciples; only taking up the cross can do this. We can learn a lot from books but following Him is the vital thing.

RHODA

A young believer—who believed

It was an unusually important prayer meeting, and Rhoda was there. Although she was only a fifteen-year-old she was as earnest as any of them and just as aware of the calamity that had overtaken them. She sat near the door, at the back of the room, next to sixteen-year-old John, whose mother's house it was in which they were meeting, and bowed her head in reverence as the strong voice of the elder John, leading the meeting, was upraised in supplication. Prayer was being made of the church unceasingly on behalf of Peter, cast into prison by King Herod and in imminent danger of death.

One of the appealing figures of New Testament history is this Rhoda, appearing on the stage with the dancing steps of a child and as quickly tripping off again. That she was barely out of her childhood is apparent from the word used to describe her, "damsel" (*paidiske*) which denotes a girl in late childhood or early youth, but not later. A different word altogether is used in the New Testament for young women of marriageable age. We meet her for just a moment at the memorable prayer meeting held in the house of Mary the mother of John Mark. Mary's house was the first centre of the church at Jerusalem and it was in that house that the first believers began to make progress in their new-found faith. Now the little community was faced with a crisis and the brethren had gathered together to make effectual fervent prayer. Whether Rhoda was the daughter of one of the believers and was herself just beginning to make the faith her own, or whether she had come in contact with the preaching of the Apostles independently and was attending the meetings on her own account we have no means of knowing; all we do know is that on this fateful night this young girl, hardly out of her childhood and necessarily quite new to the faith, became the means of impressing upon her elder brethren, at that meeting, and no less upon us, reading the story, several important lessons.

According to Acts 12 Peter, upon being miraculously released from prison in the dead of night by the angel, found himself standing in the darkened streets of Jerusalem. What he had thought, whilst it was happening, to have been a dream, he now found to be reality. It is probable that the intense coldness of

the Judean night air quickly demonstrated to the somewhat lightly clad Apostle that it was no dream. The city was, of course, deserted at that time of night except perhaps for an occasional watchman. The immediate question for Peter was: What next?

Perhaps this is the first point we should take from the incident, one not connected with Rhoda, "When he had considered" Peter turned his steps to the house of Mary (which is traditionally believed to have been just outside the city wall on the south side of Jerusalem). He did so being tolerably certain to find brethren gathered there and that is our first lesson. We do well to be where we can associate with the Lord's disciples, fellow-Christians in the Narrow Way. In seeking first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness we will best advance our spiritual interests by finding our associations, our friendships and companionships, our activities and interests, among those who like us are consecrated to the service of God and are fellow-heirs in the High Calling. The first thing Peter did upon his release, even although it was twelve o'clock at night, was to make his way to the place where he knew there was always open house for the brethren.

It was really a rare compliment that Peter paid Mary in so doing. He might have surmised, but could hardly have definitely known, that there was a prayer meeting in progress at the time of his release, but he evidently had confidence that his welcome at Mary's house would be full and free even in the middle of the night.

So it came about that Peter was presently standing at the gate in the outer wall of the premises, knocking for admittance, and this is where Rhoda comes into the story. Perhaps the entire meeting heard the knocking on the outer gate, maybe only Rhoda heard and slipped out to investigate; in either case, for all her youthful eagerness, it must have been with a certain amount of trepidation that she crossed the courtyard and stood behind the gate, resounding with the thunderous blows which it was very probably suffering under the hands of the impetuous and not always too patient Peter. For all that Rhoda knew, the knocking might be the harbinger of Herod's officers, seeking someone else, or even all of them, to be taken to prison. Peter,

however, on the other side of the gate, was probably reasoning that the sooner he got out of the public street and into the cover of the house the better.

So Rhoda's clear young voice, possessing a confidence she probably only partly felt, ringing out on the still night air, "Who's there?" was answered by a gruff and well-remembered but at the moment decidedly impatient response "Peter, of course. Let me in!" In her relief from apprehension, and joy that their prayers had been answered, Rhoda most inconsequently left him standing there and ran indoors to tell the others. One can almost imagine the lordly air of John Mark, from all the superiority of his twelve months' or so advantage in age, remarking "Just like a girl" when it was all over and the explanations were being made.

Now here is the most intriguing part of the story. The assembled brethren did not believe Rhoda. "Peter at the gate: Rubbish" they said "You must be mad". They knew perfectly well that Peter was in prison and people didn't get out of Herod's prisons so easily at that. The girl was imagining things; whoever it was, it couldn't be Peter. They had been praying unceasingly for Peter's release, and now they were told he was standing at the gate they refused to believe it. One is really justified in wondering how much of faith was mingled with their prayers. Perhaps though it might be more charitable, and maybe nearer the truth, to assume that these immature and inexperienced Christians had not yet appreciated the true power of prayer. After all, the authority of Herod must have been a very immediate and real thing to their minds. They certainly took a lot of persuading. "Thou art mad" they told her. "But she constantly affirmed that it was even so." One can imagine the young girl trying by every artifice of reiteration and emphasis to induce the stubborn grown-ups around her to take her seriously. It would seem from that last expression that the argument went on for some time—evidently the prayer meeting had been temporarily abandoned. Peter, of course, was still knocking but nobody took any notice of that. Finding it impossible to dissuade Rhoda, and being, it would seem, reluctant to test the truth of her news by sending someone else to the gate, the brethren decided that if there was anybody there at all it must be

Peter's guardian angel—speaking apparently with Peter's voice. "Then said they, it is his angel." The early Christians had a very intense and definite belief in the existence of guardian angels, though why they should expect an angel to stand out in the street knocking for admittance does not readily appear.

"But Peter continued knocking"—probably definitely thunderous knocking by now, so that at last for very shame's sake they had to open the door: "and when they saw him, they were astonished". This is the only place in all the Scriptures where a company of believers joining in supplicatory prayer are stated to have been astonished at receiving the object of their petition!

So Peter took charge of the assembly, and what had started as a prayer meeting ended in a stirring exhortation from one who by his very presence there evidenced how God can deal with the devices and plans of evil men in His own way and deliver His own people when it is His Will.

The meeting broke up; Peter, a free man, went his way; and Rhoda drops out of the story. The New Testament does not mention her again. Did she hold to the faith and in after years become one of the noble matrons who graced the Christian Church with their labours of love and good works? We do not know. Whether she lived the remainder of her days in Jerusalem and perhaps was one of the Christian community which witnessed the fall of the city when Titus besieged it some forty years later, or in later life found herself at Antioch, at Ephesus, or maybe at Alexandria in Egypt with John Mark who we know ended his days as Elder of the Church in that city, we have no idea. All we know of Rhoda is that she was the only one in that prayer meeting quick-witted enough to realise that the united fervent and unceasing prayer had been answered, and having given us that one brief glimpse of unquestioning simple faith she moves off the stage and is lost. But what we have seen is perhaps enough to give rise to some hope and expectation that in a day yet to be, when we have become citizens of the celestial land, among those whom we shall meet and recognise as our forerunners in the Narrow Way, we shall come face to face with "a damsel called Rhoda".

One foot on sea and one on shore does not enable us to launch out at all.

He that winneth souls is wiser than he who wins fortune or fame.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

There is a passage in the Psalms of David which rarely receives the attention it deserves, although of vital importance in understanding the resurrection of the dead as an integral part of the Divine purpose. "*How precious is thy steadfast love, O God! The children of men take refuge in the shadow of thy wings. They feast on the abundance of thy house, and thou givest them drink from the river of thy delights. For with thee is the fountain of life.*" (Psa. 36. 9 R.S.V.). God is here shown to be the fountain-head from which life comes and upon which all life depends. This is the normal condition of created beings, living eternally in dependence upon the Author of life and in harmony with Him. "*This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*" (Jno. 17. 3).

It follows from this that death, so far as man is concerned, is abnormal. "*Death reigned from Adam to Moses*" said St. Paul; it has reigned ever since, so that men are accustomed to the idea that human life is necessarily brief and inevitably terminated by death. That which is intrinsically abnormal is thus made to appear normal. The Bible alone insists that death will eventually be overcome and men live in full union with God eternally. The Bible also explains why death does at this time afflict humanity and the process by which it will be brought to an end.

In this respect man stands in a position different from that of lower forms of terrestrial life. The animal creation, the denizens of land, air and sea, the insects and the micro-organisms, plant life in all its varied forms, all are possessed of life during the span of their existence and all pass through their life cycles and then die. There is nothing here that is abnormal; the whole terrestrial structure is built upon the actions and interactions of countless living organisms, great and small, fulfilling their ordained purpose in creation and passing away to make room for others. Without this complex system the processes of Nature could not continue and life on earth for man would be impossible. The underlying principle is that the earth with all things upon it, inanimate or animate, is created for the service of man and to provide an environment in which he can exer-

cise to the full his God-given powers of life and activity. Man alone among all terrestrial creatures possesses the faculties of reason, introspection and mental communion with the Creator; everything else upon earth is contributing to man's exercise of these faculties. Thus God said at the beginning "*Let us make man in our image . . . and let them have dominion*" over the animal creation (Gen. 1. 26). "*What is man?*" asks David, "*Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels . . . thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands*" which he then defines similarly as the whole animal creation. (Psa. 8. 4-8). The spirit of man, said Solomon, goeth upward; that of the beast goeth downward into the earth. (Eccl. 3. 21). All this is fundamental to the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Death amongst men, then, is the result of an intrusion into God's creation—sin. Man was created at the first "very good"—perfect, sinless. But "*by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned*" (Rom. 5. 12). The philosophy of the inclusion of all men in Adam's condemnation cannot be discussed here but the fact rests upon a logical foundation and it will yet be seen that God could have acted in no other way. The consequence of Adam's sin was death, and all men, necessarily involved in the sin of Adam and the sin of all the world, likewise pass into death. There are no exceptions. "*What man is he that liveth and shall not see death?*" asks the Psalmist "*Shall he deliver his soul from the power of the grave?*" (Psa. 89. 48). The answer, of course, is that no man has power so to do. The only hope of life after death lies in a resurrection from the dead, a re-creation of body and identity and a resurrection to life, and only God has the power to effect this. Thus the constant insistence of Scripture is that entrance into future life is by the door of resurrection.

Jesus made this plain when He said "*the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth . . .*" (Jno. 5. 28-29) and in that He reiterated the belief of Israel so well expressed by Martha after her brother's death in her reply to Jesus "*I know that He shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day*". (Jno. 11. 24). The mission of St. Paul was consistently bas-

ed upon the truth of the resurrection; the philosophers of Athens were interested in his message because "he preached unto them *Jesus, and the resurrection*" (Acts 17. 18). Jesus demonstrated this truth to the doubting Sadducees by reminding them that their own Scriptures pictured God, the God of the living, as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; because those patriarchs were long since dead a resurrection was an obvious necessity that the word of God might be fulfilled. "God is not a God of the dead but of the living, for I live unto him." (Luke 20. 38).

In order to understand the process of resurrection it is necessary clearly to perceive the nature of death. To say that death is the absence of life would seem so self-evident that the assertion would appear unnecessary, but Christian theology has been overlaid with so many accretions from other religions and philosophies that there is a great deal of misunderstanding upon this vital subject. In the beginning "God made man of the dust of the ground, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2. 7). It is generally realised nowadays that the old confusion between soul and spirit has to be rejected, that the "soul" is the resultant effect of the union of the Divinely-given spirit of life with the material terrestrial body. "Man became a living soul." The spirit of life comes from God and that spirit in any individual creates a separate, self-conscious identity; but it is only through the medium of the body with its five senses and its ability to correspond and interact with its environment that the individual can live, and move, and have his being, and in fact even know that he is alive at all. Conversely, when death ensues and the material body returns to its constituent dust, there is no more consciousness of life until God in His wisdom and by His power re-constitutes that spirit of life in a new body in which the individual again knows himself for what he is and can perceive his place in his new environment. This is resurrection.

The ancient Hebrews saw this truth clearly enough even although they did not understand, as do we, the essential connection between a living creature and the five senses upon which he depends for awareness of life and environment. They pictured the death state as a time of sleep and the resurrection as the awakening. "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence." "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark and thy

righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" (Psa. 115. 17; 88. 10). "Man lieth down" says Job "and riseth not; till the heavens be no more they shall not awake nor be raised out of their sleep . . . hide me in the grave . . . keep me secret until thy wrath be past, appoint me a set time, and remember me . . . all the days of my appointed time will I wait, until my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee; thou shalt have a desire to the work of thine hands." (Job 14. 12-15). Here is a very clear definition of death followed by resurrection from the lips of one who lived at least fifteen hundred years before Christ. Hear him again; "I know that my Redeemer liveth and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. After I shall awake, though this body be destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God." (Job 19. 25-26).

The desire to find some conscious state of well-being for the righteous dead whilst awaiting the "Last Day" and the Day of Judgment, which is always associated in Scripture with the resurrection, led some in the early Christian centuries to incorporate in their thinking sundry Greek philosophies which envisaged disembodied "souls" existing in Hades, which to the Greeks was a dark and gloomy semi-conscious state but under early Christian theological thought developed into "Paradise", a state of conscious happiness for the righteous, and "Hell", a state of conscious misery for the wicked. Later centuries saw the addition of "Purgatory" for those who were not good enough for the one but too good for the other. All these conditions were expected to come to an end at the Last Day and the resurrection, at which time men would enter upon their final destiny. Most of these ideas have been coalesced nowadays into a general conception of an "Intermediate state" of usually undefined and very indefinite characteristics. Needless to say there is no basis in Scripture for any of these ideas of a pseudo-Heaven or a pseudo-Hell for the reception of the dead whilst awaiting the resurrection and the judgment. This has been recognised throughout the Age and many of the best known contenders for the faith have pressed this point home in varying degrees of intensity. Thus William Tyndale in 1530 declared "ye, in putting them" (the dead) "in heaven, hell and purgatory, destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection . . . if the souls be in heaven . . . what cause is there of the resurrection?" Dr. Priestley (1733-1804) wrote "had it not been for the authority of Calvin, who

wrote expressly against it, the doctrine of an intermediate conscious state would, in all probability, have been as effectually exploded as the doctrine of purgatory itself".

Strangely enough, Martin Luther seems first to have glimpsed the clue to reconciliation of these conflicting views. "In their sight" (the dead) "a thousand years before God are not even a day. When people shall be resurrected, it will seem to Adam and to the old fathers as though they had been living only half an hour before. There is no time there, therefore also there can be no ideal place, and there is neither day nor night. Before God it all happeneth in an instant. They will not come to the new day any sooner than we". It would seem the fiery reformer had vaguely sensed an idea that is much more familiar to us to-day, that time as we know it is relative to this earth and this life, but does not necessarily appear the same in other contexts. Our own sense of the passage of time is determined by the processes of Nature within us, the rate of the sequence of biological happenings in our bodies and in the operation of our brains. Without the body there is no sense of time; until the spirit of life is "clothed upon", to use St. Paul's expression in 2 Cor. 5, with a new body suited to the individual's new environment, the sense of time cannot be restored. Luther's suggestion is in full accord with all that present-day knowledge can suggest and the old-time men of God were absolutely right in their perception when they declared, for example, "there is no work nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest". "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Eccl. 9. 10; Psa. 146. 4). To the dead, awaiting the resurrection, time does not exist. The moment of death is to them the moment of resurrection.

The first to experience resurrection to eternal life will be the Church, that assembly of dedicated Christians to the formation of which this Age has been devoted. These are to be the associates of Christ in the evangelical work of the next Age and on this account they must be with Him in the celestial world when that Age commences. Hence the first work of the Lord at the Second Advent, before the Messianic Age is inaugurated, is the raising to conscious life all Christian believers who have been laid aside in death in the past. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout" says the Apostle "and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thess. 4. 14). Lest there should be any misunderstanding as to

the nature of this momentous event the same Apostle explains in 1 Cor. 15 and in 2 Cor. 5 that we must not expect this resurrection to be to human nature upon the earth. The hope of those who aspire to membership of the Church is that they shall be with their Lord in the celestial realm and this implies resurrection in celestial bodies adapted to that realm. John stresses this when he says "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). The resurrection of the "dead in Christ", therefore, takes place in heaven and not upon earth; the first conscious perception of those risen ones is of celestial surroundings and not earthly ones and the bodies through which they find expression are celestial and not terrestrial.

The next aspect of the resurrection is the "change" of living members of the Church. Because the Second Advent takes place in history, and at the transition point between this present Age and the future Messianic Age, there will be some of Christ's disciples still living at the time of the Advent. The simile of sleep is not appropriate in the case of these who progress from death to resurrection instantaneously as measured by human time, so that the Apostle declares "we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed". (1 Cor. 15. 51-52). The comparison of this passage with vs. 39-49 shows clearly that the Apostle is referring to the discarding of the terrestrial body and its replacement by the celestial—"as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly". This change of course involves death of the human body and re-creation in a celestial body so that the net effect is the gathering of the entire Church to the Lord in the celestial world, ready for the appointed work of service. Describing this process of gathering, St. Paul, after telling the Thessalonians that the dead in Christ will rise first as the initial event of the Advent, goes on "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4. 17). This expression "caught up" has the significance of an abrupt and sudden transfer from one place to another and is synonymous with the same Apostle's use of the word "change" in 1 Cor. 15. The passage in Thes-

salonians is figurative; the place of meeting is not the atmosphere surrounding this planet, but the celestial world itself, which is outside the dimensions of space as we know them; a moment's thought will demonstrate the truth of this since the resurrection of the "dead in Christ" is of necessity in that celestial sphere and it is there that the "changed" ones will be united with their brethren of previous ages.

The resurrection of the Church thus accomplished, and the work of the Second Advent having progressed to the point where the "kingdoms of this world" have become the kingdom of Christ (Rev. 11. 15), the Lord Christ having asserted His power and taken control of earth's affairs, and the Messianic Age initiated, nothing hinders the commencement of the general resurrection of mankind. In the more metaphorical of the Scriptural passages describing the resurrection this is pictured as the raising of the dead to stand before the "great white Throne" and be judged worthy either of everlasting life or irremediable condemnation; what must be realised is that this judgment is a process. Before the final decision is made, the irrevocable judicial decree enunciated, there must first be the bringing of each individual to a clear perception of the issues involved, and an opportunity to choose, untrammelled by the ignorance and misunderstanding which is the lot of virtually all in this present life. That there is definitely such a resurrection is abundantly clear from several sayings of Jesus. "*Woe unto thee, Chorazin; woe unto thee, Bethsaida; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon they would have repented long ago . . . I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you . . . it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee*" (Matt. 11. 21-24). The Day of Judgment is consistently allied with the time that the Son of Man takes his seat upon the throne of His glory and gathers all nations before Him (Matt. 25. Rev. 20) but Jesus calls this same era the regeneration ("*in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit upon the throne of his glory*" Matt. 19. 28) and this word regeneration means the giving of new life. Thus the resurrection is the giving of new life to men with the opportunity to have it merge into everlasting life and this is why Jesus said that of all those who will hear His voice and come forth from the grave in that day, some will rise to a

resurrection to life and some to a resurrection to judgment. There are those who make use of this day of judgment to become sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ and those who never do depart from their sin; this is shown in the respective destinies of the "sheep" and "goats" in the picture of the Last Judgment outlined in Matt. 25. Similarly in the vision of the Throne in Rev. 20 the dead, small and great, stand before God and are judged from the things written in the books; only those found worthy are permitted eventually to enter the Holy City.

There are practical problems to consider. If the dead are to experience a resurrection to terrestrial conditions in human bodies—and this is the normal theological view as expressed in the Creeds ("*I believe in the resurrection of the body*") besides being Biblical teaching from earliest times, then there will be matters of food and housing to consider. The Millennial promise that "the desert shall blossom as the rose" will have to be fulfilled on a wholesale scale before there can be a resurrection. Logically, the first result of the kingship of Christ upon earth must be a great setting of people to work, in the restoration of the earth, the reclamation of waste land, the irrigation of deserts, the preparation of homes not only for those then living but also for those who are to come. Much of the earth's natural resources has been despoiled and defiled in recent generations and this must be arrested and those resources restored. If it is objected that the earth is already in danger of over-population and unable to produce the food necessary for its existing inhabitants it can be answered that this at present widely-publicised impression is entirely erroneous. The current statements to this effect that are made are based upon the earth as it now is under the rule of human selfishness; the position under the kingship of Christ will be entirely different. The energy which reaches the earth daily from the sun is capable of producing food for many times the probable present and past populations of the world. Even now scientific men are on the point of a "break-through" in this direction which—once the soulless grip of commercialism has been loosed under the Millennial rule of Christ—will change the entire aspect of the situation. There can be no doubt about this climax to human history—the dead will return! "*Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust*" cries Isaiah, prophet of the Messianic Age "*for the earth shall cast out the dead*" (Isa. 26. 19). We can safely leave the details of how

all that is promised is physically possible to the One who is the Creator of all things and controls the administration and progress of all that His hands have made. The sphere in which man lives is created to meet all his needs; whatever the requirements of the resurrected hosts, God will provide in His own wonderful way.

The consequence of the resurrection will be the end of evil and the reconciliation to God of "whosoever will". That involves physical and mental as well as moral perfection. The mending of men's bodies and the renovation of their outward environment will be child's play compared with that inward re-

generation which is a necessity if they are to be delivered from death and confirmed in life, reclaimed from Satan and reconciled to God. There is not much doubt that the latter will exert a powerful effect upon the former; that in proportion as a man seeks intelligently and willingly to come into alignment with righteousness and yield himself in allegiance to Christ, his physical organism will progress toward the perfect state which is the hallmark of everlasting life. In the truest sense, the resurrection of the dead will only become an accomplished fact when the human race has, at last, been fully recovered from sin and death, and has entered into eternal life.

EVENTIDE

"So he bringeth them unto their desired haven"

When in the ordering of Divine Providence "the hour" and "the man" arrive simultaneously, great things may be expected—and accomplished! Just such an occasion had arrived when Barnabas went to Tarsus seeking Saul. (Acts 11. 25).

Consequent upon that spell of sharp persecution arising out of Stephen's ministry—and death—certain brethren travelled into distant provinces, thus creating for themselves the opportunity denied them in Jerusalem. Among them were brethren apparently of Greek origin, who as they travelled homewards, came at last to Antioch, and there spake openly and freely to fellow Greeks about the grace and goodness of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. A very considerable number of these hearers believed wholeheartedly and turned to the Lord. Here was an unorthodox situation—for these were Gentiles purely and simply—yet the hand of the Lord was with them.

When the tidings of these unexpected happenings reached Jerusalem, the mother Church sent Barnabas—a brother well-trusted and greatly esteemed—to investigate, and presumably to report back.

Barnabas was both amazed and delighted by what he saw and heard, and—good man that he was—exhorted the new converts to stand fast in the Lord. But he quickly realised that this work was too big and too exacting for the local overseers to control efficiently, and that help must be found somehow, somewhere. Barnabas knew the man for the task; recollections of events and of a "contact" made several years before came to mind, and he was sure that but one man in all his

range of acquaintanceship was capable of taking this task in hand. Hence that speedily determined journey to Tarsus to seek Saul.

But what of Saul? How had he fared since the day when his Master peremptorily told him to "depart" from Jerusalem? We have not much evidence to call upon concerning these intervening years, and such as we have is mainly auto-biographical. In an outline of his experiences in which comparison with other Israelites had been found necessary, Paul unintentionally lifts the curtain upon some of those earlier years—a span of life and experience which must include those spent in and around his native town prior to the call of Barnabas. This little chapter of autobiography is recorded in 2 Cor. 11. 21-27, and records the story of countless beatings—some nearly unto death—five distinct scourgings by the Jews—to the utmost limit permitted by the law—three beatings by the Romans (by rods). Three times shipwrecked, with a whole day and night adrift on one of these occasions; in dangers of many kinds and in many places, in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure—so runs the grim and frank recital. Foxes had holes, birds of the air had nests, but Paul (like his Lord) often had nowhere to lay his aching head!

Now all this crucial and punitive experience had befallen him prior to the story of his wanderings in Acts 19. 21-23. Where is the record of these things in the Acts of the Apostles? There is no record of all these buffetings anywhere. We have the main records of his first and second missionary journeys,

and while some of these experiences occurred during the one or other, there are some which cannot be accounted for during these journeys, or these later years. At least two of the Roman beatings and probably three of the Jewish floggings belong to those early years before Barnabas sought him out. Which means, of course, that the servant of the Lord, dismissed peremptorily from Jerusalem, had laboured, perhaps in the main unsuccessfully, in the hinterland above Tarsus, during these unrecorded years, and had had to pay very heavily, in suffering, for his fidelity to the Lord. How exactly and deeply do the words of the Lord to Ananias seem to have been fulfilled—"I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My Name". (Acts 9. 16).

Well, such was the man, and such the preparation for the work he had been called to do! In that quieter retreat, away from the stress and turmoil of faithless Jerusalem, the Lord had been inuring him to pain and persecution, to odium and disesteem in readiness for the arduous hours which lay ahead!

Thus when came the Gentile's hour, there came the "man" prepared of God to match the hour—and great things began to be accomplished!

*His purposes had ripened fast
Unfolding every hour;
The bud had a bitter taste,
But sweet would be the flower!*

A whole year was spent in establishing and consolidating the Church in Antioch; then forth to the wider work he and Barnabas were called to go!

The lesson here for us is that there are tides—ebbings and flowings—in the history of the Lord's people; set times and set hours for this thing or that, and that it is the Lord who arranges them. Nothing is more obvious in the stories in Acts than the Hand of God—the Spirit of God—supervised and directed everything.

"The Holy Spirit said"; "the Spirit suffered them not"; "Come over to Macedonia"; etc., etc., token upon token of the Spirit-led life!

'The Spirit-led life'! "the hour" and "the man"! Are not these things the essentials today! Perhaps not in great world-shaking movements as yet, but in the more quiet and more preparatory ways. It is an unbecoming lack of insight and charity to think that God's over-ruling Providences fall only inside one little Fellowship, and that His Hand controls none outside. In these coming days of inten-

sive strain, some poor sufferer's "hour" may come, with you, or me, the intended "man"! How if that is so? Are you going to say "I've tried and tried, and tried in vain, and am quite sure there's not another single grain to be gathered to the Lord. The whole field's been raked and combed and gleaned until it stands utterly bare of wheat"! If that is how you—we—feel, some one's "hour" will come, without the "man", or without the first-intended man! There are still "lonely hearts to cherish while the days are going by"—which a spirit of defeatism will allow to pass by unhelped and unblessed!

*"Only a word for the Master
Lovingly, quietly said,
Only a word, yet the Master heard,
And some fainting heart was fed.
"Only a look of remonstrance,
Sorrowful, gentle and deep,
Only a look! Yet some strong man
shook,
And went alone to weep.
"Only some act of devotion,
Willingly, joyfully done,
Surely twas nought! (So the proud
world thought)
But yet souls for Christ were won.
"Only!—but Jesus is looking,
Constantly, tenderly down
To earth, and sees, Those seeking to
please,
And these things he stands ready to
crown."*

Kindly Providence will continue to call for the "man" until its prearranged "hours" are outrun! Let us be sure of that!

To the rich young ruler Jesus said, "take up the cross," not *your* cross. He had not been assigned a particular cross yet; perhaps he had one later; we do not know. We are reminded of the poem about the one who tried on different crosses and found none that he could bear until he came to one which just fitted his shoulders, and he found it was the one he had taken off.

* * *

The great secret which keeps the heart of the consecrated child at rest is to realise that a full surrender of his heart to God, links him to both the centre and circumference of Heaven and Earth, and to the Almighty Energy which maintains and sustains them.



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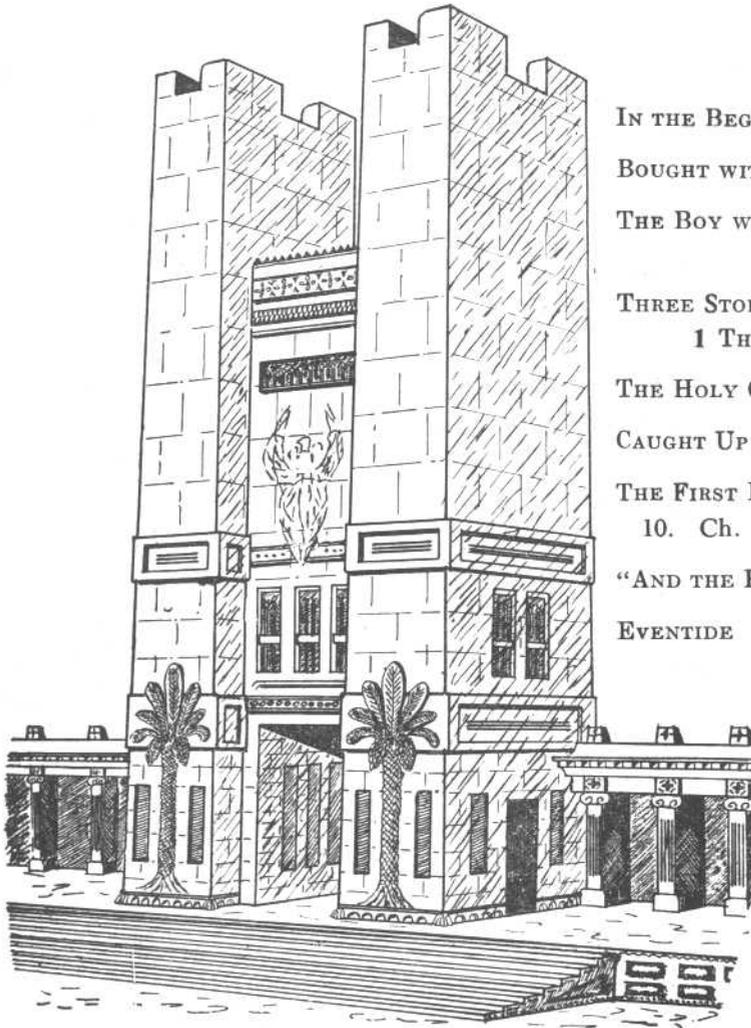
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
Soldier of Jesus Christ

Published July 1st

Next issue September 1st

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

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COMING CONVENTIONS

NOTTINGHAM — Sun., July 2

Village Hall, Wilford Road, Ruddington (4 miles south of Nottingham on A60 to Loughborough). Details from Bro. D. Nadal, 4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone, Notts.

MARANATHA CONFERENCE — August 5-12.

"High Leigh", Hoddesdon, Herts. Details from Bro. F. B. Quennell, 43 Ackers Road, Stockton Heath, Warrington, Lancs.

LONDON — August 26-28

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1. Details from Bro. T. A. Webb, 15 Craster Road, Brixton, London, S.W.2.

COVENTRY — Sun., Sept. 3

Ambulance Hall, Little Park St. Details from Bro. W. R. Walton, 2 Highland Rd, Kenilworth, Warks.

CARDIFF — September 9-10.

Institute for the Blind, Newport Road, Cardiff. Details from Bro. L. F. Shephard, Bedwbach House, Llanharen Road, Llanharen, Glam.

RUGBY — Sun, Sept. 24

St. John's Ambulance Hall, Regent Place. Details from Mrs. A. Wood, 90 Holbrook Avenue, Rugby.

WEST WICKHAM — Sept. 23-24

Justin Hall. Details from Bro. J. Bignell, 28 Croft Avenue, West Wickham, Kent.

* * *

A Request

Should any reader possess, and be willing to dispose of, a book entitled "God's Covenants" by Benjamin Barton, and published by the (now defunct) Bible Students Committee of Letchworth, Mrs. M. Chapman of 36, Cooden Drive, Bexhill-on-Sea, Sussex, would be very grateful for the opportunity of acquiring the same. Please write direct to Sister Chapman.

* * *

Free Literature

The following pamphlets are available in single copies or small quantities on the same terms as the "Monthly", i.e. sent free of charge upon request although gifts towards the cost of printing and postage will be sincerely appreciated.

- No. 31 The Bible — the Book for To-day
32 World Conversion — When
33 The Divine Permission of Evil
34 Everlasting Punishment
35 Conversion in the After-life
36 The Resurrection of the Dead
37 The Second Advent — its
Nature and Purpose

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

Bro. & Sis. F. A. Essler of U.S.A. will be visiting Great Britain during the summer and are available to visit Bible study groups. Applications should be sent to Bro. Gordon Chilvers, "Bethany", Moorwood, Chapel End, Nuneaton. Fixtures at time of going to press as below:

BRO. F. A. ESSLER

July 2	Windsor	Aug. 1	Ipswich
5	Hitchin	5/12	Maranatha
6	Downham	13	Glasgow
8	Berkhamstead		Montrose
9	Welwyn		Dundee
12	West Wickham	24	Sheffield
14	Chatham	26/28	Conway Hall
16	Central London	Sep 2/3	Forest Gate
19	Paignton	6	Ealing
21	Yeovil	8	Stroud
22	Bournemouth	9/10	Cardiff
23	Aldersbrook		Llanelly
26	Welling	14	Midland Farewell
29/30	Peterborough	15	Conway Hall Farewell

* * *

Regarding gifts

In the past we have sent receipts for all gifts no matter how small. Increasing postal charges for such receipts is becoming an appreciable proportion of the value of such gifts and we do not think that those who thus contribute as they are able would wish such portion dissipated on postage. From January last therefore we have not been sending receipts for amounts under 5/- and feel that everyone will agree with our thought in this matter.

Gone from us

Sis. M. Bent (Manchester)
Bro. R. Grice Sr. (Ruddington)
Bro. F. W. Kirton (Wrexham)
Bro. Neil MacLeod (Scalpay)
Bro. H. Ray (Forest Gate)

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

IN THE BEGINNING

When God created

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1. 1-2).

Those are the opening words of the Bible. They speak of a time earlier than the seven creative days which picture the development of the earth into a habitation suitable for man. There are several beginnings mentioned in the Bible. Jesus spoke of one beginning when, talking of the institution of marriage, He said *"He which made them at the beginning made them male and female"* (Matt. 19. 4. Mark 10. 4). That was the beginning of the human race and of human history upon earth. Satan, said Jesus on another occasion *"was a liar and a murderer from the beginning"* (John 8. 44) and this clearly refers to the same time—that of the Eden story. The One presented as the personification of Divine Wisdom in Prov. 8. 23 says *"I was set up from of old, from the beginning, before the earth was"*; of Him again it is said in John 1. 1-2 *"In the beginning was the Word . . . and was in the beginning with God"*. This beginning "before the earth was" must obviously be earlier in time than that of Gen. 1. 1 in which God is said to have created the earth. It has to be concluded therefore that Gen. 1. 1 does not refer to the beginning of Divine creative work but it does refer to the time when what we call this material universe was created and our sun with its attendant worlds came into existence. The account then has to be read as though given from the standpoint of an observer upon this planet, and tells of a time when the primitive earth appeared in the midst of the surrounding heavens.

The word for "heavens"—*shamayim*—means "the heights", and comes from a Hebrew root "*shamah*", to be high. (Some expositors make it refer to a belief in the existence of waters above the heavens by prefixing *mayim*—"waters" with the adverb *sham*—"there"—so manufacturing a rather clumsy word "there-waters" for *shamayim*, but there is no warrant for this). Genesis 1. 1 tells us that in the beginning of things God made the heights above and the earth beneath, without any reference to what had gone before. It is certain that the spiritual or celestial world

had already come into being, for Job 38. 7 tells that at the foundation of this earth *"the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy"*. It is impossible to deny that somewhere away in another sphere of Divine creation there were intelligent beings witnessing the processes which brought our universe into being.

Science is still uncertain precisely how the solar system—the sun with its planets—came into existence; several theories compete for acceptance but it is agreed that at a time between two and five thousand million years ago a vast cloud of gaseous material existing in space consolidated to form a star—our sun—and a number of smaller bodies, the planets, of which our earth is one. The earth was most probably mainly in a molten condition and much of the metals and other solid substances with which we are now familiar vapourised and forming a kind of thick and heavy atmosphere around the central core. All water was in the form of steam and there was no free oxygen and no breathable air. Because there was no air no sunlight could reach the surface and the planet was swathed in impenetrable darkness. That condition of things is aptly described by the next words. *"And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep"*. This expression "without form" denotes a waste or desert condition, and is translated elsewhere in the O.T. by words such as waste, wilderness, confusion, vanity, and so on. "Void" is a word meaning emptiness, so that the phrase really means that the earth, although existing, was a desolate, empty waste. There was no life and no growing thing; just a mass of dead material suspended in space. Another example of the same expression in the Old Testament serves to illumine its use. Jeremiah, seeing in prophetic vision the desolation that was to come upon Judah in consequence of the imminent Babylonian invasion, expressed himself thus *"I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light . . . I beheld, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of heaven were fled. I beheld, and lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by His fierce anger"* (Jer. 4. 23-26). In this lament Jeremiah likened the

state of his homeland to the desolate and waste condition of the earth before God created man.

At this point some reference should be made to what is called the "Disruption theory" which is still advocated at times although the reasons which called it into being have long since lost their validity. Briefly, this hypothesis claims that prior to the creation of the Adamic race and the events of the seven creative days there had been a pre-Adamic race of beings living upon the earth and that a great cataclysm occurred which destroyed that race and completely desolated the world so that it became "waste and void". Exponents of the thesis claim that the "was" of Gen. 1-2 should properly be rendered "the earth became waste and void" so that verse 1 refers to the pre-Adamite world, verse 2 the cataclysm or "disruption" which overwhelmed it, and verse 3 onwards the restoration of the earth by Divine power in readiness for the race of Adam yet to be created. A variation of the proposition says that these pre-Adamite beings were destroyed because of grievous sin and became the "fallen angels" of later Old and New Testament narratives.

There is no textual foundation for this suggestion. The grammatical sense of verse 2 is accurately represented in the Authorised Version. It implies that, at the time of which it speaks, God created the earth a waste and empty mass. After that, the account goes on to explain, God began to develop the earth into a suitable home for man, and at the end of the narrative man appears as the obvious climax. Grammatically the expression is identical with Jonah 3. 3 "*Jonah arose, and went to Nineveh . . . Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city*" and Gen 3. 1 "*Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field*". The suggestion that Gen. 1. 2 asserts the existence of an originally complete and perfect earth, later destroyed and then re-created to be a home for the Adamic race, was first made by Dr. Andrew Chalmers in 1814 and elaborated by Dr. Pye Smith in 1838. At that time geologists knew very little of the earth's origin, but discoveries then being made appeared to conflict with the Genesis account. In particular the growing evidence that the planet had passed through a succession of cataclysms which left their mark in the twisted and contorted rock strata, and the fossils and bones of prehistoric animals that were increasingly coming to light, were hard to reconcile with the prevailing belief in a literal seven day creative week. The idea of a

pre-Adamic destruction of the world was held to account for these conditions, and made it possible to maintain belief in the seven literal creative days by relegating the long ages of the fossil remains to a time before the first creative day. Once it is realised that the creative week of Genesis covers the entire span of geological time the "disruption theory" has no place.

There is a significant expression at this point. "*And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters*". "In the beginning" God had created the earth, but it was a dead earth, waste and sterile, an unorganised mass of assorted chemical substances of which some were solid, some liquid, and some gaseous, all intensely hot and interacting with each other but all dead. And the Spirit of God brooded over this chaotic world; that is the meaning of the word translated "moved"; as a bird hovering over and brooding over its young. The word is rendered "fluttereth" in Deut. 32. 11 "*As an eagle . . . fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings . . . so the Lord alone did lead Israel*". The Holy Spirit of God came down upon that lifeless creation to bestow life.

The story of how life came to earth and developed upon it, in ever increasing degrees of complexity until at last the time came when God said "*Let us make man, in our image*" is the theme of the seven creative days. The narrative commences in the third verse of Gen. 1. The first story of the Bible consists of two verses only and it tells, simply, how Divine power, Divine energy, brought together the material substances which compose our earth, setting in motion chemical changes which eventually made it capable of supporting life, and then the Divine Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, came down to bring the seed of life that the earth might one day teem with living creatures, and finally become a fitting home for man, the crown and glory of terrestrial life.

Energy and life; these are the twin principles of the universe as we know it, emanating from God. Many intellectual men are trying hard to discover the source and nature of both but they are still very much in the dark. The first two verses of Genesis give us the answer; they both come from God and therefore they are, to man, forever unknowable. But God is not only life and energy; He is also Love and Wisdom, and One with whom His children can enter into personal relationship and have communion. He is not only the Creator, He is also the Father; we are not

only the work of His hands, we are also His children. We are still in the formative time, not yet grown up, just as the earth we inhabit has not yet attained the fulness of perfection it will know eventually. Nevertheless the

day will come when men shall be called the Sons of God because they will have, at last, attained the ideal which God had in mind in that far off day when "In the beginning" He created the heavens and earth.

BOUGHT WITH A PRICE

A doctrinal study

"Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6. 20).

There is a commercial ring in those words which seem alien to the oft-repeated Gospel invitation to come to Jesus of one's own free will and in Him find a liberty which cannot be obtained anywhere else. The entire teaching of Scripture on the nature of that process whereby salvation comes to man resounds with words such as bought, purchased and ransomed. The literal implication of 1 Cor. 6. 20—as of some other passages also—is that the "saved" one has attained that state only by becoming the slave of God. He is bought and he belongs to God. Yet the Christian is also described as a freedman in Christ Jesus. There is sufficient apparent difference between these two ideas to warrant closer examination.

1 Cor. 6. 20 is not the only place where this principle of purchase and "belonging to God" is laid down. In the succeeding chapter (7. 23) the Apostle repeats the remark with a different twist at the end; "*Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men*". St. Peter in 2 Pet. 2. 1 refers to "*false teachers*" who "*deny the Lord that bought them*". So basically rooted is this idea of purchase that the heavenly chorus in Revelation makes reference to the fact three times (the word is translated "redeemed" here but it is the same Greek word and means literally "to purchase in the market-place"). The words, addressed to the glorified Lord Christ, are "*thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood*", "*no man could learn that song but (those) which were redeemed from the earth*"; "*these were redeemed from among men*" (Rev. 5. 9; 14. 3 & 4). The purchase price here is indicated as being the blood of Christ and this is a clear reference to His death as man on the Cross. His death is the price paid for man, and this is the evident meaning of Rom. 14. 9 "*Christ died, and rose, and lived, that he might be*

lord of the dead and the living". This same fact, that the purchase price was the death of Christ, is stressed again in 1 Pet. 1. 18-19 "*Ye were not redeemed (lutro—to set loose by payment of a price) by . . . silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ*". The most definite expression of this nature is that occurring in Paul's last words to the elders of the Ephesus assembly, when he exhorted them to "*feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood*". This passage poses no little problem; it is the only one in all the New Testament where the Father is identified with the Son in the death on the Cross. The shedding of blood presupposes and involves death, an unthinkable thing in relation to God Most High, Creator and Giver of all life. On this account it has been suggested by a considerable body of informed opinion that the words should read "*the church of the Lord*" which would remove the difficulty. The testimony of the principal early manuscripts seems more or less equally divided in that the Sinaitic and Vatican give "God" whilst the Alexandrian, Ephraemi and Bezae give "Lord". The "Received Text", with Westcott and Hort, accept "God" but Tischendorf and Tregelles, both acknowledged leading authorities, elect for "Lord". Weymouth and Rotherham both suggest that the word "Son" has dropped out from the end of the sentence (in the Greek the words run "*which he purchased through the blood of the own*"). But whichever of these alternatives is accepted makes no difference to the basic truth. Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Son of God, was put to death, unresistingly, by men who would not have His teaching. The expression "the shed blood" refers to that death, and that alone, and in these Scriptures that death is said to be the purchase price by means of which mankind is bought or redeemed to God.

It is necessary now to associate the thought of freedom, of liberty from restraint or bond-

age, with this act of purchase. Writing to his fellow-worker Titus, building up the churches in Crete, Paul speaks of "*our Saviour Jesus Christ who gave himself for us that he might redeem*" (*lutro* again—to set free by payment of a price) "*us from all iniquity*" (Titus 2. 14). Again to the Ephesians he says that in Christ "*we have redemption*" (*apolutrosis*—a setting free) "*through his blood, the forgiveness of sins*" (Eph. 1. 7) where "forgiveness" means literally a letting go or sending away. The same word is rendered both "*deliverance to the captives*" and "*set at liberty them that are bruised*" in our Lord's reading in the Capernaum synagogue (Luke 4. 18). Again is this same truth stressed in the message to the Colossians. God "*hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins*" (Col. 1. 14). The importance that St. Paul attached to this joint idea of purchase and right of ownership combined with freedom and setting at liberty is demonstrated by the frequency of such allusions in his epistles.

Our Lord added His own word. "*The Son of Man came*" He said "*to give his life a ransom for many*" (Matt. 20. 28, Mark 10. 45). This is *lutron*, the price paid for redeeming. Again the commercial aspect! Jesus gave his human life as a price to secure the freedom of all men, and in so doing He became the owner, their Lord. St. Paul took up this aspect and used the same word when he said (1 Tim. 2. 6) that Christ Jesus "*gave himself a ransom for all*" and stressed the element of exchange in the transaction by applying the prefix "*anti*" to "*lutron*" thereby implying that the price paid, the life laid down, was in all respects a full and sufficient discharge for the transaction concerned. Whether we understand the philosophy of the matter or not, it remains true that Jesus' willing laying down of His life at the hands of His enemies becomes an adequate price to secure the release of all mankind from the power of sin and therefore of death.

One has to remember in all this that intrinsically it was because "*God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son*" to effect the salvation of "*whosoever believeth*" and that it is of Divine grace that men are saved. The Scriptural insistence on the process of purchase or redemption of men by the payment of a price must not be stressed beyond its intended scope but there must be a reason why the fact is so clearly stated; in some way it must contain an explanation of the neces-

sity for Christ to die before man can be restored to harmony with God.

The key to this whole matter and the apparently commercial element in the Scriptures concerned lies in the fact that both St. Paul and St. Peter used the then prevailing custom whereby slaves could obtain freedom as the basis of their expositions and exhortations. That custom was called "*manumission*" and there exists plenty of evidence from which the details of its operation are clearly understood.

Briefly, the slave was brought by his owner to the temple of the god, the purchase price of the slave's freedom having already been paid into the temple treasury by the person interested in gaining him his freedom. In formal fashion the priest handed over the money to the slave's owner and the slave was then considered to have been sold to the god. Thereafter no man might take him into slavery again, and he walked out of the temple a free man, although for the rest of his life he remained technically the property of the god. Severe legal penalties awaited anyone who tried to enslave one who had thus gained his freedom by being sold to the god.

The famous Temple of Apollo at Delphi in Greece, often referred to as the "Delphic Oracle", was one place where this ceremony was frequently performed, and many tablets dating from the Apostle Paul's day have been discovered bearing the name of the slave and the price paid, the names of the witnesses to the transaction, and always a concluding formula, "*for freedom*". "*Sold to Apollo, the male slave so-and-so, at a price of so-much, for freedom*"; that was the magic formula which made the erstwhile slave free for ever. And the Greek words used on the tablets, describing the transaction, are those used in the New Testament for "ransom" and "redeem" and "bought" in the texts which have been considered above. The reason that Jesus used the word "ransom" was to draw a parallel between the effect of His death in procuring freedom from sin for man, and the paying of the freedom price for the slave. 1 Cor. 6. 20 is then an exact replica of what took place in the pagan temple. We, being slaves to the power of sin, have been bought with a price and are become the property of God; nevertheless from that moment we are free men. "*Stand fast therefore in the liberty where-with Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage*" says the Apostle (Gal. 5. 1).

This aspect of the Atonement shows man

as in bondage to sin and the evil that is in the world and unable by his own efforts to break free. No matter how high-minded and just he may be as an individual, he cannot but be involved in the sub-normal mode of existence which St. Peter calls "*this present evil world*" and he cannot escape death. He is thus a slave to this condition of things. Christ Jesus gave His humanity, His life as a man, as an adequate or equivalent price, and by that act acquired the right of possession of all men for Himself. This leaves untouched other aspects of the Atonement which are defined by other sets of Scriptural teaching, the manner, for example, in which Jesus bears the sins of the world, takes them upon Himself, so to speak, relieving men of their

consequences, and the manner in which the death of Jesus becomes an offset to the sin of Adam so that all who die in Adam are made alive in Christ. These have to be considered on their own merits. Suffice now to say that the intrinsic value of this purchase must be connected in some vital way with the response of the slave who is being given his freedom. "*The blood of Christ*" says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews "*who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, shall purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God*". Somewhere in that statement lies buried the truest understanding of the doctrine of the Atonement.

Specially For Young Christians

THE BOY WHO REMEMBERED HIS LUNCH

A talk given by the Editor to a Church Bible Class of 12 year old "Crusaders."

This is the story of a boy who went out for the day to hear a famous preacher and found himself in front of a crowd of five thousand people. It all goes to show how the most unexpected things can happen and when we have gone out to see or do something in which the Lord Jesus Christ is concerned then the unexpected thing can be a very wonderful thing also. This boy had heard that Jesus was declaring the good tidings of the Kingdom of God up in the hills outside the town, and healing sick people, and that thousands of people were flocking out of town to see and hear Him; and he decided he would go too and listen to Jesus. He knew it would be an all-day affair and there were no shops or places to get food away in the hills, and so he took his lunch with him. And up the road he went, out of the town and past all the houses, through the vegetable gardens where the townsmen grew their daily food, until he came to a stretch of grass where were crowds of people gathered together to listen to Jesus.

Right up at the front he could see Jesus with his twelve disciples, moving about as he healed first one and then another sick or crippled man or woman, stopping at times to talk to the people looking on, telling them of the need to repent of their sins because sin is a greater evil even than being sick or crippled, and he wanted to heal them of sin as well as of sickness. Now we do not know what the boy's name was because the Bible does not tell us,

so we will call him John; that is a good Bible name and this boy's name is as likely to have been John as anything else.

Well then, John got amongst the crowd and very speedily, as boys do, he pushed to the front where Jesus was, so that he could see and hear all that was going on. We may be sure that he listened very intently to all that Jesus was saying about being honest and straightforward and living a life of helpfulness to other people, and although there must have been many things in what Jesus said that he could not fully understand, seeing that he was only a boy after all, yet he was thrilled to hear of the coming time when the Kingdom of God would come to earth and all men would love and do good to their neighbours instead of doing them harm as they do now. And when some men brought a cripple to Jesus, and Jesus healed the cripple so that he went away leaping into the air and praising God, well, John's eyes nearly popped out of his head with astonishment and excitement, so that he quite forgot to eat his lunch and never even noticed that he was getting hungry.

Now that is where John really came into the picture, because it was getting on well into the afternoon and Jesus' disciples thought it was time to have something to eat themselves and then they realised that they had nothing with them. So they asked Jesus if they should tell all the people to go home

and get their meal because it would soon be sunset and dark. "Oh no" said Jesus "you give them something to eat where they are". "But how can we" answered the disciples. "We haven't got anything here, and if we had a hundred pounds to spend it wouldn't buy enough bread for this great crowd of people". Jesus looked at them in his usual calm way and said "Well, what have you got?" at the very moment John, realising at last he was hungry, was getting his lunch out of his little bag. One of the disciples—Andrew it was—looking around rather helplessly, saw him do it and came over to see what he had got. John showed him—five little flat barley cakes and two small roasted fishes. Andrew went back to Jesus rather disconsolately and said "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?"

John held his precious loaves tightly, fearing they were going to be taken away from him, but just then a wonderful thing happened. Jesus looked up and smiled at him, smiled so sweetly and understandingly that suddenly John felt he would do anything for Jesus, even to going without his lunch if need be, and straight away he went up and put his precious lunch bag on the ground in front of Jesus.

"Tell everybody to sit down" commanded Jesus, and off went the disciples to see about it. Then something happened which John never forgot to his dying day. Jesus took the little barley cakes out of John's bag and gave thanks to God for the good food, and then began breaking them in half, and dividing the two fishes in half, and putting the pieces on the grass before him; but as fast as he did so he still seemed to have them in his hands unbroken. Before long there was a great pile of broken cakes and fish and John was kept as busy as he knew how, piling up more of them as fast as Jesus was breaking them. He was so busy that he hardly had time to feel astonished, although he had never seen anything like it before. As for the disciples, when they came back from telling everybody to sit down they just couldn't make it out at all; and then Jesus quietly told them to start taking the food to all the people on the grass waiting for it.

Now the important thing about this story is that if John had not been practical enough to think of his lunch when setting out in the morning nothing of this would have happened. All the older people went out to see and hear Jesus without thinking of the fact that

before the day was out they would need food. John went out just as eager to see and hear Jesus but he remembered and made provision for his earthly needs as well. And because of that he became the only one in that great crowd of five thousand people whom Jesus could use for his miracle of making food for all out of five loaves and two small fishes.

In our daily lives we need to be practical while we serve the Lord Jesus and listen to him. We want to remember the needs of those around us and be ready to have the Lord use us in helping other people as well as spend our time praising him or reading about Him. We need to put into practice the things we learn from Jesus so that, as the Scripture puts it, men may take notice that we have been with Jesus and learned of Him. We should not get our heads so much in the clouds that we fail to keep our feet on the earth. That does not mean that we should forget the things of God and spend all our time looking after our earthly needs. The Scripture does say that we should not spend all our time looking after our food and clothes and homes; rather we are to seek the Kingdom of God chiefly and these other things will come in their proper place. But we must give them their right amount of attention and the Lord will do the rest. John did not busy himself trying to bring enough food for all the people. He just brought enough for himself and the Lord took it and made it enough for five thousand.

A lady in a Northern town received a prize of 10/6 for this very modern interpretation of the Christian faith, in the attempt to justify the Sunday opening of cinemas.

"Our Lord meant us to be happy and gave us the Ten Commandments as a guide to our dealings with each other, with a free will to keep them or not as we choose."

* * *

What is faith? Not an opinion, neither any number of opinions put together, be they ever so true. It is the vision of the soul, the power by which spiritual things are apprehended, just as material things are ascertained by the physical senses. It is the eye of the soul whereby the believer sees Him Who is invisible. It is a perpetual revelation . . . passing directly from God into the believer's soul.

(John Wesley)

THREE STORIES OF SALVATION

I. The Good Shepherd

"Never man spake like this man" was the verdict of the Temple guard upon Jesus of Nazareth, when they returned to the Jewish authorities without having arrested Him. (John 7. 46). The same testimony is given by Luke and is recorded of those who heard the Lord preach in the synagogue at Nazareth; "All bare him witness and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth". (Luke 4. 22). When we read over again the lovely illustrations which he used for His preaching we too are thrilled by the simple stories which so powerfully convey deep truths. They must have contrasted strongly against the current trend of First Century teaching by the Jewish leaders. Their chief concern was for superficial religion and interpretations of Mosaic Law which the ordinary folk could not understand. Their sermons were directed toward those who had already made some confession of religious faith and who were outwardly righteous. Jesus had a message of hope and comfort for the outcasts and social misfits, spoken in language which all could understand and apply to their own lives. Such was the parable of the "Lost Sheep". A mixed audience heard him convey a lesson of salvation in a setting which was familiar to them all.

The shepherd has been out all day leading his flock and now returns to the fold for the night. As the sheep file past, the shepherd counts them one by one, noting perhaps their condition and needs. At last they have all slipped beneath his searching gaze but one is discovered to be missing. Normally, his day's work would be almost complete and he, along with his flock, could settle down for rest and repose. But within the shepherd's breast there surges a compassion for the poor, lonely sheep, which has been left out on the cold, cheerless hillside. Without thought of his own comfort or safety, the master of the flock quickly turns towards the path along which he has so recently come. His thoughts are centred on that bleating sheep, away from the protection and shelter of its home. It would be an easy prey for wild beasts and readily succumb to inclement weather.

The account in Luke 15. 4-7 includes these words "until he find it". This is not the whim of an hireling or the curiosity of a stranger, but the love of a tender heart which spares no effort to reclaim that which has been lost.

No obstacle or personal injury was to be allowed to thwart the shepherd's effort. It might mean a long walk or a difficult climb, perhaps beset by hindrances and frustration, but these would only serve to spur the shepherd on "until he find it".

When at last the wayward sheep is found the shepherd places it on his shoulders for the triumphant return homeward. There is an absence of scolding or grumbling in this shepherd's voice, only pleasure and rejoicing. With the strength of a father and the tenderness of a mother the precious burden is borne towards the security and provision of the fold. Then the shepherd calls together his friends and neighbours that they may join with him in his happiness.

Jesus had drawn a picture of himself. Before coming to earth, He had enjoyed ceaseless fellowship in heaven with His Father. He had executed His Father's purpose in the creation of the Universe. His life before coming to earth had been one of unparalleled bliss, untouched by sin and its consequent misery. He willingly forsook it all that He might recover that which had been lost in men's rebellion against God. He saw not only the broken law against God's inflexible justice but the tragedy of man's condition. He saw that little children were born in sin and shapen in iniquity, with no hope of rescue from their plight. He saw too that the best intentioned leaders among men, however high their moral standards, and however brilliant their intellects, found it impossible to save the human race from its plight. Men were like the helpless little sheep out on the mountain-side. Leaving the splendour and peace of his heavenly abode, the beloved Son of God came to make His home on earth. He grew up among sinful men and women, and lived in most difficult circumstances in order that he might fully understand the creation which he came to restore to harmony and peace with God. He became in the fullest sense of the word, the Good Shepherd.

Reiterated in every Gospel story is the great compassionate love which inspired his preaching and work among men. Unlike any other "saviour of the world", Jesus' sole purpose was to restore that which had been lost. There was no self gratification nor desire for the esteem of men. Because of this he was able to speak freely to all types of people

irrespective of their social background. Differences of education and nationality are human barriers which could not hinder his message. His penetrating sermons contained food for thought valuable to professor and peasant alike. His life was devoted to the work of delivering men from their sins and showing them the way back to God. His days were spent in labouring among and preaching to ordinary folk of city and village. His nights were spent alone on the mountain top with his Father, receiving strength and guidance for his ministry of reconciliation. Besides all this, he spared time to instruct his little band of followers in His work, so that when he departed from their sight he could still reach men through them.

How different was his manner from any other leader among men. The religious leaders were too proud to hold out the hand of friendship to any except their own self-righteous set. The people of Israel were accustomed rather to the rough handling of Roman soldiers and to the unjust behaviour of the wealthy classes. As for the misfits in society such as the common thief or national traitor like the tax-collector, there was no one to give them a helping hand out of their unhappy condition. Yet Jesus came looking for people like that and was prepared to give His life in order to restore them to an upright and happy life. As we watch Him at work through the eyes of the evangelists, we see a man toiling to recover broken bodies and labouring to heal broken hearts. He was repeatedly touched by the pathetic sights of suffering and frustration which He saw. On one occasion Matthew tells us "*he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd*". (Matt. 9. 36). His words of tenderness and peace echo down the centuries to all humanity; "*Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls*". (Matt. 11, 28, 29).

What lesson has this parable for us apart from its message of salvation? Perhaps the Good Shepherd sought us out and brought us to his fold many years ago, and today we have no need of being found again. We have rejoiced in the reality of the "Shepherd Psalm" and have experienced the wonderful care of our Saviour in supplying our every need. When we are wayward he restores our soul, and when we pass through trials and suffering he "anoints our heads with oil". Since He found us we have learned to love the shep-

herd very much. We know the touch of his gentle hand and recognise the tone in his sympathetic voice. But are we to enjoy this protection and provision without it stirring our souls and inspiring us to follow the Shepherd's noble example

The work which Jesus commenced by the shores of Galilee and in the thoroughfares of Jerusalem did not end when the Good Shepherd gave his life for the sheep. He has imparted His resurrection power to His Church whereby they have continued in His purpose to reconcile all men unto God. Immediately following the baptism of the spirit at Pentecost the apostles began to obey the Master's command "*Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature*". (Mark 16. 15). Peter, who led the Early Church in the first flush of obedience and power, wrote in later years, "*for even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps . . . for ye were as sheep going astray but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls*". (1 Peter 2. 21-25).

If in fact we are following in His steps we shall be doing the same work which He did while on earth. He is still the good shepherd and He operates today through those of His followers who have been in close fellowship with Him. We who fully surrender our lives to Jesus become His instruments of blessing others by reaching out to those who are lost. Twentieth century life with all its inventions and refinements has not changed human nature. Adoration at the shrine of Science and Progress has not uprooted sin from the hearts of men. Only Jesus can do that, and He does do it through us, just so far as we yield our hands and our feet, our lips and our pens to His command.

Each day we rub shoulders with some who so far have not responded to the call of the Good Shepherd. Do they hear the voice of the Saviour as we speak to them? Does our behaviour towards our colleagues or neighbours denote the gentleness and care of a tender shepherd? Or does our biting tongue and rough handling towards other folk indicate that we are no more than a hireling? Sheep are timid creatures and are easily repulsed, yet when in need and danger they are readily assured by the skill of the shepherd. We have in the Word of God that food and drink, and that comfort and balm, which the world needs today. It is our privilege and our duty to see that we are not selfish with God's gifts but distribute them gladly according to His Word.

If we fail to do so, we shall not be gaining the experience required by those who will be associated in the work of reconciling all men to God in the age to come.

The life of the Good Shepherd was not given in vain. Jesus died in order that the lost everywhere, including those in their graves, might hear his voice and be brought home to the fold. It is the privilege of those who give themselves in complete self-surrender to Christ now, to be fitted for the work of reconciling and rehabilitating all men to the finished creation as God intended this earth to be. But association with Jesus in that work can only become a reality if our very natures are transformed by the renewing of our mind into the likeness of our Saviour. We must have His compassion and patience; our hands and voice must become gentle like His, in order that even the most wayward sheep shall

have fullest opportunity to be brought back into harmony with the Creator and His creation.

The work of that time when the violent shall no more prosper and all shall learn the way of peace, is described most beautifully by Isaiah in chapter 40, vv. 10, 11. The feeding of the flock, the gathering of the lambs, and the leading of those with young, is the work of shepherds who by reason of their uprightness and sweetness of character have gained the confidence of the sheep who depend upon them. They are principles by which the Kingdom of God upon earth is to be established and they are the qualities to be found in all who will have the oversight of that Kingdom. May those same principles dominate our lives now, so shaping our characters for God's service in this world and the world that is to come.

THE HOLY CITY

A glance at Rev. 22

The vision of the new Jerusalem, the account of which concludes the Book of Revelation and the Bible, is a symbolic representation of the final phase, the consummation, of the Divine Plan. John saw a wonderful city descending out of the heavens to settle everlastingly upon the new earth created by God to take the place of that old earth which had passed away. This city was to become the dwelling-place of God, where He would dwell with men, and into it there should nothing defiling ever enter; only those that were accounted worthy of everlasting life. From the city there flowed a "River of Life", having "Trees of Life" growing upon its banks, and from this water and food of life the sick nations of the world were to derive sustenance and healing. The vision closes with a gracious invitation to all men, that they come and partake of the water of life freely.

This is not a vision of Heaven, as so many have supposed. Its essential basis is the coming of Divine government to earth and the presence of God to be with men. It foreshadows the restoration of Edenic conditions upon earth, for the connection of this River and these Trees of Life with the Genesis story is too plain to be ignored. It pictures the time when this rebellious earth has become fully reconciled to God and, to use Paul's words in Rom. 8. 21 "The creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God".

The Church of Christ has already (in the 20th chapter) been exalted to Heaven and eternal association with Christ the Lord; the 21st and 22nd chapters tell of the corresponding completion of the Divine Plan for the earth, a completion which is to be effected during the Millennial Age.

John's introductory synopsis of the vision (chap. 21. 1-8) records the words he heard from heaven "*Behold the tabernacle (dwelling place) of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and 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*". It is sometimes suggested that this chapter records two separate descents of the Holy City to earth; this is not likely. It is more probable that John prefaced his account of the actual vision with a short summary and then in verse 9 addressed himself to the vision in detail.

The city as it appeared to John was square in outline, surrounded by a high wall of gleaming green jasper, the golden buildings set in terraces, one above another so that at the centre its height appeared to be as great as the width. This square form symbolised the justice and righteousness of the new Divine government, and its intimate connection with the heavenly powers was shown by its tower-

ing up to the skies. The wall rested upon twelve foundations bearing the names of the apostles, and at each of the twelve lofty gateways there was posted a guardian angel. The number twelve had particular significance to the ancients, for they pictured the sun as issuing forth from twelve successive portals in the heavens in turn, as month succeeded month, and this, with the division of the day into twelve hours, invested the number with the idea of earthly or material completeness and universality. Hence the twelve gateways, facing three each to north, south, east and west, symbolised the universal invitation to all peoples of earth to enter the Holy City; "Whosoever will, let him come" (Rev. 22. 17). "In this mountain will the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things." (Isa. 25. 6). The twelve foundations bearing the names of the Apostles stood for the universal appeal of the Gospel upon which the City is built. The height of the wall, one hundred and forty-four cubits, indicated the full comprehensive nature of the Kingdom, that it will contain all of God's earthly perfected creation; nothing will be left outside.

The first function of the Holy City is to cleanse the nations. God is pictured as dwelling in the centre of the City, seated upon His Throne, the Son beside Him, for the purpose of "wiping away all tears" from the eyes of men (Rev. 21. 4 and 22. 3-5), and bringing healing to all. This work is denoted by the spectacle of a River of Life, seen by John to proceed from the Throne and issue forth from the city to flow through the country outside. The A.V. verse division of chap. 22. 1-2 is unfortunate and obscures the true sense. Rightly expressed, the passage reads "*And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the street of it (the city). And on either side of the river was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manners of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations*". The term "street" means a broad highway, and "tree of life" is a generic term referring, not to one single tree, but to the species generally. John saw this broad highway extending outward from the city and the river flowing along its centre, the sides of the river being flanked with trees of life bearing twelve varieties of fruit. This is much like the vision seen by Ezekiel when he saw the river of life issuing from the Millennial Temple and flow-

ing out to the east country, the trees of life on its banks also being for food and healing (Ezek. 47. 1-12). This "street" corresponds to the "Highway of Holiness" spoken of by Isaiah in his 35th chapter "And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it (overlook it or miss finding it); for he shall be with them". This "Highway of Holiness" is the symbolic road along which mankind will be invited and exhorted, during the Millennial Age, to travel, toward harmony and reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus Christ and acceptance of Him as Saviour.

"And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it." (21. 24). These are the peoples to whom are addressed the words in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats "*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*" (Matt. 25. 34). When the evangelical work of the Millennial Age has been completed and all who are capable of recovery have become reconciled to God and attained human perfection, they are depicted as being the perpetual citizens of the Holy City. Every man will be a king, for God created man lord of the earthly dominion, and all men will share in the task of administering this earthly dominion in harmony with Divine laws. Hence all are "kings" and all will bring the glory and honour of sinless manhood into it.

Here the veil is drawn. The Holy Scriptures do not take us beyond the end of the Millennial Age to talk in detail of the "ages of glory to follow". Of the condition and life of the redeemed through the everlasting years they say nothing. We are shown the Plan of God for this earth at its triumphant conclusion, sin and evil doers destroyed, the Church of Christ exalted to the heavens, and all the nations fully converted to God and enjoying His munificence on the restored and perfected earth. "*Not a stain of sin mars the peace and harmony of a perfect society.*" For the further glories of revelation, of knowledge and of activity that must assuredly be the lot of all the redeemed we must wait, until the time shall come; but we can wait in full assurance that as Isaiah predicted (Isa. 32. 17) "*the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever*".

CAUGHT UP

A word study on a
Second Advent theme

"We which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4. 17).

The words "caught up" occupy a central position in this passage, and because of their place in Second Advent doctrine they seem to warrant more than usually close consideration. Throughout the Age Christians have expected and looked for the promised coming of the Lord to take them to be with Him, and since for the major part of that time Heaven was held to be a place "above the bright blue sky" as the old hymn has it, "caught up" was an immediately appealing word and very expressive of the process of resurrection to glory as normally visualised.

The word here rendered "caught up" (*harpazo*) appears about sixteen times in the New Testament and also in the Septuagint and Apocrypha; it is a common Greek word and is used throughout classical Greek literature. Its basic meaning as defined by Thayer is to seize, to snatch away, to carry off by force, to claim for one's self. The idea of unexpectedness or suddenness is inherent. It does not of itself contain the idea of direction, this has to be determined by the subject to which it refers, and in fact the expression "to be snatched away" is probably a more accurate equivalent than "to be caught up". Several translators (Rotherham, Young, Diaglott, Way) do render it "caught away" instead of "caught up" in this particular text.

The usage of the word is best shown by classifying the instances in which it appears. From this it seems clear that a sudden or forcible removal or carrying away is intended. Thus (with the A.V. rendering of "*harpazo*" in italics):—

- John 10. 12 "The wolf *catcheth* them"
 Matt. 13. 19 "The wicked one *catcheth away* that which was sown"
 Gen. 37. 33 (LXX) "A wild beast has *carried off* Joseph"
 Jud. 21. 21 (LXX) "*Catch* you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh"
 John 10. 28 "No man is able to *pluck* them out of my Father's hand"
 Jude 23 "Some save with fear, *pulling* them out of the fire"
 2 Sam. 23. 21 (LXX) "Benaiah *plucked* the spear out of the Egyptian's hand"
 Matt. 11. 12 "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent *take it by*

force"

- John 6. 15 "Jesus perceived that they . . . would *take him by force*, to make him a king"
 Acts 23. 10 "The chief captain commanded the soldiers . . . to *take him by force* from among them"
 Luke 8. 29 "For oftimes it (the unclean spirit) had *caught him*"
 Acts 6. 12 "They came upon him and *caught him*"
 Acts 19. 29 "And having *caught* Gaius and Aristarchus they rushed into the theatre"
 Acts 27. 15 "There arose a tempestuous wind, and when the ship was *caught*, we let her drive"
 Ezek. 22. 25 (LXX) "A roaring lion *ravens* the prey"
 Matt. 7. 15 "Inwardly they are *ravens* wolves"
 Luke 18. 11 "I am . . . not as other men are, *extortioners*"
 1 Cor. 6. 10 "Neither revilers, nor *extortioners*, shall inherit the kingdom of God".

These instances illustrate the customary usage of the word. In all cases the idea of a forcible seizure and taking away is contained; the subject of the seizure has no power to resist. In most of them there is no limitation of time involved; the seizure is unexpected and sudden but the duration of the process is dependent upon the nature of the case. In Jud. 21. 21, for example, where the men of Benjamin hid themselves in the vineyards in order to capture wives for themselves of the unsuspecting girls of Shiloh the operation was necessarily swift, all over in a minute. In John 6. 15 the proposed taking of Jesus by force to make Him a king would have been a more lengthy process. The use of the word for "extortioners" in Luke 18. 11 implies a duration lasting the lifetime of the extortioner, or at least so long as he practised his oppression. As a rule, however, the word does seem to imply that once the action of snatching away has been performed, the process is completed.

On this basis four more references have to do with subjects closely akin to the occurrence in the text under discussion. In Acts 8. 39, after Philip the evangelist, journeying near Gaza, had baptised the Ethiopian eunuch, "the Spirit of the Lord *caught away*

Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more . . . but Philip was found at Azotus". Read literally, this implies that Philip disappeared from the eunuch's sight and presence and was instantaneously transferred to a place twenty miles away. There is a marked similarity between this incident, the Old Testament story of the translation of Elijah, and the reference in Hebrews to the translation of Enoch. Each is depicted as having been taken away by the power of the Holy Spirit of God, and the observers saw them no more. A symbolic reference in Rev. 12. 5 tells of the ascent to heaven of the "man-child"; "her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne". The explanation of this allusion belongs to the realm of interpretation but although the narrative in Rev. 12 is a symbolic picture and not to be understood literally the essence of it is that the "man-child" went "up" to "heaven"; "caught up" then becomes the logically correct rendering of the word. The remaining two instances occur in St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians where he describes the occasion on which, whether in the body or out of the body he knew not, he was "caught up" into Paradise, the third heaven, and heard "unutterable things which it is not possible for a man to relate" (2 Cor. 12. 2-4). Now this passage is the closest parallel we have to the words of 1 Thess. 4. 17; one caught away into heaven, probably in vision, but hearing and seeing heavenly things. The impression left upon the Apostle's mind was obviously that of an instantaneous change from the scenes of this earth to those of heaven, and the question of locomotion, of "going there", a secondary consideration. It might well be that this experience determined the words he employed later on when in 1 Cor. 15 he described the transition of believers from earthly to heavenly life as a "change—"in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye". His letter to the Thessalonians was written some seven or eight years after his "catching away" into the "third heaven" so that here again his use of "harpazo" might well have been chosen with that memory in mind.

The conclusion to be drawn, then, is that the Scriptural usage of the word "harpazo" does not necessarily demand an upward ascent of the subject, in this case the living believer, into the air and clouds. What it does demand in Thessalonians is an abrupt and instantaneous transfer from human to spiritual, from terrestrial to celestial, from corruptible to incorruptible, from mortal to

immortal. The believer who at one moment is upon the earth in full possession of his five terrestrial senses suddenly finds himself in another world, the celestial, "clothed upon" with his celestial body, his "house from heaven", of 2 Cor. 5. 1-4, in possession of new senses adapted to that world, his old terrestrial body having been left behind to mingle its constituent atoms with the atoms of the earth from which it was originally derived—"dust to dust". In the biological sense that is death, the death of the human, even although because the "change" is instantaneous there is no consciousness of an interruption of life.

This is the "First Resurrection". The Apostle John in 1 John 3. 2 tells us that "we know not what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is". That statement fixes the place of meeting and recognition as in the celestial sphere—for never whilst in the flesh can we see Jesus "as he is", neither whilst in the flesh can it ever be said that "we shall be like him". This is an important element in the understanding of this subject; there can be no question of the human body "ascending" into heaven located somewhere in interstellar space and reached by a process of travelling outwards from earth, for nothing of the terrestrial can find any place in the celestial. The human frame has served its purpose for the believer's sojourn on this earth; it is discarded and left behind at the First Resurrection when, to use the Psalmist's words in Psa. 17. 15, he awakes "with thy likeness". With a scope of sense-perception and range of powers far transcending anything we have known on earth or has ever been associated with human nature, his life is finding expression through a new and essentially different body.

The A.V. translators were logical enough, in their day, to translate "harpazo" "caught up" in 1 Thess. 4. 17. Whatever our understanding of the nature of the spiritual world we naturally and instinctively think of it as "up there". Because in this our day we have a much clearer perception of the difference between human and spiritual natures, between the terrestrial and celestial orders of existence, it is well if we remember that what St. Paul was describing to the Thessalonians in language they could be expected to understand, and within the scope of their own range of knowledge, was the "change" that must come when, at last, we enter into the experience of the First Resurrection.

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 10 I John 3.1

The third chapter of John's first epistle opens up a new subject. It has already been observed that the first two chapters are complete in themselves and may, for all that we know, have originally constituted a separate letter. The end of the second chapter concludes one line of argument quite definitely and the beginning of the third as clearly commences an entirely fresh line of thought. The theme of the first two chapters is constancy—abiding in God, in Christ, in the light, in the Truth. The theme of the remaining three chapters of the epistle is love—God's love for us, our love for God, for Christ, for each other, for the Truth. John wants us to know that not only is Christian constancy, "abiding in Him", necessary, if we are to attain the "prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus", but also the supreme quality of love, love in all its aspects and its powers. Just as in the first two chapters he tells us that it is little use a man claiming to be walking in the light when there is darkness in his own heart and mind, so now he tells us that we sadly deceive ourselves in claiming to love God if we have not love for our brother. And the love that we have for our brethren must be of the same quality as the love that God has for us. That is a sobering thought. No mere feeling of good fellowship, this: no tacit acceptance and toleration of our brethren without any deeper or more personal feeling. Those whom we recognise as fellow members in the Body of Christ must needs be of as great concern to us as we ourselves are to God.

But before coming to that heart-searching thought John seeks to establish the foundation of our fellowship together and shows that our whole acceptance before God is based upon love: not, at first, our love for Him, but His for us. "*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.*" (ch. 3. vs. 1). In that simple sentence of twenty words John preaches a most eloquent discourse enshrining the whole truth of our acceptance with God. It is of His love, a love greater than man has ever known or can ever conceive in relation to any other thing, and its outcome is that we, weak, puny things of earth, are become sons of God, offspring of the Most High, having the right of entry to His presence as children have the privilege of access

to their natural fathers. When one compares the insignificance of mortals, inhabiting this grain of matter floating on its way through the vast recesses of space, with the majesty and magnificence of the One Who is King of kings and Lord of lords, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see, the words of John seem all too inadequate to express the feeling which he has at heart. "Behold what manner of love" that has raised us to so lofty a position of honour and privilege in His sight.

What love is this? We know that the love of God extends throughout all His creation. None of His erring creatures are debarred from a share in the redeeming power of that love if they will. The most famous text in all the Bible tells us that God so *loved* the world, that He gave His only Son for its redemption. The text is so well-known, and so familiar, that we tend to lose sight of its significance. We think of the gift and to some extent fail to realise the depth of the love that inspired the gift. We reflect upon the love of Jesus Christ Who came to seek and to save that which was lost and we measurably overlook the love of the Father which inspired that coming. Of course both those manifestations of love are really one and the same love, for this is only one of the aspects in which "I and my Father are one" (Jno. 10. 30). And this oneness which subsists between the Father and the Son demands that we reject completely and for ever the old theological idea that Jesus waits to be merciful to the sinner whilst God demands only judgment upon the sinner. The old mediæval paintings that depicted Christ protecting the fallen world from the vengeance of its angry God were little short of blasphemous; their creators can only escape that charge on the plea of ignorance. We in our day have no such excuse and we must realise that the entire Plan of Salvation is permeated through and through with the love of God, manifested in Christ Jesus our Lord. God is just; there can be no doubt about that, and Jesus is just also, for He is one with God, but God is also the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus, and Jesus Himself has said "*he that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out*" (Jno. 6. 37). These sublime words before us could never have been coined by John if he had believed, as many ill-instructed dis-

principles in later days have believed, that Jesus' death on the Cross was a blood-sacrifice offered to God in order to appease His wrath with man. That view is occasionally met with even to-day and it is rank blasphemy. The wrath of God which is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness cannot be appeased by anything short of the elimination of the sin that has provoked the wrath, and that wrath is directed against the sin and not the sinner. Hence the saying that is familiar to some of us "*God hates the sin but loves the sinner*". Those eight words at any rate express sound doctrine and true theology. When God the Father loved the sinful race of men, Jesus loved them too and came to save them; when Jesus the Son suffered as He must suffer, in the course of that act of redemption, God the Father suffered too. It could not possibly be otherwise and still be true that "I and my Father are one".

It is this love of God that is the guarantee of an opportunity for all men in the coming Age. He made men for life and not for death, and even although death must ever remain the penalty on wilful and irrecoverable sinners it is going to be a hard thing for those same sinners to steel themselves against all the persuasive influences God will bring to bear upon them during the Millennial Age. It is sometimes urged, as a reproach, that the gospel of the Millennium is a gospel of a second chance, and we do not need to apologise for the fact nor attempt to whittle it down by arguing that under present conditions of sin, no man really has had a fair "first" chance. The Prodigal Son in the parable had a second chance and the story ended happily. There are many Biblical characters whose histories show that they had a second chance to recover from past failures and demonstrate their loyalty to God. "*How oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him*" asked Peter "*till seven times?*" How positively and forcefully came the answer of Jesus to him "*Nay; until seventy times seven*" (Matt. 18. 21-22). Jesus knew Himself to be fully in tune with the Father when He laid down that principle. Not until the deliberate sinner has rejected every incentive to righteousness the Heavenly Father can possibly put before him will Divine love return to itself and leave the sinner to the inevitable result of his wilful sin. Even that will be the final proof of love; the love that withdraws this gift of life, that the recipient neither desires nor can use aright, granting him what is really a blessing to him, the only alternative to continued life in an

environment which he resents and into which he will not fit.

God's great love for man, then, is shown in four main aspects.

The first is His provision for man in creation. The earth and all it contains is so admirably fitted for the use and enjoyment and continued life of perfect humankind that we cannot but see here evidence of God's great love. Very soon after the beginning, we read of the first man to work and make articles in copper and iron; but it was God who stored the copper and iron ore in the heart of the earth, vast ages before Eden, for man to find in due time and convert to his use. We obtain our light and heat and power in this modern age very largely from coal; it was God Who caused to grow those rich forests of the Carboniferous Era, long ago, that they might eventually provide the black mineral that is so essential to our needs to-day. Upon the earth, below the sea, in the sea, in the air, everywhere we look, we can see evidence of God's love for man in the preparations that He made for man's well-being before ever man was.

Secondly, God's love is shown in His forbearance with man's sin. It is idle to pretend that the "high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity" looks down with indifference upon the wickedness and cruelty of man. Surely it is only His infinite Wisdom—and His great Love—that restrains Him from doing what the prophet Isaiah upon one occasion besought Him to do, rend the heavens and come down in swift judgment. True, from time to time He has intervened in judgment—Eden, the Flood, the Exodus; many are the instances of such judgments—but always they have been part of His calculated Plan and never has Divine judgment made an utter end. It has always left the way clear for a fresh start. That is a striking evidence of God's love for this sinful race.

Thirdly, God's love is shown in His plans for man's future. So very few know of these; we who hold this precious knowledge ought to esteem very highly the privilege that is ours. "*As truly as I live, saith God, the whole earth shall be full of my glory.*" "*The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.*" "*And my people shall dwell in a quiet habitation.*" "*The tabernacle of God is with men and he will dwell with them.*" All these and many more are promises yet to be fulfilled and promises that are sure of fulfilment. They are all evidences of God's love for man

and His determination that mankind shall yet attain to the condition of perfection that He has all the time intended.

Fourthly, God's love is shown in His contentment with man in the Ages of glory that are to follow the ending of the Millennial Age. The very phraseology of Scripture breathes the spirit of expectancy and anticipation which God manifests as He looks forward to that glad day that sees the consummation of His Plan upon earth. "*And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord*" (Isa. 66. 23). It is impossible not to sense the spirit of satisfaction with the completed work that pervades those words. "*There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor sighing, for the former things are passed away. And he that sitteth on the Throne saith, Behold, I make all things new*" (Rev. 21. 4-5). Just as Jesus shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied (Isa. 53. 11) so will the Heavenly Father behold all that He has made, and say once again, as He did in the day of Adam's creation, "*Behold, it is very good!*" In that eternal contentment with all that He has done with man and made of man in this earth we have a grand manifestation of so "great manner of love" bestowed by Him upon His earthly creation.

Then if this must be so with mankind upon earth, how great must be the love our Father cherishes for His spiritual family, the Church! The human race will spend eternity *before* the Throne, content in the radiance of His presence, but those who have been faithful to their covenant of consecration with Him in this Age are to spend eternity *in* the Throne, members of the family of heaven, having always direct access to the God and Father of us all. As members of the "Bride" of Christ, of the glorious celestial company that is to be associated with the Son in all that hereafter He is to do, there is surely a very intense sense in which the love of God is their portion. Although we cannot admit for one moment that God has "favourites", in the sense in which the world understands and uses that term, yet just as on earth there are family affections and loves that mean so much more than the affections of the wider circle, because of closer affinities and interests and sympathies, so it must be with the Most High and those whose hearts are given exclusively and wholly to Him. In the experiences of an ordinary life, those with whom we have gone through the most trying or dangerous exper-

iences, those with whom we have laboured the most intensely for the attainment of some cherished ideal, are the ones for whom we normally have love of a depth and character that we do not find in us to extend to others. It is a love that has found its root and its sustenance in those common experiences and trials and strivings, and without them it could never have been. So with the love of God to His sons; without our coming to Him and our wholehearted consecration of ourselves to His service and our sincere endeavours to be conformed to His image, the image of His Son, He could never enter with us into this experience of Divine love of such degree. We Christians have believed in God and witnessed for God and sacrificed for God when all has seemed to be against Him; we have held to our faith, enduring "as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11. 27); is it not to be expected therefore that there should be some reflection of all those things in the love wherewith the Father loves us?

This "what manner of love" that the Father has bestowed upon us therefore has two aspects. It is first of all of His great and abiding love for mankind that the opportunity of becoming the sons of God is offered to us. It is of His love for all mankind that He has provided that some may become sons of God in this Age, that they may be the means of reconciling to God all who will, in the next Age, and so complete the great purpose which was inspired by and is the embodiment of God's love. It is of that love that provision was made in Jesus that "whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jno. 3. 16), that in consequence we whose hearts are turned towards God may come to Him now in confidence, "*having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus*" (Heb. 10. 19) and so come into this hallowed condition of sonship. And having thus entered, we shall experience, as the years pass by, more and more of that other aspect of God's love that is strengthened and deepened by our lives' conduct before Him and our devotion to Him. When the Apostle speaks of our being presented before the presence of the Father with exceeding joy he is using no empty phrase; there will be joy, exceeding joy, on both sides. "The Father himself loveth you" said Jesus, and the Father Who so loveth will most surely manifest "exceeding joy" when those who have loved Him supremely are at length conducted into His presence.

(To be continued)

“AND THE PRISONERS HEARD THEM”

*An incident in the
life of St. Paul*

What an artlessly simple statement Luke makes in these few words, and yet how full of significance. Of course, all the prisoners would know what had happened earlier in the day, when the two special prisoners in the inner ward had been brought into custody. Every one of them would know that when the Roman lictors had done their work the two prisoners' backs would be a complete mass of bleeding wounds and discoloured bruises. And if any articulate sounds did pass the sufferers' lips, they would expect only groans and curses. Most men the world over, when every moment caused pain, would give vent to their resentment with such groans, even if it did not constrain them to call down imprecations of woe upon their torturers. And then, added to the physical injuries, and swollen sores, they were thrust into the stocks, so that little or no movement of the extremities was possible to them.

Thus, cramp and rigidity of muscles would supervene, and make a bad condition worse, and if the stocks confined the upper limbs as well as the legs—even if not also the neck—unnatural posture would make the body ache from head to toe, without any slightest means of alleviating the distress. One can well imagine them to be in pain within and without, and from end to end of their tortured frame. Even if (as seems probable from the text), only their feet were fast, and hands and necks were somewhat free, the actual degree of free movement would be small. A special charge concerning the prisoners had been made by the magistrates, and in view of that the jailor would not be over-lenient to them, so that though only their feet were in the stocks, it is very probable their hands were in chains.

At the very best, their position was as undesirable as could well be. Added to this physical distress would be the dankness and the darkness of their cell. Scarce a breath of air and not one single ray of light would tend to lighten the damp musty odour of the cell. Such places were often vermin-infected, even if not tainted with pestilential stench. When the two prisoners' position is summarised thus, it would seem that this wicked old earth had only one penalty more severe it could inflict. Short of depriving them of life, the passions and inhumanity of man had heaped upon them an avalanche of sorrows and woes.

To the spite of foes had been added the injury of an unjust trial, against which most men would have severely chafed. Thus, to the physical distress must be added the possible sufferings of the mind.

What a conquest of mind over matter, of the spirit over the body, of faith over actual reality occurred in that inner prison cell that night! Like others of the same little band, they counted it a privilege to suffer for the Name of the Lord, for they knew that in this suffering they were “filling up the measure” of suffering allotted to the Christ of God. As every cup may be filled by adding drop to drop, so Christ's “Cup” will be filled by every spasm of anguish and suffering nobly borne for His sake. There is indeed the “filling” of a cup, as there is also the “drinking” of a cup; and in the Way of God they who drink from the one, contribute a little quota to the filling of the other.

Hence, there was no room for vain regrets or groans or maledictions in that little cell. “Paul and Silas prayed”, then, when the voice of prayer came to an end, the accents of praise to God swept through the confines of the cell, and out into the larger outer ward. “And the prisoners heard them.” What would they think of such men? Perhaps first feelings would be of annoyance if the singing had roused them from their slumbers, but soon they had reason enough to listen and hear.

The prison itself began to shake; the doors were flung widely ajar, and even their own chains fell off! What a night that was, as Heaven answered both prayer and praise! The fortitude of two stout hearts, rising up above dismal circumstances set in motion the wheels of Providence, and great things ensued.

From this episode sprang the nucleus of the Philippian Church—perhaps the dearest church of all to one of our prisoners in the stocks! Truly it was a mysterious way in which Divine Providence that night performed its wonderful work. It planted its footsteps in the quaking earth, and rode upon the repentant attitudes of men, because two valiant followers of the Lamb had risen up superior to their woeful circumstances.

What lesson can we learn from this episode?

First, let us be reminded that the God of Paul and Silas is our God too. He knew full

well, even though midnight darkness lay around, where His faithful children were confined. No darkness could hide them from His sight. In our nights of sorrow or alarm, that is a great thought to take to heart. No curtain of night can intrude and hide God's child from God's watchful eye. The darkness is as the light to Him, and cannot intercept His view of those on whom He has set His Love.

Then let us note that prayer is better than recrimination, even at the midnight hour. Paul and Silas might have talked only of their bleeding backs and aching limbs, and have spent their time wondering how long they might have to endure their lot; or they could have allowed fear to chill their hearts about future prospects.

When terror stalks the night sky or dangers multiply, it would be far more to the glory of God if the neighbours hear of our peace of heart and our trust in God, than if we moan and grumble and lament. The difference between the two sets of prisoners that night lay in this: Paul and Silas knew

the way of God, the others did not!

That knowledge was a strong controlling power which conquered human fear and fancy, and helped to transmute suffering into Christ-like fortitude. It helped the followers of the Lord to take the episode in the curriculum of the school of Christ, and to make the members of the body the servant (or slave) of the new mind. This is the fibre martyrs are made of, when it has been sublimated by fire and ordeal. And it is in the little hole-in-the-corner episodes of life where it is done—in the darkness of our prison cells.

The best commentary upon the power of God in the heart is a calm, cool deportment in face of danger, which rises from the assurance that God is our Father, and that we are His children and that we are being kept in the hollow of His hand. We may not all be able to sing praises in the dead of night, but we can all pray, and let the knowledge thus go forth that we have been with Jesus and learned of Him. Other prisoners will then also hear.

EVENTIDE

"So he bringeth them unto their desired haven"

"Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask." (Matt. 6. 8). *"Your Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."* (Matt. 6. 32). It was no light thing Jesus undertook when He began to teach His disciples dependence upon God for their needs. A little while before He had called them to leave their ordinary pursuits to follow Him. Of some of them it is said "they straightway left the nets and followed Him". (Matt. 4. 20). And again "they straightway left the boat and their father and followed him". (v. 22). Introducing them to their new life's-work Jesus took them with Him on His first evangelistic tour in Galilee, and as He spake before them in the synagogues, and wrought His works of mercy here, there, and yonder. He brought home to their minds that there was a great work to be done in Israel. People flocked together in crowds after Him from every corner of the land, bringing along with them their ailing friends and relatives—*"they brought unto Him all that were sick . . . and He healed them"*. (Matt. 4. 24).

This first tour through Galilee was an object lesson to teach them how great the task and how urgent the service to which He had

called them. Israel was expectant and hungry. Long had they been as a flock untended and unfed. And they had sickness other than that of flesh. His preaching had revived their hopes, and quickened their anticipation. Hence those crowds from Galilee and Decapolis, and Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. (v. 25).

Because of this overwhelming response from north and south, from east and west, Jesus invited His disciples aside to teach them the basic principles of Kingdom truth. "He went up into the mountain", and when He had seated Himself, His disciples gathered close around and He taught them.

How illuminating and vital were those contrasts He drew between the "old" and the "new", between what "ye have heard it said" and what "I say unto you"! And how inspiring the assertions that they were "salt" in the earth, and "light in the world"—those vast crowds that had come to His preaching! And the "salt" must season; the "light" illuminate! They were the "salt"; that crowd was the "earth"! They were the "light", that course the "world"! Needs must be that "they" be introduced into "it" if the work is

to be done.

Obviously "they" were to be different from "it" else there could be no results. That "world" could pursue its own tasks: that "earth" could seek its own ends. That crowd could sow and reap, could eat and drink: could trade and barter: could pray and give alms in open places—not so could they! Their harvest must be of "men"; their work must be winning souls: their "keep" by the gift of men. They must "sell all", and "give" to the poor—they must give love for hate and stand ready to go the "second" mile.

Renunciation of self-rights, surrender of self-interests, and devotion of self-powers were to be the keynotes of their life. Obviously so if the "salt" was to impart its seasoning; if the "light" was to transmit its beam!

How self-evident the need that Jesus should lead them right back to the Source of things, to the Father who would know all their needs, would know all their moods, would know all their experiences. Was not His the great Cause? was not His to be the "Glory"?—then surely His should be the "Care" and the "Power" and the "Providing". For indeed these humble men were separated and set apart from Israel, almost as exclusively as were its Priests and Levites, yet without the benefit of the "tithe". Apart from the very slender provision that the labourer should be worthy of his hire, no other earthly provision was made for their necessities. No wonder then they had need to be told "your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things". How well they learned that lesson of implicit trust is obvious from the records of their lives.

"Your Heavenly Father knoweth" is still a promise for our own times. Christian life has no such stringency to-day as for those early pioneers, yet this assurance is a sore need of our otherwise very strenuous days. Bedded in amid the conditions of a very different form of civilisation Christ's disciples are still sent forth as "salt" and "light". There is still the command to impart the preserving savour of the salt, and to shed abroad

the illuminating properties of the light, yet, spite of our best attempts, decay grows apace, and darkness more deeply over-spreads society. How do we feel about it from day to day? Do we despair and give up the attempt? Has the salt become savourless, and the light become dim in consequence?

Cheer up, dear soul, your Heavenly Father knoweth all about the weariness and worries of your little day! He knew long years ago what the conditions would be to the end of the Age. The great point with Him is not exactly what you have done as the "salt" and the "light", but what you would do if you could do as you would. It is the spirit of your service that counts! When therefore you have tried to be a grain of salt and failed, or tried to cast a glow of light that waned too soon, try to recall the assuring words,

*"I know my Heavenly Father knows,
How frail I am to meet my foes,
But He my soul will e'er defend,
Uphold and keep me to the end."*

Let the seeming failures of our little day send us inwards unto Him, with our confessions of what we would have done but for the foes around, and the lack of strength within. If you have tried and failed, and tried and failed again, be assured your Heavenly Father knows all about it and has put the frail attempt to your credit and treasure above. Precious thought, your Father knoweth,

*Careth for His child,
Bids you nestle closer to Him
When the storms beat wild;
Though your earthly hopes are
shattered*

*And the tear-drops fall,
Yet He is Himself your solace
Yea, our "all-in-all".
Oh, to trust Him then more fully!
Just to simply move
In the conscious calm enjoyment
Of the Father's love;
Knowing that life's chequered pathway
Leadeth to His rest;
Satisfied the way He taketh
Must be always best.*

We need not be afraid of heartiness in our songs of praise. There is a dignity about the Truth but it is not the dignity of a cold, lifeless statue. It is the dignity of a warm, vibrant, living thing, animating all with which it comes in contact and ennobling all that it touches. So when the situation calls for praise to be loud, then let the praise be loud.

It may be our portion to bear heavy burdens, to sustain heavy losses, to fight stern battles, or to keep long and lonely vigils, but even as Jesus by communion with His Father found peace in every circumstance, so, we by learning to commune more and more with our Father, through Jesus, can find peace, perfect peace in every experience.



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

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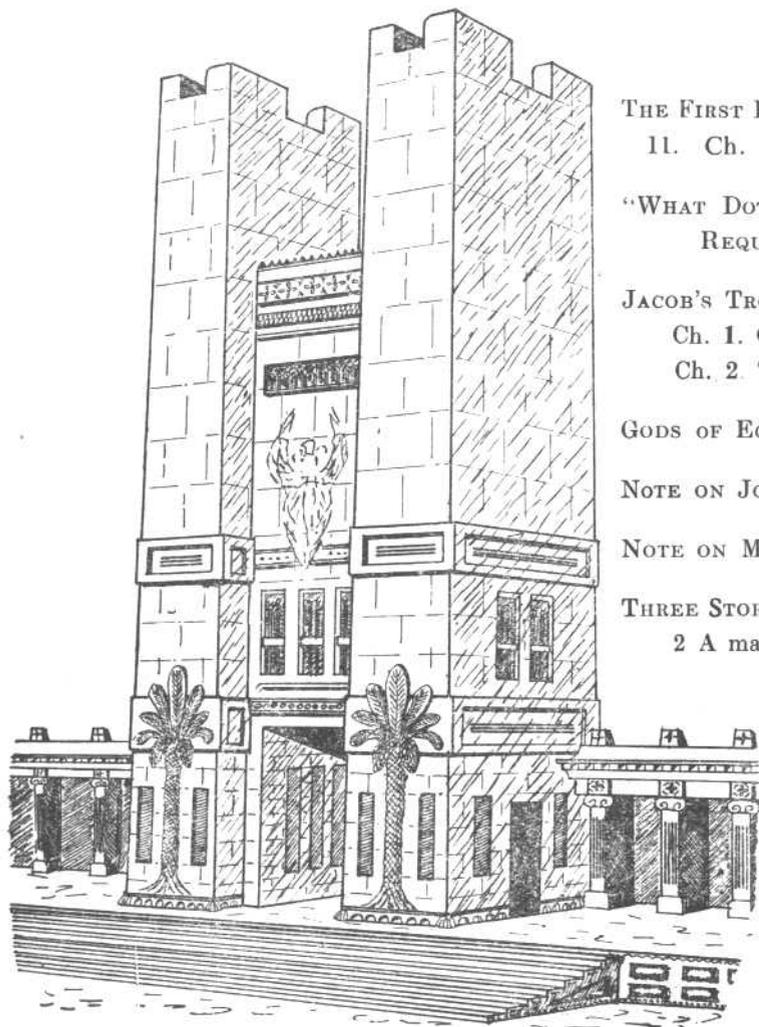
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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Recent events in the Middle East have evoked an upsurge of interest in a series entitled "Jacob's Trouble" published in the "Monthly" twenty-six years ago. Long since out of print, and in view of the interest now expressed, it has been decided to revise and reprint this series. The first instalment appears in this issue and it is planned to complete in the following two issues. The nature of the subject also demands that the presentation is not extended over too long a period of time and for this reason an unusually large proportion of these three issues will be given over to this single subject. The opening chapter, dealing as it does with the historical and geographical background to Ezek. 38/39 will be of greater interest to the student of prophecy than the general reader and we would ask the indulgence of the latter on this account. The importance of a clear understanding of this background to a valid interpretation of the passage is such that this opening chapter is really essential.

The title "Jacob's Trouble" is of course in reference to Jer. 30. 7 and is generally applied to the final trial of faith upon regathered Israel at the end of the Age, more particularly described in Ezek. 38/39 as the onslaught of "Gog and Magog" upon the Holy Land, of which latter Scriptural passage the series is an exposition.

With the prophetic study in Ezek. 38/39 commencing in this issue it may be opportune again to refer to the principles underlying serious interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies. All too often there is a manifest tendency to accept the written word as a strictly literal forecast of destined future events without any regard to the contemporary background of the writer, the limitations imposed by his day and age, or the fact that as often as not he is laying down, in symbol and metaphor, the principles of the event that is to be, leaving the generation experiencing

that event to perceive the aptness of his analogy in the current signs of the times. Symbol, poetry, metaphor, analogy, play a large part in the construction of the prophetic Scriptures and a frequently stressed fact is repeated here when it is said that the Old Testament prophets were not primarily foretellers of future events but exponents of the consequences following upon either the violation or the upholding of Divine law. Such expositions had to be framed in the language and knowledge of the prophet's own day, using symbols drawn from the everyday life with which he was acquainted. But because, in the foreknowledge of God, the inevitable consequences, at the end of the Age, of the general course of mankind throughout history is accurately foreknown, the Holy Spirit through the agency of the prophet and within the limits of his language and vision has provided us in the prophetic writings with delineations of things to come in the terms and pictures of long ago, which can be recognised by the serious student as they come upon the stage of world history. When the prophet says the Lord will turn the earth upside down he does not mean to infer that this planet is to be inverted on its axis; he does mean that the world social order is to be overturned. The sword with which the Heavenly Rider comes to smite the nations is not a material offensive weapon but the Word of God, which is capable of an equally devastating effect against evil things but in a different sphere. Ezekiel's own vision of the whole world arrayed against Israel is much more understandable when a glance at the map in this issue shows how little of the earth's surface was known to, and constituted "all the world" to, Ezekiel and his fellows, and how fully the few nations he names represented that world. It is along these lines that the study of the prophecy can be made to yield its most rewarding fruits.

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part II I John 3:1

The greatest honour that can be conferred upon any mortal being is that of being called a Son of God. We know that all life is of God, that He holds in His hands the breath of every living thing and that at the first He was the great First Cause of all that lives. In that sense all intelligent creatures are His children and He is the Universal Father. But that is not the sense in which the term is used in the Bible. A Son of God in the Biblical sense must fulfil one essential condition; he must be in harmony with God, not in a condition of alienation because of sin. Of all the millions of men and women, named and unnamed, from antediluvian days to apocalyptic times, who crowd the pages of the sacred record, only very few are dignified with the title "Son of God". The instances are so rare that they can be listed here quite quickly and quite briefly. Before we take to ourselves this honour which the New Testament tells us is ours by right, if we be Christ's, we do well to note the previous occasions in Scripture history where the title has been conferred.

Our earliest reference is that in Job 38. 7, where it is said that at the foundation of the earth the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy. The Creator Himself is speaking; no human eye was witness of the events, for this was long before man's creation. The expression is obviously a poetic one, for if this was before the appearance of man upon the earth those who are thus described as rejoicing together and shouting for joy must obviously have been citizens of the spiritual world—those righteous celestial creatures who had been brought into being by God before He proceeded to the creation of the material universe. Whether the term "morning stars" is a poetic name for the two who figure so largely in later history, our Lord before His coming to earth, and Lucifer the Adversary before his fall, may be decided by each student for himself according to the extent to which the suggestion appeals. Both these are described as "morning stars" in other and later Scriptures. That is not relevant to our present study. That the "sons of God" who "shout for joy" must have been the angels of heaven is perfectly obvious and this is right in line with our present enquiry. At that remote time in the ages which preceded this world there were angels, fully righteous

and in harmony with God, known as "Sons of God".

The next instance is at the time of man's creation. Adam awakened to life perfect and in harmony with his Creator and there was no trace or shadow of sin or imperfection in him. He was upright, pure and innocent, fresh from the hand of his Maker. In that condition he was a son of God. Luke testified as much (3, 38) in his record of the genealogy of Jesus. The line of descent, father to son through the centuries, commenced, not with Adam, where it might have been expected to commence since he was the first man, but with God, who gave life to Adam. Since all of God's work is perfect and He has never created a being in whom sin is inherent, it follows that Adam, the son of God, was perfect in his sonship. It was only after his transgression and his fall that he lost the proud title.

Next we have the antediluvian angels who "kept not their first estate". Genesis 6 tells of these sons of God and of their fall into sin. They were sons until that grievous disaster but are never referred to as sons again.

From the days of the Flood it is a long stride to the days of Jesus, and in all those long intervening ages there were no sons of God upon earth. Not one of Adam's race had proved worthy. All, as says the Apostle Paul, had alike become unprofitable. There was none to do righteousness, no, not one. Jesus was the first since Adam to lay rightful claim to the title. Peter's bold declaration settles that for all time; "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*". The accusation laid against Him was that He claimed to be, or at the least allowed Himself to be called, the Son of God. And the claim was true. The One in whom was no sin, the One holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, was indeed able to take to Himself the title which of all titles proclaimed His sinlessness and His full and complete harmony with God.

And now the same honour is ours. We who by nature are by no means sinless and righteous as He was, are nevertheless brought into a condition of justification before God which enables Him to call us His sons. We have come into the family of God and are called by His Name. So many Scriptures there are to assure us that this is no empty phrase; we are accepted by Him as though we had indeed attained

to actual righteousness and perfection of being. What manner of love is this that has led the God of all to call us His children?

It is because of our faith in the first place. "To as many as received Him, to them gave He authority to become the sons of God" (John 1. 12). That is the first essential, our acceptance of Christ. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God. Being led by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8. 14). Paul likens this to an adoption; we who were by nature children of the fallen Adam have been adopted into the family of God. The adoption is a real one, and we are indeed and in truth the sons of God. The Holy Spirit is a witness to that. The Holy Spirit assures us, bearing witness to our own spirit inwardly, that we are the children of God, receiving and enjoying all the rights and privileges pertaining to that exalted position (Rom. 8. 16, 17). We are therefore heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, sharing with Him not only His life of suffering but also His life of glory, "glorified together".

"Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." "Seeing that it knew Him not" is the literal meaning of the Greek *hoti*, here rendered "because". The servant is not greater than his lord, and seeing that the world ignored and turned away from Jesus when He was upon earth we should not esteem it a strange thing if they do the same to His followers. That is not the only meaning in John's words, though, and perhaps not the most important meaning. "Therefore" is a critical word in this sequence of thought. It is because we have become sons of God that the world knows us not. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. This sonship into which we have entered is a very real thing to us and we have the Spirit's witness as to its genuineness; but is it so real a thing to the world? How can they understand? Even Nicodemus, an educated man and a ruler among the Jews, found it impossible to comprehend what Jesus was talking about when He spoke of being born from above, and men in the world to-day are in just the same position as was Nicodemus. They just cannot understand. And the farther that the world drifts towards mater-

ialism and away from God the more difficult it is going to be for them to receive any conception of that inner life which we live by the power of the Spirit and which to us is the hall-mark of our sonship.

There is much in this chapter to remind us of John's first words in his Gospel. We must not think that the "other worldliness" which the men of this world find impossible to understand is something that is as it were against nature. "He was in the world" says John, "and the world was made by Him; and the world knew Him not" (John 1. 10). He was of the spirit realm and this world is of the material realm, yet He was in this world and this world was made by Him. Spiritual and earthly are all of one and if men are unable to appreciate the reality of spiritual things it is not because it is unnatural for them to do so but because they have lost the link that binds the two worlds together. Whilst it will always be true that the purely natural, material man will never understand or be able to visualise accurately the things of the spirit, he will when restored to the Divine image realise and know that there is a spiritual order of things, transcendently high above the natural. He will believe and accept the fact. It will no longer be true then that "the world knoweth us not" just as it will not be true that they then will "know him not". Mankind upon earth will themselves have become sons of God by then; Rev. 21: 7 is our guarantee of that. "He that overcometh" on the earthly plane of being, during the Millennial Age "shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son". Those Millennial overcomers, sons of God, will realise at last that the ones who, in former times, they "knew not", have inherited the greatest and noblest of all destinies, that of eternal association with Christ in the heavenly realm, and in the gladness of that knowledge will brush all their former ignorance away and regain that link with the unseen world which Adam had before his fall and which all men will have after the restoration. As in heaven, so on earth, "when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away".

(To be continued)

All we know about waterpots is that they were empty. Those at Cana were empty—but the Lord filled them. Rebecca came with an empty waterpot—she became Isaac's bride. The woman at the well—but she brought a whole city to the Master's feet.

The giving of our bodies is an infinitesimally small thing. The presenting of ourselves is an infinitely great thing.

* * *

Fellowship implies a joint interest. Communion implies a common possession.

“WHAT DOTH THE LORD REQUIRE OF THEE?”

“What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.” (Mic. 6. 8).

We know nothing of the circumstances under which these words were originally uttered. How they came to be preserved for nearly a thousand years, then to be quoted by the prophet Micah, we do not know either. Micah accredits them to Balaam, and all that we know of Balaam is that he was a prophet of God although a Gentile, that being hired by the king of Moab to curse Israel he blessed them instead, and that having fallen into the hands of the Israelites he was put to death by them. This wonderful utterance shows a side to his character which otherwise would be quite unsuspected. *“He hath shown thee, O man, what is good”* he says, as if he but reminds us of what we already know perfectly well, something that God has manifestly and admittedly shown us already. And that is the first keen truth that comes home to us. *We do know these things.* We have enough of the original law written in man's heart to realise that justice, goodness and unselfishness are fundamental in human relations and that without them we cannot make progress toward the Heavenly city. God has shown us that and inwardly we know it. We might do very well by writing in our hearts the one line *“He hath shown thee, O man, what is good”* for in calm, quiet reflection upon those nine words there is a wealth of spiritual instruction. The Israelites of old were treated as servants and given a code of laws in which every crime and penalty was clearly defined, and, as the writer to the Hebrews says of that law *“every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward”*; we who are of the New Creation are treated as sons, as men and women whom the Father trusts to work out the Divine law for themselves on the basis of certain cardinal principles which He has laid down, and hence we do need calmly and quietly to think out the implications of those principles.

Justice has become a harsh, unyielding word to us in the English language, calling up visions of transgressors having meted out to them the due of their deeds. Of course the true idea behind the word is that of rightness, or righteousness. The man who takes into account all that is due to his God, his fellow-

man, and to his own self, and renders to all the due that is theirs, is a righteous and a just man. This involves a sober recognition of the purpose of God in creating man and placing him upon the earth, and a willing taking up of the duties and responsibilities of a citizen of earth. Those who have consecrated their lives to God and become footstep followers of Jesus Christ, have the added duties and responsibilities of that calling to consider. These have entered into a family, the brethren of Christ, and there are family obligations to be honoured. How many there are who look upon the fellowship solely from the doctrinal angle and fail to realise that it is a brotherhood which has its basis upon things far deeper and more potent for good than mere intellectual understanding of God's Plan? There are many who are very correct in doctrine but have utterly failed to appreciate and honour the family relationship which must exist between those who hope ultimately to *“reign with him”*.

This first principle, then, must be understood along the lines of righteousness; not a cold, austere, *“holier-than-thou”* righteousness the possessor of which thanks God that he is not as other men; not a bigoted, rigid cast of mind which sees nothing save its own narrow conception of the Divine dealings; but a warm, generous, zealous attitude of heart which manifests itself in a constant endeavour to maintain the highest ideals of faith and conduct before men, a refusal to compromise those standards under any circumstances, and a firm conviction of the rightness of God's ways and the certainty of their eventual triumph that nothing can shake.

Our consecration to Divine service does not absolve us from our Christian duty to our fellow-men. Rather it intensifies that duty. We are not of the world, but we are in the world, and whilst so we cannot escape the obligations which properly devolve upon us as God's representatives in the world. The monastic form of life which involved a complete separation from ordinary affairs and ordinary people was a retreat and an escape upon the principle that all created things were inherently sinful and corrupt and that withdrawal from them, and a physical mortification of the flesh, was pleasing to God. All this is wrong,

for God Himself is the Author of creation and what He made, He made very good. Paul's words regarding the mortifying of the flesh were intended to teach and inculcate quite another truth, one that was perhaps best enshrined in the words "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). The Church of this Age is called to suffer and die in Christ that, like Him, they may be sown for the bringing forth of fruit, *new life, in the coming Age amongst mankind*. Lights in the world, bread of life, salt of the earth, every Scriptural illustration we have shows the intimate contact of the Christian with the world in which he lives, and yet his essential separateness from it.

It is thus that he learns to love mercy. Goodness, benevolence, kindness, cannot be attained by reading about them in a book—even though that book be the Bible. They are essentially practical virtues, and a man becomes a good man, a kind man, a benevolent man, *only by means of his dealings with his fellows*. To love mercy therefore implies a desire to practise mercy and this in turn leads to a way of life which finds scope for the practice of the desire. There is so much opportunity for the exercise of goodness to-day and it is not limited to those possessing money or outstanding talents. The Christian commission to "bind up the broken-hearted" is one aspect of "loving mercy". One may very conceivably do more good to a sad soul by giving assurance of the coming Kingdom than by a *present of money*. Sympathy and friendly compassion may upon occasion be more solely needed than food or clothing. The word in season, the helping hand, the friendly endeavour to lighten a burden whether in a spiritual or material connection are evidences of the attitude that God requires of us, that we "love mercy".

"Pure religion and undefiled before God" says James "is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world". Once again *there is that intimate association with practical Christian endeavour toward the distressed of this world and separateness from the world that is the hall-mark of the instructed Christian*. Moving among these people, ministering to their distresses, but not of them, professing and manifesting a citizenship which is not of this earth, this is experience

which will stand us in good stead when the time comes to turn the "pure language" to all people and teach them to call upon the name of the Lord with one consent.

These things are duties toward man. We have also, and of supreme importance, our duty toward God. "Walk humbly with thy God" said Balaam. Can we amplify his words to include that life of reverence and worship which must be ours if we would eventually see His face? "He that abideth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" said the Psalmist. All our right doing and goodness will avail us nothing if it is not lived in "reverence and godly fear". Above all our outward activities we must place the importance of the inner life, that life which finds its all in complete consecration and submission to God. Our behaviour towards our fellows will bring us rich lessons of experience that are necessary to our future work, but our dwelling in the secret place of the Most High will show us the Divine character and transform our minds and hearts into a copy likeness of His Son. Unless we have attained that likeness all the benefit of life's experiences will have been lost so far as our High Calling is concerned. Many there are, claiming with justice to have performed many wonderful works in His name, who will nevertheless be rejected from among the number of the triumphant Church. We must diligently follow after those things which will increase our perception of the inward life of the Spirit if we would truly come to know as well as worship God in spirit and in truth.

The active, businesslike, "practical" Christian often finds this a hard thing. There is so much to be done in active service, so many opportunities of preaching the message, so much of distress and suffering to be relieved, and he, by nature and temperament well fitted to undertake such labours, is very apt to give insufficient time and thought to that calm, quiet, leisurely communion with God in the things of the spirit that comes so much more easily to less active souls. He does not realise his loss, until, it may be, the failure of his activities, or disappointment at their outcome, awakens him to realisation of the things he is missing. In all our activities let us always leave room for walking "humbly with God".

All things are yours. You cannot add anything to that—except troubles.

Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers but for powers equal to your tasks.

JACOB'S TROUBLE

An exposition of Ezek. 38/39

Chapter 1 GOG OF THE LAND OF MAGOG

The establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth at the time of the Second Advent is preceded by a final and decisive conflict between the forces of good and evil. Those powers and institutions of this world which have been built upon human greed and injustice launch a concerted attack upon the new rulership which comes to bring peace to the nations, abolish war, pestilence, disease and death, and make the earth a fitting dwelling-place for redeemed humanity. The purpose of God as revealed in the Scriptures makes plain that the Millennial reign of the Lord Christ will effect these ends and usher the human race into a future in which sin and unhappiness finds no place, but it is also equally foretold that before this desirable condition of things comes about there will be stern resistance to the dawning era of righteousness by those whose interests lie in the preservation and perpetuation of the institutions and practices of this present order of world society. The old order of things will not give place without a struggle. The vested interests of this world, depending upon the exploitation of human beings and inordinate possession of earth's resources for private gain, will fiercely oppose the advent of the new era, with its proclamation of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, laying "justice to the line and righteousness to the plummet", and rendering to every man—white, black, brown, yellow or red—a place in life and a share of the world's amenities such that he may be able to develop his own abilities to the full and live in everlasting content as a citizen of creation. The conflict will be fought to a finish but the new order will be victorious and use its victory to initiate an era of peace and prosperity during which the human race will be finally and completely fitted for its eternal destiny.

Warfare between the material might of man on the one hand and the unseen, uncomprehended power of the celestial world on the other is difficult to visualise or define in human terms. There must of necessity be many factors in such a conflict which are quite alien to our understanding. That does not detract

from the determination of the contestants or the reality of the struggle. It does require that the descriptions or forecasts of related events are framed in language appropriate to normal warfare between nations of the type with which men are familiar. The Bible has many such accounts of the last great conflict, described in the terms of war as it was waged at the time they were written, and these have to be read and understood in the light of this fact and interpreted to reveal the principles enshrined rather than as strictly literal narratives of the events that are to be. Thus considered, the prophetic Scriptures relating to the "End Time" become wonderfully luminous when viewed in the light of current events. The course of the world for a century past has been such that there can no longer be any doubt that humanity has reached the crisis so fully foretold in all the Scriptures and that the dawn of the new era is upon us. Heaven is about to take control.

Of some half a dozen vivid descriptions of this last great battle none is so fully detailed and so eloquent as the account in the 38th and 39th chapters of the book of the prophet Ezekiel, popularly known as the story of the invasion of Israel by Gog and Magog. Remembering that a fundamental feature of the Divine order in the Messianic Age is to be the creation of a dedicated Holy Nation, a purified and ideal Israel, in the land which has always been associated with Divine things and Divine government from the dawn of history, and will be the centre of Divine administration, it is not surprising that this invasion is pictured directed against that centre. The incipient Kingdom of God upon earth is the target of the godless and the apostates, banded together to destroy this threat to their continued power. From this standpoint these chapters in Ezekiel are not only of supreme interest but also vital importance at this present time when world events betoken in no uncertain fashion that the fulfilment of "all things written" is imminent.

This account was written some six hundred years before Christ; because it deals so much with political events it is "dressed up" in

language borrowed from the political history of that time. Prophecy is not the unaided product of the seer; it is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit of God, operating through a human instrument and using human terms capable of comprehension by men. This fore-view of the future, written twenty-five hundred years prior to its fulfilment, was possible because the events of to-day are happening in direct consequence of the course which mankind has been pursuing for far more than that twenty-five hundred years; God in His infinite wisdom knows exactly how the forces which men have set in motion, hundreds or even thousands of years ago, pursued to their logical end, will react upon the generation of men now living. So He is able to record the outcome thus in advance.

Ezekiel the priest was born in Judea and taken captive to Babylon in the third year of Jehoiakim of Judah, 598 B.C., eleven years before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. He was then thirty years of age, a man devout and zealous, and well versed in the Hebrew Scriptures. The earlier parts of his writings reveal that he was possessed of the reformer's spirit in marked degree; he was certainly a fitting vehicle of the Holy Spirit for the transmission of revelations such as we now have before us. His later writings comprise a prophetic description of Israel's national resurrection at the close of this present Age; her regathering to her ancient land and subsequent prosperity; the envy of surrounding but distant barbarous nations and the descent of those nations, under the leadership of Gog of the land of Magog, upon her, their utter defeat and the universal conversion of the regathered nation followed by the promulgation of Divine law and rulership over the earth with the Israel land as the administrative centre. The narrative concludes with a "Temple vision" depicting the settled rule and work of the Millennial Age and its triumphant outcome in the reconciliation of men, "whosoever will", to God. The predicted events of chapters 38 and 39 are to be understood in relation to this general picture.

The physical background of these two chapters was the invasion of the Middle East by Scythians from the north in the reign of Josiah of Judah. Ezekiel was a boy at this time and witnessed this earth-shaking event at first hand. To such an extent must it have impressed him as an example of irresistible and all-conquering force that it remained with him, until years later and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he cast his mom-

entous prophecy of the last great conflict in the mould of that invasion. It is very necessary, therefore, that this physical background be examined closely and an accurate understanding of the situation as it existed in Ezekiel's mind be achieved. There are allusions to ancient nations that no longer exist, these have to be re-interpreted in terms applicable to the present. The Israel people and the Israel land of the prophecy are those of Ezekiel's own day; the extent to which both people and land in the fulfilment must possess wider attributes and be sketched on a larger canvas has to be determined. The whole conception of the interpretation has to be lifted from the narrow limits of Old Testament Israel's relations with her neighbours to the immeasurably greater sphere of world evil versus God's holiness at the end of the Age—even although admittedly there is still an Israel nation occupying the centre of the stage, and profoundly affected by all that transpires.

It is necessary first of all to identify the actors in the drama. A noteworthy feature of this prophecy is that Israel's traditional—and usual—enemies do not figure in the account and are not so much as mentioned, Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Egypt, Philistines, Amalekites, Midianites, Amorites, appear time after time on the pages of the Old Testament in combat with Israel. Not one of these appears in this narrative; their place is taken by nations hitherto unknown to Israel and coming from a great distance, from the far corners of the earth in fact. This of itself is a significant factor. It must indicate that the conflict foreseen by Ezekiel has to do with other and far greater issues than those which have traditionally concerned Israel in the past. The situation is not, as formerly, Israel versus her neighbour tribes and peoples, but Israel versus the wider outside world. The battle is not against the Israel that conquered Canaan under the leadership of Joshua but a greater and more dedicated nation which has gathered into a more extensive Holy Land under the headship of God. But before we can understand the details of this Battle of the Great Day in the light of Ezekiel's vision we must first learn our history.

About eight hundred years before Christ the nations of the Middle East—Assyria, Babylon, Elam, Media, Syria, and Israel—became dimly conscious of a new threat to their political interests. A number of strange, warlike and barbarous peoples, hitherto un-

known, had appeared in the northern countries of Lydia and Armenia, raiding, killing and taking possession. Within a century they had reached the frontiers of Assyria; the celebrated Sennacherib, and later his son Esarhaddon, led the Assyrian armies against them and with some difficulty forced them back. In the Assyrian historical inscriptions the invaders were called the Mushku, the Tabalu, the Gimirrai and the Til-garimmu; the corresponding Bible names are Meshech, Tubal, Gomer and the House of Togarmah. Meshech and Tubal were Scythian tribes first known in history in what is now southern Russia between the Black Sea and the Caspian, where Tiglath-Pileser I of Assyria fought them in the 12th century B.C. By Sennacherib's time they had moved into Armenia. Gomer and Togarmah were of the race known in history as the Cimmerians and had been forced out of their home in Russia north of the Black Sea into Asia Minor by the pressure of other Scythian tribes. The Scythians originated in Central Asia and about the ninth B.C. century were increasing and extending in all directions. Called Ashquzai or Saka by the Assyrians (Ashkenaz in Hebrew) they eventually played a great part in the overthrow of the Assyrian empire. Scythian tribes inhabited the southern areas of European Russia and Siberia from the days of Abraham to those of Malachi and the close of the Old Testament, after which they began to disappear before the impact of other racial types. It was this "expanding population" pressure which had driven wave after wave of Scythians into the lands bordering the north of Israel and Assyria, resulting in this invasion which forms the background of Ezekiel's prophecy.

Chapter 38. 2 speaks of "Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal". The translation is not very exact; literally the passage should read "*set thy face towards Gog, towards the land of Magog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal*". There is some doubt about the accuracy of the description "chief prince". The accents in the Hebrew text demand that "rosh" be read in its normal meaning of head or chief, hence the rendering "chief prince", but grammatically the expression should not appear in this form and still remain good Hebrew. The Septuagint and a number of ancient authorities such as Symmachus and Theodotion take "Rosh" as a proper name and render "*prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal*". An objection to this is the fact that whereas Meshech and Tubal are

frequently found coupled together in the Assyrian inscriptions of the times, no tribe named Rosh appears, either in Assyrian records or the Bible. It is said that some Arab writers of the early Christian centuries mention a Scythian tribe named Ros as living in Cappadocia and that it originated from the Caspian Sea district, where the River Aras (the Arab name for the Araxes) perpetuates the name. This is flimsy evidence in the absence of further corroboration, but there is the possibility that such a tribe did exist in Ezekiel's time in association with the more prominent Meshech and Tubal, without coming under the notice of Assyria.

Magog would appear to be the Gagaia of the Tel-el-Amarna letters, at that time, 14th century B.C., said to be a land of barbarians in the far north. This might well be a general name for all Scythian tribes and as such the equivalent of the Assyrian Saka and Greek Sacasene, terms for the Scythians generally.

The federal chief of this confederacy of warlike tribesmen is addressed as Gog. This is the man whose name comes down the ages as the "Northern One", the dark figure who is to lead the forces of evil against the people of the Lord at the Time of the End. Not only in the Bible—Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Habakkuk—is this shadowy menacing figure seen, but also in the apocryphal books, in Jewish legend, in Arab folk lore. Throughout the ages this dreaded name has persisted and always it is the sign and symbol of the implacable enemy of God who at the last is to meet his doom with all his followers when God rises up to deliver Israel.

Ezekiel obviously referred to a real historical figure and today the identity of Gog is known. He is named in Assyrian records as Gaagi, supreme chief of the Saka or Scythians in the days of Asshur-bani-pal of Assyria, roughly during the reign of Manasseh of Judah. The Greeks at a somewhat later time knew a Scythian tribe which they called the Gogarene, i.e. people of Gog, dwelling at the east of the Black Sea; this is probably the same as Magog, and Gog's own tribe. The two sons of Gog, Sariti and Pariza, were captured by Asshur-bani-pal during his campaigns against Meshech and Tubal and taken prisoner to Nineveh. The great Scythian invasion which spelt the end of Assyria and inspired Ezekiel's prophecy was led by Madyes, the grandson of Gog.

Here then is the setting for Ezek. 38 and 39, a confederacy of Scythian and Cimmerian tribes migrating from Southern Russia and

making their way across Asia Minor until they stood poised for a mass attack upon the lands of the Bible. Israel, in the centre of those lands, was vulnerable and helpless against the threat. She could only wait.

The prophecy goes on to associate with Gog's host certain other nations, from the east and south and west. This had no counterpart in the invasion of Josiah's time and this is one respect in which the prophetic reality differs profoundly from the historic shadow. These nations will be considered a little farther on.

At this point some notice should be taken of a rather popular exposition amongst some students of prophecy which identifies Rosh with Russia, Meshech with Moscow and Tubal with Tobolsk, a city of Western Siberia. These identifications are to be treated with caution. Tobolsk is nearly two thousand miles from the land of Tubal of Ezekiel's day; it is possible that at a much earlier date Scythian tribesmen of the same name migrated from a common centre, some in the course of centuries reaching Armenia as Tubal, others settling on the River Tobol which gives the Siberian city its name, but there could have been no connection between the respective peoples. (In much the same way the Cimmerians from Russia appeared in Armenia as Gomer and Togarmah and in Britain as the Cymry, now represented by the Welsh). In any case Tobolsk was not founded until A.D. 1587. Moscow, which in Russian is Moskva, from which word Muscovy, the older name for Russia, is derived, was founded in A.D. 1174 but did not become the capital until several centuries later. Here again there is some similarity with the Assyrian Mushku (Meshech) but Moscow was not founded by Scythians but by invaders from the Baltic.

The identification of Rosh with Russia is incorrect. The word Russia is Rossiya, derived from the Finnish term for the people of Sweden, a corruption of the Swedish "rothsmenn" meaning seafarers. During the ninth and tenth centuries of the Christian era Scandinavian peoples related to the Swedes, Angles and Norsemen entered Russia from the north and penetrated as far as the southern steppes, where they encountered and fought the Turks—the surviving representatives of the ancient Scythians. These newcomers were called the "Rus", or "Ros", and, by the Greeks of the time, the "Norse pirates". For some two hundred years they colonised European Russia, establishing their capital at Kiev. These were the people from whom

Russia takes its modern name but all this was long after the days of Ezekiel. So far as can be gleaned from the writings of ancient historians and geographers, Central and Northern European Russia was uninhabited in Old Testament times and the Baltic invaders were its first inhabitants.

Five years before the death of King Josiah, when Ezekiel was a youth and Jeremiah had spent some ten years on his prophetic ministry, the forces of Gog swept over the lands of the Bible like a mighty avalanche. The old warrior, Asshur-bani-pal of Assyria, was dead. The armies of the Medes and the Babylonians were at the gates of Nineveh, and the Assyrians were fighting for their life. Egypt was biding its time to share in the spoils. Josiah was in the middle of his reforming work aimed at eliminating idolatry from Israel. Ten years earlier, Jeremiah had received his prophetic commission and seen his vision of the seething pot overturned so that its boiling contents flooded over the ground. And the Lord said to him in explanation "*Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land*" (Jer. 1. 14-15). Now the prediction was fulfilled. Along the northern frontiers of Syria, Assyria and Media swarmed the Scythians and Cimmerians in their thousands, intent on conquest and plunder. For generations past Assyria had been the guardian of the north but now the power of Assyria was at its lowest ebb and there was no strength to resist.

The first onslaught was met by the Medes. If history be true—and the records of this period are confused and contradictory—Cyxares of Media persuaded the Scythians into a temporary alliance for a joint attack upon Nineveh. It is fairly conclusive that the downfall of Assyria and the destruction of Nineveh was the consequence of such an alliance and that the Scythian wave passed over and obliterated the proud empire that for so long had held the nations of Western Asia in an iron grip. The prophet Nahum describes the coming of this moment. "*He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face*" he cries triumphantly, "*the horseman lifteth up the bright sword and the glittering spear; and there is a great multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses . . . all they that look upon thee shall say, Nineveh is laid waste; who will bemoan her?*" That is an eloquent and accurate description of Scythian warfare. The city was so completely blotted out of existence that only two centuries later Xenophon marched his army of ten thousand

Greeks right across its site without any suspicion that what was left of it lay under his feet; not until the middle nineteenth century were its remains brought to light.

From Assyria the raiding hordes swept across Syria, through the plain of Megiddo—the “Armageddon” of the Book of Revelation—and over the seaward side of Israel and the Philistine land to the frontiers of Egypt. Here, according to Herodotus, they were met by Pharaoh Psamtik I who persuaded their leaders into a treaty which halted further advance. In any case they had now absorbed a very considerable territorial area.

The Scythian occupation lasted probably

a great military fortress at Beth-shan in the valley of Jezreel not far from Nazareth. Scythians remained in possession of this fortress and town up to the time of Christ, when it was known on that account as Scythopolis. Although within the territory of Israel, the Rabbis would not consider it a Jewish town, but the place of an unholy people. (It has been thought that St. Paul’s allusion to Scythians in Col. 3. 11 in connection with Greeks and Jews as being one in Christ is a reference to the continued presence in Beth-shan of the descendants of the ancient Scythians of God’s army).

Within a few years of the invasion the



less than ten years—Herodotus says twenty-eight, but he is certainly mistaken. In the meantime the lawless hosts roamed the countries plundering and slaying at will. The kingdom of Judah seems to have escaped much of the impact; during most of the time in question Josiah was busy with his reformation and the accounts in Chronicles and Kings do not yield any hints of untoward interference from outside. After the agreement with Egypt the Scythians seem to have withdrawn from the vicinity of Israel, although they captured and destroyed Askelon of the Philistines on the way, and also established

Scythians had disappeared. The reason is not clear; the records are scanty and non-informative. By the time that Ezekiel in Babylon was beginning his prophetic ministry they were back in Armenia and Asia Minor, and the lands of the Bible knew them no more. Only the memory of them remained.

This then is the historical basis of Ezekiel’s prophecy. It is not a picture in miniature of the future. There are many elements in the ultimate conflict, alluded to in Chapters 38 and 39, which had no counterpart in the events of Josiah’s day. Perhaps the most important is that after the cataclysm Israel

enters into an era of everlasting peace. That was not true back in history. Josiah met his death fighting with Egypt against Babylon, and not long afterwards the entire nation suffered the Babylonian captivity. Ezekiel says that the hosts of Magog will find graves in the land of Israel; in history they went back unimpeded to their own land. So the story of Gog, of the land of Magog, and his great invasion of the Middle East twenty-five centuries ago, was taken up by the Holy Spirit and used as a picture from which the salient features of the prophetic fulfilment might be deduced.

Now that picture does include some nations which were not part of the historical Gog's host but are depicted in the prophetic vision as rendering assistance and encouragement. "*Persia, Ethiopia and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet*" (38. 5) says the prophet. They are to be associated with the prophetic Gog in the latter day conflict. Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish also appear as giving encouragement and approval if not actual help. The inclusion of these additional nations is obviously to complete the prophetic picture in terms of Ezekiel's own day and it is necessary therefore to establish the position of these peoples at that time.

Persia (Heb. *Paras*) was only beginning to come into prominence in the days of Ezekiel. Commencing as a small Aryan tribe in the extreme south of modern Iran, having migrated from its home in the far east, it gradually attained equality with the Medes in the north, and under the celebrated Cyrus in the days of Daniel became predominant. Later on Persia had much to do with Israel but to Ezekiel it was still a distant and unknown people with whom Israel had made no contact. It was in fact the weakening of the Medes by this same Scythian invasion that gave Persia the opportunity to assert its position and begin its progress towards domination of the Middle East. In this narrative the name is probably used in a general sense for the unknown tribes to the far east of Israel just as those of Gog denoted those of the far north.

Ethiopia is the Greek term for the widely spread people whose native and Hebrew name was Cush. The Cushites, descended from Ham, became a numerous and powerful race, spreading both eastwards towards India and westwards into Africa. Originating from the Euphrates, the eastern branch settled in Baluchistan and the Indus valley of India; the western branch migrated through Arabia

and across the Red Sea, and by the days of the Hebrew monarchy had built up a powerful empire in East Africa. The modern Ethiopians are largely their descendants, mixed now with Semitic blood.

Libya in Ezek. 38. 5 is not the modern country of that name; the Hebrew word is Phut and has a much wider application. Libya is the Greek form of the Egyptian Lubu and Hebrew Lehabim or Lubim (Gen. 10. 13; 2 Chron. 12. 3) a tribe descended from the Egyptians and colonising to the west of Egypt. Simultaneously with this process the Phutites, a Hamitic race, left their ancestral home on the Euphrates and like the Cushites traversed Arabia into Africa, settling in what is now Somaliland, from whence they spread westwards across tropical Africa to the Atlantic. They were a highly intelligent and virile people and with the natural resources of the tropics at their disposal became a nation of traders—Egypt from the time of Moses carried on a great deal of trade with them and in the Egyptian inscriptions their country is referred to as the Land of Punt. The name of Phut, however, is found right across Africa, to its northwest extremity in present-day Morocco. St. Jerome referred to them as late as the Christian era. It seems that they became the greatest Hamitic people on the African continent, even exceeding Egypt. Until the Christian era the entire continent was known as Libya—the name "Africa" was that of a Roman colony on the northern coast. From the O.T. point of view, Ethiopia and Libya defined in a general manner the whole of the little-known peoples inhabiting Africa beyond Egypt.

These are the allies of Gog. There now appear three more names, nations which do not seem to be active participants in the attack but stand to share in the spoils. Describing the situation, Ezekiel says (ch. 38. 13) "*Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil? Hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey, to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil?*" The text needs clarification. The Septuagint and some modern translators render "villages" instead of "young lions" which, since Tarshish is a territorial definition, is more logical. The distinction between "young lion" and "village" in Hebrew is one of vowels only and in the original there were no vowels. Since the Septuagint is nearly a thousand years earlier than the Hebrew text

upon which the A.V. is based there seems no reasonable doubt that "villages" is the correct rendering. The expressions "*Art thou come . . . Hast thou gathered . . .*" etc., are what is known as the rhetorical interrogative, a statement put in question form but a statement of fact nevertheless, as in Isa. 43. 19 "*Behold, I will do a new thing; shall ye not know it?*" These words should therefore be read in the affirmative; "*Thou art come to take a spoil! Thou hast gathered thy company . . .*" etc. The real point of this verse is that Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish were trading peoples and merchants; they were not warriors. In ancient times merchants from such nations waited on the victors of great battles to purchase what they could of the spoils of victory, which they then disposed of upon terms advantageous to themselves. Joel 3. 3-6 is an allusion to this practice. So the prophetic picture here is drawn to show that commercial interests are waiting to benefit from the anticipated plunder of the land.

Sheba and Dedan were two Cushite peoples—both recorded in Gen. 10 as sons of Raamah son of Cush—involved in the drift of Cushites into Arabia; whilst the others passed on into Africa these two remained and became notable mercantile peoples, Dedan in the north in what is now Saudi Arabia and Sheba in the extreme south and on the Red Sea coast (the Yemen). This latter is the Sheba whose famous queen came to consult King Solomon some five centuries previously. (Another Biblical Sheba and Dedan, children of Abraham by Keturah, appear in Gen. 25. 3 but there is no connection). Both these peoples travelled long distances with their caravans of goods and brought the produce of Arabia and Africa into the lands of the Middle East.

Tarshish is the name around which so much romance has been woven. Tarshish in the Old Testament is the mysterious land at the ends of the earth to which the great trading vessels of the Phoenicians sailed, returning to Tyre laden with all kinds of strange and valuable goods. The expression "ships of Tarshish" occurs a number of times in the O.T. and from the context is seen to denote what we would call large ocean-going merchant vessels irrespective of destination. Mostly they sailed through the Mediterranean westwards, although King Solomon did build "ships of Tarshish" to go southwards through the Red Sea. From the lists of goods they brought back it is evident they went to widely separated places in both the temperate and tropical zones. Ivory, apes and peacocks (parrots or

guinea-fowl) came from the west coast of Africa; gold from South Africa or Spain; silver and lead from Spain; tin from Britain. "Tarshish stone", translated "beryl" in the A.V., is known to have been Baltic amber—examples found in Assyria and Babylon have been chemically analysed and found to be of a variety found nowhere in the world apart from the Baltic—and it is believed that the early Britons obtained this product from the Scandinavian lands and traded it with the Phoenicians visiting Britain. "Tarshish and all her villages" therefore can be taken as standing for the distant countries of the West, the entire West African coast, Spain and Britain. Since it is fairly certain that the Phoenicians traded with the Azores and there is some evidence that they knew the West Indies—two thousand years before Columbus—even the New World might possibly be included in the term.

It is significant that of this entire catalogue of nations not one is of the Semitic race. Taking the Table of Nations of Gen. 10 as basis, they all owe their origin either to Japheth or Ham. Shem is not represented. The only names not mentioned in Gen. 10 are Persia and the rather debatable one of Rosh. Rosh, if it existed at all, was a Scythian tribe and therefore of Japheth. The Persians were Aryans—the ancient native name, Iranian, now adopted again for the modern Persia, preserves this fact, and so they too are of Japheth. Israel's enemies from the north, the east and the west are Japhetic and from the south Hamitic. None are Semitic. This in prophetic metaphor increases the emphasis evidently to be laid on the fact that the enemies of Israel at this momentous crisis are not of their own kindred but the remote hitherto unknown peoples of the wider world.

So the prophetic picture is complete. Israel, the people of God, a tiny and apparently defenceless nation at the centre of the earth, is locked within an iron ring of implacable enemies arrayed against her from the farthest corners of the earth. Practically every part of the world known to the ancients of Ezekiel's day is represented in the list, from Britain, Spain and Africa in the west to Persia and India in the east, from Turkey and Russia in the north to Arabia in the south. The whole world stands set against the land of unwalled villages. This is the picture which, expanded to take in the greater scale of events and the wider dispersion of nations to-day, is drawn to reveal the nature of that greater conflict which is to end the dominion of evil in the

earth.

We come to our examination of this wonderful prophecy in its relation to the events of our own day with the realisation that here we have information and instruction of vital import. We do not expect to find our God represented as a revengeful, war-making military conqueror. We do expect to find Him serenely ordering all things after the counsel of His own will, first allowing men in their greed and folly to bring themselves into this welter of blood and fire, and then, by means of His own weapons—not by weapons of

man's devising—reducing the plans and devices, the might and the power, of this world to nothing, calmly calling all men to listen to the new voice which is to speak from Heaven. The first outwardly perceptible manifestation of the Kingdom in control will appear when God intervenes to confound the material might of the nations by means of a power they can neither understand nor withstand, and commands them in the words of the Psalmist "*be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth*".

Chapter 2 TITLE DEEDS OF THE LAND

"In the latter years you will go against the land that is restored from war, the land where people were gathered from many nations upon the mountains of Israel, which had been a continual waste; its people were brought out from the nations and now dwell securely, all of them . . . and you will devise an evil scheme, and say, I will go up against the land of unwallled villages; I will fall upon the quiet people who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having no bars or gates, to seize spoil and carry off plunder; to assail the waste places which are now inhabited, and the people who were gathered from the nations, who have gotten cattle and goods, who dwell at the centre of the earth" (Ezek. 38. 8-12 R.S.V.).

Thus does the prophet Ezekiel describe that fair land of the End Time upon which the nations of earth are to cast envious eyes. No wonder that Christian writers and commentators of past times have interpreted this prophecy as a poetic description of the spiritual conflict between good and evil and the final triumph of good. Unless there is a clear understanding of the Divine purpose in the Second Coming and the Messianic Era for the overthrow of all evil powers and the general conversion and reconciliation of all from among mankind who can be persuaded by the Gospel, it is hardly possible to understand the passage in any other manner. Viewing it

as a realistic forecast describing the physical situation at the end of this Age and the challenge to Divine power thrown down by world forces and institutions which are fiercely opposed to the incoming Millennial world government, it is possible to examine the prophecy very critically and realise how true it is that in events now transpiring in the world there are the beginnings of things destined to culminate in the strange yet wondrous acts of Ezekiel 38 and 39.

The invasion of the Holy Land by the hosts of "Gog and Magog" is the last great event of this Age. The overthrow of that great host is the signal for the establishment and announcement of the Kingdom of God upon earth. From that point of time Restitution processes will commence, and the work of world conversion, the restoration of the earth and rehabilitation of the human race, go forward. A clear understanding of the prophecy in the light both of Biblical lore and of contemporary knowledge is an essential for those who desire to keep abreast with the outworking of the Divine Plan.

The central feature of the prophecy is the land and its people, and a question immediately arises "Where is the land and who are the people?" The old time theology, inspired mainly by St. Augustine, declared that the whole passage is symbolic, that it depicts the final triumph of Christ and His Church over

the forces of evil. Such explanation will not satisfy students of the Bible who understand and look for the coming of Christ's Kingdom upon earth. Quite clearly, this passage is directly related to the Divine destiny for the ideal Israel of the End Time and to the establishment of the Kingdom, and must therefore be understood in a dispensational sense and in an earthly setting. Putting it briefly, the time of the prophecy is at the end of this Age and the place of its fulfilment is upon this earth.

The Old Testament, from the Book of Genesis onward, maintains a consistent claim that God promised the patriarch Abraham that of his descendants there would be developed a nation which should possess to all perpetuity the land over which he wandered and in which he lived. In that land this nation is to become the Divine instrument, to be a light to the nations and declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth. The New Testament takes up the promise and shews that it will become reality at the end of the Age. In the meantime Abraham's descendants, whilst admittedly constituting a power for good in history, have never reached up to the standard demanded for this historic destiny, but when the time comes such a nation will be ready in the land thus promised; Ezekiel's prophecy refers to that fulfilment. It is to be taken as a basic principle, therefore, that the land promised to Abraham nearly four thousand years ago, the land in which he spent his life, the land in which his descendants Isaac and Jacob, and the nation of Israel which sprang from Jacob, played their respective parts on the stage of history, is the land of the promise and of the prophecy. There it is that a people will be gathered to fulfil in every respect the description given by Ezekiel. Although the contemporary modern political state of Israel is but a small country the size of Wales the ancient nation of Israel did in fact occupy a larger area; the promises to Abraham and his successors define an even greater expanse of territory destined to form the Holy Land of the Kingdom Age. It has to be accepted that not only modern Israel but a number of other recently created sovereign States in that part of the world will eventually be merged to form the stage upon which this last act in the drama of this "present evil world", to use St. Peter's description, is to be played.

It is noteworthy that God seems to have selected this part of the earth's surface as the scene of those events which mark definite

steps or epochs in the development of His purposes. The travels of Abraham, from Ur of the Chaldees in the south-east Euphrates valley, to Haran in the north, down through Canaan into Egypt in the south-west, and back into Canaan, there to settle, mark out a great triangle which roughly defines the area promised to him and to his seed by Divine covenant. Within or immediately adjacent to this triangle practically the whole of the incidents in the Old Testament were enacted, with the three exceptions of the landing of the Ark in the far north-east, Jonah's mission to Nineveh, and the story of Esther. If it should be, in the Messianic Age, that the sites of great events in the story of redemption are excluded from ordinary uses and reserved to the interested gaze of redeemed men visiting the Holy Land from all parts of the world, there is some reason to expect that all this territory will be under the direct care of the Holy Nation.

There is a very significant expression in verse 12 of chapter 38. The regathered nation is said to dwell "*at the centre of the earth*". Now this is, geographically, literally true of the land of Israel and its surroundings. Of all the circles of latitude encircling the earth, that passing through the Middle East traverses the greatest length of land, nearly ten thousand miles. Israel is situated at the junction of three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa. It is roughly midway in distance between the West Coast of Africa and the East Coast of China, between the southernmost limit of Africa and the northernmost of Siberia. If a point had to be selected which could be said to be the centre of the land masses of the earth then Israel would logically be that point, and can claim more than anywhere else to be called the "centre of the earth". As the administrative seat of the World Government which will be in operation during the Millennial Age no more suitable place could be chosen. It is tempting to think that God deliberately selected this particular part of the earth's surface for its historic mission because of its physical suitability.

Now the actual extent and boundaries of this future Holy Land are defined in the Scriptures with a certain degree of precision and in good legal form. The ancients of Abraham's day were quite accustomed to the drawing up of legal documents embodying the title to ownership of land—many such tablets exist to-day in the British Museum among other places—and the promises of God regarding the land He has set aside for the

administration of the Kingdom are set out in precise style. There are four such "title deeds" incorporated in the Old Testament, each defining the land in a different manner, by their united testimony affording the student a very fair idea of the boundaries of the land that is to be.

The first definition was given to Abraham and recorded in Gen. 15. 18-21. The Lord had concluded a covenant with the patriarch under the terms of which his seed was to become the means of blessing all families of the earth. Later events shewed that the line of descent to the "seed of blessing" was to be traced through Isaac, Jacob and eventually the twelve tribes of Israel. Said the Lord "*unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaim, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites*". A significant element in this passage is the list of peoples then existing whose territory is to be included in the Holy Land.

The river Euphrates rises in the mountains of modern Turkey and after traversing northern Syria flows through Iraq into the Persian Gulf. The empires of Sumeria, Assyria, Mari and Babylon rose and fell on its banks. Abraham's migration from Ur to Haran followed the course of the river for a great part of its length. David and Solomon extended the commercial influence of the Kingdom of Israel to the Euphrates where it now flows through Syria. According to this title deed the eastern frontier of the Holy Land is marked by the Euphrates.

The "river of Egypt" is the Nile. The same expression is used some half dozen times in the Old Testament to describe the Wady-el-Arish, a seasonal stream running down from the middle of the Sinai peninsula into the Mediterranean sea at El-Arish. In these cases the word for river is "*nachal*" meaning a torrent bed dry in summer and flooded in winter—the Arabic "*wady*". When the Nile is intended, as in Gen. 15. 18, the word is "*nahar*" meaning a permanent running stream. The Nile delta or its vicinity would therefore appear to be the western frontier of the Holy Land. David's Kingdom reached as far as the Wady-el-Arish.

All the ten nations mentioned as occupying this territory in Abraham's day have long since disappeared from history, although in most cases a good deal is known about them. The Kenites occupied southern Sinai—Moses

during his forty years' exile from Egypt lived with a Kenite tribe—and the eastern side of the Gulf of Akaba. The Kenizzites occupied the Negeb and what afterwards became Edom, the land of Esau. Of the Kadmonites not much is known but it is believed that this was a general term for tribes living to the far east of the Jordan and towards the Euphrates. The Hittites were a very numerous people who established a notable civilisation in Asia Minor; the Hittites of Genesis, however, were a separate and isolated branch of this people occupying sites throughout the country west of Jordan and in Syria. The Perizzites held the mountainous districts of Galilee and eastward across Jordan. The Rephaim were originally from east of Jordan and only at the time of the Exodus were they found in Israel proper. They were men of gigantic stature. The Amorites were the most important of all the peoples named—they inhabited not only Canaan proper but extended northwards into Syria and eastwards to Euphrates. Canaan and Syria were known to the Assyrians and Babylonians as the "Amorite land". Several times in history the Amorites descended the Euphrates in force to attack Babylon, and from time to time the Babylonians were ruled by Amorite kings. The Canaanites were well distributed over the entire land of Canaan; the Girgashites east of the Sea of Galilee, and the Jebusites a powerful tribe in the very centre of Canaan with Salem (Jerusalem) as their capital in Abraham's time. This catalogue of tribal territories covers most of the country between the Nile and the Euphrates from Sinai in the south to Syria in the north.

The second title deed was the gift of God to the emerging nation of Israel at the time of the Exodus. "*I will set thy bounds from the Red Sea even unto the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river*" (Exod. 23. 31). This statement defines the north-south and east-west limits of the land. The expression "Sea of the Philistines" is in itself an interesting internal proof of the early date of the Book of Genesis. The Philistines were immigrants from Crete (*Caphtor* in the Old Testament, *Egyptian Keftu*—see Jer. 47. 4 and Amos 9. 7) and were settled on the coast of Canaan primarily for the purpose of growing corn for their homeland. Crete was the dominant sea power in the Mediterranean in the days of Abraham and that sea was then known as the "Sea of the Philistines". Less than a century after the Exodus the supremacy of Crete was broken and her sea power

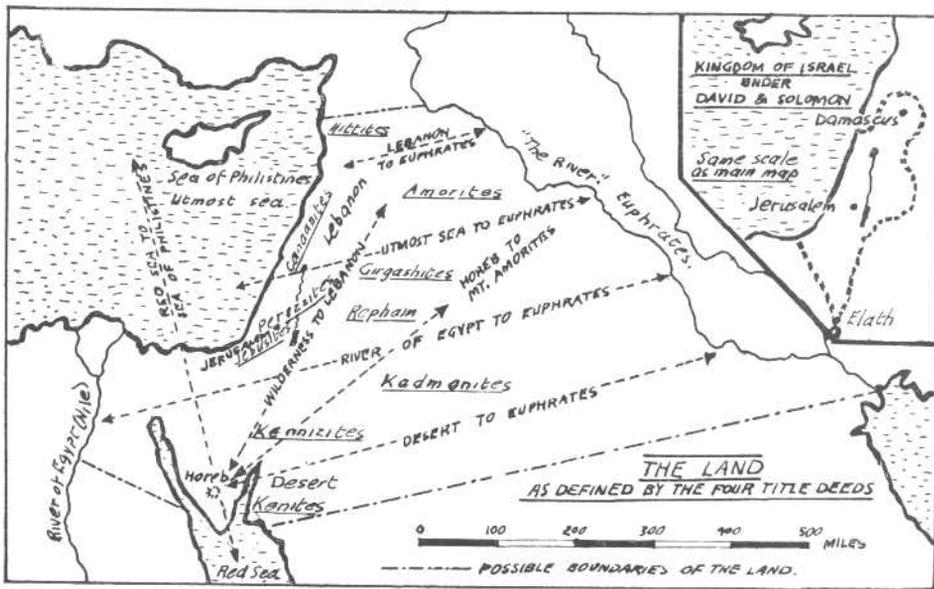
passed to the Phoenicians of Tyre and Sidon. From then the sea was known to the Hebrews and in the Old Testament as the "Great Sea."

From the Red Sea to the Mediterranean; from the desert to the river! "Desert" here is "midbar" which defined the desert of Sinai and north-western Arabia, in the former of which Israel was at that moment encamped. "The river" when not otherwise qualified, always denotes the Euphrates in the Old Testament. The Red Sea, the Arabian desert, the Euphrates and the Mediterranean coast are declared to be the ultimate boundaries of the land, agreeably to the definition given to Abraham in Gen. 15. 18 four centuries earlier.

The third title deed was awarded a few months later, when Israel was about to leave

(*ha—shephelah*) the low plain extending from Joppa southward; the south (*negeb*) the territory toward Sinai and the Gulf of Akaba, the sea-coast in the west, Lebanon in the north, sweeping across to Euphrates in the east. This vast terrain was only partially won, even in the days of David; the full accomplishment of the Divine mandate lies still in the future.

The fourth title deed given forty years later as Israel was at long last about to pass over Jordan into the land, is confirmatory of the third. Said Moses "Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours, from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be" (Deut.



Sinai. "Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the Mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the seaside, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates. Behold I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them" (Deut. 1. 7-8). The Mount of the Amorites was the elevated region extending for many miles east of the Jordan; the "plain" (*arabah*) the deep valley in which the Jordan flows from Galilee to the Dead Sea; the "hills" (*har—high peaks*) the hill country of Judea and Samaria; the "vale"

11. 24). "Wilderness" here is *midbar*, rendered "desert" in the second title deed, Exodus 23. 31, so that the boundaries here defined also extend from the Arabian desert in the south to Lebanon in the north, from the Euphrates in the east to the Mediterranean ("uttermost sea" is *acharon*, the "hinder sea" a Hebrew term for that sea) in the west.

So the four declarations, separated from each other, first to last, from the time of Abraham to that of Joshua, agree together on the boundaries of the land as it is finally to be constituted when the Divine purposes come to fruition and the Kingdom of God upon earth is at hand. The fact that Israel of old never possessed more than a part of this great area is immaterial; Israel's failure to

measure up to the conditions of her calling accounts for this as well as many other deficiencies in her attainments in history. This is the land as it will be when the ideal Israel, the Holy Nation of the End Time, takes its stand for God in face of world opposition.

The territory thus defined includes not only contemporary Israel but the whole of the State of Jordan and parts of Egypt, Arabia, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. There must obviously be a considerable political adjustment of frontiers to be effected before the Holy Land assumes the shape foreseen in the Pentateuch, and nothing in the prophetic Scriptures gives ground for thinking this is to be attained by physical force or by aggressive warfare. Any territorial changes achieved by conflicts between the present State of Israel and her Arab neighbours have to do with the fortunes of the kingdoms of this world rather than those of the next. And in any case, the Israel of today is very far removed from that God-believing "Holy Nation" of the future which is going to survive the great attack because it has put its trust in God instead of in armed force. It must be expected therefore that the future holds in prospect a much more peaceful settlement of Arab-Israel problems than at the present time seems possible. It has to be remembered that in the past these two peoples have not always been at variance, that their present antagonism is largely inspired by the conflicting commercial interests of other nations. Most important of all, the same series of Divine promises which set the sons of Isaac apart for a specific destiny also provided specially for the sons of Ishmael. The Arab race originated from a number of sources but for the most part are of Semitic stock, in the main from the thirteen sons of Joktan (Gen. 10. 26-30) and the twelve sons of Ishmael, many of their names surviving as main Arabic divisions to this day. Concerning Ishmael God declared that he would make of him a great nation and multiply him exceedingly, so that he could not be numbered for multitude. Four times in Genesis is this promise reiterated. "I am with the lad" said the Most High "I have blessed him; I will make him a great nation" (Gen. 16. 10-12; 17. 20; 21. 13; 21. 18). These words are not meaningless and the very significant fact that not one of the Semitic Arab nations appears in Ezekiel's list of those who join the forces of Gog in the attack provokes the question as to their whereabouts and their attitude at that time. The land of Arabia proper, one-third the size of Europe and something

like four times the size of the Holy Land of the End Time, if restored to the fertility it enjoyed in early ages, could support many times the present populations of the Arab nations of the Middle East. Calling to mind the progress now being made in restoring the present land of Israel from its past desolation it is not too fanciful to surmise that something of the same kind might be achieved in Arabia. God said of Ishmael that he was to dwell to the east of his brethren, i.e. of Isaac (Gen. 16. 12). The geographical definitions of the land originally settled by the sons of Joktan (Gen. 10. 30) covers the whole of Arabia to the Indian Ocean. History concurs in pointing to that land as the natural home of the Arab peoples just as Israel is that of the Israelis. It might well be, therefore, that the outlines of the promised Holy Land will begin to take shape in proportion as a hitherto unlooked for settlement of the differences between these two peoples looms on the political horizon.

This is the land, therefore, which is to become the centre of the closing events of this Age and the opening events of the next. It will be literally true that "*Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem*" (Isa. 2. 3). Not for nothing has the Holy City preserved its existence and its name for so many centuries. It was already there when history began—the earliest records we have speak of Urusalim, the City of the God of Peace, a place sacred to the worship of the Most High God. To the three great religions of the world—Judaism, Christianity, Islam—it is still a sacred city. Besieged, overthrown and destroyed at least seventeen times, levelled with the ground and ploughed up more than once, stripped and despoiled of its treasures time after time, always has the city risen again, still it stands, a symbol of the eternal things that can never pass away. Where else in all the world could God find so fitting a land and city to be the centre of administration for the new earth which is to be? "*Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, the city of the great King*" (Psa. 48. 2). There is much in all the Scriptures which speak of the day when God sets His hand to recover to this land a people which will build up the desolate wastes and raise a standard of righteousness in the eyes of all nations. Here, where Europe, Asia and Africa meet, it is the Divine intention to create a gathering place for that nation which shall enter the most fiery trial that has ever confronted a people—and, in the power of God, emerge victorious.

GODS OF EGYPT

An exhortation

"Make us gods to go before us, for as for this Moses, we wot not what is become of him." (Exod. 32. 1).

Man has ever been prone to make God in his own image and likeness. There are few who realise with Solomon that heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain God; and much less any house that man can build. The average Israelite of Moses' day believed that God dwelt literally inside the innermost sanctuary of the Tabernacle, and that Aaron went in to speak with Him face to face. Moses and the leaders of the nation knew better, but they could not impart that knowledge to the people, for the people would have none of it. A visible leader, a mighty man of valour to go before them and smite their enemies, they could follow; a popular preacher, arousing their feelings and enthusiasm for a new crusade and a great awakening to this opportunity of attaining a land flowing with milk and honey they could heed; but this mystic who remained alone on the mountain to no apparent purpose for days on end, coming down only to define and order their communal life together for a purpose still imperfectly comprehended, had ceased to fire their imagination. They did not understand what he was doing and they looked about for more tangible things upon which to fix their interest. So it was that they tired of the high mission to which they had been called; shrank from the hardships of the journey that lay before them, and magnified the obstacles which lay in the way. The fair vision of a land in which their children could grow up and the family of Israel live as a free people paled away and in their hearts the vivid colours of Egypt, its gaudy temples, its green fields and its blue river, exercised an appeal the more potent because in spirit they had never really left Egypt. The cruel slavery was forgotten, the distress and sore labour faded from their minds, and they said to one another "Go to, let us return into Egypt, for the former days were better than these". Whilst Moses wrestled with God on the mountain, the people in the plain sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play. The tremendous significance of their deliverance from Egypt no longer meant anything to them, and the enthusiasm which had led them to shout exultantly "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do, and be

obedient" had spent itself and they were left with nothing but an awareness of those things that appealed only to the gross materialism of their natures. That expression "to play" indicates a free indulgence in unholy rites and practices which were expressly condemned in the law Moses had so recently given them. For a short time they had caught a vision of heaven, and in the wonder of that vision had given themselves wholeheartedly to God for His service—but the vision had faded and they had turned once again to the more tangible if less exalted things of this world.

We must, nevertheless, impute to these unfortunate Israelites a certain measure of sincerity. They did not turn back to the gods of Egypt solely because the worship of those gods pandered to depraved desires which could not be satisfied in the purer worship of the Most High. Their reversion to the religion of Egypt was largely because that religion was expressed in terms they could understand; they had been brought up in its atmosphere, under the shadow of its temples, indoctrinated in all its lore and traditions. Those marvellous manifestations of Divine power, the ten plagues, the Red Sea crossing, and the waters of Marah, had for a time turned their thoughts and devotions to the hitherto unknown God Whom Moses preached, and the rosy promises of a land in which they might live free from Egyptian bondage spurred them on to a new zeal and service fired by that expectation; but with the magnetism of Moses' personal presence withdrawn and his own prolonged absence on the mountain top the old arguments and ideas began to re-assert themselves. Feeling themselves to be in need of leadership and guidance, and fearing that both Moses and the God Whom he represented had forgotten and deserted them, the people stretched out longing hands to the gods which they had previously served. Dreading to be left without a shepherd, they were willing to accept as shepherds even those that would lead them back into the intolerable bondage from which they had so recently escaped.

This is the test that comes upon each one that hears and accepts the Divine call to complete dedication of life. Sometimes it comes to communities of believers, sometimes to the individual, but to each and all, at some

time in life, comes the insistent question "Lovest thou Me more than these?" Are you prepared to maintain your high ideals, your continual seeking the things of the Spirit, the things which are above, even although Moses has disappeared into the mists of the mountain top and the magic of his voice, the thrill of his presence, is yours no more? Can you finish your journey to the Kingdom under the guidance and in the strength of an invisible leader now that the visible one who led you in the early days has passed out of your ken, or must you set up for yourself things of earth to which you will give your allegiance? True, these gods of Egypt will appeal more readily to the senses and give you a feeling of earthly satisfaction. There is music, and dancing, and rich viands, and exhilarating drink, and good company, for those who espouse the gods of Egypt, and for a while these things will seem to be more worth while than that stern, selfless devotion to a cause which seems on the surface to be a lost cause. But you are not really in tune with these things, and in your heart of hearts you know it. The turning away from the high spiritual standards of your calling may give temporary relief to eyes tired with "straining . . . for the tarrying day" and cause them to rest more easily upon the pleasant things of this world, but it will bring leanness into your soul, and your heart will become sick for the days when "we walked to the house of God in company". No one, having once sincerely and intelligently appreciated the conditions of our calling and caught a glimpse of the creation that shall be can ever be really satisfied with earthly arrangements, institutions and interests again. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; all things have become new." And "Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour".

We do not necessarily formally reject the faith that is in us when we turn to follow gods of Egypt. We can set them up in our own midst and worship them thinking that we are worshipping the Most High more acceptably. We, no less than others, can make God after our own image and likeness. And it is so fatally easy because, like Israel of old, we want to see results. This waiting period is a time of severe strain. There is so much to be done in the execution of the Divine Plan, and we want to play our part in it. Israel was anxious to inherit and build the Promised Land and could not understand the wilderness experiences which had to come first. We are like

that. We want to see our Father's Name vindicated and His praise and worship established throughout the earth. We know that we are called to witness to His truth and His Plan through all our days on earth, to be witnesses unto Jesus in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. We know also that this witness is a necessary part of our spiritual development and training for the future work, but because it can be made to produce results of a more visible and tangible nature than the fruits of the Holy Spirit's work in our own hearts and lives we tend—so akin are we to those Israelites in the wilderness—to give the greater attention to that which is the means to the end, and to forget the end itself. The world will not be converted through our preaching now; we hold that as a basic principle of the Truth. We are called and commissioned nevertheless to preach the Gospel at all times, in all places, in every manner that we can, as a witness to all nations, right up to the end of the Age, until the end come. That is a basic principle of the Truth also. But unless we are so guided in all our ways and activities by the power of the Holy Spirit, and transformed measurably into the likeness of our Lord, then we shall not be counted worthy of inclusion in the company that is to be entrusted with the task of reconciling men to God in the next Age. That is so fundamental an article of our faith that all else must centre on that. "Give diligence, brethren, to make your calling and election sure, for if ye do *these things* ye shall never fail, for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ", there follows an enumeration of the graces of the Christian character, fruits of the Spirit which we must acquire in their fulness if we are to be well-pleasing to our God.

We must learn to look, then, not at the things which are seen, but at those which are not seen, and in the power of that vision lay our hands to the opportunities of outward service that come our way. Our witness must be as a people, a compact body of believers, a family in Christ, witnessing not only by word of mouth, not only from the public platform, but also by demonstration of the manner in which our faith works out in our own fellowship and reveals itself in our own meetings. The one that hears our message must be able to look at us in our assemblies and see what this faith has done for us, and seeing, "fall down on his face and worship God, and report

that God is in you of a truth" (1 Cor. 14. 25). No witness is really effective unless it eventually leads to this.

We go forward, then, not behind the panoply of the gods of Egypt, borne each upon their bearers' shoulders, as Isaiah so caustically remarked "because they cannot go", but behind the guiding cloud which rises aloft and goes always in front of the host, leading onward and upward, away from Egypt and all its materialism, away from the standards and methods of this earth, away from the mechanistic organisations of men, on, ever on, towards the Promised Land and the realisa-

tion of all the golden promises made to our fathers and inherited by us. If we can only transform our fellowship into a compact family, held together, not by creeds and regulations, rules of faith, synods and presbyteries, but by the vital power of the Holy Spirit, operating in each heart and mind, leading to a spontaneous co-operation together in every good work, then, and only then, will our witness go forth so effectively that men, even in this day of intellectualism and science, will stop, and take heed, and say one to another "They are ignorant, and unlearned, men, but—whence have they this knowledge?"

A NOTE ON JOHN 19. 16

The historicity of the Passion narrative in the Gospel of John is often disputed on the basis of John 19. 16 which allegedly has Pilate handing over Jesus to the Jews to be crucified. It is rightly argued that no Roman governor would allow the chief priests to have any part in the carrying out of a crucifixion.

Moreover, the writer of the Gospel reports the Jews as saying "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death" (18. 31), implies that Pilate is in full charge of the crucifixion (19. 19, 31, 38), and explicitly states that the soldiers crucified Jesus (19. 23, 32f). All this would seem to contradict the evidence of John 19. 16. Therefore, either the Evangelist was inconsistent or the above interpretation of the verse is erroneous.

The solution is to understand "them" in 19. 16 as referring to the soldiers, not the chief priests as the preceding verse would suggest. This is paralleled in Luke's Gospel; in 23. 26 "they" refers to the chief priests and the Jews, so it would seem according to the verses immediately preceding, but in fact "they" must stand for "the soldiers" since only a Roman soldier had the right in an occupied land to demand a non-Roman subject to carry equipment for him.

In John 19. 16, "them" refers to the Roman soldiers (in accord with Matt. 27. 26-7; Mk. 15. 15-6; Lk. 23. 26) who were acting in harmony with Jewish wishes (as explicitly stated in Luke 23. 25b).

R. J. Owen

ON MELCHISEDEK

Delaporte, in his "History of Civilisation" (page 221) remarks that "the terms 'father' and 'mother' in the sense of superior or brother, meaning colleague, friend or equal, were already beginning to appear" (in 1400-1500 B.C.). "In the epistolary style of the New Empire they were frequently employed". The Tel-el Amarna letters, written from Palestinian chieftains to their sovereign in Egypt at the time of the Exodus, contain among them a great many from one Abdi-Khiba, priest-king of Jerusalem, who claims that neither by father or mother but by the power of the Most High God he held and exercised his office. All this throws some light on the reference in Heb. 7. 1-4 to Melchisedek, the priest-king of Jerusalem (Salem) in the days of Abraham, several centuries before the Exodus "without father, without mother . . . abideth a priest continually". The expression meant that he had no equal among the other petty

kings around him: he was "priest of the Most High God" and held his authority from Him. So the New Testament writer goes on to say "now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham paid tithes". This confirmation of a solitary expression in the book of Hebrews by a clay tablet which lay buried in the soil of Egypt from the days of Joshua until the year 1887 is a striking evidence of the accuracy of Biblical allusions in even such apparently trivial matters. Many theories have been woven round the phrase, some even propounding the fantastic view that Melchisedek, having no father or mother, must have been the Son of God Himself, on earth in fleshly form. The above discovery tends to show that the expression means no more than that Melchisedek in his day had no equal; he was supreme among men on earth, being a King and Priest, Priest of the Most High God, a Priest upon his throne.

THREE STORIES OF SALVATION

2. A Man of the Pharisees

A man walked quickly through the dark, narrow streets of Jerusalem, with his cloak pulled tightly around him to obscure his identity. He was evidently a wealthy man, of noble birth and an important citizen of this ancient town. He was anxious to pass unnoticed for his mission was not a public engagement and he was apparently rather retiring by nature in spite of his office. He stopped at a house and requested to speak to the prophet of Nazareth who was lodging there during the Passover festival. Jesus' ear was ever open to those who genuinely needed His help, and sympathetically He listened to the ruler's enquiry. Nicodemus, a leader of the Pharisees' party and member of the Sanhedrin, had been interested in the work and preaching which Jesus had been doing. Perhaps he was already somewhat persuaded concerning the claims of the Man from Nazareth but was rather disturbed by the Temple incident which had resulted in considerable animosity among some of the religious dignitaries (John 2. 13-17). He may have been anxious for Jesus' welfare and certainly for the maintenance of order in Jerusalem. The normal population of the city would be swollen by many thousands during the period of the feast and the Jewish rulers would not want the religious fervour of the masses to rise too high and thus endanger the peace.

There may be some significance in the word "we" used in John 3. 2. It could be that the sect of the Pharisees or just a part of it were determined to discover the true nature and purpose of Jesus' work. Unlike the Sadducees, there were periods during the Master's ministry when their bitter opposition abated, particularly when their rival party was thrown up in its true light by Jesus. Whatever brought the Pharisee to the house where Jesus lodged that night, the man in high office preferred not to be seen there in the broad light of day.

Nicodemus opened the conversation in the true style of a diplomat, paying Jesus the compliment of being a teacher sent from God. Our Master, also true to form, cut right across the flattery and went to the point on the basic issues of religion. Nicodemus was a highly religious man. He could not have maintained his place in the religious sect without scrupulous attention to ritual. He would have an

accurate knowledge of Hebrew history and be well versed in the Mosaic Law. His ability to quote the Jewish Scriptures would put many a modern minister to shame. Undoubtedly he had kept the law well and was a fine, upright son of Abraham in the eyes of his fellows. His sound judgment would be very beneficial to the Jewish people and his pure speech and conduct would contrast strongly against the background of hypocrisy and immorality of his day. Any personal reasons for coming to Jesus were obviously to improve his already well matured religious life.

Jesus showed him that his present standing before men, as a ruler and respectable religious man, meant absolutely nothing in the sight of God. All who would enter the Kingdom of Heaven would have to become as little babies, making a fresh start in life, with a revaluation of spiritual things. However good they may have appeared to be according to earthly standards, that was a matter of the past to be forgotten. Those who were citizens of God's kingdom must enter it not on the basis of their own virtue and knowledge, but through new life, founded upon Jesus Christ.

The teaching which the Lord explained to Nicodemus is one of the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. Like the ruler in Israel it is possible to belong to a religious sect or movement and thereby participate in its ritual and to understand its teachings, and yet not become a child of God. There are many like Nicodemus today and not all such are wealthy and influential leaders. Like the Pharisees they enjoy an outward respectability of religious belief, many going so far as to dedicate their lives to the service of God, shunning the attractions of this world. Yet all of these valuable aspects of discipleship to Jesus do not in themselves constitute a gateway to heaven. Only as we are prepared to die to self and to our former sinful life, and yield ourselves wholly to the will and purpose of God, can He implant within us "new life" by His spirit and through the blood of His dear Son.

Paul had passed through this experience from very much the same position that Nicodemus occupied when he visited Jesus. Before his conversion to the Christian faith, Paul had stood as one of the most worthy and most promising young men in all Israel. He must have been the hope and inspiration of the

Pharisees. In every respect he had the qualities of a great and good leader in their faith. Judging from his ability to expound the Gospel and relate it to the Hebrew Scriptures, he had remarkable ability as a teacher. But after meeting with Jesus on the Damascus road, and finding new life in Christ, Saul of Tarsus discovered that all the old glories faded, his pride and zeal wilted and that everything of the past was utterly worthless. In their place grew up a humble faith and radiant power. Instead of boasting in his own knowledge and abilities, he found fellowship with Christ to be the great absorbing interest of his life.

Paul, like many another before him, and many another who has lived since, found the way of Christ somewhat bewildering at first, in the light of his upbringing and education. He may well have echoed the words of Nicodemus during those days of blindness in Damascus and have asked "How can these things be?" Suddenly to find out that all of life's past achievements are worthless is no light thing to men of the stature and quality of Paul and Nicodemus. Yet whether we be great or small in the eyes of our fellows, the issue must be squarely faced, as we weigh up the ambitions and rewards of this world against the spiritual wealth of eternity.

God does not rush into these things however. Time for prayer and reflection is given, in order that matters can be seen in their true perspective. Both of these men of Israel must have spent a long time counting the cost. Nicodemus does not seem to have made up his mind immediately, for a little further on in the Gospel of John we catch another glimpse of him, this time not sitting chatting with Jesus about entry into the Kingdom of Heaven, but among his brethren of the Sanhedrin. (John 7. 46-53). The officers of the Temple guard had borne witness that "Never man spake like this man". Perhaps Nicodemus agreed with them as he pondered his evening visit to the prophet of Galilee. Anyway, by this time he had summoned sufficient courage to question the fairness of the accusations made against Jesus. He may not have thrown in his lot with the disciples, but his conscience impelled him to be just.

We have one final look at Nicodemus before he disappears completely from the New Testament story. It is at the tragic scene of the crucifixion. The disciples, who have stood close to Jesus' side during His life and even at His arrest, have now fled. Two men, gentlemen of high rank, who previously have remained in the shadows, afraid lest they

should be ostracised because of their sympathies with the Nazarene, step forward. Publicly they do a last service to Him who in His lifetime they held in secret regard. It is no small task which they undertake (John 20. 38-42) in the burial of the Galilean prophet who has died as a criminal. Yet in the face of previous fears and possible excommunication from public life, Joseph and Nicodemus express their love for Jesus in a most beautiful manner.

The conversation which took place when Nicodemus visited Jesus by night had slowly but surely borne its fruit. Perhaps the days which followed would give further evidence of this. How remarkable were the individual contacts which Jesus had with people in different walks of life. On occasions He preached to a vast crowd and many followed Him, but just as readily they turned away in their numbers too, when He did not speak and act as it pleased them. Our Saviour was more, much more, than a mere demagogue who could turn the hearts of the masses. He loved men and women as individuals and preached some of his most searching sermons to one person here or a handful of followers there. Salvation is like that, not a matter of mass production. Jesus still speaks to the heart of each individual, calling them to repentance and discipleship. His voice may be heard through the lips of a disciple or read from the pen of one of His servants. He may call us while engaged on some noble work or high office, and may speak to us in humbler circumstances and in the midst of our selfish and sinful life. But there has been no change in the principle behind his remarks, nor any lessening of the need to hearken to His warning, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God". This is not just the pursuit of some good moral cause nor the imitation of the fine example of living which Jesus gave to us. He asks for no less than death to all our high ambitions, and a new life begun within us which is inspired and empowered from above. Then, and only then, shall we attain the moral and spiritual characteristics of the Master, for by His grace and through day-to-day fellowship with Him, can we be like Him.

Whether or not the remainder of the third chapter of John's Gospel from verse 14 is a continuation of Jesus' remarks to Nicodemus is not clear from the record. It may constitute Jesus' teaching at some other time which the writer found helpful to include under the same heading. There is in those later verses

and in the chapters which follow a clearly defined principle regarding salvation, which the writers of the New Testament enlarged upon after Pentecost. Jesus speaks of it as "belief on the Son of God". Further on He illustrates what he means by saying "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood ye have no life in you". (John 6. 53).

It is a strange thing that a people whose national language was so pictorial and who were brought up on literature steeped in imagery and figures of speech should find Jesus' words so difficult to understand. What stubbornness of comprehension made Nicodemus interpret literally the words "Except a man be born again"? It is difficult to realise how thoroughly materialistic were the teachers of God's holy people Israel. They were blind and most of them had no desire to see the light of the Gospel. As expressed at the time of the ascension by the disciples, the one hope of all Jewry was upon the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel. Somehow the idea of a new spiritual life, of fellowship with God and development of characteristics like His, was to them an utterly foreign thought and cut right across the longings of their fleshly craving and patriotic zeal.

The principle enunciated in Jesus' words to Nicodemus is true of every age. That is why, in part at least, the Jewish leaders should have understood their meaning. There is a time in the life of every one who turns to God, when there is a "right about turn" and a definite refusal of the things of this world and its god. They look instead to their Creator in faith for life and guidance. Abraham's departure from Ur and Moses' rejection of Egyptian princely life are perhaps the clearest Old Testament examples.

The ancient Egyptians were usually buried with a copy of what moderns have called the "Book of the Dead" by their side. It was a book of liturgical texts and other matters connected with the after life, for the Egyptians believed that after death there would be a resurrection, and that the body laid in the tomb would one day live again. And because of this, they themselves had a different name for that book. They called it "The Book of Coming Forth by Day". It was not a Book of the Dead to them; it was a Book of Resurrection.

Too many people to-day, intelligent, talented, look at death and see in it only the end of all things. The Christian, however deficient in intellectual attainments, looks at death and sees it as the preliminary to a coming forth by Day. "I know that my Vindicator liveth"

We, who live nineteen centuries from the time Jesus spoke the word to Nicodemus, can so easily take for granted the ideas which stumbled Jewish leaders, that we may miss their practical application to our own lives. We ought to ask ourselves the searching questions which must inevitably spring from a study of John 3. Were we in fact "born again" of the spirit or did we consecrate to a sect, a service or a doctrine?

The same law will operate in the earthly Kingdom. Not until the former way of life under the conditions prevalent today, amid the kingdom of this world, has been genuinely repented of, and an approach has been made toward God through their Saviour Jesus, can men really expect to "live" in the Kingdom. Their former loyalties to selfishness which controls the kingdom of Satan, must be fully surrendered before citizenship in Christ's Kingdom can be granted.

As men and women rise from the tomb, they will enjoy perfect physical and mental power. The moral characteristics, however, of their former lives will remain until they consciously reject their sins. Jesus said that "No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse". (Matt. 9. 16). Here again our Lord was stating an eternal truth which applies equally well to this age and the age to come. The loyalties to a materialistic age will have to be repudiated and selfishness must give place to a heart devoted to the will of God, acceptable in the Saviour. Thus, with life fully born anew, they will be able to live for and by the One who gave them life. To them He will become "The Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace".

declared Job, "and that in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19. 25). "There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust" said Paul (Acts 24. 15). The world goes on its way, unheeding, its plans and its schemes limited by the brevity of human life. We who have pledged our lives and our abilities to the larger vision have espoused a long term policy which sees death but as an incident in our service to God, an experience marking the transition from this order of things to that better order under which the practice of evil will disappear from Divine creation, and all men enter into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Look at it how we will, we cannot escape the inevitable conclusion: that which men call death is nothing else than a "coming forth by Day".



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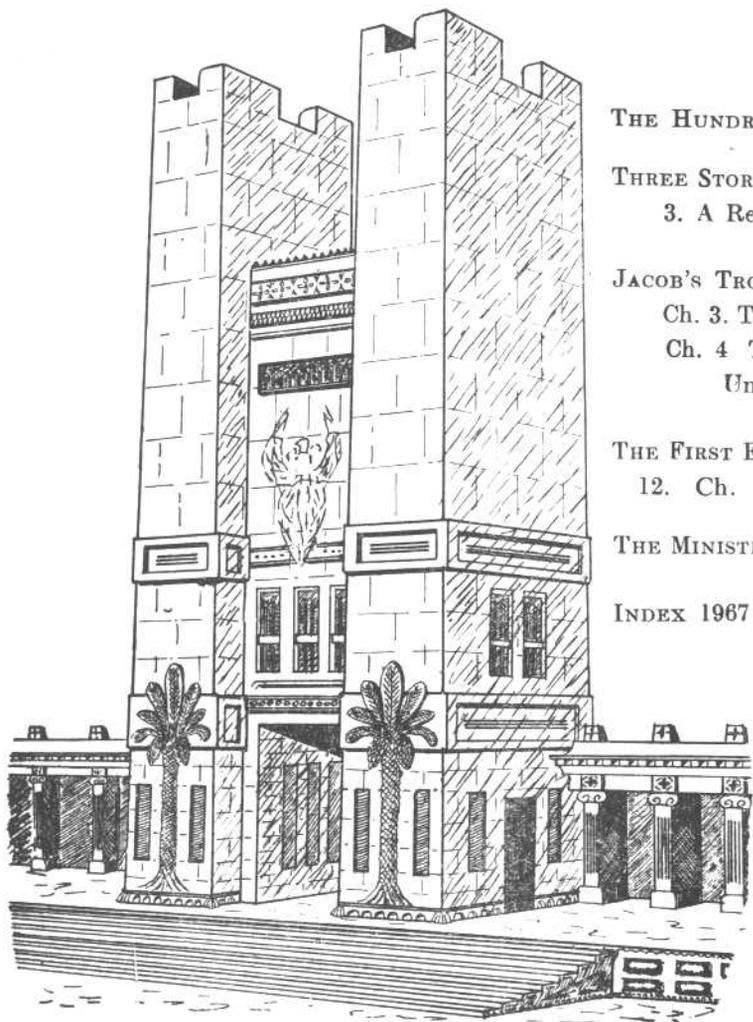
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

Published November 1st

Next issue January 1st

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

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Jacob's Trouble

Chapters 3 and 4 of this series, dealing with Ezek. 38 and 39, appear in this issue and the final two will be featured in the next issue. It is planned to re-issue the entire series in pamphlet form in the New Year.

Changes of address

Will readers changing their address please notify us as early as possible so that our records can be corrected in time for the next despatch? In the case of U.S.A. and Canada, surface mail letters or postcards take up to four weeks to reach us so that where possible an air mail advice is preferable. It is important also to give the old address as well as the new; this information is often omitted and when, as sometimes happens, we have two readers of the same name and initials, we are in a quandary.

Renewals

Readers whose address labels bear numbers 2000 and 9000 series and from whom we have not heard since a year ago will have received a "renewal slip" in their September copy inviting an intimation as to their continued interest. Such as did not respond will find a pink reminder slip in this issue. It is important, please, that you advise your wishes so that we may be sure you are still receiving the "Monthly" and that you wish it continued; your early reply will be sincerely appreciated.

Publications

Attention is invited to the list of current publications on this page, several of which are useful as small Christmas gifts to friends. The range of free leaflets also listed is appropriate for slipping into correspondence with friends who may be interested.

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The following pamphlets are available in small quantities on the same terms as the "Bible Study Monthly", i.e. free of charge but gifts toward the cost of maintaining supplies sincerely appreciated.

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- 33 The Divine Permission of Evil
- 34 Everlasting Punishment
- 35 Conversion in the After-life
- 36 The Resurrection of the Dead
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* * *

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THE HUNDRETH PSALM

An Exposition

This psalm is one to be sung before the Throne of God. It is an expression of worship designed to be uttered in the Divine Presence. It is not given to us, as it was to Isaiah, to see in vision the Temple of God opened in Heaven, and to behold the Lord, high and lifted up, His glory filling the sanctuary. It is given to us to approach and worship Him in the beauty of holiness, to draw near in spirit and behold Him by the eye of faith. This Psalm is one of those "spiritual songs" written aforetime for our encouragement and strength, and it is in the spirit of songs such as this that we can, each one of us, "appear before God in Zion".

Now it is because this is a Psalm to be sung in God's presence that it opens with praise, and more than that, with jubilant praise. No restrained, subdued harmony of quiet notes, this. No softly sung solo, audible to the ears of the faithful few and reaching no farther. This is a universal acclamation of joy, resounding to the ends of the earth. "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with thanksgiving". The call is a general one; all peoples, nations and languages are bidden to join in this anthem of praise. Gladness and thanksgiving is the keynote; it would seem that sorrow and sighing have fled away. In this we have the key to the application of the Psalm dispensationally. It fits no Age so well as the Millennial Age, the day of the Kingdom of God upon earth, the day when "the trees of the wood shall rejoice before the Lord, for he cometh to judge the earth; he shall judge the world in righteousness, and the people with his truth". (Psa. 96. 13). Then will be fulfilled the words of Isaiah "It shall be said in that day, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation'" (Isa. 25. 9). That day is to be one of universal rejoicing and the words of this Psalm will find their richest fulfilment in its light.

But although the words are thus shown to be specially applicable to that future day of blessedness there must be remembered that they can have and do have a rich fulfilment now. True, the nations do not now make a joyful noise unto the Lord neither do all peoples come into his presence with thanksgiving. It would be more correct to say of

them that they make a discordant noise unto the god of this world and enter into his slavery with lamentation. But in this world of to-day, dark and evil as it is, there do exist outposts of God's ambassadors, ministers of reconciliation. Because those ambassadors represent the new world that shall be, they must needs accept the obligation and privilege of fulfilling the exhortation in this psalm, of making a joyful noise before the Lord and coming into his presence with thanksgiving.

In the literal sphere audible praise occupies a very important place in Christian worship. There are many who cannot take place in discourse and study, or cannot offer and lead in prayer, who can join with all their heart and soul in the voicing of praise. What is usually termed a "praise service", one in which the entire congregation joins in the singing of one favourite hymn after another, is occasionally despised or spoken lightly of, by some, but it is in reality a very important and profitable form of corporate worship and fellowship. Such a service, well conducted, is a spiritual stimulus to many devoted souls whose voices are otherwise rarely heard in the assemblies. And if those voices are sometimes a little out of tune, or grate somewhat harshly upon the ear of one who has been trained to appreciate the technique of good music, of what real consequence is that? We may be sure that by the time those imperfectly rendered songs have mounted the heights and echoed through the halls of Heaven all the harshness and lack of tune has been smoothed away and only the perfect rhythm of pure praise remains.

We need not be afraid of heartiness in our songs of praise. There is a dignity about the Truth but it is not the dignity of a cold, lifeless statue. It is the dignity of a warm, vibrant, living thing, animating all with which it comes in contact and ennobling all that it touches. So when the situation calls for praise to be loud, then let the praise be loud. "Praise him upon the loud cymbals" said the Psalmist, and then, upon reflection, decided that he was not being thorough-going enough, and so "Praise him upon the high-sounding cymbals" he concluded (Psa. 150. 5). It was something of this that the Apostle must have had in mind when he spoke of our "singing and making melody in your hearts unto the Lord" (Eph. 5. 19) for there are high-sounding cym-

bals in our hearts too, and even although they are of a kind that only God can hear they are there to be used.

It is now that a new note of urgency appears in the Psalm. "*Know ye*", cries the singer, "*know ye, that the Lord, he is God. It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves. We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture*". These sentiments do not command general acceptance to-day. To an increasing degree men endeavour to persuade themselves that they owe nothing to God, no meed of gratitude for the blessings of life and intelligence, no acknowledgment of the rightness of His laws, no service and no praise. They will not know the Lord, that He is God, and as they gather together to worship at the shrine of Darwin they chant in unison "it is we that hath made us, we ourselves". God looks down from His Heaven upon them. Who can doubt that there is a gentle, indulgent smile of tolerance as He watches these self-opinionated and so ignorant children whose whole world revolves around their own constricted circle of vision. They will know better one day, and God is quite content to wait.

These verses, also, then, point to the future Age as the time of their application. It is then that men will know that the Lord is God; then that the man-made theories of modernism and humanism and every other "ism" that at present "darkens counsel without knowledge" will dissolve and vanish away like the early morning mists before the sun, and men come to realise at last that they live, and move, and have their being, in God. Then it is they become conscious of the great truth that they are the sheep of His pasture. The symbol of the shepherd is the predominant one of the Millennial Age. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd . . . and shall gently lead those that are with young" (Isa. 40. 11). Men will realise that relationship between themselves and their God, and will, for the most part at any rate, come willingly under that rule of the iron rod which is the rule of the shepherding rod, a firm and wise, and yet a loving and benevolent guidance towards God's way of life.

What wonder then that the Psalmist, seeing these things, sings exultantly "*Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise. Be thankful unto him and bless his name. For the Lord is good, and his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations*". There are several "gates" into which, in a metaphorical sense, man may enter and come face to face with God. In the

days of Israel there was a Tabernacle, a tent of curtains with a surrounding enclosure, and at the eastern end of that enclosure a "gate", a way of entry to the sacred mysteries that lay within. But not any man of Israel could enter by that gate; only the Levites. Thus was pictured the great truth that "he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11. 6). That gate represented the entrance to the condition of justification by faith enjoyed by those who have accepted Jesus as their personal Saviour. To such the world has commenced to be left behind; they are pressing forward to a life of service for God. It is with thanksgiving and praise that the advance is made and such can very truly "enter into his gates" in that attitude of mind. But inside the "court" of the Tabernacle another "gate", the "porch" or "door" of the tent itself, stands before the believer, and entrance through that door denotes consecration unto death, a presenting our whole selves living offerings, holy, acceptable to God, our reasonable service (Rom. 12. 1). Even here the progress is not ended, for the sequel to that consecrated life is entrance into "Heaven itself" through yet another door, the "veil" which is the Tabernacle dividing the Holy from the Most Holy. The believer, progressing from sin to righteousness and from time to eternity, must pass these "three" gates in succession, but he has good reason to pass through them all with thanksgiving and praise.

There are gates, too, through which mankind will be invited to pass, when the due time has come. "Open ye the gates" cries the prophet (Isa. 26. 2) "that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in". What gates are these? They are the gates of the Millennial Age, the portals through which men will pass from the darkness of this present evil world to the light and warmth of the future Kingdom. John the Revelator in his vision saw the new Jerusalem come down to earth and those gates flung open that all of mankind—save the unclean, the wilfully wicked—could enter in. They will enter with thanksgiving and praise. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isa. 35. 10).

So, at long last, men will realise that "*the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting and his truth endureth to all generations*". Goodness, mercy, truth; these are the distinguishing characteristics of the Divine dealings with

men during the Millennial Age. "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other," sang the Psalmist (Psa. 85. 10), and Isaiah, foreseeing the eventual outcome of the Divine Plan, cried ecstatically "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (Isa. 32. 17).

One great song of universal praise and thanksgiving will ascend to the Father when at length all men have tasted of His mercies, sin has been driven away, and the Lord Jesus has said to His redeemed ones "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world".

THREE STORIES OF SALVATION

3. A Rest by a Well

The message of salvation which Jesus brought from God was for all people. The barriers which men erect between peoples of different class and colour make no difference to the ultimate course of the Gospel. Therefore Jesus was friendly towards those who would have been avoided by an orthodox Jew who kept his religious ritual very carefully.

Jesus and His disciples were travelling northward from Judea to Galilee, and one of the roads by which they could journey passed through Samaria, close to the ancient city of Shechem. While the disciples had gone off to purchase food, Jesus sat resting by a roadside well. It was an ancient watering place, having been used by the patriarch Jacob many hundreds of years before. As He sat there a woman of the city came to draw water, and having nothing with which to draw water He asked her for a drink. The woman was obviously greatly surprised by the request. It was unusual for a Jew to speak to a respectable Jewess without proper introduction. The Jews were not friendly toward their Samaritan neighbours and sometimes open hostility occurred. Yet Jesus spoke to this foreign stranger who He knew to be an outcast among her own people. He did so without fear of contamination and confident that among such He could find genuine followers.

The woman's curious nature proved to be a useful means of conveying a simple but valuable message and before long the woman was tasting "living water". As they pursued their conversation she tried to divert attention from her own sinful condition and to focus it upon general ideas about religious ritual. That was the kind of worship which was now common among Jews and Samaritans, in that they were far more concerned with unimportant details of ceremony as to when and where and how they should pray and praise God than in the heartfelt communion between God and His people. Their sermons and ser-

VICES were as dry as dust, with little or nothing in them to promote the spiritual health of the participants. Hence their religion was dead and their faith bound up in places and things rather than in the living Creator. Jesus directed the woman's attention back to the realities of true worship and the individual relationship with God. He showed her that outward form and appearance are negligible compared to inner holiness and aspirations. In those few recorded sentences of our Lord on this subject in John 4, we have the radical cause of Israel's failure as a nation towards the Almighty God of Abraham, who meant little more to them than the lifeless idols and mythical gods of the surrounding nations. In stating the basis of real worship, our Master also revealed the heart of God in the words "for the Father seeketh such".

Jesus needed no vast auditorium nor flocking crowd in order to preach a sermon. He was as happy speaking to one as to a hundred. How important are the words He spoke to one here and one there. They were words which could pierce the cloaks of self-righteousness or the thick coverings of utter sinfulness. The power of his message reached down into the hearts of those to whom He spoke, and then out into a wider world. The woman was so affected by the Lord's remarks to her, that on returning to the city she succeeded in persuading some of her countrymen to listen to the "prophet of Galilee". What was there about the woman that compelled others to go to see for themselves this man who she said had "told me all that I ever did"? The immediate result of that quiet meeting by the well was that "many believed" and came to understand that "this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the World". It would be impossible to assess the complete result of Jesus' talk to the woman but it would have seemed to have laid the foundations of the great missionary enterprise led by Philip the evangelist and

recorded in Acts 8. The Lord's word of command was that the witness should be given in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria . . . The cities of Samaria and Shechem were not so very far from each other that the good tidings could not easily have spread among the neighbouring citizens.

This woman of Samaria, like many another, had an unquenched thirst of heart which only Jesus could satisfy. In the creation of man, God had given him a yearning to seek His Creator for life and fellowship. Although much of that original stimulus has been lost through sin, it nevertheless remains in the souls of men and women, and during their lives exerts itself. Because of ignorance, the longings of the soul are smothered by worldly pleasure and selfishness. Natural passions are given free rein and the human physique and intellect become slaves to sin in the worst form. The woman who met Jesus at Jacob's well was much such a person as that. The more respectable forms of satisfying the cravings of human nature, to excess and without restraint, are no less sinful and dominated by the Adversary of God and men.

All of these passions may be summed up in the one word "self". Where God has been forgotten, ignored and often purposely rebuffed, the dominating factor of life becomes the satisfying of one's own selfish ambition. It may be in greed for material wealth and power and then many others suffer as a result. Sometimes gluttony or drunkardness become the obsession wherein one's own kinsfolk are distressed, and sometimes the weakness is as with this poor creature who lived on the fringe of Samaritan society. All the children of Adam suffer from this malady to a greater or lesser extent and many who name the name of Christ have not been freed from its bondage through not yielding their lives completely to Him.

Whatever the manifestation of the selfishness, there is only one remedy for the disease and that too was discovered by the woman of Samaria as she came to the well that day. It is to meet the "Great Physician" face to face, and to accept Him as the only Saviour from all sin. Undoubtedly the woman bore the marks of her shame in her face. Fear and anxiety, mingled with a sour expression, denote those who have yet to find the true source of happiness and peace. And like so many more who have come to the Saviour, she went away transformed. She must have been changed or those in the city of Shechem who went to Jesus as a result of hearing her

message would have given no heed to the harlot. Instead they would have thought her mad, and in fact it is remarkable that they did not. John records for us that she "left her waterpot and went her way . . .". Why was she in such a hurry? After years of struggle and wretchedness she had found new life and peace and was determined to share her joy. This she did to such effect that many went to Jesus personally and claimed Him as their Saviour.

The disciples seem to have been rather left out of all this. Their understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven had not yet reached beyond the borders of their own land. Their Master seemed to be doing some strange things and appeared to speak in riddles. They did not realise that the meat and drink of which He spoke was a food for a spiritual life. As yet their minds were centred on maintaining their human life. They were still more interested in the signs and seasons of the natural world than Jesus' remarks about the fields being already white unto harvest.

Where does our chief interest lie? Have we met with Jesus and tasted the water "which was not in the well"? If so, did we leave our "water-pots" and hurry off to tell our neighbours and friends in order that they too might share with us the gift of life? Have we not found that the water which the Lord has given has not only quenched our thirst but has been a well of water springing up into eternal life? It is a solemn thought that in desert lands where water is at a premium, it is regarded as criminal to withhold information as to the whereabouts of an oasis.

Thus in this day and generation we have a foretaste of what the prophets foresaw would occur in the Kingdom of God . . . "Ho, every-one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters . . ." (Isa. 55. 1) and again in John's vision of the New Jerusalem "and let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely". Wonderful days they will be when all men everywhere are able to drink deeply of the life-giving waters in Christ. In order that we may share with Christ as fountains springing up into eternal life, we must receive now from the great Divine reservoir and already have become channels for quenching the thirst of those parched and dry in their sins.

The Lord still calls to men as He did on that last day of the Great Feast when He cried to the throngs in Jerusalem "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink". (John 7. 37). And to such as truly believe on Him, out of them shall "flow rivers of living water".

JACOB'S TROUBLE

An exposition of Ezek. 38/39

Chapter 3 THE BIRTH OF A NATION

God puts His plans into effect by means of chosen instruments. Of no time in the world's history could it be said that His witnesses were not in the earth, manifesting His standards to a generally heedless world and telling the more thoughtful among them of things that must surely come to pass. In times of crisis His prophets have been ever to the front, and at seasons of disaster His ministers have been there pouring in the oil of comfort and binding up the brokenhearted. (Isa. 61. 1).

Who will fill that position when the last great crisis comes upon the nations? The world generally will be in a state of turmoil and in no particular frame of mind to listen to any voice that speaks for God; in any case it will be gathering its forces for the final onslaught on the citadel of God's holiness. Awaiting that onslaught stands the nation which of all the world has pledged itself unreservedly to the standard of Heaven and is prepared to stand or fall by that pledge. Who are these people pictured dwelling at peace in an undefended land awaiting in confidence the advance of their foe?

Old Testament prophecy awards this role to the whole nation of Israel, recovered from all the lands into which, for more than two millenniums past, they have been dispersed. In that manner the prophecies enshrine a vital truth, that God is to plant a "dedicated nation" in the land which is peculiarly His own (Deut. 12. 11) and in that manner reverse the terrible end to which Israel's national existence came when the Roman general Titus captured Jerusalem in A.D.70 and dispersed the people of Judea and Galilee to all parts of the Roman world. But this was not the only dispersal among the nations suffered by Israel and a proper understanding of the regathering can only be had if consideration is given to the history of Israel's exile among the nations.

There have been three major scatterings. The first was due to the Assyrian invasions of the eighth century B.C. when Shalmaneser and Sargon of Assyria between them overran the ten tribe kingdom and carried most of the population into Armenia and Media. A few years later Sennacherib invaded Judea and sent many of its inhabitants to join them. None of these came back. Through the centuries their descendants drifted eastward, across

Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and westward into Southern Russia and Europe.

The second dispersal was that of the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in the sixth century B.C. His forces desolated the land, destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and took the greater part of the people captive to Babylon. A few escaped into Egypt and the poorest of the peasantry were allowed to remain to cultivate the land. Seventy years later Cyrus of Persia, conqueror of Babylon, allowed those Jews who so desired to return and rebuild the Temple, and re-establish some sort of national life. The Jewish community in Babylon must have grown quite substantially but only some forty-two thousand accepted the offer and settled in Judea. The rest of the country was populated by Samaritans, Phoenicians and Edomites and in after years these all became for all practical purposes one nation. Those Jews who remained at Babylon prospered and formed strong communities throughout the Persian Empire and eastward to India. With the growing prosperity of the re-established Jewish State—which at one time achieved virtual independence—there was continual migration of Jews into all the Mediterranean countries so that when St. Peter preached in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost there were Jews among his hearers who hailed from almost every part of the Roman world.

The Jewish nation of the First Advent, therefore, was already very much a mixed people. Jerusalem and the south was populated mainly by full-blooded descendants of Judah and Benjamin with a strain of Edomite blood. Farther north remnants of the other ten tribes persisted with an admixture of Phoenician and Syrian; in the centre of the land, Samaria of the New Testament, alien strains were so pronounced that the rigid Jews of Jerusalem would not count them as Jews; they had "*no dealings with the Samaritans*".

The third dispersion followed the Jewish rebellion against Rome in A.D.70. Many went eastward to their brethren in Babylon and Persia, or northward to Roman Asia and into Greece. Some penetrated westward into Egypt and along the North African coast. Others penetrated Central Europe, their

descendants appearing in Russia, Poland, Germany and finally England. But by far the greater number of those expelled by Titus made their way southward into Arabia where they joined with the native Arab peoples in laying the foundations of a great Judaeo-Arab empire.

This fusion of Jews with Arabs is one to which singularly little attention has been given in the study of prophecy. European history books, for obvious reasons, have little to say about the Arab supremacy of the Middle Ages in world affairs, and the part played by the Jews in that supremacy. This influx of Jews into Arabia at the beginning of the Christian era profoundly influenced the Arab population both physically and intellectually. H. G. Wells in his "Outline of History" says "It is difficult to say, in the case of this Arabic culture, where the Jew ends and the Arab begins, so essential and important were its Jewish factors". By the eighth century A.D., three hundred years before William the Conqueror landed in England, this Arab empire extended from Spain to China, and was one of the most extensive empires the world has seen. Its builders were learned in the arts and sciences, being particularly well versed in astronomy, medicine, chemistry and mathematics. Much of our modern knowledge in these branches of learning is directly traceable to them, and a great many English technical terms are Arabic words.

The modern Jews are, in the main, descendants of the Second and Third Dispersions, i.e. of those who occupied the land from the days of Cyrus the Persian until the expulsion of Titus. These are the people principally in evidence in the present State of Israel. It must be remembered however, that the promised regathering envisages reunion of the two houses of Israel, separated since the days of Solomon's death. "I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one nation in the land . . . and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all" (Ezek. 37. 21-22). Says Jeremiah "In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers" (Jer. 3. 8). The schism which resulted in the creation of a ten tribe nation and a two tribe nation at the death of Solomon will be healed and descendants of

all the tribes will appear in the regathered people.

There are grounds in the prophetic Scriptures for the expectation that membership of this "Servant Nation" of the end of the Age will not be rigidly confined to the natural sons of Jacob. St. Paul stated an important principle when he said "*they are not all Israel which are of Israel*" (Rom. 9. 6). Developing this theme he shews that fitness for the purpose in view and above all things sterling loyalty to God counts more with Him than racial descent. Ultimately, he says "*there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, but the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him*" (Rom. 10. 12). The fourth chapter of Hebrews extends this argument to shew that so far as the Christian calling of this Age, initiated at Pentecost, is concerned "*they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief*" and the opportunity passed to the wider world and the consequence of that has been that the Christian Church has been predominantly Gentile and only to a minor extent Jewish. The Church is one instrument in the Lord's hand for the conversion of mankind in the next Age, but there is also to be another instrument, restored ideal Israel, the Servant Nation, in the Holy Land, and this is fundamental to the whole structure of Scriptural doctrine. The same principle, of faith and dedication of life to God, is the indispensable pre-requisite. It seems reasonable therefore to expect that men and women sharing the faith and hopes of Israel and prepared to be identified with them, even if not of Israel stock, will not be turned away.

Isaiah's 56th chapter speaks of this. It is addressed to the "son of the stranger" who wishes to identify himself with the dedicated people of God in the land. The imminence of the Millennial Age is indicated in verse 1; the blessing which comes upon the man who already partakes of the spirit of that Age, in verse 2. Verse 3 refers to "*the son of the stranger that hath joined himself to the Lord*" and the theme is continued to verse 7. The "son of the stranger" who is consecrated to God is to be brought to His holy mountain and his offerings will be acceptable on God's altar. The "eunuch" (separated man) who has taken hold of God's covenant is given a place and name within God's walls. "*The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him besides those that are gathered to him*" (vs. 7). "*I will yet gather others to him beside his own scattered*

outcasts" says Leaser, and Rotherham "Yet others will I gather to him besides his own gathered ones", a clear intimation that when God gathers the scattered outcasts of Israel He is going to gather others, non-Israelites, as well, and give them to Israel as brethren and fellow-citizens.

The vision of the Millennial Israel recorded by Ezekiel (chap. 47) confirms this principle of adoption of the "strangers"—a term for all non-Israelites dwelling with Israel—so that they enjoy full rights of inheritance and are "as born in the country among the children of Israel". Although the time here referred to is after the establishment of the Millennial reign, the passage does afford proof of this element in the constitution of the Servant Nation. The "strangers" are to be received into full fellowship and accorded full rights of citizenship.

The new nation, then, may well find room for individuals of other races, who on the basis of faith in God and belief in the coming earthly kingdom desire to join themselves to the people being gathered together in the Land of Promise. Such will form a valuable contribution to the Nation although we must not lose sight of the fact that the sons of Jacob are certain to be predominant if only because of their past training and experience in the ways and purposes of God. It has frequently been remarked that the Semitic race is the most reflective and spiritually inclined of the races of mankind. The Hebrews are the foremost of Semitic peoples in this same respect and there may therefore be a very sound reason why in the Divine disposition of things they will form the major constituent of the Nation "in that day". It may well be, however, that this adoption of "strangers" into the commonwealth of Israel proves a feature of the later consolidation into the dedicated Servant Nation rather than the initial gathering into the land. Most of the prophetic foreviews depict the Return as that of the descendants of those who were driven out by the Assyrians and the Babylonians and the Romans. Perhaps therefore a distinction ought to be made between the initial stages of the Return, in unbelief, as an element in the political events characterising the "End Time" of this Age, and the ultimate consolidation of the Servant Nation, in belief and faith, at the climax when the final crisis occurs. Much of the prophetic description is satisfied by current immigration of Jews into Israel and the creation of an independent and virile State in the ancient land. The astound-

ing progress made in some twenty years in face of bitter outside opposition has evoked the wonder of the world and led many to claim evidence of Divine power working on Israel's behalf. The "fishers and hunters" of Jer. 16. 16 whom the Lord said He would raise up to urge the exiles back to their own land, are doing their work; this is only one of the many textual statements which associate the operative power of God with the social and political forces that for several generations past have made more and more inevitable the establishment of the State of Israel. But this does not imply that the Most High in any way endorses the position or the policies of that newly emergent State. Israel of today is one of the nations of this world, shaping its course in conformity with the standards and conventions of this world, defending its terrain and its frontiers with the weapons of this world, and no more entitled, at this juncture, to be called a Servant Nation, meet for the Divine purpose, than its fellow nations. Before the fullness of Old Testament prophecy is realised there will have to be a great change, and the immensely important and momentous part which this Servant Nation is to play in the concluding events of this Age renders it imperative that only those who are fitted for God's purpose be selected. Sterling faith, utter confidence and steadfast loyalty to the cause of Heaven must characterise each member of that Nation. It is clear from the prophecies that this initial regathering, which apart from a relative few is not accompanied by any special profession of faith, and is essentially a return in unbelief, must eventually develop into one that is inspired by faith. Before Israel is ready to play its ultimate glorious role at the end of the Age there has to be seen a stage in which the returning ones come in belief. "I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth . . . they shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them . . . I will turn their mourning into joy . . . and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lord" (Jer. 31. 6-14). "They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten" (Jer. 50. 5). "My suppliants beyond Ethiopia, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering" (Zeph. 3. 10) and Isaiah's triumphant cry "Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in" (Isa. 26. 1-4), among a number of related

Scripture passages, seem clearly to picture *this aspect of the Return*. And since the climactic feature of the whole process is the Divine deliverance of Israel from what would appear to be inevitable ruin, and in all recorded history God has delivered Israel only upon repentance and faith, it is clear that the present state of national unbelief must merge into one much more nearly approaching faith and trust, manifestly fulfilling the prophet's words, before the climax comes.

We should expect, therefore, the eventual emergence of a dedicated and faith-sustained nation in the land of Israel, principally of natural descent from Jacob, but including a sprinkling of others, which awaits, in confidence that God will deliver, a concerted assault upon its achievements and way of life by outside evil influences. That the deliverance comes in consequence of that faith is the consistent testimony of the prophets (Micah Chap. 4 and 5, Zeph. 3. 10, Zech 12, Jer. 3. 12-25 and 31. 6-9) besides being demanded by the basic principles of Divine dealings with Israel. But inside this general picture there is the insertion of an aspect in which trouble comes on the land, with the cutting off from Israel a section of the people, before the enemy is defeated. In the symbolic language of Zechariah, Jerusalem is not delivered until first it has been surrounded and a portion of its inhabitants sent into exile. Since any question of such fate befalling those who have staked all upon their faith is unthinkable, it follows that this story of capture and exile must denote, even at that late date in the sequence of events, an element in the nation which does not truly believe, and whose true character is only revealed when the fiery trial comes upon the people. This factor in the prophecy constitutes a bridge between the initial regathering of Israel in almost total unbelief and her final stand against the enemy in what is perhaps almost total belief—converted to totality of faith and full deliverance when the unbelieving element has been purged out.

To what extent do the the events of our own times point to the imminence of these expectations? At what stage in their development have we arrived? This is where a very real danger exists of becoming prophets instead of prophetic students; nevertheless there is the undisputed fact that a remarkable chain of happenings extending over nearly a century has led to the creation in our own generation of the first independent and self-governing Jewish State for over two thousand

and years. A glance at the salient peaks in that chain will not be out of place.

The story begins in 1878 when six European powers met under the presidency of Benjamin Disraeli, Jewish Prime Minister of Great Britain, to draft the Treaty of Berlin, mitigating penalties laid upon Turkey by Russia following the Russo-Turkish war. At this time Palestine was, and for four hundred years had been, under Turkish rule, numbering amongst its inhabitants some 25,000 Jews. This treaty included, for the first time, definite provision for Jewish interests in Palestine and was the first of the successive steps which led to the Israeli State of 1948.

1897 saw the first Zionist Congress headed by Dr. Herzl. By this time there were 55,000 Jewish residents in Palestine but there was now a Turkish ban on new immigrants and this was not lifted until 1906. Until the first World War progress languished.

The situation changed dramatically in 1917 when General Allenby captured Jerusalem and Turkish rule in Palestine came to an end. As far back as 1883 Dr. Grattan Guinness had suggested that the year 1917 would see a noteworthy event in the history of Israel's recovery of Palestine and now the interest of many Christians as well as Jews was aroused. 1918 witnessed the Balfour Declaration, promising British support for a Jewish National Home in Palestine. The granting of the League of Nations mandate to Great Britain in 1922 placed Palestine under British political control and by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 Turkey formally renounced all claims to sovereignty over the country. Palestine became the scene of an increasing flood of Jewish immigrants on the one hand and a mounting wave of Arab opposition to this incursion upon a land they regarded as theirs on the other. By the time of the Second World War the Jewish population had risen, from 84,000 in 1922, to half a million in 1939.

Zechariah, long ages before, had said of this very time "In that day I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people; all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces" (Zech. 12. 3). That last word means to be hurt or lacerated through trying to lift too heavy a weight. England began to discover the truth of that prediction and in 1948 renounced the Mandate and left the land and its peoples to their own devices. The result, after a short but sharp conflict between Jews and Arabs, was the establishment of a Jewish State, pitifully small in area but at least truly independent for the first time since the short

lived Maccabean State of 135-65 B.C.

At once the doors were flung open and Jews from any part of the world granted entrance as by right. The tide of immigration was immense, straining all the resources of the new-born State, but by dint of determination and hard work the newcomers were absorbed and some kind of economic foundation laid for the future. The rest of the story, covering the past twenty years, is well known. Today, Israel is an established nation taking her place among the nations of the world, and in some important respects a leading place. In certain branches of scientific discovery Israeli scientists are in the forefront. Advisers and technicians go from Israel to assist and instruct newly developing nations. In more than one direction there is already to be seen the beginnings of that era spoken of by Isaiah when he said that "*Israel shall blossom and bud and fill the face of the world with fruit*" (Isa. 27. 6).

But all this is only Stage One of the process. This Israel is as yet one of the kingdoms of this world and orders its national life according to the standards of this world. In 1948 and in 1956 and in 1967 it demonstrated how well it has learned the arts of war whereby the kingdoms of this world maintain their existence against the assaults of their enemies. It may have to fight again; it may experience reverses. It has yet to pass into that state of national sentiment in which there is acknowledgment of the supremacy of God and faith in His protecting power. There may be fur-

ther political changes, with ebb and flow of fortune for Israel, before that condition comes into sight. Stage Two is not yet discernible on the horizon—but it will come. Zechariah says of that day that the governors of Israel will perceive the strength of Israel in the Lord of Hosts their God (Zech. 12. 5). Those governors, destined to lead the Servant Nation through the last ordeal, must be remarkable men indeed. Perhaps their appearance on the political stage of the day will be the signal that the preliminary gathering of Israel under the protection of military force is completed and the consolidation of the nation into an assembly of faith is beginning; in consequence the assault of Gog and Magog is imminent.

For we do know this. When there is peace and security in that present troubled land, and that without the aid of military defences; when the people there gathered begin to proclaim their determination to abide by the principles of Divine Law, looking to God as their Leader and Defender; when material prosperity and extension of territory towards the boundaries promised to the patriarchs begin to become evident; when, most wonderful of all, men of supernormal physique and intellect come to the forefront in the affairs of that nation, none knowing whence they come, men who manifest a remarkable grasp of the world situation and a wonderful flair for incorruptible administration; then, without further delay, will the forces of Gog move forward and God rise up to deliver.

Chapter 4 THE LAND OF UNWALLED VILLAGES

There are two remarkable statements in Ezek. 38 regarding the Servant Nation of the Last Days. One asserts its prosperity in possessions and achievement, and the other its reliance upon Divine power for deliverance from the menace with which it is confronted. There are two significant statements respecting the land; one that it has been delivered from the sword, the curse of war, and the other that it has been made free from the control and oppression of alien powers. The land and the people alike are free, prosperous and secure.

This happy state of affairs must be viewed in the light of the principle of God's dealings with Israel in history. The blessings promised under the covenant concluded at Sinai in the days of the Exodus were contingent upon national trust in Him and endeavour to keep His laws. "*If ye walk in my statutes and keep*

my commandments, and do them; then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit; and your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time; and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely" (Lev. 26. 3-5). This was the ideal, but Israel never fully attained it. The nation experienced alternating periods of prosperity and disaster according to its periodic lapses into apostasy and succeeding repentance and reformation; because of final apostasy it was at length entirely dispossessed of that good land which the Lord God had prepared.

This chapter pictures a time, therefore, when the Servant Nation has entered into possession of the land in faith and trust in God, and is prospering and enjoying safety in consequence. In a sense this is a commence-

ment of Millennial work, although the Millennium proper will not have begun. That momentous event must await the final upsurge of evil forces against the Nation and their defeat by Divine intervention.

"In the latter years" says Ezekiel in chapter 38. 8 (R.S.V.) addressing the host of Gog, "you will go against the land that is restored from war . . . its people were brought out from the nations and now dwell securely, all of them". "Restored" here is "shub", meaning a complete reversal—the land which had been an almost continuous scene of war and strife for thousands of years has now entered into an era of peace. "Brought out" is "yatsa"; the land is delivered in the sense of emerging from a condition of restraint into the freedom of a progressively widening and enlarging space (compare the usage of "yatsa" in Ezek. 47. 8 as applied to the river of life widening and deepening in its passage toward the Dead Sea, where it heals the waters). These expressions obviously apply to a time when the Holy Land is at last freed both from the curse of the sword and from every form of control or oppression by other nations. Jerusalem will no longer be "trodden down of the Gentiles"; the new nation will at long last enjoy admitted and undisputed sovereign rights in its own land. This will imply, in the political jargon of today, the "de facto" recognition of territorial and national independence by the nations of the world.

Of this people it is said that they are prosperous. ". . . the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods" says Ezekiel in chapter 38. 12. The invaders come "to take a prey, to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil" (ch. 38. 13). It would be rather naive to expect that literal cattle and goods of the nature coveted by despoilers in Old Testament days is really the object of this modern attack. These are the homely symbols employed to denote that temporal prosperity of the Servant Nation which provokes its enemies' jealousy and covetousness. In fact the Hebrew word for cattle in verses 12 and 13 is not "behemah" signifying domestic cattle as such, but "migneh" which means valuable property of any kind. To the pastoral people of Bible days cattle constituted the principal source of wealth so that the term came to stand for cattle as the embodiment of wealth. Similarly, the word rendered "goods" is "qinyan", which refers to anything that is acquired or achieved, whether concrete or abstract. Achievements of the mind are

just as much "qinyan" as achievements of trade or industry or conquest—as in Prov. 4. 7 "With all thy getting get understanding" where "getting" is qinyan. The "goods" which the spoilers come to take might well include treasures of knowledge, of scientific research, of "know-how", to use a modern industrial term, and this is the more probable having regard to the leading position that even present-day Israel is attaining in such directions. The expression "to take a spoil and to take a prey" in 38. 12 and 13 points to this, for "spoil" is "shalal" meaning material plunder or "loot" of any description, but "prey" is "baz" which means living persons taken captive, and is not applied to material goods. The idea intended to be conveyed is that not only the seizure of possessions, but also the enslavement of the people, is in the minds of the attacking forces.

An unusual expression, put into the mouth of Gog the invader, occurs in chapter 38. 11. "I will go up to the land of unwalled villages". This term, "land of unwalled villages", is the name given to the land by Gog's host. It shews that from the viewpoint of the militant powers of that day the land is completely defenceless. Canaan was renowned in its early days for its cities "walled up to heaven" (Num. 13. 28. Deut. 1. 28) and these walls made the prospect of conquest a hopeless proposition to the spies who reconnoitred the land at the time of the Exodus. In later days Israel maintained defensive walls around their towns and cities, but in addition to these there were also the "perazoth", villages and settlements without walls, rendered "open villages" in Esther 9. 19, Deut. 3. 5 and Judges 5. 7, and here in Ezekiel "unwalled villages". Such settlements were incapable of resistance to an invader, and when war came their inhabitants fled for refuge to the nearest walled town. Ezekiel's picture is clearly intended to indicate that in the day to come the land will be entirely of "unwalled villages"; there will be no material defence at all, no physical means of repelling an invader. But a more certain defence will take its place. "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her" (Zech. 2. 5). Speaking of this same time Isaiah says (60. 18), "Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise". Again in 26. 1 he says "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; we have a strong city; salvation will God

appoint for walls and bulwarks". The significant thing about the invasion, therefore, is that the enemy, seeing no evidence of material defence, will conclude that the Nation is in fact defenceless, and will be an easy prey. Upon the other hand, the Nation itself will be confident in the power of God to deliver without the assistance of man-made offensive or defensive weapons, and will stake its all upon that faith.

A reservation has to be made against that statement at this point. It seems conclusive from a number of passages that in the initial stages of the invasion, at any rate, there will be an element in the regathered Nation which does not share the sterling faith of the majority, is consequently in a state of fear and apprehension, and therefore does not participate in the great deliverance. The attack of Gog's host will have its first effect in the purging of unworthy elements from the ideal Israel. Isaiah, in his 33rd and 66th chapters, both of which are devoted to this crisis, mention the unbelievers and the nature of their fault (33. 14-15; 66. 17-18). Zechariah says plainly (chapter 14) that part of the city shall go forth into exile but the "remnant" shall not be cut off from the city; it is obvious that any who go forth into exile at the very moment of Divine deliverance do so because they do not believe. Jeremiah's 30th chapter pictures the Lord asking why, at the time He is about to manifest His signal power in the eyes of the nations, He finds some of His own people pale-faced through fear. Even Zephaniah sees the Lord taking away the proud and haughty and leaving "*an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord . . . and none shall make them afraid*" (Zeph. 3. 11-13). Of those who join themselves to the land during the preceding years, therefore, it must be that some do not really share the high ideals of those whom the Lord ultimately finds fit for his purpose, and when the trial of faith is applied they stand revealed in their true colours. It is significant, though, that nothing in any of the prophetic accounts suggests that this element of non-belief leads to any kind of physical resistance to Gog's host. The land is defenceless in the material sense and remains so; either the non-believing element is so small a proportion of the Nation as to be of no account in its counsels and policies, or events move too fast for them to have any effect upon their course. Logically one would expect that the same consequences incurred by Gog's host will come upon the renegades, for the principal object of the entire

process is to nullify and destroy every voice and influence which opposes the incoming Millennial Kingdom. The net result, when all is over, is the emergence of a nation tried in the fire and found pure gold. Faith will have gained her victory. It is not that Israel is delivered, and believes in consequence. It is that Israel believes, and in consequence is delivered.

The Servant Nation stands for Divine principles in national government. It upholds the standards which will go into full effect in the Millennial Age, and will already have begun to put them into limited operation. True to His word, God therefore blesses this people in basket and store, and the nations of the world will not be slow to realise the fact. Whilst the world around is falling into chaos and ruin, the nations approaching that final crisis which marks the transition from this Age to the next, the people in the "land of un-walled villages" will be setting a standard to which men, if they will, may turn, and will already be reaping the fruits in the prosperity of their national life. The attitude of other nations to this development may be well expressed in the noble phraseology of the Second Psalm "*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us*". Forces of this world which stand obstinately for greed and selfishness and all unrighteousness will fight to the end; but their might will be of no avail against Divine power when the time has come for God to rise up.

Scriptures too numerous to quote refer to this regathered nation of faith as a "remnant". Consistently is the thesis upheld that "a remnant shall return". "in Zion there shall be a remnant", as though ultimately there will be only a considerably diminished following still trusting in God. This is not quite the proper view. The words used for "remnant"—sometimes rendered "residue" as in Zech. 14. 2 include the idea of a portion set aside for a specific purpose, as being of especial value after the loss or rejection of the mass. In this context it obviously applies to that part of the Nation which is fitted for, and quietly awaits, its historic destiny. It would seem, however, that the Nation has not attained its ultimate numerical strength at the time to which Ezek. 38 refers; a number of Scripture passages seem to describe a continuing gathering into the land after the great deliverance but this aspect of the process does not concern the

exposition of Ezek. 38, which closes with the overthrow of Gog's host.

At this point the question may be asked to what extent the current position in the land of Israel corresponds with Ezekiel's "land of unwallled villages". Is there any present evidence of the characteristics which alone would justify the application of this title to the political entity now existing?

Quite obviously, not yet. True, the Land of Promise during these past twenty years has slipped from the grasp of the Gentile powers and is now held by the lineal descendants of its ancient owners. But this little piece of territory is only one-thirtieth of the area promised to Abraham and clearly a considerable enlargement must take place before the Scripture requirements are fulfilled.

Of even greater moment is the fact that the people now dwelling there do not conduct their national life on the basis of confidence and reliance upon God. Apart from a small minority, there is no general appreciation as yet that God is going to use the land and its people as a most important element in the outworking of His purposes. Some have returned there in faith and are believers in the promises, but most have no religious faith at all and have returned in a purely nationalistic spirit. The present administration, which bases its policies frankly upon the standards of this world and seeks to support and defend them by armed force, must give place to one of which it can be said, in the words of Zechariah on this very matter, "*the governors of Judah shall say . . . the inhabitants of Jerusalem have strength through the Lord of Hosts their God*" (Zech. 12. 5). Of this change there are as yet no signs at all.

At the same time it must be admitted that the well-nigh fantastic achievements of this small nation in a country no bigger than Wales is a significant pointer to the even greater things that are to follow. The physical foundations of the "land of unwallled villages" are being laid now. Some of the earlier successes are already familiar history—the extraction of mineral fertilisers from the Dead Sea, enough to supply the whole world; the irrigation network of underground aqueducts conveying water from the far north to the deserts of the extreme south, and the consequent "deserts blossoming as the rose"; the creation of new cities in the wilderness, such as Arad, where every tree grows in a hole blasted out of the solid rock and filled with earth brought from a great distance; the sea ports of Eilat and Ashdod which one day will

carry a great deal of world trade. Even now there is a proposal to build a canal for ocean going ships from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean across Israeli territory which will share Suez Canal traffic—a stupendous work involving a waterway one hundred and fifty yards wide and nearly two hundred miles long, of which twenty-five miles must pass through a huge tunnel bored under the mountains of the Negev. Israel is probably the only nation on earth that would undertake to pass ocean liners through a tunnel!

In many branches of applied knowledge, particularly in the medical and agricultural fields and in some branches of engineering, Israeli scientists are making signal contributions to the world. Only recently they achieved success in the breeding of certain strains of wheat immune to a disease that ravages America's wheatfields. One day—not too far distant—the world's available coal, oil, gas and even uranium will be exhausted, and energy taken direct from the sun will provide light, heat and power for men. Israel is the unchallenged leader of the world in solar energy research. In these and many similar instances the thoughtful student can discern the beginnings of those factors which will eventually give physical shape and form to the "land of unwallled villages".

But this change from the small things of today to the great things of tomorrow must await further developments. The political rearrangement following the Second world war and its aftermath of 1948 saw a momentous step on the road leading to Israel's independence, just as the settlement of the First world war delivered the land from Turkish rule and set it on the way to modern development. 1967, when it is sufficiently in the past to be viewed in proper perspective, will be seen to denote another forward stride. Further steps must be taken before there is manifest to the world a nucleus of a new national power based upon righteous principles in that land. It should be expected too that the experiences through which both Jew and Gentile are now passing, and must continue to endure while these dark days persist, will lead some to realise the Divine call to give themselves to the creation of a people of God, a Holy Nation, in the land then so definitely being opened up. That regathering in faith and supplication of a people eager to learn of the Lord and zealous for the honour of His Name will be the signal that the day has come for men to speak, with meaning, of the "land of unwallled villages".

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 12 I John 3.2

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and 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" (Chap. 3, vs. 2).

If in this present time we are already possessing the high honour of Divine sonship; if we are already sons of God, then what can be the superlative honour that awaits us beyond the Vail? Some such question as that seems to be in John's mind. *Now are we the sons of God*—then imagination refuses to picture that which is to be ours *then*. That is truly so. *"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his spirit"* (1 Cor. 2. 9). There is a spiritual understanding which assures us of the reality of those things that are within the Vail, and a witness of the Spirit assuring us that we shall indeed inherit those things if we abide faithful; even so we do not and cannot visualise in our minds the nature and appearance of those who are its citizens. The spiritual understanding of future things is ours, but not the ability to picture them or see them as we shall see them when we have experienced our "change". *"It doth not yet appear"* what we shall be, but we do know that the life beyond is one of superlative happiness and glory. *"When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory"* (Col. 3. 4).

There is a "present inheritance" of the New Creation as well as a future inheritance. The rewards of consecration are not all deferred until death, just as the obligations of consecration affect this present life no less than the future one. The old theological idea that the whole aim and purpose of this life is to get through it as quickly and easily as possible in order to inherit the life to come at the earliest practicable moment has no support in Scripture. God has work for all His servants to do before they depart this life, and a great many purposes to be worked out in, and through, and by, those who are devoted to Him. Therefore the Apostle exhorts *"Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God"* (Rom. 12. 2). There is a work of

transformation to be carried out within us as we pursue the consecrated life, a work that is going to show fruitage, visible fruitage, and produce works, real works, even in this day, and in so doing will both reveal God's will and accomplish God's will. And that work of transformation is only possible because we have become, in John's own words here, sons of God. The great Husbandman is able to accomplish His work only because the subjects of His skill have become plants in His garden, ready to be planted and watered and pruned and trained as His Wisdom shall direct. It is only possible because those who are being led to glory have already become citizens of that country toward which they journey, have already turned away in their hearts from the world in which they were first born. The power of the Kingdom of God has already invaded the world of men; there are isolated outposts of the new Kingdom in the heart of the enemy's country, and therefore those who have been "translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son" can look upon themselves as defending one or another of those isolated outposts and as being "in the Kingdom" even though surrounded by all the visible trappings and powers of the kingdoms of this world.

That is why Jesus said that except a man be born again, or born from above, he could not see the Kingdom of God. Entrance into that Kingdom is not secured by a simple passage through the gates of death, out of this life and into the next. True, there must be that "change" in order that this mortal may put on immortality (1 Cor. 15), but unless the would-be entrant has already, while yet he lives in this world, experienced the new birth, he will never join the saints in light. We do not become sons of God at death; we are sons of God *now*, and have been from the time of our consecration of life to God, from the time that we were buried with Christ by baptism into His death, and risen to walk with Him in newness of life. Our being "born again" is not at the time of our entrance into the celestial realm, when our "earthly house of this tabernacle" has been dissolved (2 Cor. 5. 1), but at the time we become dead to earthly things and alive to heavenly things. It may be true—and it is true—that we "know not what we shall be", but it is also and undeniably true

that we are now, at this present time, sons of God, and that high honour no man can take from us.

Having thus firmly established ourselves in our present inheritance, the privileged standing of the sons of God now and to-day, we can with confidence and joyful hope look forward to the greater glories yet to be revealed. "*It doth not yet appear what we shall be*" says John "*but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*" (ch. 3, vs. 2). This word translated "appear"—"*phaineroo*"—means the making manifest or evident or visible something that has hitherto been obscure or unknown or hidden. John is reminding us here of the promises that connect our glorification and entry into the Father's presence with the Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Without that Coming there can be no "presentation before the presence of the Father with exceeding joy". Jesus told His disciples "If I go away, *I will come again*, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also". There can be no whittling down or minimising the importance of those words. Many in Christendom to-day doubt or deny that Christ will come again; the Christian hope is valueless unless it incorporates a firm and steadfast belief in His Second Coming, for without that Second Coming the Plan of God ceases to have any significance and the prospect for the future of humanity is bleak and hopeless. He comes to save the world, and without His coming there will never be any salvation. Therefore John stirs up the minds of his readers and brings fresh inspiration to us as once again we are reminded of the indissoluble bond that links the fruition of our own personal hopes for the future with the glorious appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ from heaven.

This is one of the most definite and clearly spoken promises of the future state of the Church that the New Testament contains. It defines the "shape of things to come" in terms as comprehensible as can be attained when talking about the spiritual world. We can understand in what way we are sons of God now, in the flesh; we know that the glory that lies beyond the Vail is greater by far than the glory that we have now; but we cannot visualise it. The only man who ever glimpsed the lineaments of scenes in the sphere that lies beyond human sense was Paul, and he found it impossible to express in man-made language what he had seen and heard. But somehow or other John must tell us how in-

initely to be preferred is that condition of life beyond the Vail to this which we now know and appreciate, glorious though this "life in Christ" may be to us at this time. So he says we shall be like Him; we shall see Him as He is. Nothing more; but then surely nothing more is needed. "*I shall be satisfied*" sang the Psalmist "*when I awake, with thy likeness*" (Psa. 17. 15). That is the goal and hope of every true follower of the Lord Jesus. To be made like Him, to know Him as He knows us, to live in the sunshine of His presence forever. The words of old take on a new ring when we think like this; "in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures forevermore" even though we know that our exaltation to that place of privilege is going to mean incessant and continuous work for God in the conversion and reconciliation of His erring children upon earth. It is true that we shall rest from our labours, where labours involve weariness and fatigue and suffering, but our works will continue, works that will still involve sowing, and watering, and tending, and pruning, before the desired harvest can be reaped. But as we look now toward the bright prospect we are thinking, as was John, of the moment of union, of the gathering together of all the saints into one great General Assembly, the Church of the First Born, whose names are written in heaven, and, like Paul, we realise that although now we are seeing as through a glass, darkly, it will then be face to face. Though we know only in part, then we shall know even as we are known (1 Cor. 13. 12). That knowledge and hope gives us strength and confidence.

This little phrase of John's fixes two most important matters together in time. The point to which he looks is "His appearing" and it is *then* that we shall be "like him"—beyond the Vail, that is evident. This appearing is the revelation of Christ, with His Church, to the world. It is the grand pivotal point around which all the aspects and phases of the Second Advent are arranged. We have our differences of thought on the earlier phases of our Lord's Coming, as to whether he has already come and is invisibly present, or has not yet come and will shortly be revealed in some way not as yet understood; such differences are inevitable so long as Christ's disciples exercise their God-given right of private judgment; but there is no room for difference of thought on this central theme of our common expectation. There is to be a day, yet future—obviously still future—when the Church complete, gathered from death and

from life, not one missing, shall "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13. 43). They will be manifested to all mankind in association with the Lord Jesus, manifest in similar fashion, as the world's deliverers. However that manifestation comes about, by whatever means mankind in general are persuaded of the fact and realise the nature of what is happening, it will be true that the Lord and His Church will be manifested together. That is the commencement of the Millennial reign, the fulfilment of the vision seen by John on Patmos when he "saw thrones, and they (that) sat on them . . . and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 20. 4). John, telling us that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, is talking about that event and that day.

When Jesus comes for His Church they are neither like Him nor do they see Him as He is. It is only after resurrection that those things are true; and it is hardly the proper use of language to speak of our being taken out of this life, and coming into His presence, as "His appearing" in the sense in which the word is used here. This is a making manifest to those still upon earth of something that was previously hidden and was not manifest before.

So our great hope is centred upon the point of time at which our Master Jesus is revealed to the world for the world's salvation, and we are revealed with Him. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of that hour, important in the councils of heaven as well as to the tangled chaos that will by then exist upon earth. Whatever our own agreements and disagreements, we must, if we would not be found wanting at the last, keep our eyes and hopes fixed together upon that one supreme moment, "looking for that blessed hope,

and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2. 13).

"And every man that hath this hope in him" John concludes "purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (vs. 3). Sacred, clean, chaste, undefiled—the word means all these things. Of course he does; the sincere reception of such a hope must surely inspire its possessor with an earnest desire to fulfil all the Master's commandments in order that the realisation of the hope may be made sure. Says the writer to the Hebrews "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12. 1). Our hope is the great inspiration that enables us to count all things but loss and dross if so be that we win Christ and be found in Him. Recognising that fact, Peter declares that it is even by these promises and the consequent hope to which they give rise that we become partakers of the Divine nature (2 Pet. 1. 4). "Exceeding great and precious promises" Peter calls them. How exceeding great and precious they must be if they can be made to lead to so glorious a destiny. And there is no doubt about it. "If ye do these things ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ".

Well, there are the promises. It is for us to believe them, and take hold of them, and claim them for ourselves, and make use of them, and allow them to work out their beneficent effect in our hearts and lives. Our Father has done all that He can do; the remainder rests with us. Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself. So shall we be His disciples!

(To be continued)

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 faithful-

ness 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"!

* * *

It is not given to us, as it was to Isaiah, to see in vision the Temple of God opened in Heaven, and to behold the Lord, high and lifted up, His glory filling the sanctuary. It is given to us to approach and worship Him in the beauty of holiness, to draw near in spirit and behold Him by the eye of faith.

THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS

A study

Belief in the ministry of "guardian angels" was unchallenged in past generations; to-day it is for the most part quietly ignored or considered a survival from more credulous ages. Like most Scriptural theses, it cannot be so summarily dismissed. To what extent do the Scriptures, logically interpreted, sustain the idea?

There is at least one passage of which the wording appears to offer solid foundation for the belief. Having called a small child to Himself to illustrate the necessity of childlikeness in innocence and sincerity as a prerequisite for entry into His Kingdom, Jesus went on to say "*see that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven*" (Matt. 18. 10 RSV). It has been generally thought that our Lord meant every child has an especially appointed guardian angel having constant access to the presence of God. That is not absolutely demanded by the construction of the sentence; grammatically it would be equally satisfied by considering that a body of angels was entrusted with the watch-care over all children generally. The sequel to our Lord's words here would appear to bear that out, for He went on to speak of the man who lost one sheep out of a hundred and rested not until he had found it, commenting "*Even so it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish*" (vs. 14). If there is indeed an angelic guardianship, therefore, it would seem to be directly connected with the ultimate object of the Divine Plan, the recovery of humankind from present evil and its consequence in death, and the reconciliation to God of those who will.

Perhaps a word as to the reality of the angelic hosts will not be amiss before enquiring further into this subject. Like anything that is not discernible by one or another of the five physical senses, that reality is questioned or denied by some. In our Lord's day there was a powerful body of opinion, represented by the Sadducees, which repudiated belief in the existence of the supernatural, of angelic or spirit beings (Acts 23. 8). Modern secular thought moves increasingly towards the same position. But the Bible is written against a background of which an unseen

world, peopled by unseen beings, is an essential part. Christians, at least, realise that our five physical senses, adapted to the sphere in which we live, cannot possibly discern all that there is in God's entire creation. An integral part of the Christian faith is the understanding that there is an order of life beyond, and superior to, the human, and that on occasion citizens of that sphere have made sensory contact with humans. The Old Testament and the New both afford examples. The fact that there are celestial beings, popularly and Scripturally called angels, carrying out the purposes of God in just the same way as will men one day, has to be accepted as beyond question.

The fact that such beings must be always actively participating in the affairs of, and contributing something to the progress of, Divine creation follows from the very fact of their existence, for this is the whole purpose of God in creating living intelligences. An eloquent word in Psa. 103. 20-21 confirms this. "*Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his will*" (RSV). Here is a picture of a community engaged in the discharge of duties laid upon them by God. There is nothing illogical or even improbable in expecting that some of those duties may have connection with the affairs of men upon earth. There is certainly definite assurance of the live interest in the affairs of earth displayed by the celestials. From the days of the formation of this planet, in which, as recorded in Job 38. 7 "*all the sons of God*" (i.e., the angels) "*shouted for joy*", to the time of the First Advent when, according to St. Peter, the angels desired to understand more of the things being preached by the Apostles (1 Pet. 1. 12), there is this interest. Sympathy with the distresses of humanity is revealed by our Lord's assurance that "*there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth*" (Luke 15. 10).

From the realisation of this evident sympathy with and interest in humanity, it is only a step to discern a very literal meaning to such texts as Psa. 34. 7 "*The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them*" or Psa. 91. 11 "*He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways*". It might be argued that

these and similar phrases are poetry framed to express the all-embracing power of God protecting His people and this may well be true; nevertheless the power of God is exerted through instruments, agents, and just as on occasion men are used as such agents so, and probably in considerably greater measure, we can expect angels so to be used. It is significant that both the Hebrew *malak* and Greek *aggelos*, both translated "angel", really means a messenger, and in fact are rendered messenger upon occasion, referring sometimes to human and, more often, to celestial messengers.

Perhaps the clearest view of the subject is gained by considering some of the actual examples of celestial missions to earth related in the Scriptures. Hagar the bondmaid, fleeing from the unjust oppression of her mistress, unknowingly destined for an important role in the outworking purpose of God, was met by an angel in the wilderness and sent back to her mistress with an assurance of future blessing. Her reverential words following the encounter leave no doubt that she knew the identity of her informant and that he was from the celestial world (Gen. 21. 17-19). Joshua, meditating the conquest of Canaan, encountered a heavenly visitant in the trappings of a soldier, with a drawn sword in his hand, and from him received the instruction necessary to the salvation of Israel (Josh. 5. 13-15; 6. 2-5). Elisha's servant, fearful at the threat posed by the Syrian invaders, had his eyes miraculously opened and he saw the hosts of heaven surrounding his master and himself. In the New Testament, Joseph was visited by an angel warning him to take the young child Jesus and His mother and escape into Egypt from the evil designs of King Herod. St. Peter, in prison, was released by an angel sent for the purpose. These and other similar examples record definite historical events which actually happened, in each case illustrating the intervention of Heaven upon this physical earthly plane by the instrumentality of a celestial messenger to produce a tangible physical effect leading to the protection or deliverance of one of God's children. So many other such examples there must have been in history, unrecorded and unrealised because the heavenly agent was unseen!

It might well be said therefore that the doctrine of guardian angels is well founded in Scripture; not necessarily that each individual upon earth has a special angel assigned him as personal protector, but more likely

that all the hosts of Heaven are instantly available for service in the guardianship of those on earth who have put their trust in God. It has to be accepted that this does not necessarily imply a kind of blanket protection against all conceivable human ills and accidents; the Divine scheme for man does not work in just that way. What it does imply is that the powers of Heaven are instantly and continuously available so to modify and divert circumstances having a direct bearing upon our Christian life and progress that "*all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*" (Rom. 8. 28). The whole point and end of angelic guardianship is that those whose hearts and lives are given in complete dedication to God may be so guided and strengthened that they will eventually "finish their course with joy" and attain the Divine ideal. We do not fight the battle alone; on the other side of the Vail, unseen by our natural eyes but close by our sides nevertheless, stand the mighty hosts of Heaven, each of those glorious ones commissioned to carry out some operation of Divine power which is to have a definite influence upon the Christian life of one or another of the Lord's disciples here on earth. It must have been some such thought which was in the great Apostle's mind when he penned the stirring words "*Greater is he that is for us than all they that can be against us*". "*There stood by me this night*" said St. Paul to the sailors in the storm-wracked ship "*the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Cæsar; and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit, we must be cast upon a certain island*" (Acts 27. 23-26). How did Paul know that their lives would be saved by shipwreck upon an island? And who guided the crippled ship through that fearful storm so that out of all the possible points in its westward drift across the six hundred miles line between Italy and Africa it should strike exactly on the hundred yards wide passage between the island of Malta and its outlying rock of Salomonetta, the only point in all that six hundred miles where Paul's words could come true, the ship's crew be saved, and Paul continue his journey to Rome, in accordance with the angel's prediction? Was it only the vagaries of wind and wave that sent the vessel on the last stage of its journey or was there a celestial hand

steering it steadily to that sandbar which still exists, seven miles from Valetta, and brought the ship to rest less than fifty yards from shore so that, as the historian Luke so graphically describes, "we escaped all safely to land"?

Elijah the prophet was a prophet of deeds. So far as we know, he wrote nothing; and this does not surprise us; for such devout impetuosity and tempestuousness as Elijah's seldom go with patient penmanship. Many of the most passionate and energetic reformers have been altogether ungifted as writers. They were dynamic rather than academic. They

There are so many examples like that in the Scripture story that it is hard not to see evidence of the interaction of celestial powers with human affairs in the interests of God's purposes and the highest welfare of those who are His.

flung themselves with passionate abandon into the effort of prevailing upon the men of their own day. They may not have perpetuated their names in books which have been handed on to succeeding generations; but they live on, none the less, in the abiding results which they wrought for the betterment of their fellows.

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