



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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"The Mission of Jonah"

Nearly twenty-five years ago the "Monthly" featured a narrative-study of the Book of Jonah under the above title, afterwards published in book form. In the belief that many of our present readers would be interested, this series is to be featured during 1969 and the first instalment appears in this issue. The unfortunate Jonah, or, rather, the book which bears his name, has for long been the butt of would-be humourists and the subject of heavy pontifical explanations deriving the story from Babylonian folk-lore or Second Century B.C. Jewish allegory. Within the framework of the more important spiritual message, which is the main burden of the book, this series will present an assembly of factual happenings which go far to show that the reported adventures of the runaway prophet may not be so incredible after all.

* * *

"From a Prison Cell"

The series under this name appearing during 1968 is now available as a 40 page booklet which will be sent for 1/6 (20c) or 4 for 7/- (\$1.00) to cover printing, packing and postage, on request. OAPs and others unable to find this sum may have a copy free on request.

* * *

Jonah the son of Amittai was in many respects the most remarkable of the Hebrew prophets. He was noteworthy, in that his mission was to a people outside the commonwealth of Israel, in that his preaching was outstandingly successful, and in that he discharged his commission, not with the burning ardour of his fellow-seers, but reluctantly and without enthusiasm. His achievement was great, and yet alone among the prophets he dared to question the wisdom of God. Alone among the prophets, too, he became a prophetic type of Christ, in his willing death that his fellows might be saved, his three days' entombment and subsequent deliverance, and in the salvation he brought to men otherwise destined for judgment. Sacrifice, death, resurrection and conversion; these are

the salient features of this historical drama. Jesus likened His own imminent three days in the grave and resurrection to the story of Jonah's sojourn inside the sea-monster; that, said He, was a sign to His own generation, a sign which that generation utterly failed to understand. The men of Nineveh are to rise in the judgment and condemn that generation, for they did at least repent at the preaching of Jonah; the Jews of the First Advent rejected Jesus. No matter how we may explain or understand the things that seem strange or incredible, the fact remains that throughout this book, more so perhaps than in any other book of the Old Testament, there is an atmosphere of the Divine presence, closely controlling the action and inter-action of events. We view this book aright when we see in it an acted prophecy, in which the actors, unknown to themselves, were the instruments of the Holy Spirit, players in a drama the significance of which they themselves never understood, a drama which, recorded in a setting of unequalled vivacity and beauty, has honoured Jonah for all time by making him peculiarly the prophet of the Resurrection.

Gone from us

—:—

Sis. L. Barnes (*Liverpool*)
Sis. E. Dickens (*Bexhill*)
Sis. F. A. Dungate (*Lincoln*)
Bro. Meador (*Liverpool*)
Bro. W. H. O'Brien (*Laindon*)

—:—

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

THE MISSION OF JONAH

Chapter I. Running away from God

The prophet who
ran away

The great ship lay by the quayside, rising and dipping on the slow Mediterranean swell. Men thronged her deck carrying bales of merchandise and boxes of goods to be stowed away in the capacious hold. Her bearded Phœnician captain stood on the quay arguing volubly with the merchant whose goods he was about to transport overseas, interrupting himself now and then to shout hoarse instructions to the labourers staggering across the gangway with their loads.

The blue sea, with its fringe of golden sand, the white houses of Joppa, and the green hills behind the town formed a picture of rare loveliness. The great waves rolled in from the ocean, flinging white spray over the jutting rocks which lay beyond the stone pier, lifting the ship gently as they passed under her keel, and raced in glistening foam across the flat beach. The hot sun bathed the scene in a vivid white glare, the stone paving slabs reflecting the heat and causing little eddies and swirls of hot air to rise quivering here and there.

Into that bustle and confusion came Jonah the prophet of Gath-hepher, fleeing from his mission and his God. *"Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord."*

The simple sincerity of the story is a witness to its truth. Was ever flagrant defiance of God's command recorded with such candour and frankness? No attempt to excuse the action; no plea of justification or extenuation; just a plain, unimpassioned statement that this man, commissioned to perform a specific duty in a stipulated place, deliberately ignored the command and sought to make its fulfilment impossible by taking himself off to the other end of the world!

Jonah came from Gath-hepher, in Galilee, three miles from Nazareth. The only mention of him outside the book which bears his name is in 2 Kings 14, 24-27 which records his prediction that Israel would recover

possession of certain lost territories, which prediction came true in the reign of Jeroboam II. It is probable that Jonah lived shortly before that time, not long after the death of Elisha, and this would point to a date about 800 B.C. He might even, in his youth, been one of the "sons of the prophets", disciples of Elisha, sharing that stalwart old warrior's life in Galilee and the Jordan valley. Such an environment would surely be the place for God to find a man for His purpose. Galileans were proverbially fiercely patriotic and fearless in their loyalty to God. That Jonah himself was not without courage is testified by the later events in the story. Why then did he make up his mind to flee to Tarshish? It was not that he was afraid of the mission. He was too true a prophet for that. Nor did he expect that by fleeing to Tarshish he would be out of the sight of his God. He knew God too well for that. Neither could it have been altogether national prejudice, reluctance to take the good news of God to an alien people, for his attitude to the crew of the ship, most of whom must have been non-Israelites, betokens a consideration for their safety even at the cost of his own life which speaks volumes. A man willing to give his life for Gentiles must surely have been willing to preach the righteousness of God to Gentiles.

The motive underlying Jonah's flight can only be understood in the light of the dread with which Israel regarded the Assyrian people, whose capital city was Nineveh. The Assyrians were the most cruel and ruthless people of antiquity; wherever their victorious armies appeared there followed ruin, desolation, suffering and death. Their unfortunate captives were treated with every imaginable form of barbarity, and those of the people who escaped torture or death were transported long distances into strange lands, there to eat out their hearts in fruitless longing for the homeland they would never see again. Under the Assyrians, nearly a century after Jonah's day, the "Ten Tribes" were taken into the captivity from which they never returned.

At the time of Jonah the Assyrian empire was in a very unstable condition. It was threatened on the north by the Medes and Scythians and on the south by the Persians.

The three great rulers, Tiglath-Pileser, Sargon, and Sennacherib, who are mentioned in the Old Testament, had not yet arisen to restore Assyrian greatness, and the golden days of its earlier power had passed away. During the period in question the rulers of Assyria were undistinguished men occupied with internal troubles and revolutions, and powerful enemies on the north and north-east frontiers. In consequence, Israel was enjoying a time of rest from oppression, and a hope that Assyria would never recover her former power to ravage and destroy as she had done; they prayed that these troubles and tumults might culminate in the destruction of Assyria. With their fixed belief in the ultimate triumph of righteousness, they were sure that Assyria and its great city of Nineveh must inevitably come into judgment and be overthrown when it had filled up the measure of its wickedness, and they longed earnestly for the day to come. The Prophet Nahum, who lived near Nineveh nearly two hundred years after Jonah's death, gave voice to this longing in vivid fashion: *"God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies . . . with an over-running flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies . . . Woe to the city of blood! it is all full of lies and robbery . . . There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous; all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee; for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?"*

Jonah, sharing in these sentiments with all the depths of his passionate nature, was appalled at receiving the Divine commission to go and preach repentance to the Ninevites. On one hand he had cause for rejoicing in that their wickedness had come up before God, that the time had come when destruction must be meted out—the destruction for which every true son of Israel longed. On the other hand, suppose his preaching was successful and Nineveh repented! What then? Jonah knew his God well enough to realise that He takes no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but is ever willing for the sinner to turn from his evil way and live (Ezek. 18, 31-32). The threatened doom of Assyria could be averted by national repentance, and he, Jonah, would have been the means of that repentance. There would be no vengeance exacted for all the innocent blood which had been spilt in Israel by the

Assyrians; moreover, they would survive as a nation and might easily return to their old ways and inflict fresh suffering on Israel. Jonah shrank from going to Nineveh, not because he was afraid of failure, but because he was afraid of success. He knew that God would be gracious, and he could not bear that knowledge.

There was only one thing to be done. He must go away; must put as great a distance as possible between himself and Nineveh; make the execution of the commission a physical impossibility, so that God might have time to think again, and relent, and inflict upon the Assyrians the punishment they so richly deserved. In any case, if he did not go to Nineveh, they would not have the message. If they did not have the message, they would not repent. If they did not repent, God would most assuredly visit His judgment upon them. So Jonah resolved to flee unto Tarshish.

Tarshish was a mystery land to the ancients. The tribes of Dan and of Zebulun—in whose territory Gath-hepher was situated—knew all the stories about Tarshish. Dwelling as they did close to Tyre and Sidon, the cities of the Phœnicians, they could not but become involved in much that appertained to that nation of merchants. They were themselves, many of them, seafarers, joining with the Phœnicians in their voyages to the ends of the earth, and this maritime connection of these tribes is mentioned several times in the Old Testament (Gen. 49, 13; Jud. 5, 17; Ezek. 27, 19). Those seafarers brought back marvellous stories of the wonders beyond the seas, of the Pillars of Hercules (the twin rocks of Gibraltar and Ceuta) sentinels at the gateway to the Western Ocean (the Atlantic) through which none but Phœnicians knew the way, of the Golden Islands (the Azores), the Sea of Mud—now called the Sargasso Sea—into which ships, penetrating, became fast and never returned, and in the mysterious north, the Tin Islands—Great Britain—source of the rare metal which meant so much in the making of tools and other goods. The Canaanites and Israelites listened with awe to these wonderful tales and never tired of watching the loaded merchant vessels set out on their long journeys to the west. "Ships of Tarshish" they called them, irrespective of their actual destination, and it is by that name they are referred to repeatedly in the Old Testament. Any large ocean-going vessel was a "ship of Tarshish" and Tarshish as a name defined

any of the far-distant lands, unknown to all save the Phœnicians, to which their trading vessels penetrated. From the list of goods they brought back, recorded in the Old Testament and elsewhere, ranging from African ivory and apes to British tin and Baltic amber, it would seem that, for vessels plying from Joppa and the Phœnician ports of Tyre and Sidon, Tarshish was the general name given to the lands lying outside the Straits of Gibraltar—western Africa, the Azores, western Spain and southern Britain. Since Britain was the most remote of all these countries and, moreover, a land with which a regular and heavy trade was conducted, it is by no means improbable that the ship upon which the prophet embarked on that fateful day was actually bound for our own shores. Had that wonderful intervention of God not taken place, Jonah might well have ended his days among the ancient tin-miners of Cornwall or the shepherds of the South Downs.

So it was that the captain turned from his discussion with the merchant to find a stranger waiting for an opportunity to bargain a passage on his ship. It would be no unusual request; in days when passenger ships were unknown and travellers not numerous, it would be possible to make the journey only in some such manner. Quite often the would-be passenger was a fugitive fleeing from justice or from the wrath of some powerful man; provided the passage money was good and the applicant willing to make himself useful on the voyage, there would be no awkward questions asked. Jonah evidently had anticipated this and had a sufficient sum with him to meet the captain's demand, for we are told in verse 3 that he "paid the fare thereof" upon boarding the ship. It is unlikely that a fixed tariff existed for such journeys, as would be implied by our own usage of the word "fare", but rather that a little bargaining took place. An agreement having been reached, Jonah would be free to go aboard.

Jonah had perhaps seen ships of Tarshish at the ports of Tyre and Sidon, so near his own home, but this was probably the first time that he had set foot on one. Surely he hesitated before crossing the gangway! Up to now there had been opportunity for repentance and a turning back to execute his mission. Once the ship had sailed there could be no turning back. Rightly or wrongly, he must go on, away and still farther away from his mission and his God. What thoughts

possessed his mind at that moment we do not know—only that he stepped on board with unshaken resolution to "go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord".

We are indebted to the world of engineering research rather than to classical or Biblical scholarship for our knowledge of ancient ships. The academic scholar thinks largely in terms of kings and battles, and ignores such things as houses and ships and the lives of common men. But in consequence of the labours of research workers interested from a technical point of view there is quite a mass of detailed knowledge available regarding the ships of the ancients (Torr's "*Ancient Ships*" is perhaps the best authority on the subject). It is likely that the ship upon which Jonah set foot was a typical Phœnician merchant galley. Built especially for carrying merchandise, such galleys were about two hundred feet long and rose some forty feet from water-line to deck. The bow and stern were curved upwards another ten or fifteen feet, the bow ending in a carved figurehead. One tall and immensely strong mast, rising from the centre, carried two spars supporting a great square sail. There were sometimes one or two smaller masts with sails. The mainsail was relied upon when wind was available, manipulated by means of ropes handled by men called in Hebrew *chobbelim*, meaning "rope-men" (the "pilots" of Ezek. 27). The Mediterranean, however, is a sea where there is sometimes no wind for days together, and therefore no vessel equipped only with sails could rely on making steady progress. Oars were therefore employed in addition to sails. In a ship of this type there could be as many as a hundred thirty-foot oars, requiring three hundred rowers, sitting on benches immediately beneath the main deck. It would be down amongst these rowers, if not, indeed, below them, with the cargo, that Jonah was found fast asleep during the storm. The ship was steered by means of two long paddles, fastened one at each side, at the stern, and not by a rudder as in modern vessels. Somewhere near the stern there was also fixed a paddle wheel device by means of which the distance travelled could be ascertained. According to records of actual ship performances which have been left by ancient writers, such a vessel could do seven knots (eight miles per hour) and the average daily rate was five knots (nearly six miles per hour). It was customary to hug the coast, keeping within sight of land, for as much of the voy-

age as was possible, and to cast anchor when darkness fell, resuming the journey on the following morning. Under these conditions the voyage from Joppa to Britain would occupy four or five months.

And now there is growing excitement amongst the small crowd of people on shore. The loading of the ship has been completed and the crew are going aboard, ready for their long journey. It may be eighteen months before they see the home land again. *Here comes a crowd of swarthy Phœnicians* who have been to offer propitiatory sacrifices in the Temple of Dagon up on the hill in the middle of the town. Dagon will ensure them a favourable voyage and good trading. A knot of Israelites and Hittites, members also of the crew, have been to offer to Baal for the same purpose—for, alas! the worship of Baal was all too common in Israel in those dark days. And here come three men with light complexions, fair hair and blue eyes, to take their places among the rowers. They are Britons, fresh from offering to the British god Lud, a great deity indeed in their own far-off land, with a temple on a hill destined in later years to be known, in his memory, as Ludgate Hill, but an unknown god indeed in this land of Dagon and Chemosh and Baal and Ashtaroth. Therefore they had no temple in Joppa in which to worship Lud, but a small shrine in a corner of the quay on which they had placed their tribute and trusted that he would take them back safely to their own land.

The captain had already made his private offering to Dagon, as befitted a respectable member of the community. He was probably a man who had knocked about the world a good deal and seen many religions and forms of worship, and reserved the right to be liberal about them all. His words to Jonah a few hours later give the impression that he placed all gods on a more or less equal footing and was prepared to judge by results. Probably his chief concern was to see that none of the gods had been omitted from their share of the usual observances, so that he could put to sea without apprehension that any of them thus slighted would show his displeasure by some form of disaster.

Jonah's fellow passengers came aboard: let us suppose, two prosperous Carthaginian merchants returning home to Carthage; a Government official on a political mission to the same city; a shifty-looking Hittite who was evidently glad to get away from the country and would quickly make himself

scarce at the first port of call. The captain, glancing with practised eye at sea and sky, took his stand at the stern and gave the order to cast off. Mooring ropes were quickly thrown ashore; a signal made to the towing boats riding on the waves far ahead, and as the men in them bent to their oars, the tow-ropes tautened and the great ship began to glide away from the land.

The *mallachim*—literally, "ocean-sailors"—stood around the sides with long sweeps wherewith to ward the slowly moving vessel away from the treacherous rocks which run out to sea at Joppa. Two more stood in the bows waiting for the captain's gestures, signalling in turn to the rowboats ahead; the *steersman* bore heavily first on one steering paddle and then on the other, awhile the rowers waited with their long oars held close to the vessel's sides and the rope-men for their time to hoist the great sail.

The rocks were cleared. A final signal, and the towing ropes slackened and were cast off. The three small boats turned and began riding the billows on their way back to shore. A word of command, a hundred oars flashed in the sunlight and dipped into the water with a quick splash; the mainsail unfolded steadily and billowed out in the wind; the ship turned her nose to the west and began to plough her way through the open sea. Jonah's voyage had begun.

The sandy beach, the white houses, the low green hills of Joppa faded into the distance and were gone. To the left, as Jonah leaned over the stern of the ship, rose the bluff headland of Mount Carmel. It was there that Elijah, not so long ago, had slain the priests of Baal and then himself most unaccountably run away into Sinai. But he had gone back. For Jonah there could be no going back. For the sake of his people, he was deliberately going into exile. "It is expedient," he may have thought, "that one man should die for the people and the whole nation perish not." What kind of life lay before him he did not know. He only knew that the pleasant land of Israel, with its tender associations and stirring history, was gone from his sight for ever, that for the sake of the people, and to ensure the coming of Divine judgment upon the Assyrians, he must stay away and never come again into a position where he could be called upon to go and preach repentance to Nineveh.

So the afternoon wore on, until at last Carmel itself disappeared below the horizon. The rope-men sang their sea-shanties as

they manipulated the great sail to get the best out of the scanty wind, the monotonous call of the oar-master was echoed by the grunt of the rowers as they bent to their task, and the ship quivered and shook as she steadily made her way onwards into the west—on to Tarshish.

And Jonah, worn out by fatigue and grief,

shrinking from the companionship and the conversation of his fellow voyagers, made his way below deck into a secluded part of the vessel, and there, alone with his heart-ache, found peace at last in the kindly arms of sleep.

(To be continued)

"THEY LOOKED FOR A CITY"

Testimony to Millennial expectations from the past

Dr. Joseph A. Seiss, well-known Lutheran minister of Philadelphia, U.S.A. latter part of 19th century. Editor of "Prophetic Times" and author many books on Biblical matters. Convinced pre-millennialist.

* * *

"The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews introduces three points in which the super-angelic dignity is shown. The first is that Christ is assigned a higher name than the angels. The second is that he is clothed with a sublimer honour than the angels, and the third is that Christ is invested with a sublimer office than the angels, they being only ministering spirits, while He is spoken of as a Divine King, whose throne is forever and ever, and the sceptre of whose Kingdom is a sceptre of righteousness. The princely investiture and reign of the Messiah is thus distinctly deduced from the Old Testament, and used by the Apostle as the sublimest demonstration of the Saviour's personal dignity. And this Messianic dominion he applies particularly to what is hereafter to grow out of the Gospel economy. He tells us that it is peculiarly "the world to come" over which the Messiah's reign is to be exercised. *"For unto the angels hath he not put into subjection the world to come, whereof we speak"*, thus proceeding upon the implied assumption that it has been by promise put into subjection to Christ, and that all those allusions to the Saviour as a King have their chief application and ultimate fulfilment in that "world to come". The Messiah's reign and this "world to come" accordingly belong together and coexist in the same period and locality. By determining, then, what is meant by this "world to come", we may form an idea of what is included in the Messianic Kingdom; or, if we already know what the consummated Messianic reign is, and where it is to be, we have it already decided what we are to understand by this "world to come".

"If any stress is, therefore, to be laid upon

this conclusion, there is no alternative left but to understand this "world to come" as the Millennial World, or the world as it shall be when Christ shall have entered upon his glorious dominion as the Sovereign of the nations and Lord of the whole earth. And to this agrees exactly the original word, *oikoumene*, which means the habitable earth—the domiciliated globe on which we dwell—and not some remote supernal region. The world to come, then, is nothing more nor less than this self-same world of ours in its final or Millennial condition. The earth is not to be annihilated. God never obliterates His own creations. The dissolving fires of which Peter speaks are for "the perdition of ungodly men", and not for the utter depopulation and destruction of the whole world; men and nations will survive them and still continue to live in the flesh. The earth is to be renovated and restored from its present depression and dilapidation, and thus become "the new earth" of which the Bible speaks. It is to pass through a "regeneration" analogous to that through which a man must pass to see the Kingdom of God; but there will be a continuity of its elements and existence, just as a regenerated man is constitutionally the same being that he was before his renewal. It will not be another earth, but the same earth under another condition of things. It is now labouring under the curse; but then the curse will have been lifted off and all its wounds healed. At present, it is hardly habitable—no one being able to live in it longer than a few brief years; but then men shall dwell in it forever without knowing what death is. It is now the home of rebellion, injustice and guilt; it will then be the home of righteousness. It is now under the domination of Satan; it will then come under the blessed rule of the Prince of Peace. Such, at any rate, is the hope set before us in the Word of God, and this I hold to be "the world to come", of which the text speaks. It can-

not be anything else. It cannot be what is commonly called heaven, for the word *oikoumene* cannot apply to heaven. It is everywhere else used exclusively with reference to our world. Neither can it be the present Gospel dispensation, for that began long before this epistle was written and could not, therefore, have been spoken of by Paul as yet "to come". We are consequently compelled to understand it to mean our own habitable world in its Millennial glory. And as the prophecies concerning the Messiah's eternal kingship are here referred to as having their fulfilment in the subjection of the Millennial world to His dominion, we are furnished with another powerful argument of Scripture in favour of the doctrine of Christ's personal reign as a great Prince in this world. Indeed, the Bible is so full of this subject, and its inspired writers are so constantly and enthusiastically alluding to it that I am amazed to find so many pious and Bible-loving people entirely losing sight of it. Ever and anon the Scriptures return to it as the great and animating hope of the Church in all her adversities and depressions, and it does seem to me that we are depriving ourselves of much true Christian comfort by the manner in which we have been neglecting and thrusting aside that glorious doctrine. My present object is to show, from the Scriptures, and by just inferences from them, what sort of a world this "world to come" is, and to describe, as far as I can, what we are to look for when once this earth has been fully subjected to that Divine King whose throne is forever and ever, and the sceptre of whose Kingdom is a sceptre of righteousness.

"That *"the world to come"* is a highly blessed world, and a vast improvement upon the present scene of things, will be inferred on all hands without argument. It could not be a subject of hope if it were not. The Saviour Himself exhibited a model of it when in the Mount of Transfiguration—from which, perhaps, we may obtain as deep an insight of its

glories as from any other portion of Scripture. That He designed that scene as a miniature model of what His future coming and Kingdom is to be, is obvious. A week before it occurred he told His disciples that "the Son of man shall come in the glory of the Father, with His angels or messengers with Him"; and that there were some standing there when He made the declaration who should not taste of death till they saw the Son of man coming in His Kingdom. This coming in His Kingdom, which some of the disciples were to live and see, is not the final Advent, for the disciples are all dead, and the final Advent is still future. Neither is it the destruction of Jerusalem, for but one of the apostles lived to see that catastrophe, and the Son of man did not then come in His Kingdom. And yet some of the apostles were to have ocular demonstration of the Son of man's coming in His Kingdom before tasting of death. Search through apostolic history as we will we shall find nothing but the Transfiguration, to which the Saviour's words will apply. That, then, was in some sense the coming of the Son of man in His Kingdom. It was not, indeed, the coming itself, but it was an earnest and picture of it. Peter says: "*The power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*" are not "*cunningly devised fables*". He declares that he was certified of their reality by the testimony of his own senses. We were "*eye-witnesses*", says he, "*when we were with him in the holy mount*". We thus have clear, inspired testimony that the scene of the Transfiguration was a demonstrative exhibition of the coming of Jesus in His Kingdom. Hence, whatever we find in the descriptions of that scene, we may confidently expect to be realised in that "world to come whereof we speak". As He was then personally present as the Son of man, so He will be personally present in the Millennial Kingdom. And as He was there attended by different classes of persons, so will His glorious Kingdom consist of similar classes."

It is a paradox of our Christian experience that familiarity with Scriptural truth, instead of increasing our sense of wonder at the Divine grace, tends rather to dull our spiritual apprehension. We sometimes wish, indeed, that we could again hear the glad tidings for the first time, that we might experience anew the overwhelming joy of the dawning realisation of the glorious fact. But, familiar as

it is, the Easter message never fails to stir to the depths the truly thankful, worshipful heart.

* * *

In proportion as we become imbued with the sympathetic, compassionate spirit of Jesus, to that same extent are we impelled to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with the sad-hearted.

PONTIUS PILATE

It has been bitterly remarked that the most well-known Roman in history is Pontius Pilate. That caustic comment is probably true. Nero is renowned for depravity and cruelty, Julius Cæsar the man who invaded Britain and was defeated, but much more familiar is the name of this rather minor diplomatic official who had the misfortune to be Procurator (Governor) of Judea at the time of the Crucifixion. Since that day he has been universally despised and vilified, and made to carry the major share of responsibility for the condemnation of Christ. What kind of man was he?

The four Gospels record his behaviour at the trial of Jesus but do not tell us anything about him. The two Jewish historians of the period, Josephus and Philo, have a little to say and what they do say shows him in a bad light. Roman historians only refer to him in passing, so that not much is known about his life before coming to Judea, nor his subsequent career after the tragedy in which he played so prominent a part. What little is known enables a picture of the man to be drawn; the history of his ten years' administration in Judea throws some light upon his character.

Pontius Pilate was appointed Procurator of Judea by the Emperor Tiberius Cæsar in A.D. 26, three years before John the Baptist appeared. He was, so far as can be determined, about thirty years of age, of Spanish-Italian blood, born at Seville in Spain, and making considerable progress in Roman government service. He was well known and esteemed at Cæsar's court, enjoying the confidence both of Tiberius and Aelius Sejanus, an influential politician who at that time was the "power behind the throne".

Pilate married Claudia Procula, a granddaughter of the late Emperor Augustus Cæsar, distantly related therefore to the reigning emperor Tiberius. It was Claudia Procula who sent her husband the warning message at the time of the trial. There is not much doubt that Pilate's connection by marriage with the Cæsars was a factor in his rapid promotion, although when he received the intimation that he was to succeed Valerius Gratus in the administration of Judea he might well have considered it a back-handed compliment, for none of Rome's sub-

ject peoples were more difficult to govern than the Jews. It was probably with very mixed feelings that Pilate and his wife set sail from Rome to take up his new appointment.

From this point some appraisal of the man's character can be made. One of the paradoxes of history is that Pontius Pilate appears in a much more favourable light in the Gospels than he does in the writings of Jewish historians. All four Evangelists unite in testifying that Pilate went to extreme lengths to acquit his prisoner and only when threatened with an accusation of treason to Rome did he give way. The literature of the Early Church is generally more favourable towards Pilate than it is toward the Jewish leaders of the day and there is no doubt upon whom the early Christians placed the main responsibility for the Crucifixion. Jewish writers of the time, Philo and Josephus, on the contrary, vilified him in the extreme. Since he represented the hated Roman power their attitude is understandable; the Jews were forever trying to get the governors into trouble with their superiors and often, it is true, with ample justification. Apart from Porcius Festus, who was Governor, A.D. 60-62 (and is mentioned in the Book of Acts) they were an unprincipled lot and usually out for illicit personal gain. Philo defined the administration of Pilate as one of "*corruptibility, violence, robberies, ill-treatment of the people, grievances, continuous executions without even the form of a trial, endless and intolerable cruelties*". Josephus describes him as "*mercenary, avaricious, cruel and bloodthirsty, conscienceless, and yet at the decisive moment wanting in decision*". There is not much doubt that Pilate was a ruthless and somewhat obstinate man possessed of a profound contempt for the Jews. The known incidents of his administration highlight that fact. At the same time he was probably, from the viewpoint of Rome, a good governor. Tiberius is known to have been very scrupulous about the men he appointed, and the fact that Pilate lasted ten years would seem to show that there was no official dissatisfaction with his regime although he sailed perilously close to the wind at times. He involved himself in trouble at the beginning of his term of office. It was the custom for

Roman troops to carry images of the Emperor on their standards, but on account of Jewish religious scruples former governors had not allowed them to be taken into Jerusalem itself. Pilate, either through ignorance or obstinacy, ordered his legionaries to carry the images into the city and this immediately provoked reaction. A number of leading Jews waited upon him at Caesarea, the official residence of the Roman governor, to plead for their removal. Pilate refused and there was a riot. He ordered his soldiers to draw their swords upon the multitude if they would not disperse and at once the Jews prostrated themselves upon the ground vowing they would suffer death rather than assent to heathen images in their Holy City. Pilate could not afford to start his new appointment with a massacre and he yielded, with bad grace. A few years later he determined to give Jerusalem a good water supply by building an aqueduct from the Pools of Solomon, thirty miles south of the city. Probably thinking that a work of such public utility would be approved by all, he raided the Temple treasury to pay for it, and this provoked another riot which he put down ruthlessly with heavy loss of life. Following this, and probably not long before the events of the Crucifixion, he erected some golden shields with dedications to Caesar in Herod's palace in Jerusalem, and this time the outraged Jews sent a letter of complaint to the Emperor. Tiberius ordered Pilate to remove the shields. Altogether, by the time Jesus appeared before him, Pilate and the leading Jews were on extremely bad terms. Jesus himself referred to an otherwise unknown incident when He spoke (Luke 13. 1) of *"those Galileans, whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices"*. A dispassionate view of the evidence seems to indicate that he was not particularly concerned about justice, had no hesitation in using his soldiers against opposition, was indifferent to the religious observances of the community even although Rome's official policy was one of toleration, was obstinate and callous in his dealings. There is no real ground though for thinking he was personally corrupt, amenable to bribes, or that he sought to enrich himself by unjust use of his power as did most of his predecessors and successors. Several indications point to the conclusion that he was a loyal and devoted servant of the Emperor and probably in all that he did was concerned only for the interests of Rome. For the subject peoples he cared not a jot.

The behaviour of Pilate at the trial of Jesus is therefore something of an enigma. There are four Gospel accounts; between them they provide a detailed narrative, and from that narrative it is clear that this usually ruthless and impatient man used every argument and artifice he could think of to avoid a verdict of guilty. Only when he was blackmailed by the suggestion of disloyalty to Caesar did he reluctantly give way. The concern he showed for this solitary prisoner is altogether out of keeping with his known character. The man who ordered his soldiers to massacre unarmed citizens whose only crime was a protest against violation of their religious customs would hardly be likely to concern himself over the guilt or innocence of one unknown man who had already been tried and condemned by his own people. What was it that made Pilate do all that he could to release Jesus, and when he found it of no avail, issue a public disclaimer of responsibility? Surely there is another side to Pilate's character which is not readily obvious.

Consider the situation. Pilate was brought out *"early in the morning"* to meet the priests and their prisoner. Morison, in *"Who Moved the Stone?"* suggests that this points to Pilate having been approached by the High Priest, Caiaphas, late the previous night with a view to an early trial and quick verdict of guilty, so that all could be over before the Passover ceremonial, due that day, began. This might very well have been the case; the Roman governor would hardly have been amenable to an early morning summons from men he normally disliked and despised unless the appointment had been pre-arranged. His formal question *"What accusation bring ye against this man?"* (Jno. 18. 29) was the normal prelude to a Roman trial and showed the priests that despite any agreement of the night before he intended reopening the entire matter. Hence their surly rejoinder *"If he were not a malefactor we would not have delivered him up to thee"* (vs. 30), to which Pilate replied by telling them to take the prisoner and judge him according to their own law. This did not suit his opponents, who pointed out that having no power to pass the death sentence their purpose could not be achieved. Balked of this first attempt to rid himself of the problem, Pilate went inside the Prætorium—this battle of wits having taken place on the concourse outside, since the priests did not wish to defile themselves on the Passover day by

setting foot inside a Gentile building—where he had left Jesus, and talked to Him in private. This was the interview at which Jesus explained the nature of His kingship; that His kingdom was not of this world, that He came into the world to bear witness to the truth. But Pilate had no head, and was not in the mood, for philosophing. "What is truth?" he exclaimed contemptuously and went out to the waiting Jews. "I find in Him no fault at all" he told them, and this without giving them any chance to proffer their accusations or produce their witnesses! But this second attempt met with no better success than the first. According to Luke's account (23. 5) the Jews vociferously accused Jesus of incitement to tumult, from Jerusalem to Galilee. Pilate's quick mind picked on the latter word; he asked if Jesus was a Galilean. Being told that He was, Pilate saw another possible avenue of escape. His own jurisdiction extended only over Judea; Galilee was under the nominal suzerainty of Herod. Herod was in Jerusalem at the moment for the Passover. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod and told His accusers to go there and proffer their complaint.

This, the third effort, failed also. Herod refused to be involved and sent Jesus back. Pilate remembered then that it was the custom on the occasion of the Feast to release a prisoner as a symbolic act of clemency. The custom was really a Roman one in honour of the gods, but had been observed also in Judea. Once again Pilate repeated his view that no fault was to be found in the prisoner, that he would therefore scourge him and release him in observance of the custom, the scourging being obviously a sop to the insistent demand of the Jews that Jesus be condemned. That alone highlights Pilate's disregard of the ordinary principles of justice.

The proposal was met with a roar of dissent. "Not this man, but Barabbas". Barabbas was a man admittedly and undoubtedly guilty of sedition and treason. Weakly, Pilate yielded and consented to the release of Barabbas. Thus ended his fourth attempt to avoid a decision.

The order of incidents in the trial is a little difficult to follow but it seems that Pilate next brought Jesus out before the crowd, arrayed in the purple robe and the crown of thorns, repeating his former statement, "I bring Him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in Him". And as Jesus approached, Pilate uttered the phrase for which he has become famous "Behold the

man!" It is impossible to determine whether those words were spoken in admiration or contempt; certain it is that Pilate was at that moment profoundly contemptuous of the accusers, for as they vociferously shouted out "Crucify him; crucify him" he replied coldly "Take ye him, and crucify him; for I find no fault in him" (Jno. 19. 6). He knew full well that they could not take and crucify anyone; that prerogative belonged only to Pilate. They knew that too, that they must rely upon the consent of the Roman to get their purpose accomplished. In a milder and more conciliatory tone, therefore, they rejoined "We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God".

It is significant that although no crime against Roman law was involved in such a claim, Pilate, as soon as he heard the words, was "the more afraid", going back into the Prætorium to ask Jesus from whence He really had come. He received no answer. To his reminder that he, the governor, had power both to crucify and to release, Jesus calmly told him that he had no power at all except it were permitted him from above, and at that Pilate was more afraid than ever. He declared once again and for the fifth time that Jesus would be released.

The priests were not defeated. They had a trump card, and now they prepared to use it. They knew where to find Pilate's vulnerable point. The former accusations were put aside; a new one brought to the front. The kingship of Christ had already been mentioned; a new cry fell upon the ears of the harassed Governor. "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar."

Pilate must have heard that cry with a tremor of apprehension. Tiberius was notoriously sensitive on any question of possible treason; these same Jews had already complained once to the Emperor about him and he had received an official reprimand. Any suggestion of connivance at possible rebellion would certainly mean something much more serious than a reprimand. He could not afford the risk. The considerations which had led him all this while to avoid the condemnation of Jesus met a powerful counterforce. He knew, now, that the priests had won.

So Pilate gave in.

There are two elements in the Gospel narratives which shed some light upon the reasons which led Pilate thus to act so much out

of character. One is the fact of his very real concern on hearing that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, and his consequent attempt to learn from Jesus' own lips His origin. The other is the intervention of Pilate's wife. According to Matthew, Pilate had taken his place in the "judgment seat", therefore was in the opening stage of the trial, when a hasty message came to him from Claudia: *"Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things in a dream this day because of Him"*. The Prætorium, in which the trial was held, was in the Tower of Antonia. Pilate's official residence when in Jerusalem was in the palace which Herod had originally built for himself, half a mile away. Morison has suggested that if in fact the High Priest did visit Pilate late the previous night to discuss the trial, Claudia would have known something about it. Pilate left early in the morning for the Prætorium; his wife, awaking later and finding him gone, sent the frantic message, just as Pilate was about to open the trial.

Like most Romans, Pilate probably had at least a nominal belief in the gods. He would certainly have been well acquainted with the literary works current in his time, and he must have been familiar with the stories of gods coming down to earth in the form of men. He could hardly have viewed the God of Israel as other than one of the many gods of heaven, one perhaps solely concerned with the Jews but essentially of the same nature as those of Rome. The histories of his own people and of the Greeks told of occasions when one or another of the gods, coming to earth in the guise of some peasant or poor man, was ill-treated by those to whom he appeared, and of the vengeance the god wrought upon them in consequence. The enigma of Pilate's conduct during this eventful trial can well be explained if the calm and unruffled demeanour of Christ. His assertion that Pilate had no power against him unless it were permitted from above, the Jews' intimation that He had claimed to be the Son of God, and Claudia's anxious warning, had given rise to a real fear in the Procurator's mind that the man before him might well be one of the gods come to earth, just as they had been reported to do in former times. Had he been sure that Jesus was no more than man, Pilate would probably have had no hesitation in condemning Him, innocent or guilty, and forgetting the whole matter. But he was not sure, and he feared the vengeance of the gods. So he wavered,

torn between his dread of Jupiter and his fear of Cæsar, while the Jews waited, exultant.

One last gesture, one despairing effort to appease the powers of heaven, since those on earth would not be mollified. He called for water, and a bowl was brought. There, in full view of the now quiet multitude, he ceremonially washed his hands. *"I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it."* And there arose a great shout, a cry that has echoed down the centuries and earned a terrible fulfilment; *"His blood be on us, and on our children"*.

"And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required."

Little more is known of the life of Pilate after that dreadful day. Two years later he was involved in a fracas with the Samaritans. A fanatical prophet had promised to reveal the secret hiding place of some sacred objects on Mount Gerizim and a multitude had assembled. Pilate, nerves on edge and fearing an insurrection, sent his soldiers against this unarmed concourse and there was a massacre. The Samaritans appealed to Vitellius, the Governor of Syria, Pilate's superior. Vitellius ordered Pilate to return to Rome to face the Emperor. So, in disgrace, the unhappy man and his wife boarded ship for home. But Tiberius died whilst Pilate was on the voyage, and when he did reach the capital Caligula was Emperor, and what happened to Pilate no one really knows. He was no longer important enough to figure in Roman historians' works and there are only the traditions of the Early Church to go upon.

It is only to be expected that the early Christians of the first few generations would preserve among themselves some recollections relating to the fate of the man who condemned their Lord. There were Jews in Rome at the time; within a matter of ten years there were Christians. The traditions as they have come down to us are fragmentary and somewhat contradictory; the most probable reconstruction is that Caligula was not greatly interested either in Pilate or his alleged crimes, but deprived him of office and banished him to Gaul (France) where in A.D. 41, eight years after the Crucifixion, he ended his life by his own hand. If that is indeed a true recollection, does that last desperate act indicate remorse for the part he had played or a haunting dread that he had indeed offended the gods beyond repair by his treatment of their Sent One? He must have known of the excitement in Jerusalem

associated with the preaching of the Resurrection of Christ and noted how the same priestly fraternity to whose demands he had so weakly submitted proved to be powerless against the unlearned disciples now preaching that this same Jesus lived again. As a Roman, he knew only the Roman gods, but what he saw and heard in Jerusalem in the months after the Crucifixion might well have convinced him that Jesus was one sent from the gods.

Several Apocryphal books contain alleged reports of the trial, said to have been sent to Tiberius by Pilate, but none of them are likely to have any foundation in fact. There

is in existence a lengthy treatise claimed to be translated from a manuscript in the Vatican library purporting to be Pilate's official report to the Emperor. Such manuscript, if it exists, is most likely to be one of the "religious fictions" of the Middle Ages—many such are known. It is certainly not genuine, for it contains too many inaccuracies, betokening its author's ignorance of the conditions in Judea at the time. If in fact Pilate did make any report justifying his actions it is most unlikely that it has survived; as a document of no particular importance it would have been destroyed at the next clear-out of unwanted Government records.

ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

Chapter 5. The Flying Roll

Of all the strange visions of Zechariah perhaps that of the flying roll in chapter 5 is the most bizarre. The prophet looked toward the sky and perceived a giant roll, of the kind used in his day for the writing of books, a roll of either parchment or dressed goat-skin—probably the latter—but of a size no ordinary roll had ever attained. Thirty feet long and fifteen feet across, it swooped down almost like a modern dive-bomber, and as it swooped it entered into the houses of the wicked, destroying them with the force of its impact, and by reason of the writings it contained—this much is implied though not stated—compelling the occupants to stand and be judged for their misdeeds and separated into the penitent and the impenitent . . . the scene changed and now the prophet beheld a large earthenware measure, a store jar, inside which crouched a woman prevented from emerging by reason of a heavy cover of lead. Even as he looked, two flying figures, women with the wings of storks, swooped down from the sky, laid hold of the jar, and flew away carrying it, so the watching prophet was told, into the land of Shinar, where it was to be permanently established. Strange pictures, flickering across his consciousness and without any attempt by the revealing angel at explanation. What did it all mean?

The key to the chapter is the flying roll itself. The angel said of it, in chapter 5. 3 "*this is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth*". The word rendered "curse" means, not only an execration or an imprecation, which is the usage of "curse" in English, but also an oath, and in this

sense is associated with the Divine promises and covenants. Thus Deut. 29. 12 "*that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day*". The "oath" between Abraham and Eliezer in connection with the latter's commission to find a bride for Isaac (Gen. 29. 41) is another instance. Quite often the word appears in connection with the Law Covenant made between God and Israel with Moses as the intermediary. The fact that this "flying roll" is shewn as meting out judgment upon the thieves and perjurers in verse 3, and destroying their houses in verse 4, is sufficient to indicate that the "curse" in this instance refers to the Divine oath, or promise, or covenant, and so the roll becomes the symbol of Divine righteousness or Divine Law by which all things are to be judged. This conclusion is confirmed by the dimensions given—twenty cubits long by ten cubits wide. This was the size of the second compartment of the Mosaic Tabernacle, the Holy, where stood the golden lampstand and the altar of incense. It was also the size of the "Porch" of Solomon's Temple—and in all probability of the rebuilt Temple of Zechariah's day—the place from which the High Priest emerged to bless the people. Thus the flying roll is associated with Divine Law, Divine judgment and Divine blessing. The fact that it is effective, destroying evil, judging sin and creating a separation between the righteous and the wicked stamps it at once as having its application in the Millennial Age, the only Age when such things are completely true. So the setting of the chapter be-

comes evident; this is the Divine Law of the Millennial Age, going out to do the work of that Age to the elimination of evil and the establishment of everlasting righteousness.

Now the A.V. says of this flying roll *"every one that stealeth shall be cut off on this side according to it, and every one that sweareth shall be cut off on that side according to it . . . it shall enter into the house of the thief, and . . . of him that sweareth falsely . . . and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof"* (ch. 5. 3-4). The determinant words here are "cut off" and "consume"; it is clear that the A.V. does not have the last word, for various translators offer one or other of two quite contradictory meanings in the case of "cut off". Thus Leeser has "destroyed", the LXX "punished", and Margolis "swept away", but Rotherham gives "let off", Young "declared innocent", R.V. "purged out" and Ferrar Fenton "reformed". The reason for these variations is that *niqqah*, which means primarily to be pure, innocent, cleansed, free from blame, pardoned, etc., also has the meaning of being "cleaned out" as we would say, vacant, empty, hence can easily be rendered laid waste or dispersed. The word is rendered "to clear" in Exod. 34. 7 where God "will by no means clear the guilty"; in Num. 5. 19 "be thou free from this bitter water"; Exod. 21. 19 "he that smote him shall be quit"; Job 19. 28 "I know that thou wilt not hold me innocent"; Jud. 15. 3 "now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines" and Psalms 19. 13 "then shall I be innocent from the great transgression". The cutting off of the sinner, by the flying roll, therefore, means, not his destruction, but the cutting off from his sin, his being made clean, pronounced innocent. Since this can only be achieved by his repentance and conversion, we have here a further insight into the basic principle of the coming Age. As the Wise Man said (Prov. 16. 6) *"By mercy and truth iniquity is purged; and in the reverence of the Lord men depart from evil"*.

But it is different with the houses of the wicked. The same Divine standard which cleanses the sinner from his sin makes short work of the erection he has built. It enters into the houses and consumes them with the timber and stones thereof. That is a significant expression. In the Levitical laws for dealing with leprosy in a house it was provided that the priest should *"break down the house, the stones of it, and the timber thereof, and all the mortar of the houses; and he shall carry them forth out of the city into an*

unclean place" (Lev. 14. 4-5). Leprosy is a well known symbol of sin in Biblical allegory; there can be little doubt that the reference in Zechariah to the houses being consumed "with the timber and stones thereof" is intended to picture the obliteration of sin by that which is pictured by the flying roll.

These first four verses of Zech. 5, therefore, may well be taken to describe in allegorical language the operation of Divine Law in the Millennial Age, both in its aspect of judgment upon sin and that of conversion of the sinner. The two specific crimes mentioned, that of swearing falsely by God's name, and that of stealing, relate to the third and eighth commandments of the Mosaic covenant. The roll was written on both sides—*"stealeth . . . this side"* and *"sweareth . . . that side"* (vs. 3); on the assumption that in a symbolic sense the roll contained all ten commandments, five on each side, those mentioned would be the middle ones of their respective sides; thus the "stealing" and "swearing" might well be representative of the entire Law. By the impact of this Law the houses—works of men—are utterly destroyed, but by means of repentance and conversion the men themselves may be saved and pronounced clean and free from guilt. This is the work of the flying roll and the result is that repentant sinners are separated from their sin and made acceptable in the sight of God.

What happens to the dominion of evil? Does it remain, possibly to rise again and pollute the cleansed earth, or is it removed for ever? The answer to that question is shewn in the second stage of the vision, the woman in the "ephah".

The prophet beheld a strange sight. He saw what is described as an "ephah" with a woman sitting inside it. Strictly speaking, the ephah was a Hebrew measure of capacity used for liquids and loose material such as grain, and was equal approximately to nine gallons. But no woman, however diminutive, could possibly have squeezed into an ephah measure. It is clear from Old Testament usage, however, that the word "ephah" was also used as a term for measures of indeterminate value. Thus Deut. 25. 14-15 speaks of *"divers measures"* and *"just measures"*; Prov. 20. 10 *"divers weights and divers measures are alike abomination to the Lord"*; Micah 6. 10 *"the scant measure that is abominable"* are some of the instances where "ephah" is translated "measure". It is correct therefore to say that Zechariah saw a "mea-

sure", a stone jar, large enough to contain a woman. Such a measure would be the homer, equal to ten ephahs, and this implies a jar say two feet across and five feet high. This is adequate to the vision in which a woman is seen crouching inside.

Now the angel defined the woman—"this" he said *"is wickedness"* and he cast her down inside the measure and imprisoned her therein by sealing the open top of the jar with what is described as a *"talent of lead"* (vs. 7). The talent was a measure of weight roughly equal to an English hundredweight. A piece of lead of that weight made to fit the top of a two foot jar would be some six inches thick—a very effective seal and not much chance of the woman ever getting out. It is to be noted here that the word rendered *"talent"* is *kikkar* which properly means a circle or sphere, hence anything circular such as a circular tract of country, a loaf of bread (made as a circular flat cake in those days) or a coin or piece of money. It is only therefore necessary to suppose that this *kikkar* or *"talent"* of lead was merely what the A.V. margin calls it, a *"weighty piece"* of circular form made to fit the top of the earthenware jar in which the woman was imprisoned.

This woman represents the evil and wickedness which had, as it were, been *"driven underground"* by the work of the flying roll. The earth and its inhabitants are cleansed from the taint, and all sin and evil, symbolised by the woman, has been concentrated in this earthenware jar and by reason of the enclosing cover unable ever again to escape to pollute the earth. Sin has been sealed up for ever. Now the prophet lifts up his eyes again and sees a new apparition in the sky (ch. 5 vs. 9-11), two flying figures, women having long wings like those of the stork, *"and the wind was in their wings"*. Swooping down upon the sealed up measure with its imprisoned occupant, they laid hold of it and soared up again into the sky, flying with strong strokes eastward until they were lost to sight in the distance. *"Whither do they bear the measure?"* asked Zechariah of the revealing angel. *"To build it a house in the land of Shinar"* was the reply *"and when that is ready they will set the measure there in its own place"*. This is an evident picture of evil, finally and for ever overthrown, taken away out of the land and banished to *"its own place"* whence it can never return to trouble mankind. The stork-winged women are the Divine agents employed to execute

this mission. The stork, although an unclean bird in the Levitical law owing to its habit of devouring serpents, frogs, lizards and the like, was given its Hebrew name *chasidah*, *"the merciful one"* from *chasid* meaning to be merciful or pious, on account of the reputed love and solicitude existing between parent bird and its young, which was famous among the Israelites. It thus became a symbol of love and devotion and of a benevolent protecting power watching over family life, for which reason storks were allowed to nest and breed in and about the homes of men without interference. In point of fact, our English word *"stork"* is from the Greek *storgos*, meaning natural or family affection; this word appears in the New Testament to render *storgos* several times, such as Rom. 1. 31 and 2 Tim. 3. 3 *"without natural affection"* and Rom. 12. 10 *"be kindly affectioned one to another"*. Thus these stork-like creatures might well picture the powers of mercy and piety which in the next Age will have the effect of removing sin and evil far away. *"The wind was in their wings"* says the prophet; in all the prophetic Scriptures there is a strong association of thought between the blowing of terrestrial wind and the Holy Spirit in active operation in the earth—the same word *ruach* is used for both *"wind"* and *"spirit"* and the translators could with equal propriety have rendered *"the Spirit was in their wings"*. Thus it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that the burden of the world's evil is lifted up and away from the places of men and taken to a far land from which it can never return.

In the prophecy that land is said to be *"the land of Shinar"* (ch. 5. 11). Shinar as a territorial name had long since passed out of use in Zechariah's day. Shinar was the ancient Sumir (Sumeria in English), one of whose cities was Ur of the Chaldees in Abraham's time, and another, Babylon. In Biblical history Sumir, or Shinar, figured in the story of the Tower of Babel and the founding of Babylon. Just as Jerusalem and Judea represented the land of God and His righteousness from the ideal standpoint, so Babylon and Shinar represented all that was anti-God and idolatrous, depraved and evil. The fiercest diatribes of the Hebrew prophets were directed against the evil city of Babylon and great was the acclamation when that city fell at length, never again to rise. If a place on this earth had to be chosen to represent the home and repository of evil then that place would surely be Babylon. Fittingly, then, the

measure with its imprisoned woman was taken, in defiance of the laws of space and time, to the ancient, no longer existing, land of Shinar, to be permanently established there and never return.

The most fitting commentary on that final scene in the vision is a New Testament one. *"And death and hades were cast into the lake of fire. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire"* (Rev. 20. 14-15). The lake of fire is, of course, metaphorical, the destruction, passing out of existence, which was suggested by the consuming fires of Jerusalem's garbage dump, the Valley of Hinnom (Heb. *Gay-Hinnom*, Gk. *Ge-henna*) outside the city. Just so will all evil and all incorrigible, irrecoverable evildoers pass away and be no more when the combined mercy and judgment of the flying roll has completed its work. The way into the New Jerusalem, the city of light and life and love, is open to all who will enter, and the opportunity to be cleansed of all defiling influences in order that entry may be gained will be freely vouchsafed. *"The Spirit and the Bride say, Come . . . and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"* (Rev. 22. 17). That is the mercy aspect of the flying roll. But it remains true that *"there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth . . . but only they which are written in the Lamb's book of life"* (Rev. 21. 27), and *"the unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers"* and so on *"shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire, which is the second death"* (Rev. 21. 8). That is the judgment aspect.

So evil and all wickedness is buried at last in the city of the dead, established in the land of Shinar, "in its own place". It is a remarkable fact that Isaiah's magnificent prediction of the doom of Babylon has remained true through the ages when other ancient cities have been rebuilt and restored to human habitation. *"Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excel-*

lency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there . . . but wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of howling creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there . . ." (Isa. 13. 19-21). To this day the site of that ancient city is a waste of broken brickwork and drifting sand, shunned by men and infested with wild animals. The place where once stood the proud Tower whose top was to reach unto heaven is now a reed-grown swamp, every vestige of that one time magnificent edifice gone save a few rows of mouldering bricks. There, in that desolation, Zechariah saw the earthenware jar, with its captive symbol of evil, carried to share the oblivion which has fallen upon that place. Here is the realisation of the promise made to the Kingly Priest in the vision of chapter 3 *"I will remove the iniquity of the land in one day"*. And it is removed to a place from which it can never return. When Zechariah was told that ephah was to be established or set in its own place he must have thought of the famous Temple of Marduk in Babylon, standing in all its glory alongside the great Tower which Genesis calls the Tower of Babel. There, in that centre of world idolatry, devoted to the service of all the false gods of mythology, he must have pictured the final resting place of the ephah. There it would be set *"upon its own base"* in the very centre of the land of Shinar and in its principal shrine. But today all that is left of that proud Temple lies buried beneath sixty feet of alluvial soil and sand, deposited by the annual floods of the River Euphrates through the centuries. That is where Zechariah's vivid allegory leaves all that is evil and alien to God—buried far underground whence it can never emerge to trouble man again.

To be continued

The closer we approach to the likeness of our Lord, the deeper must become our sympathies with the poor stumbling, blinded mankind, and the more intense must become our longing to see it delivered from the bondage of corruption and ushered into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

* * *

When we would think on the purest of things we must of necessity lift our mental vision to as high a point as possible, and, as nearly as we may be able, discern the loveliness of the perfect character of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ, and proportionately the loveliness manifested in one or another of the followers of Jesus, who walk closely in His footsteps.

THE CHRISTIAN'S RACE

Discourse on a
stirring theme

It is sometimes suggested that there are a pre-determined number of "crowns" allotted and that the members of the church of God compete against each other, as in a race, to win them; that the most faithful will receive the prize; that if one should prove unfaithful and drop out of the race others are ready to take his place in the contest; and that the less faithful and diligent (but not reprobate) will receive a consolation prize. It may be said that such is a rather blatant way to picture the making of one's calling and election sure. Possibly so, but we have all at some time or another met similar theories. We need spend little time upon it. It is far better to consider what the Bible has to say on the matter. There we shall find that our Father has no such expedient to determine who among the millions calling themselves Christians are worthy of the prize of the "high-calling in Christ Jesus". It will be immediately clear that such a notion strikes at the root of the doctrine of election and even casts doubt on the all-embracing love of God for his sons. There are but few references to Christians racing and we shall find that the texts are more concerned with running patiently, than with racing. We are urged to run the race (or course) with patience rather than with speed and to run *as though* we were competing, but there the picture ends. And now let us see if the running of others in the O.T. will furnish examples to help the Christian in his course.

The first example of running in the Bible (other than from vengeance) is that of one hastening to worship and receive some guests. This well-known incident is recorded in Gen. 18. An old man sat in his tent door in the heat of the day and suddenly became aware of three strangers standing near. He could have thought that if the travellers chose to journey under the noonday sun it was none of his business; he could have thought that if they wished to speak to him or ask for food they could open the matter. Had he sauntered forward to meet them we might have thought him indifferent, but he was of better fibre. Perhaps he thought he knew them; possibly he felt they were no ordinary travellers; perhaps because he had previously had visitations of heavenly visitors he received them. (According to a reference Bible he thus became an example to all not to be

forgetful to entertain strangers.) We may not know just what was in his mind but his action was immediate, for he *RAN* to meet and honour them, and by his haste we know him to be a genuine soul. He urged them to receive his hospitality and food, and when rested they could pass on their way. They briefly consent, and Abraham *HASTENS* to serve them and the meal seems to be prepared in record time. He stood by them while they partook of the meal apparently in silence; but we feel as we read the story that something momentous is about to happen, and sure enough it does. Suddenly they say to him "*Where is Sarah, thy wife?*" And by the question he realises who they must be; and when he answers them they confirm the promise given years before and add details so that Abraham and Sarah know that their son of promise would be born soon, and thus is his faith rewarded in this life. And no doubt when the visitors had finally left him (v. 33), he hurried back to his tent oblivious of everything else. This-one-thing-I-do was written all over that man of faith.

The next example of running is that of a man who ran *to find if his prayer had been answered*. The story is in Gen. 24 and is part of a charming love story. The same Abraham had sent his senior servant back to his old region in Mesopotamia charged under oath with heavy responsibility—that of finding among Abraham's kinsfolk a bride for his son, the son of promise. The long journey ended at eventide when he arrived at Haran. He and his camels needed water, and that need provided him a basis upon which to make his prayer to the God of his master Abraham. He prayed that He would show kindness to his master by prospering his journey; he asked to be answered just as he himself specified; he prayed that the Lord God would so respond to his request that it should happen that the damsel he asked for water would be the one destined to be the wife of Isaac. Then he would know that all was well. (In passing, would Christians today pray asking that they be answered just as they themselves might define?) The answer to his prayer could not have been speedier, for while he was yet speaking Rebekah came to draw water for the household, and as she came to the well he *RAN* to ask for

water, and she as requested in his prayer offered and drew water for his camels. (Again, in passing, do Christians now hurry to find if their prayers are answered?) The response to his prayer was so prompt that momentarily he wondered in himself if the Lord had prospered his journey, but he quickly recovered, gave her gifts and asked who she was, and hearing the name Nahor he knew all was well and he worshipped the Lord saying "*Blessed be the God of my master Abraham . . .*" When Rebekah heard the name Abraham she RAN home to tell the news, and Laban RAN back to the well and invited the servant to stay with them. But he is still anxious to fulfil his mission and he cannot rest till he is assured that Rebekah is willing to return with him to Isaac. Like his master Abraham who received the heavenly visitors, in his eagerness for his mission he runs, and as we read we know he means it. And instinctively we like these people for they were so intent on the work in hand.

Another early instance of running is when Jacob and Esau met again after their long estrangement. From the story (Gen. 33) we note that when Jacob saw his brother coming he spread out his family as though he expected trouble. He need not have been so suspicious. The passage of time had cooled the fires of revenge in Esau, and in the incident he seems the better man of the two for he RAN to meet Jacob and embrace him. Possibly we all would have liked the change of heart to have been first revealed in Jacob, but it was not so. By his action of running we observe again that it proves how genuine is his heart.

From these and other instances in the O.T. we may see that running, in the Bible, proves the sincerity and purpose, the loyalty and goodness of heart of these people. But are these the thoughts we should have in mind when we read the few verses in the N.T. that encourage Christians to run? Let us see!

The first running of the Bible was from vengeance. Is that in any way a lesson to us? In one sense it is true for we like mankind were under condemnation; but unlike them we have learned that instead of running away from the justice of God it is far better to hasten towards Him, relying on his mercy, for He himself has made the arrangement whereby mercy triumphs over justice. Long ago we all realised that unless He had made a way of escape for us we should have been eternally without hope of life, and we hasten

to receive the grace He freely offers. It is declared in the Word that though man had fallen from grace, God himself had promised to benefit mankind when He gave the gospel to this very Abraham, and so unalterable is his will in that promise that He bound Himself by oath to fulfil it. This promise and oath is considered in Heb. 6 where the writer urges his readers to be followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. In verses 12-20 he reasons that we have every ground for confidence and hope because the promise has been bound by the oath of God, and believing it is impossible for God to lie we have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us which we have as an anchor of the soul and enters within the veil where the Forerunner has already entered and received his honour—priesthood after the order of Melchisedek. What more ground for hope could we possibly need? Who would not RUN to follow this Forerunner? And so we have fled for refuge—not by attempting escape from justice, but towards Him for mercy, hope and confidence. Nothing in the Bible implies that our Lord competed with another as in a race, yet as Forerunner he hastened to serve his Father, and appeared beyond the veil in the presence of God for us, thereby opening the new and living way that those who believe and follow may obtain their reward. He thus became a goal and an incentive to his followers, which seems to be in line with Heb. 12. 1, 2. There we are encouraged to run with patience the course set before us looking unto Jesus. He kept his eyes set upon the joy before Him; we keep our eyes on Him. As Forerunner he finished his course with joy; and we along with others may succeed and share his reward. And in it all we are not attempting to beat the other fellow—in fact we wish him to have an abundant entrance into the kingdom. Thus it is no race at all; but each of us running patiently, persistently, will receive the crown at the end; and the doggedness of our running is the measure of our loyalty, the proof of our value of the hope and the extent of our love of Him who has called us. And this tallies with what we have seen of the O.T. worthies—their running proved their genuineness of heart and purpose.

In order to obtain the prize, or reach the goal, or finish the course (whatever phrase we choose) we are exhorted to lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us and to run with patience. Does this imply

that there is one sin common to us all holding back, or slackening our perseverance? Most things which prevent us progressing, will, when fully considered prove to result from lack of faith. "*Whatsoever is not of faith is sin*" said Paul, and it is a perfect aphorism. In line with these considerations are other words of Paul (Gal. 5. 7) "*Ye did run well, what did hinder that ye should not obey the truth*". They had not been competing with each other, but they had been running diligently, patiently following the Lord. They had been justified by faith in Him, they were children of faith, children of Abraham, sons of God; yet someone had turned their thoughts away from faith; someone had lured them over to the works of the law from which they had been freed in Christ; someone had "put a yoke upon the neck of these disciples" and they had ceased to run with other followers of Christ. It will be noted that the running of Gal. 5. 7 is synonymous with following or striving, and like thoughts are in Gal. 2. 2, Phil. 2. 16 and Rom. 9. 16; and in truth those in the N.T. who so run are those who follow Christ, but with this difference, that the running reveals the persistence of the follower. And so we may read Heb. 12. 1 as "*Let us lay aside every hindrance of faith and follow with patience, so ardently that we run*". Thus, running as a Bible figure differs from walking (which pictures fellowship) and standing (which pictures honour innate or credited now; e.g. Luke 1. 19 and Rom. 5. 2), and sitting (which pictures kingly honours after life's race has been run, e.g. Rev. 3. 21). And so with patience the Christian runs, or with endurance for the race is no sprint. No doubt the apostle had in mind the Marathon race of the Greeks where endurance is often in N.T. usage combined with hope, particularly the hope of the Lord's Return, with all that it holds for the Christian's eternal felicity. Thus there is always before us a goal of aspiration as well as of prize—something to reach as well as to receive. The words "*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith*" refer to Him as the goal of aspiration and the pattern of patient faithful running. And true, there is reward for those who faithfully follow Him home, but many would agree that the prize or reward we desire is best found in the words of the hymn "*Jesus, our only joy be thou, as thou our prize wilt be*".

We cannot leave the topic without referring to Paul's words in 1 Cor. 9. 24-27, for

there we are urged to run as in racing. The exhortation seems disconnected from the context, for in the preceding verses the Apostle has been defending his calling and office. Clearly some critics within the Corinthian church had raised objection to his apostleship saying that he had prospered by it. Nowadays the charge will seem baseless to us who believe that probably no Christian had surrendered more for his Lord and the faith. But the charge was there and evidently the critics had made some headway and were causing dissension among the brethren. No doubt the Adversary was behind the false accusation. The method used has been adopted at other times in church life; and it is, that when the apostle's preaching and teaching cannot be gainsaid, belittle his service on the grounds of morals or that he makes a living out of the gospel. Paul's denial is correct (see v. 18, etc.), and rather than that, he had become the slave of all (v. 19) and accommodated himself to gain the Jew and those without the law, and even become as weak to gain the weak. Possibly Corinth mistook his self-immolation thinking that none would lower themselves unless there was gain to be made; but then perhaps there was jealousy in Corinth. Then Paul changes (v. 24-27) and suggests to them that they think of better, nobler motives for service. In effect he says "Do you not realise that I am running in the service of Christ as though one will receive the prize? Do you not know that I strive for the mastery and fight for the gospel not as one that beateth the air? Those who contend in the games do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but with you and I much more is at stake. Run with me, fight with me. Corinth! And far from making profit out of the gospel, I subject myself to its service, keep under my body and bring it unto subjection, lest after all my service of Christ I should be unapproved, or had run in vain". How happy he would have been to know that Corinth and other churches were running with him in the service of the gospel, laying aside every weight and having their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace!

And so we may see in the few references to running in the N.T. much the same thought as was noted in the O.T. incidents, namely that it pictures the intensity of purpose, the loyalty of service, the determination to reach the goal of the runners. "*So run, that ye may obtain.*"

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 19 I John 5. 1-5

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him" (vs. 1).

Belief in the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth is the beginning and end of our Christian faith. It lies at the centre of all that Christianity means to us and it enshrouds and embraces every phase and aspect of the Christian life. In verse 1 this belief is an indication that we are "born of the Spirit"; that points to the beginning of our walk along the Narrow Way. In verse 5 the same belief is an assurance that we shall overcome the world; that points to the end of our walk. It is true that in an accommodated sense we can say that we are overcoming, or have overcome the world, here and now, but in the strict and truest sense of the word we cannot say we have overcome until the earthly life has ended and we have passed the final test. It may well be that here in this passage John is thinking more of present experience than final achievement, nevertheless the idea of the last judgment can never be far from his thoughts, and when in verse 4 he tells us that the victory which overcomes the world is our faith he must surely be thinking of the same thing that inspired Peter to write *"that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 1. 7).

It might reasonably be asked at this point if John's statement in verse 1 requires us to hold that anyone who professes mere belief in Jesus and His redeeming work without going on to full consecration of life and possessions and talents to God is to be accepted as one born of God—spirit-begotten. If such is indeed the case, then the whole structure of belief in the peculiar work of this Gospel Age, the selection from amongst the nations of a fully consecrated company who form the "Church" of this Age and in association with Christ will dispense Divine blessings to mankind in the next, falls to the ground. Such a position is unthinkable; the whole tenor of New Testament teaching is to the effect that God invites those who will to present themselves unreservedly "living sac-

rifices" (Rom. 12. 1) on the basis of the justification by faith which is already theirs by virtue of their already declared belief in Jesus. Not all who are thus justified by faith take the further step of consecration, but none who do not do so can become members of the Church and hope eventually to be joined with Christ in the spiritual Kingdom beyond the Vail. These references to being "born of God", or "begotten again" can only apply to those who are in the way eventually to attain the spiritual Kingdom. So we must conclude that John has a deeper meaning in his expression "believeth that Jesus is the Christ" than is apparent on the surface.

Perhaps there is a clue in the 22nd verse of chapter 2. In that verse John tells us that he who denies that Jesus is the Christ is an antichrist. That may seem a sharp sentence to pass for what may after all be but a thoughtless or ignorant denial on the part of one who may not even know what he is talking about. But it is obvious that John is not thinking of such a case. He is thinking of the wilful, intelligent denial that comes after the subject has been properly presented. In his own day he was, of course, referring to the Gnostics and others who were corrupting the infant Church with their heresies, claiming that Jesus of Nazareth was but an ordinary man into whom the Divine Christ entered and remained as a kind of tenant for three and a half years, departing when the "man Jesus" was nailed to the Cross, and leaving Him to his fate. Against that heresy, born of the endeavour to conform Christian teaching to the principles of Greek philosophy, John uttered his denunciation in no uncertain terms. Those who held or accepted such views were worthy to be called antichrist. That attitude of John seems to show that in all his epistles he is dealing with the heights and depths of Christian experience; he is not concerned with the elementary truths or the immature "seekers after God" at all. To John, the expression "believing in Jesus" means everything that is involved in the logical consequences of belief. It means not only a mental acceptance of the truth regarding Jesus and His mission; not even justification by faith, which comes in consequence of such belief coupled with repentance and acceptance of Jesus as

a personal Saviour. It means the life of consecration, the continual walking after the Spirit, the being buried with Christ by baptism into His death. All that is what John means by believing that Jesus is the Christ, and only such as go to that length can take to themselves this assurance that they are indeed "born of God".

There is a connection here with the preceding chapter. Having established the fact that we who have thus believed in Jesus are "born of God" there is a tacit assumption that our love has gone out to God, and built upon that, the reminder of what has been repeatedly said before, that we who thus love God must logically and obviously cherish feelings of love for all our fellows who are similarly "born of God".

In chapter 3 we are told that to love one another is the commandment of God. In vs. 11 of chapter 4 there comes the pleading exhortation "*If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*". That puts the matter on a higher plane than that of mere commandment; it now becomes a moral obligation. Now here in chapter 5 John takes it a step farther and removes the thought of command or obligation out of the argument altogether. He states as a demonstrable fact that anyone who loves God will obviously love his brother also; the two loves must go together. Love for God cannot exist unless there is love for brother. Following up his advantage, he drives the lesson home with the second verse "*By this we know that we are the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments*".

This theme has already been treated at length in the notes on chapters 3 and 4. It cannot be stressed too much or too often. Probably that is why John returns to it time and again. Love for the brethren is a most important factor in our Christian lives and, despite the stringent urging of John here in his epistle, one that is often found exceedingly difficult to put into practice. True, we always pay lip-service to it and even when our bungling mismanagement of affairs within our fellowship has resulted in a physical separation of believers who ought still to be worshipping and working together we try to excuse ourselves by saying that we still regard our separated ones as brethren and still have Christian love for them. It is doubtful if the Almighty endorses our words; still more unlikely that He will lightly excuse a condition of things where mutually antagonistic groups of disciples maintain

themselves in separate "camps" asserting doggedly that their own views of Divine things necessarily constitute "Truth" and the extent to which their opponents differ is the extent to which those opponents are in "error". There is certainly a case for the orderly gathering of Christians into varying groups adapted to the varying spiritual needs of that creature of indeterminate characteristics, man; but even though one believer feels that he is brought closer to God in the reverential surroundings and ritual of a High Church service, and another only in the Puritan simplicity of a Quaker meeting-house, there can always be a oneness between such, born of mutual respect for each other's beliefs and convictions, in the sober realization that the Holy Spirit has said "*in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth*" (2 Tim. 2. 20). Such a oneness can reveal itself in a hundred ways without any "sacrifice of principle" or "lowering of the doctrinal standard" or any of the other sops to conscience which we are so ready to invent to excuse what we know inwardly is our betrayal of our Lord's own heartfelt prayer "*That they may be one, as we are*".

"*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.*" (vs. 3.)

Somehow one is reminded of the words of King Solomon here. "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*" (Eccl. 12. 13-14.) Man was created in order to give glory to God. He was constituted the climax and head of all God's earthly creation so that there might be one more place in His universe from whence joy and happiness and sincere worship might radiate and testify to His all-abounding goodness. He asks only one thing—obedience to His laws of righteousness, the laws which alone can guarantee the perpetual continuance of this that His hands have fashioned and made. Solomon says that to observe these laws is the duty—the whole duty—of man. Micah the Morasthite had perhaps a little clearer discernment of the Father's own outlook on this when he declared in his impassioned tones "*He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.*" (Micah 6. 8.) This is coming very near to our

Lord's own interpretation of the Law. *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind: This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."* (Matt. 22, 37-40.) And that in turn is very plainly the basis of John's words. Love of God and love of fellow; these two embrace everything, and if this truth is received into the heart there is no longer any need of the Decalogue, for we know the law even without having it recited to us. His commandments are not grievous—burdensome, heavy, the Greek means—says John. "What doth the Lord require of thee" asks Micah, as much as to say, "He does not ask much". Perhaps one of the lessons behind the apparently trivial prohibition placed upon our first parents in Eden is that God does not really ask much of us, and what He does ask is well within our power to render, if we will. To love God; to love our brethren His sons; these things ought to be easy. And once we have attained this position we have kept his commandments. It is as simple as that!

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" invites Jesus. *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* (Matt. 11, 28-30.) Here is an invitation the acceptance of which is not burdensome, a commandment obedience to which is not grievous. It is indeed the very contrary; the entrance into this condition of love toward God and love toward fellow-men, so far from being a grievous burden, actually means a lightening the burden already borne. *"Ye shall find rest unto your souls."* That is the final outcome of that faith which is so exercised as to lead us to answer our Father's invitation by the full presentation of ourselves in lifelong consecration to Him, even unto death.

That is the thought which comes next into John's mind as he pursues his theme. In this chapter he has reflected on the truth that, believing in Jesus the Christ, we are born of God; that in loving the one who has thus become our Father we naturally and obviously love those His other sons our brethren and in so doing find that this dual love has brought us within the circle of those who keep His commandments, commandments that are by no means burdensome. But it is also true that he who keeps the command-

ments is an overcomer, and so John declares *"Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world"*—is an overcomer—and then by a swift extension of thought *"and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith"*. (vs. 4.)

That latter phrase is the one that we very frequently quote in our communion one with another, in our devotional studies, in the word of exhortation from the platform or pulpit. Do we as often realise the connection? The "faith" of verse 4 is intimately associated with the "love" and the "commandments" of verses 1 to 3. We are born of God because we believe, because we love God and our brother, because we keep the commandments, and because we have faith. All these factors enter into our overcoming and without any one of them we cannot retain that "Spirit-born" condition. The Spirit can be—and is—bestowed upon us, and can be withdrawn. We are exhorted to be "filled with the Spirit" but also warned that we "quench not the Spirit". *"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God"* cries the apostle *"whereby ye are sealed unto the day of deliverance"* (Eph. 4, 30) where "grieve" is *lupeo*, the same word that in Mark 10, 22 is applied to the rich young ruler, who on being told by Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life "went away grieved; for he had great possessions". So does the Spirit go away grieved when rejected by one in whom the light has become darkness. Always, at all times, we have to remember that God has made man a creature of free-will, capable of accepting light or darkness, good or evil. That choice will be put before the world of men in the next Age, the Millennial Age, but for we, who have heard the call of this Age, the choice is before us now, and we have liberty to walk in the light of the glory of God and find that it leads us into the heavenly Kingdom at the end, and liberty to turn aside from that light and find out, too late, that we are back again where we started. There are many called, but few are found chosen—choice, elect, fitted for the purpose for which God has called us all.

So, finally, John comes right back to his first position and asks the question to which he immediately gives his own answer. *"Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"* (vs. 5). We are born of God if we believe in Jesus; that is the intimation of verse 1. We overcome the world if we are born of God; that is the theme of verse 4. Therefore, says John in verse 5, we overcome the world if we be-

lieve in Jesus. The act of belief is our part in the process; the being born of the Spirit is God's part; the having overcome the world is the product of both parts. Again we are brought up against this incontestable truth that our salvation depends upon two parties, upon the Father and upon ourselves. He will be faithful; He cannot deny Himself; He will not of His own volition let us go. But we also must be faithful; and that is by no means so assured a thing as is the faithfulness of God. He will not be unfaithful to us; but we may insist on being unfaithful to Him. John, recognising that fact, adds his own factor to the argument by pointing out in verse 4 that in the last analysis the victory is entirely dependent upon our faith.

So it all comes back once more to the old familiar theme—belief. *If ye believe!* Those of old never entered in because of unbelief.

There remains to us a promise of entering into his rest; the achievement depends upon our belief, our faith. We are made partakers of Christ, says the writer to the Hebrews, only if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end. Even although there is that promise and opportunity of entering into his rest there is the possibility and danger that some of us will come short of it—fail to enter it. So real is that danger that we are exhorted "Let us therefore fear, lest . . ." We are bid to "labour", that is, to strain our best energies, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after Israel's example of unbelief. How vital, then, how important it is, that the one who overcomes the world is the one who *believes*, and fulfils all the implications of his belief, that Jesus is the Son of God.

(To be continued)

ST. PETER'S FISH

A strange story
of Jesus

One of the New Testament stories that sometimes provokes a smile is that of the fish with a silver coin in its mouth. Peter, approached by the appropriate officials for the customary Temple tribute money, referred the matter to Jesus, who told him to go down to the lake (of Galilee) and cast a line. His first catch would have a silver coin in its mouth which he was to use for the tribute money. The story is found in Matt. 17. 24-27. In fact there is today a species of fish in the Sea of Galilee called the musht, alternatively known as St. Peter's fish, the male of which habitually carries its young in its mouth, and at times substitutes a small stone or other object, being especially attracted to anything bright or shining. It has been known thus to carry coins. This aspect of the story is thereby vindicated. (The musht is specially reared in quantity nowadays in Israel for commercial food production.)

Jesus knew from a distance, which may have been a mile or so and could not have been less than a goodly number of yards—He was in the lakeside town of Capernaum at the time—that a particular fish was swimming about in the lake at that moment with a coin in its mouth. Perhaps He exerted the power necessary to bring it into contact with Peter's line. That should not be thought incredible in a day when men can see with their own eyes what is happening in a space-

craft orbiting two hundred miles above the earth, and control the movement of that space-craft by touching a few buttons. There is no physical link of sight and touch between the controller on earth and the space-craft above; the power by which the wonder is accomplished is an invisible electrical energy which men have learned to employ. If men can do that, why balk at the idea that Christ, who came from God, whence is the source of all energy, should do the same? One of the fruits of man's increasing knowledge of the powers behind Nature's operations is the realisation that so many 'incredible' stories of olden time are not so fantastic after all; they rest on principles which were formerly undreamed of by man but now are beginning to be understood.

This aspect of the story is, however, the least important. Of greater moment is Jesus' reason for the action. Why employ such an apparently elaborate and spectacular way of producing the tribute money when just one coin from the disciples' admittedly slender store would have met the need? There is evidently more behind the story than at first sight appears.

First of all, the background. "Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute," asked Jesus of Peter "of their own children, or of strangers?" "Of strangers" responded Peter. He knew, only too well,

the practice of conquering powers like Rome, who taxed their subject nations and occupied territories rather than their own peoples. "Then are the children free" said Jesus; free citizens of the Empire do not pay tax. But Jesus was not declaring Himself and His disciples free citizens of Rome. He had already, on a previous occasion, told his hearers to "render unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's". The tribute money now in question was a levy made upon all Jews for the upkeep of the Temple; it was an ecclesiastical tax and nothing to do with Rome. This is made apparent by the words used. The tribute money due to Rome was a "penny"—the denarius. The tribute demanded of Peter in Matt. 17. 24 was the didrachma, the half-shekel or "shekel of the sanctuary" worth two denarii and this indicates that it is the Temple tax that was in question. The "piece of money" from the fish's mouth in vs. 27 was a stater, equal to two didrachma, sufficient for Peter and his Master. Hence Jesus' words in vs. 27 "give unto them for me and thee". As a silver coin the stater was about equivalent to the English half-crown but to obtain the same purchasing power today one would have to spend about twenty-five shillings.

There had been a celebrated dispute between the Pharisees and the Sadducees as to whether this Temple tax should be compulsory or voluntary, and after lengthy discussion in the Sanhedrin the Pharisee party had won the day—the tax was made compulsory. It is quite possible that Jesus was alluding to this dispute and showing that the Pharisees, in imposing a compulsory tax on the people, were no better than their Roman overlords. In theory, every Israelite was a child of God, a Freeman of the Commonwealth of Israel, and his offerings to God were traditionally to be "of his own voluntary will" which is the formula used in the instructions for the Levitical rituals as laid down in the Book of Leviticus. Now the Pharisees had destroyed that spontaneous basis and substituted the rule of law. "The children are free" said Jesus. Every man of Israel should be free to bring his monetary offering for the upkeep of the Temple as his heart inspired him. The question which the tribute-collectors had asked Peter was therefore eminently improper.

It would seem therefore that Jesus could have evaded the tax by quoting the original Levitical law. This He did not do. What the

Pharisees demanded as a right He extended to them as a gift. "Lest we offend" ("scandalise") them . . . was the expression He used. He would not use His knowledge of the Mosaic Law to avoid a payment which was exacted out of His fellows anyway. And here, perhaps comes the real point of the story. The scanty store of money He and His disciples possessed was contributed by the poor to whom He ministered and by His followers among the people, who "ministered unto Him of their substance". (Luke 8. 3). He would not use their offerings, given for the sustenance of His little band of disciples, to meet this impost. This was a case where He could appropriately call upon the wealth of His Father in Heaven, who owns all the gold and silver, and all the treasures of earth. Hence this exercise of His extra-human power in discerning the whereabouts of that silver stater and His instructions to Peter to go and catch that fish. In a very real sense the Father paid the tribute-money for the Son.

Bunyan was the supreme example of the forceful Christian. Simple, direct, he spoke as he thought, and the positiveness of his expressions bespoke a firm and unyielding conviction of a righteous cause. Hear him on the subject of sectarianism. "Since you would know by what name I would be distinguished from others, I tell you I would be, and hope I am, a Christian. And for those factious titles of Anabaptist, Presbyterian, Independent, or the like, I conclude that they came neither from Antioch nor from Jerusalem, but from Hell and Babylon, for they tend to divisions; you may know them by their fruits."

* * *

The Greeks used the word *euphoria* to express an immense sense of well being. The true *euphoria* is seen in a puppy which rolls over on the ground for the very joy of being alive; in the lambs gambolling in the fields, in a colt galloping along beside its mother; and in children who skip, dance and run because they cannot keep still. This is the true *euphoria*; and, we believe should be the portion of those filled with all the fulness of God. Old age comes on far too speedily. The radiant morn of life is the continuous possession of those who are Spirit-filled.

Fry Siekman



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

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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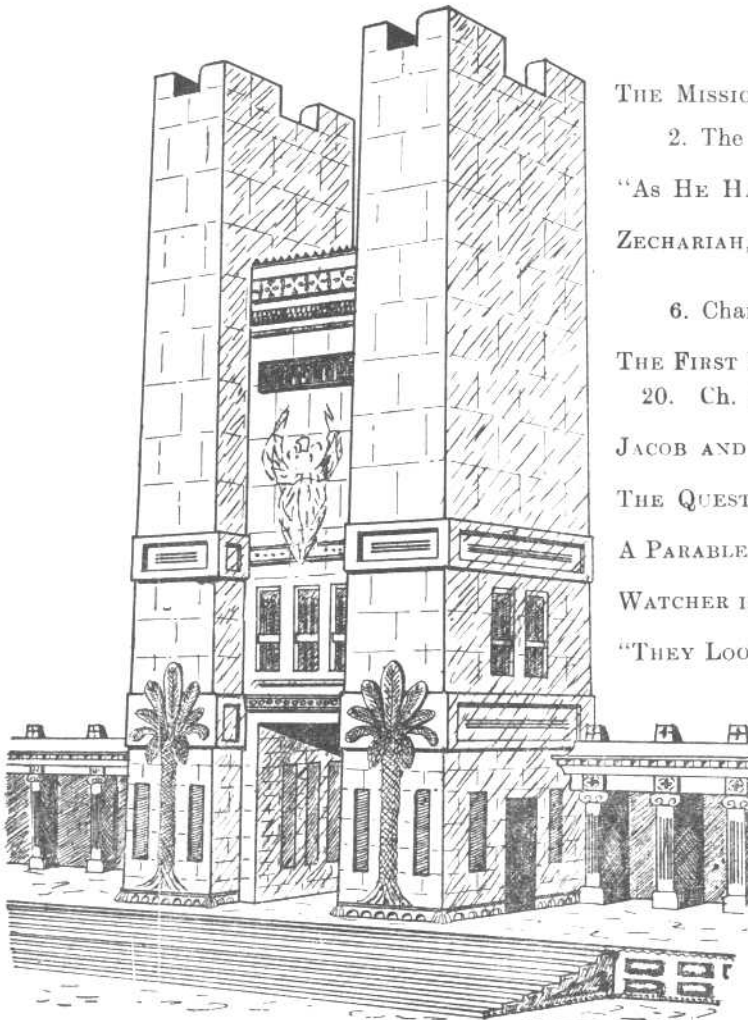
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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NOTICES

The Memorial

The date for the Memorial of our Lord's death falls this year on Tuesday, April 1, and this is the evening when many will be gathering to "do this in remembrance of Me".

* * *

New booklet

The narrative appearing in this issue under the title "Watcher in Gethsemane", first appearing in the "Monthly" twenty-five years ago, will be available before the end of this month as a 16-page pamphlet. It is thought that some of our readers would like to use these in correspondence with their friends, especially at this season of the year. The pamphlet can be furnished therefore in packets of 10, at 3/6 (50c) per packet to cover printing, packing and postage costs. OAPs and others unable to find this sum can have a few copies free on request.

* * *

Free Literature

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.

- 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

Gone from us

—:—
Bro. D. W. Desena (London)
Sis. J. MacDonald (Kilmarnock)
Sis. A. M. Mackenzie (Bexhill)
Sis. M. Tarbuck (Liverpool)
—:—

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

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"Do not toil to acquire wealth; be wise enough to desist. When your eyes light upon it, it is gone; for suddenly it takes to itself

wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven."
(Prov. 23. 4-5 RSV)

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

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

THE MISSION OF JONAH

Chapter 2. The Storm

The prophet who
ran away

It is an interesting fact that the only two stories of the sea contained in the Bible—one in the Old Testament and one in the New—are each concerned with the same locality and both tell of Divine intervention for the salvation of the mariners. In both cases a great storm threatened to engulf all; in both cases not a life was lost. The narrative of Paul's shipwreck on his voyage to Rome (Acts 27), parallels that of Jonah's adventure, except that Paul's ship was wrecked, whilst Jonah's apparently got back safely to port.

"But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken" (verse 4). The exactitude of the words used enables us to reconstruct the scene with great accuracy. The prevailing wind in the Eastern Mediterranean, in springtime, the season when the ancient long-distance ships commenced their voyages, is E.N.E., blowing away from the land and speeding the ships on their way. Climatic conditions on the mainland sometimes cause this wind to increase to a veritable gale, blowing down from the mountains of Asia. If this gale meets a hot south wind coming up from the African coast the result is a raging whirlwind over the sea. This is the "tempestuous wind, called Euryclydon" of Acts 27. 14, which caught and eventually wrecked Paul's ship nearly a thousand years later. (This same wind in the Mediterranean is to-day called the "Levanter" and behaves in precisely the same way, a striking testimony to the accuracy of the Bible narratives.) The word translated "tempest" in this fourth verse is one which means a whirlwind, and the Greek equivalent has given us our English word "typhoon". The expression "was like to be broken" is literally "to be shattered to pieces". The tremendous strain on the ship's structure by this terrific wind pressure upon the great sail and tall mast tended to strain the ship's timbers and cause her to go to pieces. The sailors would at once take the regular precaution against this threatened disaster by passing stout ropes over the bows, sliding them under the ship and securing them round the hull. This is the meaning of the expression in Acts 27. 17, "they used helps, undergirding the ship"; for the Alex-

andrian corn-ship on which Paul travelled would have been a very similar vessel to the "ship of Tarshish" on which Jonah had embarked.

The next verse indicates that disaster had overtaken the vessel, for the mariners (the "ocean-sailors", or general crew of the ship) are found calling upon their gods for succour and throwing the cargo overboard in order to lighten the vessel. That Phoenicians should dispose of their precious goods in this salutary fashion indicates a definitely serious state of affairs. Since in verse 13 it appears that the ship's only hope lay with the rowers, who "rowed hard to bring it to the land", it is probable that the mainsail had been blown to ribbons by the wind, if indeed the mainmast had not gone and taken the sail with it.

So one might imagine the whirling clouds in the dark sky above, the wind roaring and screaming through what was left of the ship's rigging, the great sail in tatters billowing and sweeping from side to side to the danger of every man on deck, the vessel itself wallowing helplessly in the raging seas, pitching and tossing as if in its death agony and threatening to capsize at any moment. Below deck the rowers strained with their oars while up above the steersman laboured to keep the ship head on to the wind, and the captain's hoarse voice spurred the men to renewed efforts as they jettisoned the cargo to lighten the vessel and enable it the more easily to ride the towering waves.

Amidst all this clamour and confusion, Jonah lay deep down in the ship, fast asleep. This was not the uneasy tossing of a man haunted by a troubled conscience; sleep under such circumstances must surely have been the deep slumber of one who had made his resolve, even though at great personal sacrifice, and had sought relief from his grief and heartache in the land of forgetfulness.

"What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not." The shipmaster (*rab chobel*—chief rope-man—probably the captain of the vessel) had descended into the "sides of the ship"—a technical term meaning the interior, or "below deck"—to seek out the sleeper. Perhaps he had been missed at a time when all had been summoned to

assist in working for the vessel's safety. At any rate, Jonah was admonished to add his prayers to those of his fellows in distress. Perhaps his God could succeed where others failed, or would look with greater favour on his devotee than the other gods did upon theirs. The captain did not seem to be too sanguine—probably he had been in such storms before and found himself left to extricate himself and his ship by his own skilful seamanship—but still, any likely way of escape was worth trying.

It would seem that Jonah had no opportunity to call upon his God, for as soon as he set foot upon deck he found himself in the middle of an excited and probably badly frightened crowd of men intent on discovering the cause of their calamity. The sailors were evidently no longer attributing this storm to natural causes; with the superstition of their kind and indeed in line with the common state of mind in those days, they had decided that someone among their number had incurred the wrath of one of the gods and that he was being pursued by this form of vengeance. It became a matter of necessity to find out the guilty man.

"And they said every man to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is come upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah" (verse 7).

The casting of lots was resorted to in ancient times as a means of determining the answer of Heaven to a specific question. The "lots" usually consisted of two small tabs of wood or metal, one white and one black. The scene can be imagined; the gale shrieking its violence and the ship shuddering and plunging like a mad thing, the rowers pulling hard at their oars and the steersman at his paddles, and an excited group on the deck oblivious to all but the matter in hand. The two lots were in the bag and the first cast was to be between the captain and the crew. The captain strode forward, put his hand into the bag and withdrew it. One of the crew stepped out and did likewise. The two men opened their hands and all crowded round to look. The mariner held the black lot!

Once again the process was repeated, between the crew and the passengers. This time one of the passengers held the black lot. So, eventually, the choice lay between one other man—and Jonah. The gambling instincts of the sailors would by now have been thoroughly aroused and a close circle formed

around the two men facing each other over the bag. Who would draw the black tab?

"And the lot fell upon Jonah!"

"Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us?—What is thine occupation?—Whence comest thou?—What is thy country?—Of what people art thou?"

The excited questions rained upon him from all sides. Customary discipline was completely laid aside; the paramount need was to ascertain who this man was, what he had done to offend his God, and how that God could be appeased: and there was no time to be lost.

The "critics" object that these questions are ungrammatical and illogical, and not to be taken as a record of an actual occurrence. A most telling comment on this attitude has been made by one student of the Book of Jonah in the words, "That a mob of excited and angry sailors gathered round Jonah and feeling themselves in danger of being drowned and of losing their ship through his fault should, one put one question, and another another, not in strict logical sequence and not expressed in accurate literary grammar, is a difficulty that could hardly have occurred to anyone but a professor who had, perhaps, never had any experience of a great storm at sea". Sailors are not the most grammatical or logical of men even at their best; and these men were not at their best.

And so, at last, Jonah was forced into full and frank avowal of that faith which was in him all the time, but had been thwarted and suppressed by the specious arguments of worldly reasoning. He had been a greatly honoured prophet of God; his words had been received with respect away in Galilee before his ignominious flight; and we know that his prophecies came true (2 Kings 14. 25). But he had allowed what we would call the reasoning of the natural mind to take priority over the leading of the Spirit, and in consequence, instead of going on in his prophetic office to even greater works of service for his God, he found himself face to face with complete disaster, and—worse still—he had involved other and innocent men in his ruin. In this crisis the true nature of the man comes to the top. The worldly wisdom with all its pretence falls away and he takes his stand, whatever the consequences, upon the only foundation left to him—his relationship to his God. *"I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land" (verse 9).*

This is the great turning point in Jonah's

life. Before this declaration, he had been an apostate, a renegade, running away from God and planning for himself. Now he turns, and puts himself into God's hands, announcing his allegiance and loyalty in no unmis-takable terms. We can lay great stress on that expression, "the God of heaven". The storm had come from heaven; it was raging in the air; and the mariners now had no doubt that it had been sent by the God of heaven, to pursue and overtake a guilty devotee. Jonah signed his own death-warrant in avowing himself a servant of this mighty God; there was no question now but that he, and he alone, was responsible for the calamity that had overtaken the vessel.

So much is evident from the mariners' horror-stricken query in verse 10, which, correctly rendered, is "*What is this that thou hast done?*" (The Hebrew is the same as in Gen. 3. 13, where God says to Eve, "What is this that thou hast done," and as in Gen. 12. 18. It implies a recognition of the serious nature of the action that has been taken and a bringing it home to the offender.) These sailors, Gentiles, heathens, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, looked askance at this man who had so defied his God and disobeyed his command.

These sailors probably had good reason, aside from the evidence of the storm, to believe in the power of the Hebrews' God. The scene on Mount Carmel, when God sent down fire from heaven upon the sacrifice, and Elijah slew the priests of Baal, was probably not more than a generation in the past, and these Phœnicians, whose home towns of Tyre and Sidon lay so near to Carmel, must have been quite familiar with the story. Now that Jonah had told them he was fleeing from this same Jehovah, they had good reason to be afraid.

Now what was to be done? That was the question uppermost in their minds. It is a testimony to Jonah's evident sincerity of repentance at this stage that the sailors should ask his advice. They were apparently assured that he, a prophet of Jehovah, would give them right counsel irrespective of the consequences to himself. For Jonah, too, the issue was no less clear. To what extent he received guidance from above at this point we do not know; we only know that without any hesitation he instructed the sailors to cast him overboard into the raging sea. Only thus could their lives be saved.

It is to their credit that they did all they could to avert this drastic remedy. The

rowers ploughed their oars through the water in the vain endeavour to bring the ship to land. The effort was futile; they were fighting against God, and no man can do that and be victorious. They realised at length that it must be Jonah's life or theirs. The God of the Hebrews had them at His mercy.

Now here we have the supreme act in this drama of the sea. These pagans with one accord came before God in prayer, acknowledging His almighty power and beseeching forgiveness. "Who hath resisted his will?" asked Paul on a much later occasion. These men must have felt like that. "*We beseech thee, O Jehovah, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood; for thou, O Jehovah, hast done as it pleased thee*" (verse 14). A saddening reflection it is that Jonah's own countrymen, throughout their long history, hesitated not to lay hands upon their own prophets and put them to death. "Which of the prophets have your fathers not persecuted?" asked Stephen at his trial before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7. 52). And yet these rude, uncultured men strove with might and main to avoid laying violent hands upon this man who, by his own confession, had brought them all into dire peril. They respected his prophetic office more than did the people to whom the prophets were sent.

"*So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea; and the sea ceased from her raging*" (verse 15). The same Divine intervention that had caused the storm to strike the vessel at the commencement of its voyage now caused the same storm to cease suddenly. The sailors believed that the God of heaven had personally intervened to deliver them; and they were right. The effect upon their minds is shown by the next verse. They were profoundly impressed, and delayed not to offer sacrifice and make vows.

The sacrifice would probably be of slain beasts, offered there and then upon the vessel. These ships, setting out on voyages which occupied several months, usually carried a number of living animals—chiefly sheep—to be slain *en route* to provide food for the crew. Tinned meat and refrigerators were unknown in those days! There would be the necessary sacrifices at hand, therefore, and vows that more opulent and appropriate ones would be offered directly the adventurers set foot upon shore again.

So the battered vessel came limping back to Joppa bearing a company of subdued and thoughtful men. Out there, in the raging and

tumult of the storm, they had come face to face with God; and perhaps life was never quite the same for them afterwards. It must have been an Israelite who had voyaged in a Phœnician ship who first suggested those stirring words to the Psalmist:

"Those that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep."

(To be continued)

"AS HE HAD SAID"

A New Testament theme

There is something very helpful when the words of a friend prove true in emergency. When we can look back along the way and say events have come to pass even as he said, it deepens and establishes our confidence in our adviser. We feel we have found a friend indeed whose word can well be relied upon.

In these few words the disciples put on record both their amazement and their satisfaction that their Master's words had been so amply verified. Along with Him they had come up to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast—a feast which was to remain the most momentous of all their lives. When the day for removing all leaven from their dwellings had come Jesus selected Peter and John to go on a little in advance, to make ready the place where He purposed to bring His little band, so that, in its quiet seclusion, He and they could commemorate that never-to-be-forgotten night in Egypt. *"Go and make ready for us the passover, that we may eat,"* said Jesus to the chosen two. *"But where shall we go, Master—from whom shall we make enquiry, concerning both chamber and food?"* *"Behold,"* said Jesus, *"when ye have entered into the city, there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water. Follow him into the house whereinto he goeth. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, 'Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he shall show you a large upper room furnished. there make ready."*

To the uninformed disciples this instruction may have appeared a most haphazard affair—a kind of indefinite goose-chase; a situation which might or might not come to pass. Only time could determine whether they were undertaking a fruitless journey and quest. But they had learned to have some respect for Jesus' word, and in obedience to the command the two selected disciples went on their quest. Arriving at and entering within the city gates, one of the first objects to attract their attention was a man bearing on his head a pitcher of water. Thus was the first stage of their instruction veri-

fied. Here, indeed, whether coincidental or accidental, was a man bearing a pitcher of water as Jesus had said.

Gathering confidence from this first verification of their Master's words, they followed the pitcher-bearer into the house. Explaining this unusual procedure, they told the master of the house that the *"didaskalos"* (master) had sent them to enquire: *"Where is the guest-chamber where I can eat the Passover with my disciples?"* Instead of meeting with rebuke for their unbidden entry, the goodman immediately led them up a flight of stairs, and showed them a large upper room furnished with couches, tables, ewers, bowls, which needed only to be set into position for the number expected to gather there. Again the Master's prescient words were fully verified, for here was indeed a room placed at their disposal, without restriction or impediment, and there they were able to *"make ready"*, as Jesus had instructed them. Evidently also, provision was made for their eating too, for *"making ready"* implied more than the arrangement of the room.

This sequence of connected events made a deep impression on their minds. Most certainly, Peter felt the influence of the dovetailing stages of the event, sufficient to relate in later days the story to the Church as proof of his Master's Messiahship, so that from his lips, Luke, the writer of the narrative, obtained an unmistakable insight into the reaction on the hearts of Peter and John which the clear fulfilment of Jesus' words had produced. *"They went, and found even as He had said unto them."* *"Even as He had said!"* The words may be Luke's, but the amazement and satisfaction was Peter's.

Something similar had occurred a few days previously, when Jesus and his little band were wending their journey to Jerusalem. *"Go your way into the village over against you, in the which, as ye enter, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon no man ever yet sat, loose him and bring him. And if anyone ask you, 'Why do ye loose him?' thus shall ye say,*

"The Lord hath need of him'." (Luke 19. 29-31). The deputed messengers went over to the village, found the colt there, heard the very question, and were able to make the actual reply given to them by their Master, *"... they that were sent, went away, and found even as He had said unto them"*.

Just how Jesus came to possess this foreknowledge it is not our purpose to discuss. It is the fact that events did come to pass even as He said they would that is of vital interest to us, just as it was to those early disciples. His words came true. They were fulfilled accurately and precisely. Men's actions and responses occurred in distant places, in full accord with what He said. It was this amazing fact that came to be noted with great satisfaction by the observant little band.

But there was motive and purpose in all these little episodes of life. Jesus was teaching them to believe on Him; to take Him at his word. He had said many other arresting things to them relating to future days. He had promised them a share with himself in Kingdom honours, and that, if they proved faithful under trial and test, they should be with Him when He returned to restore Israel to their place in God's purposes. He had spoken of things associated with the "regeneration", when the Son of Man should sit on the Throne of his Glory (Matt. 19. 28), and the blessedness of those who should be accounted worthy to attain that age and the resurrection from the dead. These were tremendous things for them to learn, and they were intended to incite the little band to faithfulness and constancy. But these things lay some way ahead along the stream of time, and, as there was a dark future to intervene, the faith and confidence of even the best of them would be tried to the extreme.

They had great need to learn the lesson of trust and confidence in His spoken word. It was necessary to inspire in them the same kind of confidence concerning the bigger things, which they were showing in the smaller things. *"Lord, increase our faith"* was once their plea, and in these little episodes their Master was making His response to their prayer. He wanted them to accept and believe his words as words of authority and truth; hence, by act and voice He sought to teach them the elements of true faith. Little by little, in this experience and then in that, He laboured to create in them a deepening certainty that He himself knew fully the verity of those great things of which He spoke.

It was no easy thing to bring forth in these simple hearts the depths of faith commensurate with those eventful days. The nation from which they sprang had failed to appreciate the visit of the Dayspring from on high, and the prevailing unbelief could have been a stumbling block for this chosen few. Events were at hand which would strain their slender faith to the utmost extent. Jesus had said that *"heaven and earth may pass away, but my words shall not pass away,"* yet within a few days they were to see Him pass away, and heaven and earth and all His enemies remain.

To find things taking place "even as He had said", therefore, was valuable tuition as they neared the fateful hour when their Master was to be slain. This tuition may be classed as of elementary type, but it was intended to be introductory to the upper-standard stage. "Go into the city, and ye shall find a room furnished" may be instruction of a kindergarten kind, but the simple and immediate was intended to lead on to the distant and profound. The same instructive principle was employed when He foretold the "kindly host" and "the waiting ass" as when speaking of the Kingdom day. *"Ye believe in God; believe also in Me,"* He said, in that upper room, even after the shadow of death had fallen across the path. *"Believe in Me . . . believe in Me, for the works I have done, even if not for the words I have spoken,"* was frequently the theme of his utterances.

Shortly after listening to their Master's solicitous words the little group fell into deep perplexity and distress. Their Lord and Master was put to death. Their hopes were rudely dashed. *"We trusted that He should have redeemed Israel,"* was their downcast reply. *"We trusted!"* That slender trust lay crushed and withered, though not quite dead. But when He came triumphant from the tomb they called to mind what He had said before He died. They remembered that He had said He would rise again from the dead. And then, when they beheld him, even as He had said they would, the good seed He had sown in their simple hearts sprang forth to rich fruitage of confidence and trust. From that time forward they had no further doubts or unmaturing faith. They believed him now, and in their hearts that deep deposit of faith was laid which has grown into the unwavering confidence and trust of the Christian Church. From their inspired and inspiring words believers of many generations since

have learned to take the words of the Blessed One *"even as He said"*.

There are many ways to-day in which we may take these simple words and apply them to our own estate. The blessed lips spake many things of this our day; of things about to come to pass, of wars and sorrows and distress; of signs and tokens marking an old world's death, and telling of a new world's birth. His words may seem to us hard to place and difficult to understand, but He wants his waiting people to believe that all these words will surely be fulfilled, *"even as He had said"*. The important feature of such belief lies in the fact that when He comes again there would be but little true faith in the earth (Luke 18. 8). Many hearts, once believing, will have grown cold and apathetic towards the Lord and towards the brethren everywhere (Matt. 24. 12). Disbelief, not faith, will characterise the day of his return, hence but few will be able to appreciate his words and expect them to be fulfilled even as He said. For some, the non-fulfilment of former expectations will prove a severe test to faith. The lengthening time of tarrying here, when all had expected long ago to be gathered to the Lord may be a matter difficult to understand. Disappointment over the protracted delay may be a handicap to faith, but through it all, the Overseer of our lives desires us to take it all on trust. He wants us to believe that the sequence of *"Parousia"* events will come to pass even as He said, and that if our expectations have not been in full harmony with what He said. By re-attention to his words He wants us to understand that events will come to pass *"even as He had said"*. Such re-scrutiny of his words will result, not in loss of faith, but in its increase. Come to pass they will, and no power on earth can stay their coming for a single day. Some great event, at an appropriate time, will bring the key to unlock the mystery, and as we pass within the portals of that event, we shall then stand in holy awe and reverent appreciation of all that He has said. We shall then learn that what He has said was sure and true.

Meantime, to keep our faith alive, and help us wait in patience for the consummation of

our desires, our Lord said He would be with his people to the end of the Age. Some have lost faith in this providential presence of their Lord. The chilling influence of dispensational disappointment has damped the warmth and enthusiasm of many hearts, and with this damping down has gone, in many cases, the quick responsiveness to the shepherd care of the Lord. The disturbed state of mind has led to a disturbed state of heart, which, in its turn, has led to a less reverential and worshipful attitude before the Lord. And thus the many tokens of the loving Shepherd's care are overlooked and become, in time, no longer expected or desired. In this refrigerated state of heart, the little tender endearments of the Lord produce no salutary effect, and joy and happy praise then very quickly decay.

If we had continued to believe that the Christian life would be *"just as He had said"* it would, this sad consequence could not have come about. We begin the sad decline by forgetting what He has said along pastoral lines, concentrating more upon what He spake along dispensational lines. Then when our incorrectly drawn conclusions fail to correspond with the drift of dispensational events, the balance in our hearts is gone. Longing for his appearing has out-weighed the longing for his caress, and when the tokens of his *"Parousia"* are slow to materialise, the tokens of his shepherding become less apparent too.

The ripened faith that can trust under darkening skies is not of mushroom growth. It does not grow, like Jonah's gourd, in a single night. It is a balanced thing—a deep assurance that can feed as well on the shepherd care as on the dispensational event. It accepts fully all that He has said about the pastoral care as about the *"Parousia"* event. This balanced faith is the most desirable thing in the Christian heart, for when the dispensational fulfilment seems slow to come, it still can feed on the lush grass beside the gently flowing waters of his Providence, knowing throughout that the Shepherd still is near. It is better to walk in the dark with him, than to go alone in the light.

Coming Conventions

The friends at Warrington are arranging an Easter convention over the period April 5-7 at the Masonic Hall, Winmarleigh Street, Warrington, and details of the programme can be obtained from Bro. F. B. Quennell, 43 Ackers Road, Stockton Heath, Warrington, Lancs. A warm welcome is

extended to all who would like to attend.

Advance notice is given of a similar gathering at Liverpool for the week-end June 21-22. On June 21 the venue will be the Y.M.C.A. and on the 22nd at the Tudor Room. Full information can be obtained from Mrs. A. F. Pampling, 6 Clive Road, Birkenhead, Ches.

ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

Chapter 6. Chariots of Judgment

The last of the visions is simple in its elements. Two mountains, from between which come four chariots, passing before the watching prophet and his angelic guide to proceed in differing directions until they are lost to sight. Apparently insignificant, but in reality full of meaning.

"There came four chariots out from between two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of brass" (copper) ch. 6. 1. What is signified by the two mountains? The Hebrew text has the definite article "the two mountains" as though something specific is intended, not just mountains in the general sense. What could such an expression have conveyed to the Israelites who first heard Zechariah's words? Mountains consisting of solid copper are unnatural to say the least, but every Israelite was well acquainted with the Divine promise to their forefathers concerning the land they were to inherit "a land . . . out of whose hills thou mayest dig copper" (Deut. 8. 9). Primitive Israel existed in what we call the Bronze Age, in which copper held the place today occupied by steel, and the land of the mountains of copper, to every true Israelite, was the land of Israel. The two mountains of the vision, then, might very well picture the dual kingdoms of Israel and Judah, as they existed side by side in the years before the great captivities.

Against the background of these two kingdoms are displayed the four chariots. The foremost one was drawn by red horses, the second by black, the third by white, and the fourth by what the A.V. calls "grisled and bay" horses (ch. 6. 3), actually "dappled strong" horses. "Amutstism", rendered "bay", is a word meaning strong, active or nimble, as applied to horses. (The A.V. "bay", meaning a deep red, arises from the desire of the A.V. translators to find a place in verse 7 for the red horses appearing in verse 2 who otherwise have no assigned destination, and is based upon the assumption that *amutstism* should be read *adamim*, for which there is no warrant). In reply to the prophet's query the revealing angel told him that these chariots were the "four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of the whole earth" (ch. 5. 5), that the one drawn by black horses goes into "the north country" and is followed there by the white,

and that the dappled ones go into the south country. Here the A.V. confuses the issue by postulating an extra chariot drawn by the "bay" going "to and fro through the earth" and this has to be corrected. The sense of vs. 6-7 is that the dappled ones go forth first toward the south country, and that being active or nimble (the "most strong" as the Douay version has it) proceed to penetrate other parts of the earth. They "sought to go", says the narrator "that they might walk to and fro through the earth" (vs. 7). This expression "to and fro" is derived from the verb *halak*, "to go" continuously as with settled intent, in specific directions not otherwise defined but not necessarily an alternation on a single path as is meant by the present usage of "to and fro". Our modern term "hither and thither" more accurately represents the term to us today.

Now what is the explanation? It will not escape notice that the colours of the first three horses are the same as those of the riders in the first vision (ch. 1. 8). (The notes in chapter 1 have already shewn that "speckled" in that chapter should properly read "black"). The fourth colour, grisled or "dappled", is new. It must also be noted that although four chariots come before the prophet's attention only three are assigned destinations. Of the first, the red, nothing more is said.

As a symbol the chariot pictures judgment, usually Divine judgment. "For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury . . ." (Isa. 66. 15). "The chariots of God are twenty thousand . . . the Lord is among them, as in Sinai . . . to God the Lord belong the issues from death, but God will wound the head of his enemies . . . such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses" (Psa. 68. 17-21). These chariots, said the angel, are synonymous with the "four spirits—or winds—of the heavens", and the four winds of heaven are also used as a symbol of Divine judgment. The eloquent passage in Psalm 18 illustrates that. "The earth shook and trembled . . . he did fly upon the wings of the wind . . . the Lord thundered in the heavens . . . the foundations of the world were discovered, O Lord . . . at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils" (Psa. 18. 7-15). "With his

mighty wind shall he (the Lord) shake his hand over the river and shall smite it" (Isa. 11. 15). Speaking of His judgment on Israel, God says "*But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not*" (Zech. 6. 14). Hence these four chariots are vehicles of Divine judgment, symbols of the wrath of God going out to whoever and whatever is represented by the "north country" and the "south country".

Consistently in the Old Testament Babylon is depicted as the "north country", the land of the north; although geographically it lies east of Israel the fact that its invading armies had to descend on the Israelites from the north in order to avoid the intervening desert gave rise to the name. The "south country" is Egypt and Arabia. With these facts in mind the interpretation of the vision begins to take shape. It is a picture of Divine retribution overtaking the powers which through history had oppressed and enslaved Israel, or were yet to do so. The standpoint from which the chariots are viewed is that of Zechariah's own day and this explains the omission of the red horses' onward progress. As in chapter 1, the red horses represented Assyria, the power to which Israel was enslaved in the first of the great captivities, and in Zechariah's day judgment on Assyria had already been executed. Assyria, with its capital city Ninevah, disappeared from history a century before Zechariah lived. That chariot had already passed on its way. "*I will break the Assyrian in my land*" the Lord had said through the prophet Isaiah "*and upon my mountains tread him underfoot . . . the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it?*" (Isa. 14. 25-26). The red chariot of judgment upon Assyria appeared to Zechariah's prophetic consciousness but he did not see it proceed on its mission because that was already past history. Assyria had fallen and was no more.

Not so the case with the chariot of black horses. That, again as in chapter 1, pictured Babylon and the judgment to come upon that land. Said the angel (vs. 6) "*the black horses which are therein go forth into the north country; and the white go forth after them*". The white logically picture Persia, as in chapter 1. Divine retribution began to come upon Babylon in Zechariah's own lifetime; he was there at the time and he witnessed the fall of the city and the death of Belshazzar its last king. Although Persian rule commenced there and then the Babylonian nation continued and the city did not disappear

at once; something like two centuries elapsed before Babylon completely lost its commercial importance and the city reverted to its dust. Judgment was being executed all that time. And more or less contemporaneous with the latter part of that period the succeeding empire, Persia, began to receive its due at the Lord's hand by the agency of Greece, so that by the time of Alexander of Greece that white-horsed chariot also had completed its mission. Both Babylon and Persia in turn had suffered the fate of Assyria their predecessor even as the Hebrew prophets had foretold. It is of these chariots that the proclamation of vs. 8 is made: "*these that go toward the north country have quieted my Spirit in the north country*". That word quieted means to permit rest or to pacify. The downfall and destruction of the successive empires, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, as it were satisfied the Divine justice; after the chariots of judgment had completed their work the Divine Spirit was "pacified" so far as those lands were concerned. Something like this must have been in the mind of Jeremiah when he contemplated the same kind of retribution coming upon other of the enemies of God, "*O thou sword of the Lord*" he declaimed "*how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still. How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given it a charge . . .*" (Jer. 4. 7. 6). Here in the case of the "north country", the sword of the Lord, at last, was quiet.

There is still the fourth chariot to consider. This went forth "*to the south country*". In Zechariah's day this was yet to come. After the fall of Persia the dispersion and exile of Israel lay in the south and west rather than in the north and east. Greece succeeded Persia as Israel's overlord but there was no captivity in Greece. From this time the dispersion of Israel was, first, south into Egypt and Arabia, and later, about and after the time of the First Advent, when Rome succeeded Greece, into North Africa and Europe, the west. So the dappled strong horses may well represent the variable but mainly harsh rule of Greece which sent so many of the sons of Israel southward, followed by the fall of Greece and of Egypt before the armed might of Rome. Then came the time when the "strong" of the horses began to go "hither and thither" through the earth. Just as the power of Rome has extended throughout the earth—the Mediterranean world which is what the Old Testament means by the term—and just as the dispersion of Israel

has extended similarly, so does the chariot of judgment follow, bringing Divine displeasure upon every vestige of evil rule and evil power until all is destroyed before the coming of earth's new King. Perhaps this fourth chariot is still going "hither and thither" through the earth and the disruption and disintegration so prevalent today is the final manifestation of its presence. The whole earth has entered into judgment, but afterwards comes the reign of the Prince of Peace.

Thus seen, this last of Zechariah's visions pictures the progressive judgments of God upon evil powers in the earth preparatory to the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom. From the re-establishment of Israel in the sixth century B.C., pictured in the first vision, the prophet had seen in symbol the development of the Christian Church, the preparation of the earthly Holy Nation, the dawn of the Messianic Age with its light and life, its standards of right and wrong, the elimination of evil, and the completion of retribution upon the evil forces of this world. Now the visions come to an end. As commentary upon the whole he was now to engage in a kind of symbolic charade in which he with his fellows would present in dramatic form a picture of the Millennial world which is yet to be, and this is the meaning of the remaining passage in chapter 6.

Verses 9-15 tell how the word of the Lord came to Zechariah telling him, in effect, that three men were coming from Babylon, apparently bearing gifts of gold and silver to the Jewish community. He was to take a portion of this tribute, and of it construct a crown with which, in a symbolic ceremony, he would crown Joshua the High Priest and proclaim him as the Lord's anointed, the "Branch", a Messianic title. Thus consecrated, Joshua was to reign as a royal priest in the day of the completed Temple, and foreigners from far-off lands would come and share with Israel in the work and service of God. All of which was a wonderful ideal never realized in that day; Joshua never became a ruler on a throne, and foreigners were never accepted within the ranks of Israel. The entire proceeding was a prophecy of a then far future day.

"Take from the exiles Heldai, Tobiah and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon, and go the same day to the house of Josiah, the son of Zephaniah. Take from them silver and gold, and make a crown." This is the R.S.V. rendering of vs. 10-11, supported by

other modern translators. The A.V., based on the Vulgate, has confused the text and rendered it difficult to understand. The plural "crowns" as in the A.V. refers to the several circlets of which the single crown is composed (this incidentally is the meaning of the "many crowns" of Rev. 19, 12). It was a common thing for visitors from the Jewish community in Babylon to visit their brethren in Judea bringing valuable gifts for the new Temple. None of the four individuals here mentioned can be identified elsewhere in Old Testament history although two Jedaiahs, both priests, were in Judea at the time of Zechariah. Suffice it that these three had come from Babylon with their gifts, that Zechariah met them and went with them to the home of Josiah the son of Zephaniah, and there made this crown. Evidently Joshua the High Priest was present, and probably a company of others, so that Zechariah was able in an impressive fashion to crown Joshua and declare the Divine decree.

"Thus saith the Lord of Hosts:

Behold the man whose name is **THE BRANCH**,

*For he shall grow up out of his place,
And he shall build the Temple of the Lord,
And he shall bear the glory,
And shall sit and rule upon his throne.
And he shall be a priest upon his throne.
And the counsel of peace shall be between
them both" (vss. 12-13)*

This can only be understood as a Messianic prophecy and the whole proceeding as a tableau depicting the ruling power of the Messianic Age. To depict Joshua himself as a crowned ruler in Judea at that time would not only be treason in the eyes of Persia, for Judea was a subject State, but treason against God, for the one who was to become both king and priest and dignified with the title of "the Branch" (of David) must come of Judah, the royal tribe, Joshua was of Levi, the priestly tribe. Thus the interpretation must be carried forward into the day when the Royal Priest, the one "after the order of Melchisedek" (Heb. 7) assumes His office and power "in glory", and this points unmistakably to our Lord "at His coming and His Kingdom". To this the language fits. "The Branch" is His title as the scion of David's house, the "root and offspring of David" (Rev. 22, 16). He "grows up out of his place" from the days of His humanity at His First Advent to the glory of His Second Advent. He shall sit and rule upon His throne both as king and as priest with complete harmony

between the two functions; *"the counsel of peace shall be between them both"*. One could picture this declaration as the Divine announcement to all the world at the time of the investiture of earth's rightful King in the dawn of the Millennial Age, calling all men to take heed to the new world order headed by this Priest-King for their salvation.

It is noteworthy that whereas Joshua was used in chapter 3 to prefigure the cleansing and development of the Church during this present Age he becomes, in chapter 6, the symbol of the reigning Christ in the next; it will not escape notice in this connection that the Church is destined to be associated with her Lord in the kingly-priestly work of that Age so that the use of Joshua as a symbol of both "Christ the Head and the Church which is His body" is perhaps not altogether accidental.

"And the crown shall be, to Heldai, and to Tobiah, and to Jedaiah, and for the kindness of the son of Zephaniah, for a memorial in the Temple of the Lord. And they that are far off shall come and build in the Temple of the Lord" (vss. 14-15). Two minor corrections in the text have to be made. *"Helem"* in vs. 14 is obviously *"Heldai"* as in vs. 10, this is evidently a copyist's error at some early date, the *daleth yod* (DI) at the end of the word having been mistaken for *mem* (M), a mistake due to similarity between the characters if written somewhat carelessly in the manuscript. *"Hen"* in the same verse is not a proper name and by some translators is linked with a word meaning favour or kindness; thus the R.V. and others render *"for the kindness of the son of Zephaniah"* which removes all disparity between this verse and verse 10. It is now possible to take a look at the apparent meaning of the statement. The crown, following its use for the ceremonial crowning of Joshua, is to be laid up in the Temple as a memorial to the three pious men who brought the original gift from Babylon, and to record the "kindness" of Josiah the son of Zephaniah who received them into his house and provided a place in which the ceremony could be performed. Since the entire proceeding has its setting in the Millennial Age and the "crown" is laid up in the newly built Temple after the Priest-King has been crowned and therefore presumably entered upon the duties of His office, the Temple can hardly represent other than the edifice built during that Age, the all-righteous system of world government instituted and presided over by our Lord and His

Church—corresponding to some extent to the Holy City of Revelation. Within that system of administration there will be a memorial of some who in a past time brought their gifts away from the lands of unrighteousness, and within the confines of a friendly house contributed their symbol of faith that the time for the reign of earth's great Priest-King had come. If we take it that those three unknown men, Heldai, Tobiah and Jedaiah, pictured all of Israel who in the Last Days come in faith, away from the lands of the old world into the friendly land which is to be the nucleus of the Kingdom on earth, and for a short time join concert with those who, like Josiah the son of Zephaniah, are already in that land living in faith and hope, expressing their belief in the imminent coming of earth's new King, then perhaps the house of Josiah can symbolise the land, and the four figures in the tableau, the people, whose faith and works immediately prior to the establishment of the Kingdom in full sight of all people will be remembered for ever—a "memorial in the Temple of the Lord."

Logically enough, it is then that *"they that are far off shall come and build in the Temple of the Lord"*. In that glorious Age men will come from all nations, from earth's remotest bound, to play their part in the building of the new social system which is described so succinctly in the New Testament as *"a new heavens and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness"*.

To be continued

Who, of experience, does not know how great a matter a little fire may kindle; how much evil may be started by the fire of the tongue; how many unkind thoughts, evil suspicions, surmises, how much envy, malice, hatred and strife may be started by a mere insinuation? Since the Lord declares, *"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."* it follows that the hearts and lips, from which emanate these evil influences, are not controlled by the wisdom that cometh from above, though they be in some measure consecrated to the Lord.

* * *

The poet has well defined prayer as being *"The soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed."* Another has well declared that it is *"the Christian's vital breath"*—that is to say, Christian character cannot be maintained without prayer any more than a human life could be maintained without breathing.

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 20 I John 5. 6-8

"This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood, and these three agree in one." (vs. 6-8).

The great difference between the mission of John the Baptist and that of Jesus was that John came preaching repentance, purification, and preparation for Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom, whereas Jesus was Himself the Messiah and Himself introduced the Kingdom. Malachi, long centuries before, had declared of John *"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly (immediately) come to his temple"*. (Mal. 3. 1). Jesus, on the other hand, declared *"The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it"* (Luke 16. 16). But the way into that kingdom could only be through the gates of suffering and death. That new life must of necessity involve the cessation of the old life, a giving up in sacrifice that which by virtue of the sacrifice became the source of life that is to be. Jesus Himself touched on that truth when He said *"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 work of John was by water only, the water of baptism, the ceremonial cleansing which betokened the repentance of those who came to him. The work of Jesus was by water and blood. Not only must there be repentance and cleansing and a re-dedication of life to the covenants and the service of God, there must also be a voluntary laying down of life in that service, even unto death, that the disciple may be indeed as his lord. In the case of Jesus there was no question of repentance or cleansing or re-dedication of life. He always did those things which pleased His Father. He was always holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners; yet he insisted on going through the baptismal waters at the hands of John. Was it that the witness of the witness of the water might thus be His? Here in John's epistle He is pointed to as the One who came by water, and the water is called as a witness to His Messiahship. Can it not

be that the ceremony at Jordan on that memorable day, witnessed as it must have been by many people, and attested by the descent of the Holy Dove upon His head and the voice from heaven saying *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"*; can it not be that that ceremony was a symbol, not of our Lord's cleansing from sin, for He knew no sin, but of His innate sinlessness and purity. He stood before Israel, there in the river, without sin, without stain, without blemish, proclaimed by the Father as One in whom resided all perfection. That surely was the witness of the water.

In a sense the water was a symbol of the old covenant, the Law Covenant negotiated by Moses on behalf of Israel at Mount Sinai. The writer to the Hebrews makes reference, almost contemptuously as it would seem, to the period of the Law as one of *"divers washings and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation"* (Heb. 10. 10). John the Baptist was the last prophet of that Mosaic Covenant; he called the people to a renewed observance of that arrangement on the principle that only by adherence to its provisions and requirements could Israel as a nation ever be in the right condition to receive their Messiah and inherit the Kingdom. They failed, of course. *"The Law made nothing perfect"* says the writer to the Hebrews again *"but it was the bringing in of a better hope, by which we draw nigh unto God."* (Heb. 7. 19). Something more than water was needed; before mankind could be redeemed there must be the death of a willing offerer, the shedding of blood. If Jesus is to be the Christ there must not only be the witness of water; there must also be the witness of blood.

The symbol is so obvious that it hardly needs elaboration. The shed blood of Christ is a witness to His Messiahship. Isaiah seven centuries previously had painted in sombre hue the picture of the One Who would pour out His soul unto death. *"He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth . . . he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken . . . it pleased the Lord to bruise him . . . when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin."* (Isa. 53. 7-10). The wit-

ness of shed blood must have been particularly significant to those early believers of John's own day, accustomed as they were to the idea of shed blood of the Atonement Day sacrifices being taken into the Most Holy by the High Priest and sprinkled upon the Propitiatory as a covering for sin. (Lev. 16. 14). Perhaps in no other way could Jews of the First Century be brought to believe in Jesus as the "Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world" than by the witness of His death on their behalf; their whole training and background demanded that *"almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood there is no remission"*. (Heb. 9. 22).

But first of all, and most important, is the Spirit's witness. "It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth." John can appeal to no higher authority, for *"The Spirit searcheth all things"* (1 Cor. 2. 10). It is not possible for any finite human brain to grasp all that is involved in the truth regarding the Holy Spirit of God. To say that the Holy Spirit is the manifestation of the power of God in active operation is at best an inadequate presentation. When we are told in Genesis that *"the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters"* (Gen. 1. 2) we are being told of no less a thing than God Himself, the great Creator, rousing Himself to a mighty work of creation. Just so truly did Elihu, millenniums later, say to Job *"The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life"* (Job 3. 4) and reveal by that declaration his grasp of the transcendent truth that all men are the work of God's own hands. *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."* (Gen. 1. 26). The testimony of the Spirit is the testimony of God Himself, and that is just what we have in the story of the Baptism. *"This is my beloved Son."* What greater testimony could there be than that? Truly it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

Pentecost was a witness of the Spirit that Jesus is Christ; it was the fulfilment of His promise, that power should come upon them after His departure. That power came and has continued with the Christian church ever since. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus; the history of the Early Church, steadfast in persecution unto martyrdom; the experience of true disciples everywhere throughout the Age, even down to the present; the fulfilment of prophecy; the present ever increasing signs of the nearness of the Kingdom; all these are witnesses

of the Spirit testifying to the truth that Jesus is Christ and will surely redeem His every promise. The certainty of the twelve apostles immediately after the Day of Pentecost and their steadfast adherence to their faith for the remainder of their lives was a foretaste of the certainty and steadfastness of many thousands of faithful believers in all the centuries since. The Church of Christ in the flesh is itself a witness of the Spirit that Jesus is Christ.

So, says John, these are the three witnesses and these three agree in one. There is no divergence and no difference. The three witnesses speak with one voice. No matter how many false prophets may have gone out into the world, as he says in chap. 4, verse 1, no matter how many antichrists there might be, no matter even how many failures among those who have taken the name of Christ and called themselves His brethren, still the witness stands out and nothing will ever shake it. Jesus is Christ; here is a rock upon which the Church has been built, a foundation so sturdy and strong that even the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matt. 16. 18).

We must digress at this point to examine the well-known interpolated passage commencing with the words *"in heaven"* in verse 7 and concluding with the words *"in earth"* in verse 8. There is general agreement amongst scholars that the words first appear about the end of the 5th century, being then cited by Vigilius Tapsensis, a Latin writer. They seem to be unknown to any of the Greek theologians before the 13th century and the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament in which they appear are copies of the Codex Britannicus and Codex Ravianus, both dated in the early part of the sixteenth century. Had the expression been in any New Testament at the time of the Council of Nicæa in A.D. 325 it could hardly have failed to have been quoted in the Trinitarian controversy which was one of the features of that Council; yet it is certain that it was not so quoted. Practically every scholar of repute brands the passage as an interpolation, the celebrated student Tischendorf, usually reckoned the greatest New Testament authority of all time, even going so far as to say *"That this spurious addition should continue to be published as a part of the epistle I regard as an impiety."* The *"Textus Receptus"* or *"Received Text"*, on which our present New Testament is based, admitted the words on the authority of the sixteenth century scholar

Desiderius Erasmus, who hesitated but accepted them at last on the authority of the Codex Britannicus. Martin Luther, contemporary with Erasmus, refused to accept them and in consequence they were not included in the German Bible until many years later after Luther's death. Their survival appears to be due entirely to the fact that they appeared in sundry Latin translations and in some—not all—editions of the Latin Vulgate.

Fortunately the words are quite unnecessary to John's argument—in fact they read rather illogically, for what necessity is there to witness in heaven to the fact that Jesus

is Christ? The citizens of heaven were fully aware of that from the start; the glorious anthem of Rev. 5. 8-10 is an expression of the voice of heaven giving praise and glory to the conquering Messiah. John's teaching is plain and straightforward when the disputed words are omitted.

There are three witnesses to the Messiahship of Jesus; the Holy Spirit of God, the baptism of Jesus, and the crucifixion of Jesus, and these three give a united and harmonious testimony. *"These three agree in one."*

(To be continued)

Our Lord enshrined two distinct thoughts in His final instructions to His disciples respecting their life work—and therefore our life work. According to Luke and Mark he told them to *preach* repentance and remission of sins among all nations, and to preach the Gospel to the whole creation. (Luke 24. 47; Mark 16. 15). According to Matthew He also told them to *teach* all nations, *"bidding them observe whatsoever I have commanded you"*. (Matt. 27. 19). There is a world of difference between the words "preach" and "teach", and there is no reason to doubt that all three Evangelists' accounts embody part only of all that Jesus said to them at His departure, and each injunction was actually spoken separately and in its own setting. We might do well, therefore, to examine more closely than we have done heretofore the differences between these several versions of His parting words.

The word "preach" is from the Greek

"Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house." (Gen. 24. 31).

What a cordial greeting to fall upon the ears of a weary traveller! But far more condescending and wonderful is the blessed call of God at this time! And ten thousand times more abundant than Laban's little store is the infinite plenitude of Christ's provisions.

"Come in." Have we come fully into the rich spiritual experience of righteousness by faith? Let us possess all our possessions in Christ.

"Thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?" Others may turn back, but why do we hesitate? Why have we lingered without so long? Christ has prepared the house. Come in! Come in to the wonderful provisions of His providence.

"evangeliso", meaning "I tell good news", or from *"kerusso"*, which means "I proclaim as a herald". "Teach", on the other hand, is from *"matheteuo"*, which denotes the instruction of pupils or learners, the making of disciples. In the Christian way preaching comes first and is followed by teaching. The Apostles at Pentecost first proclaimed good news and went about as heralds, announcing the Kingdom of Heaven, and then settled down to teach their converts. In the individual Christian life it is inevitable that the early years are taken up with declaring the message, telling out the good tidings of redemption that is in Christ Jesus; only when the experiences of the way, and progress in the faith, has brought maturity of knowledge and character, can the believer begin to teach. Preaching belongs to youth and teaching to mature age; preaching is the work of the morning but teaching that of the evening.

There are also heavenly mansions which Christ has gone to prepare for us. Are we prepared to live in them? When Jesus returns and says, "Come in", shall we enter them? That same Jesus says now, *"Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray"*. How about this secret place of prayer? Have we learned to enter in now into the secret of His presence? Have we experienced the unspeakable joys of secret fellowship with Jesus? Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; why standest thou without this beautiful gate of prayer? It is the gate of power and blessing and service.

A thousand verses of neglected Scripture cry out: Come in; search me; come in and explore my hidden treasures; I am prepared for you, thou blessed of the Lord, Come in! Come in!

A. A. Esteb

JACOB AND THE ANGEL

An Old Testament
Incident

The somewhat chequered life of Jacob included that period during which, having separated from Laban his father-in-law, he made his way from Haran to his native land of Canaan, three hundred miles distant, with his family and possessions, to rejoin his father and settle down. He had gone to Haran alone and penniless; he was returning with four wives and a large number of children, probably some grandchildren, with servants and employees, vast flocks and herds. He was a wealthy and prosperous man. He returned, as he went, in the conviction that the Divine promise of ultimate blessing for all families of the earth was to be fulfilled through his seed; before he died he was to see in his posterity of several generations the beginning of the nation of Israel—a people which has resumed the ancient name in this our day in the land which he was at that time about to enter.

During this journey there occurred the rather obscure little incident which is recorded in Gen. 32, 24-32. Jacob wrestled with an angel, and prevailed, receiving as token of his victory the name Israel—"a prince of God". The incident is narrated as history but there is no explanation and it takes a little understanding as to its purpose and significance.

Prior to the occurrence, Jacob had made his peace with his pursuing and somewhat irate father-in-law, had sent messengers to his brother Esau in the hill country of Edom, and received intimation that a strong force of Esau's men was on its way to meet him. In some panic, and remembering the manner in which he had tricked Esau many years previously and the latter's vow of revenge, he apprehended the worst, and made hurried preparations for defence. He first divided his flocks and possessions into two sections, hoping that if Esau's men captured one half then he might escape with the other. He followed that with an impassioned prayer to God in which he—rather tardily perhaps—acknowledged his shortcomings and pleaded for deliverance from his brother's wrath. As an additional precaution—perhaps he was not, even yet, fully persuaded that his prayers would be effective—he sent rich gifts of flocks and herds in advance to his brother, following these by his wives and family,

sending them on in front while he himself stayed in the rear. It does not seem a very gallant or manly course of conduct, but then the character of Jacob as revealed in the O.T. is not that of a straightforward or courageous man. At any rate, when this incident occurred, Jacob was alone in the darkness of the night, with all his companions and possessions miles ahead.

"And Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he (the man) saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he (Jacob) said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me—and he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God, and hast prevailed." That was when Jacob realised that his antagonist was not mere man, but a celestial visitant. He asked the angel's name and his request was refused but he received a blessing. As he loosed his hold and the angel departed he said reverently *"I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved"*. So he called the spot Penuel, meaning "the face of God" and that name it continued to bear throughout the later history of the Israel nation. But Jacob retained a physical effect; he was thereafter, at least for a time, lame on the thigh the angel had touched.

The narrative must have been written by, or originated from, Jacob himself, for there were no witnesses. Whatever the nature of the physical factors, it was obvious that this whole thing was, to Jacob, a profound spiritual experience. It meant something of deep significance to him and it changed his outlook completely. Before it happened, he had gone in mortal fear of his brother Esau and was doing all he could to put off the moment of meeting him, even to the extent of letting not only his possessions but his wives and children go first to meet the avenger and suffer whatever was in store. After this encounter his attitude completely changed. Overtaking his wives and family (ch. 33, 1-3) he placed himself in front of them and so faced his brother. And, of course, he need not have been afraid, for Esau had long

since forgotten the old animosity and received him warm-heartedly. Jacob was able to take up residence in Canaan unmolested.

Was this incident, in which Jacob found himself wrestling with, and prevailing over, the powers of heaven, a means of restoring his self-confidence and conviction that if God be with him, who could be against him? According to his own statement while still in Haran, the angel of God had appeared to him in a dream commanding him to return to his native land and assuring him of protection (Gen. 31, 11-13). God had defended him from the quite justifiable wrath of Laban who admittedly had some cause of complaint; he had survived a three hundred mile journey across a difficult desert terrain without loss either at the hands of Nature or of marauding Bedouin. After all this the mere intimation that Esau's men were on their way to meet him threw him into an unreasoning panic. He did go to God in prayer, confessing his own unworthiness, reminding God of his promises, and asking for deliverance from the wrath of Esau. He evidently had little faith in either the power or intention of God to deliver, for he then made the frantic and somewhat pitiful attempt at mitigating the impact of Esau's enmity on himself even at the risk of losing his possessions and exposing his family to danger whilst keeping in the background himself.

Then came the struggle. There, in the quietness of the night, torn, perhaps, between the desire to go forward after his family and the fear of meeting Esau, he found his way barred by a stranger who attacked him aggressively. Whether at first thought he took the stranger to be one of Esau's men who had found him, so that now he must in fact fight for his life, or realised by means of that strange insight which the ancients appear to have had in greater measure than we today that his assailant was more than human and had come from God, we cannot now determine. Some of the old Jewish theologians hazarded the guess that Jacob took his adversary to be Esau's own special guardian angel come to exact vengeance, but there is not much substance in that. Suffice that Jacob, for some reason, knew that now he must fight, fight as he had never fought before. With such good effect did he wrestle that, whilst he could not overcome his opponent, he could at least hold him in a powerful grasp from which the other could not escape. But the angel was equal to the occasion. He touched the "hollow" of Jacob's "thigh" and

Jacob was lamed. In plain language that means the socket of the hip joint and the "sinew that shrank" of vs. 32 is the sciatic nerve. Physically, perhaps it was that in the intensity of the struggle Jacob had overstrained the muscle. But he held on still. Something of the meaning of this midnight encounter was beginning to enter his mind. "*Let me go, for the day breaketh*" commanded the angel. Those who love to find folklore and mythology origins for the Genesis stories hail this as a relic of the old superstitions that night spirits must flee away as soon as dawn breaks. But this was no myth. The angel's meaning was much more likely that with the onset of dawn Esau's arrival was imminent and it was high time for Jacob to get on the road to rejoin his company. But now Jacob was growing exultant. He had struggled with a celestial messenger of God and had prevailed; why should he now be afraid of a mere man like Esau? He would go out, not in his own strength, but in the strength of God, and God would be with him. He only now needed the blessing of God. "*I will not let thee go*" he cried exultantly "*except thou bless me*". And the angel, knowing that Jacob had now come to a right understanding of his position, gave him the blessing. "*Thy name shall be Israel, for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.*" From that day forward the nation which sprang from Jacob has been known as Israel; though its political existence came to an end in A.D. 70 the name was but dormant; in our own time the nation has become politically re-established and the name chosen by the hardy pioneers who established the modern State on the ruins of the British Mandate was the one awarded to their forefather so long ago—Israel.

Jacob wanted to know the angel's name; the angel refused to give it. The affairs of heaven are not the concern of mortal men. He had given Jacob the Divine blessing and his mission was accomplished; he left the patriarch in a different frame of mind to that in which he had encountered him. "*I have seen God face to face*" said Jacob reverently "*and my life is preserved*". He knew, of course, that he had not looked on the Most High with his natural eyes but he accepted the one with whom he had wrestled as the manifestation of God. In that way he could see God, and yet still live. And now he knew that within himself there resided a strength which, because it was of God and because

he had complete trust in God, would carry him victor through whatever opposition was raised against him. Without further ado he quickened his pace and overtook his wives and children, pressing on then in front of them without qualms to meet his brother Esau.

To Jacob, then, the experience was a demonstration that he could and would

triumph by determination, but only when God was with him. His persistence overcame the angel, but the angel showed he could have the last word by touching his hip-joint. The determination of Jacob, added to the power of the angel, made him irresistible, with the Divine blessing he went forward in full assurance of faith that the promise of God would certainly be fulfilled.

? THE QUESTION BOX ?

When and for what reason did the Apostle Paul change from his original name of Saul?

* * *

"Saul" is used consistently in the Book of Acts up to his visit to Cyprus, where (Acts 13. 9) both names are used interchangeably and after that he is always called Paul. No explanation of the change is given anywhere in the N.T. When, standing trial before Agrippa and relating the circumstances of his conversion, he quoted the heavenly voice on the Damascus road (Acts 26. 14), he used his Hebrew name "Saul", from which it would appear that he regarded the Hebrew name as fitting in a Jewish context. The fact that the name of the Roman governor of Cyprus was Sergius Paulus has induced some to suggest that Saul of Tarsus changed his name to Paul—which is actually Paulus in Latin or Greek—upon making the governor's acquaintance and in the belief that with a Roman name he would be better received in the Roman world. What is much more likely, however, is that Paulus was his "patronymic" or surname. Unlike most of his fellow-Jews, Paul was a Roman citizen, and, moreover, born with the privilege of Roman citizenship. (Acts 22. 28). This meant that his father had also acquired, or inherited, Roman citizenship. In such case it is certain that such status would have been accompanied by a Roman name so that the Apostle's full name might well have been Saul Paulus, just as that of St. Mark was John Marcus. Paul's visit to Cyprus was the commencement of what was to be a life-long ministry in the Greek and Roman worlds; Judea was left behind from now on. What more natural than that he should henceforth be known by his Roman surname rather than his Jewish first name. In Jerusalem he had been known as Saul of Tarsus because of his birthplace; as a member of the intensely nationalistic Sanhedrin, his Jewish name would certainly

be used in preference to a Gentile one; as the Apostle to the Gentiles no such inhibition existed and it was probably the part of wisdom to let himself be addressed and recorded by his Roman name Paulus.

* * *

Is or is not tithing incumbent upon a Christian?

* * *

This is one of the questions to which the short answer is that the Christian is not subject to the law given at Sinai but to a higher rule which embodies the spirit of the older law without holding to its letter. The Mosaic Law required that every Israelite yield one tenth of his annual increase, whether of cattle or crops, or other forms of wealth, to the Lord, by the agency of the priesthood. This was a method of acknowledging that all that they had achieved and gained came from the Lord and it was obligatory; no man could be a true son of Israel unless he paid his tithe. Inevitably the response became mechanical and the tendency with many was to feel that, having paid their tithe, their duty to God was done and they could thereafter please themselves what they did with the rest. Some, like the woman of Jesus' parable, who cast two mites into the treasury, did more. She gave "all the living that she had" and in so doing pointed to a deeper understanding of the principle behind tithing, which was later to find its full expression among Christians.

The propriety of tithing is, on occasion, a subject of discussion today. It sometimes extends to refinements such as whether the Christian should "tithe his income" before or after rates and taxes have been deducted. All of this is really going back to the Mosaic Law which was given to Israel only and has nothing to do with today. Jesus gave a higher law and one that called for, not just ten percent, but complete, one hundred per-

cent, dedication to God. In short, the Christian lives for the purposes and service of God, and all his endeavours, his abilities, his possessions, and income, are entrusted to him as a stewardship to be used according to his discretion to the glory of God. This is the difference between Christ and Moses. Each individual believer is a steward and no regulations are laid down as to the administration of his stewardship; that he must decide for himself on the basis of his knowledge of the Divine Will and the measure of his zeal for its accomplishment. St. Paul told

the Corinthians (1 Cor. 16. 2) "*let every one of you lay by in store, as God hath prosperea him*", for the needs of the Church. No fixed ten per cent, but each to be judge of his own contribution. When Ananias brought his offering St. Peter conceded that the disposition of the proceeds from the sale of his land was entirely within his own discretion (Acts 5. 4). This is the tithing that is incumbent upon the Christian, a considered and reverent placing of his life and all its attributes in the manner which he discerns is acceptable to God.

A PARABLE OF OLD BRICKS

Fifty miles south of Baghdad, on the railway that runs to Basra there is a little wayside station, a station set in a wilderness showing no signs of human habitation, a station so unimportant that the trains do not stop there except by special request. There are no station buildings; there is no station staff, no town or village busy with life and activity; only miles of broken brickwork, groups of palm trees, and a few jackals and lizards. The express trains, northbound to Baghdad and southbound to Basra, hurry past the flimsy, desolate platform so quickly that the interested traveller has barely time to read the one word, painted in Arabic and English upon a board about four feet long—"Babylon"!

How are the mighty fallen! That wooden platform with its painted sign marks the site of what was once the mightiest and most magnificent city on the earth, a city that for size and wealth would have compared favourably with the greatest of cities to-day, a city that throughout a considerable portion of human history was the acknowledged queen and mistress of all nations. Merchant vessels from Africa, from India, and even, it is thought, from far-off China, made their way up the great river, the River Euphrates, from the sea four hundred miles distant, bringing the produce and the riches of the four corners of the earth to her quays. Caravans of camels and asses, bearing the wealth

of the interior lands of Asia and Arabia, travelled the trade routes which ran over desert and mountain, through valley and plain, to converge at last on the market squares of Babylon. Here were gathered the rich men and the merchants of the earth, and all in the city shared in their prosperity. Sometimes native kings dwelt and ruled in her palaces; sometimes alien conquerors imposed foreign rule and sat upon the throne, but always Babylon paid tribute and remained through all political changes the unquestioned commercial centre of the world. Her palaces and her temples were the admiration and the envy of all who came to see. Her public monuments, her architecture and her many works of art displayed the creative artistry, no less than the mechanical skill, of the people that had created this great city. For two thousand years she remained thus, arrogant in her proud title of the "lady of kingdoms" (Isa. 47. 5), flaunting herself before the admiring world as the achievement of men who had given themselves over frankly and avowedly to the law of brute force, proclaiming abroad their determination to live their lives and build a nation that should endure for all time, without God, in defiance of God—and to-day there is nothing left of all the glory that was Babylon save a few masses of mouldering brickwork and a wayside station through which the trains pass without troubling to stop.

There is an idea abroad among moral people that they should make their neighbour good. One person I have to make good—myself. But my duty to my neighbour is much more nearly expressed by saying that I have to make him happy—if I may.

R. L. Stevenson

Go forth into the busy world and love it, interest yourself in its life; mingle kindly with its joys and sorrows; try what you can do for men rather than what you can make them do for you, and you will know what it is to have men yours, better than if you were their king or master.

WATCHER IN GETHSEMANE

*A Memorial
Meditation*

The boy shivered slightly in the cold night wind, crouching behind the tree. The tall cypresses rustled softly and the gnarled arms of the olives threw fantastic shadows across the grass. Beyond the valley to the right twinkled the lights of the city, and the great white and gold mass of the Temple gleamed pallid under the moon. But the boy was gazing ahead where an abyss of darkness in the valley marked the deep gorge through which the Kedron rushed, foaming, to the sea. He could hear its tumultuous waters now, as they sluiced over the rocks, the sound coming to his ears faintly in the silence of the night.

His lip quivered as he waited, oppressed by a sense of impending tragedy. He did not understand all that was happening; he did know that things were going terribly wrong for the One he loved with all the ardour of his boyish heart. When they had come downstairs from the upper room in his mother's house half-an-hour ago he had seen in their faces that which frightened him. These tense, tight-lipped men were not the happy, enthusiastic companions he had known, always ready to talk with him about their leader. And the Master Himself was changed. Glancing neither to left nor right, features rigidly set, a strange look of triumph in His eyes, He had set straight off along the road to Siloam and the others had followed Him.

With quick intuition the boy guessed where they were going, and as quickly had put his own plan into execution. He knew that something terrible was about to happen, and he knew, too, that Judas was at the bottom of it. He had seen him leave the house an hour ago and climb the hill toward Zion Gate. He had told his mother, but Mary had taken no notice. And so, saying nothing to anyone, he had crept into the little cave near the house, and there had stripped himself of his clothes, rubbed his body all over with thick grease, and, casting a single linen sheet around him, waited until the footsteps of the little party had died away in the distance. He could afford to give them five minutes' start, for whilst they were making their leisurely way along the high road that skirted the south and east of the city, he could run across the

rocky ground below the city wall, wade through the river Kedron and be up the opposite slope and safely in the Garden before they had emerged from the little village of Siloam.

So it was that he lay now, ensconced behind his olive tree—waiting. If they did come to take the Master, they might arrest the others as well, but they would not take notice of him, and even if they did, the precautions he had taken would enable him easily to slip out of their grasp. Two things he would do. He would protect his mother, and the mother of the Master, and Mary of Magdala, and Joanna and Salome. That was one thing. And if the Master was put to death he would, one day, write a book that should tell the world all that his Master had said and done. He knew what he would call it, too. He would use the words the Master was so fond of using, "good tidings", and he would call his book "The Good Tidings according to Mark".

From lower down the hillside there came a quiet murmur, shaping itself into men's voices as the fitful wind died away and was still. They had arrived at the Garden and were making their way up the slope. He could see Jesus leading the way, and hear His quiet voice as He turned to the little band of disciples and said "Sit ye here while I go and pray yonder". He could almost follow the quiet movements of the hand as Jesus motioned for Peter, and James, and John, to follow Him further. The trees hid them from view now but he could hear them groping their way, and then, presently, the same quiet voice saying—and how it struck at the heart of the listening boy—"My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death; tarry ye here, and watch".

Now there was silence, silence for a long time. The lights in the city had gone out, one after another, and only one remained, piercing the darkness like the eye of some beast of prey. Mark knew whence that light came: it was from the house of Caiaphas the High Priest; and he found himself wondering dully if there was any connection between that steady, unwinking light and the stealthy departure of Judas from his mother's house earlier in the evening.

The beloved voice broke the stillness. Mark turned swiftly to peer into the darkness higher up the hill. Was it his fancy, or could he really discern a vague shape, a form, against one of the rocky outcrops on the hillside. "O my Father" came the low tones borne upon the breeze "if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." A pause, and he could see Jesus, plainly, standing erect in the moonlight. He watched Him as He went back down the slope and behind the trees to the spot where He had left the three devoted disciples. He was out of sight now, but Mark heard the words, infinitely sad but infinitely tender, "Simon, sleepest thou? Could ye not watch with me one hour?" followed by tones of greater urgency "Watch ye and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak".

Mark knew what had happened. They had failed to watch; had gone to sleep; had disappointed their Master in His hour of need. The boy braced himself against the tree-trunk. He would watch; he would not fail the One he loved. Jesus knew he was there, for nothing could be hidden from Him; and He would understand.

Again that long silence. Jesus was communing with His Father, Mark knew, and he stood quietly at his post, like a little sentinel, eyes fixed on the dark patch which was the Kedron valley, and beyond which lay his home. There was nothing he could do, no way in which he could help, but he must keep watch, if needs be until dawn flamed over the topmost ridges of the Mount of Olives and the time for watching was over.

Again that quiet voice, and again those heartfelt words "O my Father, if this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, thy will be done". Again the erect posture, the long gaze across the valley in the direction of Jerusalem, and then the quick, decisive steps toward the disciples. The lad waited, sick with apprehension. Would they have failed in their watch again? He heard the tender, regretful words, and the confused voices of the three, as of men freshly awakened out of sleep; Peter's deep, quick voice in impassioned explanation, and the slower, softer voices of his two companions. Then all was quiet again, and the boy watched his Lord pacing slowly up the slope, head bent, in deep thought—pacing slowly—slowly . . .

Mark stiffened suddenly. Had he also slept,

leaning there against the tree? He looked up the hill toward the place where last he had seen Jesus. He was still there, kneeling by the rock. His form picked out in silver by the brilliant moon, His face looking up to heaven, a vivid patch of moonlight playing on the rock just above His head, moving, taking shape, almost like a reflection of Jesus Himself standing beside Him—Mark drew in his breath sharply and tried to blink the sleep from his eyes; it was as if that other form had bent down toward Jesus in the attitude of strengthening and encouraging Him. Was it—could it be—an *angel*? The boy's mind raced swiftly through the stories of olden time that he had learned at the feet of the doctors; he thought of Samuel, to whom the voice of God had come in audible tones. But that had been in times gone by, in his own day it had not been known for a man's eyes to behold an angel. He bent his head in awe, and when he looked again the bright vision was gone and he could see Jesus walking with firm step back to His disciples. "Sleep on" he heard him say: "Sleep on now, and take your rest; it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners". He was silent, and in that pause Mark became conscious of a flashing of lights in the road below. Men were approaching, a large party of men, and they were coming into the garden, their torches moving hither and thither like fire-flies among the trees. Jesus must have perceived those torches, too, for His voice, calm as ever but with a new note of urgency, came clearly to the lad "Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand"; and at that John Mark leaped from his position behind the tree and began running towards Jesus as fast as his legs would carry him.

Already the disciples were on their feet, thoroughly awake at last and altogether conscious of the danger that threatened their Master. This was no party of enquiring villagers come to listen to His message. These men came with angry shouts—the more angry because of a certain quality of fear which possessed their minds, for they all knew the marvellous powers of the Nazarene, and they were for the most part quite uncertain as to whether they would be able to take Him at all. More than one of them hung back timidly at the rear of the crowd, apprehensive that this One Whom they knew to be at least on a level with the prophets of old might imitate the example of His predeces-

sor Elijah and call down fire from heaven to consume them in a moment. So for the most part, the crowd kept its distance; just a few bold spirits advanced toward the One Who stood so serenely in the moonlight, waiting.

"Whom seek ye?"

"We seek Jesus of Nazareth" came the sullen reply.

"I am He."

And at that quiet avowal a nameless panic seized those men and they retreated hurriedly, falling to the ground and remaining prone, as though they expected immediate Divine judgment upon them for their temerity.

Again that calm, unruffled voice: "I have told you that I am He. If ye seek me, let these go their way".

The men got to their feet and looked about them uncertainly. The disciples, gathering courage, crowded round the Master. Peter, the first shock of surprise over, drew his sword and stood menacingly in front of his Leader. John Mark edged his way toward the little band of would-be defenders.

It was Judas who resolved the situation, Judas, who had staged this whole affair in order to force Jesus' hand and make Him declare Himself King of Jewry and the avowed opponent of the Roman and the Jewish leaders. Full well did he know the awe in which all men stood of Jesus. The Temple guard, sent out to effect the arrest, might very well lose their nerve and return without having accomplished their purpose. The mixed rabble, drawn from the dregs of the city and armed only with sticks, would quickly melt away in the face of such a defection, and the whole of Judas' plan would come to nothing. It was necessary to act, and act quickly. He fervently hoped Jesus would understand. Glancing dubiously at Peter's threatening sword, he walked quickly up to Jesus and embraced Him.

"Hail, Master" he cried.

The words of the answer fell upon the still night air like the slow dropping of heavy rain drops from trees.

"Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?"

But the spell was broken, and the Temple guard advanced toward their intended prisoner. Peter aimed a wild blow at the leader, but the action was mis-directed and the

sword glanced by the man's head and sliced off his ear. He cried out, and his followers halted in their tracks. James drew his sword—the only other the little band possessed—and Peter made ready to follow up his advantage; but Jesus stopped them both with an imperious gesture.

"Put up thy sword again into its place, Peter, for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword!" Stepping forward toward the stricken man, Jesus lightly touched him on the side of his head, and, lo! the severed ear was restored, whole and healthy.

Peter's nerve broke. Staring, first at the sword in his hand, and then at the serene, dignified figure of his Master, an expression of bewilderment and utter despair slowly overspread his countenance. In another moment the sword was lying on the ground and Peter was gone, crashing his way through the trees. They heard his stumbling run as the twigs cracked under his feet; sudden panic seized the other disciples and they ran, too, scrambling up the hillside and over the top of the Mount to get away toward Bethany, away from the city and all its dangers, away from the Master Who had so unaccountably frustrated His own mission by submitting to willing arrest at the hands of His enemies.

They had not gone unhindered. At the precipitate flight of Peter the guard had closed in and attempted to seize the unarmed disciples. For a few minutes it was difficult to distinguish friend from foe. Three men surrounded Jesus and tied his hands behind His back. At a word of command the others, pursuing the fugitives, came back into the little clearing in which stood Jesus, heavily guarded. As they trooped back one of them stumbled over a white-clad figure crouching behind a tree. In a moment John Mark was struggling in the grip of two powerful men. As he struggled he could see that Jesus was already being led down the hill toward the city, and his heart died within him. He slipped out of his linen robe, leaving it in the hands of the man who held him, wriggled like an eel in the grasp of another who found his well-greased body too slippery to hold, and, darting like a hunted animal across the clearing, was gone.

For a few minutes he lay quiet, the while the flickering torches marked the progress of the arrest party down the hill and out of the Garden across the road and up the ascent leading to the city. Then he picked himself

up and ran, ran as he had never run before, sobbing as he went, down the slope, turning to the left at its foot, then along the road, into Siloam half-a-mile away. He walked stealthily through the village street, but the villagers were all asleep and the little lights burned low. A dog barked at his passing, and then he was in the open country again, the noise of the turbulent Kedron sounding in his ears. Splashing through the water, he climbed the opposite bank and soon was making his way through the Valley of Hinnom, where the perpetual fires were burning, casting their eerie shadows and weird reflections upon the lurid scene.

How often had he heard Jesus liken the utter end of the wicked to the consuming action of those same fires. "Fear God" He had said "Who is able to kill both body and soul in Gehenna"—*Gay-Hinnom*, the Valley of Hinnom. Now those same wicked men had taken Him, and would slay Him, and all the glorious promises of the coming Kingdom on earth had come to naught, and life would not be worth living any more. So he told himself, sobbingly, as he ran on, bending his steps back now toward the city, the moonlight showing him his own home with the light that always shone so clearly from the window. He darted into his little cave, retrieved a cloak, and hastily wrapping it around himself, was in the house.

"They have taken the Master," he burst out as the women turned at his entry.

Mary the mother of Jesus went suddenly white. The others started up in alarm.

"What do you mean, boy?" cried his mother, "Where have you been? And where are the menfolk?"

"They all forsook him and fled. I was in the garden, behind the trees, and I saw them come, and men with torches came with Judas and He is betrayed, and the others have fled away, and He is taken into the city." The boy poured out the words incoherently.

"But did they not defend him?" asked Joanna quickly.

"He forbade them; and Peter, when he could not use his sword, threw it away and fled."

"And did the Master not destroy His enemies before they could touch Him?" demanded Joanna.

"He stood silent, and neither resisted them Himself nor suffered others to resist them."

"Then all our hopes are perished—What will become of us?" cried Salome.

Mary the mother of Jesus stopped her with a quiet gesture. "The time has come" she said dully, "He will surely die. I know that He will not resist, even in the face of death. He is led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He will not open His mouth. The angel told me that a sword should pierce through my soul also; now I know what he meant." She buried her face in her hands, and sat, still and immovable.

Joanna rose and put her arm round the stricken woman's shoulders. "Courage, dear heart" she said, "Even though He die, and all that He has promised fail to come to pass, yet has He wrought great deliverance in Israel. Many there are who thank God for healing and for happiness, who beforetime sat in darkness and in the shadow of death".

"We must find Nicodemus and Joseph" declared Mark's mother. "Perhaps they can influence the Sanhedrin to set the Master free."

The mother of Jesus shook her head sadly "It is so written" she said. "I see now what I have never seen until this day. The Son of Man is come to give His life a ransom for all men, and it must be that He die. How He will bring the blessings He has promised to the men for whom He dies, I know not, but I know that He must die." She dropped her head into her hands again.

"If only the men had not fled" sighed Salome.

"They will come back" announced Mary Magdalene decisively. The others looked up in surprise. This was a new Magdalene. They had known by repute the proud, imperious Mary of Magdala and the life she had lived, but during the whole time of her discipleship Mary's gratitude and love toward the One Who had changed her life had manifested itself in a gentle, docile disposition which almost belied the firmness of character that lay beneath. She stood up now, the unconscious leader of the little band of women.

"They will come back" she repeated. "John will come first, and then Peter. After that the others will come."

"What makes you think so, Mary?" asked Salome doubtfully.

"I know men" replied Mary. "I know their

weaknesses, and I know their strength. They do not understand Jesus as we women understand Him. They think only of swords and crowns and a kingdom that is sustained by force. They know nothing—yet—of a kingdom that is built upon love and conversion, that only upon such foundation can God win fallen man to Himself. They think of Jesus as a leader to go before them and fight their battles, to exalt them to be rulers with Himself that they might be seated at His right hand and His left hand in the glory of His Kingdom. They strive among themselves, who shall be greatest. They do not understand why He should minister to the poor, the simple, the unlearned. When He talked with the Samaritan woman at the well, and spoke to her heart, they marvelled. Would a woman have marvelled? When the little children came to Him, because He smiled at them, they drove them away. Would a woman have driven them away? They do not understand—yet. But they will. And

they will come back."

"But if the Master is put to death" moaned Salome, "of what avail is their coming back? Are not our hopes destroyed?"

Mary's eyes clouded over. She hesitated for a moment. Then, "I do not know" she said. "But this I do know. Abraham our father held his son, his only son, in whom all the promises centred, at the point of death, obedient to God's command. And it was only when hope seemed gone that God delivered. I know"—the soft voice spoke in low tones—"what He has done for me. How can I lose faith in Him now?"

There was silence for a little while. Joanna looked across at Mary Magdalene. In that look there was acknowledgment of leadership.

"What shall we do, Mary?" she asked.

"We must wait" said Mary firmly. "Wait until the men come back."

"THEY LOOKED FOR A CITY"

Testimony to Millennial expectations from the past

C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) was one of the most famous of British preachers. The following extract from one of his sermons shows how fully he accepted the Millennial teaching of the Bible.

* * *

"We stand on the borders of a new era. The present dispensation is almost finished. In a few more years, if prophecy be not thoroughly misinterpreted, we shall enter upon another condition. This poor earth of ours, which has been swathed in darkness, shall put on her garments of light. She hath toiled a long while in travail and sorrow. Soon shall her groanings end. Her surface, which hath been stained with blood, is soon to be purified by love, and a religion of peace is to be established. The hour is coming when storms shall be hushed, when tempests shall be unknown, when whirlwind and hurricane shall stay their mighty force, and when 'the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ'. But you ask me what sort of kingdom that is to be, and whether I can show you any likeness thereof. I answer 'No'. *'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath*

prepared for them that love Him' in the next, the Millennial, dispensation; *'but God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit'*. Sometimes when we climb upwards, there are moments of contemplation when we can understand that verse *'From whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ'* and can imagine that thrice-blessed hour when the King of Kings shall put on His head the crown of the universe; when He shall gather up sheaves of sceptres, and put them beneath His arm; when He shall take the crowns from the heads of all monarchs, and welding them into one, shall put them on His own head, amidst the shout of ten thousand times ten thousand who shall shout His high praises. But it is little enough that we can guess of its wonders. *O Christians, do you know that your Lord is coming?* In such an hour as ye think not, the Man Who once hung quivering on Calvary will descend in glory; the head that once was crowned with thorns will soon be crowned with diadem of brilliant jewels. I do look for His pre-millennial advent, and expect He will come here again. Jesus, our Lord, is to be King of all the earth, and rule all nations in a glorious, personal reign."



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

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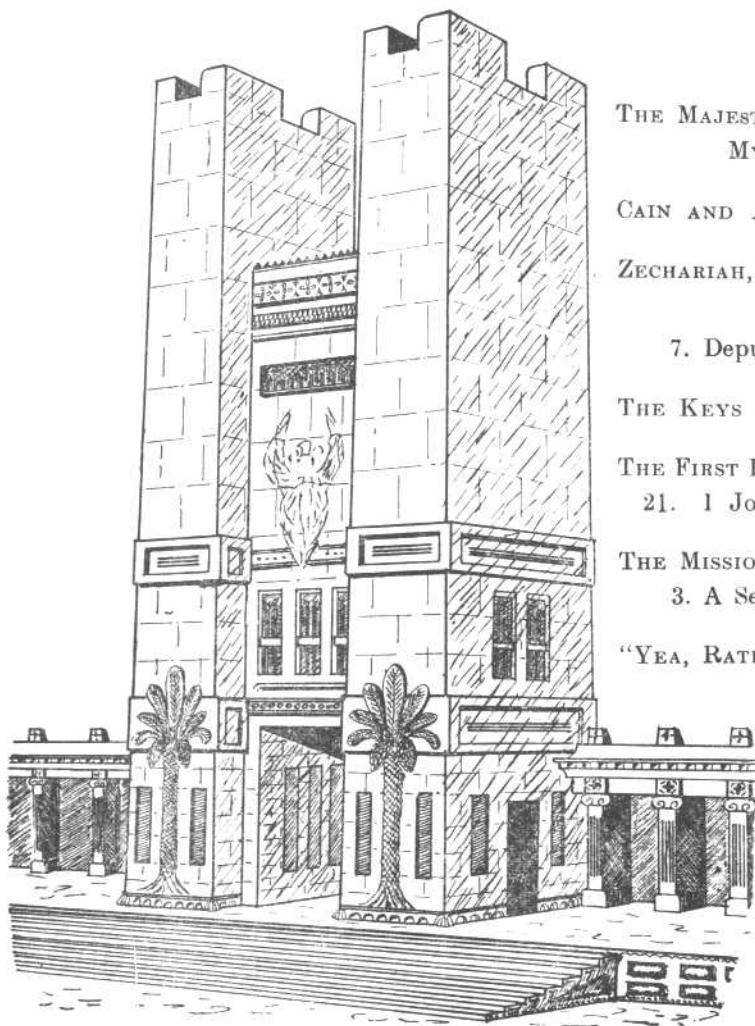
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Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.

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Coming Conventions

Northern Ireland friends have arranged the usual Convention at Portrush on Saturday, Sunday and Monday, May 24, 25 and 26. Programmes and details from Mr. T. R. Lang, 31 Hawthorn Terrace, Londonderry, N. Ireland, or Miss F. J. Stinson, "Port-na-Glas", Lansdowne Crescent, Portrush, N. Ireland.

* * *

London friends announce the usual Convention at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, on Saturday and Sunday (only) August 30 and 31, with a Baptismal Service at the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Walthamstow, on the morning of Monday, September 1. Programmes and details from Mr. D. Walton, "Connahs Quay", Shire Lane, Chorleywood, Herts.

A correspondent in a contemporary Christian journal suggests that the projected landing of astronauts on the moon is presumptuous sin in the sight of God. Similar suggestions have been made in the past; with the possibility of a landing in the near future the point is perhaps worth a passing thought. Columbus was accused of the same thing when he set out to discover what lay beyond the Atlantic Ocean, even though he declared that his incentive in part was to contribute to the fulfilment of the prophecy that the Gospel would be preached in all the world for a witness before the end come. *"In the execution of my enterprise to the Indies"* he said in his book on prophecy written in AD 1498, six years after he discovered the New World *"human reason, mathematics and maps of the world have served me nothing. It has accomplished simply that which the prophet Isaiah had predicted, that before the end of the world all the prophecies should have their accomplishment"*. From his studies in chronology Columbus held that the Second Advent would take place in AD 1656.

Now it might well be that the motives behind this modern endeavour are not so altruistic as those professed by Columbus. Insofar as the effort is dictated by man's inherent desire for exploration and discovery there is nothing to deprecate and much to

Gone from us

—:—

Sis. E. Baughan (Birmingham)
Sis. L. G. Derwent (Manchester)
Bro. H. Fletcher (Bolton)
Sis. Glasscott (Wallasey)
Bro. L. Jones (Wallasey)

—:—

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

(For Overseas Visitors' plans see page 54)

commend. So far, there is no question of sin. Man had that desire inbuilt at the time of his creation, and it is God-given. But some suggest that the inspiring motive is to gain military and war-making advantages and to the extent this is true sin is involved, but this differs in no wise from similar activities of men on this earth. Sin resides in the misuse man makes of his God-given powers to disturb the orderly progress of God's creation, not in travelling to places in that creation which those same God-given powers enable him to visit.

The more important thing to realise is that no matter how far men eventually may range through the vastness of space they can never get away from God. *"Whither shall I flee from thy presence?"* asks the Psalmist (139. 7). *"If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in the grave, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me"*. Of course the Most High follows the flight of every astronaut and not one will ever get beyond the bounds that He has set, but He is not thinking in terms of presumptuous sin but only of what is His ultimate purpose for those astronauts and for all mankind. One day all men will come to realise that and willingly take their place in that purpose.

THE MAJESTY AND MYSTERY OF GOD

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

* * *

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

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

We may consider these words first as a testimony to the glory of that Being of Whose ways all creatures see but a part, and as the text implies, but the very fringe and lower end. Look at the manifestation of Divine power which confronts us in the universe! Look at the power implied in the act of creation—a power which to the human mind is inconceivable, because we pass from

something in God of which we have no equivalent in ourselves. Men and angels may conceive and design and mould, but they cannot create. Give a man the materials and he will build a St. Paul's Cathedral. Give an angel the material, and he may build a structure of which, perhaps, we can form no adequate conception, but neither man nor angel can bring into existence the smallest atom from nothingness. And yet the universe which shines around us had a beginning. It did not create itself, for that is implying that it acted before it existed, which is a simple absurdity. It is not eternal, as it is continually changing, and we can chase it back in thought to a mere nebulous vapour. It had a beginning. "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*" He first threw the outlines of Creation over the universe of rayless darkness. He created the primal atoms, with their potencies and their laws, and then, intensely watching, He saw the grand picture evolve gradually and grow until all this mighty wilderness of suns and systems trembled into being.

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

Here also is the secret of the wisdom that appears in insensate things. The march of the universe is not a discord but a rhythmic

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

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

"...stellar sea

Whose waves are suns that break upon the shore

Of God's infinity for evermore."

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

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

which constitutes the whole. We can only find the final reason for anything when we know the final for everything.

Hence, as Goethe tells us, we are not born into this world to solve the problem of the universe, but to find out where that problem begins, and then to restrain ourselves within the limits of the comprehensible. All the men who have tried to solve those, like Carlyle, Goethe, Fichte, and Hegel, have only broken their wings against the bars of their cage. There are limits to the human mind, as well as to the restless sea, and God has said to the human intellect as well as to the ocean, "*Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed*". We should smile if we heard an insect on the top of this church criticising as folly the wisdom of the architect, or of the man in the pulpit. Just so. I fancy, the angels must smile when they hear men with finite faculties criticising the stupendous government of God. When however, we do understand anything that God has made, we find it to be perfect. As, for instance, an animal or a plant. If you analyse a flower, you find it adapted to the ends it is intended to serve, and if we knew all that God has done and permitted, we should find it perfect also. When Sir Isaac Newton discovered the great law of gravitation he found that certain planets did not move in a perfect orbit, but were drawn hither and thither in their course. He thought that this aberration might mean future disorder in the universe, and that the system was not complete. We sometimes seem to think that God has thrown the reins on the horse's neck and allows this world to bound on ungoverned and unrestrained; but we find that all has been included in the Divine purpose, that the existence of sin and sorrow will be explained, and that the justice of their permission will be demonstrated. We shall know when God has done all, and so certain is his vindication that an anthem is prepared in Heaven to celebrate it, and the angelic fingers are trembling to strike their harps to the music of the song: "*Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify thy Name, for thou only art holy; for all nations shall come and worship before Thee, for thy judgments are made manifest.*"

When the judgments of God are made manifest, when the perfect picture of which we see only the outline is complete, when

the sublime melody of which we hear only a few broken notes rolls its chorus to the stars, then we shall see that God's purpose is universally wise and tender. Meanwhile, we say, "Lo! these are parts of His ways, but how little a portion is heard of Him!"

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

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

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

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

We may consider the words of our text again as an incentive to the Church's faith. The faith of the Church is oftentimes darkened, and the "Where is the promise of His coming?" of the doubters swells into a deeper

murmur as they watch the apparently slow progress of the Gospel in the world. This difficulty is chiefly the result of our human impatience. Human life is short, and God's great purposes are so long, there is little wonder that to us the advance of the Gospel should appear slow. Let us remember that these are but parts of His ways. If there be any seeming delay in God, it is only such delay as belongs to steps of majesty. Faith and patience are not at all incompatible, nor protraction and mystery, with the certainty and glory of the issue of the struggle now waging in the world between light and darkness, holiness and sin.

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

*"Ever through the ages an increasing
purpose runs,*

*And the reign of Christ is widened with
the process of the suns."*

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

We may consider these words finally as comfort to the Church in sorrow. Let any one of you, bowed down by trial and adversity, remember that these are but parts of His ways. Your years are not all winters. The blue of heaven is larger than the cloud. There is more joy than pain in the world,

more love than hate, more song than sighs. The sorrows are but part of His ways. If we are bowed under the mystery of pain, we do but share the common lot. Unless we wish to be separated from the brotherhood and sisterhood of our race, we must bear the pangs of sorrow and the thrill of pain. It is the common lot, and because it is, there must be some beneficence in it, that we cannot at present fathom. Because it is universal it must have some magnificent ministry, or God would not have permitted it.

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

Furthermore, let us think of the future. The reason we are so perplexed and crushed by the calamities of time is that we think we are going to be here for ever. As an old divine has said, if we realised that human life is but the stopping for a night at an inn to go forth again in the morning, we should not be so troubled about the insufficiency of the accommodation. It is only because we

think we are going to stay here for ever that we are so perplexed and broken and crushed. Paul, whose life was so shot through with agony and bitterness, standing, as it would appear, with his back against Heaven's pearly gates, flung wide open, beholds the sorrows of his life dancing like motes in the sunbeam, and bursts forth into the triumphant utterance, "*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*"

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

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

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

So, dear friends, we will ponder the simple unfathomable words of our text. They shall teach us that mystery is not incompatible with faith since we cannot fathom the purposes of the Eternal. They shall teach us that our duty is to keep chime and step with that which is noble, and wait for the radiance which shall either clear up the mysteries which baffle us, or leave us contented with our ignorance.

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

VISITORS FROM OVERSEAS

Bro. & Sis. Jas B. Webster of Boston, U.S.A., expect to visit this country during June and July and the following itinerary has been planned. Further details from D. Walton, "Connahs Quay", Shire Lane, Chorleywood, Herts.

June	15	Central London
	18	Bexhill-on-Sea
	19-20	Eastbourne/Seaford
	21-22	Liverpool Convention
	24-27	Bury
	27-30	Glasgow
July	3	Dundee
	3-5	Coventry
	5-7	Cardiff
	9	Welling
	10-12	Butlers Cross
	12	Berkhampsted
	13-15	Windsor

Bro. & Sis. Percy Morrell of Vancouver, Canada, hope likewise to be here during May and the following fixtures have been made. Further details from J. Thompson, 15 Argyle Street, Bury, Lancs.

May	4-6	Windsor
	7	Central London
	9	Hitchin
	10	Berkhampsted
	11	Glasgow
	14	Rugby
	15-16	Atherstone
	17-18	Blaby
	19	Fazakerley
	20	St. Helens
	21	Warrington
	22	Manchester
	23	Accrington
	27-28	Dublin
	29	Belfast
	31	Gloucester
June	1	Forest Gate

CAIN AND ABEL

An Old Testament
study

The story of Cain and Abel is, in a very real sense, that of the beginning of sin and death amongst mankind. The earlier narrative of the Fall in Eden is concerned with the sin of man against God. This one deals with the sin of man against man, and the sorrow and suffering which thereby ensues. The incident is so familiar and so simple that much of its real significance, perceived only by "reading between the lines" is not appreciated. As a parable of man's relationship to God this vivid story of the early days of the world has tremendous value.

Cain was Eve's first child. The question whether Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, were actual historical personages and the human race literally descended from one original pair, or not, has been debated for centuries and powerful arguments are presented on both sides. Biologically there is nothing against it, and the story comes much more alive if it is accepted that Cain and Abel really did live and the narrative as we have it is the account of something which actually happened.

So the first human child was born. "*I have gotten a man from the Lord*" said Eve reverently, according to the A.V. of Gen. 4. 1. It seems that there is another shade of meaning in her words which is difficult to recover now, due to the fact that the Hebrew text of Gen. 4 is derived from a much earlier Sumerian language which recorded the original story, and repeated translation from earlier archaic tongues has rendered some words obscure. It is considered that the original expression meant she had "acquired a man" with the help of, or by the power of, the Lord. Now Eve must have been perfectly familiar with the processes of birth among the animals with which she was surrounded, yet upon the birth of her own child she immediately gives the credit, so to speak, to the Lord. There is an indication here that despite the tragedy of the Fall, and the measure of alienation from God which resulted, the first human pair had retained some reverence and loyalty toward God, and the first impulse on the birth of the child was to acknowledge the hand of the Lord in the event. God had already promised Eve that her seed would become the means of undoing the damage that had been done in Eden, that he would "bruise the serpent's head", which could only mean the overthrow of sin and the restora-

tion of primitive sinlessness, and without any doubt at all she saw in the birth of this child the first step to the fulfilment of that promise.

Hopes must have run high, therefore, as the lad grew to manhood's estate, joined later on by his younger brother Abel, and, of course, sisters. With the elder devoting his energies to cultivation of the soil and the younger to the raising of sheep and goats the family must have been reasonably happy, waiting for the next move in the Divine purpose, and with no indication of the tragedy soon to come.

There is very little guidance as to the time scale of these events. The genealogical tables in Genesis state that Seth, the third son, was born when his father was one hundred and thirty years old according to the Masoretic, or two hundred and thirty years according to the Septuagint. Ignoring these for a moment, there is evidence from sources outside the Bible that the life-span of early man was inordinately long compared with modern experience, and it is probable that both Cain and Abel were grown men, perhaps married—to their sisters—at the time of the tragedy. The one chronological fact which stands is that Seth was the third son and Abel was already dead when he was born.

"*In process of time*" therefore—perhaps anything up to a century after the Fall—"Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstfruits of his flocks and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering. But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell." (Gen. 4. 3-5). Some thought must be given to the purpose of these offerings. It has been suggested that Abel offered slain lambs on an altar; that this, prefiguring the shed blood of Jesus Christ after the fashion of much later Levitical ceremonies, was on that account acceptable to God where Cain's offering of agricultural produce was not. In this manner, it is suggested, Abel thus prophesied the death of Christ. In the light of cold hard facts, however, it is not likely that anything of this is inherent in the story. This is the first recorded instance in history in which men brought a spontaneous offering of the fruits of their labour to God. To suggest that on such a significant occasion

God should reject one and accept the other in the interests of an academic illustration of theological philosophy which neither of those men in their very primitive condition could have been expected to understand in the slightest degree is not very reasonable. And there is an important element in the text which disallows the idea completely. Abel brought "firstfruits" of his flock, and the text has "*bekorah*" which means female firstborn, of either sheep or goats. But female lambs were not admissible as blood sacrifices prefiguring Christ in the ceremonies of Israel—Passover or Day of Atonement. The Passover lamb must be a male, of the first year. Had Abel been Divinely led to enact a prefigure of the later rituals he would have been told to bring a one year male and not a first-born female. But there was a place for first-born females in later Israel ceremonial. They were specified, not for sacrifice, but to be included with the firstfruits of the ground—fruit and crops—as thank-offerings to the Lord. Our modern harvest festival is the lineal descendant of such ceremonial. Deut. 12. 6. Deut. 14. 23 and Neh. 10. 36 are instances of *bekorah*, female firstlings, being thus employed. Lev. 27. 26. Num. 3. 41 and 28. 17. Deut. 15. 19 tell of *bekor*, male firstlings, treated similarly. The point is that the thank-offering has to be the firstborn, whether male or female, animal or vegetable, on the principle that the firstborn of anything is peculiarly the Lord's and should be given to him. (Exod. 13. 2).

When it is thus realised that what these two men were doing was quite spontaneously bringing a thank-offering to the Lord as recognition of His overruling power in giving them success in their respective spheres the story begins to take shape and a further examination of the Hebrew text offers a reasonable explanation why Cain's offering was rejected. Dr. Young's translation says that Abel brought "*the female firstlings of his flock, even from their fat ones*". In other words, rightly surmising that God should have the first and the best of his flock, he chose the fattest and best of the firstborns as his contribution. Why he chose female instead of male, thousands of years before the Mosaic Law provided for female offerings, is a point of interest. For some reason Abel must have considered female the more appropriate, as, in some sense, better than the male. Perhaps, in the rudimentary state of knowledge of that first family, the female was considered the channel of life, life that

came from God. That would explain Eve's crediting the coming of Cain to God rather than to her husband. It is significant that it was Eve and not Adam who named Enos, and perhaps the other sons too. But Cain did not bring the best of his produce. This is shown by the words used. The "firstfruits", in the sense of the earliest to ripen, is *bikkar*. The firstfruits in the sense of the best of the produce is *reshith*. Both these terms are used in the O.T. to refer to the offerings of firstfruits in Israel. The term for fruit in general is *peri*, and this is the word used in Gen. 4. 3. Cain did not bring firstfruits as did Abel; he brought of the fruit of his labours but it was not of the best or choicest or earliest, and that was why his offering was rejected. That was why "*Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain*" (Heb. 11. 4). The Almighty can only accept of our best, and Cain did not give of his best.

So "*Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell*" and the Almighty spoke to him. "*If you do well*" He said "*will you not be accepted? And if you do not well*" and here came the warning "*sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it*" (ch. 4. 7 RSV). Here is the first intimation that man has a positive responsibility to strive against sin. The basic promise that sin would one day be undone because the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head did not authorise man to adopt a static and non-committal attitude, passively waiting for the Lord to execute His word. Sin was an active reality, waiting to ensnare men; it was imperative to give heed and not be entrapped. God apparently passed over Cain's failure to offer of his best, and stressed as of greater consequence his unjustified wrath which could so easily—and quickly did—lead to jealousy, violence and finally murder. The Lord exhorted Cain to take stock of his position and fight the dark thoughts that were crowding into his mind before it was too late. Cain did not heed the warning.

Tragedy followed swiftly. According to the LXX Cain invited his brother into "the field", the Hebrew word denoting cultivated or irrigated land as distinct from pasture or wild land. In other words, Abel was enticed away from the family home into Cain's own area of labour. There, in the field, Cain slew his brother. It may have been a pre-meditated act; it may have been a sudden uncontrollable upsurge of jealousy. In any case it is a sad commentary upon the ease with which

human free-will, undisciplined by loyalty and allegiance to the Divine way of life, can sink to actions so contrary to the basic instincts of man. These two must have grown up as boys together in the wonder of a world revealing ever new and increasingly exciting discoveries. The knowledge that death must one day come, because of the original sin, was with them but in the vigour of their near-perfect manhood the event must have seemed almost inconceivably far away. It is not likely that Cain intended the death of his brother but rather that in the intensity of his resentment he struck a blow which proved fatal. But the sequel of his animosity proved the reality of the Lord's warning. Sin was already there, crouching at the door, waiting to obtain the mastery. He could overcome it if he would, but he must exert his will so to do. And Cain, like Eve his mother before him, failed to do so.

His immediate reaction was fear, a futile endeavour to avoid the consequence. In what manner the Lord spoke to Cain we know not, but the dialogue between the two must have been real in Cain's mind. "Where is Abel thy brother?" came the accusing question from Heaven. "I know not" the surly yet apprehensive reply "Am I my brother's keeper". Then was pronounced the fearful condemnation before which Cain quailed and was broken. "What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground . . . when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth". The "ground" and the "earth" from which Cain was banished is *adamah*, the land of their habitation, but the "earth" in which Cain was to be a fugitive and vagabond is *erets*, meaning the earth as we use the term, the whole extent of the world, the earth as a planet. Cain was to be exiled from his home, his family, and his land and doomed to wander—"fugitive" is a wanderer fleeing as from an enemy or from justice; "vagabond" a wanderer as having no home—an exile in the earth.

"My punishment is greater than I can bear" cried Cain. The Reviser's marginal alternative "mine iniquity is greater than that it may be forgiven" is a possible construction of the Hebrew but the general assessment of scholastic opinion is that the traditional rendering is correct. There is really no indication in the story that Cain felt any remorse or was in any way repentant; his concern appears to be only with the consequence

upon himself. He was to be cast out into the desolate earth with no means of subsistence, he was to be hidden from the presence of God; and he was to be in danger of death at the hands of his fellow-men. "Thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth" he cried "and from thy face I shall be hid, and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that everyone that findeth me shall slay me". His dismay at being banished from the Divine presence is thought by some to be an indication of some residual reverence for God which led him to lament the separation; more likely, perhaps, it reflected a fear that banishment from God's presence implied withdrawal of Divine protection, leaving him with no shield against possible avengers. There is a fundamental principle here. Fear of the consequence of sin is no basis for acceptance with God. An upright life gains no credits in the books of Heaven if that uprightness is dictated only by fear of the alternative. Many of the old-time revivalists, and a few modern preachers too, have not realised this. They tried, and try, to stampede unbelievers into the good life by painting lurid pictures of the fearful fate awaiting the unregenerate. The Almighty does not want that kind of allegiance; more, He will not have it. The man who eventually gains his place in the Divine scheme of creation will gain it because he has fully and completely given himself in willing conformity to the Divine way, not because he is afraid of what God will do to him if he does not. He recognises that he owes life and all that life means to his Creator and wants nothing better than to place himself in that Creator's hands to be used as He wills. Had Cain admitted the enormity of his crime, given evidence of sincere contrition, and placed himself in the hands of God for judgment, the outcome would have been different. But he did not, and he went out into the wilderness unrepentant and resentful.

Many a critic of the Bible has scoffed at this story on the ground that since Cain and Abel were the only sons of Adam at the time there could not have been anyone else to meet Cain and slay him, so that the narrative is inherently inconsistent. None of these critics appears to have done more than scan, hastily, the Authorised Version before making his pronouncement. A little greater care in examining the position yields a much more informative presentation.

The birth of Seth was the next event re-

corded as worthy of note following the death of Abel. It has already been suggested that on this basis the tragedy may have occurred a century after the Fall so that Cain may well have been ninety years of age—comparatively young against the time-scale of life-spans stated in Genesis. Since the story must be considered against its own claimed background it is logical to accept these long life-spans as part of the picture presented. Cain and Abel, then, might well have already become the fathers of several sons and daughters so that the family springing from Adam and Eve already numbered grandchildren. There is however, no mandate in Genesis for thinking that other human beings, not derived from Adam, existed in other parts of the earth. The whole Bible stands or falls on the position that all humanity came from Adam. It becomes necessary then to examine the hypothetical “every one” that, meeting Cain, might conceivably slay him. Cain’s fear in vs. 14 is usually understood in English as that any individual man of all possible men might be the slayer. Verse 15 supports this by saying that the Lord set a mark upon Cain lest “any” finding him should slay him. But the Hebrew in both cases is the same, “chol”, which in the grammatical case here used means, “everyone” in the sense of a whole or a totality. Cain’s fear, and the Lord’s action, both presupposed the whole of the race of mankind then existing acting together as a unit, as a single body, in this matter of slaying. The narrative therefore implies, not that he might meet death at the hands of some stranger in a chance encounter, but that his own family, in the face of this crime that he had committed against them all, might consider it imperative to capture or seize or fall upon him—this is the meaning of *matsa*, rendered “find” in this context—and put him to death. It is impossible to conjecture what was the reaction of Adam and his family to this terrible calamity which had befallen them, a circumstance for which no precedent existed, and it is not likely that any kind of Divine law had been given them to deal with such a contingency, but it is conceivable that they might reason that Cain, who had shown himself capable of destroying one life, might well do the same thing again, and must himself be destroyed to avoid the possibility. Hence God stepped in with His prohibition. The “mark”, Hebrew *oth*, meaning a sign, set upon Cain, need not have been a physical disfigurement as is often popularly thought, but an indica-

tion of some kind to his fellows that he must not be interfered with, but left to go his way into exile.

So Cain departed, taking his wife, “and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden”. This is one of the geographical indications which date the first writing down of the story, for the Hebrew “Nod” is the Sumerian land of Nadu, on the eastern side of the Persian Gulf (modern Persia), as it was known twenty-five centuries before Christ. (Later on the land became known as Manda and this name survives to this day as that of the main river of the district). The Sumerians believed that the primeval Eden was an area now covered by the waters of the Gulf so that the whole story is geographically consistent. Cain went east, out of the valley into the mountains where his descendants were afterwards the first men to work in metals—metals that are still mined in those same mountains.

There he disappears. His descendants to the eighth generation are recorded, and then, silence. The man who was the firstborn of the first family, peculiarly one who was God’s own and might have become the first link in the line leading to the promised Seed through whom all families of the earth shall yet be blessed, the firstfruit of the procreative power God had implanted in those to whom He had entrusted the populating and the dominion and the enjoyment of the earth, so far failed to appreciate the goodness of God that when he came to make his acknowledgement he only brought God his second-best. Because of God’s inevitable rejection of second-best he allowed resentment, jealousy, hatred, to take possession of his soul and drive him into the commission of sin—sin which was never repented of and the consequence of which, because it was never repented of, was alienation from God and loss of the honoured future he could have had. The lesson of Cain’s tragedy is that the placing of God first in the life, the giving of one’s self unreservedly to Him for His purposes, and the best of our abilities and talents and achievements to His service, is a sure defence against the “wiles of the devil”. Satan cannot gain entry where God already reigns. Sin is ever crouching at the door, ready to spring—but in the power of God we gain the mastery. And it is all really so very simple. Micah knew the secret. “*He hath shown thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.*”

ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

Chapter 7. Deputation from Bethel

Two years after the visions the word of the Lord came again to Zechariah, this time in the form of a message to his own generation. The Temple was approaching completion, only two more years and the edifice that had been commenced eighteen years earlier at the return from Babylon was finished and dedicated, and the worship of the God of Israel resumed in His own sanctuary. It was the imminent prospect of this long-looked for consummation which inspired the sending of the deputation from Bethel to Jerusalem and so gave occasion for the happenings that are recorded in chapters 7 and 8.

"Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-melech and their men to entreat the favour of the Lord . . ." This is the R.S.V. rendering of ch. 7, 2 and it is the true one. The A.V. has mistaken the word and rendered Bethel "the house of God", its meaning in Hebrew, without realising that it was the town of Bethel in Samaria that was intended. The import of vs. 2 and 3 is that the Jews living in and around Bethel, for so long the centre of idolatrous worship in Israel before the Captivities and now in the Restoration the most important town in the north, had sent a deputation to Jerusalem with an important question. The leaders of the deputation were these two, Sharezer and Regem-melech, who despite their Babylonian names were certainly Jews. The question was whether the priests and prophets at Jerusalem considered it necessary still to observe the day of mourning associated with the burning and destruction of Solomon's Temple by Nebuchadnezzar on the tenth day of the fifth month some seventy years earlier, now that the new Temple was almost complete. One would have expected the answer to be almost self-evident; why weep for the destruction of God's sanctuary now that it was rebuilt? It almost seems as if the questioners were more concerned with ritual observance than realities; they had always observed this day as one of mourning and lamentation, "these so many years" they said, and if the ritual so demanded, were prepared to go on doing it even though the situation which called it into being no longer existed. At any rate, the Lord's reply transmitted through the prophet shewed that He was under no illusion. "When ye fasted and mourned . . .

those seventy years, did ye fast to me?" He demanded. "Should ye not have heard the words which the Lord cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity . . ." (ch. 7, 4-7). In a few short, sharp words the Lord told them that their mourning was only ceremonial, that they were not really weeping for the desolated Sanctuary and the despoil done to God's glory. They had not listened to the warnings of the prophets in the days of their prosperity, neither were they sincere in their lamentations over the years of adversity, for there was no real remorse or repentance in their hearts. So the first answer from the Lord was a plain and uncompromising intimation that they were not honest in their profession and therefore He was not interested whether they mourned in the fifth month or not.

This was, however, only a first answer. The Lord does not leave His children, even grievously erring children, without guidance and encouragement, and He had a great deal yet to say to these messengers from Bethel. So He expanded His words. As though it might be claimed that the words of the prophets had been forgotten and lost in the troublous times that had for several generations afflicted Israel the Lord gave them a brief resume. "Execute true judgment, show mercy and compassion, oppress not the widow, the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor: and let none of you imagine evil against his brother" (ch. 7, 9-10). This was the spirit of the Law, the principles by which, if Israel lived in them, everlasting peace and prosperity would be their portion. But they did not so live, so that at the last there had to be penned the sad, regretful words of 2 Chron. 36, 15-16 "The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy". So the penalty of the broken Covenant came upon Israel and they were carried into captivity by their enemies. Therefore the words of the old Chronicler were repeated to the messengers from Bethel by Zechariah. "They refused to hearken" he said "they stopped

their ears that they should not hear. They made their hearts as an adamant stone" (diamond) "lest they should hear the law and the words which the Lord of Hosts hath sent by the former prophets . . . therefore it is come to pass . . . I scattered them among all the nations whom they knew not . . . for they laid the pleasant land desolate" (ch. 7. 11-14).

Then the Lord turned, and spoke to those messengers in a very different tone. Gone are the words of reproof for the shortcomings of their fathers and the broken covenant, gone the stern admonition as to their own insincerity and formalism, their own failure to mourn the destruction of the Temple in the spirit of remorse and repentance for the sins which led to that destruction. Chapter 8 strikes a different key, one of hope and confidence for the future, one in which blessing and not judgment is the predominant note. The message was primarily for the people of Zechariah's own day, outlining some of the glories which Israel was shortly to enjoy in her renewed national status, but going on into the far distant future when, in the Kingdom of God, Israel should attain her destiny. It is as though God had cast behind His back all thought of the failures and shortcomings and sins of His people, all the reproofs and the penalties and the rejections, and begun to tell them of His plans for their future in the time of their conversion and reformation.

"I am returned unto Zion" He said "and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth" (ch. 8. 3). This theme has of course recurred from time to time from the very beginning of Zechariah's prophecy and it refers very definitely to the restoration of Israel in her own land in his day and the flowering of national sovereignty which followed. *"Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the Lord of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built" (ch. 8. 9).* Those prophets were Haggai and Zechariah, the two spiritual leaders of the nation at this critical point in their history. But the Lord is nothing if not up to date. *"Before these days" He says "there was no hire for man or beast; no peace to him that went out or came in, for I set every one against his neighbour" (ch. 8. 10).* This is a little picture of the dark days before the Restoration, when the people went into captivity and the land lay desolate, and war and tumult was the order of the day.

Now those days were past; they had been ordered of the Lord but now He had turned His face toward His people again. *"But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the Lord. For the seed shall be prosperous, the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things . . . I will save you, and ye shall be a blessing . . . so again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear ye not" (ch. 8. 11-15).* A crowning description of the peace and prosperity that was in store for Israel appears in vss. 4-5 *"There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof".*

All this was fulfilled in the resurgence of the Jewish State during the centuries intervening between Zechariah and Christ. These words were uttered in the fourth year of Darius of Persia, 518 B.C. The Temple was completed and dedicated two years later. A considerable Jewish population had returned from Babylon during the preceding twenty years and much of Judea and Samaria was being re-colonised by Jews. During the times of Zechariah and Zerubbabel, and later on of Ezra and Nehemiah, and finally the prophet Malachi, a period of nearly a century, the people were relatively prosperous and enjoyed peace and safety. There were times of backsliding from their allegiance to God but they always returned. Another century of relative peace under Persian rule passed, and then came Alexander the Greek and the end of the Persian empire. But Alexander favoured the Jews and for more than yet another century Judea remained untroubled. Only when the development of the Syrian and Egyptian powers brought upon Judea the terrible oppression of Antiochus Epiphanes was the bright picture shadowed, and although after that there was a short lived period of less than a century during which Judea became completely independent, there began a sad series of wars and tumults which culminated in the annexation of Judea by Rome and the end of all national aspirations and all their glory. For some four hundred years they had enjoyed, in measure, the fulfilment of the promises of chapter 8 but it all came to an end because they did not continue to fulfil the conditions upon which that

blessedness depended. The terms were clearly laid down. *"These are the things that ye shall do: speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord"* (ch. 8. 16-17). They did observe these injunctions at first, in the days of Zechariah, when the Temple was new, and the promises began to be fulfilled accordingly; but they slowly abandoned those high standards as time went on, and the promises progressively failed in consequence. The traditional days of national mourning, the fast of the fourth month, remembering the day that Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem; of the fifth, when the Temple was burnt; of the seventh, when Gedaliah, the governor left behind by Nebuchadnezzar, was slain; and of the tenth, when the siege of the city began, all of these, said the Lord in ch. 8, vs. 19 were now to be *"joy and gladness and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace"*. So it was, for a time, but they did not continue in the love of truth and peace, so that once again the land and the city knew siege and battle and murder, and the joy and gladness vanished, and the people of the Lord failed to receive the promises, because they would not believe. Once more the fulfilment of the Divine promise had to be postponed because of continued unfitness on the part of those who were destined to be the Divine agents in the final outworking of that promise. Babylon had not been sufficient after all; Antiochus, the Herods, the Romans, all the oppressors of future days must yet come upon the scene to chasten this people that would not learn, and the full import of the promise be deferred.

The Lord knew that. The last four verses of this chapter enshrine His assurance that the time will surely come when this stiff-necked and hard hearted people will have profited aright by their experiences and been forged in the crucible of trouble into a vessel fitted for His use. *"It shall yet come to pass"* He says *"that there shall come people . . . saying, Let us go speedily to seek the favour of the Lord of Hosts . . . yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem. In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men out of all languages of the nations shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you for we have heard that God*

is with you" (ch. 8. 20-24). The numeral ten is used in the Bible for an indefinite number and too much emphasis should not be read into its use here. Thus we have the ten virgins and the ten talents in the parables of Jesus; ten women shall bake in the oven as a symbol of scarcity (Lev. 26. 26); Israel proved the Lord "ten times" (Num. 14. 22) and Elkanah considered that he meant more to Hannah as a husband than ten sons could mean (1 Sam. 1. 8). So here we have an indication that people of all nations will come to the Jew for their blessing, *"in that day"*, and this is precisely what Isaiah meant when he said that the mountain of the Lord's house would be established in the top of the mountains and *"all nations shall flow unto it"* (Isa. 2. 1). These few verses, from 19 to 23, lay down the order in which men will turn to the Lord *"at his appearing and his kingdom"*. First comes Israel in the land, next Israel from the Dispersion, finally the Gentiles, the nations at large. Perhaps the Douay version gives the most intelligible rendering here. After saying that the various days of mourning, lamenting the destruction of the Jewish polity by Babylon, shall become *"joy and gladness and great solemnities"* the Lord continues *"only love ye truth and peace, until people come and dwell in many cities, and the inhabitants go one to another saying, Let us go and entreat the face of the Lord, and let us seek the Lord of hosts"* (ch. 8. 19, 23). Here surely is depicted the growth of the Holy Nation in the territory of Israel, building the old wastes, raising up the former desolations, repairing the waste cities, the *"desolations of many generations"* (Isa. 60. 4) coming to realise as they do these things that the hand of the Lord is with them, and in the wonder of that discovery progressively casting off their former unbelief and coming to God in faith and trust. The *"many peoples and strong nations"* will come next and add their quota to the restoration of the ancient land and nation, until at last the whole world of men begins to take notice of this thing that is happening and to a constantly increasing degree begin to ally themselves with Israel and pay allegiance to Israel's God. *"It shall be said in that day"* says Isaiah again *"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).

But that wonderful climax will be after the scourge of "Jacob's Trouble" has come

upon the Holy Nation and purified it, leaving it fine gold. The story of Ezekiel 38 and 39, when the hosts of "Gog and the land of Magog" descend upon the Holy Land and are met by the powers of Heaven, has first to be enacted. That is not mentioned here in Zech. 8. A vivid and detailed picture of that momentous happening came later to the prophet in his old age and is recorded in Zech. chapter 14. The Lord's message here in chapter 8 has to do entirely with the final outcome. At the end of time, when all the tumult and the shouting is over, when all the captains and the kings have departed,

the Lord will find humble and contrite hearts waiting for the inspiring and life-giving touch of His Holy Spirit. In the power and wonder of that great moment the new world will be born, and the old one irrevocably pass away. "And the nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" cried Isaiah, the man who saw more of that blessed day than any other prophet. "Saviours shall come up on Mount Zion" said his successor Obadiah "and the kingdom shall be the Lord's". Not one of us can add anything to that.

(To be continued)

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16. 19).

Strange words, seemingly giving to Peter greater power than has ever at any time been given to any other man! What was it that Jesus saw in this simple fisherman which led Him to repose such confidence in Him? What was the nature of that commission whose terms extend beyond this earth and its span of time into the heavens and into eternity?

There is evidently some connection between these words and those given by the resurrected Jesus to John on the island of Patmos. *"These things saith he that hath the key of David; he that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth."* (Rev. 3. 7). There is an air of finality about these words which marks them as having reference to some very decisive aspect of the Divine Plan, and that the kingly power of Jesus is involved is very evident. Fully to understand the allusion, however, it is necessary to go back to the Old Testament, and it is in the eloquent words of Isaiah that we find the source of this theme.

In Isaiah's twenty-second chapter the prophet speaks of one Shebna, who is treasurer over the royal house and therefore responsible to the king for the welfare of the nation. He is an unfaithful steward, for he has sought his own advantage, and that of his personal friends, to the detriment of the people and the national welfare. On this account the prophet is commissioned to pronounce Divine judgment upon him. His office is to be taken away and given to Eliakim the son of

Hilkiah, who will be a true father to Jerusalem and Judah, and discharge the duties of the office faithfully. On the shoulder of this man is to be laid the key of the house of David, so that he shall open, and none shut; and he shut, and none open. Here is the prophecy which gave inspiration for our Lord's words to Peter and those concerning himself.

Shebna and Eliakim are known only as Court officials in the time of King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18. 18-37). They were probably men of some note during Isaiah's life but their only place in Divine revelation was that of actors in a drama which was to be a foreview of a greater thing. One chapter in Isaiah's writings tells us all we need to know about them. Six verses of that chapter are sufficient for our immediate purpose *"And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: and I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David I will lay upon his shoulder: so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place: and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall the nail that is fastened in the sure place be removed, and be cut down, and fall; and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off; for the Lord hath spoken it."* (Isa. 22.

20-25).

The "key of the house of David" is obviously the Divine authority vested in the royal line of David. The Davidic dynasty was the only one recognised by God as enjoying the right to rule on the "throne of the Lord" in Jerusalem over Israel. David was promised that he would "never want a man to rule over Israel"; i.e., the Davidic line would never become extinct and God would never recognise a king of any other line. True to this, Jesus Christ, Who is to be King of all the earth during the Millennial Age, was of the line of David. And Israel was the chosen people of God, made so they might be His missionaries to all nations when the time comes. Hence the man upon whose shoulders was placed the "key of David" occupied a most honourable and responsible position. He was in a very real sense the Executor of the Divine Plans, and in the days of natural Israel such a man, more than any other, could haste or hinder the accomplishment of God's purposes.

Shebna was an enemy of God, and God removed him. He was "*tossed like a ball into a large country*" (Isa. 22. 18), that is, he was stripped of all his glory and honour, his ill-gotten gains and robes of office, and flung out into the wilderness to perish. He, previously to Eliakim, had held the key of David. He, previously to Eliakim, had been a "nail in a sure place" upon which everything in the house depended. But now the Divine decree had gone forth and that nail which had been fastened in a sure place had fallen, and the burden that had been upon it had been cut off, "*for the Lord hath spoken it*" (vs. 25). The rule of Shebna had given place to the rule of Eliakim, and all the glory of the house of David was to find its focus and its centre in the person of this, the Lord's anointed.

There is only one time in history to which this language respecting the glory of the house of David can be applied in symbol, and that is at the setting up of Christ's Kingdom, when the Lord Jesus Christ, as the personal representative of the Father, will rule the world in justice and equity (Isa. 11. 4) and all things will depend upon Him, things small and great, "*vessels of cups to vessels of flagons*" (vs. 24). Jesus Himself knew that He was the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy and therefore He could say with truth that He had the key of David. Upon Him is to depend "*all the offspring and issue*" (vs. 24) for all who enter into life during the Mil-

lennial Age will receive it from Him. "*He shall see his seed*" (Isa. 53. 10). "*I am come that they might have life*" (John 10. 10). "*His name shall be called . . . the Everlasting Father*" (Isa. 9. 6). And that glorious "*throne to his father's house*" spoken of in vs. 23 finds its reality in the Great White Throne of the Millennial Age (Rev. 20. 11), before which all the nations of the world, dead and living, will be arrayed to receive judgment, and, if they will, blessing and everlasting life.

The robe and the girdle of vs. 21 are terms associated with the priesthood. There is more than a hint here that the One whom Eliakim prefigured is both a priest and a King, a priest upon his throne (Gen. 14. 18). The 11th chapter of Isaiah describes the kingly work of Christ during the Millennium. "*Of the increase of his kingdom and government there shall be no end*" and the noble words of Psalms 110 come to mind, "*The Lord said unto my lord, sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool*". The rule of Christ during that Age is one that will bring blessings of health and everlasting life to those who are truly converted to Him, but at the same time will firmly repress evil and all attempts to commit evil. Hence it will be true that earth's new King will "open, and none shall shut" and "shut, and none shall open". Those who willingly come into harmony with the laws of the Kingdom will enter into life, and none will be able to take away from them that life; those who persist still in attempts to do evil, and will not come to Him that they might have life (John 5. 40) will eventually reap the inevitable result of wilful sin, and no one will be able to deliver them from that death.

Now these are the thoughts that Jesus must have had in mind when He spoke to Peter. Just as He Himself had received the "key of David" and had thus become the representative of the Heavenly Father in the execution of His Plan; just as to Him had been entrusted the oversight and control of all mankind and of all the earth for the purpose of bringing both them and it into full conformity with the Divine intentions, so Jesus was now appointing Peter as His representative to take the lead in initiating the work which was to commence at Pentecost and continue for two thousand years, until the Lord should come again. That the disciples understood it this way is shown by the fact that Peter remained the acknowledged head of the little band through all

those early years when the Church was gaining its foothold in the earth. It was Peter who at Pentecost preached the first Gospel sermon. It was Peter who received the first Gentile convert—Cornelius—into the Church. It was Peter with whom Paul, the next great leader given to the Church, conferred preparatory to taking up his own place in the ministry. The whole of the work and fellowship of the Jewish Church of the generation that knew Jesus in the flesh bears the impress of Peter's mind, just as that of the Gentile Church of a little later is characterised by that of Paul. Peter was given the keys of the Kingdom, that Kingdom which his Master had preached, and Peter opened the door through which others, Paul included, were to follow when their time of service had come.

So we can picture this grand disciple laying down the standards of the Kingdom just as he had received them from His Master. His mind was clear now; there would be no further hesitation or denying. As the years went by he became more and more confident, so that he could say at last *"we have not followed cunningly devised fables, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty"* (2 Peter 1. 16).

"To him that overcometh will I give . . . a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it."—Rev. 2. 17.

In ancient times the Greeks and the Romans had a custom of noting and perpetuating friendship by means of a white stone. This stone was divided into halves, and each person inscribed his name on the flat surface, after which the parts of the stone were exchanged. The production of either half was sufficient to ensure friendly aid, even from the descendants of those who first divided the stone. A similar custom was sometimes observed by a king, who would break a white stone into two parts, one of which he would retain and the other part give to a special ambassador. That part could be sent to the king at any time and would ensure aid. Thus the divided stone became a mark of identification.

Rev. 2. 17 seems to refer to this ancient custom. The white stone signifies a token of the Lord's love, and the new name written in the stone suggests the Bridegroom's name. The statement indicates a special acquaintance with the great King of kings, secret between Himself and the individual. The

The truths that Peter taught were the truths of heaven; the things that he promised were things that must surely come to pass, and therefore it was that whatever he bound on earth was bound in heaven; whatever he loosed on earth was loosed in heaven, for no man could gainsay or set aside what he said or taught. Heaven's confirmation was upon his work, and in the power of that authority he was able to go forth and do mightily in the service of his Lord.

Paul was the theologian, but Peter was the man of faith. In the long run it is faith rather than theology that will gain us the Kingdom, and hence it is that Jesus' words are still true. The stirring exhortations to Christian living and steadfast faith which form so large a part of Peter's epistles still define the way by which we must walk to be overcomers. *"By these,"* says Peter, *"ye may become partakers of the Divine nature . . ."* There is no other way; and what Peter has bound for us, and loosed for us, in the teachings he has bequeathed to us, are recorded as bound, and loosed, in the archives of Heaven, and stand for all time as the gate through which we may gain access to the Heavenly City.

overcomers are not to be recognised merely as a class—the Bride class—but each will have the personal favour of the Lord. Of this no one will know save himself and the King. There is an individual and personal relationship between the Lord and the overcomers, who may be said to receive the mark of identification—the anti-typical white stone—now, in this life.

This mark is the sealing of the Holy Spirit by which the Lord identifies the overcomers. While this is said to be a part of the final reward of the Church, yet from the very beginning of our experience we have this personal acquaintance with the Lord. The full seal of the Holy Spirit will be given in the Resurrection, when we receive the new body. Then we shall have the complete knowledge of the name by which we shall be known to the Lord and He to us forever.

Do not keep the alabaster boxes of your love and tenderness sealed up until your friends are dead. Fill their lives with sweetness. Speak approving, cheering words while their ears can hear them, and while their hearts can be thrilled by them.

H. W. Beecher

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 21 I John 5. 9-12

"If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." (vs. 9-11).

We have come to what is virtually the end of John's First Epistle. The three-fold witness of chapter 5, verses 6-8, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, constitute the climax to all his arguments and all his exhortations. There is really nothing more to say after he has invoked those three witnesses. The remainder of this final chapter, from verse 9 onwards, is in the nature of an orderly descent from the mountain-top which he had reached in the earlier part of chapter 5. All the argument, all the exhortation, all the warnings, of the earlier chapters culminate in the Witnesses. The Word Who is life, the life that is light, the light that banishes darkness, of chapter 1, all are illuminated once and for all by the Witnesses. The darkness that is sin, the sin that is death, of chapter 2, are condemned once and for all by the Witnesses. The love for God and love for fellow that leads eventually into the love of God, of chapter 3, are inspired by the Witnesses. The whole of John's Epistle leads up to this theme, that of the three Witnesses to the one central and all-embracing fact of Jesus' Messiahship. When John has led us to that point he has achieved the aim and object of his Epistle. His work is done and he has but to round off the discourse with words that both sum up in brief what he has already said and lead us gently back into the commonplaces of daily life. Our period of sojourn with him on these lofty themes is ended and we are about to step outside the golden sanctuary. In so doing he reminds us that if we are prepared to receive the reliable testimony of men as to the Messiahship of Jesus—as many did in John's own day from those who had known the Lord in the flesh—we must acknowledge that the testimony of God is infinitely more reliable and convincing and we should be correspondingly the more ready to receive and accept it. The

Revised Version has it *"The witness of God is this, that he hath borne witness of his Son"*. The very fact that God has borne witness, as He did do at the Annunciation, at Jordan, at Calvary, and above all at Pentecost, should be sufficient for each one of us. *"God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son."* (Heb. 1. 1). The witness of God concerning Christ is given to us through Christ! Is that what Jesus meant when He said (John 8. 17-18) *"It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me"*. That mystic oneness which subsists between the Father and the Son and which, define or explain it how we will, is ever too deep and profound for us to understand utterly, is manifested in this witness as in so many other aspects of our Lord's revelation of the Father to the sight of men.

It is quite a natural consequence of this understanding that leads John to tell us next that the one who truly believes in the Son of God has the witness within himself. If believing were merely an intellectual exercise of the mind that statement would not necessarily be true. It is because believing on Christ—or "into" Christ, as some would have it—is an affair of the heart as well as of the mind that immediate results follow the act of believing. Justification by faith is the immediate consequence; the entry of a new power into the life that at once commences a transforming work. *"If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things become new"*. (2 Cor. 5. 17). It is the realisation that such a change has taken place that constitutes the inward witness. No one can truly come into Christ and realise the grace that has filled his life without knowing also that he has this witness within himself, that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. In like manner the Roman centurion, beholding with affrighted eyes the signs and portents that accompanied the tragedy of Calvary, looked up into the heavens and cried aloud his involuntary testimony *"Truly this man was the Son of God"*. So must all who have experienced the power of the risen Christ coming into their hearts

and lives make the same confession, a declaration to their own selves and to others that by the power of Jesus of Nazareth they now stand whole and entire in the grace of God.

And he that believeth not? John has a word to say about him also; but it is the same word that he has elaborated so much previously in the Epistle. He hath made God a liar! The evidence is so clear and plain, the power of the Spirit so manifest, that for one who has received it to throw it back is tantamount to giving the lie to God. It comes to this, says John, that God has given to us eternal life, and the evidence of that gift is manifest and overwhelming, and here is a man who sees this wonderful thing and refuses to admit that it is so. And because he will not believe, it is impossible that he share in the precious gift; and because he does not share in the gift he has no witness within his own self as to its truth. So again it all comes back to the old question of belief or unbelief. There was the evidence, brought back on the shoulders of twelve strong men; the fruits of the land, fruits such as Israel had never seen before, fruits that bore out in every detail and to the full what God had told them concerning the land toward which they journeyed. But still they disbelieved; could not bring themselves to think they could ever win the land for themselves, even although God had told them they had but to march forward and all opposition would melt away. And so they never did enter in, "because of unbelief". So it must ever be with all who approach the sacred things. They are there to be grasped, and once grasped the evidence of their reality is inherent; but without that primary belief which is faith they cannot even be grasped.

So verse 12 becomes both a summing up of what has gone before and an enunciation of a great law in the fabric of God's dealings with those who would come to Him, one might say, the great law, for it enshrines the most important truth of all. "*He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the*

Son hath not life."

That text has been used in the past to separate the sheep from the goats and point the respective pathways to Heaven and Hell. It does not have anything to do with that subject at all. It has nothing to do with the final judgment on the world of men—except as an expression of a principle which will always be valid. John is here speaking only of the Church of this Age, the "footstep followers" of Jesus, who have set their hands to the plough, including those who, in the Lord's expression, "look back" and hence are "*not fit for the Kingdom of God*". (Luke 9. 62). It is of these, probationary members of the Millennial Age "Royal Priesthood", he says, only those who "have the Son" are possessors of the eternal life that ensures their entrance into the everlasting Kingdom. Some there are who, like those in the parable, will claim to have eaten and drunk in His presence and to have listened to His voice in their midst and yet to whom He declares "*I never knew you; depart from me*". How evident it is that this whole matter is one of the heart's utter and unreserved dedication to God, without condition and without stipulation, like Isaiah "*Here am I—send me*"; or the Psalmist "*Lo I come, to do Thy Will, O God*".

So the high song of exultation is partnered with a solemn note of warning. The lofty mountain peak reaching up so near to God, serves also to reveal the dark and deep chasm beneath. We can attain to the highest salvation in this wonderful power that is given to us—we can find ourselves thrust down to the sides of the pit. John's very next words reveal his confidence that those to whom he writes will not thus make shipwreck of their faith; he does not fear that his brethren and friends themselves stand in so perilous a position, but he recounts these truths that they may be reminded of the things from which they have so clearly escaped, and may be inspired to hold fast to their faith that they fall not after other men's examples of unbelief.

To be continued

God created man with a great "need" so that He might play the part of a great giver. Man has but to open his hand to take of that bountiful fulness which God opens His hand to give.

* * *

Friendship is one mind in two bodies.

God's exhaustless reservoir is there, free and open to all. The thirsty man may sit on its brink and long for water, but his thirst will not be quenched unless he himself stoops and drinks. Its infinite resources may be used for a large variety of purposes, but man must dig the channel, build the viaduct, or lay the pipe to conduct its flow in which he wants it to go.

THE MISSION OF JONAH

Chapter 3. A Seafaring Story

The prophet who
ran away

The story of the most astonishing happening related in the Bible is recorded in three short verses comprising no more than fifty-five words:

"Now the Lord had prepared (Heb., appointed) a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly . . . And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land."

No writer of fiction could have contented himself with so brief a reference to so amazing an occurrence. One of the indications that this story is in fact a strictly historical account is the restraint with which the marvellous is subordinated to the main purpose of the book. To Jonah the incident of the great fish was a purely personal matter. He learned a vital lesson from the experience and that lesson he has put on record in words of distinct beauty (2, 2-9), but he relates only so much of the actual experience as is necessary to his purpose.

Of course, enquirers and sceptics in these days are not content with that. That a man should be swallowed by a giant fish and come out alive seems so incredible and apparently impossible a thing that to profess belief in the story is usually to elicit a pitying smile. It is in fact this part of the account that has done so much to discredit the book. Rather than believe that such a thing did actually occur, men prefer to dismiss the entire narrative as a pure invention having no basis in fact.

Reasons for accepting the Book of Jonah as true history have already been given. Those reasons should be sufficient ground for accepting the fact that this amazing thing really did happen to Jonah and Christians need not feel that any additional evidence is needed so far as their own faith is concerned. It is good, however, to investigate such further arguments and evidences as can be brought forward, for the assistance of others who may still be honestly incredulous of the entire proceeding.

Such arguments and evidences do exist and they make interesting reading. It would almost seem as if God, knowing what a strain this story would put upon the intellectual credulity of many in our day, has seen to it

that independent testimony to the possibility and the probability of this having actually happened has been placed upon record.

On the score of possibility, modern history does afford an authenticated instance of a man being swallowed by a whale and being rescued alive. (Nothing in the book of Jonah requires that the fish concerned must be a whale, the expression being in the Hebrew "a great fish". The Hebrews had no word for whale, but the translators of the Septuagint adopted the Greek *ketos*, "whale", and our Lord used the same word when He referred to the story. Whales were abundant in the Mediterranean in ancient times, and up to the advent of the steamship. They are rare to-day but are occasionally seen. The London *News Chronicle* of 17 May 1957 reported the stranding on a beach in Cyprus of one which had to be disposed of by a detachment of the British Army, wearing gas masks). On the score of probability, there are a number of indications in classical literature which go to show that the town of Joppa in Canaan was at one time the scene of some strange and memorable happening connected with a whale. It is appropriate to examine these evidences.

On August 25, 1891, the French *Journal des Debats* (a leading French journal founded in 1789) published the results of an investigation by its Scientific Editor, M. de Parville, into the story of a strange happening reported to have occurred a few months previously. M. de Parville, with a fellow scientist, had verified the facts and published the story, with the comment that he now found it quite possible to believe in the Biblical story of Jonah. The reputation of the *Journal des Debats* is such that an account of this nature would not be published in its columns unless the evidence was conclusive, and the fact that it was afterwards published in the *Literary Digest* offers a further guarantee.

It appears that in February, 1891, the *Star of the East*, a whaling ship hailing from Liverpool, was engaged in hunting whales in the South Atlantic near the Falkland Islands. In the ordinary course of the work a whale was sighted and two boats sent in pursuit. The first boat to approach the animal harpooned it, whereupon the whale swam away at high speed, dragging the boat

for about five miles, then turning and coming back towards the other boat, the harpooner in which also succeeded in sending a harpoon home. Both boats were towed about three miles by the whale, after which it "sounded" or went below the surface. As was customary in such cases, the men in the boats began to wind in the ropes attached to the harpoons with the object of bringing the whale to the surface, and soon it unexpectedly broke through the water and began to beat about in its death agony. In the confusion one boat was struck by the whale's nose and upset, the occupants being thrown into the water. All save two were rescued by the other boat.

The survivors rowed back to the ship, and in a few hours had made the dead whale fast to the ship's side and were busy cutting it to pieces. They worked all that day—the incident having taken place in the morning—and part of the night. Next morning they resumed, and eventually came to the stomach, which was to be cut loose and hoisted to the deck. Whilst engaged in this task they were startled to find that something inside the stomach was giving spasmodic signs of life. Upon cutting it open, one of the missing sailors, James Bartley, aged thirty-five, was found inside doubled up and unconscious. He was soon revived, but for two weeks his mind was untinged. By the end of the third week he had recovered sufficiently to go about his duties again.

The sailor remembered being lifted into the air and dropping into the water. After that he recalled a fearful rushing sound, which he thought might have been the beating of the water by the whale's tail, and then he was enveloped in a terrible darkness and found himself slipping along a smooth passage that seemed to yield and carry him forward. He felt about him, and his hands came in contact with soft walls that seemed to shrink from his touch. He finally realised that he had been swallowed by the whale, and although he tried to face the situation with fortitude, he evidently fainted, for his next recollection was awaking in the captain's cabin.

Upon the whaler's return to England, Bartley was taken to a London hospital. His skin had been bleached and wrinkled to the appearance of old parchment by the gastric juices of the whale's stomach, and never regained its natural appearance. He enjoyed normal health, nevertheless, after his recovery. The happening was said among the

whaling captains to be unique in that, whilst it frequently happened that men were swallowed by pain-maddened whales, there had never been known any other instance where a man came out alive.

Shortly after its publication in the *Journal des Debats*, the story appeared in various American newspapers at the instance of a Pittsburg business man, James I. Buchanan, who had received it from his cousin, a Scottish captain named George Jarvie. The latter knew nothing of the earlier newspaper account, but had received the story in his contacts with South Atlantic seafarers, among whom, he declared, it was generally vouched for and believed.

A few more recent factual incidents may be of interest as relevant to the subject. In December 1964 a Russian whaling ship killed a sperm whale and took from its stomach a still living giant squid weighing 450 lb. (London "*Daily Mail*" 31 Dec. 1964). This creature, weighing nearly four times as much as a man, must have been some eight feet long and five round. How long it had been in the whale's stomach is not known, but that it should be recovered alive is supporting testimony to the stories both of James Bartley and of Jonah. Hans Hass, the famous under-sea explorer, tells in one of his books ("*We come from the Sea*" London 1958) of a fifty-foot whale captured off the Azores in 1953, inside the stomach of which was found two half-digested sharks, exceeding ten and eight feet in length respectively. A giant tunny fish forty-five feet long caught near the Florida coast in 1917 had within its stomach a 400 lb octopus and an unknown fish weighing nearly three-quarters of a ton; these were dead. And in November 1946 fishermen killed a twelve-foot tiger shark thirty miles out to sea from Bombay and found in its stomach the complete skeleton of a man and some clothing. In a somewhat different sphere it is not so many years ago that the world's Press carried the story of a schoolmaster in India who punished a small native boy for some misdemeanour by locking him in the school woodshed and forgetting to release him. Upon going to the woodshed twelve hours later he found no boy but a large serpent giving visible evidence of having swallowed a heavy meal whole. The reptile was killed and the boy extracted. He was still living, although he died a few days later in hospital. With these authentic reports on hand the story of Jonah does not look so fantastic after all.

The reference to the "belly of the fish" need only be taken as referring, in a general way, to the monster's interior, although if Jonah was actually swallowed he would obviously have ended up, as did the nineteenth century sailor, in the whale's stomach. From a biological point of view, there are some grounds for thinking that Jonah, upon being swept up by the fish, was in fact carried, not in its stomach, but in its capacious mouth. This hypothesis was put forward in a paper read before the Victoria Institute of London in 1924. The species of whales known to have existed in the Mediterranean in former times attains a length of anything up to one hundred feet. The mouth is between ten and twenty feet in length, eight to twelve feet wide and eight to fifteen feet high, the front portion being closed in with a screen of long flexible bones which forms a network or kind of giant strainer. This screen of bones is so devised that it opens inwards to admit solid objects, but allows only water to pass out. The animal obtains its food by swimming along the surface with its mouth open, sweeping up small fish, seaweed and any other floating matter, all of which is retained in the mouth whilst the sea-water filters out again.

It was through this whalebone screen that Jonah was swept after he had been thrown into the sea. If the whale was a full-grown specimen, eighty or one hundred feet long, it could have swallowed him without difficulty. If a small one, it could not have swallowed him and he must perforce remain lying on its great tongue, unable to go either forward or backward. Certain considerations which will be presented in the succeeding chapter give some grounds for thinking that this particular whale could in fact have been a small one some forty feet long. Jonah would then be lying in a cavity about the size of an ordinary living-room, with plenty of fresh air—and sea water—so long as the whale was cruising on the surface. The average temperature of the water in the Mediterranean is 70° F., so that he was not likely to be suffering from cold. At frequent intervals, however, the whale would "sound", i.e. dive below the surface and remain below for periods usually of ten minutes or so at a time. Now, a whale is not a true fish; although a sea creature, it is a mammal, breathing by means of lungs like any animal. Consequently, when below the surface it exists by breathing the air contained in its huge mouth, and must return to the surface

before that air is exhausted. Whilst there was air in the mouth for the whale, there was air for Jonah too, so that although at such times he was in dense darkness he at least had air to breathe, and, moreover, would be warm and comparatively dry. A man requires seventy cubic feet of air per hour for breathing, and since the capacity of even a small whale's mouth is at least six hundred and fifty cubic feet, there would be no risk of Jonah suffocating. The sea-bath to which Jonah was treated when the whale swam along the surface might have become monotonous, but was at least endurable. The swimming speed is only four miles an hour, so that there is no need to imagine foaming torrents of water pouring in and around Jonah, but rather a gently swirling stream flowing in and out again. This is strikingly borne out by Jonah's words in verse 3, "*Thou didst cast me into the depth, in the heart of the seas; and the flood was round about me; all thy waves and thy billows passed over me*". The word for "flood" is *nahar*, which means a stream or river, the other words being rightly used for the waves and billows of the sea.

When the whale "sounded", i.e. dived toward the sea-bottom, Jonah, though safe and able to breathe, was in intense darkness and excessive heat. The downward or perhaps undulating up-and-down motion must have been terrifying in the extreme, and this would be equally true whether he was in the creature's mouth or in its stomach. How could he have expected, in the natural way, ever to survive this awful experience. It is here that his sterling faith comes to the top; quite evidently Jonah, for all his frowardness in refusing God's commission for him, still had faith in Divine power, and now that he was in this terrible predicament his heart turned to God in true repentance. "*The waters compassed me about, even to the soul. The depth (Heb., abyss) closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever. Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God*" (verses 5-6).

We must not be misled by the use of the past tense in that last phrase. Jonah uttered this prayer whilst he was being carried by the whale, not after his escape. It is common in Hebrew literature for happenings yet future, but regarded as absolutely certain to happen, to be stated in the past tense as

though they had already happened. Jonah realised that Divine power, preserving him hitherto in this marvellous manner, had done so for a purpose. God had not let go His hold of Jonah His servant. More than that, He had not even accepted his rejection of the commission. And He had afforded an opportunity for repentance and a retracing of steps which could not have been obtained by Jonah himself in any way whatsoever. Without the intervention of God, Jonah was irrevocably committed to going to Tarshish, but the hand of God took hold of him and brought him back.

It is evident then that Jonah's repentance took place during his sojourn inside the whale. As the great mammal plunged into the green depths, down to the very foundations of the mountains, into the ravines and valleys of the sea bottom which threatened to hold Jonah prisoner for ever, the prophet's prayer went up to God who sits on the throne of the universe, and keeps watch and ward over every one of His creatures. Surely He heard that petition, and in His mercy gave command that the suffering of His wayward child be no more prolonged.

It is likely that Jonah, like the sailor in the modern story, speedily became unconscious in his prison. Human endurance, even although buttressed by faith in God, could hardly be expected to be equal to seventy-two hours of such a fearful ordeal. Some such sequel seems to be indicated by verse 7: "*When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple*". As sensibility faded into unconsciousness, the last thought in Jonah's mind must have been that his prayer had been heard and that he would be

saved. He suffered the shades to gather about him in confidence that he would awake and find deliverance.

Here is a perfect picture of our Lord's death and resurrection. Jesus once said that this experience which befell Jonah was a figure of His own passing into and through the shades of death. (Matt. 12. 40). It was in perfect trust and confidence that our Lord bowed His head when He felt the shades of death closing round Him and said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit", then to lie in the garden grave until that momentous morning when the event occurred at which the "keepers did shake, and became as dead men."

So with Jonah! The instrument of destruction became the vehicle of salvation. Whilst master of himself, confident in the possession of ways and means whereby he could plan his own course in life and avoid the Divine call, Jonah had brought upon himself the loss of all things and, apart from Divine interference, certain death into the bargain. His repentance changed all that, and what had been Jonah's grave became instead his gateway into a new world, a world in which unswerving obedience to the word of his God would be his joy and his delight.

"I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord."

And so it came to pass, as is recorded in words of the most exquisite simplicity, words that do instantly convey to man, woman or child of any intellectual level the utter control God has over His creation, that "*the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land*".

(To be continued)

"YEA, RATHER . . ."

A discourse on
Rom. 8. 34

It is not always the biggest words of a text, nor even the centrally positioned ones in a paragraph that will carry most weight in the argument. Sometimes words of two letters, by their comparative values, such as "as" and "so", will open wide the door of argument, or close it shut, leaving no doubt in the reader's mind what the writer's meaning was. For instance, "*As in Adam all die so also in Christ shall all be made alive*" (1 Cor. 15. 22). Whatever may be the full scope of this Scripture its argument turns upon two

small words.

The two words of our text also institute a comparison, but throw the balance of importance upon the statement next following. They add emphasis to the assertion that follows them, and increase its importance greatly when compared with the one that precedes them. Paul could have made use of the facts regarding the life and death of Jesus without using these two words. He could have written: "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, and it is

Christ that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God . . ." He would thus have been stating the two great facts of Jesus' life as unassailable facts, but, stated thus they would be "in parallel" with each other, and of equal value for the purpose of an argument. But that was not his intention here. Apparently he did not desire them to be of equal value in their application to the main point of his discussion. He was not, at this point, basing his claim to freedom from condemnation on a dead Christ—however acceptable that death of Christ may be—but upon a living and exalted Christ, who had passed beyond the reach of death, and was present at God's right hand to represent Paul and all his brethren there.

Already he had shown the vital necessity of the death of Christ as one of the great essential factors in the work of Atonement and Reconciliation (chap. 3. 25; 5. 6, 12-19; 8. 32), and here (as always, elsewhere) Paul did not underrate or undervalue the worth of that Redemption Sacrifice. Always in presence of either friend or foe he gloried in the Cross of Christ, and declared it the one foundation upon which all future hope must be based. It had done for men what no other work had ever done. Jesus by His death had done what no other man, nor any number of men combined could ever do. Alexander the Great had overrun the world while still little more than a youth—a feat almost without parallel in the annals of time, up to Paul's day—yet what had the conquest accomplished for men? Even among his own people there was none to compare with Paul's gracious Lord. Moses had been God's instrument in giving to the fathers the Law. David and Solomon had given of their great wealth to build God a house, and had employed tongue and pen to sing the goodness of the Lord, and while they had given much to benefit those who loved the Holy Name, what had they given that could be compared with that great price Jesus gave for man's release? Not all the feats of arms; not all the bright gold dug from the earth, nor all the erected temples upon the earth could compare in its effects upon men with the effects of that dark tragedy on Calvary. That, to Paul's persuaded mind, was the one event that transcended every other event throughout the world, throughout all time.

Yet it was only the first chapter of a great story. It was a chapter gloriously true, but it was not the whole story. It was a truth—a pure unadulterated truth—yet not the whole

truth—there was something more! Here, in the argument he was now presenting, it was as the wicket-door leading into a larger auditorium. It was a case of passing through that to this, and it was "this" that really mattered most!

He was writing of God's Elect! He was writing to God's Elect—of those and to those whom God's Love had won over from the ranks of evil and wickedness. They had forsaken the ways of sin, and Satan, and turned with all their hearts to God, in order to serve Him, and live in accord with His great purposes toward men. But they found to their great sorrow that the fallen flesh of men (which they still shared with other men—other fallen men) was no fitting instrument through which to serve the living God. Try as they would, and even with the best intent, they could not always do the things they would have loved to do, or say the things they would have preferred to say. They found that even their best attempts came short of the perfect standard, and how often they had cause to groan and pour out their sense of unworthiness in sighs and sobs! Would God condemn them for these deficiencies and ineffective attempts? Would Jesus chide and rebuke them because they so often missed the mark? Would anyone condemn them and point the scornful finger at their vain attempts to measure up to righteousness? Yes, there were some who could scoff and scorn and ridicule and condemn! One "accuser of the brethren" always stood ready to heap condemnation on their heads. Along with him was a whole host of wickedness in exalted position, ready to hinder and oppose, to dishearten and condemn, when frailty and wickedness marred their best endeavours. But (and this is what matters most to Paul and his believing friends) these accusers and opponents had no right of entrance to the Divine Court where all these actions—these efforts to please God—were assessed and judged. That Court of assessment was in heaven, at the very Throne of God. Satan and his hosts had no right of entrance there—they were confined to the lower heavens—to the earth's atmosphere. They had no standing as "the prosecutor-at-the-bar". They had no power of attorney in that Supreme Court. Therefore, though they might shriek their condemnation above the raging voice of the gale, it had no relevance to the "case" in hand. "Who is he that condemneth?" asks Paul. None!—there is no prosecutor in the

case.

Would Jesus condemn? Nay, He had died for them! But more than that, He was now living for them, and serving their need more than before. Would God from His Throne condemn? Nay, He had already issued His writ of acquittal! He had already declared the decree of His Court, freely justifying the believer from his sins and weaknesses. The verdict of the Court was favourable to the Advocate and His earthly clients and companions, so that in heaven there was none to condemn. Other accusers mattered not, let them shout their impeachments loud and long! So long, therefore, as their name and credit stood unimpaired in the one place, and at the one "Bar" that really mattered, all was well with them. And that it stood well in that one place was sure beyond all further question because their Advocate was so fully acceptable to the Judge, who alone was qualified to judge and justify, that He was keeping the Advocate at His own right hand—to remain there throughout the Age, till the whole company for whom He had appeared had achieved the object for which they had been justified.

It is no dead Christ that occupies the centre of God's Plan. It is a living Christ—a Christ over whom death has no dominion or power—a Christ, eternal, immortal and all powerful, who ever liveth to help each generation of His struggling followers along and up the heights to heavenly glory. "*I am He that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore*" are the words of assurance sent down from heaven to earth, to stand as guarantee that no struggling follower can ever pass from the sight of His watchful loving Eye.

Some of the reputed followers of the Lord make their boast in a Christ who died, and carry a crucifix as token of that death. That is something, but it is not enough. It is not enough that a sacrifice should have been made, or that a Cross and a tomb should be the symbol of Divine Redemption. That alone could not have secured the blotting out of sin. The "Bar-of-all-Authority" was not in session on Calvary's hill, or Gethsemane's tomb, but had placed its throne in the highest heaven. Divine Justice had instituted its own Court, and thither must the "case" of all believers be carried for adjudication.

We may truly rejoice with any or all who

rejoice in the great Sacrifice of the Man of Sorrows, but that would be ending the great story in the opening chapter. With Paul we might announce to heaven and earth that all our glory is in the Cross, but we must complete the great account by proclaiming to all our "Yea rather". "Christ died, *yea rather* . . . was raised from the dead" is the vital energising fact at the heart of God's purpose.

Much is made to-day over the radio of "the historic Christ", and men are asked to make their decisions concerning righteousness on the basis of the teachings of a good man who lived nineteen centuries ago and taught a new way of life. No wonder the world looks coldly on while only one here and there responds to the Great Voice from the past. It needs more than the historic Christ to energise a cold world into life. The rating of Jesus as "the historic Christ" places Him but little in advance of the founders of any other religion or "way of life". The "historic" advocates make the plea that "the Christ" is "God", and argue therefore that His words should be heard, heeded and followed. Still the world looks coldly on. It cannot understand even that assertion, for it lacks the living power to grip the vital strings of the heart of men in these tumultuous days. Not a "dead Christ", nor yet a "historic Christ", but a "Living Christ", who has learned compassion for the suffering generations of men, is the one theme, the only theme, that can strike home, arrest and rivet the attention and expectation of the perplexed and doubting hosts of men, bewildered and lost in the mazes of modern thought. But who shall tell them of that Living Christ? And the answer surely comes, only they who can say: "*Yea rather, Christ has risen from the dead.*" Our two little words then contain volumes of sacrificial and dispensational fact, and stand as an expression of conviction that, great and vital as the death of Christ most surely was, His resurrection is more vital still, to those who now follow in His steps.

Lives there one child of God to-day, who, knowing and experiencing the care of the great Shepherd of the flock, whose heart will not rise up in gratitude and appreciation before God for the great facts covered by our little text—"yea rather"?

Dryden



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

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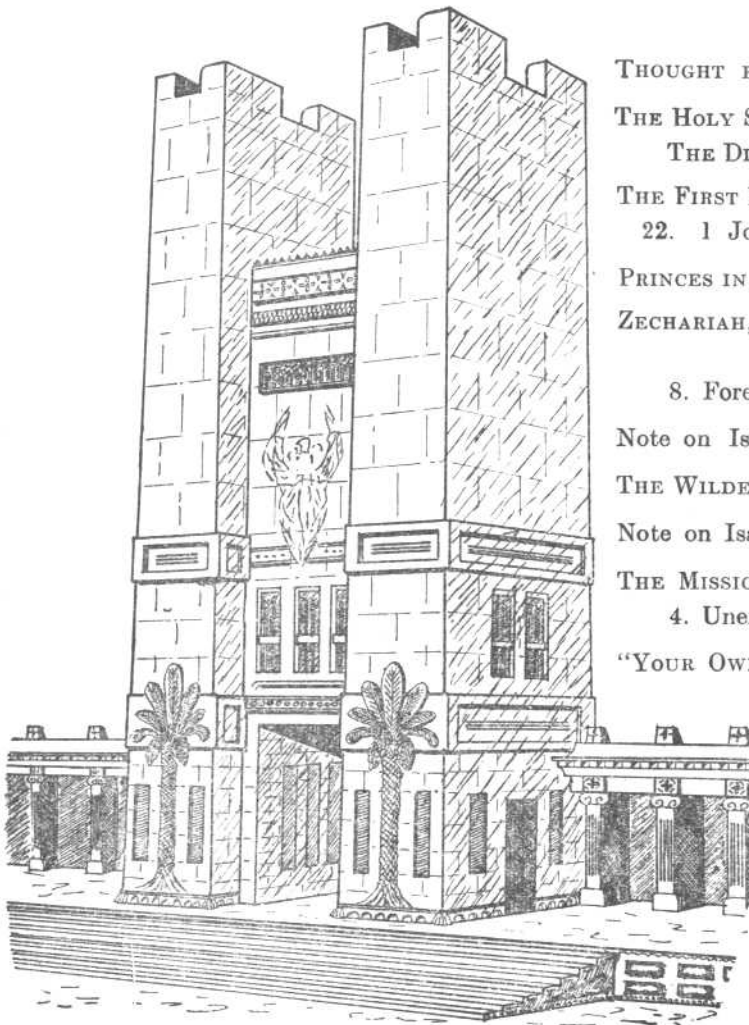
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Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.

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"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 5. 16).

A recently discovered and hitherto unpublished sermon of an old-time famous preacher, Charles Simeon, has this passage: "If your life be not as becometh the Gospel of Christ, the world will despise religion as a worthless unproductive thing, and those who profess godliness will be apt to catch the infection and to sink into lukewarmness". Is this one reason for the loss of faith and zeal which many bemoan in these trying days? Is it that the world's unbelief and scorn as regards our message, reflected back to us, of itself induces a growing loss of zeal and even of conviction, resulting in a lack of enterprise and a resultant settling down in the social comfort of our fellowship and a waiting for the Lord to set up His Kingdom and take His Church to heavenly glory without being concerned any longer with the manifesting of the outward characteristics of the salt of the earth, lights in the world, and a city set on a hill?

It would seem so in some cases at least. Advancing age can justify some cessation of active service; the more strenuous and trying conditions of this distressful period involves a certain restriction of opportunity; the fact of decreasing numbers within the fellowship renders effective co-operation increasingly difficult. But none of these things would be seriously argued by any of us if our Master plainly appeared before us to exhort us, as He did His own disciples, that we go on in life, in whatever circumstances and under whatever disadvantages we may be placed, *just showing how a Christian can live!* In so many connections we do fail to manifest that in our day-to-day dealings with our fellows. We fail often enough with our own brethren, and how much more with the world. And it brings leanness into the soul.

We tend to view our Christian life from too intellectual a viewpoint. Even our entrance

thereinto is carefully prescribed for us in technical terms; repentance, justification, consecration, sanctification, glorification; and too often the whole matter is presented to the immature believer as though he is invited to enter into a commercial agreement with God. Cold as ice, and about as inviting! And all the time we are conscious—or ought to be conscious—of the warm, vibrant words "sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not . . . a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise".

This is the source from which we must get the oil for the light, the virtue for the salt, the power to raise that city to its elevation on the hill; here, at the foot of the Cross, where repentance and determination, contrition and hope, renunciation and consecration, go hand in hand. Not in the emotionless formalism of the detached acceptance of a cold invitation "if ye do this . . . I will give you that" but in the spontaneous eager realisation of tender, compassionate tones "My son, give me thine heart . . . who will go for us?", lies the power that will make us to "shine forth as the sun" here and now in the sight of all men. In that experience, and that alone, shall we realise what was in the mind of the "beloved physician", Luke, when he beheld the fellowship of the Early Church and wrote of them, "praising God, and having favour with all the people: and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved". Is it any accident that those two phrases are associated so intimately together?

Gone from us

Sis. E. Angelinetta (Bristol)
Sis. E. Bartley (Enniskillen) (North Ireland)
Sis. F. Melliush (Aylesbury)
Bro. R. Thurman (Peterborough)

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

THE HOLY SPIRIT — THE DIVINE DYNAMIC

The Bible is replete with examples of the power of the Holy Spirit. The first recorded event in history is the moving of the Spirit of God on the face of the waters (Gen. 1. 2) and the last recorded event (one that is yet in the future) is the call of the Spirit and the bride to "whosoever will" to take of the water of life (Rev. 22. 17). Both of these, rightly understood, betoken marvellous creative activity, one in the realm of the material and the other in the realm of the spiritual. In between there is the record of how God's Holy Spirit has been and continues ceaselessly active in the world, converting the dark and formless waste of human depravity into that glorious orderly city which is God's Kingdom on earth. The Spirit of God is referred to many times in both Old and New Testaments, and always in connection with activity, energy, illumination, creativeness of a beneficent kind. "*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work*" said Jesus (John 5. 17) and in many references to His Father He acknowledged the *dunamis*, the power, of the Holy Spirit as a force that operates in the whole of Divine creation to effect that accomplishment of God's purposes.

Our Lord's words to Nicodemus (John 3. 8) convey an analogy which has given us the very word itself. "*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh . . . so is everyone that is born of the Spirit*". That delicate inbreathing of air which is the characteristic of life, that violent wind which is the essence of invisible force, are the symbols of the creative, life-sustaining energy which we call the Spirit. In the Old Testament the word is *ruach*, rendered "spirit" 232 times, "wind" 90 times and "breath" 28 times. It means the breath of the nostrils, air in motion, wind, the vital life principle, the rational mind or spirit, of man, or of God. Gesenius puts it "*The Divine power which, like the wind and breath, cannot be perceived, and by which animated beings live*". In the New Testament the word is *pneuma*, identical in meaning with "*ruach*", and so used by classical Greek writers. Thayer defines it, as applied to the Holy Spirit, "*God's power and agency—distinguishable from God's essence in itself considered—manifest in the course of affairs*".

In the Old Testament the Spirit of God is repeatedly shown to be an influence in the hearts and lives of men. Exod. 31. 3 tells of Bezaleel being filled with the Spirit of God to exercise his craftsman's art in the skilful workmanship of the Tabernacle furniture. In the times of Israel's struggle to possess the land the Spirit of the Lord inspired, for instance, Gideon (Jud. 6. 34) to deeds of valour and daring. In a very intense sense the Spirit of God came upon the prophets (see Num. 24. 2) and gave them inspiration and strength to deliver their messages. When the exiles, returning from Babylon, found themselves dispirited at the magnitude of the reconstruction task before them, dismayed at the overwhelming superiority of their enemies, the cry was "*Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts*" (Zech. 4. 6). The forces of materialism are impotent before the dynamic energy of that unseen power which is presented in the Scriptures as the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit.

This same power is manifest in the world of Nature. "*By his Spirit he hath garnished the heavens*"—i.e. set the stars in their places (Job 26. 13) says Job. Declared Elihu (Job 33. 4), "*The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life*". Speaking of the brute creation, the Psalmist says (Psa. 104. 30) "*Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth*".

The Greek "*pneuma*" in the New Testament is rendered "spirit" 150 times, "Spirit" or "Holy Spirit" with the Divine connection about 130 times, and "Holy Ghost" some 90 times. It is also used twice (Matt. 27. 50, John 19. 30) for "ghost", in connection with the moment of Jesus' expiry on the cross. The idea of personality associated with the present usage of the term "ghost" is not warranted in Scriptural usage, this word having changed in meaning since the days when the Authorised Version was prepared. "Ghostly" and "ghastly" (a variant of the same word) come from the Old English "*gastlic*", meaning 'spiritual'. The corresponding noun '*gast*', later '*gost*' and by Dutch influence eventually modified to 'ghost', meant "life", "spirit", "soul", and by development, "angel". The term "ghostly father" for "spiritual adviser"

survived to quite recent times. This English word is the equivalent of the Latin '*spiritus*' (breath, breeze, breath of life, life, soul, mind, energy, courage, pride, arrogance), Greek '*pneuma*', and Hebrew '*ruach*', and so was quite properly used by the New Testament translators. Its modified modern usage, however, does render desirable the adoption of "spirit" consistently throughout the Scriptures, and in recognition of this fact the term "Holy Spirit" is more and more coming to replace "Holy Ghost".

Apart from its application to the Holy Spirit of God, the word 'ghost' in the Bible is confined to the act of breathing one's last ('giving up the ghost') where the allusion is to the going back to God of that life principle which He implanted at the beginning. It is thus used 11 times in the Old Testament and about 8 times in the New. (See Gen. 25. 8, 17, Job 11. 20, Lam. 1. 19, Matt. 27. 50, Acts 5. 5, 10.)

Perhaps the most powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit is its influence on the minds and hearts of Christians. Our Lord was very definite that there is such a thing as being "born of the Spirit" and it may well be that the sight which it was given to John the Baptist to see, when he beheld the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus in the form of a dove (John 1. 32), and to the apostles in the upper room when there appeared the likeness of leaping fire upon their heads (Acts 2. 1-4) were appearances intended to symbolise the indwelling and characteristics of a new and spiritual influence that henceforward was to possess the lives of Jesus and His apostles. Paul declares that the possession of the Holy Spirit confers an ability to discern spiritual matters which is not possessed by the natural man, (1 Cor. 2. 12-14) and a common exhortation in New Testament epistles is the injunction to be so guided and influenced by the Holy Spirit that the inner life is brought more and more into tune with the spiritual world, "*where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God*" (Col. 3. 1).

In harmony with this are our Lord's own words when about to leave his disciples. "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another '*parakletos*' . . . the Spirit of truth" (John 14. 16-17). '*Parakletos*' is mistranslated '*comforter*'; it means primarily one called to one's aid, as an advocate in a court of law (the same word is translated '*advocate*' in 1 John 2. 1). Thus it signifies, in the widest sense, a helper in time of need, which in fact is the function of the Holy Spirit since Christ

ascended to the Father.

There is, then, in the case of the believer, a definite act of God continuously operative in the mind and heart, enlightening, sustaining and transforming from kinship with earth to kinship with heaven, "*from glory unto glory*" (2 Cor. 3. 18). It is thus that the Holy Spirit is said to be dwelling in us (Rom. 8. 11, 2 Tim. 1. 14), permeating the life with its influence until at length the Spirit-guided individual is prepared for that great change which must come when earthly experiences are ended and he is born into the spiritual world.

Even so, the work of the Holy Spirit as respects humankind is not done. One phase of God's plans, as seen by prophets and apostles alike, deal with that time, yet to come, when the Holy Spirit will be "*poured out upon all flesh*" (Joel 3. 28). The completion of the Christian Church, founded at Pentecost and in process of selection ever since, will be the signal for a fresh effusion of God's creative power upon the still sin-sick world. It is then that there will be realised those words of Isaiah in which he described a king reigning in righteousness over all the earth, the spirit of the Lord resting upon him. (Isa. 11. 1-9). It is then that the nations will be taught the laws by which alone man live, and in the exaltation of that new revelation will cry "*Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us*" (Isa. 25. 9). In that day of world-wide conversion and abolition of evil, sin, pain and death the Holy Spirit will be active in the earth, entering into the minds of men, and carrying out creative and re-creative work until it has become true that "*in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow*" (Phil. 2. 10).

The Holy Spirit of God, the Divine dynamic, constantly working in all creation by a myriad means, profoundly influencing the hearts and minds of men, is a link between the Father and His creatures. Perhaps it was something like this that the Apostle Paul had in mind when he declared to the Athenians upon a certain noteworthy occasion (Acts 17. 28) "*In him we live, and move, and have our being*".

Happiness, at least, is not solitary; it joys to communicate; it loves others, for it depends on them for its existence . . . the very name and appearance of a happy man breathe of good nature, and help the rest of us to live.

R. L. Stevenson

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 22 I John 5. 13-15

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." (Vs. 13.)

"You that believe," "Ye may know," "Ye may believe"; all these affirmations of conviction crowd one upon another in this verse and those immediately following. We are coming very rapidly now to the end of the epistle and John's thought is entirely for those who have so given themselves to God in wholehearted surrender that they are now members of the Divine family. No room in these last intimate passages for the world. No time left now to consider those who have never accepted Christ. John is not heedless of them and their needs but he knows that a day yet to come will give all such every possible opportunity to repent of their past heedless ways and come at last into lowly surrender. God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." (Acts 17. 31.) So that although John knew full well that the time had already come when God "commandeth all men everywhere to repent" and had played his own part in proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom as a "witness to all nations" he now turns away from that general work and devotes himself to the deeper interests of the inner circle of disciples. Full well did John know that, as with Paul, so with himself, after his departing grievous wolves would enter in, not sparing the flock. And John desired, as did Paul, to finish his course "free from the blood of all men". He wanted to render a good report of his stewardship, so that his last words to the Church on earth are words of Christian counsel and encouragement, words that give strength and stamina to Christian character, that those who receive may neither run nor labour in vain. That is why John talks so much about believing and knowing in these last verses. The belief and knowledge is not that of intellectual things but that of the heart and life. These of whom he says they have believed on the name of the Son of God are not those who have believed *about* Jesus. The knowledge they possess that in John's

view is of such supreme importance is not the knowledge of *how* Jesus redeemed them and all the philosophy of the Ransom, but the knowledge that Jesus *has* redeemed them. It is not so much the knowledge precisely *how* we, the Church, are joint-heirs with His glory and sharers in His sufferings and by what process of legal form we have attained to that position, but the knowledge that we *are*, in sober fact, associated with Him in all that He is and does. We have as it were placed our hands in His and given Him our trust and we know that henceforward all is well. Therefore, in John's own phrase, we know that we have eternal life, and nothing of all the arguments and sophistries of man can rob us of that unshakable conviction.

"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." (vs. 14, 15.)

This is going back to the words of Jesus yet again. No less than four times did John record those words in his Gospel. It is clear that Jesus must have repeated that assurance many times during His ministry and clear that John must have been quick to pick up the words. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." (John 14. 13-14.) "I have chosen you . . . that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you." (John 15. 16.) "In that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." (John 16. 23-24.) So often have there been long and serious debates over the scope and extent of this promise. Did Jesus mean literally anything that we could conceivably ask? If there is a limit, what is that limit and why is it not defined in one or more of these many texts? As it stands the promise is definite enough. Whatever we ask, provided it is in His name, will be granted to us. That would seem to include everything, even things that might not be good for us or might even react against our endeavour to walk worthily of

Him who has called us to His kingdom and glory. The secret, of course, lies in the obvious fact that none of those addressed are of the class who would misapply the promise anyway. All to whom the words are spoken can already be trusted to make intercession "according to the will of God". (Rom. 8. 27.) "Thy Will be done!" "Nevertheless not as I wilt, but as thou wilt" is always the unspoken element in every supplication that goes up to the Majesty on high.

There is a more intimate aspect of this matter that we do well to consider at this point. We can picture to ourselves the total immersion of our own wills into the will of God so that we can honestly say we as independent individuals have subordinated our own aims and impulses and desires to the overruling dictation of our God, but then there is a mystic but very real sense in which we are no longer independent individuals. In coming into Christ we have become one with Him and one with His Father; and that oneness can only be attained and maintained if our wills are so closely attuned to His that we begin to think and speak and act as He does. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" is the Apostle's admonition and it is not an empty one. It implies a unity of mind which is much deeper and more intimate than the position of two independent minds who merely happen to think and react alike. Jesus prayed that His disciples might be one—one with each other and one with Him and with His Father. "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 they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one . . ." (John 17. 21-23.) Those were not meaningless words; they were uttered to give expression to a truth too profound for any of us fully to comprehend in the flesh, even although we may glimpse something of its ideal and seek in our own imperfect way to make some progress toward it. There is something here that touches the fundamental relationship between God the Creator and Life-giver, and the creatures to whom He has given life—and from whom He can withdraw life. "In him we live, and move, and have our being" declared Paul to the philosophers of Athens. "Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created, and thou renewest the face of the earth" sang the Psalmist (Psa. 104. 29-30.) The spirit, says the Preacher in

Ecclesiastes, returns to God who gave it. What really is the relation between man and His Maker? What is this life that pulsates in our bodies and makes thinking, intelligent beings out of a mere collection of chemicals shaped like a human body? To what extent is it still a part of the Divine life? It certainly is entirely dependent upon the decree of God? He bestows and withdraws at will: He can give everlasting life or relegate to eternal death. Can it not be therefore that in some very real sense we who have become joint-heirs with Christ have entered into a true oneness with God which finds its deepest expression in this present time in the spiritual communion that we have with the Father, and will in future days beyond the Vail enlarge into an even closer oneness that now we cannot even begin to visualise? Perhaps, after all, one reason that the things we pray for are always in harmony with the will of God is this very fact, that we have become so much one with Him that the mind which frames the prayers and the will that prompts the requests are already so fully in tune with the mind and will of God that it is not possible for us to ask for things that are contrary to His will. That at any rate is an ideal to be striven for and the more we seek to make such a condition a reality in our lives the more we shall find that these few verses in John's epistle are truly descriptive of our own experience.

Of course this does not imply that all the things we might at first impulse request are going to be automatically given to us. There are so many petitions we could—and do—present on the basis of our old natural outlook that sober reflection would compel to the admission are not good for us. There is always the heartfelt appeal inspired by some deep and dear earthly love that ascends to heaven in perfect sincerity but finds no affirmative reply. But many a time that is only the immediate stress of our human affections and desires looming up strongly before us and crying for some consideration. Behind the immediate urgency of the petition there is always the background thought "Thy Will be done". The stress of the moment may infuse a sharp note of appeal into the prayer but behind the urgency there is a calmness that comes from knowing that our God is "too wise to err; to good to be unkind", and as we rise from our knees we know that whether the plea be granted or whether it be refused, it is still true that "we have the petition that we desired of him". So many have thanked

God in after days because the answer was "No". They have realised, looking back, how much better it has been that it was so. So the One, who knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him will always answer our petitions, not according to the words of our lips, but according to the desires of our hearts. As He did with Ezekiel, He may take away the desire of our eyes at a stroke, yet we shall be able to say "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good". And that is not a weak, spineless acquiescence in the decree of One whose power cannot be challenged, but an intelligent and willing union with Him

ON HERESIES

Our all-wise Head made a most choice selection in the word he used to foretell that the spirit that says "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos" would manifest itself in the midst of the true Church—as it did do even under the ministration of such powerful leaders as Paul, and Peter, and John. On this word, "*heresis*", found in the King James Version, E. P. Gould writes in the American Commentary: "*Heresis* is a transliteration (the Greek word spelled with English letters), but not a translation of the Greek word, which has come over into English with a different meaning from its ordinary Greek, or New Testament, meaning. It means, originally, a taking; then, introducing the idea of selection, the taking what one desires and leaving the rest, election, choice; then, a chosen way of living or thinking; then, a body of men choosing the same way of thinking or living; and finally, dissensions between different bodies of this kind. Its use in the New Testament is divided between the last two meanings—sects and their dissensions. In this sense, it is classed by Paul among the works of the flesh. (Gal. 5. 20.)" This writer gives also what we believe is the correct explanation of the last clause of this text, "that they which are approved may be made manifest among you". He writes: "Those who stand the test and receive the Divine approval; here those who show an unpartisan and loving spirit. 'May be made manifest'—viz., by the contrast between them and the dissident". How simply and how skilfully our Heavenly Judge shows up the selfishness, the wilfulness, the lovelessness of the unfaithful!

Man's province in the Universe is not to create, but by thought and labour to combine and direct the forces that already exist and convert them into different forms for new purposes

in what He has decreed shall be done. We have the petitions we ask of him because we are one with Him, and what He will have, we will have too. John calls this "the confidence that we have in him". He could have chosen no better word. We have confidence, from the human standpoint trusting where we cannot see, and so willingly accepting His decision; from the spiritual standpoint, entering into His decision and identifying ourselves with it so that it becomes our own decision also.

(To be concluded)

FORGETTING THE THINGS BEHIND

It sometimes becomes necessary for the Christian to sever his connection with some particular organisation which for a term, may be of years, has nurtured his spiritual growth. The causes of the severance may be various—disagreement with doctrine or with conduct, or a realisation that the particular organisation can no longer afford that which alone can satisfy. The voice of the bridegroom is heard no more; the light of the candle is not seen. The parting causes pain, and mayhap not a little perplexity. It is sometimes accompanied with hard words from those who have been one's companions in the faith; or there may be much misunderstanding which cannot easily be put right.

None of these things should be taken as though some strange thing happened unto us. This is but another stage in that spiritual development which demands continuous progress until "that which is perfect is come". It may be that the Good Shepherd has called His child out of one environment because there is nothing more there for that child to learn; fresh experiences and surroundings are necessary to the onward progress of the soul which is seeking oneness with Christ. Like Abraham, let us go out, not knowing whither we go.

But guard against one thing—that unhealthy watching of the former communion with the object of disparaging whatever it is doing. You have left it—then leave it alone. To their own Master let them stand or fall. Their beliefs, their activities, their declarations, are of moment to you no longer. Your future is bound up with other interests—then go forward, seeing only the guiding cloud which is to lead you onward to the Promised Land, and let your references to your former fellowship be characterised by that courtesy and charity which is the hall-mark of the sincere Christian.

PRINCES IN ALL THE EARTH

A little-known factor
in the Divine Plan

The reign of Christ and His Church over the earth during the Millennial Age is a well-known Scripture theme and there are many who look forward to the coming Day when the present social order gives place to that reign and its righteous Administration. But who are the Administrators? The destiny of dedicated Christians, to be with and as their Lord in His other-worldly glory, implies that their home and "base", so to speak, will be in the celestial world even though during the duration of the Millennial Age they will have much to do with this earth with the evangelising and conversion of the world. That leaves open a place upon earth for some who might be termed resident Administrators, earthly representatives of the celestial powers, men and perhaps women of such proved sterling worth that they may fitly guide the affairs of mortal men along lines laid down by earth's spiritual ruler, the Lord Christ. What does the Bible have to say about such?

The fact that the Divine Calling for this present Age is to a celestial destiny implies that these earthly executives of the new order must be drawn from the ranks of those who in pre-Christian ages manifested the same degree of devotion and loyalty to God as does the Christian Church now. In recognition of this fact the Nineteenth Century designated them "Old Testament Saints" or "Ancient Worthies" in token of their sterling qualities, which incidentally are praised in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. A number of Biblical allusions confirm that these earthly rulers, who will, as it were, "take over" when the Messianic Kingdom is established in power, will be selected from among those "heroes of faith" whose exploits are narrated in many a thrilling Old Testament story. "Princes in all the earth" is one of the Scripture titles given them (Psa. 45. 16) and a very good descriptive title it is.

The earliest intimation on record that God purposes such an arrangement was at the hand of Isaiah. In a brief pen-picture of purified Israel's part in the inauguration of the Millennial order God said "I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning" (Isa. 1. 26). The force of this promise lies in the fact that the word for "judges" is that used for those "judges" who rose up from time to time to deliver Israel in

the period between Joshua and the Kings. These men were deliverers, inspired by faith in God and belief in His all-pervading power, and the advent of each was coincident with a time of repentance for past apostasy and a renewed national dedication to God. Deliverers and counsellors; this is what the world needs, now and until these men appear on the scene. "A King shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment" says Isaiah (ch. 32. 1) in one of his Millennial descriptions. Remembering that what this world needs more than anything else is sound and righteous judgment in high quarters, the coming of such "princes" is surely an event to be fervently desired. (It is of interest to note that "righteousness" in this text is *tsedeq*, ethical righteousness, and "judgment" is *mishpat*, judicial righteousness. The relative spheres of the King and the princes are thereby indicated.)

It is of course inevitable that much of what is said about these "princes" is against the background of the Holy Nation, the idealised Israel of the Last Days which is established in the Holy Land in faith and fortitude, awaiting the final conflict in which God Himself is to be manifested for its deliverance. Thus in Jer. 3. 15 He promised "I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding" and again in Jer. 23. 4. "And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them; and they shall fear no more . . . neither shall they be lacking".

It is necessary to turn to Hebrews 11 for positive identification of the "princes". That chapter is devoted to the praise of various Old Testament characters whose predominant characteristics were unquenchable faith and fierce loyalty to God, by virtue of which they "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness . . . out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens . . . had trial of mockings and scourings, of bonds and imprisonment, were stoned, sawn asunder, slain with the sword; wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, tormented, in deserts, in mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having received a good report on account of their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should

not be made perfect". (Heb. 11. 33-40.) This last remark provides the key to what has been a most puzzling text to many, our Lord's words in Matt. 11. 11. "*Among men that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist; nevertheless he that is least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he*". John the Baptist died before Christ initiated the new way, the "High Calling of God in Christ Jesus" by which the Christian Church of this Age is fitted for its future celestial mission, and so could have no part in that calling. But the Lord's words leave us no room for doubt that he is one—perhaps the greatest one—of those Old Testament stalwarts who are to be princes in all the earth and whose resurrection to that high duty waits only for the prior resurrection of the Christian Church. In that way it is true that "they without us shall not be made perfect".

The manner in which the princes will be made manifest to the world at the time of their resurrection is perhaps best indicated in Zech. 12. 5-6. This is part of a prophetic foreview of the last great trial of faith to come upon the restored nation of Israel, loyal to God and settled in faith that He will deliver them from the threat of hostile forces which will then come up against the land. "*And the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the Lord of Hosts their God. In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf, and they shall devour the people round about . . . In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem*". These "governors" are the ancient stalwarts of Israel, resurrected from the grave. There is no intimation that the Holy Nation is to have national leaders other than these "princes in all the earth" at the Time of the End. Since it is a fact that directly this long-predicted final deliverance has taken place the Law of the Lord is to "*go forth from Zion and the words of the Lord from Jerusalem*", it is logical to expect that these stalwarts of old will have been present upon the earth for some time previously and attained positions of unchallenged leadership among their own people. The men who guide the new nation through its severest trial of faith will be the men to whom is entrusted its future destiny.

A Scripture that may indicate some connection between the resurrected "princes" and the ultimate solution of the "Arab ques-

tion" is found in that little known book, the prophecy of Obadiah. That prophet based his message upon the scenes he saw during his own time, when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, taking the people captive to Babylon, and Edom, one progenitor of the Arabs of today, rejoiced at Israel's calamity and joined hands with the persecutors (Psa. 137. 7, Ezek. 25. 12). Obadiah was moved by the Spirit to speak of the far distant future when "*upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; . . . and the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Esau*" (Edom) "*for stubble . . . and saviours shall come up on Mount Zion to possess the Mount of Esau, and the kingdom shall be the Lord's*" (Obad. 17-21). That word "saviours" appears also in Neh. 9. 27, where it is referred to the Judges who were raised up to deliver Israel in the early days. This passage cannot possibly refer to any time now past, for there has never been any occasion in history when "saviours" of any description have extended their rule from Mount Zion—a godly, righteous rule therefore—over Edom, a united kingdom of God resulting. Edom certainly did become tributary to Judah for short periods during the troubled centuries just before Christ, but the slightest acquaintance with the history of those times is sufficient to show that in no sense could this prophecy have been fulfilled then. And Edom ceased to exist as a nation two thousand years ago. The passage refers, conclusively, to the events of the Time of the End, and Edom fairly evidently is here representative of the Arab world.

If Obad. 19-20 is taken literally the area of territory occupied at that time by the Holy Nation, even although not so much as that promised to Abraham as the final extent of the Holy Land, is certainly appreciably greater than that held by the present political State and this would seem to imply that these "saviours" appear at a time when the stage is set for the final judicial settlement of a problem that is at present embittering Arab-Israel relations. Many of these "princes in all the earth" were progenitors of Arab peoples as well as of Israelites. Many of Abraham's descendants are Arabs—numerically many more than Israel, and it is probably true that in any case the whole of the Arabic world traces its descent back to Abraham's progenitor Heber six generations earlier. The patriarch Job—certainly destined to be one of the princes—was of Arabic and not Israelite blood. It might well be, therefore, that the

first achievement of the "princes in all the earth" after their resurrection and advancement to power will be the mutually satisfactory adjustment of the, at present, bitter relations between the two peoples. It is worth noticing in this connection that in the great "Gog and Magog" prophecy which describes the enemies of Israel in the last conflict not one Arab nation appears.

There is a remarkable Messianic passage in the 5th chapter of Micah which appears to have direct reference to the princes. The general theme is the coming of Messiah to rule and deliver Israel at the last and inaugurate the Messianic Kingdom. Out of Bethlehem—Ephrathah is to come the future ruler in Israel, whose destiny has been fore-ordained from times of old—from everlasting. He is to "stand and feed in the strength of the Lord" and be "great unto the ends of the earth" (Micah 5. 4). He is to "be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land, and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men. And they shall rule (RSV) the land of Assyria with the sword . . ." (Micah 5. 5-6). This is a difficult passage to elucidate but its nature makes clear that it can only refer to the coming of the Millennial Kingdom and Israel's prosperity immediately prior to that coming. The "Assyrian" here mentioned is evidently a term used to designate the prophetic king of the north, the host of Gog and Magog, set to invade the Holy Land, just as the Assyrian kings did in Micah's own time. The all-conquering Messiah is to be the Deliverer when this "Assyrian" invades the land but when the event transpires there will be auxiliary agents raised up to execute the Messiah's judgments; seven "shepherds" and eight "princes of men". The numbers may be readily recognised as symbolic and based upon the seven days of the week. The seventh day completed the work of the week and symbolised completion and rest; the eighth day the beginning of a new week and the commencement of a new work. Ferrar Fenton, who for all his sometimes rather flamboyant style of translation often seems to grasp the underlying idea behind an obscure phrase better than most, renders this verse "He will bring us deliverance from Assyria and will . . . appoint seven shepherds above us and eight who will organise men". The function of shepherds in Scripture metaphor is spiritual; the same Hebrew word is rendered indiscriminately "shepherd" and

"pastor". That of princes is secular. If the verse is taken to indicate that there will, in that day, be spiritual teachers, pastors or shepherds, the Church of this Age developed and completed on the last day of the "week" of man's rule, of the "kingdoms of this world", and also secular leaders, princes in all the earth, brought forward in the eighth day, the commencement of the new Age, the Kingdom of our God, there may be some meaning in the expression "seven pastors and eight princes". At any rate, it is plainly stated that the "eight princes of men" will appear at a time when not only shall the "Assyrian", invading the land, be repulsed, but the "remnant of Jacob"—significant expression—will be to many people as a dew from the Lord, as showers upon grass, and as a lion among the beasts of the forest—on the one hand, a refreshing draught of new life, and on the other, a destroyer of the wild beasts of evil. Quite clearly, this pictures the ending of this Age and the dawn of the next.

Theologically, the resurrection of the "princes" must wait until all who participate in the First Resurrection, the Church, have finished their earthly course and experienced the change of nature which introduces them into the heavenly world. The coming of the Lord for His Church is one of the first events in the succession of events which comprise the Advent. His coming and revelation of Himself with His Church is a later event. Between these two events, and before the powers of evil of this present world have been overthrown, occurs the resurrection of the princes, the first to experience restoration of life to terrestrial conditions. Obviously they must be present upon earth, unknown to men in general, for some time while they are familiarising themselves with the conditions of today, so different from those they knew when on earth before. Eventually they will gain the confidence of their fellows and with their notable grasp of world affairs and their evident abilities will quickly come to the front. No man will be able to say, with certainty, from whence they come but there will be a time when their identity is declared and they are accepted in that knowledge. The rest of the world may well dismiss their claims with scorn and incredulity, but these men will be armed with the power of the incoming Kingdom and none will be able to fight against that. In a very real sense the end of the dominion of evil and the commencement of the long-promised era of righteousness will have arrived when men become con-

scious of a new force operating in world affairs against which they find all their traditional weapons of offence and defence val-

ueless, a force which is manifest in all that is said and done by these "princes" in all the earth.

ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

Chapter 8. Foreview of History

The six final chapters of Zechariah's prophecy are so markedly different in style and contents from the earlier ones that it is evident they constitute a separate book, or at least a separate part. The difference in style is accounted for by concluding that Zechariah composed these chapters in his old age, some fifty years later than the earlier visions, in the days of Nehemiah when hopes of an immediate manifestation of Messiah had receded and it was becoming evident that a long span of history must run its course before the long-looked for day should dawn. Hence these chapters, nine to fourteen, comprise a vivid—and so far as they have already become history, a remarkably accurate—foreview of the predominant factors in the outworking of God's purposes with Israel and with all men, from a time almost immediately following the close of Zechariah's ministry to the full establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth. In these six chapters there is a contrast drawn between the political power of the great kings of this world and the overriding power of the Lord Christ; the one is pictured in all the pomp and panoply of human greed and brute force, the other in the selflessness, the devotion and moral power of the Good Shepherd. The conflict between the two continues and accelerates to the final clash and, as in so many of the prophetic Scriptures, in the stress of the conflict many lose faith and apostasise, but a remnant are steadfast and win through at the end. The doctrine of the "Remnant" is very prominent in this second part of Zechariah's prophecy.

The first eight verses of chapter 9 picture the events surrounding the transfer of universal dominion from Persia to Greece, the silver of Daniel's image to the copper. The remarkable correspondence between the details in these verses and the incidents attendant on Alexander the Great's invasion of Asia in 332 B.C. has been realised by practically every commentator of note and the application is reasonably conclusive. Hadrach (the Hatarika of Assyrian inscriptions) Damascus and Hamath (modern Hama) were

leading districts and cities of Syria; Alexander's first move was to subdue Syria and capture Damascus, which he did without difficulty. Hence verse 1 "*The word of the Lord is against the land of Hadrach and will rest upon Damascus*" (RSV) "*and Hamath also which borders thereon*". His next move was against Tyre and Sidon, twin commercial cities of Phoenicia; Tyre held out for seven months but fell in 332. Verses 2 and 3 speak of this and add the information that Tyre had built herself a "*stronghold*" but the Lord would smite her power "*in the sea*" and she would be consumed by fire. This is a remarkable statement, for at the time of Alexander the Tyrians had abandoned their seaside city and built a new one on a small island just off the coast which they had fortified and surrounded with a wall a hundred and fifty feet high. They considered themselves impregnable. Alexander built a causeway across the intervening water and so captured the city, which he then burnt. Having thus secured his position he drove southward towards Egypt through the land of the Philistines, capturing Gaza and executing its king, destroying Ashkelon completely, and making Ashdod and Ekron tributary. All of this is stated plainly in verses 5-6 "*Ashkelon shall see it, and be afraid; Gaza too, and shall writhe in anguish. Ekron also, because its hopes are confounded. The king shall perish from Gaza. Ashkelon shall be uninhabited; a mongrel people shall dwell in Ashdod; and I will make an end of the pride of Philistia*" (RSV). Up to this point the Scriptural narrative corresponds in every detail with the progress of Alexander and his Greeks in that momentous year 332. Now in verse 7 the Lord says that there shall no longer be a Philistine nation; it will be absorbed into Judah. The expression "*he that remaineth*" refers to the remnant of the Philistines who survived Alexander's invasion; that remnant shall "*be for our God*"; the word rendered "*governor*" means a family chief or tribal leader; "*Ekron shall be as Jebus*" (not "*as a Jebusite*"). All these expressions indicate the complete coalescence of the Philistines into

the Jewish nation, just as the Jebusites were coalesced in the time of David. This is just what happened. The Philistines as a national entity drop out of history after the time of Alexander; what was left of them became indistinguishable from Jews and their land became part of Judea.

This was not the end. Verse 8 declares the Divine intention "*I will encamp about my house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth; and no oppressor shall pass through them any more*". The army here referred to is the Greek army. Alexander had sent a message to Jerusalem demanding the submission of the Jews. Jaddua, the High Priest, principal citizen of the nation, had refused on the ground that he had sworn allegiance to Persia. Immediately after the fall of Gaza therefore, Alexander marched to Jerusalem to take vengeance. The outcome is recorded by the historian Flavius Josephus. Unable to offer armed resistance, the High Priest, instructed by Heaven, arrayed himself in the splendid robes of his office as Head of the Levitical priesthood and went out to meet the conqueror, followed by the priests and citizens in white. To the astonishment of his own officers, Alexander, instead of giving orders to attack, went forward alone, made obeisance to the sacred Name emblazoned on the High Priest's mitre, and then saluted Jaddua with every appearance of respect and friendliness. His principal general, Parmenio, ventured to ask the reason for this unexpected behaviour, whereupon Alexander explained that when originally contemplating the invasion of Asia he had seen in a dream a person attired in this same regalia who had assured him that he should embark upon his project and that it would be crowned with success by the defeat of Persia. Never having seen or heard of such a man before, he was convinced that this was the one who had appeared to him in his dream of years past. So saying, he walked with the High Priest into the city and was conducted to the Temple, where Jaddua showed him the prophecies of Daniel which declared that a Greek would overthrow Persia. Thus was Judea saved from the fate that had overtaken Syria, Phoenicia and Philistia, even as verse 8 states in a few telling words.

It has, of course, been suggested by some authorities that Josephus was romancing a little when he recounted this story but there is really reasonable circumstantial evidence for its truth. It is a fact that after Alexand-

er's visit to Jerusalem he conferred favours upon the Jews that were not conferred upon any other of his conquered nations. Something must have happened to avert the horrors of massacre and pillage which had been the invaders' intention for Judea as for the other lands he subdued, and to change him into a beneficent patron instead. In any case, the terms of verse 8 were met; God had averted the threat of the army that passed by and returned. With that the picture in Zechariah comes to an end. In history Alexander went on his way, besieged and took Babylon, overthrew the Persian dominion, continued into India and finally met his death, but of all that no notice is taken here. Zechariah has recorded sufficient to indicate the first outstanding event to concern Judea in times yet to come—the transfer of dominion from Persia to Greece with all that it would involve, another step in the progress of the Divine Plan, eventually to culminate in the Kingdom of God.

The prophet now skips some three centuries and lights upon the days of the First Advent. He sees another King presenting himself to Israel for acceptance, not coming as did Alexander with all the pomp and pageantry of military power to establish his rule by force, but in peace to establish a rule founded upon love and persuasion. "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion*" he cries in verse 9 "*Thy King cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, upon a colt the foal of an ass*". It may be, as is sometimes stated, that the traditional manner in which the kings of Israel entered upon their office was to ride into Jerusalem upon a white ass, although there is no specific instance of such a custom in the Old Testament. Asses were more common than horses in the earlier years of Israel's national existence, but by the time of David and onward through the whole duration of the monarchy horses were used for ceremonial purposes. Riding upon an ass might well be intended more as a symbol of humility—"lowly, riding upon an ass". The remarkable correspondence between this verse and the action of Jesus just before His arrest justifies its application and therefore the ensuing passage to the First Advent and the reactions of Israel at that time. Verse 10 defines the peacefulness of His reign and its ultimate conquest—the war-chariot, the war-horse, the battle-bow shall be cut off; "*he shall speak peace to the nations, and his dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the*

river to the ends of the earth"—universal. This was the promise brought to the men of that day by the Prince of Peace when He presented Himself to them. *"By the blood of thy covenant"* said the Lord *"I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water"* (verse 11). This is addressed to that same generation and the first impulse perhaps is to apply these words to the Mosaic Covenant, sealed at Mount Sinai fourteen centuries previously with the blood of sacrificed animals and now due to come to an end with the institution of something better on the basis of the death of Jesus Christ. But the Mosaic Covenant effected no release of prisoners, either at the First Advent or at any other time. It was in fact the failure of that Covenant to effect any real deliverance for Israel which paved the way for God's promise of a New Covenant that would achieve success where the old one had failed. Now although the real work of that New Covenant, the writing of God's laws in the hearts of men and their wholesale turning to Him in repentance and dedication, is the work of the coming Millennial Age, it is true that Jesus referred to His coming death as *"the blood of the New Covenant, shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matt. 26. 28) and that by virtue of this same sacrificial death there is deliverance here and now, and has been since Pentecost, for all, whether Jew or Gentile, who believe. It may well be therefore that verse 11 is a reference to this fact, and that the "blood of the Covenant" there mentioned is a symbol of the death of Christ, the "Ransom for all". Those who did accept Him at His First Advent are the prisoners who were delivered from the empty well or reservoir (this is the meaning of "pit" here) of the old system of Judaism.

"Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee, when I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man" (chap. 9. 12-13). This is the only instance in the Old Testament where the word "hope" has the definite article: the expression is properly "prisoners of the hope". St. Paul was a "prisoner of the hope". *"For the hope of Israel am I bound with this chain"* said he to the Jews of Rome (Acts 28. 20); *"Now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise"* when before Agrippa (Acts 26. 6). He uses "prisoner" in the same sense when he calls himself "the prisoner of the

Lord.' (Eph. 4. 1). These "prisoners of the hope" were the men of Israel at the First Advent, subject to alien powers but in their bondage directed to the stronghold of God's promise and the hope that one day their servitude would end and their mission as God's ambassadors to the nations be realised. Hence the promise that God would render to them "double"—not *"shenayim"* which means a double portion, but *"mishneh"* which means the second part, the complement of what has gone before. In the past they had endured sorrow and adversity, but in the future they would experience joy and prosperity. Isaiah voiced the same principle when he said *"For your shame ye shall have double . . . in their land they shall possess the double; everlasting joy shall be unto them"* (Isa. 61. 7). And with this stirring exhortation to that generation to turn to Jesus and so inherit the glorious promises of the future the prophecy leaves the First Advent behind and passes unrestrained into the mighty deeds of the Kingdom in power, the days of the Second Advent and the Millennial reign. Verse 13 marks the transition. *"When I have bent Judah for me . . ."* and so on. The time of the promised "double" is governed by that "when". A day is to come when God takes Israel—a restored and purified Israel—as His instrument. Using a military metaphor, He likens Judah to His bow, Ephraim the arrows, the sons of Greece to the armed might of this world, and the sons of Zion to the Holy Nation. But the Lord Himself is the leader and His power is irresistible. Verses 14-17 declare that the Lord shall be seen among His people, implying full acceptance in faith and loyalty; His arrows go as lightning, his whirlwinds devastate the enemy. He defends His people, and the victory is so overwhelming that their rejoicing is as that of a feast of wine and their praises to God as though they had brought so many sacrifices to His altar that the bowls were brimming over with blood and flooding the horns (A.V. "corners") of the altar—a vivid metaphor taken from the ancient Levitical ritual. So the Lord their God will save them and Israel will be as the precious stones ornamenting the diadem upon His head or an ensign, a display lifted up for all to see. *"For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty"* cries the prophet. *"Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids"* (vs. 17).

Chapter 10 continues and concludes this theme, the long term prospect of the hope of Israel. It opens by reminding all men that

the blessings of that Age will be to those who come to Him in faith. "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall . . . give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field" (vs. 1). In past times the people were misled by false shepherds but this will be the case no more. "The terra-*phim* have spoken empty things, and the diviners have seen a lie, and told false dreams; they comfort in vain . . . Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds and I punished the goats, for the Lord hath visited the house of Judah and made them as his goodly war-horse" (vs. 2-3). The Lord is here taking His stand, as it were, in the dawn of the Millennial Age when the apostate leaders and unfaithful pastors have been deprived of their positions and the Lord Himself has come out of His place to feed and exalt Israel. The past times had known the power of idol worship, of false prophets and soothsayers, of rapacious shepherds, and ambitious leaders, the "he-goats" of verse 3. "Be as the he-goats before the flocks" was His admonition in the days of the Captivity (Jer. 50. 8) when He called upon Israel and Judah to assert themselves and take the lead among the nations; but more often the leaders were themselves apostate as in this case and merited condemnation. "Shepherds" was the term for rulers whether civil or ecclesiastical; the priests were shepherds and so were the kings. "The priest said not, Where is the Lord? and they that handle the law knew me not; the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that do not profit" (Jer. 2. 8). But now those dark days are past, and the Lord is King; this is the alluring prospect of chapter 10 even although its fulfilment is far away in the future. A dazzling resume of Messianic prophecy, taken from every part of the Old Testament, is the presentation in this gallery of vivid pictures. The time indicated is that at which the Lord of hosts has made the house of Judah His war-horse in the battle, that fixes it at the inauguration of the Messianic Age. From God comes the "corner" (*pinna*—chief man, or as we would say "the key man") which harks back to Psalms 118. 22 "The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner" and Isaiah 28. 16 "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a chosen corner stone, a sure foundation. He that believeth shall never be confounded". (The R.S.V. puts verse 4 in the future tense "out of him shall come" which is logical.) So too, is the "nail" in this same

4th verse, alluding to Isaiah 22. 23. the nail "in a sure place", the Messiah upon whom all things will depend. So, also, the battle-bow which symbolises the triumphal progress of Messiah against the forces of evil as in Psalm 45; "thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies". Logically then, the restored and purified people of the Lord shall indeed, as verse 5 declares "be as mighty men which tread down their enemies . . . because the Lord is with them".

With this stirring and somewhat martial picture of the victory which righteousness gains in the "Last Day" comes the Lord's promise to Israel regarding their future destiny and the downfall of their opponents. He will "strengthen the house of Judah" and "save the house of Joseph" and they will be restored to their land (vs. 6). Ephraim shall be regathered following the Divine call "I will hiss for them" (vs. 8) where "hiss" has the meaning of to call by means of playing a pipe or wind instrument. The mention of these three, Judah, Joseph, Ephraim, denotes that the centuries-old rift between the two halves of the nation has been healed; there is now only one people of Israel and that people is a united one rejoicing in the Lord. Verses 9 and 10 promise a return from all parts of the world. "I will sow them among the people and they shall remember me in far countries"; this is the Dispersion among all nations, but, "and they shall live with their children, and turn again". This is the final end-of-the-Age restoration. "I will bring them . . . out of Egypt . . . and out of Assyria, and I will bring them into . . . Gilead and Lebanon, and place shall not be found for them". Verse 11 defines the manner in which God will do this great thing. He will "pass through the sea with straitness" (the A.V. "affliction" in vs. 11 means straitness or tightness) and in this context pictures a deliverance analogous to the Red Sea crossing where God led the hosts while "the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left" (Exod. 14. 22). He shall "smite the waves in the sea, and all the deeps of the river shall dry up" continues vs. 11, a manifest allusion both to the Red Sea passage and the later crossing of Jordan into the Promised Land. "And the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the sceptre of Egypt shall pass away".

In such fashion will the powers of evil of this world give place when God rises up for that purpose, as surely and inexorably as that of Egypt failed in the days of Moses. So

the people of God will be given strength (vs. 12) *"and they shall walk up and down in His name"*, an affirmation of confidence that at that time, the time of the Messianic reign, peace and prosperity shall come, and the dark shadow of evil flee away.

Here the prophet stops for the time being. In chapters 9 and 10 he has conducted his readers through a rapid survey of history outlining the careers of two great personages, both of whom set out to achieve world domination, the one by fear and force, the other by love and persuasion. The first was the Greek, Alexander the Great, conqueror of the world three centuries before the First Advent, a man of whom it was said that after subduing all known countries he sat down

and wept because there were no worlds left for him to conquer. Three years later he died and the empire he had built fell to pieces. Verses 1-8 of chapter 9 tell of his progress and his conquests so far as they affected or concerned Israel. The second is Christ the Lord, Prince of Peace, who came, not with fanfare of trumpet and show of force as did Alexander, but in lowliness and love. Verses 9-12 picture His coming and His invitation to men to accept Him. Then the rest of chapter 9 and the whole of chapter 10 foresee the day yet to come when He takes to Himself His great power and reigns, King of the nations. And under that reign there will, at last, be peace.

To be continued

A NOTE ON ISA. 53. 3

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." (Isa. 53. 3.)

This is the most bitter prophecy of the Old Testament. From the very beginning, when amid the loveliness of Eden the first guilty pair stood and heard the sad tones of God passing sentence, there had always been the promise of a coming Redeemer. It is fairly evident from Eve's words at the birth of Seth that when Cain was born she had seen in that, to her, wonderful event the fulfilment, or beginning of fulfilment, of the Divine promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. That early hope was dashed when Cain became a murderer and was banished from the company of peace-loving men; but with the coming of Seth the hope revived, and from that time onwards the world was never without those who looked for the coming of the Deliverer. The ancient mythologies of Babylon, reaching back to the shadowy times before Abraham, pagan though they were, show unmistakable traces of the belief, persisting even though men's ideas of God had become woefully distorted. When Abraham made his bold venture of faith and left his native country for the land of promise, it was because he believed in the Coming One, and so

to him came the promise that in his own seed would the word be fulfilled and deliverance come. Throughout Israel's long history the flame of expectation never died down; always were they a people chosen by the Lord to hail and receive the Deliverer when He should appear, and under His leadership become a light to the nations, to declare His salvation to the ends of the earth. That was the hope that kept them separate from the nations around them, that held them, despite their many shortcomings and failures, a people for a purpose, fashioned and developed by virtue of many and varied national experiences for the part they would be called upon to play when Messiah should appear.

And to Isaiah fell the bitterness of proclaiming in advance that it was all to be of no avail, that when the supreme moment of Israel's existence had arrived, they would turn away from the Deliverer and fail at the very moment of achievement. He would be despised and rejected of men, and all the glorious things associated with His Advent vanish away like the morning mists. They would fail to recognise the time of their visitation, and the magnificent opportunity pass them by for ever—for even then the Divine sentence was in process of formulation "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof".

The blessedness of giving is not limited to cheques and bank-bills. There are gifts that far transcend these—gifts of patience, sympathy, thought and counsel, and these are gifts that the poorest can give.

Our human years are only a mortal stage of which death happens to be a part; but death is a door with two sides, and the other side of it belongs to immortality, which is more really ours than the present.

THE WILDERNESS TEMPTATION

*A story
of Jesus*

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

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

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

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

"And when the tempter came to him."

Here is one very definite instance where the personality of the Devil is clearly implied. It is fashionable nowadays to dismiss belief in the personal Devil, the implacable enemy

of God and man, as a worn-out idea, and to conclude that the principle of evil, in active operation, is all that is implied by the Scriptural references to Satan. But in this story of the temptations the whole idea conveyed is that of a personal being with whom our Lord held converse. This was certainly the general belief in our Lord's own day. The Book of Wisdom, which was written within fifty years of the time of Christ, is an accurate reflection of Jewish thought at the time of the First Advent and in Wisdom 2. 24 it is indicated that the devil (*diabolos*) is the one through whom death came into the world at the beginning, as related in the third chapter of Genesis. It is important also to remember that the story as we have it must have come from our Lord's own lips, for no human being was witness of His temptation. He was alone in the wilderness, and that which passed between Jesus the Son of God and Lucifer the rebellious archangel was overheard by no man. Therefore Jesus must have told these things to his disciples in later days; and there is an interesting fragment in the so-called "Gospel of the Ebionites" which asserts this much: "The Lord told us that for forty days the Devil spoke with Him and tempted Him".

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

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

This temptation of Jesus is the preface to His life and work, just as the temptation of the first Adam was the preface to the life and work of man. The first Adam failed under temptation; the second triumphed. There is a striking analogy between the first and second

temptations. The tree of Gen. 3. 6 was good for food; in Matt. 4 Jesus is invited to make the stones into bread. The tree was pleasant to the eyes; Jesus is urged to create a magnificent spectacle by casting Himself down from the Temple. The tree was "greatly to be desired to make one wise"; all the power, wealth, and honour of this world is offered to our Lord.

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

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

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

But it would have deprived man of needed

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

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

This "pinnacle of the temple" was probably the parapet of the portico of Herod, overlooking the valley of Jehoshaphat seven hundred feet below. It was not literally, but spiritually, that Jesus stood on that parapet and heard the insidious voice suggesting that by some such spectacular feat He could attract the notice of all men to His mission. Perhaps He remembered the tradition, current in His own day amongst the Jews, that the Messiah would appear suddenly from Heaven descending upon the crowd of worshippers in the Temple court, in much the same fashion that many Christians in our own day look for Him descending from the skies with an audible shout, failing to realise that the Lord is now a spiritual being, invisible to human sight and that His Advent must be appreciated by evidences other than those of the natural eyesight and hearing.

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

and establishing the mountain of the Lord's house in the top of the mountains.

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

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

Luke says that the Devil showed him all these kingdoms and their glory "in a moment of time". John Bunyan's scornful comment on that observation was "it did not take the devil

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

A NOTE ON ISA. 35. 8-10

"An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it . . . no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. 35. 8-10).

A century after Isaiah had been gathered to his fathers, there was a magnificent high road in the great city of Babylon, a road that may even have existed in Isaiah's own time although it attained its greatest splendour under the famous King Nebuchadnezzar in the days of Daniel. It is possible that Isaiah, who seems to have seen much of the future glories of Babylon in prophetic vision, did see something of Nebuchadnezzar's great "Processional Way", the "Aibur-shabu" as it was called, as Daniel saw it in reality over a hundred years later. If in fact he did so see it, one can imagine him contrasting that ornate pagan road with the pure holy way crowded with its throng of pilgrims progressing to Zion. Nebuchadnezzar's road, leading from his splendid palace to the mighty Temple of Bel, the god of Babylon, was level and straight, raised up above the streets of the city, a built up causeway just like Isaiah's Highway of Holiness. It was constructed of beautiful white limestone along its centre,

with coloured stones on either side, flanked by walls adorned with the carved figures of lions throughout its length, white lions with yellow manes and yellow lions with red manes, on a background of vivid colour. Could that be one reason why Isaiah said of his Highway "No lion shall be there"? On the great feast days colourful processions passed along that road of Nebuchadnezzar's, coming out from the palace which Daniel knew so well, through the Gate of the goddess Ishtar, a structure something like our Marble Arch, but much bigger and adorned with six hundred sculptured lions, bulls and dragons, then across the industrial quarter of the city where perhaps the sad Jewish captives looked on with feelings of revulsion and despair, past the great Tower, whose top seemed to reach unto heaven, one of the tallest of buildings ever erected by man, and so at last into the glittering Temple where Nebuchadnezzar had put the holy vessels from Jerusalem (Dan. 1. 2), where the eight huge bronze serpent-dragons guarded the entry. That was a highway symbolic of the pomp, the materialism and the sin of this world. Of all its pageantry and all its splendour not a vestige now remains—its very site is a ruined and weed-strewn waste, a habitation of jackals and owls. But Isaiah's Highway of Holiness is yet to come. Its glory is one that will endure for ever, and its travellers, pressing on with songs and gladness, will find that it leads them surely and safely home.

THE MISSION OF JONAH

Chapter 4. Unexpected Witnesses

*The prophet who
ran away*

It is not often that Greek and Roman classical writers are called in to add their testimony to the truth of the Scriptures, but there does seem to be justification for relating certain scattered allusions in Pliny, Strabo, Ovid and Herodotus to the story of Jonah, allusions which indicate that at a time remote in history the town of Joppa in Judea had cause to commemorate some event which was connected with a whale.

The chain of testimony commences with Pliny, a Roman historian and naturalist who lived at the same time as the Apostle Paul and perished in the eruption of Vesuvius which buried the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum in A.D.79. Pliny is the author of a voluminous work on natural history. In Book IX of this work he speaks of a well-known Roman statesman, Marcus Scaurus, who, during the year of his ædileship, staged a great natural history exhibition at Rome. Scaurus imported hippopotami, crocodiles, leopards and many other animals strange to the citizens. He also brought, from the town of Joppa in Judea, the skeleton of a monster which, from Pliny's description, is agreed by modern naturalists to have been that of a whale some forty feet long and between ten and fourteen feet high. This skeleton had been preserved for many centuries in a temple at Joppa, apparently in order to commemorate some noteworthy event. Pliny himself says that the skeleton was that of the monster which figured in the Greek legend of Andromeda and Perseus. According to the story, the hero Perseus, returning home to Greece from travelling to the farthest parts of the earth, and passing Joppa in Canaan, found a maiden named Andromeda chained to a rock on the seashore. She had been placed there to placate a terrible sea-monster which was ravaging the land. Perseus slew the monster and delivered Andromeda.

Pliny, like other educated Romans of his day, looked on these tales much as we do today—highly embellished poetic legends handed down for ages and having their origin in some barely recognisable basis of truth. The fact of the skeleton itself, however, is quite a different thing. It is known that Marcus Scaurus was Ædile of Rome in the year 58 B.C., and there can be no reason to doubt that Pliny's account of this exhibition, held

only a generation before his own time, is accurate. We are left, therefore, with this reasonably well established fact, that for an unknown length of time prior to the year 58 B.C., the skeleton of a forty-foot whale reposed in a temple at Joppa to memorialise some far-off forgotten event.

The story of Andromeda is given at length by the Latin writer Ovid, who was born in 43 B.C. Ovid's description of the monster is strongly suggestive of a whale, as witness the following extracts:

"But see, as a swift ship with its sharp beak ploughs the waves, driven by stout rowers' sweating arms, so does the monster come, rolling back the water from either side as his breast surges through. . . . Smarting under the deep wound, the creature now reared himself on high, now plunged beneath the waves, now turned like a fierce wild boar when around him a pack of noisy hounds give tongue . . . The beast belches forth waters mixed with purple blood" (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book IV. 670). The Greek geographer Strabo (A.D.20) also says that Joppa was the scene of this exploit, in his *Geography*, Book I, 34.

The legend goes back a long way, for Euripides, the Greek playwright, who lived at Athens, 480-406 B.C. (about the time of Nehemiah), wrote a play on the story; incidentally, in his play the monster is definitely called a whale. Sophocles, another Greek playwright, at about the same time, also introduced the story into his plays. Something noteworthy must have happened at Joppa to set these men romancing for the benefit of Greek audiences four hundred years after the time of Jonah.

Herodotus, the Greek historian, says that the Persians in the time of Artaxerxes included descendants of Andromeda and Perseus, so that, whilst he does not retail the story of the monster, it was evidently current in his day (440 B.C.) as having occurred at least several generations earlier—say, in the sixth century B.C. at latest. This is getting nearer to Jonah's day.

Herodotus also records the story of Arion and the dolphin. He is evidently a little dubious as to its truth, for instead of employing his usual definite style, he prefaces each statement with "they say", as though he is not personally prepared to vouch for its

accuracy. The story is set in the time of Periander, King of Corinth (sixth century B.C.). A renowned Greek musician, Arion, was returning from Italy and overheard the sailors of the vessel conspiring to throw him overboard in order to seize his possessions. Entreaties were in vain, and eventually, after taking his stand on the rowing benches and singing to his own accompaniment what was known as the *Orthian strain*, Arion leaped, fully dressed, into the sea. A dolphin received him on its back and carried him home to Corinth, where he arrived ahead of the ship, much to the astonishment and dismay of the sailors when they in their turn came into port. The narrative in full is to be found in *Herod*, Book I, 23. Strabo repeats it briefly in his *Geography*, Book XIII, 4.

Although Herodotus assigns this story to the sixth century B.C., there is evidence that it has an older basis. There is an engraving in a tomb at Praisos, in the island of Crete, dating from about 800 B.C., picturing a man being carried on the back of a giant fish. The story behind this tomb painting is quite unknown, but it is evidently in the same category as the later one of Arion and the dolphin. The Cretans in 800 B.C. were in close touch with the Phoenicians and the Israelites—the Philistines who figure so much in the Old Testament were Cretan colonists, engaged in the growing of wheat for export to their own land—and a great many of the Greek tales came from the earlier civilisation of Crete.

What then can be learned from this mass of fairy tale and folk lore? Is there anything of value in connection with our study of the Book of Jonah?

There seems to be a common thread running through all these legends, one which fits in with the historic fact recorded by Pliny. That thread, stripped of the fantasy and embellishment, may tell us this.

Jonah's experience with the whale, recorded in the book which bears his name, occurred at a time probably between 810 B.C. and 850 B.C. The fact that the whale vomited out Jonah upon dry land denotes unmistakably that the animal became stranded on a shelving beach, and Jonah was able to escape without even having to "swim for it"! What is more appropriate than that God should return Jonah to the very beach—the beach at Joppa—from which he had set out so determinedly a few days before? With what force would the futility of fighting against God be impressed upon the prophet's mind. And, from a different angle of view, would the

prophet not take this as an indication that God had blotted out all that had happened since the ill-fated ship set sail? Jonah was back again at his starting point, with an opportunity to make a fresh start.

Granted that this assumption is correct, it may be expected that the ship would have arrived at Joppa before Jonah. It is true that the Bible account does not say what became of the ship, but a little reflection will suggest that the mariners, having already cast overboard the wares which they were taking to Tarshish for purposes of trade (Jonah 1. 5), would have no reason for continuing their voyage and must perforce have returned to their home port. The storm had fallen, but their sails and masts were gone, and they were compelled therefore to rely upon the rowers. Under these conditions, they would make about five miles an hour, not much faster than the whale, but whereas they would steer straight for Joppa and make all haste to get their unseaworthy ship safe to land, the whale would swim more or less aimlessly and take perhaps three times as long to reach the shore. We can expect, therefore, the arrival of the disabled ship with its relieved crew, full of the tale they had to tell about the strange passenger, and how his God, wroth with him, had pursued their ship with a fearful storm and only relented when they had cast him into the sea. They probably told the story in subdued tones, with an anxious glance over their shoulders as they did so; this Jehovah, the God of the Hebrews, had shown Himself to be a most powerful God.

The story would go the rounds of the town for a day or so, and then be eclipsed by a new wonder. A whale, venturing too far inshore, was observed to be in difficulties. There are but few whales in the Mediterranean to-day, but they were common so recently as a hundred years ago and dwellers along the coast of Canaan would be moderately familiar with them. A crowd would quickly have gathered on the beach to watch this monster twisting and rolling in the waves and thrashing the water with his enormous tail, until perhaps a larger swell than usual, rolling in from the sea, lifted the forty-foot creature and swept it into shallow water with its great head driven almost on to the sandy beach.

By this time a goodly number would have been present, for the stranding of a whale is a lengthy process and it might have spent several hours wallowing in the shallows before it finally gave up the conflict. Some were drawn by curiosity, others with a view to

killing and cutting up the stranded body and making profit of this unexpected gift from the sea. There may or may not have been present some of the sailors from Jonah's ship, but if they were, neither they nor any others were in the slightest degree prepared for what must have happened next.

The great mouth slowly opened, and the contents of the whale's stomach were expelled on to the beach—and among them a shape that moved spasmodically, and then, perhaps, sat up and raised shaking hands to its head. At that the onlookers must have taken fright and scattered in all directions. They would soon recover their wits and approach, cautiously, to find Jonah more or less in his right mind and capable of discoursing with them intelligently.

Probably they worshipped Jonah. He must be more than a man, who travelled the seas inside a whale and emerged alive. Certainly they worshipped the whale. Joppa had been, for centuries, the port for the Philistines, the town from which their grain ships set out with their cargoes for Crete, six hundred miles away, and the god of the Philistines was Dagon, the sea-god, part man and part fish (see 1 Sam. 5. 1-7, esp. verse 4, margin). The sailors of Jonah's ship must by now have heard of the occurrence and hastened to the scene, and would quickly confirm that this was the man they had cast overboard." The conclusion was obvious. Dagon had taken a hand in the matter and sent his own special messenger to pick up Jonah and transport him safely back to Joppa. There was probably a religious revival of unprecedented dimensions in Joppa that night, with both Jehovah and Dagon the recipients of fervent protestations of devotion and allegiance.

There would, of course, be no further attempts to make money out of the dead monster. As a Divine messenger, he was sacred and his remains must be duly respected. Both Jehovah and Dagon had shown that they were not to be trifled with.

The stranded whale would, however, remain an obvious fact—increasingly so in the hot Canaanitish sun, and the fact that there is practically no rise and fall of tide in the Mediterranean necessitated approximately eighty tons of whale meat remaining on the beach at Joppa until something was done about it. Fortunately, a feature of the Middle East is the presence of vultures (the "eagles" of the New Testament) and they are proverbially keen of sight and of scent. It is possible that nearly all the vultures in Can-

aan visited Joppa for a short time whilst Jonah was there.

There remained the skeleton—picked clean, massive, but at least transportable. Since the vultures had not eaten that, it had to be assumed that Dagon required it to be preserved. The obvious thing was to house it in the local temple of Dagon as a permanent memorial of the most wonderful happening ever recorded in the history of Joppa. Bones are almost indestructible, and in any case the ancients were adepts at preserving such things, and the task would present little difficulty.

If something like this was in fact the sequel to the story of Jonah, it explains why, over seven hundred years later, Marcus Scaurus found the skeleton of a whale in a temple at Joppa and shipped it to Rome as a fitting subject for his great exhibition. In that lapse of time the true story associated with the relic would have been forgotten and overlaid with other explanations, or varied so much from its original form as to be totally unrecognisable. At the time, however, the story would spread rapidly. The very next ship to sail for Crete would carry it there and that might give rise to the inspiration for the tomb painting already referred to. In another century or so the Greeks were visiting the country in increasing numbers, and to every visitor who inspected the famous relic the story would be told and retold, with additions, and these stories, taken back to Greece, would be worked upon by the Greek poets and dramatists, giving rise to the legends we have quoted. It may be that the theme of Joppa and its wonderful monster has been immortalised by the Greeks on the level of legend just as that of Jonah and the whale has been preserved by the Hebrews on the infinitely higher plane of truth.

Legends do grow on a basis of truth in this fashion. That typically British story of St. George and the Dragon is considered by many authorities to have been derived from this same story of Andromeda and Perseus. The birthplace of St. George is supposed to have been Lydda, which is nine miles from Joppa, and it was at this place that he is said to have slain the dragon and rescued the doomed maiden. He is said to have then been a missionary for Christianity in Nicodemia and martyred by the Roman Emperor Diocletian. Upon this rather slender basis he was canonised a saint by Pope Gelasius in A.D.496. His birthday, April 23rd, was ordered by the Council of Oxford in A.D.1222 to

be observed as an annual national holiday in England and Wales. In A.D.1350 he was instituted patron saint of the Order of the Garter by Richard III of England. It is rather intriguing to think of the possibility that the most familiar figure in English pageantry, the votary of British chivalry, the guardian spirit of the Crusades, the symbol of British patriotism, may in reality owe its origin to a legendary memory of Jonah the

Israelite, the prophet of God.

And so Jonah, in chastened mood, must have retired to his native village of Gath-hepher to await the next instruction from God—an instruction which he would receive in very different spirit to that in which he heard, and rejected, his first commission to go unto Nineveh, and cry against it, because their sins had come up before God.

(To be continued)

"YOUR OWN SALVATION"

An exhortation

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Phil. 2. 12, 13.)

In examining this important subject of "working out" salvation, it is essential to realise that these words from the Apostle Paul were addressed to Christians. The terms "saints" and "Christians" are rightly used only for those who are fully consecrated followers of Christ. It is necessary to realise this, because in many quarters the title "Christian" is used to describe one who shows a good spirit and who seeks to do good works, irrespective of faith in Christ. This is too liberal an application of the word altogether, because the word "Christian" means "anointed one"—anointed by the Holy Spirit of God.

In Romans 4. 16-25 there is a wonderful presentation by the Apostle Paul, describing the faith of Abraham, *"who is the father of us all"*. Abraham's faith *"was imputed to him for righteousness"*, and Paul continues from verse 23—*"Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."* Abraham had his faith established in God's promises; if we have the same faith that Abraham had, we now have the privilege of exercising such faith in Christ as our Saviour, as we read in Romans 5. 1—*"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"*.

Our Lord illustrated the important matter of justification by the use of parables. One of these is found in Luke 19. 11-13. *"And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds (one to each), and said, Occupy till I come."* That is, trade with this till I come. All these ten servants received the same

amount, a pound, picturing justification by faith. Each one received the same gift, the same quality, the same value; there was no difference shown to any of the servants. That is a clear picture of justification by faith; none can have pre-eminence above another in the sight of God.

Another parable explaining this same matter of justification by faith is found in Matt. 22. 1-12. *"And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment; and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless."* The wedding garment here pictured the righteousness of Christ. It was a Jewish custom to provide white robes for all the guests at a wedding. All the guests would appear the same, a very good illustration of the righteousness of Christ covering His true followers so that they may appear acceptable to God. As noted in Rom. 5. 1, all who are justified by faith have peace with God. The one guest who had not on the wedding garment in the parable pictured those who, after accepting Christ by faith, go back into unbelief, taking off the wedding garment, thereby being exposed in their own unrighteousness. The wedding garment pictured the covering robe of Christ's righteousness; God looks at His faithful servants through Christ.

Seeing then that we are saved from Adamic condemnation through faith, and that this is the gift of God, what did the Apostle Paul mean in our text, that we should *"work out our own salvation"*? He undoubtedly refers to the second step which is essential for everyone who really desires to be a true Christian. The Apostle refers clearly and beautifully to this second step, the step of consecration to God, in Rom. 12. 1. *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God,*

which is your reasonable service." The words are addressed to those who are not yet "saints", but believers, justified by faith in Christ; no longer sinners and aliens, but members of the household of faith, in fellowship with God but not yet consecrated to walk in the footsteps of Christ. The bodies of these justified brethren are "holy, acceptable to God", which means that they were ransomed, justified and therefore acceptable. They could not appear in the sight of God in their own righteousness, but now they are holy, acceptable to God, in Christ's righteousness, accepted into God's family of sons, looking to the Head, even Jesus, the Captain of their salvation. This secondary step and wonderful relationship with God is shown in Rom. 5. 2—"By whom (Christ) also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God".

Eph. 1. 13, 14 helps us here. Speaking of our Lord, the Apostle says, "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the holy spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." After we consecrated our lives on the basis of justification by faith, we were sealed with that Holy Spirit of God, sealed as one of God's own. God has put His seal upon such; they are "New Creatures in Christ". These sealed ones have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life. What a privilege to be in this sealed condition in the family of God, that we may by His grace seek to work out with Him this wonderful new life that the Lord has given us by His spirit!

A similar exhortation to grasp the privilege of the invitation to walk in the steps of Christ by full consecration is found in 2 Cor. 6. 1, 2. "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain . . . behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." How often is this Scripture presented with the thought that now is the only accepted time, now is the only day of salvation. The Apostle is not saying anything of that kind at all. He is saying that you who have now received that favour of God, or justification by faith, can see the privilege now of entering into this salvation for the Heavenly Calling. He does not say it is the only opportunity, but this is a special day,

the accepted time wherein God is inviting members to walk in the footsteps of Christ, that they may be with Him in His heavenly kingdom, to supervise a further day of salvation for mankind in the Kingdom Age. The exhortation of the Apostle is to appreciate that privilege of justification by faith by going on to consecration, to be a member of this acceptable class now being called out. This is the only day of salvation for the heavenly inheritance; therefore, "see that ye receive not the grace of God in vain".

For all who do accept the Lord's invitation to present themselves living sacrifices through Christ, the Christian warfare begins, and this means fighting the good fight of faith, as Paul tells us in 1 Tim. 6. 12—"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses". Here we see the Christian's effort required. It is not just a relaxing condition in the love of God; we have to "lay hold" on eternal life. This again emphasises the working out of our salvation. Our hearts and minds must be devoted to this energetically and fully; to lay hold on anything means to give it our whole attention, to be very earnest about it, for this is eternal life of the highest quality, the heavenly eternal life, "whereunto thou art also called".

Rom. 12. 2 reads—"And 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." Here is something very definite for a Christian. After presentation as a living sacrifice, "be not conformed to this world". Be not influenced by the world's arrangements of any and every kind. Set an example to the world. Do not go with the stream. Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. We need our minds renewed day by day in the good truths of God's Word. We need to read and meditate upon these things daily; we need continually a re-intake of the truths that have given us such a start in the Christian life. We need to replenish day by day, that we may prove, experience, find out for ourselves; this is a personal matter. God is working in us to will and do His good pleasure, so long as we are co-operating and allowing the infilling of His Spirit to accomplish just what He desires. It is very understandable that God will work in us only if we commit our hearts to Him for this purpose, and this committing of our lives to the

Lord brings about the desired result in working out our own salvation.

The matter is revealed again in Eph. 2. 10—*"For we are his (God's) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them"*. We are God's workmanship, provided we walk in good works, to develop the Christian life. The clay has to be pliable in the hands of the Potter; it has to be moulded according to the Lord's requirements. Sometimes we have not taken in enough of His indwelling power, but allowed too much of the present world to influence us, not allowed God's spirit to eradicate the things that would offend God. In working out our salvation we have to eradicate those cross-grain things, the sour things, that we may be sweeter. The oil of gladness has a lubricating influence; Paul said that our Lord was *"anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows"*. He had a full indwelling of God's Spirit. We need the indwelling of the oil of gladness to take away the harshness that our natural disposition possesses. That will allow God to work in us to will and do His good pleasure.

It is helpful to note from the Scriptures how progress in the Christian way is stated sometimes to be wholly of the Lord, and in other places to be wholly of the Christians themselves. Rev. 19. 7 says *"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready"*. This verse is undoubtedly referring to the full co-operation of the members of the Bride of Christ with their Lord, allowing His Spirit to work mightily in them, and proving themselves overcomers, by His grace and strength. *"His wife hath made herself ready."* She has been so joyfully committed to the Lord; God has so dwelt in her by the Holy Spirit, and the co-operation has been so complete that it appears as though the Bride has made herself ready.

The greatest help in development of the Christian life, in addition to co-operation with the spirit of Christ, is meditation and study of His Word. Paul's advice to Timothy along this line is good instruction to us also. 2 Tim. 3. 14, 15 reads—*"Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith*

which is in Christ Jesus". What a privilege it is for children to be brought up in the knowledge and nurture of the Lord, to love the Lord and His Word. The importance of handing down good impulses for the Christian life cannot be over-estimated. God takes hold of these trainings and uses them where young hearts are responsive.

Writing to the Romans (13. 11, 12), the Apostle Paul reminds them of the approaching end of their salvation. He says, *"Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed"*. If any of us have been in a measure sleeping, intoxicated to any extent by the things of the world, it is surely high time to awake out of sleep. *"The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light."* In the parable of the sower, the cares of this life interfere with the growth and production of the fruitage. Let us be awake, alert and zealous for the Lord and His truths. As stewards it is required that we be found faithful. Our salvation is nearer than when we believed. These exhortations are good for us, to stir up our minds by way of remembrance, to cause us to remember that we are a separated people. God wants us to be ever alert in our service for Him and His cause.

How important it is to preserve our first love, as indicated in our Lord's message to the Ephesians in Rev. 2. 2-4. How sad was the reproof—*"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love"*. In the church at Ephesus there was everything manifest but their first love. What an exhortation to us! It was that first love that brought us to the Lord. We were so thrilled in knowing the Lord and devouring His truth—the wonderful plan of the ages. How is it with us today? Is it still the joy and rejoicing of our hearts? We must preserve our first love for the Lord; He is the altogether lovely One, and He will help us to keep ourselves in His love and cares as we commit our lives fully to Him. *"It is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."* May we allow Him to do that each day and each hour as we press on in the narrow way that leads to eternal life!

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

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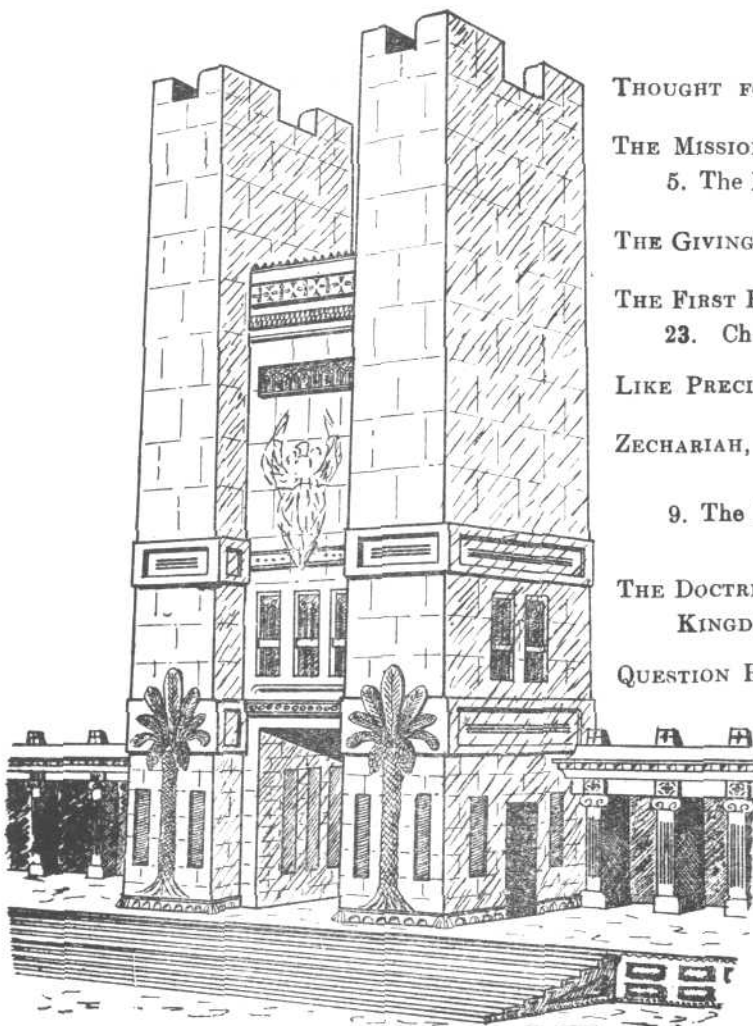
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." (Luke 19. 44).

Those who despised and rejected Jesus at the First Advent, and were in consequence themselves rejected, were not so judged because of lack of knowledge, or unsoundness of theological outlook. On matters of the Law, and of doctrine, and of righteousness before God, the scribes and Pharisees had much in common with Jesus. He certainly condemned them for their narrowness and rigidity in the interpretation of the Mosaic Law but He did not dispute the soundness of the theological ground upon which they stood. It was not their orthodoxy or their beliefs which cost them the Kingdom; it was their failure to appreciate and manifest and practise the mind of God—which in our day we would call the spirit of Christ—that led to their rejection and thrusting out from the Kingdom. *"Go ye, and learn what that means, 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice'."* That was the stumbling-stone. They despised and rejected Jesus because He manifested a spirit of love and tolerance and mercy, and with all their doctrinal orthodoxy they could find no room for those virtues. So they

rejected Him, arrogantly, scornfully, and at the end, maliciously; and so He in turn rejected them, sadly, regretfully, but firmly.

So it will be with us. Like Paul, the most intellectually minded of all the apostles, we may understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, but without faith it profits us nothing. If we refuse to have our lives guided by love, tolerance, and mercy, and insist instead upon the empty shibboleths of intellectual understanding and a mechanical memorising of Scriptural doctrines, we shall without any doubt at all end up where the Pharisees did—outside the Kingdom. Our Lord will be just as sad and regretful as He was in the case of the Pharisees, but He will be just as firm. The Millennial work of the future needs many qualifications, some of them of a nature that cannot be learned out of a book. Unless we have well learned, and practised in our own lives, that spirit which pervaded the life of Christ we shall not be fitted for the Church's future work, and it will become true of us as it was of them *"the Kingdom of God is taken from you"*. We also shall have become of those who *"despised and rejected"* Him.

THE MISSION OF JONAH

Chapter 5. The Repentance of Nineveh

The prophet who
ran away

"Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh" (Jonah 3, 1-2).

There was no hesitation this time. The lesson had been well learned. Jonah packed the simple necessities required for his journey, bade farewell to his village home in Gath-hepher, and set out.

How did he travel? It was a long journey he had to take—about nine hundred miles. Wherever possible he would join a caravan of merchants and travel with them for company and protection. The great trade route which from time immemorial had run from Egypt to Asia passed within a few miles of Gath-hepher, and Jonah would be in no difficulty about the start of his journey. A day came that he could have been seen striding down the hill from Gath-hepher to the road in the valley. Had he raised his eyes and looked to his right he would have seen the houses of Nazareth nestling on the hillside only three miles away—but another eight hundred years were to run their course before the One whose Resurrection Jonah prefigured was to grow up to manhood in one of those houses. Jonah tramped steadily on, and before long was at the foot of the hill waiting for a caravan to pass by.

He would not have to wait long. Trade by land was prosecuted as diligently as trade by sea, and perhaps even as he made his way down the hill his eyes had espied a cloud of dust in the distance, far away to his right. It was to that direction he had turned when he went to Joppa, along the road in the direction of Egypt, and he had proved by experience what his fellow prophet Isaiah was to declare a century or more later—that woe is to those who go down to Egypt for help (Isa. 31, 1). Now he was going in the opposite direction, to the north instead of to the south—and God dwells in the "sides of the north"! Some such thought may have flashed across his mind as he sat there by the roadside waiting for the caravan that was coming up out of Egypt.

There would be no fare to pay this time. He could attach himself quite freely to the mixed multitude of men and animals—asses, perhaps even a few horses although

they were rarities in that day—and lumbering waggons, all loaded with merchandise of every description. Intermingled with the throng, and in strong contrast to the mild Egyptian and Babylonian merchants, were the fierce, well-armed Arabs whose work it was to defend the caravan against attack, for marauding bands were frequent. There would probably be men of half a dozen different nations in that motley assembly.

Down to the shores of the Sea of Galilee the caravan wended its way, and on to Damascus, where there would be a halt, and much unloading and loading of goods. Some of the merchants, having arrived at their destination, would be going no farther, but others would be waiting to join, and so before long the procession would be streaming out over the road that led northward, and Jonah finding himself climbing the mountains of Lebanon.

Did he reflect, as he did so, that he was following in the steps of his forefather Jacob, who went this same way in search of a wife? Did he think of Eliezer, the faithful steward of Abraham, who also came this way to bring back the bride of Isaac? Jonah's heart must have beat quickly as he remembered the soul-stirring events of which these mountains had been witnesses—the ladder stretched up to heaven, seen in vision by Jacob; that mysterious stranger with whom the same patriarch wrestled, and, prevailing, earned for himself the title of Prince of God, Israel (Gen. 32, 24-32).

So to Carchemish, on the River Euphrates, were yet several hundred miles to cover. Necho of Egypt was to meet his doom at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, finally sealing the fate of Judah (Jer. 46, 2). A halt here, for at this point the route from Egypt and Canaan joined the greater road which ran to Europe in the west and to Asia—eventually to the borders of China—in the east. If Jonah had commenced his journey without any beast upon which to ride, it is likely that he had acquired one by now, for it was about three weeks since he had left Gath-hepher and there were yet several hundred miles to cover.

A few evenings later the caravan would be winding down the mountains towards a city which in the glinting rays of the setting sun lay a resplendent fairyland of rare beauty.

Built in the shape of a vast crescent moon, lying along the hillside, its white walls and gleaming palaces set off to perfection the stately temple in its midst. Jonah's pulse beat quicker as for the first time his eyes fell upon Haran, the city of the moon-god. Here it was that Abraham came with Terah, his father, in the dim long ago when the promise of God was fresh and new. From here did Abraham remove himself when his father was dead (Acts 7. 4), away from all the pomp and glitter of its cultured idolatry, to the land which God had promised should be his and his seed for ever. *"In thee and in thy seed shall all families of the earth be blessed"*; so had run the promise; and Jonah, given the opportunity to extend that blessing to the Ninevites, had turned away so that God's blessing should not come to them. Perhaps the sight of that proud city, its very outline testifying to its consecration to the moon-god, strengthened Jonah's determination to proclaim faithfully all that his God gave him to speak, be the consequences what they may.

But the glories of Haran were left behind, all the palaces and markets and gardens and fountains, the elaborate ceremonies and ritual, and the caravan was in the plain. The crescent-shaped city lay hidden again in the mountains, and now the road led across long stretches of gently rolling pasture land with barely an inhabitant, frowning mountains on the left and a seemingly endless desert on the right—and at its end, the River Tigris and Nineveh.

To-day that same plain is studded, every six or seven miles, in every direction, with rounded hillocks, *tels*, as the peasantry call them. They are the remains of villages, villages built a hundred years after Jonah passed that way, villages in which dwelt, with weeping and sorrow, Jonah's own people—for this plain is part of the land to which the Ten Tribes were transported and left to mourn bitterly for the desolations that had come upon Israel.

Jonah was a prophet. The Holy Spirit was upon him and he had seen in foresight the triumphs of Israel in times yet to come, the days of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14. 25). Did that same prophetic vision show him, as he wended his way through this wilderness, those villages which were yet to be, filled with old men and children far from their own land, young men and maidens bending under the burdens of the proud Assyrian conqueror? Did the caravan in which he travelled

change its form before his very eyes and become a great multitude going out with weeping, driven on by a fierce soldiery, wending their weary way farther and ever farther from the land of their birth? It might well be that Jonah's prophetic gift did indeed show him the calamity which was to happen not much more than a century later; but even if it did, the story tells us that he went resolutely forward, knowing nothing but that he must proclaim the message of his God, whatever the result might be. Though the Assyrians repent, and later apostasise and take Israel captive—yet he must be faithful.

The journey was nearing its end. For perhaps ten weeks he had been plodding steadily forward, with opportunity during all that time to relent and turn back. But he did not turn back. Down to the brink of the Tigris, across the ford where the water foamed and sluiced over the rocks, then along the winding course of the river, descending the broad plain of Aram-Naharaim, the land of the two rivers, until, one day, there came a shout from an Arab at the head of the caravan, a brown arm pointed, and away there in the dim distance Jonah descried the battlements and towers of a vast city.

He had reached Nineveh!

"Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey" (verse 3).

Prior to the rise of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, Nineveh was the greatest city of the ancient world. It was in ruins before Nebuchadnezzar began to build, and that king made Babylon the greatest city of all time; but when Jonah first cast his eyes upon the place where his message was to be given it was a city calculated to impress the beholder. It had not, at that time, risen to the peak of its magnificence; it was Sennacherib who did for Nineveh what Nebuchadnezzar was later to do for Babylon; nevertheless, what Jonah did see was impressive enough.

This "great city of three days' journey" was actually a group of cities loosely linked together by outlying suburbs, parks and gardens, in the triangular area formed by the junction of two rivers, the Tigris and the Great Zab. This triangular space measured about twenty miles each way, and the expression "three days' journey" probably refers to the time required to travel around it. There is a link between this passage and the Book of Genesis, for these same cities are mentioned in connection with the story of Nimrod, who *"went out into Assyria, and builded Nineveh, and the broad places of the*

city, and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; the same is a great city" (Gen. 10. 11-12). Thus the whole area is defined as a "great city" by the Genesis historian. The palaces of the kings, and the chief temples, were in the well-fortified and defended portion known as Ninua, the city of the fish-god. Twenty miles downstream lay Calah, the mercantile part of the city, with its quays and docks at the head of a long lake created by a dam across the river many miles lower down. In between lay the houses and gardens of the people.

Ninua is best known to-day in consequence of modern excavation, but it is probable that Jonah passed right through this part of the city and preached his message among the common people. That seems to be the setting of the account. Nevertheless, he would doubtless have gazed with intense interest upon the wonders of Ninua, so different from anything he had ever seen or imagined before. Damascus would have impressed him as a city of merchants, Haran by its artistic beauty and high culture, but Nineveh in its massive architecture. Great brick fortifications, tremendous palaces faced with coloured tiles and marbles, massive temples, gigantic statues of winged lions and other strange beasts at every turn; the predominant impression produced upon his mind must have been that of overpowering brute force, and that was truly characteristic of Assyria.

The caravan probably entered by the Gate of the Moon-god at the north-western corner of the city, that being the point at which the road from Haran ended. Here Jonah would take his leave of his travelling companions. They had twenty miles yet to go, to the trading quarter. He had already arrived; as he wandered along the magnificent highway leading straight to the eminence upon which stood the king's palace he may well have wondered whether any of these busy hurrying city folk would stop and listen to his message. There might have been a natural hesitancy in making a start. Perhaps he lingered on the bridge which carried the road over the canal that surrounded the palace area, and looked down into the placid water. To-day that canal is merely a ditch, quite dry for most of the year, but in Jonah's time they called it the Tebiltu Canal and planted trees and flowers and lawns on its banks. But the water only showed him his own reflection, staring back at him, and presently he must have gained the farther side of the palace area, crossed the centre of the city and found

himself before another elevated area, with more palaces and temples. We know nothing of these to-day, for this part is the hill known as Nebi Yunus (Prophet Jonah) and is crowned by an Arab village, in the centre of which is a mosque, and below that mosque, say the Mohammedans, the Prophet Jonah himself lies buried. Hence no excavations can be undertaken, for the whole hill is sacred. A staircase leads from the interior of the mosque to the tomb, but no Christian is allowed to descend. As partial compensation, the visitor is permitted to examine the large piece of swordfish suspended on the wall of the mosque, and asserted to be part of the whale that swallowed Jonah. The people of the village are ready also to point across from their own hill to the other palace hill a mile away, where, they say, the body of the whale is buried—and that hill is a mile long and one hundred feet high. It is only right to add that although many wonders of Assyrian art, the remains of palaces and temples, and a library of twenty-four thousand written tablets dealing with almost every conceivable subject have been brought to light in that other hill during the last hundred and fifty years, the whale's bones have not been discovered!

So Jonah, having entered one day's journey into the city (verse 4) and perhaps passed out of the Ashur Gate into the residential suburbs leading to Calah and Ashur, found his voice and began to cry his message: "*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown*". It is a very bare announcement as recorded in the story; there can be little doubt that we are given only the outstanding expression of his preaching and that in fact he had much more to say. No prophet of God can preach without including in his preaching a call to repentance, and Jonah must have exhorted the people of Nineveh to turn from their evil ways, even although he may not have felt himself commissioned to promise that God would avert the judgment now overshadowing the city. There is an interesting passage in one of the early books circulating among the early Christians, the so-called First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians. This Clement was the third Bishop of Rome, and there seems to be no doubt that he actually did write this treatise. This is what he says: "*Jonah denounced destruction against the Ninevites; howbeit they, repenting of their sins, appeased God by their prayers and were saved, though they were strangers to the covenant of God*". Now, this seems to be

just what did happen. Jonah preached God and His righteousness, denounced in no unmeasured terms the blood-guiltiness of the people of Nineveh, called upon them to repent, and announced the imminent destruction of their city on account of their past crimes.

And the Ninevites believed. That is the most amazing thing in the whole of this amazing story. That a people who for generations had been brought up to glory in brute force, in pillage and murder and every kind of inhuman atrocity, should repent of all their deeds at the preaching of one obscure man, is a most remarkable outcome. *"The people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on a sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them"* (verse 5). Neither was the reformation confined to the lower orders, for *"word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes"* (verse 6).

Jonah seems to have been a most successful prophet. He promised Israel that their lost territories would be restored, and his promise came true. He so impressed the pagan sailors that they wrought with all their power to save him from death and acknowledged the supremacy of his God. Now he had, single-handed, converted the people of the most ruthless nation of the ancient world and made them as little children—the only recorded occasion in the whole two thousand years of Assyrian history when the slightest touch of softer feelings showed itself in that fierce, warlike national temperament. The conversion of Israel by Elijah on Mount Carmel is looked to as a great thing—surely this conversion of the Ninevites by Jonah is equally great!

What influences brought about this conversion? Was it purely the prophet's eloquence, his sincerity, his impassioned appeal? Were there some feelings of guilt in the hearts of the Assyrians, some realisation that retribution for their crimes against humanity must surely come one day? Or was there something else?

Perhaps there was. Perhaps the fearful experience through which Jonah had passed in consequence of his attempted flight to Tarshish was having its repercussion here at Nineveh, a thousand miles away. For the Assyrians also worshipped the fish-god, Dagon. In the Nineveh palaces frequent representations of Dagon have been found, and

in the very oldest mythologies of these lands he was known as Oannes, a mysterious Divine creature, half man, half fish, who came up out of the waters of the sea in the very dawn of history to teach mankind the elements of agriculture and of civilisation. It is not difficult to see in that ancient legend a dim and distorted recollection of Noah, the man who came up out of the Flood to set the world going once more. The people of Nineveh, therefore, would probably be as superstitious in regard to matters connected with the sea-deity as were the people of Joppa.

We do not know what space of time separated Jonah's second call from his first, but it was probably a matter of months. News travels fast in the East, and the caravans which constantly plied between Egypt and Assyria passed Joppa on the way. Merchandise brought from overseas to Joppa joined these caravans and found its way to Nineveh. It is quite possible—even probable—that the story of the Israelite prophet who ran away from his mission and was brought back from the sea by a giant fish had found its way to Nineveh before Jonah's arrival. It would be told in the markets by the visiting merchants and be passed from mouth to mouth through the city. The great sea-god who had thus sent his messenger to return the prophet to his duty was worshipped at Nineveh. Jonah's story would be sure to have been elicited by his travelling companions during that ten week's trek to Nineveh, for at night when the travellers had pitched camp and were sitting around their fires there would be nothing to do but tell stories to each other and discuss each other's past lives and future aspirations. In such a case, it would be natural for the travellers, upon arrival at Nineveh, to announce that they had with them the hero of the story, and since it is quite possible that Jonah's physical appearance was permanently altered by his sojourn in the whale's interior, he would speedily become an object of wonder and veneration.

There may therefore have been a mixture of motives in this conversion. The king, his advisers and his priests, perhaps, had a consultation and decided that their own god was evidently on excellent terms with the strange God preached by the prophet, to have gone to the trouble he did in restoring him. It might even be that Jonah's God was superior in power to their own and had called upon Dagon to perform this service. In any case, it would seem that the preacher must

be taken seriously. Hence the king issued a State decree to stamp with the seal of officialdom the repentance which had already spontaneously burst forth from the people.

The word rendered "decree" in verse 7 is a technical word for State edicts issued by Assyrian and Babylonian kings, and is used in fact by Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus and Darius, as recorded in the books of Daniel and Ezra. It is an interesting evidence that the writer of the Book of Jonah was at least in Nineveh at the time of the happening. Verse 7 preserves the official announcement, in its stereotyped wording, and if set out properly should read like this:

"And he caused it to be proclaimed, and published through Nineveh:—

*"BY THE DECREE OF THE KING
AND HIS NOBLES*

"Be it proclaimed:

"Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing; let them not feed nor drink water. Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth and cry mightily unto God;

"Yea,

"Let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn, and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"

The decree was published throughout the city, and most certainly a copy was placed in

the State archives. It may be amongst those twenty-four thousand tablets which were recovered from the palace library and distributed to the world's museums, for many of them have not yet been deciphered or translated. The crowning vindication of the story of Jonah may yet come from the labours of some cuneiform translator, patiently transcribing the records from those little fragments of baked clay—and what would the critics say then?

So God repented of the evil that He said He would do unto them, and He did it not. That is so characteristic of God. He has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but would much rather that he turns from his evil ways and lives. Like the father in the story of the Prodigal Son, He is always waiting to go out and meet the repentant one and draw him back into the light and warmth of home. So in the final outworking of the story of this world, men will find that God has been planning all the time to lead them to repentance, and no matter into what depths of degradation their past lives have been steeped, if they will listen to the "greater than Jonah", they will inherit a salvation greater by far than that which came to the Ninevites three thousand years ago. *"When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive"* (Ezek. 16. 27).

(To be concluded)

"I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes; I will not forget thy word."
(Psa. 119. 15-16.)

Here is the secret of a pure and noble life, acceptable to God. It is to be attained, not merely by prayers and righteous resolutions, but in addition to these by careful painstaking heed, by systematic and diligent effort in self-cultivation of pure, benevolent and noble thoughts, and by nipping in the bud the weeds of perversity before they bring forth their hasty harvest of sinful words and deeds. If we make the Word of God the theme of our constant meditation, its principles will soon be assimilated and become part of our mental make-up, making our characters more beautiful and commendable both to God and to our fellowmen, and in harmony with this habit of the mind the acts of life will speak.

"If my word abide in you." For God's Word to abide in us implies that we have a knowledge of God's Word. This necessitates the studying of the Word of God, that we may know what to pray for. We should not hasten to offer our petitions and make a great mistake, and then say, "I have made a mistake, and have asked for the wrong things." We should consider what the Word of God teaches on this subject, and if anyone has become well acquainted with the Word of God, he should know whether or not he has met the conditions which will sanctify his prayer. It is only after he has come to this position that he may continue to make his request nothing doubting. But very likely he will find that he has not a very large list of petitions that he can present.

THE GIVING OF THE MANNA

*A story of a very
wonderful happening*

The giving of manna to serve the children of Israel for food was an outstanding feature of the Exodus. The imagination of generation upon generation, first of Hebrews and then of Christians, has been stirred by this inexplorable provision of food for a multitude in the otherwise barren wilderness. It is true that modern discovery has established that Sinai in the days of the Exodus was by no means so barren and desolate as the popular expositors conceived it, or as it is now; but even so the marvellous story has lost none of its appeal, and the wonder of it has passed into the language of every day so that "manna from heaven" has become an expression denoting any unexpected and beneficial gift. It was no less so in Old Testament days, for the Psalmist (78. 24-25) sings exultantly "He . . . rained down manna for them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels' food, he sent them meat to the full". The language is poetic; the Psalmist did not mean to convey that this white substance "like hoar frost upon the ground" is literally eaten in heaven by the glorious angels who in their perfection of spiritual life do always behold the face of the Father. Rather does the Psalmist, in a flight of poetic fervour, attribute the provision and the qualities of the manna to the direct intervention of Heaven at a time of sore necessity, and quite naturally speaks of God as sending down food from His own table to meet the need of His people on earth.

Let the narrative be examined in the light of all that the twentieth century can tell us regarding the district in which this thing happened and the circumstances under which it took place. The wonder of the story will be by no means lessened and our reverence for the Divine power which brought this about just at the time when it was needed will be immeasurably increased.

"And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost upon the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another 'It is manna' for they wist not what it was . . . And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating; and when the sun waxed hot, it melted . . . And it was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it

was like wafers made with honey." (Exod. 16. 14-35.)

It was at Elim, just after the passage of the Red Sea, that the manna first appeared (Exod. 16. 1) and at Gilgal, following the crossing of Jordan, forty years later, that it ceased (Josh. 5. 12). During the whole of the intervening period, throughout the length and breadth of Sinai, wherever the people wandered, there was the manna, ready for gathering, fresh every morning, *except on the Sabbath*. When they dwelt in Egypt, manna was unknown; after they settled in Canaan it was seen no more; the phenomenon was confined entirely to the Sinai peninsula and the green hills of Edom and Moab, but so integral a part of the whole account is this story of the manna that unless we accept the fact that this thing really did happen we must reject the historical trustworthiness of the entire Exodus narrative.

The story never died. Long after the strings of the Psalmist's harp were stilled Nehemiah encouraged his brethren by telling them of the "bread from heaven" (Neh. 9. 15). Jesus, in His teaching, reminded His hearers that their fathers did eat manna in the wilderness. (John 6. 49). The Psalmist's "angels' food" was not able to arrest the processes of death at work in the bodies of the Israelites, and their daily gathering sufficed only to sustain life for another day. Jesus turned their minds to Himself, "the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6. 51) and talked to them about those things without which no man can enter into life. So, in words intended for His disciples of this Age, the consecrated members of the Church of Christ on earth, the resurrected Lord promises (Rev. 2. 17) to give to "him that overcometh to eat of the hidden manna"—that spiritual quality, immortality, the Divine nature—of which the earthly manna of the Exodus was but a symbol.

The same truth is taught in the fact that a vessel of the literal manna, miraculously preserved, was laid up and preserved in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle throughout Israel's national existence (Exod. 16. 30-34; Heb. 9. 4). There, where the supernatural Shekinah glory blazed out over the mercy-seat, where the presence of God in His Heaven was symbolised, stood the sacred vessel, century after

century, its contents the incorruptible symbol of that "life-in-itself" which is to be the inheritance of those who are "faithful unto death" (Rev. 2. 10).

Now what is there known about this manna? Can it be identified to-day? Did Sinai's hills and valleys no more receive the "bread from heaven" after Israel's hosts had travelled that way and departed? Or was it that God did take hold of something in Nature to meet the needs of the occasion?

Through the centuries it has been commonly reported that the manna of the Exodus is still to be seen in Sinai. The Jewish historian Josephus, writing in the first century, said that it never disappeared but was even then to be found in the places where Israel gathered it. In the fifteenth century, a traveller, Breidenbach, declared that manna was common in the valleys surrounding Mount Sinai, hanging in drops on twigs and grass and stones, sweet as honey, and sticky. Since then various travellers have reported finding this substance and have hazarded various theories as to its origin. It is established that the Sinai Arabs have known and collected it for centuries, and in the sixteenth century it could be found on sale in Cairo. In the eighteenth century it was observed that the substance is connected with, and found upon the tamarisk tree, and Burckhardt, the eighteenth century traveller, describes it thus:—

"In the month of June it drops from the thorns of the tamarisk upon the fallen twigs, leaves and stones which always cover the ground beneath that tree in its natural state. The manna is collected before sunrise, when it is coagulated, but it dissolves as soon as the sun shines upon it. The Arabs clear away the leaves and dirt which adhere to it, boil it, strain it through a coarse piece of cloth, and put it into leathern skins. In this way they preserve it until the following year, and use it as they do honey, to pour over their unleavened bread, or to dip their bread into. I could not learn that they ever make it into cakes and loaves. The manna is found only in years when copious rains have fallen, sometimes it is not produced at all."

The Arabic name for this substance is "*manu*" and this has been its name so far back as it can be traced. The writer of Exodus says that the children of Israel called it "manna" "*for they wist not what it was*". The Hebrew word is *man hu*—"What is this?"

Appropriately enough, however, it is the glory of the Hebrew University at Jerusalem

finally to have cleared up the question of manna. Dr. Bodenheimer, of that University, has investigated the problem upon the spot and published a book on the subject, illustrated by photographs. The manna, it is definitely established, is produced by two insects which feed upon the tamarisk tree. They bear the somewhat terrifying names of *Trabutina mannipara* and *majococcus serpentinus minor*. Just as bees visit flowers to produce honey, so do these insects live on the tree and from its sweet juices manufacture manna. Dr. Bodenheimer has photographed them in actual process of producing manna in beads varying in size from pinheads to peas ("like coriander seed, white"). At first the beads are transparent as glass and later they crystallise, becoming milk-white to yellow-brown. They are found all over the leaves and twigs on the ground, and are soon carried off by ants. The modern counterpart of Moses' golden vessel of manna is now in the University, where glass vials of the "bread from heaven" are preserved.

But in thus identifying the manna we have not disposed of Divine intervention and reduced this wonderful story to the mere level of a commonplace happening which might be repeated any day. The scanty amount of manna which Sinai produces at the present time would not feed a hundredth part of Israel's multitudes. We need the fruits of research in other directions fully to illuminate this wonderful story.

The first chapter of Numbers gives the number of men of twenty years and upwards, able to go to war, as being 603,550. The twenty-sixth chapter gives the number at the entering into the land, forty years later, as 601, 730. These figures are confirmed by the numbers accredited to each tribe and it makes nonsense of the record to assert, as do some modern scholars, that the word translated "thousands" properly means "families" and that actually there were merely six hundred families that went out of Egypt. According to a leading present-day economist, Colin Clark, in "*The Economics of 1960*" (1942), the proportion of males between the ages of 20 and 60 to the whole population can be taken as averaging 1 to 4. On this basis, and allowing for the tribe of Levi, there would be about two and a half millions of men, women and children in that long trek through the wilderness. One might say, hastily, that all of Sinai would not produce manna enough for such a multitude.

The Scripture itself gives us the data nec-

essary for a calculation. The ration for each person was to be one omer per day (Exod. 16. 16-18). An omer is roughly equivalent to three pints, as far as Hebrew measures are at present understood. A little less than a million gallons or 150,000 cubic feet of manna therefore, would be required daily to satisfy the terms of the Bible account. It has been shown that the manna, or rather the insects producing it, depend upon rainy years and the presence of the tamarisk tree. It is known that in former times Sinai was thickly forested with tamarisk and acacia (the latter is the "shittim wood" of which the Tabernacle was constructed). Much of this forest lingered until the nineteenth century, but during that century there was a great burning of the trees by the Arabs for the sake of producing charcoal, which was carried into Egypt, a great trade in this being conducted resulting in Sinai becoming almost completely deforested and transformed into the sterile barren waste that it is now. It was only in 1944 that the Egyptian Government decided to undertake the systematic afforestation of Sinai to restore its ancient productivity.

It was shown, some years ago, in a paper "*Climatic changes since the Ice Age*" read before the Victoria Institute, that the world in general experienced a period of intense wet weather round about the time of the Exodus and on to the ninth century B.C. Several features of the ten plagues on the Egyptians confirm the thought that that the time of Moses was one of plentiful rainfall. We have evidence therefore that the two factors necessary to the production of manna, viz., trees and rainfall, were present to an unusual degree and with the assurance we have that Divine control over the powers of nature is constantly being exercised in the interests of God's Plan we may be certain that this was of design. Given the climatic conditions indicated above, the quantity of

manna just mentioned could be produced, and gathered, over an area of no more than two square miles. The host of Israel, with all the tents and impedimenta required for camping would be spread, at any one time, over an area of fifteen square miles, the size of a British city such as Coventry. It need not be thought incredible then, that such a vast host should be able to find a sufficiency of manna for their needs, gathered day by day on either side of the line of march.

But the wonder of the miracle remains. Men of science may reveal to us the nature of this mystic food, showing that God laid hold of that which the wilderness already brought forth. They can bear unwitting witness to the unerring foresight of God for His people's needs and His control of natural forces when they tell us that the climatic conditions at that period were unusually favourable to the satisfaction of those needs. But they cannot explain why it is that for forty long years those myriads of busy insects worked unceasingly for six days in every week—and *rested on the remaining day!* For when the Israelites looked out of their tents on every Sabbath morning, there was no manna on the ground! They must needs gather on the sixth day enough for two days. That mysterious cessation of the natural course on one day in every week has a regularity which is not of Nature unaided—it is of God. Only the One who rules the universe from above could so command and restrain the labours of His creatures that they rested every sixth day so that there might be no manna on the seventh. Therein is the hand of God revealed, as it is revealed throughout the whole of this wonderful account, taking up the ordinary, insignificant things of earth, bending them to His purpose, and in that totally inexplicable fashion which men call "miraculous" using them to fulfil a vital need in the execution of His Plans.

The resurrection of the dead is implied in the statement (Isa. 35. 10) that "*sorrow and sighing shall flee away*". It is impossible to picture the living nations alone enjoying this blessed state and not wishing to have their departed loved ones to share it with them; it is likewise impossible to accept the words as meaning what they say if human death is to continue through the Millennial Age as it does now. This prophecy can mean only one thing: that at the beginning of that Age the death sentence is abolished by virtue of the

Ransom for All (1 Tim. 2. 5-6) given by our Lord on Calvary, and that in consequence all the dead will return to conscious life upon earth and together with the living nations enjoy a full opportunity of entering into eternal life by willing acceptance of the Lord Jesus. Only the wilfully sinful, who will not accept the opportunity proffered, and decline to come into harmony with God's ways, will pass into the death from which there is no awaking.

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 23 I John 5. 16-21

"If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for that. All unrighteousness is sin, but there is a sin not unto death." (vs. 16-17.)

A great deal of discussion—much of it not very well informed—has centred itself upon this subject of the sin unto death. John's words here appear at first sight to imply that sin can be separated into two categories—that which can be forgiven and that which cannot be forgiven. For the sinner who comes within the first, prayer can be made with some certainty that a favourable answer will be forthcoming from Heaven. For the one whose sin is embraced by the second, prayer is useless, and the thoughtful disciple is not recommended to pray for such an one. Now that is a most perplexing position for those who believe that God has appointed a future day of trial in the which He will give to all men everywhere a full and fair opportunity to repent of their evil deeds and come to Him in repentance and dedication of life. These words of John immediately pose the question: What is the sin that, committed during this Age, while as yet the "present evil world" is running its course, is of so heinous and irremediable a nature that it debars forever from the opportunities that redeemed humanity of the Millennial Age are to have in such abundance?

Fortunately, perhaps, we do not have to find an answer to such a question. If there is in fact a sin that cuts the offender off from all hope of repentance and salvation, either now or in the world to come, we who are still in the flesh will not be able to pronounce judgment upon it. One thing is very certain; only God Himself, who sees into the heart, can ever say whether or not any individual is beyond hope of reclamation. Even in the next Age, when the secret of men's hearts will be laid open for all to see in a fashion never known in all the history of this present world, it will only be God the Judge of all who passes the final sentence. So that when John says that if any man sees his brother sin a sin which is not unto death . . . or is unto death . . . he shall pray for it or not pray for it accordingly, he must be talking of something else than the case of the man

who is already lost to all hope of redemption. He must certainly be talking of a distinction and a judgment which is in our power properly to make.

The expression "sin unto death" was in common use among the Jews in John's day; it referred to certain specific sins that were considered more than usually serious, which, under the Law Covenant, were punishable by death, "cutting off from among the people". Thus in Num. 18. 22 the rash Israelite who committed sacrilege by entering the Court of the Tabernacle and approaching the Holy had thereby committed a sin "unto death" and was cut off from among the people. In Lev. 22. 9 the priest who denied his calling by profaning his priestly office similarly committed a "sin unto death". In New Testament usage the expression really means a sin that calls for immediate and outwardly observable punishment in the same fashion. Thus Paul's condemnation of the immoral member in 1 Cor. 5, and his excommunication of the offender, is a case in point. This man had committed a sin unto death, a sin that implied a much greater measure of wilfulness and deliberateness than did the many common faults and failings of daily life in the Church. There was no question of his being eternally lost, but he was rigorously excluded from the fellowship and worship of the "ecclesia" until he had repented and reformed. Likewise on another occasion Paul declared that he had delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan that they might learn not to blaspheme. (1 Tim. 1. 20.) In such cases it would seem that treatment other than prayer was necessary—not that there is any admission that prayer is of lesser avail than other measures, but that prayer for the sinner implies at least a measure of sorrow and repentance on the part of the sinner, and prayer then is made that strength against future temptation may be given and the sinner restored to a position of peace and reconciliation with God. Where the sin is so wilful and deliberate that there is, at the moment, no repentance and no sorrow, no regrets, then, says John, he does not insist that we should pray for the offender. Even so he does not forbid prayer being made; only that prayer is not laid upon us as an obligation in such such case. And in all these instances there is

no suggestion that the case is hopeless even though it be not an appropriate one for prayer at the moment. The corrective judgments of God may yet bring the sinner to an appreciation of his position and his eventual reconciliation, even as it did with the man in 1 Cor. 5.

There must be a difference between this case of the disciple who is said to commit a sin unto death and the position of those spoken of in Heb. 6 who cannot be renewed to repentance. It has been said that it may well be possible for human beings steeped in willing sin to destroy their own capacity for repentance, as though they have come to the point where there is absolutely nothing left on which God can work to bring them back to Himself. Be that as it may, it is clear that in Heb. 6 we have a clear description of some such state of apostasy but no indication that any earthly observer is given power to say when that point has been reached in any particular case. One would think, however, that sufficient outward signs of such an apostasy would be evident to justify the withdrawal of the term "brother". Such an one must surely have come to the point where he is quite evidently no longer one of the "brethren in Christ"; the nature of his apostasy would at least demand that. And these in John's epistle, even though fallen into sin, are still brethren. "If any man see his brother sin . . ." It seems clear therefore that the two cases are not the same.

It comes then to this, that in our prayers for the recovery and reconciliation of the erring ones in our midst we may have confidence that in general our prayers will be affirmatively answered and life given to the fallen in consequence of our prayers, but not in every case. There may, and will, be some instances where God—not we ourselves—can see that the sin is of a nature that needs stern remedial treatment—judgments—before reconciliation can be granted, and when that happens, if unwittingly we have prayed for such an one, our prayers will not be answered affirmatively—not at once anyway. And as though to assure us that even though this be the case there will always be ample scope for our prayers the Apostle tells us in rounding off this little allusion, "all unrighteousness is sin, but there is a sin not unto death". There will always be plenty of faults and stumblings and failures to reach up to the mark which can form the burden of our prayers.

"We know that whosoever is born of God

sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." (vs. 18.)

This verse goes back to verse 9 of chapter 3 and tells us practically the same thing. It evidently comes in here again as a reminder after talking about the sinners and their reclamation, John tells us that the ones born of God do not sin at all! It sounds very contradictory but of course it is not really so. It is in the spirit of our minds and intents of our hearts that we do not sin; in our flesh there are still the old processes working and leading us from time to time to do the things we would not, and these are the things for which we need the prayers of our brethren, which is exactly what we are told in verse 16. Paul explained this apparent paradox very clearly when he said in Rom. 7. 25 "With the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin". "The good that I would I do not" he said earlier in the chapter "but the evil that I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." That is exactly what John means when he says that the one born of God sinneth not, and in the same breath he tells us to pray for the brother who has sinned.

"And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." (vs. 19.) The last word should really be "wicked one"—the Devil. "All the world is under the influence of the Evil One" says the 20th Century version. In these few words John sums up the whole situation. We who have given ourselves to God and repudiated the Devil and all his works are the only representatives on earth of God's Kingdom. We are on the Lord's side. Everybody else, whether they know it or not, are on the other. We represent the outposts of the army of light in the enemy's country. The time is to come when the Rider on the White Horse will descend from heaven with His armies and do battle with all the evil powers of earth and utterly overthrow them, but for the present we few who still remain are His only representatives. Glory be to God that the time will not be much longer delayed and that, the Evil One bound so that he may deceive the nations no more, the world will no longer lie in the Wicked One but stand erect in the glorious liberty of the children of God.

So we come to the end. The aged Apostle has said all that he has to say, of doctrine, of exhortation, of warning, of reproof, of encouragement. He has put forth his every

effort to instruct his disciples, knowing how much they need that instruction. His eye looks down the Age, not discerning how long it must be before the signs of the end appear and men realise that the coming again of his Lord is actually taking place; but he realises that all he has said must be for the instruction of the Church in all generations until that time. He has done all he can, and now in a final brief recapitulation which reads almost like a benediction he tells us in a few well-chosen words just what is the basis of

his faith and our faith, and leaves us there, secure in the knowledge that his Lord will never let go the hands of those who have put their hands into His, and continue to keep them so.

"And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

*"Little children, keep yourselves from idols."
"Amen." (THE END)*

The Decree of Cyrus

The name of Cyrus is always associated with the famous "Decree" in which he gave authority for the return of the exiles and the restoration of the Temple at Jerusalem. Taken in conjunction with Isaiah's prophetic words of two centuries earlier in which Cyrus was mentioned as the Lord's anointed for the restoration of Judah (Isa. 45. 1), it has been generally assumed that Cyrus the monotheist had a special partiality for the Jewish religion as against the polytheism of the Babylonians whom he had conquered. The record of his Decree, preserved in Ezra 1. 2 seems by its phraseology to betoken a special faith in the God of Israel. *"The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him, and let him go up..."*

But compare, with that, another decree of Cyrus, issued at about the same time. This one appears, not in the Bible, but on inscriptions discovered in the ruins of Ur of the Chaldees, a city that was sacred to Sin, the Moon-god of the Babylonians. *"Sin, the illuminator of heaven and earth, with his favourite sign delivered into my hands the four quarters of the world, and I returned the gods to their shrines. The great gods have delivered all the lands into my hands; the land I have caused to dwell in a peaceful habitation."* The sentiments are almost identical, except that here Cyrus credits the gods, especially the Moon-god, with having given him all the kingdoms of the earth, whereas in his Decree to Israel he gives the credit to Israel's God. It would seem that Cyrus was, in fact, more of a diplomat than was formerly thought; he evidently intended being polite to all the gods in order that he might at least run no risk of unwittingly slighting whichever one of them proved in the end to be the true God.

Bible Emphasis

If the Bible be divided along the lines of its three predominant themes, viz., History, Doctrine and Prophecy, and the amount of space devoted to each be examined, an interesting analysis results.

In the Old Testament, the books from Genesis to Esther are mainly history, those from Psalms to Song of Solomon, devotional and doctrinal, and from Isaiah to Malachi prophetic. In the New Testament the same order is shown: Matthew to Acts may be fairly described as history, Romans to Jude as doctrinal, and Revelation as prophetic.

The proportion of page space thus given to these three main classifications is roughly:

History	...	...	...	60%
Doctrine	...	...	...	15%
Prophecy	...	...	...	25%

This does not mean that doctrine is to be regarded as of very minor importance; there is much in the historical and prophetic books that is vital doctrinal teaching. What perhaps is a desirable conclusion to draw is this: the amount of space given to historical accounts would seem to indicate that our consideration of the lives and actions of those who served God, or rejected God, in past days is very necessary in the ordering of our own Christian lives. The greatest lessons of life can perhaps best be learned by the study of things that happened in times gone by.

That, at any rate, must be a potent factor in the educational and remedial work of the Millennial Age. Each one of the resurrected hosts will have a comparatively narrow range of personal experience on which to call. There is much of the evil consequences of sin and the beneficial results of righteousness with which he can only become acquainted by hearing of the lives and deeds of others. The study of history will surely take a very prominent place in the work of the Millennium!

LIKE PRECIOUS FAITH

A New Testament study

The apostle Peter addresses his second letter to those who are already in the faith; in that faith which is alike precious to the writer and his readers. Each of them has received and absorbed the truths of the faith and has had those experiences in the life of faith as to speak of it as being precious. Experiences differ in all cases and therefore the faith is not precious to all for the same reason, nevertheless all will be able to give some personal reason why they prize the faith, and it would form a good basis for a testimony meeting. Think of a few of the reasons why we value the faith: it is prized by some because of its logic, its justice and wisdom: or because the human channels through whom it came sacrificed their lives in its service and gained no material advantage thereby: it is precious to some because though they have fallen seven times they have risen again and intend to go forward undismayed: and it is precious to some because in the words of the hymn "it satisfies their longings as nothing else could do". The apostle himself had very precious and personal reasons why he prized the faith, for he had had contact and visual sight of our Lord himself and such experiences as he had on the mount of Transfiguration would always be specially treasured by him. True, we do not have such experiences to-day as Peter had, and maybe we do not have his difficulties and trials in Christian service. But, whatever our reason for prizing the faith once delivered to the saints, Peter is writing to us.

It will be found profitable to read Peter's second letter straight through in order to find what circumstances prompted him to write, and at the same time we shall see how anxious he is for the welfare of his readers and the precious faith. We immediately note that the epistle divides itself into three sections in agreement with the chapters. It is sometimes said that the division of the Bible into chapters is a man-made expedient, but in this letter the divisions are ready done by the writer. An encouraging first chapter is followed by a severe denunciation of false teachers and their associates, and that is followed by the warning that the day of the Lord will surely bring judgment and dissolution, and will not tarry. And we are not a

little sorry as we read that fully a third of what begins as a most persuasive epistle is occupied in warning. There can be only one reason for it—Peter is guarding the precious faith! Although he is writing to those informed in the faith, he foresees that from their own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things, even to denying the Lord that bought them. (2 Pet. 2. 1.) To combat this falling away Peter urges his readers to heed the sure word of prophecy, which is the basis of the precious faith.

We note as we read both epistles of Peter that he is partial to the use of the word PRECIOUS to describe salient points of the Christian faith and they show to us how the faith which we have been called upon to affirm is indeed precious—precious to God the giver and precious to us recipients. Let us consider them. There is one thing which stands out as the foundation of the Christian Faith and is not to be found in the creeds of other religions and that is redemption by ransom-atonement. Opponents of the Christian faith in redemption by blood-atonement (within and without Christian communities) say that the idea of one dying sacrificially for others is repulsive to reason and savours of the practice of pagans in sacrificing animals or humans to pacify their gods. There is nowadays increasing numbers of those who deny this basic teaching of Christianity; and the teaching of evolution and the notion that man can save himself is responsible. Contrast with this, the exactly stated truth of redemption made by Peter in 1 Pet. 2. 24. As the day approaches the number of disbelievers shows up in marked contrast to the few who still follow the old paths. And by this reasoning we could say that the faith is precious to the faithful because fewer nowadays believe, but that is not the sense of Peter's words, for the faith is valued by the holders irrespective of number of adherents.

The truth of atonement by sacrifice is given by the apostle Peter in one of his "precious" texts in 1 Pet. 1. 18-20. The standards of men, silver and gold, may seem to men to be enduring, but for the purpose of redeeming mankind are in comparison with their true redemption price, corruptible or perishable. To Peter one price alone can redeem us, "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb with-

out blemish and without spot". Even the blood of a lamb has accomplished more than silver and gold, but that is surpassed by the blood of Christ, "who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world" for this very work. These references to silver and gold, and a lamb, would remind readers of this epistle of how Israel were redeemed in their early national life. They would remember the half-shekel ransom which every man had to give upon being numbered unto the people (Exod. 30. 12-13) which in turn was used to make parts of the tabernacle fittings, the pillars, sockets and hooks. Thus the tabernacle tent, itself used for atonement, had as its foundation the redemption money which had redeemed the men of Israel (Exod. 38. 24-31.) And they would recall the great event which made them a people, the Passover, when the slain lamb saved the firstborns directly and the nation indirectly at the Exodus. It may be that Peter's words here are specially addressed to those Jews who though they knew of that early redemption, through the traditions of the fathers failed to realise their need of true and complete redemption, not only from those traditions which were the basis of their manner of life, but also from that one original condemnation which penalised the whole race. They failed to see their need of eternal redemption, knowing themselves to be the chosen of God and thinking themselves secure in their traditions and history. We should remember that these things happened to Israel for types or figures by which they would look forward to future and better redemption and national deliverance; for Paul speaks of the things which happened unto *them* for ensamples and are written for *our* admonition. Let us not read Paul's words as that these things were intended for their admonition and are types only to the Church. It was the object of those types that Israel should look forward to the better, rather than the church should look back to the type. These seem to be the reasons why Peter speaks of our redemption as being "precious" and the longer we live the more do we believe the adjective to be appropriate.

Peter begins the second chapter of his first epistle with an appeal to lay aside all deceptions, etc., and come as new-born babes to the Word. He says, in effect, leave the old way of life now that you have been redeemed by the precious blood (no more a slave to the traditions or "vain conversation" than is a babe) and come to the word and to the

Word. Come to Him, the living stone, disallowed of men, but chosen of God and precious; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious—and who has not? Peter's remarks about the stone disallowed by those masters in Israel who should be helping to build the temple of the Lord, recalls the Lord's parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matt. 21. 33-46) in which He spoke of Israel's rejection of Messiah and the letting out of the vineyard to those who would render the householder its fruits. The rulers in Israel, blinded by their traditions, argued about the first advent mission of Jesus, and finally rejected Him as Messiah or even as a prophet, and belittled those works which proved Him to be the Sent of God, and so lost the honour of being united with Him in the spiritual house; and that honour was given to those who in time past had been "no people", and had not obtained mercy, but are now the people of God (v. 10)—people who know Him to be precious.

Within the context of Peter's words we shall see that the living stone is precious to the Father and to the believer. He is precious to God because He is His only begotten Son whom He gave as man's redeemer, and He is precious to the believer because He is the foundation of all we believe and hope for. The Son having finished the work given Him to do, becomes the foundation, the sure foundation of all God's purposes and temple, when exalted in the resurrection. He was in every sense "a tried stone" or as Rotherham's footnote to Isaiah's words (ch. 28. 16) puts it "a stone, tested itself and testing others". The apostle Paul also quotes these words of Isaiah (adding other quotation) in Rom. 9. 32-33 to explain that Israel stumbled at the rock of truth. The cause of their stumbling was virtually the same as mentioned by Peter. He says, they followed after the law of righteousness (v. 31) or went about to establish their own righteousness (ch. 10. 3), that was the "manner of life" that Peter would free them from, but could he when the traditions of the fathers blurred their vision? Both apostles knew that Israel stumbled at the cross of Christ; that which should have been "precious" to them.

Let us note in Peter's quotation of Isaiah's words one of those fortuitous happenings which show the integrity and charm of the Scriptures. The name Isaiah means "Salvation of Jehovah", and it is Isaiah who makes this prophecy of salvation using the figure of the stone. Simon the son of Jona was given

the name of Peter (which is by interpretation, a stone), and it was he who made the wonderful pronouncement of Jesus being Messiah. This being so, the words of Isaiah would instantly appeal to Peter, and these he takes to prove that the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled in Christ. We have a complete cycle of truth in this fragment of the Bible—from Isaiah (salvation) to the stone: from a stone (Peter) the truth of salvation by teaching Christ when quoting the prophet. (See also Acts 4. 10-12.) And all this gives us a very personal reason why He is precious to Peter. What a foundation rock of truth for Peter himself! What a consolation throughout his life would this precious truth be!

Also in ch. 2 is revealed that those who believe Him to be precious may also as living stones be built upon this foundation into a spiritual house and priesthood—a precious truth indeed! It was intended to be true of Israel, but they stumbled at the stone (Rom. 11. 11) and through their fall this salvation is come to the Gentiles. And the precious truth that Gentiles would inherit in the church equally with faithful called Israelites (Eph. 2. 20-22) was itself a trial of faith to the Jews at the first advent period. Sometimes, we who were Gentiles, may think ourselves to be unworthy of such high honour and a trial of faith arise therefrom. This may be why Peter refers to “the trial of your faith, being much

more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1. 7). There is another precious truth—the ending of the long trials of the church when it is revealed with its Lord at His second advent. And in v. 8 we have in glowing words the church’s regard for Him who to them is precious. In these words are covered all the relationships we have to our Saviour, all our hopes and treasure.

With these thoughts in mind we turn to Peter’s other precious text—2 Pet. 1. 4, feeling that the great and precious promises whereby we might be partakers of the Divine nature must refer to those rich prospects that he has mentioned in the first epistle, chapters 1 and 2. These surely are the ingredients of the precious faith (or as a companion epistle has it “the faith once delivered to the saints”); these are the truths we know and have helped our establishment in the present truth (2 Pet. 1. 12); these are precious items of the faith we must remember (2 Pet. 1. 13); these are the truths which Peter wished that after his decease we should always have in remembrance. And the particular aid to memory that he has given us are his epistles. These things, to him, were precious, and will continue to be so to those of like faith.

The Soul

“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2. 7). The Hebrew *nephesh* has the primary significance of “breath” and points back to the account of man’s first appearance on earth as a creature dependent on breathing in order to continue life. The use of *nephesh*, translated “soul”, as a word descriptive of a living creature, is constant throughout the Old Testament. Animals are described as souls in Num. 31. 28. Souls are said to eat (Lev. 17. 18) to eat blood (Lev. 17. 12) to eat dead bodies (Lev. 17. 15) and to have a longing to eat flesh (Deut. 12. 20). They can be thirsty (Prov. 25. 25) and have a longing for strong drink (Deut. 26. 16). They may on the other hand have an abhorrence for meat (Job 33. 10). It is conceivable for souls to swear or to touch unclean things (Lev. 5. 2 and 4) and although all these operations denote life and that the soul is a living

entity, it is also possible for the soul to be smitten by enemies (Josh. 11.) and to die (Ezek. 18. 4 and 20). References such as these can be found scattered all through the Old Testament. The word occurs seven hundred times and is translated “soul” 471 times, “life” or “living” 150 times, and also by such words as man, person, self, they, me, him, any one, breath, heart, mind, appetite, this body, lust, creature, and beast. Twenty-eight times is the word applied to the lower animals. The New Testament word corresponding to the Hebrew *nephesh* is *psuche* and this is translated “soul” 59 times, “life” 40 times, as well as mind, us, you, heart, and heartily, occurring one hundred and fifty times altogether of which two references are to the lower animals.

Three great essentials to happiness are—something to do, something to love, something to hope for.

ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

Chapter 9. The Rejected Shepherd

Zechariah's 11th chapter is the story of Israel's suffering under false shepherds, and her rejection of the true shepherd who would have fed the flock but was refused. Historically it covers the time between the period of the First Advent, pictured in symbol in chapter 9, and that of the Second Advent with its related events, shewn in chapters 12-14. The background to the description is the land of Israel as it so often appeared when suffering invasion and destruction, and the basis of the picture a pastoral one, the relation between the sheep and the shepherds, bad and good. In the end only a faithful remnant survive, but this remnant enters into the stirring events of chapters 12-14 and emerges triumphant at the end.

The curtain of this chapter rises upon a scene all too familiar and infinitely sad. Judgment upon Israel because of apostasy is being executed by the agency of foreign oppressors, invading the country and desolating the land. *"Open your doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars! Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen! Wail, oaks of Bashan, for the thick forest has been felled! Hark, the wail of the shepherds, for their glory is despoiled! Hark, the roar of the lions, for the jungle of the Jordan is laid waste!"* (chap. 11. 1-3 RSV). Every time the Assyrians or the Babylonians invaded the land they came down from the north, first destroying the stately cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan, cutting down the standing timber for the construction of their war machines or carrying it away for building purposes in their own land. Then as they swept southward the pastoral country was despoiled, the people's flocks and herds pillaged and their villages burnt. Finally came the turn of the valley of Jordan and the highlands of Judea. All this happened, whenever it happened, in consequence of Israel's apostasy from God, for thus were the terms of the Covenant. These three opening verses constitute the scenery, so to speak, at the back of the stage upon which the drama is to be presented.

"Thus saith the Lord my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter, whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty; and they that sell them say, Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich; and their own shepherds pity

them not". This "flock of slaughter" is Israel, doomed to pillage and violence and death at the hands both of alien invaders and her own rulers. This was so often the case in Israel. The people forsook the Lord and followed other gods and then found that those other gods were quite unable to protect them from their enemies. They forsook the principles of righteousness in their national life and found that oppression and injustice rebounded upon their own heads. But this time worse was to come. In the past God had always delivered after a season. *"Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble"* recounted the Psalmist *"and he heard, and delivered them out of their distresses"*. But now, says God, *"I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, but I will deliver every man into his neighbour's hand, and into the hand of his king; and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them"* (vs. 6). This verse fixes the period to which the whole chapter applies; it is that following the Babylonian captivity. Up to the restoration from that captivity, in Zechariah's own day, God had always delivered. Sooner or later the circumstances which gave rise to the chastisement changed, and God intervened, and the people were restored to their own land, and freed, if only temporarily until the next apostasy, from their oppressors. But not any more. The next apostasy, with its penalty of calamity, was one that was to endure until the end, until the very time of the Kingdom and the final repentance and regathering. That apostasy had not begun at the time Zechariah received this message; the enthusiasm of the Temple rebuilding was still upon the nation and the fervency of Messianic hopes following its recent deliverance from Babylon, but it began very shortly thereafter and has continued without intermission to this day. The fulfilment of chapter 11 therefore must be held to begin not very long after the death of Zechariah and continue to the present.

From verse 7 onward the speaker is the Shepherd of Israel, the One appointed by God the Father to lead Israel in the right way into their appointed destiny, if so be they would be led. In the Old Testament He is the Divine Word, the Logos, the Son. In the New Testament He is the Word made flesh, our

Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This chapter presents Him in both aspects, for although as the Divine Word He ministered to Israel in pre-Christian centuries it was as Jesus the Christ that He manifested Himself to them at His First Advent and was rejected. That is what this chapter is all about.

"So I fed the flock of slaughter, therefore also the godly of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock" (vs. 7). Here is action; the Divine Shepherd enters upon a pastoral mission which for all we know might have been God's final effort to bring Israel to a position of readiness for the opportunity which was to open before them when their Messiah came to them. The three centuries prior to the First Advent was a period of intense nationalism on the one part and fervent expectation of Messiah on the other; Judah became an independent political State for a short time and the Pharisees and Zadokites and other zealous religious sects had their rise. It was a golden age for the God-fearing element in the nation, expecting daily the fulfilment of all that God had promised, but it was also a time which gave increasing scope for the development of a rigid, bigoted view of the Divine purposes and a narrow, arrogant attitude of superiority over all other nations and peoples which ultimately overcame the better things and created the Israel which condemned and slew Jesus Christ. For those three centuries the Shepherd fed the flock, a flock that was doomed to slaughter, and a few, the godly of the flock, profited, but the majority turned away. At the end of those centuries a small minority only were ready to receive and accept Jesus in the way He came, and the rest, even although "all men were in expectation", were found wanting. They knew not the time of their visitation.

The shepherd's staff named "Beauty" (properly "Favour") is explained in verse 10 as picturing the Mosaic Covenant, obligatory upon Israel but so often in their history repudiated and violated. The other staff, named "Bands" (properly "Binders") is referred in vs. 10 to the organic union of the peoples in the land. Both these staves had their place in the Shepherd's ministry during those three centuries. The Covenant was reaffirmed and the sect of the Pharisees represented the national adherence to the letter of that Covenant. The pre-Babylonian division into two nations, the two tribes and the ten tribes, was ended at the return from

Babylon and now the nation was one; tribal divisions were practically eliminated and the entire nation was known as Judah, the people as Jews. Never in all history had Israel enjoyed so favourable a position and opportunity to go forward in faith and expectation to meet and receive their coming Messiah and with Him fulfil their age-old commission to be a light to the nations and declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth.

At this auspicious point the Shepherd moves to action, and describes that action in the words *"The three shepherds also I cut off in one month, and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me"* (verse 8). In the sequence of events pictured in this chapter this cutting off of the three shepherds, whatever it may mean, is prior to the rejection of the good Shepherd by the flock and their payment of thirty pieces of silver for his services (vs. 12) so that it must have its application during those three centuries before the First Advent. Who or what, then, are the three shepherds thus cut off and what is the significance of the "one month"?

It is only to be expected that so obscure a phrase should be difficult of interpretation. It is said that among all the commentators and scholars involved with the Book of Zechariah there are extant some forty interpretations of the "three shepherds". Almost all confess themselves baffled by the "one month". There are not many expositors who have realised that this chapter constitutes a link in what might be termed a prophetic history of the period between the Restoration and the First Advent occupying chapters 9 to 11 and merging then into the events of the end of this Age in chapters 12 to 14. Once this fact is fully appreciated a pointer to the meaning of the three shepherds is provided. The A.V. has it "Three shepherds . . ." but the Hebrew text has the definite article *"The three shepherds . . ."* Three specific unworthy shepherds are indicated and they are all cut off together "in one month". This is before the First Advent. Vs. 15 speaks of a fourth unworthy shepherd who afflicts the flock after the Divine Shepherd has been rejected and therefore after the First Advent.

The term "shepherd" is used either for native rulers or guides, as in Jer. 2, 8, 17, 16, 23, 1-4 and Ezek. 34, 2, or for foreign rulers and oppressors, as in Jer. 6, 3, 25, 34-38 and 49, 19. Whatever man or power ruled the people was a "shepherd". It is interesting in this connection to note that in primitive Semitic languages the same word did duty

for "king", the ruler of the people, and "shepherd", the keeper of sheep. Since the background of this chapter is the foreign domination of Israel, and an integral part of the action is God's declaration (vs. 6) that He will deliver them into *"his neighbour's hand and into the hand of his king, and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them"* it seems reasonable to conclude that the three shepherds picture foreign ruling powers whose dominion over Israel, permitted by God for a season, is cut off by the Divine Shepherd preparatory to His offering His own self as King.

In such case it is easy to see in the three shepherds the three Gentile powers which by Divine permission, and within the framework of the period known as the "Times of the Gentiles", exercised control over Israel. Babylon, Persia, Greece; these are the three shepherds whose influence hung heavily over Israel until well within the period covered by this 11th chapter, and then, more or less abruptly, disappeared from the scene.

It is customary to think of each of these powers as ruling Israel in turn and giving place at the end of its term to its successor. Politically this is so. Persia overthrew the Babylonian empire in 538 B.C. when Cyrus captured Babylon, and Greece overthrew Persia in 331 B.C. when Alexander in his turn captured Babylon. But in practice each nation continued and various rebellions and other military adventures make it difficult to say with precision just when each one was truly superseded by the next. In point of fact all three still existed in the days of Zechariah and all three exerted various degrees of influence over Judah. This is where the allusion to the three shepherds being cut off *"in one month"* might have its place. Daniel, in his vision of the four world-empires, says (Dan. 7. 12) *"As concerning the rest of the wild beasts (i.e. the three representing Babylon, Persia and Greece) they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time"*. True to this, Babylon, both city and nation, continued after its capture by Cyrus in 538 B.C., until the building of Seleucia on the Tigris by the successor of Alexander about 281 B.C. attracted commerce from the city. Antiochus, the next Greek ruler, rebuilt the old temple in Babylon but the city was doomed and it vanished between 250 and 200 B.C. and this marked the full end of the old Babylonian people and power. The last Seleucid king of the second empire, Persia, was defeated in

236 B.C. by Arsaces I, founder of the Parthian empire and this marked the end of ancient Persia (the modern State and nation of that name developed long afterwards, in the early centuries of the Christian era). Greece, the last of the three powers, was increasingly harassed by the rising power of Rome and lost its independence about 228 to 208 B.C. Thus in a practical sense all three world powers, Babylon, Persia and Greece, came to an end, were "cut off", as Zechariah has it, during the third B.C. century. This century can therefore quite reasonably be spoken of as the "one month" of judgment on these powers. A similar usage is met with in Hos. 5. 6-7 where the unfaithful of Israel *"go with their flocks and their herds to seek the Lord but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them. They have dealt treacherously against the Lord . . . now shall a month devour them with their portions"*. The RSV renders that final expression *"Now the new moon shall devour them with their fields"* and the meaning seems to be that the dawn of a new month ushers in a period of judgment and destruction on those who have incurred the Divine displeasure in past time. The month as a short time period compared with the year as a normal time measurement is reminiscent of our Lord's words *"Except those days shall be cut short there should no flesh be saved"*. Judgment, swift, sure and final, is pictured as taking place within the confines of one month. And in thus cutting off the three oppressive shepherds the Shepherd of Israel expresses His loathing for them, and they for Him, as in verse 8.

So the Shepherd turns to His flock, the flock that is still rebellious and is still in consequence doomed to destruction. Perhaps it is at this point we should begin to see the events of the First Advent taking shape. The history of the period immediately before the Advent shews that the nation as a whole was in no condition to meet or to accept its Lord. The work of the Shepherd for three hundred years, since the golden days of the Restoration, of Zechariah, Ezra and Nehemiah, had produced a faithful "remnant" who were ready for Him, but the rest were unworthy and fit only for rejection. So we have verse 9 *"Then said I, I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die: and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off: and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another"*. That prophecy had its fulfilment in real history when Jesus pronounced over Jerusalem its doom *"How often*

would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her chickens, and ye would not. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate". (Matt. 23. 38). And at the same time came the reality of verse 10 "I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people. And it was broken in that day; and so the godly of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the Lord". Jesus cut that staff asunder and abrogated the covenant when He declared to the Scribes and Pharisees "The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21. 43).

Almost immediately the challenge came to Israel of the First Advent formally and finally to accept or to reject the Shepherd. "If ye think good, give me my price" (wages). He said to them "and if not, forbear" (vs.12). For three and a half years He had moved amongst them, doing good and offering them the Kingdom of God. Perhaps the point at which this invitation applies is at the end of Jesus' ministry when He presented himself in formal fashion as Israel's king, riding into Jerusalem "upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech. 9. 9) and despite the immediate cries of joy and enthusiasm was within a few days rejected with the cry "not this man, but Barabbas". The token of that rejection was the thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas by the priests for his share in the betrayal.

Now here comes an intriguing coincidence of thought. Following the Shepherd's request for his wages, he goes on to say "So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter—this magnificent price at which I was assessed by them". The latter phrase is the literal Hebrew and is suggestive of the Lord speaking ironically of the amount which in ancient times was the price given for a slave or compensation due for the death of a slave. That was all that Israel would offer in return for the pastoral care of the Shepherd. "And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord" (vss. 12-13). There has been a lot of discussion and speculation as to the meaning of this expression. It is not easily apparent why the money should be paid to a potter or why there should be a potter in the Temple anyway. Some have suggested that the word rendered "potter" is a colloquial word for treasury or treasurer

and that the Shepherd thus paid the money into the Temple funds but there is no real foundation for this. The most reasonable explanation, bearing in mind God's scornful rejection of this "magnificent price", is that the expression "cast it to the potter" was a saying expressing contemptuous rejection of a worthless thing. We have a somewhat similar phrase today when we speak of a man as having "gone to the dogs". So the picture afforded us is one in which the Shepherd, insulted by the paltry sum of money given him as wages when he might reasonably have expected respect, esteem, gratitude and love in return for his ministrations, goes into the Temple courts and contemptuously throws the money on the floor of the Sanctuary.

Matthew's gospel draws attention to this passage when he recounts the story of Judas and the betrayal of Jesus (Matt. 27). The correspondence is not exact. The Shepherd received the money as wages; Judas received his as the price of betrayal. The priests used the money after Judas threw it on the Temple floor to buy the "potter's field" to bury strangers in; this is not the same thing as casting the money "to the potter" on the floor of the Temple. Matthew suggests a fulfilment of prophecy but there are numerous instances in Matthew's Gospel where he is quite clearly quoting an Old Testament passage as illustrative of, or analogous to, the incident he narrates without really claiming that the one is a prediction of the other. It is not so much in the details of Zechariah's vision on the one hand, and of Judas' betrayal on the other, that the prophecy resides, but in the central principle. In both cases the Shepherd of Israel is rejected by those to whom he had ministered and the symbol of that rejection was a monetary one, thirty pieces of silver, thrown back upon the floor of the Temple in the sight of the ecclesiastical rulers who were primarily responsible for the rejection. Matthew, in the A.V. of Matt. 27. 9 credits the prophecy to Jeremiah instead of Zechariah but it is generally agreed that this is probably a mistake of an early copyist; Matthew does not always mention the prophet's name in his allusions and probably he did not do so in this instance and a later transcriber, taking it upon himself to add the name, added the wrong one. This supposition is confirmed by the fact that the Sinai Palimpsest, a 4th century copy of a 2nd century Syriac translation, thought to be the oldest translation of the Gospels into

any language, does not include the reference to "Jeremiah the prophet" in this verse, and neither do the Peshitta and the Diatessaron (two 2nd century Syriac versions) or the 2nd century Old Latin versions.

"Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between" (prop. "among") *"Judah and Israel"* (vs. 14). The preposition can mean equally "between" and "among". At the time of the First Advent there was no distinction between the ten tribe and the two tribe nations and no brotherhood which could be broken. There was a very real sense in which the entire nation, Judah and Israel, viewed as an entity, was disrupted and the brotherhood between its individual members destroyed. The brotherhood existing *among* the citizens of the nation was completely and finally broken when, in A.D. 70, Titus quelled the Jewish rebellion against Rome, destroyed Jerusalem, and exiled the entire people, scattering them into all parts of the Roman empire. Even today Israel has not recovered from that Dispersion. This symbolic action of the prophet indicated the fact that following the rejection of Christ the nation was doomed to the breaking of family ties and national bonds, to separation and scattering all over the earth. Judah and Israel, after fifteen hundred years of national existence

in the Land of Promise, would be a nation no longer.

Verses 15 to 17 describe the agency by which that scattering was to be accomplished. Three evil shepherds in verse 8, Babylon, Persia and Greece, had already been cut off. The true Shepherd had been rejected. *"We have no king but Cæsar"* cried the mob at the time of that rejection. Now they should have Cæsar. The "worthless (not "foolish" as A.V.) shepherd of vs. 15 is the fourth of the shepherds which afflicted the flock and well pictures Rome, the fourth oppressor of Israel. This is one who, according to the RSV, *"does not care for the perishing or seek the wandering, or heal the maimed, or nourish the sound, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs"* (vs. 16). That is a very eloquent description of the Gentile power that has ridden roughshod over Israel throughout the long centuries of this Christian era. But retribution comes. Israel brought this suffering upon herself but that does not excuse the perpetrator. *"Woe to the idol shepherd"* says God. Judgment shall come upon his right arm and his right eye. His power and his perception will be alike destroyed, and in the troubles that are upon the nations in our own day we see the fulfilment of that prediction.

(To be continued)

THE DOCTRINE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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

The earliest definite view of this coming

Kingdom was that of the eighth century B.C., when prophets like Isaiah foresaw a future Golden Age, in which *"a King shall reign in righteousness and princes rule in judgment"* (Isa. 32. 1), *"The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose"* (Isa. 35. 1), *"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb . . . and a little child shall lead them"* (Isa. 11. 6), *"Every man shall dwell under his own vine and fig tree, and none shall make them afraid"* (Mic. 4. 4). This transformation of the earth was to be achieved, Isaiah foretold, by the exaltation to power of a righteous people, purified through suffering and aflame with missionary ardour for the conversion of all nations. Two centuries later, Jeremiah and his fellow-seers stressed the need for individual repentance from sin and personal holiness of life as a necessary element in the ideal Divine Kingdom, and so laid the foundation for the much later preaching of

Christ. Then during the Babylonian captivity Daniel spoke of a coming kingdom upon earth before which all the powers of this world would vanish away, and the "*people of the saints of the Most High*" would possess the kingdom "*for ever and ever*" (Dan. 7. 18). He pictured a time when Messiah would come, exalt His faithful people to association with Himself, raise the dead of past ages, and destroy all evil in a cataclysm likened to devouring fire.

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

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

The Advent of Jesus, therefore, cast the

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

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

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

thought is beginning, slowly but yet surely, to turn again in the direction of the original understanding.

The passage of fifteen centuries has seen a great advance in the perception of Divine principles relating to the Kingdom. The Scriptures teach that God purposes for all men a period of full and unhindered instruction in His way of life, and that all the dead will be restored from the grave to participate in this time of instruction. Under the spiritual administration of Christ and His Church, and the no less effective administration of stalwart men of God upon earth, the practice of evil and injustice toward others will be completely restrained and death—except as the natural and inevitable consequence of incorrigible sin—be no more. This is in fact the “Day of Judgment” of mediæval theology, the judgment (Greek “*krisis*”—crisis) to include a period of instruction and testing as well as the moment of final decision. “*He hath appointed a day*” said Paul to the Athenians “*in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained*” (Acts 17. 31). The Psalmist declares that this day of judgment is to be a time of universal rejoicing (Psa. 96. 11-13). Jesus called the same period “the regeneration” (Matt. 19. 28) and Peter, “times of restitution” (Acts 3. 21). In both the Old and the New Testaments it is spoken of as a “new heavens and new earth” (Isa. 65. 17, 2 Pet. 3. 13).

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

It is during this period that the resurrection takes place, and all who have lived will be found again upon earth sharing in the

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

Those—and there will be many such—who hail with enthusiasm this revolution in world affairs will naturally set to work to persuade and convert their neighbours, and the result will be a period of world-wide missionary endeavour. The planning of the world's resources to meet all needs will become a simple matter when selflessness has replaced selfishness as the dominant motive. Scientific knowledge will be applied to the harnessing of natural forces for the benefit of humankind, and the creative and artistic instincts of men applied to the beautifying of the earth and everything that is upon it. The willing acceptance, by each citizen, of the obligations and duties properly devolving upon him will make for a peace and order in human society which has not before been known in earthly history.

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

Farther than this the Bible does not take us. We have only the bare statement “*Then cometh the end, when He (Christ) shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father . . . that God may be all in all*” (1 Cor. 15. 24). This is after the vanquishing of sin and the destruction of the last enemy—

death (1 Cor. 15. 26). We are left with the vision of a dual creation, a spiritual world to which the closest followers of Christ during this present Age have succeeded, and a material world restored to Edenic conditions and inhabited by a race of sinless undying human beings fulfilling to the full all for which their Creator intended them.

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

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

Faith on trial

The trial of our faith, to which the Lord and the Apostles refer, is a trial, not only of our intellectual recognition of Divine Truth, but also our heart reliance upon God. In both respects every true child of God will find his faith severely tried. As a soldier of Christ let him not fail to be armed for the conflict. If an attack is made upon the intellectual foundation of our faith we should see to it that we have a "thus saith the Lord" for every item of our belief. If the foundations of faith become unsettled, the superstructure cannot stand when the winds and floods of adversity and temptation beat against it. It is your faith that is on trial now. In the calmer days when the sun of favour shone brightly upon you, you were quietly laying the foundation of a knowledge of the truth, and rearing the superstructure of Christian character. Now you are in the furnace to be proved: summon therefore all your courage; fortify your patience; nerve yourself to endurance; hold fast to your hope; call to mind the promises, they are still yours; and cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. *"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him,"* and faith has gained her victory.

QUESTION BOX

Q. In the light of Luke 1. 78, Luke 1. 17 and Matt. 17. 10-12 is the prophecy of Mal. 4 to be considered as fulfilled at the First Advent, or is there a wider manifestation at this Age end?

A. The promise that *"I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord"* is one that links the First and Second Advents with each other and with the visions of Isaiah. Moses and Elijah were the two great prophets of Israel; one made them a nation and led them to the Promised Land, the other converted them from Baal worship to serve the living God. Both prophets died "supernaturally," one upon a mountain top, alone, and *"no man knoweth his sepulchre unto this day"* (Deut. 34. 6) the other carried into heaven by a whirlwind. Jesus said of John the Baptist, *"If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come"* (Matt. 11. 4), but John said of himself that he was a voice crying in the wilderness as spoken by Isaiah the prophet (Jno. 1. 23). Isaiah in turn links the "voice in the wilderness" with his grand theme of the "suffering servant" who is destined to lead mankind to reconciliation with God. Can we see in all this a further illumination on the two-fold nature of that "servant"—a heavenly part, the Church, "sent" before the great Day of Trouble to witness before men and convert some, to be caught up to the spiritual realm and completed during the troublous days of the End; and an earthly part destined to become the nucleus of the Kingdom on earth, to organise mankind into one great holy nation and lead them into the greater Promised Land? Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Head over both the heavenly and earthly phases of the "Servant", and is Himself the fullest expression of that same "Servant". If this be so there may be a pointer here for our own future work—for how will the earthly part of the Servant Nation receive the knowledge of their opportunity and high destiny if not from those who are already, in this Gospel Age, the custodians of the oracles of God?

Without doubt the prophecy does have reference to events at this end of the Age and would well repay deep study and earnest discussion; for a right understanding must be capable of shedding much light upon our way just at this time.



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

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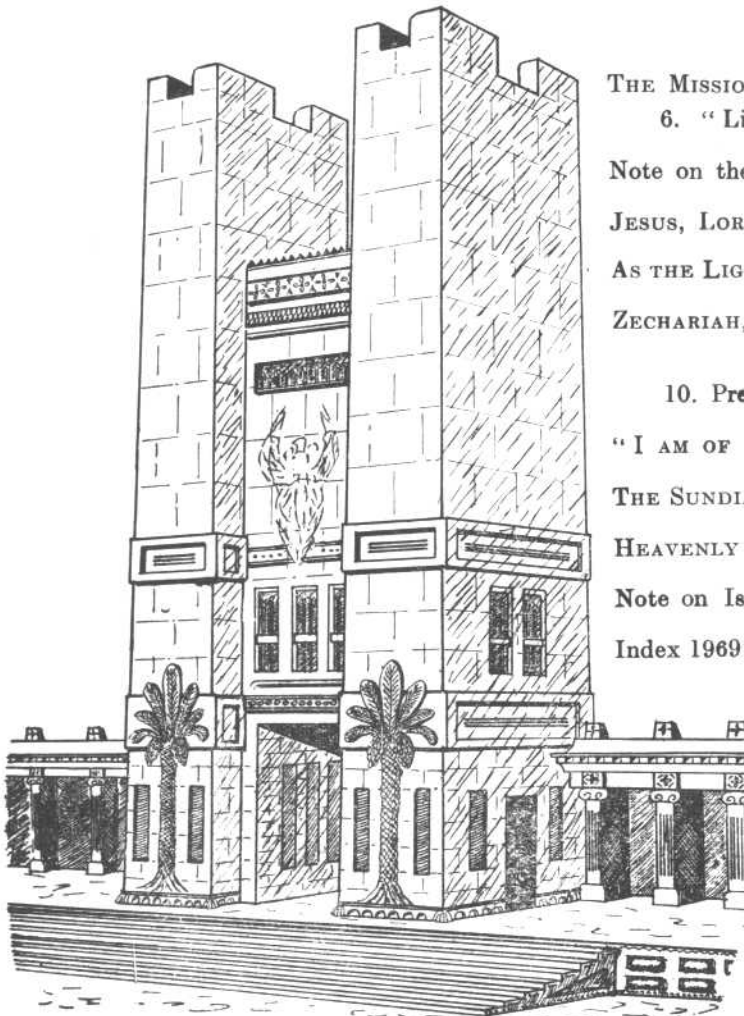
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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Gone from us

—:—

Sis. Bodle (Warrington)
Bro. J. Holliday (Guildford)

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

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THE MISSION OF JONAH

Chapter 6 "Like as a Father"

*The prophet who
ran away*

"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry" (4.1)

Jonah's anger with God is a thing unique in Old Testament history. Many men rebelled against God and disobeyed Him; some, like Moses, ventured to remonstrate and plead with Him, but of no other prophet is it said that he dared to be angry with God. Jonah must have felt very sure of his own position to venture upon this familiarity. His anger has often been put down to petulance, and his character is presented by nearly all orthodox commentators as that of a narrow, self-centred, ill-tempered man. There is really no evidence of this in the story. He does not seek to reverse the decision of the Almighty. He does not plead with God to change His mind and destroy the city after all. He does not even advance any argument such as the peril to future generations of Israelites if the city is spared. His acceptance of the Divine decree is full and absolute, but his feeling of one-ness with his God is so intense that he feels privileged to "speak his mind," as we would say, as to a familiar friend. "Was not this my saying," he says, "when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil" (verse 2). These words are wonderful words to have been uttered so early in Israel's history. This is no "tribal god of the Hebrews," as some would have us believe was the only conception of God to which men had attained at that time. Here is a man who knows that God is Love, knows it so well that directly Nineveh repented he realised that the threatened destruction would not come. Against his own will and desire he had been made the instrument of salvation to the Assyrians and of future anguish to his own people. His mind could reach no farther than that. Assyria would one day forget her repentance and newly found piety, and return to her old ways. He knew that. And then would come to pass the desolations of Israel foretold by prophets of old and perhaps seen by him also in prophetic vision. He knew that, too, and he could not bear the knowledge. In the bitterness of his soul, he prayed that he might rest in death, for life no longer held anything of value to him. "Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live" (verse 3).

Like Elijah of old, he was utterly discouraged and dispirited. He had not wrought any deliverance for Israel; he had not had any greater success than had his predecessors. He could not bear to see his countrymen suffer, and so, despite all the wonderful preservations he had experienced, he prayed now that he might die.

And in all his grief he quite forgot that if Assyria could be saved by repentance, so could Israel. One of the most striking impressions one gathers from the story of Jonah is the prophet's ignoring of his own people's sin. He was zealous for judgment upon Nineveh, but not for judgment upon Israel.

In that fact lies a lesson for all time. Jesus brought it home to the individual, made of it a personal matter, when He spoke of the man seeking to pluck the mote out from his brother's eye, all the time failing to perceive the beam in his own (Luke 6.41). So Jonah had yet to learn the greatest lesson of all—the overruling and overriding providence of God which is able to protect and deliver those who are sincerely His own, even although to our human reasoning there seems to be no way out.

The reply of God to Jonah is one of the most intimate touches of the Father's attitude to His children that we have on record. In an indulgent, almost semi-humorous tone, He asks, "Art thou greatly angry?" The Hebrew can be equally well translated as in the text or as in the margin, but the latter does perhaps agree better with the setting. "Art thou greatly angry?" asks the Most High gently. But Jonah is in no mood to respond lightly. He is in deadly earnest. "I am greatly angry, even unto death," or, as we would say, "I am deadly angry." Such an answer is demanded at this point, although it does not appear in the text. The conversation probably took place in the booth Jonah had erected, for although verse 5 reads as though Jonah then went out and built his booth, a number of scholars consider that the verse should read: "Now Jonah had gone out of the city, and abode on the east side of the city, and there he had made him a booth, and had sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city." It is certainly more reasonable to expect that after the Ninevites' repentance Jonah would retire and wait the forty days to see what the outcome was going to be.

We may picture him therefore as making

his way eastwards, through the Ninlil Gate beside the great reservoirs which supplied Nineveh with water, over the outer ramparts and along the road leading across the plain east of the city, until after a few hours' walking he would be climbing the foothills of the Kurdish mountains. Somewhere up in those mountains lay Elkosh, where a century later the prophet Nahum was to utter his denunciations against the wicked city. There on the slopes Jonah built his little booth and sat under it, gazing upon the vast city spread out on the plain below him and the great River Tigris winding across the desert toward the sea. There he sat on the fortieth day, waiting, hoping against hope, for the catastrophe. It could be so easy for God—a great flood as in the days of Noah, a wall of water rolling down the river, bursting over those lofty walls, overflowing the houses and palaces, carrying all that pride and splendour away in one vast maelstrom of rushing torrents until great Nineveh was reduced to a sea of mud. Or there could be fire and brimstone from heaven, as in the days of Abraham when God destroyed the cities of the plain. There were so many ways in which Nineveh could be overthrown—but the sun came up on the morning of the forty-first day, and as the pools of mist cleared away from the plain the city stood revealed in all its accustomed magnificence; the river rolled on to the sea as serenely as ever, and Jonah was exceedingly angry.

Yet Jonah's prediction was fulfilled eventually. The Ninevites' repentance was short-lived; they soon went back to their old ways; and less than two hundred years later Nineveh fell, never to rise again. That great city through which Jonah had walked, crying his message, "*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown,*" was so utterly destroyed that in after days a great Greek army marched over the very spot without knowing that the fabulous city of the ancients lay beneath their feet. Those magnificent palaces and temples, those massive walls and embankments, all were of the dust, and all turned to dust again. The place where the city had stood was forgotten, and remained undiscovered until Paul Botta in the year 1843 was shown some inscribed tablets dug from a hill across the river, and, following up the clue, came upon the palaces of the Assyrian kings, buried far underground.

Jonah's forty days was not a literal forty days. The number forty is associated in the Scriptures with times of testing or of trial. Nineveh's literal forty days produced repentance and consequent deliverance for that generation. But the symbolic forty days—a period of nearly two centuries' testing time—demonstrated that there was no real change in the national character, and so, the iniquity of the

Assyrians having come to the full, the judgment of God fell upon the guilty nation, and Assyria fell, and great was the fall thereof.

But God was not finished with Jonah yet. There was a more personal lesson for him to learn, and now was the time when the prophet would be impressionable. So as Jonah remained in his booth, a light shelter of tree branches, ill adapted to protect him from the noonday heat, a spreading vine-like plant, a gourd, began to grow and twine itself over the booth. The commentators have spent a lot of time and gone to a lot of trouble in order to decide precisely what kind of plant was involved, but that is really quite immaterial. There are many creeping plants which in that tropical heat grow exceedingly fast, and it need not have been many days before Jonah found himself ensconced in a cool and snug retreat. Perhaps the greater comfort of body to some extent eased his troubled mind; at any rate, we read that he was exceedingly glad of the gourd. It is evident that after his disappointment over the expected destruction of Nineveh he was undecided what to do next, and was spending a few days here in the hills until he should receive some indication as to his next move.

"But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered" (verse 7). The word here denotes the class of creature concerned and does not necessarily mean that only one specimen was concerned. A similar usage is met in Isa. 14. 11. What apparently happened was that the mass of greenery covering Jonah's booth was attacked by a horde of caterpillars, biting into the succulent stems and so withering the whole mass, destroying Jonah's cool retreat. Jonah was angry again—not because God had failed to destroy, but this time because He had destroyed. Jonah professed indignation against this apparently wanton destruction, but, of course, his pique was really due to his own frame of mind. He was in the mood to complain at whatever happened. But there was more to come. *"It came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live"* (verse 8).

This "vehement east wind" is a well-known phenomenon in Mesopotamia and Persia. Under certain circumstances, the sun's heat produces an eddy of intensely heated air which can kill a man in a few seconds. The natives call it the *sam*, or poison wind. Marco Polo, the Venetian traveller of the thirteenth century, tells of this wind having suffocated sixteen hundred horsemen and five thousand footmen on one occasion in Persia, and a modern writer, so lately as 1928, tells of a case in his own knowledge

where a man was struck down and suffocated in this very district. It need not be considered any exaggeration, therefore, when we read that Jonah fainted and wished in himself to die.

Again that gentle, indulgent question, "Art thou greatly angry?" and again the same sullen reply, "I am greatly angry, deadly angry." Swift as an arrow came the accusation from the Almighty, "*Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither made it grow; son of the night it was, and as a son of the night it died. And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand people that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?*"

Jonah had no answer—and for a very good reason. The pity and mercy of God is greater by far than the weakly sentiment of men. Jonah had admitted to feelings of pity and mercy for this creeper of the field, a few trailing strands of vegetation whose life was inevitably for a brief span and even then only to serve as food for living creatures of a slightly higher order in creation. A son of the night it was, said God, and as a son of the night it died, and yet for this humble representative of the plant world Jonah had pity. How much more then should God have pity for that great city which housed a hundred and twenty thousand human beings, with all the tremendous possibilities inherent in their hearts and minds. True, their ignorance of God was so profound that in His sight they could not yet discern between their right hand and their left, but all that was provided for in His Plan, and one day they are to come before Him for that instruction which may well bring them into His image and likeness. They may have been cruel and bloodthirsty by upbringing and training, but they were not utterly depraved. Their repentance, short-lived though it may have been, showed that, and God knew that He could in due time do much with that unpromising material.

"*And also much cattle.*" That surely must have hit Jonah. He was solicitous for the creeping vine; God was tender toward the cattle. Can we not take a leading point from this? Man is to be the glory of earthly creation, a king over this dominion, and God took pains at the first to make him in His own image and likeness. But God does not forget that He made the cattle too, and took delight in what He had made, and has a place for them in His world. When the angel of death was hovering over the threatened city, God looked down and saw, besides repentant men, the dumb beasts His own hand had made, and on their account too He bade the angel sheath his sword.

So we leave Jonah, in his booth, waiting . . .

for what? We know not. We do not know whether he spent the rest of his days in Nineveh or went back to his own land. We do not know whether this experience closed his career or he was given yet other mighty works to undertake for his God. What is claimed to be his tomb is shown at Nineveh, and again at the modern village which stands on the site of the ancient Gathhepher, and again in the village of Khan Yunus on the southern frontier of Israel. We do not even know where he is buried. The curtain drops upon a lonely man, sitting in his little shelter away there on the Kurdish hills, bitter in his disappointment and apprehensive for the future, and yet, we may dare to hope, conscious of a dawning realization that there is something grander and greater in the plans of God for mankind than either he or his people had ever dreamed. The full understanding of that greater thing has yet to wait for a later day, a day when the One whom Jonah prefigured is revealed to men at His Second Coming to complete the work He began at His First Advent. Like Jonah, He went into death and was raised up out of death. But still the world was not converted; was not made again in God's likeness. More; the vast majority of men had gone into death without even so much as hearing the only "*name given under heaven whereby we must be saved*" (Acts 4.12). The world is still waiting—although it may not have to wait much longer—for that day of Christ's reign on earth, when all, the living and the dead, will come before His appointed ministers, first to answer for the deeds done in the past, and then to hear the gospel of the Divine purposes proclaimed to them as it has never been proclaimed yet. The great lesson of Nineveh is that God condemns no man until he has had a full opportunity to accept the Divine way of life. The period of the reign of Christ on earth, the "Day of Judgment," is to give all, the awakened dead as well as the then living, a full, complete and adequate opportunity to learn and accept God's ways and to be reconciled to Him through acceptance and discipleship of Jesus Christ. Only when that opportunity has been intelligently and deliberately rejected will God turn sorrowfully away and leave the incorrigible sinner to his choice—death.

That is why Jesus said (John 5. 28) that all will return from the grave, some to a resurrection to life, but others to a resurrection to judgment. That is why Daniel said (12.2), some will rise to enduring life and others to shame and enduring contempt; for the secrets of all men shall be manifest in that day, and those Ninevites, despite all their vices and depravity, their short-lived repentance and national obduracy, will stand face to face with others, men and women of two thousand years ago and men and women of to-day, mute witnesses to a long-foretold condemnation:

For it was said by One having authority:

"The men of Nineveh shall rise in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn

it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonas, AND BEHOLD, A GREATER THAN JONAS IS HERE!"

(THE END)

The Needle's Eye

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of god". (Matt. 19.24.)

It is stated by some, and by others denied, that our Lord's words allude to a small door fixed in the gates of cities in ancient times whereby late travellers could enter when the great gates were closed. Confirmation of the allusion comes from Samuel Schor (died 1933) who was born in Jerusalem and spent his life in Jewish mission work; he actually witnessed a camel thus going through the "needle's eye" after being unloaded of its goods. He says in *"Palestine and the Bible"* that in his day camels still came into the city laden with sacks of goods projecting three or four feet on either side of their bodies. So loaded, the animal could only pass through a wide gate, never through the needle's eye. *"Its only chance of entering would be to remove the burden first."* Our Lord indicated by this allusion, not that a rich man could never become His disciple, but that he could do so only by divesting himself of his earthly interests and achievements, and possessions, coming to Jesus in full personal surrender. And the rich young ruler found this too hard *"for he was very rich."*

On one occasion, when a boy, Mr. Schor continues, desiring to pass out of the city (Jerusalem) he reached the gate too late; it had just been closed. *"Someone outside knocked and demanded admission. The sentinel, after several questions, opened the 'needle's eye' to admit him. He proved to be an officer and he*

entered, leading his horse. While the soldier stood at attention and saluted, a 'fella' suddenly slipped in from without. He had a rope in his hand, and before long there appeared the head and neck of a camel he was leading. With his head, long neck and two of his legs in, the camel refused to go back, and there ensued a great struggle, causing much mirth. Men outside tried to force the camel by pushing and beating; the soldier tried with the butt end of his gun to force the camel and man back again. But the crowds were on the side of the man, with the result that after a great deal of struggling and groaning on the part of the camel, his hind legs and body at last passed through the small gate, amid the cheers and laughter of the crowd. The camel was carrying no burden."

Yet another Jonah

In the July—August instalment of the series on Jonah there was told the old Greek story of Arion, who was thrown overboard from the ship on which he was travelling and carried home to Corinth on the back of a dolphin. The story is usually regarded as legend, but.....

A modern equivalent to this story occurred so recently as August 1969. The crew of a Swedish ship a hundred miles out to sea from the coast of Nicaragua sighted a South Korean seaman clinging to the back of a giant turtle. He was taken on board and told the captain that he had fallen overboard from his vessel, came across the turtle and had been riding on its back for fifteen hours. He was landed at Los Angeles. (Daily Mail 25/8/69)

A Note on Thomas

"Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow-disciples, let us also go that we may die with him" (John 11. 16). The Jews were seeking Jesus to stone Him, when news came of the death of Lazarus, and he set out to go to Bethany despite the entreaties of the disciples, who were apprehensive for his safety. It was then that Thomas came out in such a favourable light. He was the first to express his desire to follow Jesus even though it seemed to be into certain death. Because of his refusal to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus until he could see his Lord in His pre-crucifixion likeness, he has become known in later times as "doubting Thomas"; maybe the slight is undeserved,

for in this incident his loyalty to Jesus shows up very strongly. He was prepared to take the lead of the others in following Jesus into death. Perhaps it was the same intense loyalty which forbade him believe until he had identified the wound-prints in hands and feet. If so, it seems clear that loyalty is not enough if it is not accompanied by spiritual discernment. "Blessed are they who, *having not seen, have believed*" i.e. have not seen with the natural sight, but have done so with the spiritual sight." Thomas is reputed to have carried the Gospel to Mesopotamia and then to India, where the memory of his name is cherished to this day.

JESUS, LORD, SAVIOUR

A Christmas message

"Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2.11)."

Perhaps one of the most familiar stories of the Bible is this one of the Judean shepherds camped out with their flocks at night, to whom the angels appeared with the thrilling news that the Saviour was born. Although it is generally admitted nowadays that the true date of Christ's birth was in October and not in December the story will never lose its association with Christmas and the end of the year. Here in the darkest hour before dawn, the depth of the world's winter, came that radiance from heaven which betokened the sunrising. *"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined"* (Isa. 9.2.) Messiah had come, and now everything was going to be alright.

The shepherds must have wondered, though, when they found the babe in the humble surroundings of a wayside inn, and not even the inn proper at that. The Lord's Messiah, lying in the animal's food trough surrounded by bullocks and camels! This was not the way men would have ordered it had men invented the story. The Wise Men from the East, when they came to worship the Christ later on, went automatically to the palace of King Herod first, never dreaming but that there was the place to find the Messiah. The shepherds would feel more at home in the humble surroundings of the village inn. There is a tremendous contrast between the story of the Babe of Bethlehem and the awe-inspiring description of the Lord Christ given by the writer to the Hebrews *"the effulgence of God's glory and the exact impress of His Person"* (Heb. 1.3). The infant child of a village maiden, almost unnoticed in the rush and bustle of a wayside inn, completely unknown to the rich and influential of the day, the priests and the princes and the kings, yet addressed by God the Father, Maker of Heaven and earth, in tones of majesty *"thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom"* (Heb. 1.8). If there existed no other evidence of the truth of the Virgin Birth this first chapter of Hebrews should be sufficient. How else could the Divine Son come into the world of men if not by the life from above uniting with the clay of the earth and in that manner partake of man's nature and man's environment and become subject to man's limitations whilst yet remaining, as He so often said, *"of the Father"*? Adam received the primal human life from God and that was trans-

mitted through successive generations, but it is unthinkable that the life of the Son who is of the Father should come into the body which Mary gave Him, through the medium of a multitude of sons of Adam as would be the case were Joseph His natural father. Scripture tells us that He laid aside the glory He had with the Father before the world was and took hold of human nature for the suffering of death, after that returning to the Father, where He ever liveth, supreme over all creation. *"The world was made flesh"* says John *"and we beheld his glory, the glory as of an only-begotten of the Father"* (Jno. 1. 14). And it was in order that God might manifest Himself to man that the Son came thus.

This is a most important principle. When Philip said to Jesus *"Show us the Father and it sufficeth us"* and Jesus replied *"Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"* (Jno. 14. 8-9), that principle was clearly declared. St. Paul talked about it when he referred to *"the mystery of Deity—God manifest in the flesh"* (1 Tim. 3.16). When one comes to think about it, this is the only way in which the Father can manifest Himself to man, in the frame and lineaments of man like ourselves, yet not of us, not of our race. True, the ancients thought of God as a venerable King of majestic mien and superlative wisdom and power, seated upon a magnificent throne somewhere in the upper heavens, but basically having the form of man as we know man. Nowadays and with our greater knowledge of the vastness of His creation we realise that God is far beyond our powers of either understanding or imagination. We know He is there but how to describe Him we do not know. We can only repeat Paul's own words *"dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen or can see"* (1 Tim. 6.16.). Therefore in the person of Jesus Christ God reveals Himself to men in a form and in a language they can understand. And while thus in the flesh and subject in many respects to the requirements and limitations of human nature our Lord was always in possession of the Divine power which made Him one with the Father, as he declares *"whatsoever things He" (the Father) "doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise"*. (Jno. 5.12).

But He is not only Christ the Lord, He is also Jesus the Saviour. *"Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins"* said the angel to Joseph (Matt. 1.21). Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua or Jehoshua, the meaning of which is *"God saves"*, and a popular name among the

Israelites on that account. *"The Son of Man"* said Jesus of Himself *"is come to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19.10). There is an active element in the redemption which is sometimes not stressed as it should be. All too often the emphasis is laid upon the virtue of belief in Jesus Christ, who is prepared to accept the burden of human sin, as though the sinner thus relieved is at once fit to be ushered into the Divine Presence whereas in point of fact he certainly is not. The heart and the mind and the character that has been sullied and distorted by sin must be reshaped and made fit for the society of the blessed, and for whatever place in His purpose God has for that individual, before the work of redemption is complete. Repentance and acceptance of Christ and the consequent removal and non-imputation of past sin is the first step, but cleansing from the defiling and destructive effects of sin and the implantation of Divine character-likeness must follow before the work of grace is done, and all this is implicit in the deliverance that is in Christ Jesus. And so throughout life it is necessary to continue *"in Christ,"* making continual progress toward the Christian ideal which is set before us in the New Testament. None of the exhortations to Christian living appearing so frequently throughout the Gospels and the Epistles would be necessary if the mere formal profession of belief in Christ and of faith that He takes away our sins were all that is necessary to ensure eternal salvation. Having once become Christ's men, unfit for His purposes though we are, despite our faith, we have then to submit to His disciplines that at the last we may attain to what St. Paul in Eph. 4.13 calls the *"measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."*

To be saved from sin in the sense intended by Jesus does not mean merely a forgiveness for the past, a wiping the slate clean, so to speak, without consideration for what in everyday language would be called the rehabilitation of the sinner. It also involves that rehabilitation, the undoing of all that sin has done to the individual, so transforming his character that he can stand before God. In this Age, during which the Christian church is being *"called out,"* this is described as being *"transformed by the renewing of your mind"* (Rom. 12.2.), and, in the next, when God turns to the conversion of the world, He says *"I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts."* (Jer 31.33).

The work of Christ in the heart and life of the individual who has already believed upon Him and accepted Him as personal Saviour is of supreme importance. God made man for a purpose and that purpose is intimately associated with the development and progress of His creatures. For much too long has

the idea prevailed that this present life is merely an essential and rather tiresome preliminary to an entry into heavenly joys, consisting mainly of everlasting choral praises to God without purpose or action. That is not the Scriptural outlook. *"This sore travail"* said the wise man *"hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith"* (Eccl. 1.13). There is a reason for the permission of evil; the long history of the human race has demonstrated and is demonstrating the fact that inharmony with Divine Law cannot co-exist with an orderly creation. This corner of God's creation, our earth with all its affairs, is out of order; it is under the dominion of sin. Christ came to show mankind the way out from under that dominion, to lead them into the *"glorious liberty of the children of God"* (Rom. 8.21). But man is a creature of free-will, a quality implanted by his Creator, and he cannot be compelled into the good life, only persuaded. So repentance and conversion is essential before any man can make a start on the road to his goal. Thus Christ came, first to call men to repentance and acceptance of Him as the channel of enduring life, and secondly, to a life devoted to His image. When in the execution of His inscrutable purpose God has ended the dominion of evil in the earth and introduced the Messianic Kingdom of everlasting righteousness, man will enter into the sphere for which all this training has been intended. Life is the glory of Divine creation; intelligent living creatures, entirely and irrevocably in harmony with the Will of God and the laws of creation of His devising, will play their part to all eternity in a ceaselessly active and continually developing and widening existence. *"And still new beauties do we see, and still increasing light."*

This is the salvation which Jesus brought to man and this the purpose of His coming. *"God made man upright"* says the Wise Man again *"but they have sought out many villainies"* (Eccl. 7.29.F.F.). In the love and wisdom of God the villainies will be overcome and done away with, and man saved from their power and effect, so that these wonderful beings, compounded from clay and the spirit of Divine life, may take up those duties in God's creation for which they have been designed. Upon this earth, in the heavens, in some distant sphere of life the conditions of which imagination at this present cannot even conceive, we may not know. What we do know is, that, as so movingly expressed by the Quaker poet John G. Whittier,

*"I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air.
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care."*

Wherever and under whatever conditions our

eternal future is to be spent it will always be true that God is there and that in the glory of his presence, and the power of His Spirit, we shall live, and learn, and serve, without sin and without evil, in an environment which meets our every need and desire, into infinity. That was the vision which inspired another poet to write:

*"These things shall be: a loftier race
Than e're the world hath known shall rise
With flame of freedom in their souls
And light of knowledge in their eyes*

*"They shall be gentle, brave and strong
To spill no drop of blood, but dare
All that shall plant man's lordship firm
On earth, and sky, and sea, and air*

*"New arts shall bloom, of loftier mould,
And mightier music thrill the skies,
And every life shall be a song
When all the earth is paradise"*

Thus, at last, it will be true that He whose name was called Jesus will have saved His people from their sins.

AS THE LIGHTNING SHINETH

A Bible Study

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

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

Which view is correct?

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

It is obvious that Jesus was likening His presence to something in nature with which they were already familiar, and had themselves witnessed a hundred times before. His use of the analogy would have been futile otherwise. We need then to determine the precise nature of the allusion.

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

be appreciated.

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

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

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

From the New Testament.

Acts 9. 3. "There shined round about him a light from heaven."

Acts 22. 6. "There shone from heaven a great light round about me."

Luke 24. 4. "Two men stood by them in shining garments."

Luke 11. 36. "As when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light."

Luke 9. 29. "His raiment was white and glistening"

Luke 10. 18. "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven."

Matt. 28. 3. "His countenance was like lightning."

From the Old Testament.

Deut. 32. 41. "If I whet my glittering sword."

Dan. 10. 6. "His face as the appearance of lightning."

Hab. 3. 11. "At the shining of thy glittering spear."

From the Apocrypha.

Wisd. 11. 18. "Wild beasts . . . shooting horrible sparkles out of their eyes."

4 Macc. 4. 10. "There appeared from heaven angels riding on horseback all radiant in armour."

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

The sun comes up suddenly, and a few minutes suffices to transform the velvety blackness of tropical night into the full brilliance of the day. It is for this reason that very few inhabitants of the land actually witness the sun's rising, for their sleep is broken only by its dazzling beams as they encircle the earth. There is no long and gradual dawn as in more temperate countries. The first sign of approaching day is a greyness in the eastern sky, a greyness for which—in Jerusalem at least—both city watchmen and the priests in the Temple were waiting and watching; the watchmen, because it indicated the end of their period of service, and the priests, because as soon as light had flooded the land it was their duty to offer the morning sacrifice. Hence the constant Scriptural association of the coming day with the "watchers", and the meaning of

that cryptic message, "Watchman, what of the night? . . . The morning cometh, BUT IT IS YET DARK" (Isa. 21. 11-12 French version). Within a few minutes the greyness is streaked with shafts of pink, and then, so rapidly as almost to bewilder the unaccustomed observer, a glorious golden light spreads from the east and moves visibly across the sky. Within a few minutes more the full blaze of day is pouring down upon a people quickly arising from sleep and betaking themselves to their accustomed tasks.

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

"As I was paying heed to what was profitable, some writings came into my hands which were too old for Greek ideas, and too divine for Greek errors. Thus was my soul instructed by God, and I understood how pagan teachings lead to condemnation, whilst these teachings abolish the bondage that prevails throughout the world, and free us from a plurality of rulers and tyrants innumerable. They furnish us not with something which we had not already received, but with something which, thanks to errors, had been lost."

Thus wrote Tatian, an Assyrian, and one of the most brilliant pagans of the second century, speaking of his conversion to Christianity. It is worthy of note that, coming to the Old Testament (the writings to which he refers above) and the teachings of

the Christian church, he realised how different were these principles from the Greek philosophy which held premier place in the world of that day, and, too, that acceptance of this new way of life brings freedom from the bondage which is upon men. Said Jesus: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," and again "If the Son shall make you free, then shall ye be free indeed." There was not much liberty in the Roman world, and that freedom in Christ which is the portion of all who become His by full surrender to His way of life stood out in sharp contrast to the condition of those who still sat "in darkness and the shadow of death."

ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

Chapter 10. Prelude to the Great Day

The last three chapters of Zechariah's prophecy tell the story of the end of this Age. They commence with the rumblings of the coming conflict, the confusion of nations in their hostility to Israel and the incoming Kingdom. They go on to tell of Israel's growing awareness of her Divinely ordained destiny and the development of a "remnant" which will be faithful to God through the fiery trials which lie ahead; of the emergence of new leaders, stalwarts of olden time returned to rule in righteousness during and after the crisis; of God's promise that He will surely defend Jerusalem. A spirit of grace and supplication begins to become manifest among the people, a recognition of their past national failure to accept and believe on Christ, culminating in a campaign against the modern political idolatry which will still have great influence in affairs.

Nevertheless the nation as a whole is not yet truly converted; some there are who face the coming crisis with apprehension and unbelief and some, perhaps, who are in the land only for the material prosperity it brings them and not by reason of any real faith in the Divine purposes. These will be purged out, cut off from the land, exiled, when the test of faith is applied. But a loyal section remains, steadfast while the enemy advances, and at that moment Divine power is manifested for deliverance. The 14th chapter tells in detail of that final phase, when the forces of unrighteousness meet head-on with the powers of Heaven and are destroyed. So the story closes. God's earthly "people for a purpose", the "Holy Nation", is standing secure among the nations and ready to embark upon its destined mission, that of proclaiming God's salvation to the ends of the earth.

Verse 1 of chapter 12 is an introduction to the momentous happenings of chaps. 12 and 13, covering the preliminary events of the period immediately preceding the dramatic moment when God rises up to deliver Jerusalem. It is important to realise that these three chapters do cover happenings occurring over a period of time; the gathering of the nations against Jerusalem and the fiery trial into which the people enter and from which only the faithful "remnant" emerge is not the work of a moment. Many distinct and varied factors enter into the sequence of events which characterises Israel's history at the end of the Age and they have to be viewed in their proper relation one to another. Hence the solemnity of this introductory verse. "An Oracle!" says the R.S.V. "The word of the Lord concerning Israel! Thus says the Lord, who stretched out the heavens

and founded the earth and formed the spirit of man within him". It is a strange verse, seemingly having little bearing upon the prophetic statement which follows, and yet, of course, it is vitally connected. The predominant theme of these three chapters is the all-pervading power of God, and His absolute supremacy over this earth that He has created and the men thereon to whom He has given life. In these three chapters the armed might of this world's evil is brought to a focus and launched against the earthly citadel of God's holiness, and is utterly broken. Nothing in all the earth can stand against God when He rises up to act. Hence it is fitting that right at the outset He declares Himself the One who brought heaven and earth into being and made men to have the powers they possess. And having thus stated the fact, God goes on to declare His intention. "Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem" (vs. 2). The "cup of trembling" is a figure of speech used several times in the O.T. (see Psa. 75. 8 and Isa. 51.21—22); it is the cup of wine put into the hands of an enemy to cause stupefaction and confusion, and so assist the ease with which that enemy can be repulsed and defeated. This is what Jerusalem (a figure for all Israel) is to become to the nations. During practically the whole of this century that has been true. Since 1917, when General Allenby captured Jerusalem and liberated the land from Turkish control, the consequent political problems have been a source of stupefaction and confusion to the world's politicians. And the problem has grown worse with time. "On that day" God says "I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it shall grievously hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth shall come together against it" (ch. 2.3 R.S.V.). The word for "grievously hurt" means to be cut and lacerated by a burden too heavy to hold; how true it has been that in these latter years every political power which concerns itself with the problem of Israel finds it one that is "too hot to hold" to use our modern colloquialism.

The expression "come together against it" seemingly refers to the gradual hardening of opinion against Israel typical of the present time. Judah and Jerusalem are associated together in the crisis and, later on, in the deliverance, this being the implication of the phrase in verse 2. Why it should be thought necessary to stress this fact when it would normally be expected that Judah, the land, would naturally

share the fate of the capital city Jerusalem might be thought rather strange, but it may be because in the historic invasion of Judah by Sennacherib two centuries or so before the time of Zechariah Judah was desolated whilst Jerusalem was delivered, and since that invasion was evidently the background against which Zechariah's presentation is set there might be an indication here that in this particular detail the reality does not correspond with the background. Three times in the narrative it is made plain that Judah and Jerusalem come through the crisis together.

Verse 4 pictures the next development in the situation among the nations. The Lord will "smite every horse with panic" (not "astonishment" as A.V.) "the riders with madness, and every horse of the people with blindness". Horses in prophecy are metaphors for the military might of nations; the well known passage in Isa. 31.1—3 is a good example of this. Blindness, madness, panic; surely these are the characteristics manifest in the policies of the nations in their dealings with the "Middle East" problem today. That which commenced with the cup of stupefaction, becoming a burdensome stone which lacerates all who pick it up, develops finally into complete failure to apprehend the true nature of what is happening, that the Most High is preparing the way for his intervention in the affairs of earth. Blindness, madness and panic is a very late stage in the period of preparation for the last siege of Jerusalem.

Now the workings of God begin to become outwardly evident. At this point, when blindness, madness and panic begins to grip the nations, "I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah" says the Lord "and the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the Lord of Hosts their God. In that day will I make the governors of Judah 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, on the right hand and on the left; and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again" (ch.12.4-6). This is a most remarkable statement, for it speaks of a time in the end of the Age, prior to the deliverance of Israel and therefore prior to the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom, when the leaders of Israel avow their own faith and the faith of their people in God. "Our strength" say these governors "is not in the arm of flesh nor in carnal weapons, but in God". This implies an awakening of faith in the nation, a beginning of that turning to God which blossoms into fulness at the time of the actual deliverance. At this moment God has opened his eyes upon the house of Judah and some have responded.

Who are the governors? These are political leaders of a new kind, for none of today's

statesmen, even those of present day Israel, would adopt so hazardous a policy as faith in Divine protection, and neither would their peoples. These governors are men of God, raised up from some totally unexpected source. There is good reason for the conclusion that they are none other than the promised heroes of Old Testament days, the "Ancient Worthies", restored from the dead to lead the nation into the Kingdom. If this in fact be so then the chapter has already carried us to a stage in the events of the end of the Age very near to the final act, the consummation when Divine power is employed to bring the kingdoms of this world to their end and establish the earthly Kingdom of God in their place. By that time the "change" of the Church will have taken place and the work of the Messianic Age be at the point of commencement.

The impact, upon mankind generally, of the advent of these governors will be tremendous. "Like a blazing pot in the midst of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves" says the R.S.V., "they shall devour to the right and left all the peoples round about, while Jerusalem shall still be inhabited in its place" (ch. 12.6). This verse is so momentous that it needs to be viewed in correct relation to the rest of the narrative with some care. It has its place prior to the active intervention of God to save the city at the critical moment; the influence of the "governors" is felt among the nations for a little while before, and it is a consuming influence. It is almost as if the battle commences and rages for some time before God steps in, and during that time the burden of defence rests upon the governors, and the nature of that defence is indicated in this verse. Something of this kind appears to be demanded by the more detailed narrative of chapter 14 where the siege continues with sundry losses to Israel but without harming the faithful remnant, until, after the nation has been purged of its apostates who then go into exile, the time of actual Divine intervention comes and the city is saved.

"The Lord will give victory to the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may not be exalted over that of Judah" (ch.12.7 R.S.V.). The expression "tents of Judah" really denotes the dwelling places of the ordinary populace of the land—derived from Israel's early experiences at the Exodus; "tents" became a term throughout the Old Testament for homes, whether temporary or permanent. There is a contrast here between the people of the land generally and the "upper crust" of society concentrated in the city and the king's court. Many of the invasions of Old Testament times saw the country dwellers despoiled and enslaved whilst the walled and defended city Jerusalem held out and escaped. There will be nothing like that in this battle of the Last Day.

The entire land is to be delivered from the invader; further, in order to intensify the fact that God is fighting for His covenant people as a whole and not just for a few elite, as it were, in the city, the countryside is to be first to experience deliverance, so that neither the royal ruling house of David nor the aristocracy of Jerusalem can claim priority of Divine favour over the masses of the people. The application of this symbolism to the time in question, when no Davidic kings rule nor is there any "aristocracy" element in restored Israel, is a little difficult to perceive. Perhaps it is intended to convey the idea that despite various vivid Old Testament pictures of the siege of Jerusalem, which from the literal viewpoint would involve the subjugation of the surrounding countryside, in this case the whole of the land of Israel is to be inviolate. It is certainly true that the siege of the city is just as truly a siege if the invaders are drawn up around the frontiers of the land instead of just outside the city walls and this would certainly be more appropriate to the idea of an entire nation awaiting the assault of the enemy in perfect trust in God and experiencing deliverance thereby.

"In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the

angel of the Lord before them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem" (ch. 12.8-9).

This is the final stage. David of old was the champion of Israel; his exploits both as a "guerilla" fighter, as we would say, in his early days, and as a warrior king later on, made his name a legend. "Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands" sang the maidens of Israel after one of his resounding victories. Even the weakest of the people "in that day" will be valiant as was David; not by dint of physical prowess in material warfare, but in the triumphs that faith will then bring. The house of David in ancient times was the ruling house, the royal family. "In that day" the ruling house will be the company of the resurrected Ancient Worthies and they truly will be "as God, as the angel of the Lord before them". Just as the Angel of the Presence went before Israel in the days of the Exodus, guiding and protecting them, so will the men whom God has appointed prove themselves sure guides and strong defenders in Israel's time of trial. So the Lord will defend His people and render ineffective all the assaults of their adversaries.

(To be continued)

The great city of Babylon was once the metropolis of the world—its merchandise was renowned among all nations. But the proud city was a city of sin, and Divine condemnation came upon it. The fiery words of the prophets regarding Babylon are familiar to all of us, and in fulfilment of those words, the site of Babylon has now, for thousands of years, lain desert and derelict, the proud buildings levelled with the ground, the wonderful gardens and parklands dry and sterile, and wild beasts the only signs of life.

In recent years there has been a change—date-palms are springing up everywhere over the ground that is ruined Babylon. During the archaeological excavations in the early part of this century, dates formed the staple food of the native labourers, and the stones, thrown down haphazardly, have taken root and begun to clothe the desert with living green.

The date palm was the most valuable product of ancient Babylonia, providing

food, several kinds of drink made from the juice of the fruit, timber for building, and fibre for many other uses. This is the tree which is depicted as the "tree of life" in Babylonian and Assyrian legend and sculpture. How appropriate then that upon the very site of the city which above all cities stands for the reign of evil, there should now be springing up "trees of life", as a result of the work of men who have been busy there proving the Bible true.

During this Age the earnest consecrated followers of Jesus have been sowing seed—the seed of the Kingdom—and soon it will be springing into life in the very soil of the reign of evil, the hearts of fallen men, called at last to rise up from the ruins of this "present evil world", and see it transformed into a "world wherein dwelleth righteousness". The seed sown to-day will become trees of life in the Millennial Age just as those date-stones dropped in the ground of ruined Babylon are clothing the waste place with living green. *"The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose."*

"I AM OF"

A discussion on
Christian unity

One of the deepest and most elusive aspects of the believer's standing in Christ is the fact that all such believers are members of one Body—a Body over which the Lord Jesus has been constituted the Head. The statement of the Lord Jesus that He is the true Vine of which every Spirit-joined believer is a branch has stood (together with Paul's illustration quoted foregoing) before the Christian Church since its earliest days, yet in all the years of the Church's pilgrimage, it may not be too much to say, the truth of that blessed fact has never yet been fully realised. From those early days the tongues and pens of her ablest sons have tried repeatedly to explain what that sacred "One-ness" means, but never yet have they made the outward organisation of the Church agree with the deductions drawn from the Holy Word. It has been (and still is) one thing to hold this doctrine as an article of faith; it is quite another thing to realise it as a matter of experience. Even in those purer days when the disciples had all things in common, the early company of believers, with the Apostles in their midst, failed to realise that full degree of Christian unity. An Ananias was found among them—a token that other interests had crept in. Again, the widows of the homeland Jews were getting more attention than the widows of the Grecian Jews and dissatisfaction and murmuring arose. While these symptoms were of no great severity and were promptly put right, yet they were as the small occasional bubble rising to the water's rim which showed that there was fermentation down below.

Nor has that idealistic One-ness been more than a mirage throughout the Age. Ever as the pilgrimage came to the spot where hope would seem to materialise, the vision disappeared and only desert sands remained.

The Roman Church long claimed to hold the bond of unity. Men had only to betake themselves to the repose of her cloistered community and accept as their credo what she was pleased to define, and all was well. There could thus be one fold, one flock and one Shepherd and Vicar of Souls. But no sooner had she pushed her claims to the ultimate, then restless and non-consenting men spoiled the serenity of her fold—clear proof that they were not at one.

Reform followed reform, and many creeds displaced the one. All of them read the same Master's words—"that they may be one, even as we are one", but how to fulfil them was beyond their power. Every new advance of truth made former differences more acute, and made more subtle modes of defining "one-ness" necessary. To join the broken fragments into

one whole stick was seen to be impossible, but, if they could not be "one-stick", at least they could be one "bundle" in which every separate chip could lie alongside its fellow-chips and thus lose its identity in the aggregate of one greater whole. "*We are not divided, all one body we,*" they sang, as they surveyed the bundle of chips, but consistories here and synods there ruled and governed each its part separately. They were not "One", either in form or purpose, and as things are, they cannot be "One" in the Christian sense. "I am of Rome," said one, "I am of Luther," said another; "I am of Calvin," said yet another, and so *ad libitum*, the whole professing Christian Church had, and still has, its varying party-cries.

We find the microscopic pattern of the whole Christian Church within the walls of the Corinthian ecclesia. It had not reached the unity of Christ. "*It hath been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren... that there are contentions among you, Now this I mean, that each of you saith, 'I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ'.*" (1 Cor. 1. 11-12 R.V.) Who and what these divisions were may be gathered from careful scrutiny of Paul's epistles to his Corinthian friends. Phrases here and whole paragraphs there describe the peculiarities and differences of this party and that, so that it is possible to construct an outline of these hostile elements pretending to fellowship as one whole.

The churches resulting from Paul's earliest missionary labours were composed of two hostile and incompatible elements—that is, they contained both Jews and Gentiles. Long-standing hereditary animosities had to be overcome in the converts from either side, and, so long as outside adverse elements did not introduce themselves, these animosities were greatly curbed, if not suppressed, by the exalted thrill of belonging to the same Lord, and by the mutual participation in salvation through His blood.

The first disturbing influence to break into these happy scenes proceeded from the mother Church at Jerusalem. In that then unholy city many thousands who, in some measure had believed (Acts 21.20) still remained zealous of the Law, and strove hard against Paul to maintain the rites and practices inherent in the Law. Learning of the large influx of Gentiles into some of the distant churches, they sought to compel them to submit to circumcision—telling them "*Unless ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved*" (Acts 15. 1). Certain emissaries from James and the mother-Church followed in the wake of Paul, and crept into the little companies he had

gathered, and in his absence sowed these seeds of disturbing thought. This had happened everywhere where Paul's intensive labour had gathered a little nucleus of believing souls, and rent the perplexed companies in twain.

The baneful influence of Jerusalem had been felt in the Corinthian Church. At least two sections of this divided Church had been created by this influence. These were the parties professing to follow Peter and Christ. These parties held themselves aloof from the uncircumcised Gentile converts, and where the influence from Jerusalem was strong (as at Antioch, see Gal. 2.11-13) would not deign to eat with their Gentile brethren. This separation of the Jewish element had its reaction on the Gentile element also. Greece had long been notorious for its speculative philosophies—its communities, as at Athens (Acts 17. 21) always seeking to learn some new thing. As at Jerusalem, where over-zealous souls sought to blend the Gospel into the Law, so at Corinth enthusiastic tutors sought to amalgamate the Gospel with native philosophy and teach things which the Jewish section could not accept. These were the men who lined themselves behind the name of Apollos, who himself was a native of Alexandria, where Oriental philosophy had established its principal school. It was from this section that denial of the resurrection of the dead arose (1 Cor. 15). Then there were some who misinterpreted Christian liberty. Taking as their warranty Paul's teaching that the true believer in Christ was set free from the Law, they stretched this teaching to mean that they were not under any law or any restraints of any kind, and that no act was to be accounted sinful or censurable. All kinds of gross immorality were tolerated and excused—such immorality as was not sanctioned even in the unbelieving Gentile world (1 Cor. 5).

In addition to these were others who understood Paul aright and sought, like their dear father-in-God, to live holy and upright lives—some, who from among the Jews, had found the burden of the Law intolerable; some also from the Gentiles who rejoiced in the salvation brought into their lives through Jesus' sacrifice. What a strange admixture of outlook and teaching was gathered together in this one ecclesia at Corinth! Truly it seems as if that Church was the dumping-ground for all the theological and philosophical garbage of the earth!

Together with the proclamation of the pure Gospel of Grace and the Cross of Christ, there was the enunciation of Mosaic claims, and the propagation of Oriental mysteries, interspersed by the impudent clamour of those brazen enough to excuse the blackest sin. With diversities such as these is it to be expected that anything but division could ensue?

Without doubt every section could offer (at

least satisfactorily to itself) some justification for its attitude, and for its separateness and throw on some other group the blame for the disunited state of the Church. Seeing that neither Paul nor Peter, nor even Apollos, were resident elders in the Corinthian Church it stands obvious that every group must have had some leading man or men at its head, around whose dominating personalities the members of each party were ranged. Apostles and evangelists paid no more than flying visits, then went on their way. Resident elders remained to carry on where Apostles left off.

This was where the trouble usually began. Division was not engineered nor sanctioned by the Apostolic visitor, but no sooner had he left than comparisons were drawn and preferences expressed concerning the nature of their several ministries. And they who became the most readily articulate were just those who should have deprecated such comparisons and rebuked such preferences. Thus, as the forefront brethren expressed their preference for this or that style of utterance and for this or that view of the outworking of the Divine Plan, the rank and file ranged themselves in alignment with this or that leading elder in his approval and support of this Apostle or evangelist, and his attack upon the rest of the visiting ministers. The rank and file were not much to be blamed for this—they only followed where they were led. The fault was in the supposed shepherds of the flock who, forgetful of the sacred task laid upon them by the Lord, turned away from the ministry of holy things to discuss personalities with their merits and relative demerits. Of course, each group could justify its attitude and make out a good case for the position it assumed.

"If only Paul would be content to be like Peter, and not open the door widely to the Gentile dogs, there would be far more of our own kith and kin embrace Gospel truth." "Paul does not seem to realise that what he gains from Gentile lands he more than repels from among his own people." *"If only he was content to be like Peter and James—men who really saw the Lord, and heard the Gospel from His mouth, there would be thousands more who, though still remaining zealous of the law, would accept Jesus as the Messiah of Israel."* Thus spake the supporter of Peter's claims.

More violent and dangerous than these were the "holier-than-thou" "go-to-the-fountain-head" zealot who said he was "of Christ". Is it assumed that here, at last, was one party beyond reproach, and which knew where its allegiance should be placed? Not a bit of it! Headed, presumably, by some venerable patriarch who had visited Jerusalem in the Master's earthly days, and who, hearing the discourse of Him who spake with such authority, had accepted

and believed His testimony direct, then carried it away to this foreign soil, there to forget much and mistake more of what the Blessed One had spoken, so that now it was but a travesty of what it should have been.

It is to this group Paul refers when he writes again (2Cor. 10.7). *"If any man trusteth in himself that he is Christ's (of Christ) let him consider this again with himself, that, even as he is Christ's, so also are we."* Of Paul, this section had not one good word to say. They challenged his Apostleship, first, because he never saw the Lord in the flesh, and next because he did not presume to live upon the brethren, but laboured with his own hands. Though admitting that his letters were weighty and strong, they held in ridicule both his personal presence and his speech. He was "straight-laced" "not-as-these-other-men" Phariseism masquerading in a supposed Christian garb, and justifying it all in the name of Him who accepted all.

What was here amiss? Why did all this fleshliness of outlook prevail? Exactly because they had not understood the purport of the Gospel call. It was a new thing in the world. Judaism had been divided into rival schools, Heathenism had had its myriad cults, and they could not conceive that the Gospel call was of a different nature altogether. Every leader lived for and fostered the interests of his own following. Each one was partisan and sectarian. No single one could labour for the good of all. Not one amongst them could or would say "We are all of Christ" or viewing the broken ranks, say "Let us all together strive to be of Christ". That was their fault—they were myopic, hard-hearted, suspicious, and uncharitable. They scrupled not to interdict, to slander and defame those for whom Christ had died, and who had been sent forth in His Name.

There was a little truth, or some semblance of a truth, in the teachings of each group. What they would not see was the truth held by the rival groups. They did not realise that they saw only "in part" and not the whole truth. They did not see that truth must be progressive and grow from bud to bloom. Each section thought it had "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth", and would not for a moment allow that any rival section subscribed to truth. Each rival leader thought he had all the truth and ministered what he had for his own following alone. To one group and its leaders Cephas possessed the hallmark of the truth—to another group Apollos was the criterion, to still another Paul, and to the straitest group of all, an earthly Christ. And as at Corinth, so has it been throughout the Age. So truly has the glorious ideal of Christian Unity been at once both mirage and morass—a mirage to draw onward, and a morass to engulf.

There may have been some true saints in every section of the Corinthian Church, but no

single elder or leader therein was able to minister to all such saints, because the deeper and profounder things of the Christian faith had been overlaid and obscured by lesser and shallower things. Nor, so long as the dividing boundaries were observed could saint reach out to saint over the barriers. But—and this is the great fact outstanding in true Christian relationship—while their sense of one-ness was dulled and impaired, it made no difference to the actual One-ness in the heavenly Courts. That actual One-ness is an other-worldly spiritual thing, registered in heaven above. It is a mystic union of kindred souls, joined to the Lord, who died with Him in His death, and were raised with Him in His Resurrection, and are accounted alive because He lives, yet running their earthly course, centuries apart, perhaps, with whole continents or oceans lying between their habitats—and found one here, and another there; one then, another now,—but spite of all earthly handicaps, linked, and joined up to their Lord and Head. The Shepherd of the flock knows all His sheep and no man plucks them from His hand, no matter how that man despoils the pasture, or fouls the flowing streams of truth.

It is not easy to maintain the sense of unity, even to-day. While the real interests of every sheep is in the great Shepherd's hands, the sense that we are of one calling can be blurred and dulled by an elder's unhelpful ministry. Too much insistence upon secondary things can upset the balance of the mind concerning more important things and tend to divert attention from the all-essential relationships. Such over-insistence may suit a "following", but it does not minister to the needs of the whole flock. It tends to apply itself to only a "part"—and that is Corinth over again!

Mistakes in theology may indeed need to be corrected, and a stand may have to be made for Truth, but the Christian cannot live on negatives or on denials of another man's theology. He must have the positive affirmations of the Word as his provender. And more than that, while "truth" must be, at times, defended and proclaimed, "Truth" is not the great set thing in the Christian economy. The proclamation of Truth is but a means to an end, and the end is greater than the means. God revealed His Truth to win for Himself a family—and every son and daughter to-day is greater in God's sight than any spoken means that led them into that relationship. The child is more precious in the Father's sight than even the most correct definition of a truth. Let us never forget that fact.

This conclusion remains. There are some aspects of Truth which separate the flock and divide its interests. There are some other aspects that unite, and deepen the present sense of unity. Insistence on secondary things can work present injury to sensitive souls, and draw

barriers down the ranks, keeping saint from kindred saint. Only when minds have been dulled by deprivation of essential truth do they reach the point where they begin to say "I am of . . ."

Is it not the duty then of every pen and voice to seek the interests of all the flock—of all the

brethren known and unknown, both inside and outside our present fellowship and seek to feed the wearied sheep with such provender that will make the sense of one-ness keen and sharp? Then, as any modern Paul may plant or some present-day Apollos water, God can use both to produce increase to the flock.

"Being crafty, I caught you with guile"

2. Cor. 12. 16

The words occur in Paul's letter to his Corinthian converts when he is assuring them of the extremes of personal inconvenience to which he would go in labouring for their welfare. The expression does not sound good in the light of English usage; it seems almost as if the Apostle was prepared to resort to "shady methods" in the pursuit of his object. This is not borne out by the original; the word rendered "crafty" is used in a bad sense as cunning, knavish, treacherous, deceitful, and in a good sense as wise, sagacious, dexterous, and skilful (compare our English words craft and craftsman as indicating skill at a trade). Likewise that rendered "guile" means to catch with a bait as in fishing, and "caught" to receive or take to one's self. Whether a bad or a good sense is intended here depends entirely on the context. Paul is speaking, and from chapter 9

onward has been speaking, of the comprehensive money offering that was being organised by the Christian communities in Greece for the benefit of the poor and destitute Christians in Judea. Intermingled with this he reminds them that his own ministry, and that of his co-labourers, by means of which they themselves came to know Christ and were freed from the bondage of paganism, was given to them freely and without cost. He left them to infer the moral. Freely had they received, of the Gospel; now freely might they give, evidencing in a practical manner the extent to which the principles of the Gospel had penetrated their hearts and lives. In that sense the Apostle was sagacious or skilful in the manner he brought the Corinthian Christians to the point where they could not escape the logic of his words, or fail to realise the moral obligation which rested upon them to reciprocate the freely given service of the Apostle to them by giving freely in return to the necessities of the poor saints in Judea.

Angel's Food

"Man did eat angel's food". This expression occurs in Psa. 78. 25 and refers to the manna sent as food for the Israelites in the wilderness. In the past, some thought that manna was indeed the food of angels, on the strength of this verse. The word here translated "angel", however, is "abbir" which is nowhere else rendered "angel" but is rendered "bull" four times "strong" or

"strong one" (referring to bulls) four times, and "chiefest" "mighty" "mighty one" and "valiant". The verse in Psa. 78 appears to mean that man ate mighty or strength-giving food—the food of the mighty; thus contrasting the Divine provision for Israel with the poor provision they would have to depend upon if the power of God had not been exerted on their behalf.

"Yet hath the king devised means, that his banished be not expelled from him" (2 Sam. 14. 14).

This is the principle upon which God has been working from the dawn of history. He is no ruthless autocrat, exercising grim sovereignty over a mass of helpless subjects, choosing some for everlasting bliss and dooming all the remainder to everlasting misery. Neither is He an unapproachable Deity to whom the sufferings and shortcomings of humanity make no appeal. And neither is He a Creator Whose creation has got beyond His control. For reasons too un-

fathomable for us to understand as yet, God knows the way of suffering can be made a means to the execution of His ultimate ideal; and although it is not true to say that God is responsible for the world's sin and suffering—for it was man, in the exercise of his own free will and in the light of knowledge of the Divine command who brought evil into the world—yet God has at all times had the situation firmly in hand and is working steadily to bring back to himself those who, because of sin, have been banished from Him for a season.

THE SUNDIAL OF AHAZ

*The story of a
Divine sign*

"Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down." (Isa. 38. 8).

This is another of those Old Testament incidents which seem to set at defiance the known laws of Nature and hence receive more than the usual meed of criticism from sceptics and "modern" Bible scholars. In reaction to this, many studious Christians of the traditional school have sought to explain the account along lines of scientific explanations of the miracle, always on the basis of the Authorised Version translation.

It was in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign that the apparently fatal illness gripped him, and the word of the prophet Isaiah came to him "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live" (Isa. 39, 1). And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, for he was a devout man, and he had worked hard for the good of his people of Judah, and his work was not yet finished. There was more in Hezekiah's grief than appears on the surface, too, for as yet he had no son, and the promised seed, Christ, could come only through his line. It seemed as though God intended to abandon His own purpose and the glory of Israel never come at all. So Hezekiah prayed that he might live.

His prayer was answered. He heard that fifteen years were to be added to his life. Isaiah was commissioned to give him a sign that the Lord would both heal his sickness and deliver the city from the army of Sennacherib, which was at the time threatening Judah, for this was before the celebrated destruction of Sennacherib's army outside Jerusalem. (Isa. 38, 6-7 and 36, 1 and 37, 36). According to the parallel account in 2 Kings 20, 8-11, Hezekiah was given the choice of two signs. Either the shadow of the "sundial of Ahaz" was to go down ten degrees, or it was to return back ten degrees. Hezekiah chose the latter. It was a light thing, said he, for it to go down ten degrees; it did that every day anyway; "nay, let the shadow return back ten degrees."

And the shadow went back!

This sounds like a most amazing happening. It would seem to the ordinary man that the only way in which the shadow on a sundial could return would be for the sun to reverse its course and appear to traverse the sky from west to east, which, since it is the earth that moves, and not the sun, would imply that the earth had changed its direction of rotation and was turning backwards. On this basis the commentators of the nineteenth century endeavoured to

demonstrate that such a thing did actually happen in the days of Hezekiah. A distinguished astronomer, E. W. Maunder, in the early years of this century produced elaborate calculations to support this view.

Before discussing the nature of the miracle, however, let us examine the story itself, and particularly the language used, and let us try to reconstruct for ourselves the scene of which Hezekiah's sick-bed formed the centre-piece on that memorable day.

Hezekiah lay sick in his palace. There is still much that is not known about the Jerusalem of his day, but the position of the palace of the Kings of Judah is definitely established. It lay a little to the south of the Temple, facing the Mount of Olives, which rises from the opposite side of the deep valley of the Kedron. From where Hezekiah reclined he could see the Mount directly before him and the Temple towards his left. Somewhere nearby, near enough for him to witness the "sign," was the "sundial of Ahaz."

Nowhere else in the Bible is there any mention of an instrument for measuring time. Until the days of Daniel, over a century later, there are no indications that the children of Israel divided the day into hours. One is justified therefore in looking a little more carefully at this expression "the sundial of Ahaz."

Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, was a great admirer of foreign innovations, as is evidenced by the account in 2 Kings 16, and he might very well have acquired a sundial for his palace grounds were such things in existence in his day. The earliest known sundials are of Greek manufacture and date back only so far as the sixth century B.C., two hundred years later than the time of Ahaz. The Roman engineer Marcus Vitruvius, the author of a celebrated work on architecture and mechanical inventions, written in the time of Augustus Caesar, a few years before Jesus was born, says that the sundial was invented by Berosus, the Chaldean priest (*Arch.* 9, 9); and Berosus lived only about 250 B.C. Herodotus, the Greek historian (440 B.C.), states that the sundial was invented by the Babylonians (*Hist.* 2, 109), whilst in Homer's "*Odyssey*" (900 B.C.) there is an obscure reference to a means of observing the revolutions of the sun in use in Syria (*Odys.* 15, 402). It is just possible therefore that Ahaz could have possessed a sundial.

It is when the word "sundial" is examined that a totally different complexion is put upon the account. The Hebrew is *maalah*, which denotes an ascent by means of steps or stages, and is used for "steps" or "stairs" in the Old

Testament. The *steps* of the altar in Exod. 20, 26, and of Solomon's throne in 1 Kings 10, 19 and 20, and the *stairs* of 2 Kings 9, 13 and Ezek. 40, 6 are "*maalah*." So, likewise, are the majestic words in Amos. 9, 6. "It is he that buildeth his *stories* in the heavens" where "*stories*" refer to the stages or terraces of the Babylonian *ziggurats* or temple towers, reared up into the heavens. And this word "*maalah*" is also translated *degrees* in the accounts of the miracle. The A.V. translators are guilty of an inconsistency here, for both "*degrees*" and "*sundial*" are from the same Hebrew word. Rotherham translates 2 Kings 20, 11, "*And he caused the shadow on the steps, by which it had gone down the steps of Ahaz, to go back ten steps*" and Isa. 28, 8, "*Behold me; causing the shadow on the steps, which hath come down on the steps of Ahaz with the sun, to return backwards ten steps.*"

The "*sundial*" of Ahaz, therefore, was in reality the "*steps*" or stairs of Ahaz. What stairs were these?

Nehemiah (3, 15 and 12, 37) speaks of "stairs that go down from the city of David." Jerusalem was built on several hills with two deep valleys—those of the Kedron, and Gay-Hinnom (*Gehenna*), intersecting them, and there were various flights of stone steps built up the sides of these valleys. It is known that one such staircase descended the slope from the King's Palace eastward down to the Horse Gate in the city wall (Neh. 3, 28; 2 Chron. 23, 15; Jer. 31, 40) and another ascended from the Horse Gate up to the south side of the Temple. By means of these two stairways the King possessed what amounted to a private way to the Temple, and there is one rather obscure passage in 2 Kings, 16, 18 which indicates that Ahaz made some alteration to one of these stairways. It seems then that the stairs leading down from the Palace to the Horse Gate are those to which reference is made in Isaiah.

Now these steps, running roughly eastward down the slope, with the lofty buildings of the Palace at the top between them and the afternoon sun, were shrouded in shadow every afternoon. As soon as the sun had passed the zenith at midday, the shadow of the Palace roof would fall upon the topmost step, and thereafter as the sun sank towards the west, so the shadow would grow longer and creep down the stairs to the end. That is the shadow that had gone down ten of the steps ("*degrees*" in the A.V.) at the time of the sign. It must have been about the middle of the afternoon. Hezekiah had lain there many afternoons watching the shadow of his father's house creep down those stairs until at length, as it reached the Horse Gate at the bottom, the sun sank below the horizon behind his palace, the daylight rapidly faded and the short Palestinian twilight gave way to black night. So is the fate of my father's house, he must have thought bitterly; I am to die childless;

there will be none of my line to reign after me on the throne of the Lord in Judah; all the promises made to the fathers will fail; there can never be a son of David to become David's Lord. God hath forgotten to be gracious.

And then he saw the sign! Josephus makes it plain in his account of the circumstances (*Ant.* 10, 2, 1) that the shadow had gone down ten steps of the staircase and then returned. What had happened? What was it in this inexplicable phenomenon that convinced Hezekiah that God was with him and would heal him?

It is not necessary to suppose that God interfered so much with the normal course of Nature as to halt and reverse the onward progression of the sun through the sky. Less spectacular and unlikely causes would have produced the effect. Under certain climatic conditions clouds of minute ice crystals can form at a great height in the upper reaches of the air; the apparent result as seen from the earth is the appearance of a band of light passing through the sun, and two additional suns, one on either side of the true sun. This effect, which is known as *parhelia*, or "mock sun" is due to the refraction of the sun's light as it passes through the prismatic ice crystals on its way to the earth. If now a cloud, at a much lower altitude, should obscure real sun and the western "mock sun" over a certain district, the only light reaching that district is from the eastern "mock sun," and the effect is as if the sun had receded eastwards by a certain fixed amount (always equal to one and a half hours of our time). Two occasions when this actually happened are on record; one was on 27th March, 1703, at Metz, in France, when the shadow on the sundial of the Prior of Metz was displaced by one and a half hours. The other occasion was on the 28th March, 1848, over parts of Hampshire when the same effect was observed.

Now this is a perfectly logical scientific explanation and the miracle could very well have been due to this cause, except for one consideration. Hezekiah had been at great pains to put down Baal worship, the constant curse of Israel, and to restore the worship of Jehovah. The sun was the visible symbol of Baal. Such a phenomenon as is described above would be probably interpreted by those who witnessed it as a manifestation of the power and interest of Baal. The credit for the sign, and consequently for the cure of Hezekiah's sickness, would have been given, not to the God of Israel, but to Baal. Much of Hezekiah's own good work would have been undone. For this reason it is unlikely that God would use the sun as an instrument for effecting the "sign."

Is there then another possible means by which the miracle could have been performed, more in keeping with the majesty and power of God and more indisputably attributable to Him? The fact that as Hezekiah looked down his staircase the Temple of the Lord was in full view

upon his left, at the summit of Mount Moriah, suggests that there is.

The shadow of the palace lay ten steps down the staircase. Only the return of the sunlight could remove it—or a light brighter than sunlight! Every Israelite knew that there was such a light; the holy “*Shekinah*,” that supernatural light that shone from between the cherubim in the Most Holy, that had been the guide of Israel in the wilderness in those long ago Exodus days, a “fire by night,” one that had been seen on rare occasions when God had cause to manifest His majesty and power in visible form. That fierce light, brighter than the sun at noonday, had flashed out from the Tabernacle to slay Nadab and Abihu when they offered “strange fire” before the Lord (Lev. 10, 2); it had flooded the camp at the time of Korah’s rebellion (Num. 16, 42–45); it had filled Solomon’s Temple at its dedication. Isaiah saw it once in vision when he received his commission of service (Isa. 6, 1). Is it possible that as Hezekiah gazed still upon the staircase, waiting for the sign that the Lord had promised him, the wondrous glory of the *Shekinah* did indeed blaze out from that sanctuary on the hill, blotting out the brightness of the sun itself, lighting all Jerusalem with its radiance? The shadow on the steps would have vanished in an instant, and the whole scene, the Palace Gardens, the stairs themselves, the city wall and the Horse Gate far below, the Mount of Olives on the opposite side of the valley, stand out in sharp relief vividly delineated in that blinding white light. If this is indeed what

happened on that memorable day, what possible doubt could remain in Hezekiah’s mind? More convincing by far than any natural celestial phenomenon, this message from the sanctuary was as the appearance of God Himself.

All Jerusalem must have seen it. All Jerusalem must have interpreted it aright. The *Shekinah* came forth only for destruction or blessing. Hezekiah was a good king, a God-fearing man. It could only mean that he would recover, that he would live to play his part in the fulfilment of Divine promise, that there would yet be a son to sit upon the throne of the Lord after him, that the destiny of Israel would yet be achieved. The news would travel quickly, and before long all Judea would know what had happened, and that the king’s life had been prolonged for fifteen years.

So the wonderful story concludes with Hezekiah going up to the Temple to sing his songs of praise to the stringed instruments, all the days of his life, for his deliverance and for the marvellous happenings (Isa. 38, 20). Fifteen songs did he compose and named them “songs of the steps.” They appear to-day in the Book of Psalms as Psalms 120 to 134, and they are headed “songs of degrees” by the A.V. translators. (The ascription of some of them to David is incorrect). For ever afterwards they were used in the Temple ceremonies, and to-day we use them still, a memorial of that day when the Lord turned back the shadow that was over the house of Israel, and His glory was seen in Jerusalem.

“Neither in Egypt nor in Babylonia has any beginning of civilisation been found. As far back as archeology can take us, man is already civilised, building cities and temples, carving hard stone into artistic form, and even employing a system of picture writing; and of Egypt it may be said, the older the country the more perfect it is found to be. The fact is a very remarkable one, in view of modern theories of development, and of the evolution of civilisation.

ion out of barbarism. Whatever may be the reason, such theories are not borne out by the discoveries of archeology. Instead of the progress we should expect, we find retrogression and decay; where we look for the rude beginnings of art, we find an advanced society and artistic perfection. Is it possible that the Biblical view is right after all, and that civilised man has been civilised from the outset?”

Dr. R. Bell Dawson, F.R.S.

King Asa’s disease

King Asa of Judah was diseased in his feet, “yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord but to the physicians”. (2 Chron. 16, 12.) This is not to say that Divine displeasure is upon those who seek to obtain relief from sickness and physical ailments by means of the skill of the medical profession. In Asa’s day the only physicians were the priests of idolatrous faiths and their “cures” were

invariably mixed up with the worship they professed. Asa preferred to become contaminated with such rather than go to his God for instruction. It may be remembered that good King Hezekiah, in like case, went to the prophet Isaiah, and he, although not a physician, was evidently guided by the Holy Spirit in the selection of a remedy that proved effective. (See Isa. 38, 1 and 21.)

HEAVENLY WISDOM

An Old Testament Study

"Wisdom is the principal thing" (Prov. 4. 7.).

What a priceless gem is wisdom. Do we value its excellency; see our need and the unspeakable advantages it carries? It cannot be purchased with all the wealth of the world; it cannot be willed in an inheritance for another. It is written of a well-known Bible commentator. He was near the end of his earthly course and recorded: "I have now disposed of all my property to my family; there is one thing more I wish I could give them, and that is the Christian religion. If they had that and I had not given them one shilling, they would be rich; and if they had not had that and I had given them all the world, they would be poor." Nor does wisdom pass to us through the traits of heredity. It is a gift of God, and excels folly as much as light excels darkness. (See Prov. 3. 13-24.)

History records many men travelling great distances in search of wisdom. They crossed the seas, deserts, mountains to visit seats of learning in quest of what Paul describes—the hidden mystery of God. (1 Cor. 2. 6. 7.) One outstanding figure was the Queen of Sheba. She had heard from others of the great wisdom and fame of Solomon. "There came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth which had heard of his wisdom." It is commonly known how in the telling of strange and wonderful things there is a tendency, especially where fame is concerned, to exaggerate. The Queen decided to discover for herself. She was so confounded and amazed at such wisdom and skill that "there was no more spirit in her." Solomon "gave her of his royal bounty." He instructed a diligent pupil concerning this gift of wisdom, which was so appreciated she in return gave out of her treasures gold, precious stones, and of spices a very great store. There came no more such abundance of spices as these which the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. (1 Kings 10. 1-9.)

Jesus alluded to her. "The Queen of the south came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon," and no doubt He was saddened by the disregard of the princes of this world for the Greater than Solomon. However, as He imparts to those with the ears to hear something of God's wisdom, does it not also leave us floundering, amazed, "with no more spirit in us"? Do we not applaud Paul who says, "the thousandth part was not told." The Queen said of what she thought was an exaggerated report, that not only was it true, but the half was never told. She expressed her appreciation in gifts. We may lack the silver and gold she was able

to give, but what about the spices? The Wise Men of the East gave of such to our Lord. Have we any spices to give in gratitude?

We know from the Parable of the Talents that when anything good is buried it profits no one. On the other hand, when some good thing, wisdom for example, is possessed and put to good use, many people benefit. In this connection let us read Eccles. 9. 13-18. Briefly the facts are: A poor wise man in a little city, or a poor man in a poor city. He was, one could say, buried alive in poverty and obscurity. Despite this, when opportunity came, he employed his wisdom to good account; he rendered valuable service in a time of public distress and danger. All his friends and neighbours benefited.

Embodied in this story must be some peculiar features for the wise man to conclude that to him this type of wisdom seemed great. Scanning it more particularly we find a few abnormal, unrealistic features: Since the city is so insignificant and so few in it, why did such a great king send such a great army and so many armaments against it? Surely he could have no reason to fear it, containing as it did, so few and they being so poor. We know that those who intimidate go out of their way and to great lengths to crush the timid and the weak, but the circumstances in this instance seem out of proportion. The city is besieged and the inhabitants examine their citizens for military strength. This poor man had nothing to contribute except his wisdom. They discovered his wisdom; we uncover his unnatural quality—selflessness. This poor wise man might have hidden his wisdom and no one be the wiser as to this selfish act. He might well have reasoned, "What have I to lose except my poverty? What does it matter to me who governs this place? With a change of administration, I may even be rewarded for my services." Putting aside his private, personal interests, he served the public good. The moral is, "Wisdom is better than strength and better than weapons of war." Now we understand why he was soon forgotten. Where do we find this brand of selflessness being rewarded, acknowledged, respected?

In substance we could find many applications where this great wisdom and selflessness were employed for general benefit. For instance, when the Philistines encamped against Israel and the poor wise man (the shepherd boy, David) delivered the weak Israelites from the mighty hand of the oppressors with Goliath at their head. In fact it could be applied to all the prophets, including Moses and all those poor wise men of their time who did so much and received so little—soon forgotten, "of whom

the world was not worthy." Another application, the best of all, suggests itself, although it may not be found similarly applied by known writers.

"A poor wise man"—He who was so rich became so poor, having not where to lay His head, that we through His poverty might become rich. "In a little city"—Nazareth; so poor, so mean and despised that people questioned whether any good thing could come out of Nazareth. "There came a great king against it, besieged it and built great bulwarks against it"—the prince of this evil world; he feared this poor man and his great wisdom; the evil one's dominion was threatened. Hence the bulwark of armaments: all the machinery of the Roman army and empire being brought into the assault. "A poor wise man was found"—He taught them in their synagogues, warned them and prepared them for the oncoming assault. They were astonished, amazed; "whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works?" Never man spake as He, and all wondered at the gracious words He spake. He rendered invaluable service in a time of public distress and danger. A crisis had come to Israel; long outstanding accounts from Abel to that time were close to settlement date. Public distress was acute; poverty, sickness, doubt, fear and death filled the ranks of the fifth column in the city whilst outside were the evil hordes of Satan. The siege lasted three and a half years. The little city of Zion was delivered; the prince of this world was defeated, for through death this poor wise man is to destroy him who had the power of death. Christ, the power of God, the Wisdom of God, triumphed. Those few men in the little city, the despised sect of the Nazarenes, delivered, now enjoyed a peculiar type of immunity; the consolation for this little flock was not to fear, the Heavenly

Father had much also in store for them. "And the poor wise man was soon forgotten"—He left them temporarily, promising to return, but "When the Son of Man cometh will he find faith in the earth?"

It is interesting to contrast earthly wisdom with heavenly wisdom. Both these influences present claims to our affections. Their methods and what they have to offer are set out comparatively in Prov. 9. The heavenly has a sacrifice, bread and wine, and from the highest places invited the simple (those seeking instructions) to eat and drink bread and wine, and at the same time to forsake the foolish and live anew, in the paths of understanding.

The earthly wisdom, pictured as a foolish woman, also occupies a prominent and respectable high place of esteem in the city of men. She also calls to the simple—passengers out of their way, seeking, seeking, something . . . the advice these unfortunate people are given is that "stolen waters are sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." This so-called wisdom is earthy, sensual; that is, appealing to natural appetites, to a sense of pleasure and desire of gratification. If gratified, conscience and love (with all its wonderful attributes) are slowly but surely strangled by envy, strife, hatred, confusion, and every evil device. The heavenly wisdom is satisfying and entire for all the understanding; it glows with a light and purity; is a guidance for will, cleansing for the conscience and still more strength for a practical expression of a Christian life. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness and her paths are peace" (with God). "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom—wisdom is the principal thing," because a "man of understanding hath wisdom."

(Peoples' Paper, Melbourne)

We are by nature and environment of the earth, earthy, and therefore unavoidably susceptible to the beguiling influence of the things of earth. Our human instincts prompt us to be continually reaching out for these things, and we need to be constantly on the alert to set and keep resetting our affections upon the things above. (Col. 3. 2.) Some of us may have had the experience of trying to train some creeping plant such as the morning glory, to climb up some upright structure in order to form a floral archway. If so, we can

hardly have failed to notice how persistently the plant by means of its shoots or tendrils, strives to entwine itself around every garden flower or object within its reach. It has to be constantly disentangled from these things and to be reset around the upright we wish it to cling to. Thus it is with our affections and inclinations. If left to follow their own devices they will persist in becoming entangled with earthly things before we realise the dangerous trend our thoughts are taking.

A NOTE ON ISA. 53. 2

"For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground." (Isa. 53. 2.)

The word translated "tender plant" comes from "suckling" as in "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings" in Psa. 8. 2, and refers to the young saplings that grow up from the stump of a tree which has been felled. In our own day such shoots are still referred to as "suckers". This is a picture of the coming of Christ which is similar and yet in marked contrast to Isa. 11. 1. *"There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots"*. In that chapter the "Branch" comes forth to glory and power, the Spirit of the Lord resting upon him leading him to judge the poor with righteousness and slay the wicked with the rod of his mouth. Isaiah has passed over the day of humiliation and suffering and sees only the triumphant Kingdom beyond, when Messiah shall reign gloriously and all the nations flock to His banner. In this verse of the 53rd chapter the same "rod of the stem of Jesse" is depicted as a sapling growing out of dry ground to disesteem and spurning. Its growth and development is to be under unfavourable circumstances. But it is the same shoot. It will go on growing until it has survived the winter and passed into the light and sunshine of the spring, and it is then that the fully grown tree will spread abroad its branches in invitation to all creatures. Just as the stone which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his vision became a great mountain that filled the whole earth, so here we have the picture of a tender sapling which thrusts its roots into the soil and its leaves into the air until it has filled the whole face of the land, and, like Israel in her own destined times, blossomed and budded and filled the whole world with fruit.

The background of the picture is the allusion in Isa. 10. 34 to the fall of the Davidic kingly rule under the symbol of the cutting down a great cedar in Lebanon by the ruthless invader. The cedars of Lebanon were the mightiest trees known to the ancient world. It was only fitting that these proud monarchs of the forest, standing erect in their towering majesty over all the other trees, should be chosen to picture the royal authority of the house of David, who "sat upon the throne of the Lord" and ruled Israel in the name of God. The apparent permanence of those cedars told fitly of the throne that was to endure for ever before God. But Isaiah in his day knew that because of faithlessness the throne of David must be overthrown, the upstanding cedar be cut down. That was the theme of his prophecy but he

did not end there. The throne of David would one day be re-established, when "he whose right it is" appeared to claim His possession. So in verse 34 of chapter 10 the prophet sees the Assyrian and Babylonian invaders ravaging the land and taking the people captive and destroying the kingly power, and he says *"he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one"*. Immediately following, in the first verse of chapter 11, comes the golden sequel *"and there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse . . ."* Like the tree of the Babylonian king's vision, which was cut down until seven times had passed over it, and then was to sprout again, so it is here. The great cedar of Lebanon which was the kingship of David's line was cut down by the oppressors of Israel. Zedekiah was the last king; but a tender sapling out of that cut-down stump would one day arise to grow into a cedar mightier by far than that which had flourished and perished.

So out of the apparent barrenness and failure of God's promises there grows the "root of David". Christ is to be as a root out of dry ground. The learned men of our Lord's day were quite unable to understand how Christ could be both David's son and David's Lord, even though Jesus quoted the Old Testament Scriptures to that effect and they had prided themselves on understanding the Old Testament Scriptures. This "rod out of the stem of Jesse", this "tender plant" or sapling from the cut-down stump, is also the root itself! *"I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star."* *"All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made."* Unless Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Lord from heaven, is the root of David as well as his Son, the whole of our faith is founded upon a falsity and we are of all men most miserable. The only possibility of salvation for this fallen race of which we are members lay in the active intervention of God from heaven. *"God, sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh . . ."* *"He Who was rich, for our sakes became poor . . ."* Without the root there could never have been the tender sapling growing up into maturity to the lasting benefit of mankind.

The "dry ground" is the "dry and thirsty land, where no water is" of Psa. 63. 1. The Psalmist longs and seeks for God but sees no evidence of His presence, until he finds Him in the sanctuary and remembers Him on his bed, meditating on Him in the night watches. Unless we search for God, and finding Him, hold Him fast, even the promises and plans of God are as dry ground to us, barren and profitless. But for those who will have it,

there is a root in that dry ground which contains within itself the springing life that is to burst forth into the light of day, bringing life and immortality to light through the Gospel, and

causing, at last, the desire of all nations to come. To we who know these things, the dry ground has indeed become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water.

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