



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

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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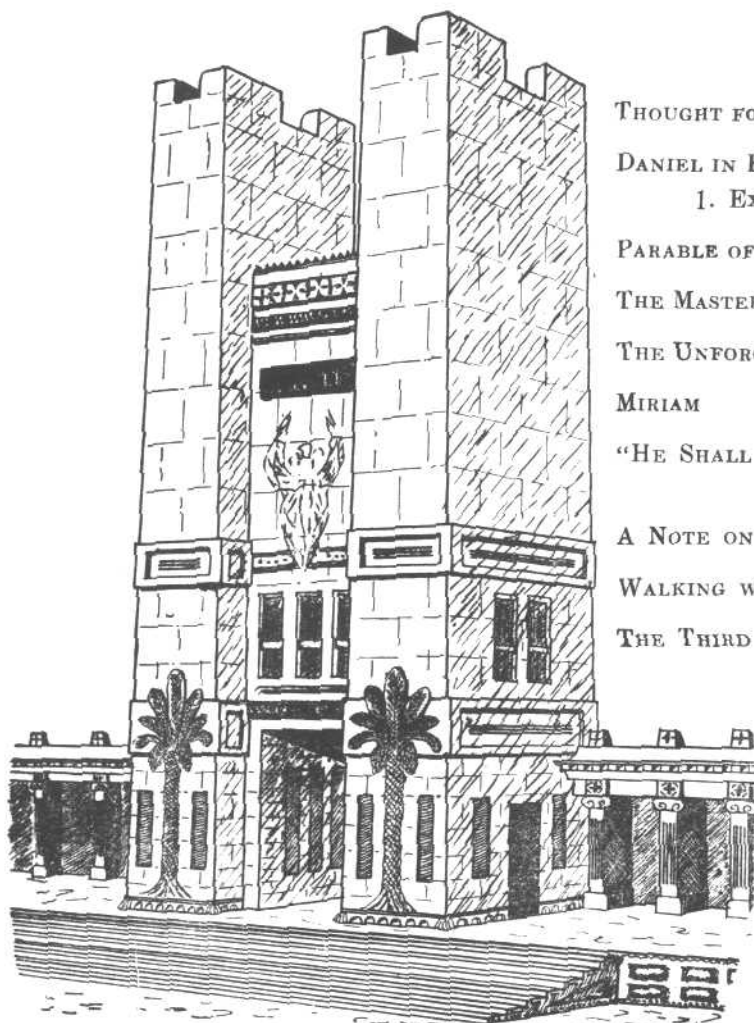
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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New features for 1971

A series devoted to the life of Daniel in Babylon commences in this issue. First published in this journal fifteen years ago, it is believed that it will be appreciated by readers who read it then, no less than by later readers to whom it is new and for whose benefit largely it is now to be repeated. The series will go through the

entire Book of Daniel and is framed on the basis and in the belief that the book is a true historical document of the times with which it deals and that the events therein described did actually happen—as has been demonstrated in many instances by the results of modern archaeological research.

Thought for the Month

"When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what gain has their owner but to see them with his eyes?" (Eccl. 5. 11).

That comment seems to be an example of an early "Parkinson's Law" long before Professor Parkinson began issuing his series of famous dictums. There is at any rate a very modern ring in these words written down by Solomon many centuries ago. The Western world of to-day is enjoying a rising standard of living and the benefit of multifarious amenities of life, from fast cars to electrically-driven toothbrushes, the real utility of many of which is questionable but all of which bring handsome profits to the makers and distributors. The owners and users of these things rarely stop to reflect that they are working doubly hard to earn the money necessary to acquire them so that in the end there is little real gain, only the dubious satisfaction of possession. Whilst there is no denying that modern technology has given mankind many things of tremendous value in life, it has also produced much that is trashy and puerile and detracts from rather than adds to the full life which man ought to enjoy and would enjoy if he was more in line with the natural order ordained by God. Solomon's next remark points to the real values—the merits of honest labour and sharing in the world's work irrespective of relative reward. "Sweet is the sleep of a labourer, whether he eats little or much, but the surfeit of the rich will not let him sleep." There is a New Testament equivalent to this maxim in Paul's

words to Timothy "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content". (1 Tim. 6. 6-8). All the labour-saving devices and mechanised entertainment and instruments of pleasurable self-indulgence in the world are useless and worse than useless if contentment and peace of mind are missing and that is so often the case nowadays. There can be little doubt that the Messianic Age which is to supersede this present very unsatisfactory Age of human self-will is going to witness a widespread return to real values in life and a rejection of the shallow and the superficial. Deeper and more serious thinking, and above all a greater consciousness of the place of God in daily life, will spell the end of much that is considered essential in our present civilisation, but contributes little or nothing to the exaltation of the human spirit. The products of the arts and sciences will rise to levels more consonant with the Divine ideal for the dignity of human nature.

Gone from us

—:—
Bro. B. M. Bonner (Luton)
Bro. R. Holland (Warrington)
Sis. M. Holmes (Nottingham)
Sis. J. Humphrey (London)
—:—

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

DANIEL IN BABYLON

1. Exile from Zion

*The story of a
great man's faith*

He walks on to the stage a youth, with life just opening out before him, already an exile from his native country, doomed to attain manhood's estate in an alien and unfriendly land, far from the Temple of God and all that Temple represented. When at length the curtain drops, we see him still on the stage, an old man and full of days, too aged and infirm to join the procession of rejoicing men and women wending their way back to the land of their fathers, there to rebuild their Temple and worship their God in His appointed way. During the long years of a life spent alternately in prominence and seclusion, in honour and neglect, he maintained inflexible faith and a constant passion for the restoration of his people to their own land; when at last the fruition of all his hopes appeared he was too old to share in the home-going! Nevertheless he died content, knowing that God would remember him and, in the resurrection life, grant him his heart's desire. For the intervening time he left on record, as his legacy to all who in after times would come to know God, a narrative so thrilling in its adventure and so stimulating in its sterling faith that it has been the inspiration of thousands who in their own day and generation have endured the fires of persecution and withstood opposition to righteousness.

The Book of Daniel is full of vital interest to the student of prophecy and to the earnest believer who seeks strength and encouragement for faith. Its vivid stories, of heroic deeds dared by stalwart believers in God, and of the mighty arm of God stretched out on their behalf, never grow old and will never die. The revelation of things to come, given to Daniel by means of visions and dreams, have proven themselves beyond all doubt to be "visions of God". They have occupied the attention of students all through the twenty-four centuries which have elapsed since his day. Less than two hundred years after his death, if the historians are to be believed, Jaddua the High Priest of Israel showed the prophecies of Daniel to the Greek conqueror Alexander the Great, explaining to him how his own career of conquest was foreshadowed in those prophecies. Now in this twentieth century Christian students still scan the ancient words to gain some clue to the significance of present-day events, and take assurance from them that the days of the Kingdom

cannot be much longer delayed. But what is of greater importance is the insight this remarkable book gives us into the personal lives of men; the stimulus to faith and constancy which is afforded by the stories of loyalty, fortitude and Divine deliverance which have made the book to stand out in the Old Testament as a record of marvellous achievements against a background conspicuous for its gallery of remarkable men. The lad Daniel, making his way by sheer force of character and unswerving loyalty to the highest office in an idolatrous and materialistic land; the proud pagan king Nebuchadnezzar, arrogant in his might, at length utterly abased and humbled before God; his effeminate grandson Belshazzar, ignominiously slain in the midst of unheeding revelry; the three servants of God who were prepared to suffer a cruel death rather than deny him; Nitocris, the royal daughter of Nebuchadnezzar who grew up with Daniel, never espoused his faith yet turned to him for enlightenment when the mysterious hand wrote the doom of Babylon upon the banqueting room walls; the jealous courtiers who plotted the death of Daniel but themselves fell into the pit of their own contriving; these characters stand out vividly against a background which tells us more about the life and customs of ancient Babylon than any other single book now in existence.

Daniel and his three companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were boys together at the time, about six hundred years before Christ, when the Kingdom of Judah was declining to its fall. The ten-tribe kingdom of Israel, inhabiting the northern part of the land, had already gone into captivity, over a century earlier. Now it was the turn of Judah, the kingdom of the two tribes. Jehoahaz, king of Judah, had been deposed by Pharaoh Necho of Egypt, and Jehoiakim placed upon the throne. He had reigned only a little over two years when the dreaded Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, not yet sole king, for his father Nabopolassar was still alive, had invaded Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem. Jehoiakim was forced to renounce his allegiance to Egypt and become the vassal of Babylon. As surety for his good behaviour, the Babylonians took some of the aristocracy and nobility of Judah back to Babylon as hostages, and these four lads, either of royal blood or relat-

ed in some definite way to the royal line of the kings of Judah, were taken among them.

It was a common practice of the Babylonians thus to take into the royal court of their own land selected members of the younger relatives of vassal kings. The idea was to train them in the ways and ideas of the conquerors so that eventually they might become trustworthy rulers over the conquered peoples from whom they had been drawn. Daniel and his companions found themselves thrown into the society of many other lads of their own age in the king's court at Babylon, taken from other countries which the Babylonians had overrun and conquered. Nabonidus, the father of Belshazzar, was a son of the High Priest of the Moon god at Haran, where Terah the father of Abraham died, and he had been taken captive in the same way as Daniel and ultimately rose to become the husband of Nebuchadnezzar's daughter, Nitocris, and, by virtue of that marriage, the last but one king of Babylon. Belshazzar, their son, was the last king.

Daniel could hardly have been less than eighteen years of age when he was taken to Babylon. Nabopolassar died in the next year and Nebuchadnezzar became sole king. Two years later Daniel stood before him and interpreted his dream of the great image (Dan. 2. 1). The term "children" (Dan. 1. 4) in the original Hebrew has the meaning of youths or young men, a different word being employed when the meaning is limited to a child; the word used allows for any age up to twenty-four or so.

Jeremiah was living at Jerusalem at that time and had been for twenty years past. He was well known in Court circles and the lad Daniel must have been well acquainted with him. They had probably often talked about the judgments which Jeremiah so consistently predicted would surely come upon the nation. His message and preaching must have had much to do with the early development of those four young men who showed so soon afterwards what sound training they had received in things pertaining to God.

Ezekiel, too, was a lad of seventeen at this same time but since his home was, in all probability, by the Dead Sea he and Daniel may not have met. It was not until eight years later that Ezekiel in his turn was taken captive to Babylon. Two other prophets who also lived and prophesied at this same time were Obadiah and Habakkuk, but there is no evidence to indicate whether or not they and Daniel ever came into contact. It would seem,

however, that Daniel kept in touch with the older prophet, Jeremiah, and had obtained copies of his writings as the years passed by, for when in Dan. 9. 2 we are told that Daniel understood by the books of Jeremiah that seventy years were to mark the limit of the Exile he refers to a prophecy that Jeremiah uttered in the first year of Zedekiah (Jer. 29. 10) by which time Daniel had been in Babylon eight years.

So it came about that one day a little procession could have been seen making its way out of the Damascus Gate on the northern side of Jerusalem. First, a detachment of Babylonian soldiers, stepping smartly along the highway, their coats of mail gleaming in the sunlight. Behind them, a line of chariots, each containing five or six passengers, chiefly bearded Babylonians, but in some of them Jewish youths. After these came heavy wagons, lumbering along with their loads of treasure, of gold and silver vessels, taken from the Palace and the Temple. Finally, another detachment of soldiers. Daniel and his friends were leaving their native home for perpetual exile in a strange and idolatrous land. Never again were their eyes to look upon that wonderful Temple which Solomon had built more than three centuries earlier. They could not have known, at that moment, that only another nineteen years were to elapse before that glorious edifice was to sink down in the destroying flames and lie, a desolate mass of rubble, while Israel expiated her national sin in a foreign land.

As the little procession left the Damascus Gate and the city walls behind, it passed a little rocky eminence on the right hand side of the road. Daniel's eyes may have lighted upon it as the chariot rattled past. He little dreamed that the Messiah for whose coming he was in later life so ardently to pray must one day in the then distant future suffer and die upon a cross on that little hill. The soldiers, elated at the prospect of soon getting back to their own land and homes, had no idea that long after their own city and nation had vanished into the dust, soldiers of another empire would gamble for a robe at the foot of that hillock. So the land of Judah was left behind, and for something like thirty days the little party travelled, through Samaria and Syria, along the great high road that led to Carchemish on the Euphrates, and then, turning southward, and following the course of the river as it flowed serenely across the flat Babylonian plain, come at last in sight of the great city Babylon.

Daniel could not have failed to reflect that he was re-tracing the very steps of his forefather Abraham, in the reverse direction. This was the road by which Abraham had come from Ur of the Chaldees, following the river Euphrates past Babylon and up to Haran, and, when his father Terah was dead, down through Syria into Canaan. Abraham, obeying God's call, had left the luxury and glitter of that pagan land for the simplicity and purity of a pastoral life in the place to which God had led him. Here had he lived and died, his son Isaac lived and died, and the twelve tribes of Israel grown into a nation. Now this young lad was called upon to leave the hills and valleys, the tree-clad mountains and rushing streams, the vineyards and olive-yards, the orange groves and pomegranates, of this hallowed country where God had put his name and planted his chosen people, for a land of great and luxurious cities, gigantic temples and magnificent palaces, wide rivers and straight-cut canals, busy with the trade and commerce of many nations. Instead of the chaste and dignified worship of God Most High he was to witness every form of debased idolatry, the allegiance and reverence of the

people given freely to images of gold and silver and wood and stone—objects that could neither see, nor hear, nor speak. Like his friend and teacher, Jeremiah (10. 4-5) he might say of their idols "They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not; they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good". Abraham was called to come away from this place and be separate from the unclean things: Daniel was called to go back among them. Surely the ways of God are mysterious and past finding out! Daniel must have wondered what purpose God could have in sending him to such a place, what usefulness a life spent in these surroundings could have for him. And as the towering walls of the world's greatest city loomed up before him the lad's young heart must have been lifted to God in earnest supplication that, in the unknown life which he must now face, his faith and loyalty might never give way.

(To be continued)

PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

Matt. 25. 1-13

Jesus had nearly finished telling his disciples how they, or their successors, were to recognise the imminence of his Second Advent. A long series of signs had been unfolded to them as they sat together on the Mount of Olives, signs which manifestly required fervent expectation and constant watchfulness if the joy of realisation was to be attained. Jesus had not given them any indication as to whether his return was to be expected in their own lifetimes or not; He had, in fact, said that He himself did not yet know "of that day and hour". Only the Father knew, therefore it was incumbent upon all who would not be taken by surprise "at his appearing" to be watchful. "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."

In order to emphasise that injunction Jesus gave a set of five parables, each one drawn from a different sphere of life but all designed to inculcate, from their various viewpoints, the need for watchfulness. The five are, first, the parable of the days of Noah (Matt. 24. 36-42; Luke 17. 25-37); second, the parable of the goodman of the house (Matt. 24. 43-44; Luke 12. 39-40); third, the parable of the faithful and evil servants (Matt. 24. 45-51;

Luke 12. 42-48); fourth, the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25. 1-13); and fifth, the parable of the talents (Matt. 25. 14-30). There are in fact two more parables of watchfulness, one being that of the man taking a far journey (Mark 13. 34), which may be merely another version of the parable of the talents, and the other, that of the men awaiting their lord's return from the wedding (Luke 12. 36-38), which is very much akin to the story of the ten virgins and may owe its inspiration to the same source. Jesus may have told both stories on the same occasion and one been preserved by Matthew, the other by Luke.

The lesson that is common to all these parables is watchfulness. "Watch, for ye know not what hour your lord doth come." In a very special sense this watchfulness is necessary at the end of the Age, when the time is at hand for the fulfilment of "all things written". That this particular parable is intended to be of special application to the time of the Lord's union with his Church at his Second Advent is clear from the opening word "then". "Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom." When is this

"then"? It is necessary to go back into the preceding chapter for the answer. It is at the time when verse 37 has become true and the statements of verses 38-51 apply. As the days of Noah *were*, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man *be*. For as in the days that were before the flood" . . . and so on; "Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened . . ." Although the principle of watchfulness is one that has been sustained throughout the Age, the setting of the parable, that of the bridegroom returning to his house after the marriage at the bride's home, is one that renders it especially appropriate to the time of the "marriage of the Lamb", and there is no doubt that Jesus intended it to be so received.

What then did Jesus have in mind when, in the course of a quite long discourse enriched with a number of eloquent illustrations on watchfulness, He looked round upon his circle of hearers and told them that the Kingdom of Heaven in *that* day, the day of the Second Advent, would be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. First must be considered the manner in which Jewish marriages were conducted in the time of our Lord. The actual ceremony was performed in the house of the bride's father, the bridegroom being escorted thither accompanied by a triumphal procession consisting principally of his men friends. After the marriage had been solemnised there was a ceremonial meal which formed an important part of the proceedings and which was continued until nightfall. Then the bridegroom, accompanied by his bride, set out for his own home, at the head of a joyous procession. In the meantime—and this is where this parable has its place—the female relatives of the bridegroom, and their friends, had assembled at the bridegroom's house awaiting the news that he had set out on his journey back. If the celebrations at the bride's house had become protracted, as was possibly often the case, they may have had to wait for several hours after dark before the expected message arrived: "the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him". The waiting girls and women then set out with their torches to meet the oncoming procession, and so returned to the bridegroom's house, upon which the wedding feast commenced, a feast which in more ancient times was kept up for seven or even fourteen days, although in our Lord's time it was usually restricted to three.

To disregard an invitation to such a feast, or to be late for its commencement, was considered an unforgivable insult. There is an

allusion to this fact in the parable of the marriage of the king's son (sometimes called the parable of the wedding-feast) in Matt. 22. 1-14. The failure of the "foolish virgins" to be ready at the critical moment placed them in the same category as the man who, for whatever reason, failed to don his wedding garment. They all, with him, were excluded for ever from the privileges and joys of the feast.

Apart from this parable the only clear allusion to this marriage procedure that is found in the Scriptures is in the account of Jacob's marriage to Leah. That story as recorded in Gen. 29. 21-27, shows that the seven days of the feast followed the actual marriage. A more detailed account of the same custom is found in the Book of Tobit, a book which dates from only a few centuries before the Lord's own day and therefore probably reflects fairly accurately the manner in which the ceremonial was performed in his day. In chapter 20 of Tobit there is the account of the marriage of the Israelite youth Tobias to the Israelite maiden Sara, and of the fourteen day wedding feast that followed the ceremony. And another reference, not so detailed but evidently having the same basis, is that which is enshrined in our Lord's own words "*ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he shall return from the wedding*".

So the ten virgins in their waiting may very well picture all who now wait for the consummation of their hope in Christ. The great event to which they were looking was not the arrival of the bridegroom at the house of the bride's father to claim his bride, but the return to his own, or to his father's house, with his bride, for the wedding feast. If this teaches anything, it is that our minds should be directed, not so much to the moment of the return of our Lord from heaven to gather his saints, but to the heavenly wedding feast which follows the union of Christ and his Church, the entry into the Father's presence and the "shining forth as the sun in the Kingdom of the Father."

"While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." There was nothing blame-worthy in this—provided that they had made all necessary preparations so that when aroused by the call they could immediately go out to meet the coming one. But some had not made their preparations. They had not been careful to secure a sufficient supply of oil for their lamps. These "lamps" were torches, a mass of rags soaked in oil and tied to the top of a long stick or pole. They were

kept alight by pouring oil every now and again over the mass from a vessel which was carried. With these torches they escorted the bridegroom, and it was this "torchlight procession" which was the reason and purpose of their vigil.

And the foolish virgins missed, not only the triumphal reception of the bridegroom, but also the joys of the subsequent feast! This is the climax of the parable. Even whilst the call was fresh in their ears and their more prudent companions were setting out to meet the coming one they found themselves without oil. There had been plenty of time to have accumulated a sufficient supply, but now, at the last moment, they were without, and their hastily lighted torches, quickly lapping up that with which they had originally been soaked, were already "going out". There was only one thing that could be done; haste to the sellers of oil—it might be an unusual proceeding to knock up the shop-keeper in the middle of the night but probably the occasion would be held to justify the proceeding and anyway business was conducted on considerably more informal lines than at present—and hope to be back in time to meet the procession before it arrived at the bridegroom's house. They were evidently unfortunate in their quest—perhaps the shop-keeper was not very accommodating after all and they had to wait until early morning before he would open for business—for when at length they did arrive back the feast had been in progress for some time and . . . the door was shut.

The unbelievable thing had happened. They were too late; they were outside. The story tells that they knocked for admission, but—although it does not say so—probably without any real hope, for they knew the custom, and it was doubtless without surprise that they heard the fateful words "I know you not".

That is the end of the parable. It closes on this note of finality. Whatever happened to the foolish virgins afterward, one thing is crystal clear. They never entered the wedding feast. Their omission debarred them for ever from those joys. And, turning to his disciples pondering over this simple little story, perhaps familiar to some of them in their own experience, Jesus drove home the lesson He wanted to impress. "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh."

To-day, that injunction is more than ever vital. In the early years of our Christian walk,

especially when the movement with which we may have been associated was prosperous and thriving, it was easy to be zealous and active in the Master's service, alert to observe every sign or fulfilling prophecy and eager to absorb more and more of the knowledge of the Truth. In later years there is a growing tendency to take things for granted, to slip back into the comfortable condition of the so-called "established Christian", and regard the promise of his coming as of less importance than was at one time thought, or at least to be still a long way off. One tends then to forget that the Father is very busy even now calling out of the nations a people for his Name, selecting and training individuals for the mighty work of converting the entire world in the next Age, and that if we aspire to be included in that company and be assigned to that service we cannot afford to relax our vigilance one iota. If the final call, when it comes, finds us unready, it will pass us by, and by the time we have gathered to ourselves our lost zeal and faith and endeavoured to make up for lost time, it will be too late. The door will be shut; the "marriage of the Lamb" an accomplished fact, and the "General Assembly of the Church of the Firstborn" a completed body. Whatever may then happen to us in the future, to whatever sphere of life and activity the Divine providence may assign us, it will always be true that we have missed the prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus, because we were unready.

Our hearing and reception of this call does not depend upon our head knowledge to an undue degree, for the Lord is looking primarily for qualities of the heart. It is needful that we are made aware of the significance of the times in which we live; without that we are likely grievously to err in our reading of the Divine Plan and Will for us. (It is important that we hold a clear understanding of the object and the manner of our Lord's return; else we shall be deceived by looking for the wrong thing even although we are looking at the right time.) But above all things we need to attain and maintain that Christian maturity of character, that inflexible resolve to do and dare all things for Christ, that resolute enmity towards all the manifestations of evil that now surround us, that stamp us as being "of Christ", that proclaim us as being "his". Thus, when the call comes, we shall not only know him; He will also know us; and with joy and triumph we shall both meet him in the way, and enter in with Him to the marriage.

THE MASTER'S JOY

A word of encouragement

The Lord Jesus joyed in God. All nature spoke to him of his Father. This wondrous world of which we, even to-day, know so little was to him, not alien soil, but a mansion in the Father's House, and the Father himself at the back of all Nature's bounty, beauty and beneficence. Jesus joyed in the Scriptures; they spoke to him of his Father and revealed the character of One with Whom He was in constant communion. As a boy He eagerly awaited his attainment of the age of twelve, the age at which He could get to Jerusalem and be found in his Father's House. What a keen desire there must have been in the heart of the boy Jesus to enter those Temple precincts where He could ask the great ones there, "sitting in Moses' seat", some of the many questions which were crowding in upon his perfect but as yet undeveloped mind!

God's Word throughout his whole life was the joy and rejoicing of the Master's heart. By that Word He repelled the Tempter at the commencement of his ministry and by it He caused the hearts of the disciples to burn within them immediately after his resurrection, at its close.

To the Lord Jesus God was unimaginably good: in the joy of his knowledge of God's love He sketched for us the picture of the prodigal son and the love of an earthly father, saying in effect, "if ye then, being evil, are like that, how much more God!" He experienced constantly the joy of boundless hope in a God so wonderfully and unimaginably good. Satan was the god of this world, evil was rampant, those who would do God's Will must endure persecution, He was confronted by the thought of a cruel death but the Master's gaze was habitually directed beyond these things. He lived in constant view of those conditions that will prevail when God's Will is done upon earth as now it is done in heaven.

The Lord Jesus continued in communion with the Father, not merely One to be enjoyed, but also one to be served, and this opportunity of loving devotion was in itself to Jesus another constant source of delight. The Will of God; this was placed centrally in the Master's life, and to carry it out was his meat and drink. His natural love for his own home, for his mother, and for his family circle, was intense, and yet before all these He placed

those who did the Will of God. "Whosoever shall do the Will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matt. 12. 50). From this delight in doing the service of God there arose another source of joy, that of a constant sense of the Divine approval on his life. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" was the testimony given from heaven to John the Baptist on the banks of the River Jordan, a testimony that was repeated to the three disciples upon the Mount of Transfiguration and attested by numerous evidences of the Father's favour during our Lord's earthly ministry. Those declarations were made that "men might know . . . Jesus Christ" whom God had sent, for Jesus himself needed no such outward assurances. Within himself, all the time, like sweetest music in his soul, vibrated the thought "I do always those things that please Him".

Greatest of all, our Master had the supreme joy associated with supreme self-sacrifice. Despised and rejected, scorned and spat upon, scourged and crucified, that wonderful love in the heart of Jesus inspired him to exult with a deep and holy joy that in this way, through the valley of suffering and humiliation, He could bring the prodigal world back to God. All the evil that was inflicted upon the Master, all the mental and physical suffering which He bore so patiently, all the evidences of hardness of heart and lack of faith in those near to him as well as far from him, only made him feel the more how desperate was their need of him; in prophetic vision he saw "of the travail of his soul" and was satisfied.

How true then is the Scripture which declares that "For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the majesty on high". It was because our Master so consistently found joy in all that his life held that He was able to say "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you . . . Let not your heart be troubled"; and the Apostle adds as a triumphant commentary and exhortation "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice".

The highest exercise of charity is charity to the uncharitable.

THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN

A doctrinal
study

Scripture quotations herein are from the Standard Revised Version unless otherwise stated.

The subject of what is variously called the sin unto death or the unpardonable sin is not so relevant to current Christian thought as it was several generations ago, but it does happen from time to time that minds are exercised as to the precise meaning of those passages in the New Testament which speak of a sin which is apparently so heinous that no hope of Divine forgiveness can ever be entertained; the offender is eternally lost. There are five short passages which form the foundation of this impression, and since these five can be grouped into three separate cases not otherwise connected it is best in examining the subject to consider each case separately in turn.

The first case occurs in the records by Matthew and Mark of an occasion when Jesus healed a blind mute and the jealous Pharisees accused him of working miracles by the power of the prince of demons. In his reply Jesus declared that whereas sin and blasphemy against himself would be forgiven, that against the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven, now or in the future. The second case concerns a remark by John in his epistle to the effect that whereas it is a good thing to pray for a brother who has sinned, there is such a thing as a "sin unto death" for which John does not advise his readers to pray. The third case is furnished by two passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews which declare that in certain circumstances it is impossible to renew to repentance those guilty of apostasy from the faith, and there awaits them only certain and inevitable condemnation. None of the passages are very explicit and a great deal has been read into them which is not justified; nevertheless there is obviously something here which is of the highest importance bearing on the question of the final consequences of sin.

Jesus had brought to him "a blind and dumb demoniac . . . and he healed him, so that the dumb man spake and saw. And all the people were amazed . . . but when the Pharisees heard it they said 'It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.'" Jesus uttered a lengthy reproof against their hypocrisy and

malice, culminating in the words "I tell you, in the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned". It is during the course of this reproof that the particular matter in question was outlined. "I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matt. 12. 22-32). The parallel passage in Mark's Gospel, recounting the same incident, reads "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3. 28-29).

The first hasty impression one might take from these words is that blasphemy against the Son is less serious than that against the Spirit, so that the one need be no bar to salvation, whereas the other is, which does not seem very logical. It is to be remembered that Jesus Christ "is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2. 2). There is no suggestion here or anywhere else in the Scriptures that our Lord's offering of himself for human sin was not efficacious for certain classes of sin, but rather to the contrary; as the hymn has it "his blood can make the foulest clean, His blood availed for me". Whatever Jesus intended by his words, they were not meant to contradict this fact, and there are no distinctions or classes of sin; "all wrongdoing is sin".

The words form part of our Lord's reproof to men who had suggested that his miracles of healing were due to demoniac powers. They knew that was not the case; they knew that Jesus was at the very least a prophet come from God, even if they would not admit his Messiahship or that He was the Son of God. And in these solemn words Jesus told them how serious was their position. To speak a word against, or to blaspheme, Him personally was something He could ignore; that kind of sin—for sin it was, the sin of hypocrisy, of malice, of misrepresentation—

He could and did forgive. Their attitude He was prepared to put down, in part, to ignorance and prejudice. On the Cross He prayed the Father to forgive his enemies "for they know not what they do". But these Pharisees stood in a position of greater danger in that their insensate hatred of him and determined enmity to him was steadily approaching a condition of deliberate sin against the convincing and convicting influence of the Holy Spirit, and this process of hardening their hearts and closing their minds to the evidences of goodness in Christ could lead them at last to a condition in which they destroyed their own capacity for repentance. Without repentance there cannot be forgiveness. Jesus told them, in short, that whilst He himself was prepared to overlook and forgive their malicious words and actions, they themselves were on the way to a position in which repentance was impossible, and so they could never obtain forgiveness. That is the sin against the Holy Spirit.

The expression in Mark "guilty of an eternal sin" is a better rendering than the A.V. "in danger of eternal damnation", but even so the correct shade of meaning in our Lord's words is not faithfully reproduced. The word rendered "sin" is *hamartema*, which means an act of sin, and "eternal" is *aionian*, the basic meaning of which is "enduring" without stipulation of duration. "Never" is *ouk*, which is a simple prohibition better rendered "not" as in the parallel verse in Matt. 12. 32 ("Never" in the N.T. is usually *oudepote*, literally "not even at any time"). The literal meaning of Jesus' words may well be "shall not have forgiveness, for he is guilty of an enduring act of sin". Matthew's version adds an extra qualification; "either in this age or in the age to come", and this clearly is intended to shew that the same possibility of wilful sin and the same principle will apply in the "age to come", the Messianic Age, as in this. In neither case is forgiveness entirely ruled out, because if there should be repentance even at the eleventh hour then God would forgive. It is out of the question to think otherwise. The point of our Lord's words here is that the Pharisees were perilously near that condition of heart where even a thousand years of opportunity might fail to bring them to a better frame of mind and therefore forgiveness could not come. He was not condemning them, but He was warning them.

Words written by Dr. Paterson Smyth many years ago in "The Gospel of the Here-

after" are very apt on this matter. "Is it hard to believe that a man knowing Christ and wilfully rejecting him should thereby risk the ruin of his soul? Can we not recognise this awful law of life, that wilful sin against light tends to darkening of the light, that a life of such rejection of the light tends to make one incapable of receiving the light for ever? We must believe that through an eternity, if the worst sinner left touched by the love of God and wanted to turn to him, that man would be saved. What we dread is that the man may not want, and so may have rendered himself incapable of doing so. We dread not God's will, but man's own will. Character tends to permanence. Free will is a glorious but a dangerous prerogative. All experience leads towards the belief that a human will may so distort itself as to grow incapable of good."

Thus seen, our Lord's words were intended as a solemn warning to those Pharisees. He did not, He could not, close the door of salvation to them but He did make clear that throughout the whole of God's great Day of grace—which includes both "this Age" and the "Age to come"—the fixed, inviolable principle is that forgiveness and salvation depend upon repentance and conversion, and in their then condition they were blinding themselves to that fact.

Next for consideration come the words written by the Apostle John. "If any one sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin which is mortal; I do not say that one is to pray for that" (1 John 5. 16). Here again one might say at first sight that there are two kinds of sin, one not so heinous as the other, but upon reflection this cannot be so. All sin, without qualification, is opposed to the Divine principles of good, and on that account can only result in death, unless it is expunged by repentance and conversion. All sin, without qualification, can be so expunged. The difference between sin which is not mortal and sin which is mortal, or as the A.V. has it, sin not unto death and sin unto death, is that in the one case there is repentance, and in the other there is not. Hence behind John's words in this passage lies the principle that not until God has as it were put forth every possible effort and been rejected, until the erring one has so steeled his heart and mind against all things good that he has become literally incapable of repentance, can his case be considered hopeless. Now since the Divine

day of grace which began at Pentecost does not end until the close of the Millennial reign of Christ there is no question of that kind of "sin unto death" until then; at any time up to that point there is hope that the sinner may turn from his ways, and enter into life. It is more reasonable therefore to consider that John's injunction is intended to refer to those whose present course, if continued unchecked, would eventually bring them into that hopeless condition. Such would then be in the same class as those Pharisees to whom the Lord addressed his allusion respecting sin against the Holy Spirit not having forgiveness. 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. Mark that he does not forbid prayer being made; only that prayer is not laid upon us as an obligation in such case. There is no suggestion, either, 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. Prayer might very properly be made for the man that such might eventually be the case; John does not forbid that; what he does insist upon is the impropriety of prayer to God for life, for the gifts of God, to one who is not in a condition of repentance. The cardinal principle here is that one must turn from "*dead works*" to "*serve the living God*" (Heb. 9. 14) before God can extend to him the gift of eternal life.

Finally there has to be examined the two passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews. "*It is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God, and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy; since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt*" (Heb. 6. 4-6). From the preceding verses in this chapter it is clear that those referred to are Jewish Christians who have forsaken Judaism and have come into Christ in the fullest sense. They have been enlightened by the gospel of Christ, the light of the world; they have received the free gift of justification by faith in Christ (Rom. 5. 18); they have received the Holy Spirit (Luke 11. 15, Rom. 8. 15); have entered into an understanding of the word of God, and in all this have entered very largely into the blessings

and gifts which will come upon all the world in the Messianic Age, the "powers of the age to come", as the writer here puts it. They are no longer Jews bound to the Mosaic Law; they have become part of Christ's Church, because they have come into Christ, and all the obligations of "the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1. 3-19) devolve upon them. But there is an element of doubt as to their steadfastness and ability to remain faithful to their calling. In the latter part of chapter 5 they are told that many things which they ought to know and understand are "*hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing*". By now, after the time they had been in the faith and in the way, they should have become teachers of others; instead they still needed someone to teach them again the first principles of God's word, able only to assimilate milk and not solid food. So he opens chapter 6 with a stirring call to them to "*leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity . . .*" for, he says, if, because of such continued immaturity, the erstwhile believer loses his faith and zeal, forgets what he has learned, falls away from the faith, returning to what St. Paul elsewhere called the "beggarly elements" of Judaism (Gal. 4. 9) thus becoming an apostate from the faith, then one might as well abandon all hope of his recovery to the faith. By rejecting Christ in favour of Judaism, going back to Moses and the old Covenant which Christ brought to an end by the Cross, they "*crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt*". "*It is impossible*" he says "*to restore them again to repentance*"—reformation. This restoration, of course, is to their previous position in the Body of Christ with all its contingent privileges in the future day of Christ's glory. This word "impossible" is *adunatos*, which is the antithesis of *dunatos*, meaning powerful, mighty, strong. *Adunatos* means, literally, to be deficient in the necessary strength or power for the matter involved, to be too weak, impotent. Hence it is often translated correctly, "impossible", but its basic meaning must be kept in mind. Thus the cripple at Lystra (Acts 14. 8) "*could not use*" (*adunatos*) (Rom. 7. 3). "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the *weak*" (*adunatos*) (Rom. 15. 1). The obstacle to reformation therefore is not some kind of Divine decree which refuses any subsequent approach to God after the apostasy, but the inability of his feet. "God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, *could not do*" (*adunatos*)

the one who would reclaim the apostate to do any more than has already been done. The terms of the High Calling have already been explained; the whole of the process of entry into life in Christ—repentance, conversion, justification, consecration and the commencement of the sanctified life—has been completed, and now repudiated and rejected. There are no further arguments to bring forward, no additional aspects of the Calling to declare; there is nothing anyone can do. It might be better to use the word "cannot" as better expressing the underlying sense. The apostate cannot be restored to reformation; he has returned to that bondage of the Law from which he had escaped and there he must stay until the enlightening work of the Lord in the Millennial Age compels him to face up to the implications of life and death. Although he has repudiated the High Calling he may never have lost his basic love for God; if he has, it may be restored under the evangelistic appeal of that Age. But if so, his destiny is with the world of that Age and not the Church who by then will be with Christ in glory.

Some translations qualify the expression "once been enlightened" by rendering "once for all been enlightened" and from this it is sometimes suggested that there is a finality about this matter which precludes any further opportunity for the apostate. This is not in accord with the fundamental principle of the Divine relationship with man which demands that opportunity for repentance is always open until the end of the day of grace. Neither is it logical to think of a "once for all" enlightenment during this present Age when it is an accepted fact that the god of this world is blinding the minds of those that believe not (2 Cor. 4. 4) so that full enlightenment is just not possible. Even those who are "in Christ" are said by St. Paul to know only "in part". It is true that the Greek word concerned is used at times to denote happenings in time which are never repeated or do not need repetition, as for example Heb. 9. 26 and 1 Pet. 3. 18, both referring to the one act of Christ culminating on the cross, which is never repeated. It is also applied in Heb. 9. 7 to the High Priest offering sacrifices "once every year". Having once been offered, there is no repetition for the rest of that year although they had to be repeated in the following year. When St. Paul was recounting his treatment at the hands of his enemies in 2 Cor. 11. 25 he said "three times I have been beaten with rods: once I was stoned" which

certainly does not mean that he had been stoned "once for all" but merely that this had happened but once in his experience. So here, there is no warrant for assuming that the enlightenment here spoken of was given "once for all", only that the believer-turned-apostate having had the experience of entering in the first time into an appreciation of the "truth as it is in Jesus" could never pass through that experience again. He might reject or repudiate or ignore the light and it might become dim in his mind; afterward in the mystic processes of God's ways he regain it again, but it will in such case not be a new enlightenment. It will be a re-acceptance of the original enlightenment.

There must therefore be recognised a clear distinction between the believer who withdraws from the High Calling, perhaps because of the rigours of the way or the attractions of other things, and yet has not necessarily lost all reverence for God or all appreciation of goodness, and one whose fixed and incorrigible opposition to all goodness has destroyed within himself all capability for repentance. Only in the latter case can we say that there is no hope, that there is nothing more that God can do.

This is where the passage in the tenth chapter of Hebrews has its place. Here is stated in all its baldness the position of the incorrigible sinner. "*For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries . . . the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the Covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace*" (Heb. 10. 26-29). This entire tenth chapter is a remarkable exposition of the principles upon which God is working and, like everything in the Book of Hebrews, sharply contrasts the futility of the old Mosaic Law with the adequacy of the deliverance that is in Christ, the penalties imposed under that Law with the final reckoning made at the end of His Millennial reign. Verses 1 to 8 shew how the sacrifices for sin made under the law of Moses were in fact valueless. It is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. So Christ abolished all that arrangement, all the ritual of the Law extending throughout that Jewish Age, that He might establish a better and an effective order. Verses 9-14 tell of this new order and how the offering of himself by Jesus was and is effective. "*By a single offer-*

ing" says the writer "he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified". Then in verses 15-18 he turns our attention to the Millennial Age of Christ's reign over the nations, with its New Covenant which will write the laws of God on the hearts and minds of men, their sins and misdeeds being remembered no more. Swinging back in thought to the present Age and the position of the Christian Church, in verses 19-25 he exhorts the believers to steadfast faith and assurance in their chosen vocation, the High Calling, increasingly so as they perceive the Millennial Day approaching. Now all this lays down the basis on which any may attain eternal life—whether the Church of this Age or the world in the next; the principle is the same. Only by means of the exercise of faith in Jesus Christ and the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit will life be attained.

All that has been said up to this point has to do with the removal of sin. That removal implies the consent and desire of the sinner. The offering for sin is there, the life-giving power of Christ; the sustaining grace of the Holy Spirit. All is available for the one who will. But what of the one who does not will, who elects to abide deliberately in sin? This is where verses 26-31 have their place. "If we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth." The Greek has the force of continuous action; "If we be sinning deliberately". Again it has to be stressed that only in the next Age can it be possible to attain the knowledge of the truth in any genuine sense. There are none, can be none, in this present Age and present life, who cannot claim at least some degree of ignorance, some degree of Adamic imperfection or influence of the Evil One, to hinder and thwart their progress toward, or their desire for, righteousness. In the next Age there will be no such excuse, for God "desires all men to be

saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 3: 4), and has ordained the characteristics of that Age for that purpose. Only then will it be possible for any man finally to "spurn the Son of God", refuse the life which comes through him and can only come through him; "profane the blood of the Covenant", that New Covenant which was sealed by the death of Christ and promises the recreation of man in the image and likeness of God; "outrage the Spirit of grace", turning away from the manifest power of the Holy Spirit which is in that day to be poured out on all flesh. And if the man thus flings back in the face of God all that He has done for him and all that He stands ready to give him, what is there left to do? "There no longer remains any sacrifice for sins" says Hebrews. All that the sacrifice for sins has done, all that it can do, has been offered, and rejected. This, and this alone, is the unforgivable sin—unforgivable because the sinner steadfastly refuses to be forgiven. God grant that there be not many such!

In confidence that this may indeed be the outcome let other words of Dr. Paterson Smyth be recalled. "In the Judgment there are sentences of awful doom and visions of 'the lost' going into outer darkness, but we are bound to believe that in the judgment no man will be lost till the Father has, as it were, put his arms around him and looked him in the eyes with His unutterable love and been finally rejected. It is not for us to presume into unrevealed mysteries or to tighten the fate of impenitent sinners. But it is for us to assert that the Divine Brother is the Judge and that the Bible bids us look forward to when Gehenna shall be no more, when evil and the Evil One shall have vanished for ever out of the whole wide universe of God".

We do not easily realise how great is the debt we owe to some of the ancient monarchs whose names are familiar in the Old Testament. The Israelites were chiefly concerned with those ruthless invasions which made the Assyrian name feared and hated throughout Canaan, and the Scriptures tell us little about these men beyond recounting their victories and defeats when they came into contact with the chosen people. But many of them were men of literary tastes, and accumulated vast libraries which have survived in part to our own day. Much of our knowledge of ancient peoples, their history, their ways of life, and

their origin, has come to us from such records, and from these things has come much light upon the Bible record. The great library of Agade, founded by Sargon I, who lived several centuries before Abraham, was stocked with thousands of books, many of which had been translated from earlier tongues. There are catalogues now in existence instructing the readers in Sargon's library to write down the number of the book required and hand the tablet to the librarian, for all the world like a reference library in any of our great cities to-day.

MIRIAM

Miriam was the elder sister of Moses and is chiefly celebrated for the part she played when the daughter of Pharaoh found the infant Moses in the bulrushes. She was at that time a young girl, anxious only for the welfare of her baby brother; in later life she appears, in the only two incidents in which she figures, as a somewhat passionate and militant woman. Scanty as is the information regarding her, there are a few deductions possible which can be of interest and perhaps profit.

Miriam was born during the period of the Oppression, when the Egyptians, perturbed at the phenomenally rapid increase of the alien people in their midst, enslaved them and "*made their lives bitter with hard bondage*" (Exod. 1. 14). Thothmes I, the Pharaoh of the Oppression, had issued an edict that all male children born to Israelites were to be thrown into the river; this was an effort to halt the increase in numbers, thought to endanger the native population. Moses' mother had not complied with the command; instead she placed the babe in a boat made of papyrus reeds and consigned him to the providence of God. And it was in that providence that the daughter of Pharaoh, going down to the river to bathe, found him.

The daughter of Thothmes I was the famous Hat-shep-sut, known to history as a vigorous and determined woman who was married successively to Thothmes II and Thothmes III but arrogated their duties as Pharaoh to herself. For some forty years she was the real ruler of Egypt and under her firm and far-sighted administration the country flourished. At the time of Moses' birth, however, her father was still Pharaoh and she herself probably between twenty and thirty years of age, married to the weakling future Thothmes II and already despairing of having any children by him. This fact may explain her action in adopting the infant Moses as her own son.

Miriam was about sixteen or seventeen at the time. The word used to describe her in Exodus 2 is *almah*, which means a young girl of marriageable age. Lingerer near by, "*to wit what would be done to him*", Miriam watched as the Egyptian princess had the child brought to her, saw that, in her own words "*this is one of the Hebrews' children*", and determined to keep it for herself. In so

doing she must have known that she was transgressing her father's edict, but this determination on her part is quite consistent with the headstrong and self-willed character of Hat-shep-sut as it is known to history, as is also her adoption of a Hebrew child rather than a native one.

Here was Miriam's opportunity, and the first indication that she was not lacking in qualities of courage and initiative. It probably needed both in good measure for a young girl of the despised slave caste to accost and address the leading lady of the land, the daughter of Pharaoh herself. But Miriam was equal to the occasion; she suggested to the princess that she should secure the services of a Hebrew woman to nurse the child until it was of a suitable age to be introduced into the royal palace. Her offer was accepted and of course Miriam fetched her own mother, who thereby had her son restored to her and his life saved. She probably had him for two or three years and then his adoptive mother took him into her own care and began to groom him for royal honours, and his own mother saw him no more. It does not appear that Hat-shep-sut's husband was consulted about all this, but Thothmes II was a physical weakling completely dominated by his wife and the fact that he was unable to give her a son himself probably supplied her with an unanswerable argument.

At this point Miriam drops out of the story and the next glimpse we have of her is eighty years later, at the deliverance of Israel in the crossing of the Red Sea. Much had happened in the meantime. Moses, grown to manhood, had repudiated his royal status and associated himself with his oppressed kinsfolk, in consequence of which he had spent forty years in exile. Hat-shep-sut had been dead for forty years, Amen-hotep II, another obstinate ruler, was now Pharaoh, and he with his people had just suffered the disasters of the Ten Plagues culminating in the loss of his cavalry in the waters of the Red Sea. The Israelites were safe on the other side. And Miriam, who had spent her entire life of some ninety-seven years under conditions of slavery and oppression, now took a timbrel in her hand and led the women of Israel in dancing and song. The song—a fine example of what is called a "taunt song", peculiar to the Old Testament—is given in

full in Exod. 15. "*Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously;*" she sang: "*the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.*" Lest it be thought rather improbable that a woman of ninety-seven should be physically capable of leading the dance, let it be remembered that the normal life-span in the days of Miriam was considerably longer than it is now, anything up to a hundred and forty years. Not only Biblical characters but also Egyptian and Babylonian notables, as demonstrated by ancient records and tomb inscriptions, attest this fact. She was evidently considered the foremost woman in Israel in consequence of the position of Moses her brother as the acknowledged leader of the nation.

At the time of this incident she is referred to as "*Miriam the prophetess*" (Exod. 15. 20). This must certainly indicate that during the dark days of the Oppression she had been a stalwart defender of the Faith. Whilst little is known of Israel's spiritual condition during those times, it is clear that faith and belief in God was at a low ebb. Of some twenty or so persons of Miriam's time who are named in the histories only about three—Aaron her brother, Hur of Judah and Joshua the son of Nun, figure as men of God, whilst at least seven—Dathan, Abiram, On, Korah, Achan, Nadab and Abihu—appear in some one or other deed of apostasy. It does seem that the family of Amram and Jochebed—Miriam, Aaron and Moses—stand out as rather unique in their zealous faith and it might well be that whilst Moses was in exile in Midian those forty years his sister was a tower of strength to the Hebrew community and kept alive what little faith there was in Israel. There might be a wonderfully inspiring but for ever unknown story of militant heroism and stalwart faith hidden away behind those apparently casual words "*Miriam the prophetess*".

Jewish tradition—not supported by the Old Testament—has it that Miriam married Hur, of the tribe of Judah, the man who shared with Aaron the duty of second in rank to Moses in affairs of State (see Exod. 24. 14). The supposition is not unlikely; they were very possibly of much the same age and the evident fact that Hur was a trusted lieutenant to Moses implies his close personal connection with the family. If these two were indeed husband and wife it would follow as a matter of interest that Miriam was the grandmother both of Bezaleel, the constructor of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and of

Caleb, who with Joshua brought back the true report in the matter of spying out the land, and was specially honoured of God in consequence. In such case the marriage must have taken place while Moses was still a youth, since Caleb was forty years old at the Exodus, so that one could imagine this trio comprising Aaron, Hur and Miriam closely associated together in working for the welfare of Israel during the whole forty years of Moses' exile in Midian.

All that was now in the past and Israel was delivered. Little more than a year later, not long after the momentous happenings at Sinai, where Moses had been manifestly revealed as the intermediary between God and Israel, another side to Miriam's character was thrown open to view. Jealousy, naked and unashamed, brought her into conflict not only with the brother she had worked with so long a time, but also the God she had served so faithfully since childhood. The story is related in Num. 12. 1-16.

"*And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian (Cushite) woman he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only to Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the Lord heard it*" (Num. 12. 1-2). This is the first indication of a rift in the association between these three. Moses was accustomed to challenges against his authority from others jealous of his position or apprehensive of the unknown terrors of the journey to Canaan and desirous in consequence of returning to Egypt, but now he was faced with a challenge from his own brother and sister, themselves highly esteemed in the eyes of the people. The trouble focused on the wife of Moses. Miriam and Aaron professed to object to the fact that she was not a native Israelite. There is something a little odd in the accepted text here in that, in the A.V. she is called an Ethiopian woman whereas the earlier history of Exodus tells the full story of Moses' marriage, whilst in exile in Midian, to Zipporah, the Midianite daughter of Reuel the tribal chief who sheltered Moses. "Ethiopian" is the Greek equivalent of "Cushite", children of Cush, and there were Cushite tribes in Arabia as well as Africa so that the contradiction may in fact be more apparent than real. At any rate, Moses' wife was not of the house of Israel, and although the fact had apparently not aroused any animosity before, it seems to have done so now when the host was well on its way to the Promised Land.

Very possibly it was the old question "Who shall succeed the ruler?" Moses was at the moment the unquestioned leader of the nation. At eighty years of age he was in the full vigour of manhood, a usual thing in those days. But one day he would die; upon whom would the mantle of authority then descend? He had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, but they were only half Israelite; their mother was a Midianite. Aaron, as the next in authority, was married to Elisheba, of the tribe of Judah, and he had four sons. Jacob, dying, had indicated Judah as the future royal tribe. Surely a man having the blood of Judah and Levi in his veins would be the more appropriate leader of Israel! If in fact Miriam was married to Hur, as the legend claims, then here again, since Hur also was of Judah, the sons of Hur, Uri and Jephunneh, could make the same claim. Here, it seems were all the ingredients of a fight over the future leadership and Miriam seems to have taken the initiative; her name is mentioned in front of Aaron in this, and only in this, instance. Maybe the question of Moses' wife was just the immediate excuse; the militant and probably domineering character of Miriam was no longer content to remain in a subordinate position; she aspired to equality of status with Moses, and Aaron her brother, who is revealed in the incident of the Golden Calf as being easily led, was persuaded to go along with her. If the three of them could be accepted as a triumvirate ruling Israel, then when the time came that a successor to Moses' office was necessary it would be easy to ensure that a scion of the house of Judah would be chosen and the sons of the Midianite woman cast out. That, perhaps, was the reasoning which lay behind this rather unpleasant incident.

And, of course, in all this reasoning Miriam and Aaron quite forgot that it was the Lord who appointed Moses in the first place and would doubtless be equally positive about the appointment of his successor.

They were quickly reminded of that fact when the Lord came on the scene. This is one of the occasions of what is called a theophany, a visible appearance of God. The narrative says that the Lord appeared visibly in human form and talked with them. Whatever may be the truth of that or the reality behind the story, the pair were left in no doubt of the Lord's attitude. "How dare you" He demanded "speak against my servant Moses?" *"And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and he departed . . . and, behold, Miriam*

became leprous, white as snow."

That instantaneous infliction of the dreaded disease, leprosy, brought about a quick reaction. Miriam must have been numbed with horror. She, the first lady of the nation, esteemed a prophetess of God, now and henceforth condemned to live the rest of her life an outcast, forbidden entry to the camp of Israel or to share in its life, trailing along on the outskirts as the people journeyed and living apart with such other equal unfortunates as there were, dependent for food and livelihood upon the thought and charity of the people! The pride and militancy of her nature must have vanished in a flash and left her crushed and broken. The question of equality with Moses, of authority over Israel, was no longer of any importance; for her, life was finished.

Aaron, equally horror-stricken, was imploring Moses for mercy. *"My lord,"* he said, now freely acknowledging the superior status of his brother which a few minutes ago he had denied, *"we have done foolishly . . . we have sinned"*. He begged that Miriam might be healed, and Moses, doubtless genuinely concerned at his sister's plight, and feeling that the lesson had almost certainly been thoroughly learned, cried unto the Lord *"Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee"*. And the Lord, looking down and perceiving that the lesson had indeed been learned, assented and healed her—but stipulated that she should be shut out of the camp and isolated as unclean for seven days before resuming normal life, just to impress the point. It is perhaps reasonable to expect, because Miriam was after all a devoted and fervent servant of the God of Israel, that she came back into the camp a humbled and chastened woman, the old militancy and self-assurance tempered by a new spirit of willing submission to the overruling wisdom of God.

That is all we know of Miriam. Forty years later, on the eve of entry into the land, after enduring with Israel all the hardships and terrors of that long sojourn in the "waste and howling wilderness", she died at Kadesh, on the frontier of the Promised Land, at the ripe old age of about a hundred and thirty-seven. She did make one bad mistake, but after all she was a woman of faith, and without much doubt is included in the gallery of stalwarts who, to use the language of Heb. 11, *"received a good report through faith"* and will in no wise fail their place in the future purposes of God.

☞ **"HE SHALL CARRY THE LAMBS IN HIS BOSOM"**

How often in the Bible we find reference to lambs! Jesus told Peter to feed his lambs and his sheep. What is the difference between lambs and sheep? As always we need only to compare things spiritual with things material for the answer, for is not this the way our Heavenly Father stoops to our need?

Instinctively we connect lambs with the innocence of children and rightly so, for they represent innocence. Jesus said *"Unless ye become as little children ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of God"* and this means that we have to become innocent as they. Some will ask how this is possible, and like Nicodemus say *"How can these things be?"*

The first thing our Father requires is implicit trust. Every little child who has loving parents trusts them implicitly, goes where they send him, and if he is obedient, does what they tell him. He knows that they will only tell him to do what is good for him, and that they love him and that any discipline he receives is for his own good, and when he comes to manhood he is able to look back and thank them for training him to become a good citizen and is grateful for all their love and care and forethought for his well-being. So it is with our Heavenly Father. He is seeking to bring us always to our highest good, and He guides us by his Holy Spirit and, even though we do not in the least know to what He is guiding us, we can safely trust in him, looking to him for everything, instruction, guidance, dependence on him alone. For does the psalmist not say *"It is vain to put confidence in man"*.

This then is the only attitude which opens the door of heaven to us. We have accepted his "free gift" of grace, his full salvation, and we allow ourselves to be led "whithersoever the spirit leadeth". What rest and tranquillity of peace will be ours when we thus allow ourselves to lean confidently on the Saviour's bosom. Yet, how often we forget to trust our dear Saviour and instead of confiding in him and trusting in his salvation for us, his "all-sufficient merits" we try and do the works ourselves. Then, alas, as we must always do when we drop back into the "Covenant of Works" we stumble and fall. It is only in complete surrender, by realising our own helplessness of our case, that we can go forward. For Jesus himself said *"Without me ye*

can do nothing" (John 15. 5).

We will do well then if we continually recall that our salvation is by grace alone. St. Paul reminds us of this in his epistle to the Ephesians, for he says—

"For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not of works lest any man should boast." (Eph. 2. 8 and 9).

This is to "enter into rest"; to cease from the fret and worry of striving to do what we cannot possibly do, and what Jesus came to do for us. Oh let us be thankful and rejoice in our salvation. Let us accept with outstretched, eager hands, that most precious gift which He suffered so much to give us his children, for *"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life"*. Then, as we realise our own utter worthlessness, we shall long to bring others to him. When the full realisation of this breaks in on our souls we grasp the wonder of St. Paul's words that *"He became sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him"*. (2 Cor. 5. 21). Oh the wonder of it, to know He has done it all for us!

How anxious should we be to "rest in His love" and be glad to accept willingly the "free gift" which He won for us by great sacrifice and, with the Psalmist, joyfully cry:—

"I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only." (Psa. 71. 16).

This is to rest confidently on Jesus' bosom and like David again, let us acknowledge that *"All things come of thee and of thine own have we given thee."* (1 Chron. 29. 14).

All love, all wisdom, virtue, goodness, whatever of these there be in us is of him alone, and to realise and acknowledge this, and that we have nothing of ourselves, and to be glad that it should be so, this is Innocence. This is to be "gathered in his arms, and carried in his bosom". Jesus said *"My sheep know my voice and follow me"*, and it is good to be a sheep, but how much more lovely to be one of his lambs, and as He—the spotless Lamb—ever sought the glory of his Father, and who said that *"My meat is to do the will*

of him who sent me" let us endeavour to do his Will also.

Let us seek his honour and glory, who alone won the victory, and remember that, as we started on our journey relying upon his help alone, only thus can we complete the journey and reach our goal.

Then, just as our earthly parents desire all good things for their children, let us remember that so does our Heavenly Father desire—far more than earthly parents could do—to

give us good things. For did not Jesus say:—

"If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

*"And Thou hast brought to me
Down from Thy throne above
Salvation full and free,
Thy pardon and Thy love;
Great gifts Thou broughtest me;
What have I brought to Thee?"*

A Note on Zechariah 14. 15

A correspondent has raised a query with respect to an item in the exposition of Zechariah in the Sept.-Oct. issue. On page 105 of that issue there is reference to Zech. 14. 15 *"and so shall be the plague of the horse, of the mule, of the camel, and of the ass, and of all the beasts that shall be in these tents, as this plague"*. Commenting thereon, reference was made to the fact that in ancient times, as exemplified in the historical books of the Old Testament, it was the custom after a battle for the victors to offer up to God the captured beasts of burden as a consecrated sacrifice, the idea being that the property of the vanquished infidels, being thereby unclean, must not be taken into secular use but immolated by fire as a burnt offering to God, who made the victory possible. It was not intended to suggest that such a literal sacrifice of animals would figure in the fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy at the end of the Age, but it would seem that this was not made sufficiently clear in the exposition. The intention in fact was to suggest that the prophet's allusion to the ancient custom was a symbol or metaphor picturing the utter destruction, to the glory of God, of the implements and accessories of warfare which figure in the last great conflict. Of course horses and camels and asses and so on are no longer used in modern warfare; their present equivalents are tanks and transport vehicles and aeroplanes and so on. But these things are the concrete symbols of the evil forces which have incited men to fight against the Lord in this Last Day and this passage in Zechariah is really telling us that when the conflict is over and the powers of evil have

been subdued, then every instrument of evil and every power that works for evil will be swept away and be no more. The same idea is well put by Isaiah when he says *"they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more"* (Isa. 2. 4). It is hoped that this brief explanation will be of interest to any other reader who may have queried the same point.

That our God has definite concern and care for the "lower creation" is more than hinted at in the Scriptures. Jesus said that not one sparrow falls to the ground without the Father's knowledge; God, sparing Nineveh in the days of Jonah, was concerned not only about the hundred and twenty thousand human inhabitants of the city but also the fact that there was "much cattle"; the Mosaic Law forbade the unequal yoking of ox and ass, and the muzzling of the ox that threshed out the grain. A right view of terrestrial creation demands that God brought all creatures into being to fulfil definite purposes in creation and would not be party to senseless and useless slaughter. Of the animal creation in the Millennium it is said *"they shall not hurt nor destroy"*. So that, despite the system of animal sacrifices associated with Israel's early nationhood, which requires separate and longer consideration than can be given here, it must be accepted that the prophetic pictures, based on old-time practices long since discarded, are metaphors illustrating the principles which will obtain in the reality to which Zechariah's prophecy refers.

Great gift of God to mankind—it rekindles in the heart extinguished love, and relights the lamp of life, and restores the Sabbath of the soul. To the grandeur of the man it adds the glory of the saint. It over-arches the

dreary caverns of despair with the dew of promise; it sets duties in the bosom of benedictions, and precepts in promises; it offers pardon for the greatest sin, and gives dignity to the noblest duty. Dr. A. Cumming

WALKING WITH GOD

An Exhortation

During the dark centuries from Eden to the Flood only three men receive honourable mention in the Bible—Abel, Enoch and Noah—and we might think that the thoughts of other men were evil continually but for the bare hint in Gen. 4. 26 that some began to call upon the name of the Lord. Some hold the opinion that this call upon the Lord was not genuine, though the versions of the text imply that some were seeking the Lord if haply they might find Him. Be that as it may, only these three are of particular mention for they pursued their searching until successful. Each of them is creditably mentioned for his faith in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, but our thoughts will be of Enoch, for while brief details of his life are given they will guide Christians in their walk with God. In fact only three points of his character are referred to—his faith in God, his pleasing God, and his walk with God. We shall not be able to separate these, and we would not wish to, but we know from the Word that the first, his faith, was the foundation of the other two. Let us note how he began his walk of faith which culminated in his walk with his God. Two steps only began his approach, and they are the steps that all must take. This—of God is clearly stated in Heb. 11. 6 “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, *and* that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him”. It is most clear from these words that belief in the existence of God does not constitute faith, but that it must be coupled with the assurance of reward. Possibly this shows the difference between Enoch and his contemporaries. Quite probably there were those who believed in his existence, and those who called upon him, and possibly those who wished merely to be called by his name, but there was one truly satisfied that he would be heard and blessed if he appealed in faith. Thus did he prove the veracity of his belief and became an early example of the maxim “Seek and thou shalt find”. We must assume what was in his mind when in faith he knew that appeal to God would not go unanswered; but it is no flight of fancy to think that as he looked round and saw the world astray from God he, like another of whom no fault is recorded, asked “*What shall be the end of these things?*” (How often that question has led to others seeking the Lord!) There being no prophetic word of which he could enquire,

no man of God, no priest and no teacher of God's ways likely to be able to give inspired answer, he turned to his God; and his request was answered so fully that he was able in turn to prophesy of the coming of the Lord to execute judgment, and thus he became the first of a long line of prophets. The assurance of Divine intervention and of coming judgment has always been the answer to those who seek to know how God will rectify the affairs of men. It is a primary truth and also it leads to another question—stated in various ways by others—it is “*When shall these things be?*” or “*How long shall it be . . .?*” or “*Wilt thou at this time . . .?*” and the answer to every Daniel and disciple is still the same, that times and seasons are God's own secret. No rebuke is implied in the negative answer, in fact we may well believe that our Father and his Son are pleased with such enquiries in faith, even though it is not his purpose to reveal all. This leads to the suggestion that the steps of faith of Enoch developed into a walk with God, and as walks lead to conversation and fellowship we would be surprised if Enoch did not ask “*When?*”. How much of the plans of God were revealed to him we cannot know; we may however rest assured that the testimony that he pleased God was the result of his faith and righteous life. He stands as an example to us of one who did find the Lord and whose life of fellowship with God was so intense that it is best pictured as being a walk. Let us approach like him believing as he did that we shall be met more than halfway. And since his day, further light has been shed on the pathway by prophets and apostles that we may walk.

We should observe that Enoch walked *with* God. He was not called upon to walk alone and neither is the Christian. Such would be discouraging, but on the other hand he had only one companion, and he needed no other. And never is the Christian pictured in a procession or with a band, for the Bible picture is one of companionship, fellowship. To see two walking together is always the sign of unity even if they do not converse as they journey. “*Can two walk together except they be agreed?*” was the call of Amos to Israel; and by the prophet's cry they knew they had failed in their agreement with him who had said that they only had He known of all the families of the earth. In noting that none are

expected to walk alone we should remember that if the Bible has to picture solo effort, then running may be used; but then a Fore-runner is mentioned (as an example) and a goal (as an incentive). We note also that Scripture uses a figure as commonplace as walking as one of its figures of fellowship and this is because it is portraying a habit of life, something which is done without consciously thinking about it. We walk by habit, learnt in early life, never forgotten, never thought about. Such is the picture of fellowship with God, and characters are revealed by one's companions. It would be difficult to find a more apt expression to show Enoch's righteous life of faith and fellowship. It is noticeable that it is not recorded that he obeyed or that he served God. This would not be denied, but because the picture is not one of king and subject, nor of master and servant, the figure of walking reveals the companionship which had grown between Enoch and his God. We gain further thoughts by attempting to find an alternative word for "walk" to show the Bible picture of fellowship. The word "live" is good but is not as graceful as walk; the words "abide" and "dwell" are better as showing a habit of life (and 1 John 2. 6 shows the close connection); the word "fellowship" is best of all, though the apostle John seems to use it interchangeably with walk and abide. With these thoughts in mind John would have particular pleasure when recording in his gospel (John 1. 38-39) our Lord's reply to the disciples' question "Master, where dwellest thou?" for by the time he recorded the incident he and the other disciples had learned that their apparently simple request had been used by Jesus to mean more than they intended, and they had found that the true answer is only to be found in years of fellowship or walking with God and his Son.

It is to be observed that the exhortations are to "walk" not "march". Marching is no picture of fellowship, but it is suitable for such as regiments with a destination in view. When the Bible speaks of walking with God it is not concerned with destination to be reached, but does emphasise *how* and *with* whom we walk. Thus we can be sure that if we walk with God, how we walk will be governed by him. But though the thought of destination is not in this picture, the idea of methodical progress is clearly there for among other things we are urged to walk in the light, and light always spells progress. Nothing in the injunction to walk in the light

implies that we have to keep pace with flashes of Bible interpretation that shine more and more unto the perfect day, or from one beacon of truth. It is providential for Christians that they may walk in the light without being called upon to assent to every notion of truth exposition however true they may be. We have but to look at the apostle John's own words to see that walking in the light is far different; and in fact, it may appear to some that his conception of walking in the light is elementary. John begins his epistle by declaring that he is pursuing no myth, no supposition, no uncertainty (just as Peter had said early in his epistle that they were not following cunningly devised fables) and on that basis urges his readers to join in fellowship with God and his Son and other believers (v.3). Having said that much, he announces his great message which as an apostle, he has to declare. It is just this (v.5) that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. What would be the thoughts of the church to-day were they to receive a message from an apostle couched in these words, and with that as its dominant message? Some might say that they expected something up-to-date, something about the signs of the times, or some remarkable unveiling of Revelation that only the true people of God would be able to fathom. Let it be said now, that the message from John is up-to-date, for it is one of the truths which are without thought of time, without horizon. It was one of the first truths (if not the first) of creation and will certainly be the last (if there is any last). And here we meet face to face the purpose of Bible truth. This is the message if we wish to walk in the light (of fellowship), but not the message if we wish to walk in the light (of information). Let us in our minds turn back to the example of Enoch. Did he not turn away from the darkened world believing in faith this very truth—that God is light and in him is no darkness at all? And he found the truth of the words later spoken by James "Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you". Being met halfway, he walked with his God in the light of fellowship receiving the reward of those who diligently seek him. The Christian is similarly blessed, and here we may remember the words of Jesus in John 6. 45, 46, 37 "*And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and learned of the Father, cometh unto me. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and he that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out*". But as the Chris-

tian approaches in faith he will surely feel himself to be a man of unclean lips; especially if he compares himself with the source of all light. He could then be despondent, but providentially for him the apostle John has foreseen these thoughts within his heart and has given the answer before he speaks. In the seventh verse he tells that the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. There is therefore no hindrance to continual fellowship, the only possible barrier being removed by him with whom we would walk. And so John's message is most appropriate to them in his day and to us—that God is light, and freed by him of all sense of unworthiness we may fellowship with him and his Son. It was true of Enoch, that being justified by faith and therefore judicially free of fault, he could walk with him; and the standing of justification has added blessing now that the darkness is past and the true light shineth. And now that the light of the world has come, as the representative of him who is light, to walk in the light means also to have fellowship with him, or in the words of Jesus himself to his disciples *"Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light. . . . While ye have the light believe in the light, that ye may be children of the light"*.

We might here notice the difference between Enoch's position and that of the Christian before God. His failings as a son of Adam were covered by the God-provided principle of justification by faith; but he could not receive that standing which in the language of Paul is called "justification by blood" because he lived long before atonement was made. The apostle John is likewise very emphatic in speaking of the cleansing we have by the blood of Christ—the groundwork of our walk with him in the light. To John, walking in the light means having fellowship with God and his Son, and because to him there is no alternative and no half measures, he can say in his downright way *"if we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie . . ."*; *"If we say we have no sin . . ."* to him it is an absurdity. To John the conflict of light and darkness is intense: to him he who denies that Jesus is the Christ is a liar. To our modern minds it would seem unparliamentary, or inadvisable, or unnecessary to refer to opponents of the faith in such terms; yet if we had his keen appreciation of the absolute holiness of God and his Son and his detestation of the works of darkness we might even use his frank words.

We may now be assured that in receiving the cleansing from him with whom we walk there can be no other barrier to our continuing in the light of his countenance. But how shall we travel further in the walk of companionship? We may obtain an answer by recalling the walk to Emmaus. The fellowship of the two disciples was disturbed even to the point of dismay because for them the light had gone out, for they had trusted that it would have been he in whom they believed who would redeem Israel. They were not at that moment walking in the light of assurance; but they were willing enough to tell their woe to the stranger who drew near asking *"What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?"* Let us learn from them. They told him all that was in their hearts and He replied with telling them of the Scriptures, the light of truth. And soon the threescore furlongs walk from Jerusalem became a walk in fellowship with him and his Father, who of old had caused holy men to write the Scripture in which they trusted. All that was needed to turn the sad journey into communion was their teacher's reminding them and linking the words of the prophets of God. And it is just there, in the word of God, that we may continually have fellowship with God and his Son. There is revealed his will and plan for all of us; there are the words of comfort and consolation we need; there is the advice to help us to walk in the Spirit, in newness of life, and to walk worthily of our calling, there also is that assistance we need whereby we may pray aright (for prayer is another means of walking with God in fellowship), and there is the story which satisfies our longing as nothing else could do. We shall then rejoice in his word as one that findeth great spoil, and as the years of fellowship go by we shall find how much truer and grander are John's words *"God is light and in him is no darkness at all"*.

Having reached Emmaus with their hearts burning within them, they did not ask the stranger, as did the first disciples, *"Where dwellest thou"*, but asked him *"Abide with us"*, or in other words, dwell with us, fellowship with us. And He did, for though they rose up the same hour and returned to Jerusalem to tell the others, they had not parted from him, for the insight they had gained of him remained for a lifetime's fellowship.

The wear and tear of rust is faster than the wear and tear of work.

THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN

It is generally agreed that the Third Epistle of John was written at about the same time as the Second Epistle while John was living at Ephesus. Like the Second, which was addressed to a Christian woman, Kyria, this one is a personal letter, its recipient being a brother in the Lord named Gaius. The identity of this Gaius is unknown; it is not likely that he can be identified with either man of that name mentioned in the New Testament. We know of Gaius of Derbe in Macedonia (Acts 19. 29 and 20. 4) and Gaius of Corinth (Rom. 16. 24 and 1 Cor. 1. 14) but these texts refer to a time probably forty years previous to John's epistle. Gaius was a very common name and it is more likely that the recipient of John's third epistle is otherwise quite unknown to history. There was a Gaius who was Bishop of Pergamos at about this time and it is just possible that this might be the one to whom John is writing but we really do not know. It is perhaps sufficient to appreciate the evident fact that here is a brother who was well-beloved by John and enjoyed his high esteem. *"The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth."* That is how he opens his letter, and what a revealing opening it is! John was the "disciple whom Jesus loved" and his own loving disposition is proverbial. It is in little touches like this verse that we see how John retained the right to be called the "loving disciple" even into old age. It is said of him that when he was so old that he had to be carried into the meetings, and was quite unable to preach to the brethren as in past years, he used to repeat just the one exhortation "Little children, love one another". That was the end of his ministry and his service, the sum and substance of all that he had ever said or done.

"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." The expression "above all things" is not correctly translated. It would be more accurately rendered "in all respects". We may note from this verse that John does not shrink from wishing temporal blessings of prosperity and health for his friend Gaius. It is true that he qualifies it by saying "even as thy soul prospereth"; evidently he wishes temporal and spiritual health and well-being to go hand in hand together. That surely is a sane and balanced outlook upon our position

as "New Creations" having the "all-things-new" mind operating in a body which is still very much tied to and dependent upon this old world. John, for all his character of loving-mindedness, was no impractical mystic. He knew full well that the good things of this world—health, prosperity, ability, and so on—could be of great use in the service of the King of Kings, and having confidence that Gaius was so devotedly consecrated to his Lord that the possession of such blessings would by no means draw him away, John wishes for him prosperity and health, that he might be able to serve his Lord the better.

"For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

It would appear from the succeeding verses that some little company of brethren has gone out on a kind of tour, preaching the Gospel. Gaius was one who had received them hospitably and sent them on their way with a "God-speed". Coming to John, they had brought this good report of Gaius which so rejoiced the aged Apostle's heart. In these first four verses the expression "the truth" used with the significance that we ourselves attach to the word, occurs four times. "The Truth" was a precious thing to John, just as it should be—and usually is—to us. He has no greater joy than to receive tidings assuring him that his children, his disciples, his converts, are still walking and rejoicing in the Truth. The trials and vicissitudes and disappointments and disillusionments of a long life had not destroyed or weakened his appreciation of the Truth or his love for the Truth. Something like sixty years had passed over his head since that memorable day when he had stood upon Olivet and watched his Lord ascend into the cloud and disappear from sight, but that long lapse of time had not shaken his faith nor replaced zeal by apathy. He was as sure and certain as at the beginning and just as eager to bring new converts into the fold of the Church. "I have no greater joy". Happy are we if we can say the same thing and feel that notwithstanding all we have experienced in life's journey, despite all the failures and disappointments, we are as convinced and enthusiastic as ever

we were in those halcyon days, so far away now, when "the Truth" was a new and precious thing to us.

"Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; which have borne witness of thy charity before the Church; whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to remember such, that we might be fellow helpers to the truth."

This is the passage on which is based the belief that there had been an expedition, as it were, of missionary brethren from Ephesus, passing through the towns and villages of Asia preaching the Word, and that in so doing they had stopped at the house of Gaius and been hospitably entertained. True to the best traditions of Christian ministry, these had gone forth on their work of love, taking no payment or even, perhaps, gifts of any kind from those to whom they were sent. They laboured only for their souls, seeking to win them to Christ. John draws the attention of Gaius to this fact and points out what meritorious service it is to entertain and care for the wants of such. Our thoughts might well turn to our own time. It is not always possible to be one of the heralds of salvation who go forth into the world to preach the gospel—not always possible to undertake "active service" in the execution of the Church's age-old commission. And yet there is always something we can do towards the great work. It may be assisting in the provision of the material resources necessary to the promulgation of the message, helping to bear the cost, or performing with faithful diligence some of the hundred and one little "behind-the-scenes" duties that have to be carried out if the message is to go forth with good effect. It may be that one's part lies in the ministry of prayer, on behalf of the "travellers" as they go "into all the world". It may be in that other ministry, the Ministry of Encouragement, which has so necessary a function to perform on behalf of those whose labours so often, especially in this our day, are apparently so unfruitful. Depend upon it, there is something for each member of Christ's church to do in the great work of making known the glory of Divine truth and the Plan of God, and those who diligently apply themselves to the full exercise of such talents and abilities as they have will earn the Apostle's approving words here to his

friend Gaius "Thou shalt do well".

"I wrote unto the Church; but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words; and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church."

This Diotrephes is one of the six men named in the New Testament as opponents of the true faith. They were all professing brethren, not men like Demas who openly forsook Paul and the faith "having loved this present world". These six, Hymenæus, Alexander, Hermogenes, Phygellus, Philetus and Diotrephes had adopted various courses of opposition to the Apostles and their work and had in consequence become menaces to the settled and orderly progress of the Church. It is not said of Diotrephes, as it is said of the others, that he was guilty of doctrinal lapses or that he was a teacher of error. But the Apostle's condemnation is none the less forthright and definite. This man, who evidently occupied the leading position in the Church, the "Bishop" or elder as we would say, was exercising the powers of his office in a thoroughly improper manner. He had even gone so far as to disown the Apostle himself and prevent the reading of his letters before the assembled Church. He was not interested in the wider preaching of the Gospel and sought to hinder the free communion between brethren from elsewhere who came thus preaching, and the members of his own Church. He was, in fact, busily engaged in forming an exclusive little religious club presided over by himself with all outsiders barred. We have all seen the same thing in our own time; the spirit of Diotrephes is still amongst us and the pity of it and the shame of it never grows less. All too often "my people love to have it so" and then there is not much that can be done about it. John held a certain Apostolic authority which he did not hesitate to invoke on this occasion. Although in his epistles he normally shows little inclination to appeal to his own Apostleship and prefers to appeal and exhort, allowing his gospel of love and light to penetrate the hearts of his "children" and do its work there in its own way, he can certainly be sharp at times and this was one such time. Diotrephes and his ways he would not tolerate, and one can well conclude that if John ever did carry out his expressed intention of

visiting the church referred to in this letter, then Diotrephes received very short shrift at the hands of the father of all the churches.

"Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God; but he that doeth evil is not of God. Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself; yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true."

It is impossible to resist the conclusion that in these two verses John is addressing the Church through Gaius. It seems so unnecessary and even inappropriate in view of John's earlier words of commendation to Gaius to think that he is now counselling him to avoid evil and embrace good. He was doing that already. But taking these verses in conjunction with those immediately preceding in reference to Diotrephes one can detect a tone of reproof to the church for permitting this sorry state of affairs. If Diotrephes was an improper person to have the oversight of the little company, it was not because they had no one else. "Demetrius hath good report of all men." John could hardly go further than this in recommending Demetrius to the notice of the Church—surely here was the man who ought to be their elder. Well reported of by all who know him—a good report concerning the Truth—the endorsement of the Apostle himself. What more could they want? Perhaps the church did eventually take the hint and replace Diotrephes by Demetrius, to their own spiritual good and advancement. We do not know, but it is nice to think that perhaps they did.

"I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee; but I trust I

shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name."

A very similar conclusion to that of the Second Epistle. Just the kind of conclusion we should expect. So much to say and discuss and the written word so unsatisfactory a medium by which to say it. So much better to defer it until they could meet and then spiritual communion would be free and unchecked. So the friends with John at Ephesus send greetings to their brethren with Gaius in the unnamed church, and in so doing express once more that spirit of understanding brotherly love which is the cohesive force holding together all who are Christ's. "The love of Christ constraineth us"—holds us together.

John's work is done. He has given of his best, spending himself in wise instruction, grave warning and loving exhortation. It is for us to take great heed of his words and apply them very seriously to our own hearts and lives. This man lived a long and crowded life in the service of his Lord and ours. He knew—none better—how the practice of the principles of Jesus' teaching, rightly combined with a proper perception of the doctrinal understanding of Scripture can make the Christian life full and complete, giving every happiness and satisfaction now, furthering the interests of the Gospel in this world, and in the after life beyond the veil, bring joy unspeakable and full of glory. "We know not what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure."

The sculptor, with an ideal form in his thought, produces a statue from the block of marble. Every measurement of the block, every turn of the drill, every blow of the mallet upon the chisel, and every effort of the sculptor's mind, goes to make up the finished form, which is the production of his ideal, as nearly as the materials would admit. So, our Lord, as our Maker, has the idea toward which He seeks to form us. And all his operations are but steps in the work of our formation. Every measurement of our life by the Divine truth tests our capacity to attain the ideal; every turn of the drills of penetrating precepts of life, prepares us for the ideal character; every blow of the hammer of circumstances is, in the hands of the Divine providence, constantly shaping us toward the heavenly pattern. And, in the perfect econ-

omy of our Lord, never do we have to bear one measurement, or one penetrating cut, or one blow of circumstances, that is not absolutely needed to produce the perfect work which we will allow to be done within us.

* * *

Christ, in turning water into wine, shot forth a ray of that glorious love which redeemed the world. His whole action is marked with tender consideration. He saves this poor couple from the disappointment of being unable to entertain their friends. He adds to their store, but in such a manner as to lay them under no embarrassing obligation to Himself. So God bestows his blessings so unobtrusively that we forget the Giver; but here, as ever, would teach us to imitate Him when we bestow ours. Canon Liddon



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

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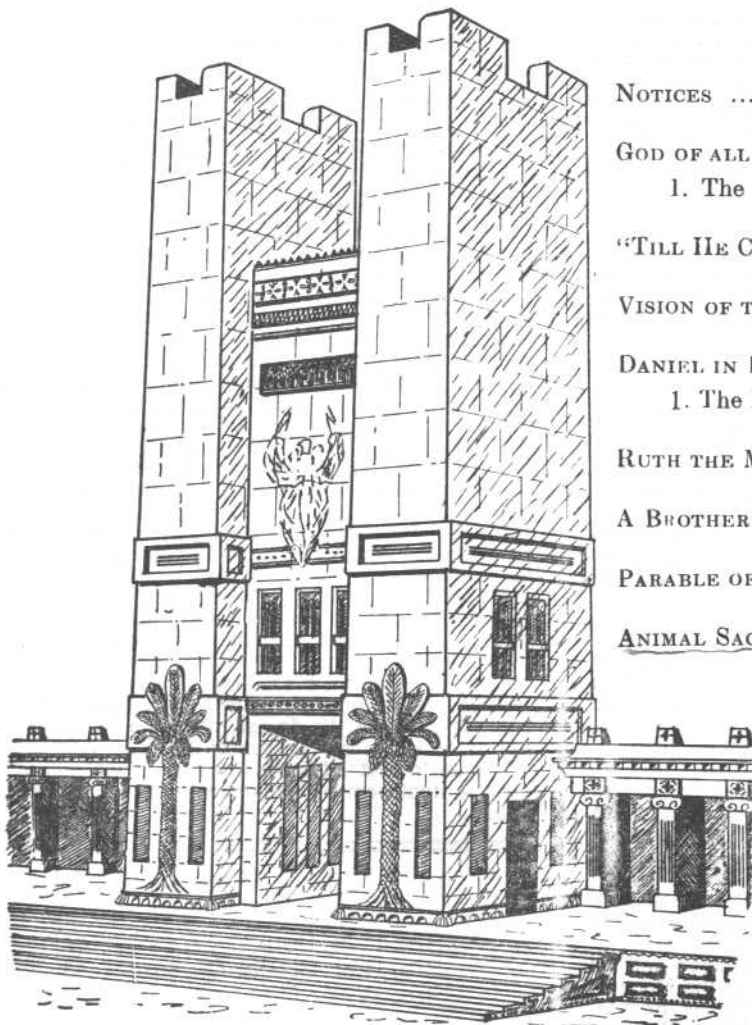
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of charge to all who are
genuinely interested, on
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voluntary gifts of its readers*



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

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NOTICES

"God of all Space"

The relation of the Christian faith to the increasing knowledge of outer space phenomena and the magnitude of the universe is becoming more and more a question demanding an answer. Is there life on other worlds and if so what is the effect upon the traditional doctrine of the Atonement? Can the astronauts disprove the existence of God by going far enough into space to see what is there? These are questions which could not be asked of past generations; they are being asked now. "God of all Space" is the title of a short series commencing in this issue which takes a quiet look at what is known of the universe and offers some answers to such questions from the Bible standpoint. This series should be of especial interest to youthful Christians, who are the ones most likely to be challenged on these grounds.

Back numbers

A limited number of sets of the "Monthly" for the years 1964 to 1970 inclusive are available and may be of interest to recently enrolled readers. These will be sent to anyone upon request, which must state the particular years for which issues are required. There is no charge but we would appreciate any gifts towards the cost and postage incurred. If no answer is received within three weeks of the request (ten weeks in the case of overseas readers) it should be taken that stocks are exhausted.

The Memorial

The anniversary of the Last Supper falls this year on the evening of Thursday April 8, being the day before Good Friday, and this is the appropriate date for the Memorial Service.

Coming Conventions

The friends at Windsor plan a week-end convention on Sat./Sun. June 12-13 next. Details and programmes when ready will be obtainable from the Convention Secretary, Bro. H. Charlton, 43 Halkingcroft, Langley, Slough, Bucks.

A similar gathering at Blaby is planned for Sat./Sun. May 15/16. Details from A. Charcharos, 55 Greenacres Drive, Lutterworth, Warks.

The usual Easter convention at Warrington will be held on Sat./Sun./Mon. April 10/11/12 in the Masonic Hall, Winmarleigh Street, Warrington. Details from F. B. Quennell, 43 Ackers Road, Stockton Heath, Warrington, Lancs.

Anonymous

Bro. John Shepherd of Bradford has asked us to acknowledge, on behalf of his committee, the receipt of

two anonymous donations to the special fund they administer, to wit, £5 (Maidenhead) and £100 (Home Counties), and to assure the donors of their appreciation.

The Old Order Changeth

Most Christian — and other — journals have had to announce revised prices in terms of the British New Penny but since we are in the position of relying upon the spontaneous gifts of our friends and readers to cover publication costs we do not need to follow suit. Concurrently with the introduction of the new coinage, however, has come a sharp increase in postal rates and this has led us to review our practice respecting the acknowledgement of donations. The sending of a receipt by post will now cost 2½np (6d old style) inland and 4np (10 USA cents) overseas, and since Mr. Callaghan, in telling us that he was establishing Britain's coinage for the next thousand years (see Isa. 55. 1) also intimated that the New Halfpenny was not going to last very long, we shall probably soon be paying 3np (7½d). Since many of the gifts we receive are for quite small amounts (as the business world to-day counts smallness; we know they are often given out of slender store and like the widow's mite are esteemed great in our Lord's sight) it seems wrong in principle to expend so large a portion of such gifts in sending receipts. As from this date, therefore, we shall send receipts only for amounts exceeding 50np (10/-). Just to assure any who may fear that the failure to receive a receipt means that the "Monthly" has been discontinued we would say that no one is deleted from the list until we have satisfied ourselves that there is no true interest or the recipient has left the address or has passed away. We do ask that if the "Monthly" does not arrive within say a week of the usual time that you notify us to that effect in which case we immediately send a replacement and investigate what has gone wrong.

Gone from us

Bro. L. H. Bunker (Winchester)
Bro. H. J. Clarke (Seaford)
Bro. W. A. Dinsdale (Eastbourne, late London)
Sis. M. Hastings (Newton Abbott)

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

GOD OF ALL SPACE

1. The Heavens are the Lord's

*Impact of space science
upon Christian belief*

Only during this twentieth century have men come to realise what an insignificant little speck of dust is our earth in the immensity of God's creation. The achievement of modern astronomers and physicists, probing the secrets of distant stars, discovering strange objects in outer space which no one previously suspected were there, have given almost everyone a completely new outlook upon man's place in the universe, and led some to wonder just how this new knowledge fits in with traditional ideas about God and the Christian faith. There are not wanting those who declare that it spells the doom of belief in Christianity, that the idea of Christ coming down to this little earth to save this puny human race is quite irreconcilable with the fact—which, incidentally, is quite unproven—that there must be many other worlds having intelligent creatures living thereon. The scientific journal *"Nature"* as far back as 1944, said that the new discoveries were *"ticking like a time bomb at the foundation of Christian belief"*; the discoveries which have been made since then render the knowledge of 1944 by comparison almost like that of the Dark Ages. One noted space expert said in 1965 *"One of the results of space travel will be the end of the old religions"*. Because these things are said, because they are said by men possessing various academic qualifications which are thought to confer upon them wisdom greater than their fellows, and because in consequence ordinary people do not know the answers or do not perceive the fallacies in such statements and are liable therefore to be misled, it is very desirable that this question of the relation of Christian belief to the new knowledge of "space science" be examined in the light of the Scriptures. If the Bible is indeed God's revelation to mankind it has nothing to fear from such examination and in fact may be found to have much to contribute. It is not always remembered that Twentieth Century scientists are not the world's first scientists and some of the men whose words and writings are preserved in the Bible were pretty acute observers in their own day; moreover they had the advantage of a much closer association with God than most of their modern counterparts.

The universe, vast as it is, is the work of God. The Christian faith is able to include in

its philosophy the effect of every astronomical discovery man has made and every one he will yet make. That men heretofore have associated it only with this earth and with mankind is because they had no idea that any other sphere of life is possible. Primitive peoples pictured the earth as an island floating on a circular sea covered by a curved vault in which moved the sun, moon and stars. God, or the gods, as the case might be, dwelt somewhere on the earth although in a place inaccessible to man. Then there developed the idea that God's dwelling was in an aerial heaven outside the curved vault but still quite near the earth. Even when, not much more than two thousand years ago, it was realised that the earth is a globe, it was still considered the centre of the universe with the sun circling it at a respectful distance and this was the accepted scientific belief until the seventeenth century when Galileo and Kepler showed that the sun is the centre of the solar system. As late as the year 1920, it was still held by astronomers generally that the solar system is in the centre of the universe, due to its apparent position amongst all the visible stars in the heavens. (An earlier astronomer, Thomas Wright, in 1750 had claimed this same honour for the constellation Pleiades.) All of this tended to preserve the idea that there could be only two abodes of life, heaven, the place of God's throne and the home of the angels, and earth, the home of man. God speaks to men in the language of earth and so He became, to them, a God of the earth and of mankind, having no other conceivable interests. The spiritual insight of Solomon King of Israel at the dedication of his temple a thousand years before Christ was appreciated and heeded only by a relative few. *"But will God dwell indeed with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built!"* (2 Chron. 6. 13-19). Only within this present century have men realised that God is intrinsically independent of the physical universe; because He is its creator and sustainer He must of necessity exist outside its limits.

Since 1920 knowledge of the universe has increased enormously, particularly so during the last forty years. It is known now that our solar system is one component member of a

vast conglomeration of stars, estimated by competent astronomers to number anything between ten thousand millions and thirty thousand millions, generally known by the term "Galaxy". The Galaxy has the shape of a gigantic cartwheel, revolving slowly in space, taking something like two or three hundred million years to complete one revolution. When we look up at the "Milky Way", the dense band of stars which arches over the heavens, we are looking straight into the "rim" or the "cartwheel"; but of all those millions of stars the naked eye can pick out only about six hundred at most. This, then, thought the observers, is the universe, a cloud of stars most of which are at such colossal distances that, although expressed in figures, the imagination cannot visualise them. But this is not the end; in more recent years it has been found that far beyond the bounds of our Galaxy there are other galaxies, millions of them, each comprising more millions of stars, extending as far as men's measuring instruments can reach. There seems to be no end to it all, and although one expert, Hubble, has calculated the size of the universe from certain theoretical considerations, another, Hoyle, declares that there is no end—it goes on into infinity. And now since 1950 there have been new and mysterious objects discovered in deep space, radio stars, pulsars and quasars, not stars in the conventional sense but certainly storehouses of tremendous energy and no one is quite sure exactly what they are and what they do. It is still true that the only One who knows what the universe is all about is—God!

The prophet Isaiah was aware of this; so was King David. *"He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is infinite"* (Psa. 147. 4-5). *"Lift up your eyes on high and see who created these. He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by names by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing"* (Isa. 40. 26). Of course these declarations were made by men, but they were men attuned to the Holy Spirit of God, and what they said and wrote was the word of God. Vast as is this creation, it is all of God. Range as far as men might range in the most sophisticated of space ships, they will never get away from God. The Psalmist knew that! *"Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol"* (the under-

world, the grave, the death state) *"thou art there! If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there thy hand shall lead me"* (Psa. 139. 7-10). A modern application of that last phrase might well in principle be applied to man's ambition to wing his flight to the distant recesses of outer space; if he does succeed in doing so he will still be within the sphere of Divine power. As the old hymn has it *"God is present everywhere"*.

At the moment, however, man is still limited to this earth. It is true several astronauts have landed on the Moon for a few hours but the Moon is only just outside our front door, so to speak, and can be reached in two or three days, less than the time it takes an ocean liner to cross the Atlantic. But the Moon is not habitable. Neither are our neighbour planets, Mars and Venus, which men hope to visit some day although the journey will take several years. Amongst the nine planets and their many moons which together constitute the solar system this earth is still man's only practicable home. That fact is in itself remarkable. This one planet of the nine is so admirably adapted for our needs that it gives every evidence of having been especially designed for creatures like ourselves. Isaiah says as much. *"The Lord . . . formed the earth and made it. He did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited"* (Isa. 45. 18). The Apostle Paul told the philosophers of Athens that God *"made from one every nation of men to live on the face of the earth, having determined . . . the boundaries of their habitation"* (Acts 17. 26) which seems almost to hint that the practical limit of man's normal habitat on and around this planet. At a much earlier date David said much the same thing. *"The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth hath he given to the sons of men"*. (Psa. 115. 16).

Now all this of itself does not dogmatically assert that men will never, in the eternal ages of the future, find their way to distant planets. It only requires that there is no Scriptural warrant for supposing that they will. It is true that one group from amongst mankind, the Christian Church of this Age, dedicated believers in Christ, are promised a resurrection to another sphere of life away from the earth, and in fact outside this material universe altogether. More will be said about that later in this treatise. But so far as the Bible tells of the destiny of mankind in general, apart from the Church, it pictures them ultimately attaining a state of sinless perfection upon this

earth; what might conceivably happen in the future ages or eternity can only be speculation. Neither do the texts above quoted or any other direct Scripture statement forbid the possibility of the existence of intelligent beings in other parts of the universe. It neither affirms nor denies, and the likelihood or otherwise of such forms of life existing can only be considered in the light of the relation of that possibility to the basic principles of God's purpose in creation; that too is the subject of a following chapter.

It is well established that the same physical laws operate throughout the universe and all the heavenly bodies are built up substantially from the same substances. Most of the stars, it is believed, are accompanied by planets in the same fashion as the star which is our sun, and although most of such planets are unsuitable for human life, it is calculated by competent authorities that our own "Galaxy", the cloud of stars of which our solar system is a member, must contain between one hundred million and six hundred million planets—the latter staggering figure being the latest and most favoured—so similar to this earth that human beings could live on them comfortably. And this is in our own Galaxy only; Asimov says that there are more than one hundred million galaxies! There would appear to be plenty of room for living creatures in God's universe.

It is not to be expected, though, that an astronaut of the future can land on the first piece of solid ground he encounters and expect to make himself at home. For a human being to survive there must be air and water. If the planet is less than six thousand miles in diameter it cannot retain enough breathable atmosphere for life; if greater than ten thousand the heavier force of gravity would render movement well nigh impossible. The earth at eight thousand is nicely between these limits. The "sunlight" from the parent star or "sun" must be within certain limits if plant and animal life is to flourish. The seasons, the length of day and night, the length of the year, and many other factors, determine whether a planet is habitable or not. In addition to the six hundred millions which could conceivably support beings like ourselves there is inevitably a much greater number which could not.

Could such planets support forms of life unknown to us? Some authorities think so. Genesis tells us that God made man of the "dust of the ground" (Gen. 2. 7); in other words, the elements of which the earth itself is made. More than 98% of the human body is composed of three elements, carbon, oxygen,

and hydrogen, and human beings can live only on a planet where these three elements are plentiful, so that water and air are essential. It is believed by some investigators that life processes could proceed in creatures constituted of certain other elements when placed in an appropriate environment. Thus a world might be possible in which ammonia replaced water and nitrogen replaced oxygen. Such creatures could stand intense cold intolerable to human beings. Another form of life is envisaged in which the physical body is made of sulphur, silicon and phosphorus and all the seas and rivers are of sulphuric acid instead of water; such beings could live in intense heat sufficient to burn everything on this earth to a cinder. These deductions are not at present greatly favoured because for a number of reasons it would appear, in the present state of knowledge, that the presence of carbon is an essential to any kind of living creature. The knowledge of tomorrow may well upset this position but so far as science goes today the dictum is that if there are intelligent beings elsewhere in the universe they must be men like ourselves.

Now before considering the effect upon the Christian faith if life should indeed exist elsewhere in the universe it may be well to take a look at the state of current scientific thought on the subject. The search for signs of what is called, in the best circles, "extra-terrestrial life", has been going on for twenty years past. The most spectacular element in the search was "Project Ozma", the setting up of radio receivers at an American observatory in 1960, to listen for possible man-made signals from possible planets surrounding two relatively near-by stars. Observations were continued without success for two years and then the project was abandoned. Five years later Russian astronomers believed they had detected such signals from another part of the universe, but it was later established that the "signals" were natural radio waves emanating from a particular kind of star known as a "quasar". The emphasis nowadays therefore is directed to investigating the physical conditions necessary for life and the type of life that could conceivably exist, and the probability of suitable centres for such life existing in other parts of space. A very comprehensive investigation into this subject a few years ago produced the conclusion that the average distance between any two "habitable" planets would not be less than 24 light years. A "light-year" is the distance light travels in one year at its speed of 186,000 miles a second; that

does not convey much to the average reader but if we say that a moon rocket ship which could cross the Atlantic from Britain to America in ten minutes would take one million years to travel to the nearest habitable planet, it might give a better idea of the enormous distances involved. Our nearest neighbours, if they exist, are not so very near after all. And there is another difficulty. Shklovskh, of the State Astronomical Institute at Moscow, reputed one of the world's foremost astronomers, has made calculations leading to the supposition that whilst there could be as many as three hundred thousand planets on which life has at some time appeared, the birth and death of any two such civilisations could well be separated in time by up to a million years! One is led to reflect what a disappointment it would be to some future space travellers, or, rather, to their descendants in the space ship, after spending several million years making their way to an inhabited planet, to find upon arrival that all the inhabitants had died a million years earlier. One feels that the Bible message is both more helpful, more logical and more rational than some pronouncements based upon earthly wisdom. At any rate, the Scriptures do promise the solution of all human problems, and the attainment of God's purpose with man, at the end of another thousand years, which is a lot better than the astronomer's millions.

It is this vast universe, with all its possibilities, that we have to picture in our minds when we talk about the relevance of the

Christian faith today. Man, in all sincerity but with great arrogance, looks out at the vastness of it all and aspires to conquer it for himself. He does not realise, or does not believe, that it is God's universe and that God created it for His own purposes, which though they may be unrevealed to us, will certainly be accomplished. Man's view is well expressed in words spoken at an astronomical conference a few years ago: *"Unrestrained expansion of human activity throughout the entire near-solar space is an inevitability . . . various criteria seem to suggest that humanity will conquer and transform the solar system in a few thousand years . . . there can be no limit to the abilities of that highly organised form of existence of matter which we call life"*.

Long years ago the Creator of the universe and of man, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, said *"Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them like a tent to dwell in, who brings princes to nought and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble"* (Isa. 40. 21-24).

For, after all, the heavens are the Lord's.

(To be continued)

"TILL HE COME"

An exhortation to self-examination

If ever there were words vibrant with hope and longing, an expression of all the heart's deepest convictions and fervent expectations for both Church and world, surely these are those words, *"Till He Come!"* In those three syllables is summed up all for which Christ's disciples have stood throughout the centuries, the fellowship and the witness, the self-denial and the consecration, the endurance and the suffering. All has been because *He*, once so long ago, promised that at the end of days *He* would come again, and receive us unto Himself, that where *He* is, we might be also.

That is not all. Our desire for the "gathering unto Him" is not—or should not be—

dictated by selfish reasons, the hope of merely personal salvation and deliverance from the distresses of this world. It is only natural that like the few pious ones of Ezekiel's day, those who "sigh and cry for the abominations" of man's world should earnestly desire the coming of the better world, the heavenly, "wherein dwelleth righteousness". But we who have been instructed these many years in the principles of the Divine Plan realise that God is not working just for the taking away from an evil world of a small elect of righteous ones that *He* might leave the world to its evil, but rather the coming of Divine power to that evil world that His righteous ones may convert and transform it into an abode of har-

mony and peace. If we go to be with our Lord Jesus and enter the presence of His Father with exceeding joy it is only that we may be present with Him in the great work of restoring to righteousness all the families of the earth. That is why Jesus comes again. That is why the words of hope written aforetime for our comfort are not "Till we go!" but "Till He come!"

So many in past ages have failed to realise that difference and in consequence have become self-centred, bigoted, concerned only for their own eternal interests and caring little or nothing for those of humanity in general. They forgot that our Lord came "to seek and to save that which was lost". They did not heed—or perhaps never really understood—the fact that God did not create man upon the earth in vain; that even although He foresaw the fall into sin He had made provision for the recovery of "whosoever will" from that sin and the eventual restoration of the human race to the Divine likeness. Men became so pre-occupied with the theology of the Church's salvation and the golden prospect of the heavenly city that they overlooked the promise of another salvation and the creation of the green fields and sparkling streams of an earthly paradise. And so, whilst they still paid lip service to the hallowed words "Till He come" the thought that was really in their minds was "Till we go!"

Was this one reason why the Apostle Paul, writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, brought these words into such close association with the Memorial? "As oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup" he said "ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come". The Memorial is a time when we come together to commemorate, not only our Lord's death for us, but also His death for the world; not only the privilege we have of association with Him in present sacrifice and future service, but also His intention to give life and human perfection to all men in due time; not only our fellowship together as one family, as fellow-heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant, but also our future service together as able ministers of the New Covenant. And because these things require for their accomplishment the long awaited Second Advent of our Lord in glory and power, the predominant thought in our celebration together is always "Till He come!"

This prayer is not fulfilled when He comes for his saints. That is only one phase of his coming. After that—how long after we do not know—He comes again with his saints for the

setting up of his Kingdom and the blessing of all the world. It was for this, as much as for the other, that He died. It is this, as much as the other, that is shewn forth year by year in the ceremony of bread and wine. It is not until this has taken place that it can be said He has "come" in the sense which Paul intended when he wrote the words.

We can then with perfect propriety continue to breathe the prayer when we come together, quite irrespective of our personal convictions as to the time when our Lord's Second Presence can be said to have become an accomplished fact. Whether His coming for his saints is an event now in progress or still in the near future, it is undisputed that He has not yet "come" in the glory of the Kingdom to rule over the nations, and until that event has also taken place and the world is no longer in ignorance it cannot be said that He has fully "come". So we may celebrate, still looking for the fruition of all our hopes, still watching for "His appearing", still waiting for Him to change the body of our humiliation into conformity with his glorious body. As we share together in the symbols that tell us of all these things we can still breathe toward heaven the reverent words "Till He come!"

There is much that is disappointing and saddening and unsatisfactory in our daily lives and it is easy to let the mind dwell on the future glories that are promised the faithful ones and hope fervently for their speedy coming. But the world also is groaning and travailling in pain together, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, and their distress is far greater than ours, for they have not the hope that we have, no knowledge or expectation of future deliverance, nothing but a dull despair that sees no avenue of escape from the oppression of this world's evil. Where we can lift up our hearts to heaven and rejoice, knowing that deliverance draweth nigh, they can only "*look unto the earth, and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness*". So that we ought to take thought for the world more even than for ourselves, and manifest to them something of the hope that fills our hearts, and show them that we really believe it. And one way in which we can all do something toward this is by the manner in which we keep the Memorial of our Lord's death together. It is a witness and a testimony, not only to our own brethren, but to all men, that these things are true and will surely come to pass. As oft as ye do this, said Paul,

ye do shew forth . . . That "shewing forth" extends beyond the circle of the brethren to all who know and see that such things are being done. They will see, and glorify God.

That is not to say that the annual observance of the Memorial, as a ceremony or a service, is itself so noted by those outside that it becomes a powerful witness. That ceremony is probably the least outwardly noticeable of all that takes place in our fellowship and service together. It is the day by day conduct of our Christian communion together, which is symbolised for us in the Memorial service, that is the effective witness and of which men will take notice. *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* "They took note of them that they had been with Jesus, and had learned of him." *"They may see your good works, and glorify God in the day of visitation."* It is the manner in which our professed beliefs and our spoken message works and operates within our own fellowship and our dealings with our own brethren that will persuade the world of its truth. No amount of preaching that "God is Love" will impress our hearers if we have not love one toward another. It is of no use expounding John 3. 16 if we ourselves are not also found to be "giving" of our best and dearest that others might be saved, nor of talking about the One Who came to be a servant and serve mankind if we show no disposition to serve them too. Our lives must match our profession and our own fellowship become a miniature, within present limitations, of what the Divine Kingdom on earth will be in the future Age; and then we can reasonably expect men to listen. We can then say with confidence "See; this is what the Lord's death has done for us. It can do the same for you".

It is in some such way, it may be, that we may interpret this "shewing forth the Lord's death till he come". It is not the only meaning; undoubtedly the ceremony of bread and wine is testimony, a "shewing forth" between

the participants that they continue to share the same faith and hope in the fundamentals of the faith and the promise of the Kingdom. But none would want to restrict that "shewing forth" to one day in the year, and not many would want to confine it within the bounds of "the elect". We are, most of us, ambassadors for our Lord Jesus in this world, and we want to manifest his Name and his message and his saving power in such a way that, if it be possible—as one day in the future Age it will be possible—"all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God". And so we can take this exhortation into our daily lives and make the communion of our fellowship, the Christian brotherliness that should exist between all of us and knit us into one family "in Christ". The outward evidence to all the world that Christ's death has indeed borne fruit, giving assurance of greater fruits yet to come. We are a kind of first fruits of his creatures, the Apostle assures us. There are to be after fruits. In our daily lives we can "shew forth" the nature of those after fruits which are to be the result of our Lord's death but cannot be seen in their reality "until He come".

Let this then be our resolve, that, casting aside all that makes for disunity and unbrotherliness, and scrupulously respecting each other's convictions in those matters of our faith and practice which do not violate the fundamentals of the faith, remembering that as servants we each stand or fall to our own Master, we may become a community united in our fellowship, persuaded of the truth of our message, possessed with a sense of the urgency of the times in which we live and the imminence of the Kingdom. Let us justify within ourselves the famous saying attributed to Tertullian sixteen centuries ago *"Behold, how these Christians love one another!"* With that resolve in our minds and hearts we can come together to eat of that bread and drink of that cup in full confidence that thus we are shewing forth our Lord's death "till He come".

VISION OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

*A meditation on
Revelation - Chapter 21*

He sat on the mountain, a lonely old man, bereft of all save memories of a long life spent in the service of Christ, and as he sat, there arose before his wondering eyes a marvellous vision, a vision of the Holy City, descending out of Heaven to settle for ever upon the earth. In his vision he got to his feet,

descended the mountain, and went into that Holy City and saw all its wonders, and the glory of his experience has been written in golden letters with jewelled capitals at the end of the book that bears his name.

The panorama of history had already been unfolded to John in vivid imagery and he had

been carried in Spirit into the Age of peace and righteousness. Now he was to experience the final revelation, that of the restoration of Eden and all that was lost when man, because of sin, was expelled from Eden. It seems as though Rev. 21: 1-8 is the seer's own introductory synopsis of the actual vision which is recorded in detail from 21: 9 to 22: 5. He had just witnessed the pictures of Millennial judgments which occupy chapter 20 and now he was to view further aspects of the same Age. He was to see the coming of men into reconciliation with God, their healing of body and mind, and their entering into an eternal inheritance of righteousness and peace. Even the very landscape was changed. In exultation he cried "*I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away . . . and I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem . . . and I heard a great voice out of heaven saying 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God'. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away*". (Rev. 21: 1-4). So an angel came to him, and took him into the city, that he might see for himself what God was doing.

The old city of Jerusalem had been destroyed, twenty years previously. All the golden hopes that it was soon to become the city of David's greater Son, from which He would rule the earth in righteousness, had been shattered. *Uru-salim*—City of Peace—named in almost prehistoric times after the ancient Semitic god of peace, had never really been a City of Peace; nearly always one of strife and blood. But now he saw that the golden promises of the prophets were true words indeed, even although their fulfilment must wait for the ending of a world, the passing of the heavens and earth in which he and his fellows still lived. The New Jerusalem would come to earth to be the true City of Peace, and then all would be fulfilled as God had promised. So he gazed upon its shimmering beauty, with its great and high wall marking it out four-square, the length even as the breadth, and followed with his eye its gleaming buildings, terrace upon terrace, tier upon tier, up and up, until they reached the central buildings, so high above the outer wall that the height of the city appeared to be as great as its breadth, and as he gazed he rejoiced in spirit.

And now, following the angel, he had

reached the wall, a towering wall, one hundred and forty-four cubits high, more than half the height of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, a shining precipice of brilliant green jasper. Green is the Millennial colour, the colour of fields and forests, for the desert is to blossom as the rose, and trees grow in the wilderness, and those who pass into the Holy City pass into a fair land of smiling meadows and sparkling streams. Nature will come into her own again and the squalid erections of men be done away. But how to effect an entrance? John gazed upon that two hundred feet height of rampart, twelve times twelve cubits, built upon the twelve foundations gleaming like precious stones, in each foundation the name of an Apostle. He looked upon the twelve lofty gateways with their two-leaved doors of pearl. His memory raced back to earlier days when as a lad he had sat at the feet of doctors and rabbis and learned of the twelve portals of heaven, out of which the sun emerges, in every month a different portal, returning at night that at dawn it might emerge again. From those twelve portals, said the rabbis, the angels come forth from the presence of God to execute their commissions on earth—and now he himself was seeing with his own eyes twelve just such portals out of which the blessings of God were to come like the sun rising each day and travelling in his strength. Twelve was the number of perfection; and only those who are perfect, righteous, undefiled, may enter into the Holy City; all that is unclean and that defiles must forever remain outside.

Now he was inside the city. Following his guide, he had passed through the lofty gateway with its attendant guardians and was standing in the street, the "broad place" or central square of the city, a street that shone like gold and reflected the light like glass. It was not that the sun was shining; John knew how bright the Palestinian sun could be at noonday but here there was no sun visible in the clear heavens. And yet the light was radiantly brilliant, a light that touched the surface of the ground so that it shone like burnished gold. He knew, without being told, that it was the light of God, Who giveth light and life, the light of the One Who dwells between the cherubim, shining out from His place and overpowering the light of the sun. So John lifted up his eyes to where the Temple ought to be, there on the summit of Mount Moriah—but here in his dream city of Jerusalem there was a difference. There was no Temple. Long and earnestly he pondered

over the meaning of the enigma. The Sanctuary that for many long ages had made Jerusalem what it was, a place of prayer for all peoples—to have no place in the city that shall be at last? To what could men look when they came before God in reverence and adoration? And as if reading his thoughts, the revealing angel turned and looked up toward heaven, and into John's mind there came the memory of words spoken long ago—it seemed a long time ago now but the memory was as fresh as if it had been only yesterday. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth." Ah! there was the answer. What need of a Temple made with hands in that glorious future day when all men would know God as a Father and come to Him in sincerity and confidence, with no sacrifices but those of praise and thanksgiving? The material building which for so long had represented God to the multitude would wax old and vanish away; God Himself would be the Temple, and the day would certainly come when the true worshippers would neither in the mountain of Samaria nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father, for all would know Him, from the

least unto the greatest, and come before Him without need either of priest or vail to separate their sin from His holiness.

A touch of vivid green, away there in the centre of the broad place, set startlingly against the sheen of golden buildings and glitter of precious stones; a green that was not the green of jasper, or of beryl, or of emerald. He looked again; there were trees, trees bearing rich fruit, and between and beyond them the glint of light upon water. He went towards them, and as he drew near beheld a place where was the Throne of God, and from that Throne, quietly, gently, but in abundant volume, came the shining waters of a crystal river.

As he took his stand upon its banks and looked down into its limpid depths, the vision of the city faded from his sight, and left him standing upon the river's edge, looking out into a mighty distance, a vista of lush meadows and far-away stately mountains, a view of redeemed multitudes returning to Zion, returning to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. He knew that he was looking upon the River of the water of Life.

TWELVE LEGIONS

"Thinkest thou not that I could ask of my Father and He would presently (meaning 'immediately' in the 17th century when the A.V. was translated) give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26. 43).

A Roman legion consisted of six thousand soldiers. Jesus meant his disciples to understand that his Father was able to send his assistance a heavenly host greater than would be a Roman army of seventy-two thousand men. "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels" (Psa. 68. 17). "But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled?" The disciples had looked and hoped for a time when the Son of Man would come in the glory of his Kingdom attended by thousands of angels—and that time Jesus had told them was certain to come; but it was not yet. To strengthen their failing faith Jesus assured them that He had but to ask, and the heavenly legions would come to his aid—but He had no intention of asking. "Thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third

day." (Luke 24. 26).

Surely though those legions were there already, like the angels at the time of Elisha's peril (2 Kings 6. 17) in their invisible hosts doing honour to the Son of God in the act of ensuring salvation for the world. How they must have watched and waited, and what a chorus of heavenly praise and exultation must have ascended to God when the defences of the grave were thrown down, and the One they knew and loved so well arose "in the power of an endless life" (Heb. 7. 16) never again to limit his glory to the limits of humanity. Resplendent in his resurrection body, the victorious King Who had vanquished the power of evil forever: with what joy must his ascension to the Throne of his Father have been attended!

"And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying 'Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever' (Rev. 5. 13).

Prayer is the silken thread God has placed in our hands by which we draw down from Heaven the strong cable of Almighty power and strength for our daily need.

The burden of suffering seems a tombstone hung round us, while in reality it is only the weight necessary to keep the diver down while he is collecting pearls.

DANIEL IN BABYLON

2. The Land of Shinar

*The story of a
great man's faith*

When, in later years, Daniel committed to writing his recollection of how the treasures of the House of God in Jerusalem had been carried into the land of Shinar and deposited triumphantly in the treasure house of Babylon's idol-temple his heart must have been heavy with the recollection of that sad day. He began his narrative with that incident; it stood out to him as the commencement of a life spent away from Judah and all its hallowed memories, a life given to serving God in a strange land, yet, because he was serving God and because he had no other will in life but to serve God in His way and at his bidding, a life of supreme content. The golden vessels of the Lord were in pagan hands and defiled by their residence in a heathen temple, but he remembered the words of the prophet Isaiah and took comfort in the sure knowledge that one day those vessels would come forth again and be restored to their own place. "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing" the elder prophet had cried in the ecstasy of his vision. "Go ye out of the midst of her. Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isa. 52: 11). That had been nearly two hundred years before Daniel's time, but the lad knew that the words would surely come to pass, and the bitterness of seeing the sacred vessels profaned by the sacrilegious touch of unbelievers was mitigated by his realisation that God had not cast off his people forever; He would surely come to deliver. And before Daniel died he was to see that faith vindicated.

It was probably not without design that Daniel used the ancient term "land of Shinar" to describe the country of his captors rather than "land of Babylon" by which it was more familiarly known in his own day. "Shinar" was the name it bore in those early days soon after the Flood when Nimrod established the first empire there, and impious men built a great tower "whose top should reach unto heaven". The tower was still there and Daniel probably saw it as he entered into the city. The name "Shinar" was associated in his mind with rebellion against God and apostasy from God and defiance of God, and in the book he was to write he would have all the world to know that this land and city which had been the scene of his life's work was one that stood for everything that God hates.

Neither its wealth nor its magnificence blinded him for one moment to the fact that it was under Divine condemnation—the city of God's curse.

That thought might have been of some comfort to him as he watched the treasure-waggons turn aside at their journey's end and pass through the gateway into the courtyard of the great Tower, in the treasury of which the sacred Temple vessels were to repose for seventy long years, until a then far-off day when the impious Belshazzar was to lay careless hands upon them to grace his drunken revels, and so doing to lose his kingdom and his life. But Daniel could not foresee that at this time. Now he gazed from his chariot at the stately buildings of the Temple of Marduk, the god of Babylon, set in the midst of wide gardens and paved terraces. He saw the four massive gateways, each flanked by two huge bronze serpents, gleaming red in the sunlight, and must have remembered how that it was by means of a serpent that sin came into the world and man apostatised from God, and that here he was in the very midst of a worship that perpetuated that apostasy. His eyes followed the waggons bearing the vessels of God's Temple across the wide courtyard that surrounded the tremendous seven-staged building which towered into the heavens behind the Temple. He knew what that building was without being told. It was the famous Tower which godless men had commenced to build in the days when the world was young and the memory of the great Flood had scarcely faded from men's minds. "Go to" they had said "let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, that we be not scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth". (Gen. 11: 4). God had come down to see the city and tower which those men were building, and he had frustrated their design and scattered them abroad upon the face of the earth. But later generations had gone on building the city, and their kings had each added his contribution to the tower, and now as Daniel gazed upon it he saw it soaring six hundred feet into the sky, the highest building men had ever built or would ever build until this modern day of sky-scrapers should exceed the height they had attained. He saw the staircases hugging the sides of each successive

stage and the terraces surrounding the top of each stage. The scintillating light at its summit held his attention and right up there he could see the solid gold sanctuary to Marduk, the god to whose honour this great tower was dedicated . . . The chariot rolled on and Daniel could see the Tower no more. "E-Temenanki" the Babylonians called it, "The House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth," and they claimed that it was going to stand as long as the world endures; but into the lad's mind there must have come something of the words of Isaiah, "*And Babylon the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah . . . and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged*" (Isa. 13: 19, 22). He was travelling now along the royal road which led from the Temple and the Tower to Nebuchadnezzar's palace, "Ai-ibursabu", it was called, a name meaning the "Processional Way" and along that road the idolatrous processions of the worship of Babylon's false gods often passed. The lad looked down upon a gleaming white limestone road with pavements of white and red veined stone slabs on each side, flanked by high walls of glazed enamelled coloured bricks, sculptured in the form of lions, white lions with yellow manes and yellow lions with red manes, on alternate light and dark blue backgrounds, all seeming as if themselves marching toward the great palace which could be clearly seen in the distance. From his elevated position in the chariot Daniel could see over those glaringly ornate walls into the straight streets and small houses of Merkes, the artisans' and industrial part of the city, and then, looking forward, the place which was to be his own home and that of his three companions, the palace of the great king himself.

Even when judged by modern standards, the palace of King Nebuchadnezzar can truthfully be described as colossal. Only about one third of it has been excavated as yet, but enough is revealed to show that the building, or rather range of buildings, was something like a quarter of a mile square, flanked on one side by the river Euphrates and surrounded on the three other sides by wide canals so that it was virtually a fortress. Here lived the king and his family, the officers of his Court, many of the priests and wise men of Babylon, distinguished captives taken as hostages in similar fashion to Daniel and his companions, and a host of servants, guards and soldiers, anxious, in abject obedience, to carry out the

wishes of this great king who was rapidly making himself master of the world.

The chariot rumbled over the bridge that spanned the Libilhigalla Canal, sped a hundred yards, turned left and passed through a lofty double archway into the East Court of the palace. The horses came to a standstill and a group of soldiers stepped briskly towards the travellers. Thus the four Hebrew captives reached the end of their journey.

It was the intention of the king that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah should receive three years' schooling in the ways and the learning of the Babylonians and then become personal attendants on his wishes in his court. They were not the only ones to be thus treated; Nebuchadnezzar had taken lads from other conquered countries for a similar purpose, and therein lay the first trial of faith that was to befall the four Hebrews. Cast daily into the company of youths of their own age but brought up in different and idolatrous surroundings, their impressionable young minds could very easily be diverted from the faith and the code of conduct they had learned, sullied with the standards and the outlook of the pagans, and so spoiled in great degree for the life of usefulness for God which would in other circumstances be theirs.

It speaks well for the unknown teachers who instructed these four boys in their earlier years in Judah that they showed not the slightest trace of being influenced by their surroundings. It was the order of the king that they should be given the rich foods and wines habitually used at court; this doubtless included refinements and luxuries of all kinds normally enjoyed by those upon whom the king's favours were bestowed. "*But Daniel purposed within himself that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank.*" (Dan. 1: 8). So he made request, on behalf of his three companions beside himself, that they might be permitted to refuse these rich viands and subsist upon plain fare. Pulse and water is specified in verse 12, but this might very reasonably be extended to include any kind of vegetarian food and non-intoxicating drinks. The principal thing in Daniel's mind appears to be the fact that to partake of foods and drinks from the king's table might well involve eating and drinking that which had been offered to idols, or poured out as a libation, or in some way associated with idolatrous ceremonies, and Daniel was determined to have nothing to do with such things.

The official to whose care the four lads had

been entrusted was, not unnaturally, rather dubious about assenting to this request. If the thing became known, and the lads appeared to suffer in health in consequence of this rather Spartan diet of their own choosing, his own head would be endangered. Royal justice was administered in an arbitrary and summary fashion in the Court of King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel showed considerable tact in proposing a ten days' trial on the understanding that he would abide by Melzar's judgment of the results at the end of that time. The bargain was struck, and at the end of the ten days the four Hebrews were manifestly so superior in general health and appearance to their companions—who anyway had probably been making full and not too wise use of the royal favours so freely granted, with the obvious result—that no further objection to their preferences in the matter of food was raised.

This was the first stand for principle and the first victory. It might seem to revolve around a comparatively trivial matter, and from one point of view so it did. But it was the starting-point from which much greater things were to proceed. The lads who obeyed their consciences, not fearing the wrath of the king, in so trivial a thing as daily food, were as grown men to withstand a more vital assault upon their faith, to the extent of facing, without fear, what seemed to be the prospect of certain death in a fiery furnace.

So their education in the "*learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans*" (ch. 1. 4) was commenced, a course of study that was to last three years. What that learning was has been revealed to us in these latter days by the multitudes of inscribed clay tablets, treating of almost every conceivable subject, which are now in the possession of scholars and distributed through the world's museums. The term "Chaldeans" in every book of the Bible except Daniel refers in a general sense to the people inhabiting Babylonia, but in the Book of Daniel it is used to denote a certain class of men within the nation, men who formed a kind of quasi-religious society which preserved the ancient lore and traditions of the past. The priests, the historians, the archæologists—for there were archæologists even in Babylon, delving into the relics of civilisations as much older than their own as is theirs than ours—all were members of this caste of the Chaldeans. They held the highest positions in the land and wielded immense power. The priesthood's possession of the national records, extending over many thousands of years, enabled them to construct an elaborate

system of omens and portents by means of which they claimed the ability to forecast future events. The art of astrology played a large part in their practices, and their knowledge of astronomy was by no means inconsiderable. The Tower of Babel had been used as an observatory for thousands of years—when Alexander the Great captured Babylon in 324 B.C., the scientist Callisthenes, who was with him, found records of astronomical observations in the library of the Tower going back to the year 2200 B.C. During all those centuries the priests had kept watch on the stars and planets from the top of the six hundred foot high tower, and recorded all that they had seen.

These were the men under whose supervision Daniel and his companions pursued their studies. One of the leading subjects was sure to be history and Daniel would have been taken back to the early days of the empire, long before Abram left Ur or the Chaldees. It is almost certain that he perused the Babylonian accounts of the Flood and Creation, and compared them with the more accurate accounts of the same events in the Book of Genesis. He must have spent much time learning the five hundred signs of the Babylonian alphabet, and gradually become expert at reading the literary treasures in the great library of the Temple of Marduk—a library which still lies sixty feet below the sand and has so far defied all the archæologists' efforts to penetrate into it. It is fascinating to reflect that he may have come across records which had been written by his own ancestors when they lived in this land, Abram, Terah, Nahor, Serug, Reu. More than one record from their days, though not from their hands, now reposes in one or another of the world's museums.

Many of these tablets could be understood only by a few scholars among the Babylonians themselves. The spoken and written language of Babylon in Daniel's day was not that of ancient Babylon. In saying that Daniel was to learn the "tongue" of the Chaldeans it is plain that he was to study the ancient languages, Sumerian and Akkadian, which were spoken in the days of Abram, and in the dim centuries before Abram's day when the first descendants of the three sons of Noah were peopling this land, building its cities and creating the civilisation which endured for something like three thousand years. Probably no Hebrew since Moses had been able to read those ancient languages, the mother tongues of the sons of Ham and the sons of Shem, and in learning them Daniel probably found entry

to a written revelation of the deeds of his nation's remote ancestors which coloured all his future outlook and was very probably left on record by him for the enlightenment of later generations in Jewry. Much of the later Jewish stories of early days, not derived from the historical books of the Bible, may have had their origin in Daniel's researches in Babylon.

Daniel's interest in the ancient history of this land which had been the birthplace of his own race would probably be equalled by that which he manifested in its religion. Not that Daniel was in the least degree likely to anticipate the example of some modern Christian leaders and proclaim that "there is good in all religions", and on that—measurably true—statement proceed to admit the world's false gods to a place of equality with the only true God. Daniel knew that the gods of Babylon were sham, the creations of men's minds, but he must nevertheless have reflected on the manner in which the originally pure faith possessed by Noah and his sons had become corrupted into an "image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things" (Rom. 1. 23). It is perfectly obvious to those who accept the Biblical story of the Flood that there was a clear and accurate knowledge of God amongst men immediately following that event, and that the faith which Daniel found when he came to Babylon must have been corrupted through the centuries from that one-time pure faith. Joshua is authority for the statement that Israel's fathers dwelt in old time beyond the flood (i.e., the river Euphrates) and served other gods (Josh. 24. 2) so that even at that early day the falling away had extended to the Abrahamic line. And we also know that the worship of the "Most High God" prevailed in Canaan at the same time, and evidence of this is to be found not only in the story of Melchisedek in Gen. 14. 18-20,

but in that of Abimelech king of Gerar, between Canaan and Egypt, who was also a true worshipper (Gen. 20. 1-10) and in the discoveries made at Ras Shamra on the coast of Syria in 1930, when a whole library of tablets was found that gave testimony to this worship.

So, at the end of three years, their education was complete, and they were brought in before the king. But that education was not only, and not even principally, in the "learning and tongue of the Chaldeans". During those same three years, we are told in ch. 1. 17, "God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams". What a vivid picture that simple sentence paints for us; four earnest young men giving themselves in all sincerity to the reception, by the power of the Holy Spirit, of the wisdom that is from above. How God taught we are not told, but can there be much doubt that it was in the communing and reasoning together of four young hearts, poring over the sacred Scriptures which were to them the guide of life, the Old Testament as we have it as far as the Book of Isaiah and no farther, earnestly seeking enlightenment from above? In all their enforced studies in the ancient lore of Babylon they found time to devote to the wisdom from on high which is the noblest science and the best instruction. Now in their very early twenties they stood forth equipped as few men ever have been equipped to spend a life in useful service for God at a time when the needs of the Divine Plan called for such consecrated service in the face of opposition and ruthless persecution.

So they stood before the king; "and in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm".

(to be continued)

"My soul followeth hard after Thee" (Psa. 63. 8). The word here used means properly to cleave to; to adhere; to be glued to; to stick fast. Then it means to attach oneself to anything; and then, to pursue or follow after. The Psalmist's meaning here is that he adhered firmly to God, as pieces of wood glued together adhere to each other; that he, as it were, STUCK FAST to Him; that he would not leave Him or be separated from Him. The language represents the feeling of true piety in adhering firmly and constantly to God, whatever there may be that tends to separate us from Him. The adhesion of bodies by glue

is a striking but not an adequate representation of the firmness with which the soul adheres to God. Portions of matter held together by glue may be separated; but nothing can separate us from the Love of God.

*"Thy watchful eye pervadeth space,
Thy presence, Lord, fills every place;
And wheresoe'er my lot may be,
Still shall my spirit cleave to Thee."*

* * *

We must not expect to be wheeled into Heaven in an arm chair—the road is too rough; rather let us go as becomes pilgrims—on foot, treading where He trod.

RUTH THE MOABITESS

One of the most appealing stories in the Bible is that of Ruth the alien whose love for her deceased husband and her husband's mother led her to forsake her own land and her own gods to share that mother's life in the land of Israel and serve the God of Israel. The narrative is an exquisite cameo of Israel's occupancy of the Promised Land immediately after the Conquest. It is eloquent, not so much for what it does say, as what it does not say, and what can be read between the lines. It is built around what is called the Levirate law, and is the most complete exposition of the operation of that law which the Bible contains; to understand the story aright it is necessary to know something about that law.

Moses the Lawgiver had included in the Law given at Sinai a provision to cater for the position created when a man died childless, so that no heir was left to inherit his holding in the Land. The arrangement was intended and suited only for the primitive form of agricultural community which was to be Israel's lot for quite a few centuries following the conquest. It presupposed that in most families where a relatively young husband died there would be younger unmarried brothers, and it provided that when this eventuality arose one of the brothers should marry the widow, the first child of the marriage being counted the child of the dead man and lawful heir to his estate. It is not clear what happened if the remaining brothers were all married, but since the Mosaic Law did not preclude a man from having two wives, and such unions were not unknown, it may be that no difficulty existed. In later times it seems that any available near relative could assume the obligation and this appears to have been the case in this instance.

The scene of the story as it is related in the Book of Ruth is set partly in Judah and partly in the adjoining land of Moab on the other side of the Dead Sea. The period was during the century immediately following Israel's entry into the land and soon after the death of Joshua. Precise dating is questionable but casual allusions in the story do make it possible to construct a possible framework which is probably true within ten years or so either way.

Elimelech, of the tribe of Judah and closely related to Salmon the founder of Bethlehem

—probably his nephew—lived with his wife Naomi and two young sons in the district of Bethlehem. The land was smitten by famine and the family emigrated to the country of Moab some hundred miles away and settled there; before long Elimelech died and left Naomi with the two boys, by now growing into manhood. They both married Moabitish girls and the family settled down; the sons were more Moabite than Israel in sympathies and it seems there was no question of a return to Judah. Then, unexpectedly, both sons died, still young, probably while still in their twenties, and Naomi was left alone with her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth.

This is where the action of the story begins. Naomi decided at once to return to Judah. The inference is that the decision to come to Moab was Elimelech's and that Naomi had accompanied him only because of duty; her heart remained in the land of Divine promise. Her character as presented in the story is that of a reverent, trustful woman of faith. The fact that her husband had willingly abandoned the land which his people had laboured and suffered forty years in the wilderness to attain, ignoring the promise God had made respecting the material prosperity which would be the lot of Israel whilst they retained loyalty to Him, shows that he was probably of those who at this very time, after Joshua's death "*forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt*" (Jud. 2. 12). It was this apostasy which brought upon Israel their first great disaster, the famine, and the invasion and oppression of Chushan-Rishathaim, the ruler of Aram-Naharaim, whom they served eight years until Othniel arose and delivered them (Jud. 3. 8-9). Naomi's decision to return was strengthened by the news from Judah that "*the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread*" (Ruth 1. 6) and when she arrived she found a plentiful harvest in full swing; this, under the provisions of the Mosaic covenants, could only mean that the people had repented of their apostasy and re-affirmed their loyalty to God so that her return must have been in the early years of Othniel's leadership and the stay in Moab coincident with the time of invasion and oppression.

Naomi could see no future in Judah for the two girls. She advised—even entreated—

them to leave her and find other husbands of their own people. Orpah took her advice and went back; Ruth refused to do so. In words of compelling beauty, some of the most beautiful in the Old Testament, she affirmed her resolve to stay with the older woman, come what may. Judah was a strange land to her, Judah's God an unknown God, but she would accept both in her love for her dead husband's mother. *"Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; whither thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me"* (Ruth 1. 16-17). And so Ruth came to Bethlehem.

They arrived destitute. What possessions they did have had been left behind in Moab. An ass, on which the older woman rode, a few clothes and one or two pots and pans probably constituted their worldly wealth. For shelter they most likely found an abandoned cottage in which they settled down to face the future. Naomi still possessed her legal right to the family plot of land which they had left to go to Moab; it was probably being farmed by someone else in her absence but it would be restored to her after the next harvest without question. With no menfolk to work it the land was only a liability. Naomi was too old herself to work. Ruth took the initiative; she was to be the breadwinner, and she proposed as a first step to go gleaning in one of the harvest fields to acquire some store of grain for their immediate subsistence. The Mosaic Law required all farmers to leave the corners of their fields unreaped with liberty for the needy to glean at will. By means of hard work Ruth would be able to gather a sufficiency for their immediate needs. There is no hint of reluctance or complaint; willingly she had elected to share Naomi's life and fortunes and if, in the lack of a husband, this meant what it always did in such a society, poverty and hardship, Ruth accepted the position with serenity and quietness of mind. To what extent, at this stage, she looked to the God of Israel for guidance and help it is not possible to say from the story; probably that came later as she became more accustomed to the ways of Israel.

Nevertheless God was not unmindful. Of all the farmers in whose fields she might conceivably find herself gleaning, *"her hap"* says the narrative *"was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of*

the kindred of Elimelech". By an overruling providence of God, we must be sure, she had been guided to the man who had both power and will to help them in their plight. Boaz was a son of Salmon, who entered the land with Joshua, married Rahab of Jericho, and was the most important man in the community. Boaz himself was *"a mighty man of wealth"*, but not only so, he was also an upright and God-fearing man and respected by his employees. Coming into the field in which Ruth was working he saluted his men with the greeting *"The Lord be with you"* to which they responded *"The Lord bless thee"*. It is easy to see that here was a man who did not run away into Moab or anywhere else when famine and invasion afflicted the land; he stood his ground and maintained his loyalty to God and now, in consequence, as the Mosaic Law promised, he was prosperous and secure.

It was not long before Boaz noticed the stranger gleaning so industriously in his field and enquired her identity. The Hebrew term he used—rendered *"damsel"* in the A.V.—indicates that Ruth, although a widow, was still in her twenties, and it is obvious that he looked on her with more than passing interest. The fact that she was a Moabitess, of an alien race upon which the Israelites normally looked with distaste and enmity, weighed nothing with Boaz against the fact that she had willingly entered the commonwealth of Israel. He had evidently heard her story: *"It hath fully been shown me"* he told her gently *"all that thou hast done to thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust"*. Boaz' own mother, Rahab of Jericho, was an alien likewise accepted into Israel; this fact may well have inclined him to sympathy for the woman standing before him. Doubtless conscious of the many injunctions of the Mosaic Law concerning treatment of the *"stranger that is within thy gates"*, he gave instructions that Ruth's presence among his reapers was to be respected and her gleaning facilitated, enjoining her to remain in his own fields in the company of his women servants, and so left her. He even went so far as to instruct his workers to allow her to glean from the standing sheaves, and to let fall reaped corn purposely to give her the richer gathering. Human nature being what it is,

there is not much doubt that the reapers, perceiving their master's interest in this young stranger, assisted her with a will, so that by the end of the day Ruth had gathered and threshed out for herself some five gallons of ripe barley.

So passed some three months, from April to early July, whilst the barley harvest ran its course and was followed by wheat harvest. Ruth gleaned assiduously every day and went home every night to her mother-in-law. Naomi is not likely to have been idle all this time; she may have found some means of contributing a little to the family income, and in any case she would be re-establishing herself as a member of the community. She also had an important matter to think about—Ruth's future. Without much doubt she first wanted to satisfy herself that Ruth would not change her mind and return, after all, to the easier life in Moab, where she still apparently possessed living parents. That decided, she must then set in motion the processes of the Levirate Law which would both secure a husband for her daughter-in-law and settle the question of the landed estate which had been the property of her sons and would now pass to her daughter-in-law's first son.

It must have been a cause of considerable gratification to the older woman when she concluded, from her knowledge, so far as it went, of the ramifications of her husband's family tree, that the nearest surviving relative of the dead Mahlon, the one therefore who must act as the *gaal*, to marry Ruth and raise up a son to Mahlon, was none other than the wealthy and evidently very likeable Boaz. With his known loyalty to the Mosaic Law there would be no doubt as to his concurrence, and in any case his personal interest in Ruth must by now have become general knowledge in the community so that Naomi might well have begun to feel that a happy solution to all her problems was in sight.

So she instructed Ruth in the manner she must make the customary formal approach to claim the benefit of the Law. The third chapter of the Book tells the story, how that Ruth adorned herself in her best raiment and joined Boaz in the threshing barn where he was finishing the day's work with his reapers. There, when all had composed themselves to rest and the others were all asleep, she made her plea, and Boaz listened. What were his feelings at that moment we do not know, for they are not recorded, but what he had to say to her was in all probability a crushing blow

to her hopes as well as to his. Gladly, he said, would he have done as she desired, but—*"it is true that I am thy near kinsman; howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I"*. An unknown stranger had the right to take Ruth and to him must she bear the son who would take the inheritance. Perhaps that was the moment when Ruth's determination to remain a child of Israel, with all the obligations it might entail, was put to its severest test. That she passed the test and emerged triumphant is evidenced by the fact that the matter proceeded according to law, and the unknown kinsman was brought upon the scene. *"Tarry this night"* said Boaz gently *"and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform the part of a kinsman unto thee, well: let him do the kinsman's part; but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth; lie down until the morning"*.

The identity of the kinsman is shrouded in a certain obscurity. His name is not given. This in the O.T. narratives usually means that the one concerned is an irreligious or apostate character and not worthy of record; the omission of the man's name is a mute condemnation. This kinsman was certainly irreligious for in the end he flatly refused to do his bounden duty. Boaz had lost no time in convening a court of the elders of Bethlehem before whom the case had to be heard, and securing the attendance of the kinsman. That worthy evidently failed to realise the implications of the matter, for upon hearing that family land standing in the name of the two deceased sons of Elimelech was awaiting a claimant he promptly entered his claim. Upon learning, however, that part of the contract was to marry Ruth so that the land might pass to her son and not to himself after all, he hurriedly washed his hands of the whole affair. *"I cannot redeem"* he said *"lest I mar mine own inheritance"* and then, perhaps a trifle maliciously, to Boaz *"redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it"*. The ground of his refusal is not immediately self-explanatory but it may well have been a fear that this woman who was childless after a term of marriage to Mahlon might fail to give him a son to succeed to his own land, and so his inheritance would fall into the same condition as the deceased Mahlon's. At any rate, Mosaic Law or no Mosaic Law, he wanted nothing to do with it.

So Boaz married Ruth, and of their descendants was born some two hundred and

fifty years later David, king of Israel, and a thousand years after that, Jesus, the son of Mary. The story of Ruth the Moabitess probably owes its inclusion in the Bible to that fact, but being thus included it remains an

eloquent testimony to the far-reaching consequences of the love and faith displayed by this alien girl who embraced the obligations and privileges of the commonwealth of Israel in full assurance that God would receive her.

A BROTHER IN ADVERSITY

*An incident in the
life of St. Paul*

The story of Paul's life as told in the Acts of the Apostles is the story of a 'great-heart'—the story of a faithful 'man of God'. Yet, heroic though that story is, it is not the whole story. The careful student is enabled to fill up some of its missing chapters by extracts from Paul's own pen.

And though Paul calls them all light afflictions, lasting but a moment, one soon comes to realise that only a man built of moral granite and steel could have endured them. He endured sufferings and privations which would have chilled the ardour and extinguished the love of probably ninety-nine out of every hundred men. We have only to read the scrap of his own autobiography as recorded in 2 Cor. 11. 22-33, to realise how full his life was, at all times, of threatening danger and menacing death. All this extensive catalogue of suffering is omitted from the account of his life in the Acts, and much of it had been experienced before he appeared on the scene as the general evangelist to the nations. It is an amazing record, and would make a heartening study to take this catalogue clause by clause and seek to bring out some aspects of the hardships which the narrative records. Five whippings by the Jewish lash, three beatings by the Roman rod, three times wrecked at sea and at the mercy of the waves (this, remember, does not include the story told in Acts 27), added to which were perils from both stranger and his own kin; limping footsore over wilderness track or fording with danger some river in spate; travelling from place to place, ill-clothed, cold, hungry and athirst; chased by open foes or betrayed by false friends—these are the things that fell to him every day and at every turn of the road. Something of the fiery ardour of soul, which carried him through all this suffering is shown by his reactions and responses to the frequent warnings on his way up to Jerusalem for the last time. ". . . behold I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Spirit testifieth unto me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

But I hold not my life of any account as dear unto myself, so that I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus to testify the Gospel of the Grace of God. And now, behold I know that ye all among whom I went about preaching the Kingdom shall see my face no more . . .

Acts 20. 20-25. R.V.). Then from his lips fall words of white-hot urgency imploring the elders of Ephesus to feed the flock of God and discharge diligently and faithfully the duties of under-shepherds laid upon them by the Lord Jesus.

At a later stage of his journey one with a gift of prophecy apprised Paul of the dangers awaiting in Jerusalem, illustrating with Paul's own girdle how he would be bound hand and foot. "So shall the Jews of Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles" (Acts 21. 10-12). Sorrowing friends besought him not to proceed further on his way, but to tarry at Caesarea, or turn aside to some other less dangerous field of service. "What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus." Here is an example of unwavering resolution akin to that which dominated the heart of Jesus as He too went up to Jerusalem for the last time (Mark 10. 32-34). Knowing what awaited him, some of the disciples were afraid, inasmuch that they marvelled at his stepping resolutely ahead of them. Jesus knew the supreme hour of his earthly life was near, and fortified by the approval of his Father, He went unfalteringly along to meet it.

It requires the courage of complete conviction to do this. There must be the unwavering assurance within the heart and mind that the intended step is according to the Will of God, and that God will be with his servant right through to the end of the Way. Only thus assured and fortified will men step calmly and quietly into the arms of death. This is the martyr's courage, not the worked-up courage of the battlefield, and comes only from the presence of God in the soul. That calmly her-

oic attitude was only one aspect of Paul's many-sided make-up. He could face danger better than suspense and uncertainty. He could stand before false brethren or hostile foe better than the unknown reception. This shows us that this 'Great-heart' was a man, much as we are ourselves. The text shows him arrived in Italy and on the last stage of the journey to Rome. For two years he had been under arrest at Caesarea, subject to the whims and caprice of the Roman governors there. Appealing to Caesar, there followed that disastrous and hazardous journey through the Levantine and Mediterranean Seas, until, at last, the centurion and his charges set foot on Italian soil. Then the journey on foot began from Puteoli (a port more than 100 miles down the coast) to the Imperial city. A delay of seven days provided opportunity for Paul to receive a company of brethren residing there, who evidently gave him a cordial welcome, for they "entreated him to stay with them" (Acts 28: 14). Apparently also they sent on a messenger ahead of Paul to inform the brethren in Rome of Paul's coming "And from thence (Rome) the brethren, when they heard of us, came to meet us as far as the Market of Appii and the Three Taverns"—a distance of some forty and thirty miles respectively. How would they receive him? Would they despise him for his chain? Would they scorn him for his diminutive and bedraggled appearance?

For many years he had looked forward to seeing Rome, but he had not then thought of entering it bound by a chain. In the prosecution of his commission Paul had thought of entering Rome perhaps as the last stronghold of the enemies of the Lord. Years ago he had sent to them the announcement of his intention "I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also, for I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 1: 16). Now, however, when the ordering of his circumstances actually found him nearing Rome, and as he thought of the abject condition in which he was making his approach—an old weather-beaten, grey-haired broken man, a chained prisoner recently escaped from the sea, his heart was heavy within him, and though he had found some of his friends by the way, he wondered what the brethren of Rome would think and say and do!

As he approached the waiting groups his quick sensitive eye searched their faces, if haply he might read thereby the attitude of

their hearts. Strong and self-reliant as he was at other times and in other places, yet he was also exceedingly sensitive to human sympathy, and in these little groups of brethren he found what he sought. Their greetings and welcome were such, that despite his chain, and the tiring nature of his journey thus far, his spirit rose out of its slough of despond and he thanked God and took fresh courage. Their welcome restored him to his wonted confidence and helped him to regain the optimism of which he wrote to them years before. His heart began to swell again with hope of achievement in Rome despite the chain, for he knew that he carried in his heart and mind the force and power that could win human hearts even in that proud imperial city.

That is a story from which we of little stature in Christ may gain great comfort. Paul knew that God and his Master were with him. Even as they drifted before the storm the Lord appeared to Paul in a vision and assured him that he and all his sailing companions would be saved, though the ship would be lost. And Paul knew, as much as any man alive, the verity of the Lord's presence and comfort in the dark day. Yet notwithstanding that, apprehension and uncertainty had gripped his heart as he neared Rome, as he wondered how he would be received by the brethren there. Ought he not to have suppressed his fears and told himself that the Lord was his sufficiency no matter what his brethren did? Was it a proper thing to do, when he wondered what these brethren would say? Was he allowing the coward within to overcome the martyr spirit of his earlier days? Or was he resolute before the bigger thing that lay ahead in Rome only to falter before the lesser things that met him on the road?

Do we not often find ourselves there? Nothing on earth would make us deny or prove faithless to the Lord, but oh! how we tremble at what the brethren will say! Well, a great-heart giant in the Lord trod that self-same way, and found new heart of grace for the bigger thing in life, because he found the look and touch of sympathy in his brethren's eye and hand. This little episode affords a source of comfort to those who are little in their own eyes and who know, with considerable frequency, what it is to feel discouraged by the way. If a man of Paul's stature in Christ—a man in constant communion with his Lord—could feel the bitter effects of adversity, and sink down to zero (or below) there is no need for shame or blame if a more immature fol-

lower of the Lord finds himself or herself sinking beneath the load of care. It is not the fact that we sink at times that matters most, but that, like Paul, we can rise again at a touch of Providence and take new courage and press on again.

Perhaps it may be to our greater advantage to view this illustration from the two-fold point of view, that of Paul, and then that of the brethren.

It is possible for any one of us to be like Paul—a prisoner of circumstance. The bonds that bind us may not be forged of cold steel, nor is it necessary for us to be undertaking a journey, like Paul, under compulsion. Some peculiar phase of life, linking us to an uncongenial environment, may be our chain, some dominating circumstance beyond our control may have us captive in its train as we move forward to some crisis in our life, and for the time, circumstance proves too much for us, and the spirit sinks and courage fails. A depressed heart magnifies the burden out of its proportion, till it seems to fill both heaven and earth, with no way out to escape its crushing weight. Again, we say it might be any one of us, you, good Brother; you, dear Sister. No one is immune from such circumstance while living in this evil world. We may not say these things are exactly orderings of Providence in every case, but always, when not Heaven-sent, they are by permission of that Super-vising Power. They are secondary as well as first causes in operation in and around us, and unrighteous forces as well as the heavenly messengers may be serving the purpose of Divine Wisdom in the distressing and overbearing circumstance. But God, the All-merciful and All-wise, is watching, and when we have sunk deep into what may seem a bottomless pit, we come to our "Three Taverns" and "Appii Forums".

The smiling welcome from the brethren of Rome was a providence of God for Paul. The

smile and welcome were the product of the spirit of God, long active in their lives. It was none the less a Providence because the love of the brethren is a fruit of that indwelling Spirit. That brings in the other side—the brethren's side of this little episode. The news that Paul was nearing Rome could have left the brethren unconcerned. "What is that to us?" they could have said, "he should have been more careful and discreet in word and act, and not have brought this trouble on himself". Reasons in abundance for withholding help or comfort could have been found, and Paul could have been left to enter Rome a dejected prisoner, unwelcome and unesteemed. But instead of imputing blame or deciding that his imprisonment was just, they saw a brother in distress and went forth to show that they were eager to help him in his distress. Even though they could not unlock his chain, nor remove him from the Roman's supervision, there was something they could do. They could meet him on the way—and when they looked into his suffering eyes, their own could smile a welcome and a "God bless you, brother", and let him see that the stigma of the chain was of no deterring consequence to them. Chain or no chain, Paul was their brother, and it was Paul they saw, not the chain.

And so, in time of need, one of Christianity's great-hearts found grace to help, and took new courage to his heart, and sent up his thanks to God because the spirit of brotherhood—the spirit of God and of God's great family—had found expression in the hearts and faces of brethren who hitherto he had never met.

If opportunity to do this self-same thing should come to you, dear brethren in the Lord, what will you do? Will you not lend yourself to Divine Providence to work out its gracious purposes?

Who does not love a tranquil heart, a sweet-tempered, balanced life. It does not matter whether it rains or shines, or what misfortunes come to those possessing these blessings, for they are always sweet, serene, and calm. The exquisite poise of character which we call serenity is the last lesson in culture; it is the flowering of life, the fruitage of the soul. It is as precious as wisdom, more to be desired than gold—yea, then even fine gold.

How contemptible mere money wealth looks in comparison with a serene life—a life which dwells in the ocean of truth, beneath

the waves, beyond the reach of tempests in the Eternal Calm.

How many people we know who sour their lives, who ruin all that is sweet and beautiful, by explosive tempers, who destroy their poise of character by bad blood; in fact, it is a question whether the great majority of people do not ruin their lives and mar their happiness by lack of self-control. How few people we meet in life who are well balanced, who have that exquisite poise which is characteristic of the finished character. *Author unknown*

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING GARMENT

Matt. 22, 1-14

This is one of the "dispensational parables", drawing a contrast between the two great ages of this "present evil world" during which God is preparing his agencies for the work of world conversion which is the purpose of the third age, the "new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 13, 13). There is personal instruction for the individual Christian, in the fate of the man who rejected the proffered wedding garment; there is also illumination on the outworking of the Divine purposes in this description of an invitation that was rejected by those to whom it was at first offered, so that the honour passed to others who did accept it.

A certain king negotiated the marriage of his son and invited guests to the resultant marriage feast. That is the basis of the story and the outworking of the sequel shows that the son and his marriage form no part of the parable proper; they serve merely to explain the reason of the feast being held. The story really begins when the king's servants went out to call the guests to the feast. They refused to come. Not only so, some of them ill-treated and even slew the servants, wherefore the king sent his army and destroyed those men's city. Determined that his feast should be replete with guests he commissioned his servants to go out again, this time to the open streets and gather in all who would, without discrimination. So the banquet hall was filled. At this point, conformably to the customs of Jewry in the First Century, each guest was provided with a white festal garment so that inequalities of social status, as evidenced by distinctions of dress, would no longer be apparent and all the guests would mingle on a common level. One man, arrogant, refused to don the garment, whereupon he was expelled from the festivity, the warmth and light of the banquet hall, and thrust into the "outer darkness" of the cold Syrian night. That was the story, and its intent and meaning was so obvious to the Pharisees and priests in whose hearing it was spoken that they once again took counsel, how they might limit or destroy Jesus' influence (ch. 22, 15).

Once it is realised that God is working to a plan, and that the successive ages and dispensations of world history are epochs marked out in that plan, the interpretation of this parable is not difficult to find. The first call, to

those invited guests who refused to come, was the call of God to his chosen people of old, Israel, selected at Sinai to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19, 6). After Israel's rejection of the call, a rejection made absolute at the First Advent, a second invitation went out, this time to those who by reason of their acceptance of the call became the Christian Church of this present Age. In this framework the first ten verses of the parable fall easily into place.

The king "sent forth his servants, to call them that were bidden . . . and they would not come . . . he sent forth other servants . . . but they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise" (ch. 22, 3-5). In these few words is enshrined the story of Israel's unbelief and hardheartedness. Called to be a covenant people, to declare God's glory to all men, recipients of Divine favour, they rejected all out of hand. The scathing words of the Lord to Isaiah when the youthful prophet received his commission of service were true of Israel all through their history. "The heart of this people has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted" (Isa. 6, 10 LXX). The writer to the Hebrews shows that there is a "rest" awaiting the people of God, but they to whom it was first preached—Israel—entered not in because of unbelief (Heb. 4, 6). The parable is exact even to the sending forth of the servants twice to call in the originally invited guests; one very plain feature of Old Testament history is the distinction drawn between Israel before the Babylonian Captivity and Israel afterwards. That seventy years in Babylon marked a climax of the first Israelitish Age and a judgment involving the destruction not only of their city and Temple but of their whole national existence. Their restoration in the 6th century B.C. gave them a fresh start and a new succession of prophets, the "other servants" of the parable, but the second set of servants fared no better than the first. The post-exilic prophets were given only the same scanty and half-hearted attention that was the lot of the pre-exilic prophets, and most of them suffered or were put to death in much the same manner. "Which of the prophets

have not your fathers persecuted?" was the scornful accusation of Stephen at his trial before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7: 52). The parable of the vine-dressers in the previous chapter (Matt. 21: 33-44) has the same succession of two consecutive sets of servants, in that case followed by the sending of the vineyard owner's son, who was killed by the wicked vine-dressers. The application is the same in both cases and it is an obvious one.

So the "king was . . . wroth, and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city" (ch. 22: 1). At this point the history of the parable passes into prophecy; these words came terribly true forty years after Jesus' death, when the Roman emperor Titus besieged, captured and destroyed Jerusalem, and scattered the nation to the four corners of the earth. And simultaneously with the rejection of that people which, though "bidden, were not worthy" (vs. 8) the next section of the parable came into the picture with the going forth of the king's servants into the highways to call in all who would come.

That invitation had its commencement in history when Peter baptised Cornelius, the Roman centurion who is the first recorded Gentile convert to the Divine call in Christ (Acts 10). Not many years afterwards the Apostle Paul, preaching at Athens, gave formal testimony to the fact that God was now calling upon all men everywhere, without distinction of nationality, to repent (Acts 17: 30). "Of a truth I perceive" Peter had said to Cornelius "that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10: 34-35). Now in his own ministry Paul declares the same truth. Writing to the Ephesians, he says that the Gentiles "are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2: 19). So the servants went out "witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea . . . and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1: 8). For nearly two thousand years those servants have been going forth—and they go forth still.

So the wedding feast was furnished with guests. This is not a feast of the future, beyond the skies. This feast is here, on this earth and in this life. It has been proceeding ever since the first Christians entered into heart communion with their Lord and began to feast at his table. It is the feast which Israel could have enjoyed in their own day, and failed to enter because of unbelief. "It remaineth that

some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief . . . there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God . . . let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (Heb. 4: 6-11). That is the verdict of the writer to the Hebrews on the matter.

Here the dispensational aspect of the parable comes to an end. The remaining picture is an individual one. Of the guests who have been gathered one is unworthy. "When the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment" (ch. 22: 11). This was the greatest insult guest could offer host; the man preferred to display his own finery rather accept the covering provided by his host. And when taxed with his offence, he had nothing to say. "He was speechless."

What is the wedding garment? Clearly the free gift of justification by faith, consequent upon our acceptance of Christ, by whose righteousness the gift comes. "By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." . . . "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5: 1-2, 18). This is the common covering which renders us all alike acceptable to God despite our own imperfections and shortcomings, and hides the defects which are impure in God's holy sight. "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" cries Isaiah (64: 6), but "wash you, make you clean; put away the evils of your doings . . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow" (1: 16-18). We come to God in faith, accepting the finished sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, even though we may not with our limited human minds understand just how his death is efficacious for our redemption. But some there are who come, not having accepted Christ in that sense, trusting more in their own endeavours to maintain a standing before God, maintaining that man needs no personal Saviour to reconcile him to God, that a profession of good works and good intentions is all that is necessary. There are "both bad and good" (ch. 22: 10) gathered into the feast, but the king's inspection speedily discerns those who have spurned the wedding garment and trust rather in the "filthy rags" of their own righteousness; and He commands his servants to expel all such from the feast.

"Cast into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (ch. 22. 13). This is the class of text which used to be related to the final destiny and punishment of the wicked and on that account this parable used to be considered a word picture of the separation of righteous and wicked, and the final doom of the latter. There is however no justification for identifying "outer darkness" with the ultimate penalty of sin. The expression occurs only three times in the New Testament, all of them in Matthew's Gospel. In none of these cases is the ultimate fate of incorrigible sinners in question. Jesus in Matt. 8. 11-12 said that many would come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and other men of faith in the kingdom of God, whilst the "children of the kingdom" would be cast into outer darkness where is weeping and gnashing of teeth. In Matt. 25. 30 the unprofitable servant who had wasted his talent suffered the same fate. In all three instances the idea is that of rejection and separation from the purpose of God in this present Age through unworthiness, unfitness. The ultimate fate of the individuals concerned is not in question and is left undecided; what is certain is that they are unfit for inclusion in the band of disciples which God is selecting from both Jew and Gentile during the present and past, that He might use them in his plans for world conversion in the next Age. Separated from the body of believers because of unworthiness now, cast into outer darkness

in the sense that they have been excluded from the light and joy of that spirit-filled society which ultimately becomes the "light of the nations", such will eventually realise what high privilege they have missed—hence the typically Eastern hyperbole "weeping and gnashing of teeth".

For it is very true, as Jesus said in conclusion of his parable *"Many are called, but few are choice"* (not "chosen" as in the A.V.). The Greek here is *eklektos*, which means the valuable or choice part of a thing. Jesus did not say that God would call many and then arbitrarily choose only a few of them; what He did say was that of all to whom the Divine call comes in this Age, in whose hearts the Word finds some lodgment, only a few, after the testings of a lifetime, prove worthy, worthwhile, choice. Because God is seeking characters of sterling worth to be his ministers in that day when He sets before mankind the final decision, the choice between good and evil, He is rigorous in excluding the unworthy. They are not necessarily lost; they revert to the mass of unsaved mankind from which they came, to listen afresh in a future day to the appeal of the Gospel, but they have lost for ever the opportunity of sharing with those who live and reign with Christ a thousand years (Rev. 20. 4) and who in the course of that reign will labour with their Lord in the conversion of all nations. That is the lesson of this parable.

Psalm 23 through Indian eyes

This is a Red Indian version of the 23rd Psalm, now in the Indian section of the museum at Banff, Canada. There is no information as to how old it is but it is evidently a paraphrase written by a red-skinned disciple of the Lord Jesus in speech familiar to his fellows. The old, old story, clothed in words comprehensible by each nation and in every age, has always the same appeal and will never die.

* * *

The Great Father above is the Shepherd Chief. I am his and with him I want not.

He throws down to me a rope and the rope of his love and He draws me to where the grass is green and the water is good and I go and lie down satisfied.

Sometimes my heart is weak and falls down but He lifts is up again and draws me into

a good road. His name is Wonderful.

Sometimes, it may be soon, but may be long, it may be a long, long time, He will draw me into a place between the mountains.

It is dark there but I will not draw back, I will not be afraid, for it is there, between those mountains that the Shepherd Chief will meet me and the hunger I have felt in my heart all through life will be satisfied.

Sometimes he makes the love rope into a whip but afterwards He gives me a staff to lean on. He spreads a table before me with all kinds of food. He puts his hand upon my head and all tired is gone. My cup He fills until it runs over.

What I tell you is true, I lie not. These roads that are away ahead will stay with me through this life and afterwards I will go to live in the Big Tepee and sit down with the Shepherd Chief forever.

ANIMAL SACRIFICES IN THE MILLENNIUM

Three passages in the description of Ezekiel's Temple are sometimes taken as justification for the belief that the practice of ritual sacrificing of animals to God, as known to ancient Israel, will be restored—and apparently continue permanently. There is no similar reference anywhere else in the Scriptures.

The impression stems from the literal interpretation of the entire passage describing the Temple of Ezekiel's vision and all that is associated with it. Now although it has been fully demonstrated that the Temple as described by Ezekiel is an architectural possibility and could conceivably actually be built it is not necessary to insist that all the related portions of the vision must necessarily be interpreted literally and cannot be accepted as metaphors for the spiritual truths characteristic of the Age which the Temple represents. In some cases a literal interpretation is physically impossible, as, for instance, in the case of the River of Life which flows from the Sanctuary. That river, says Ezekiel, flows into the Dead Sea and makes the salt water fresh, bringing life wheresoever it comes. That, as an expression of a spiritual truth, is a wonderfully apt simile; in practice no stream running into the Dead Sea could ever turn its saline waters fresh, for that salinity is caused by the minerals carried by the rivers themselves—at present principally the Jordan and the Arnon. The Dead Sea can only be made fresh by giving it an outlet to the ocean and this is not envisaged by Ezekiel.

There are fundamental objections to the idea of animal sacrifices in the next Age. In the first place such an institution would be a retrograde step—such practices were in line with the level of human development three or four thousand years ago but certainly not today or to-morrow. God's distaste for sacrifices and offerings of that nature has long since been put on record and appreciated by devout men. The "*sacrifices of a broken and contrite heart*" and "*the sacrifices of praise continually*" are the offerings He desires and one cannot imagine His deriving much satisfaction from symbols of devotion fitted only

to a semi-barbaric people only just escaped from Egypt.

A more telling point is the fact that in Ezekiel these sacrifices are sin-offerings, burnt offerings and so on, presented as satisfaction for sin. But in that Age all offering for sin has long since been abolished. Christ gave himself for that purpose and from then onwards "*there is no more offering for sin*" (Heb. 10. 17). And in the Millennial Age, as in this present Christian Age, "*it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin*" (Heb. 10. 4). This points to a symbolic rather than a literal application of these particular verses.

There is also the well-known fact that every prophetic picture of the Millennial Age depicts it as a time when "*nothing shall hurt nor destroy*" and the animal creation is at peace. "*The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid*"; "*the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox*" (Isa. 11. 6-9; 35. 25). Such passages are likely to have a metaphorical intention much more important than the literal, but even so the general impression of order and peace without the prevalence of violent death in all God's earthly creation is predominant. And if there is in fact to exist such a condition of peace and harmony amongst the lower creation and still there persists the practice of animal sacrifice, then man has become the killer whilst the lion has become peaceful and this does not seem very logical.

All in all, it seems that Ezekiel's description of sacrifice associated with the Temple worship is intended to show in a figurative manner how men will come spontaneously before God to acknowledge their faults and shortcomings of the past and declare their full acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ and their future whole-hearted loyalty to him so that the reality behind the symbols is found in those offerings of contrite hearts, of praise and prayer and devotion, which are so much better and mean so much more in the Lord's sight than offerings of slain beasts.

Prayer is the soul of man moving in the presence of God, for the purpose of communicating its joy, or sorrow, or fear, or hope,

or any other conscious experience that it may have, to the bosom of a parent.

H. W. Beecher



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

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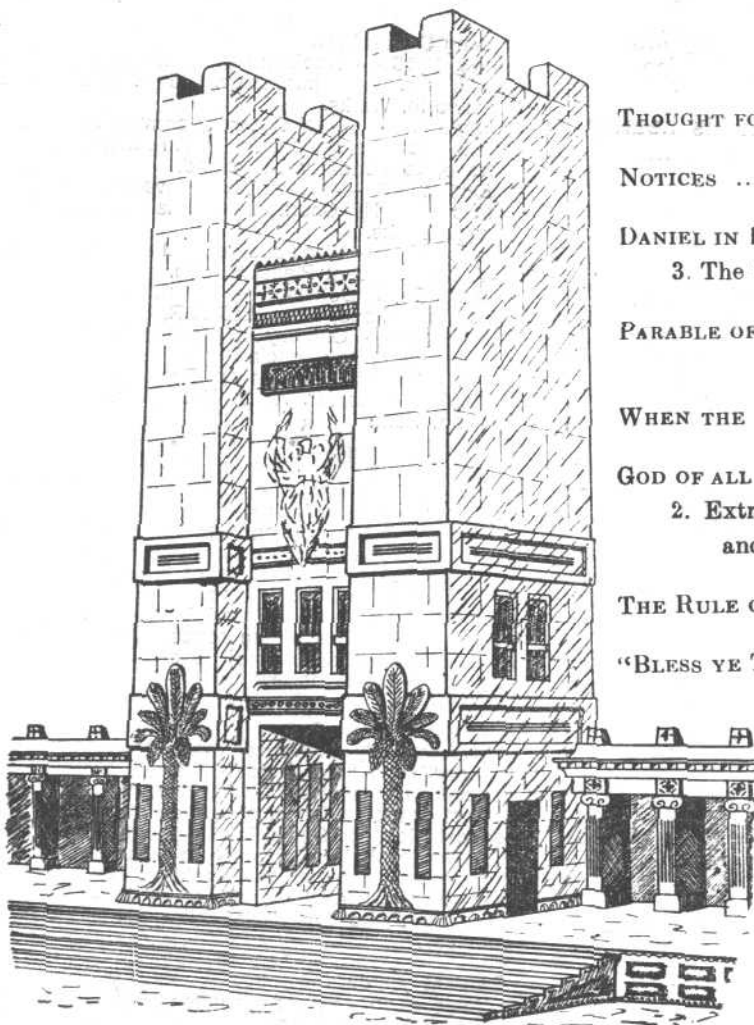
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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Thought for the Month

"Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26. 8).

St. Paul's ringing question at his hearing before Agrippa is as timely to-day as when it was uttered. The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead lies at the root of the Christian faith; if that is not true then Christianity has no meaning. "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain" said the great Apostle on another occasion; at this season of the year the fact of His death and resurrection in history is more than usually in mind. Sadly, and tragically, personal conviction that Jesus of Nazareth, who died under judicial sentence of the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, in A.D. 33, is increasingly on the wane to-day, even among professing Christians and not a few ministers. The modern, and regrettable, idea that the teaching and mission of Christ contained no more than a "way of life" for men here and now, as though He were a kind of First Century Mahatma Gandhi, and all the "other-worldly" elements in the Gospels were added by later miracle-loving devotees, may very well be suited to this colony of Twentieth Century ants running over their ant-hill and greatly impressed with their technical ability to see a distance of at least three feet from its summit, but it is still true that the "wisdom of man is foolishness with God". Christ is risen; He ever lives, and in His life is bound up the life of every man.

Gone from us

Sis. N. Allen (Leicester)

Sis. L. Birch (Birmingham)

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

NOTICES

Coming Conventions

May 15-16 — Week-end convention at Blaby, Leics. Details Mr. A. Charcharos, 55 Greenacres Drive, Lutterworth, Warks.

May 29-31 — Usual three-day convention at Portrush. Details and accommodation Mr. T. R. Lang, 31 Hawthorn Terrace, Londonderry, N. Ireland.

June 12-13 — Week-end convention at Windsor. Details Mr. H. Charlton, 43 Halkingcroft, Langley, Slough, Bucks.

June 19-20 — Week-end convention at Liverpool. Sat. at Y.M.C.A., Mount Pleasant. Sun. at Tudor Room, 145 Prescott Road. Details Mrs. W. E. Pampling, 6 Clive Road, Birkenhead, Ches. L43 5RR.

June 26 — One-day Saturday Home-gathering at Welling, Kent. Commencing at 3.0 p.m., in the Congregational Church Hall, Kelvin Road (5 mins. Welling Station). Details Mr. A. O. Hudson, 24 Darwin Road, Welling, Kent.

Back numbers

A limited number of sets of the "Monthly" for the years 1964 to 1970 inclusive are available and may be of interest to recently enrolled readers. These will be sent to anyone upon request, which must state the particular years for which issues are required. There is no charge but we would appreciate any gifts towards the cost and postage incurred. If no answer is received within three weeks of the request (ten weeks in the case of overseas readers) it should be taken that stocks are exhausted.

Booklets of interest

Two formerly well-known booklets, "God's Fulfilling Purpose" and "The Golden Future", both comprising general outlines of the Divine Plan, are again available at cost of production plus postage and will be sent on request. Cost of "God's Fulfilling Purpose" is 4 np and the "Golden Future" 5 np each with postage extra at the rate of 1 np per two booklets. Overseas readers may note that the USA or Canadian dollar equals about 40 np and the Australian dollar about 45 np (new pennies).

"Lardent" cards

Some of our readers are users of Scriptural greeting cards published by the Christian Truth Institute. Consequent upon the passing of Bro. F. Lardent these cards will no longer be published and the existing stock is being liquidated. Orders may be sent to us while stocks last. Packets of 12 assorted cards are available at reduced price of 10 np (25 cents) per packet post paid.

DANIEL IN BABYLON

3. The Dream of the Image

*The story of a
great man's faith*

King Nebuchadnezzar was in thoughtful mood. His deeply religious turn of mind and almost passionate yearning for the approval and blessing of the gods rendered him singularly receptive to dreams, considering them, as was the custom in those days, messages from the other world, revelations of the powers of heaven. There are sufficient examples in the Old Testament to make it abundantly clear that God has from time to time revealed Himself to his servants the prophets and patriarchs in this fashion. Many of the ancients—idolators—firmly believed that their own deities communicated their wishes in the same manner so that the idea was by no means confined to the relative few who served the one true God. Additionally, the Scriptures give several instances in which God disclosed his purposes in the same way to men who were not his avowed followers, so that there is no reason for rejecting the idea that certain noteworthy dreams of unbelievers may have been inspired directly by God for his purpose.

Such was the case in this present instance. The King, awaking from his sleep, recalled an impressive dream, and the more he thought about it the more he felt that it was no ordinary dream. That it held a message for him he felt sure; but who would interpret the symbolism of the dream and reveal to him its message? That was the problem which occupied the king's mind.

A colossal, towering image, of a man; almost certainly a warrior dressed in the style of a Babylonian soldier. King Nebuchadnezzar was himself a soldier; as a young man he had led the armies of Babylon into the field against Egypt, Elam, Assyria—all the traditional foes of Babylon—while his father, Nabopolassar, rested from his own military exploits and administered as king the affairs of the country which he had successfully freed from the Assyrian yoke. Now in his own turn, although his military career was by no means over, Nebuchadnezzar was enjoying a brief respite of peace, and it was while he was at home in Babylon planning the great building works for which he is famous that the dream of the image came to him.

No ordinary image this—the head was of gold, the breast and arms of silver; the body and thighs of copper; the lower legs of iron;

the feet iron mingled with soft, yielding, wet clay. An impressive sight, but built upon a foundation which threatened to go to pieces at any moment; nevertheless while it stood, the image proudly surveyed its surroundings as though commanding reverence and allegiance from all who beheld.

Then came action. A mass of rock, not man-made, no carefully carved monolith bearing the impress of human labour and ingenuity, but rugged and massive as if torn out from its parent mountain by the hand of God himself, came bearing down on the image. No human hands guided it; the power by which it travelled was invisible and irresistible. Even as, fascinated, the king watched, the mighty mass of rock struck the image on its feet—the feet of iron and clay. The colossus trembled, swayed, and crashed to earth with a fall that smashed it to pieces. Fragments of gold, silver, copper and iron lay in inextricable confusion over the plain.

That was not the end. With the strange inconsequence of dreams the fragments went on breaking up, dividing into smaller and ever smaller pieces, until as fine dust they were caught up by the wind and blown away. Soon there was nothing left of the image, nothing to show where it had stood or give any evidence that it had ever existed—nothing but the dry sandy plain of Babylonia.

Now the rock itself started to grow. Before the king's amazed eyes it steadily increased in size until it filled his whole field of vision, covering the plain in every direction as far as eye could see. He saw it encircle and swallow up his own capital city of Babylon; he saw it reach southward to the sea, and northward to Assyria with its capital city of Nineveh. He watched it as it extended its spread over the lands of his old enemies, Hittites and the Amorites, the Great Sea in the west and the empire of Egypt in the south-west. His gaze followed it as it covered lands and peoples he had never heard of and did not know existed, and when it had finished growing he saw that it had become a great mountain that filled the whole earth. All peoples, nations and languages had their homes and their lives on its slopes and under its shadow. No wonder the king was in a thoughtful mood.

It is highly probable that Nebuchadnezzar had been cogitating seriously on the possible

fate of his empire after his own death. He was now a man of between thirty and forty years of age, happily married to a wife he loved, and the father of three small children. He was firmly established as monarch of the world's leading nation and he had great plans for that nation's advancement. He had made Babylon the strongest power in the Middle East and although vigilance was still needed there was no real danger from the only other great power, that of Egypt. Nineveh had been destroyed a few years previously and the power of Assyria was broken for ever. Persia as a rival had not yet emerged on the scene. He was busy organising and administering the empire his father and he had created and initiating ambitious schemes of building, irrigation and road-making. He was an Oriental despot and given to violent bursts of temper, but he was an educated man and a wise and enlightened ruler. He must have known how many times in past history individual men had built up just such edifices only for them to crash in ruins after the builder had gone the way of all flesh. Perhaps the great king had been thinking about the future of all that his hands were fashioning and in that frame of mind was receptive to this dream that God sent.

God did send it; there is no doubt about that. As that man lay sleeping on his ornate bed in the magnificent palace beside the flowing Euphrates, our God was setting in motion a chain of revelations that have had lasting effect on the lives and thoughts of men. The dream of the image was but the first of a sequence of messages that have made the Divine Plan clear to God's servants from that day to this, and given assurance to all who would know what God is doing to bring to an end the reign of evil, and reconcile man to Himself.

So in the morning the king did the expected thing; he summoned his professional interpreters of dreams to his presence to demand an interpretation of the dream. According to ch. 2.2 they constituted a formidable assortment; there were "the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans". They all came in and stood before the king.

Later on Daniel was to find himself at the head of this motley collection and it will be necessary presently to examine their credentials a little more closely. For the moment, however, suffice it to say that the "magicians" were exorcists of evil spirits, the "sorcerers" utterers of incantations which constrained the

gods to do things for men which in the ordinary way they would have declined to do, the "astrologers" were occultists who professed to have communication with the spirit world, and the "Chaldeans" a senior caste of wise men who specialised in both astrology and astronomy, issuing predictions something after the style of the present-day "Old Moore's Almanac". It was from this heterogeneous assemblage of the "wisdom of this world" that the king expected to obtain the interpretation of his dream.

Perhaps he did not really expect it. He started off by demanding that his advisers give him first a detailed account of the dream itself, and afterwards proceed to the explanation. The company was thrown into considerable confusion. The great king was certainly in a difficult mood this morning. They had come into the royal presence with their usual serene confidence and glibly recited the customary formula "O king, live for ever; tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation". That would be easy enough; it was merely a matter of applying the rules of the art and the king was generally perfectly satisfied.

On this occasion he was not going to be so easily satisfied. Perhaps he had an instinctive feeling that this would prove to be a most important dream and he ought to be sure that he got the correct explanation. Perhaps—for king Nebuchadnezzar was a long-headed man—he already suspected the veracity of his counsellors and determined to put them to the test. If they really did get their interpretations from the gods, who knew all things and saw into the depths of men's minds, then logically they should be able to get the details of the dream as well. Their ability to do the one would convince him of their authority to do the other.

Rather helplessly, they made their plea a second time. "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation of it". This was worldly wisdom in its extremity; faced with a problem the solution of which was vested only in the power of God they must needs admit defeat. Despite the royal anger and the threat of an immediate and ignominious death they could do nothing else but admit that there was none on earth who could meet the king's wishes; none but the gods, "whose dwelling is not with flesh".

So in the last resort these men had to confess that they were not messengers of the other world at all; they had no Divine authority and no other-worldly enlightenments. Presen-

ted with the demand that they prove their claims they stood before the king and the world, admitted imposters, and in his rage and fury at having been tricked the king commanded that the entire fraternity be put to death.

This might be the right place in which to correct a common misconception to the effect that the king himself had forgotten his dream and wanted the wise men to recall it to his memory. The idea is based on Nebuchadnezzar's words in ch. 2.5 "The thing is gone from me," but the king did not mean that at all. He was talking to the wise men and after their first refusal to repeat to him the dream he used a phrase which was common to autocratic potentates asserting the irrevocable nature of their dictum. The full text is "*The thing is gone from me; if ye will not make known to me the dream with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces and your houses shall be made a dunghill*". The first sentence is equivalent to saying "The word, or decree, is gone out from me and will not be revoked". It was the fixity of his purpose to slay the wise men to which he was referring. From that moment their doom was sealed unless the dream was told. There is little doubt that the king remembered the dream all right; he wanted to find out if the wise men could discover it independently.

At this point Daniel really comes into the limelight. He is still only a youth, in his very early twenties, but already he has attracted the favourable notice of the king by his bearing, discretion and knowledge. Unfortunately that same learning has put him and his three companions into one of the categories involved in the arbitrary sentence of death just uttered by the king, so that Arioch the captain of the palace guard was soon on the spot to arrest the four youths in order to carry out the royal command. In response to Daniel's enquiry he unfolded the whole story, and Daniel knew immediately that the time had come for his life's work to begin. There was no hesitancy or uncertainty in his mind; there is no suggestion in the narrative that he went first to God asking why this calamity should fall upon them or pleading with him to save their lives. He knew, as it were instinctively, that God was in this thing and that he was the agent of God and must needs be ready for service. He went straight to the king and declared that given a little time, he would tell to the king his dream and its interpretation.

It is not likely that he literally walked into

the king's presence with his request. It was not usually so easy to obtain an audience with the great man, and vs. 26, describing the entry of Daniel with the interpretation, does not read as if the king had held previous personal conversation with him on the matter. It is more likely that the request was made, and the permission obtained, through a third party, probably the captain of the palace guard, who was already intimately involved in the progress of this matter.

Daniel's next action is of close interest to us. He gathered his three companions, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, and bade them join him in united prayer before God for the revelation of this secret. There is surely something very significant here. Daniel was already perfectly confident that God would reveal the truth to him; his request just made to the king shows that. Why then did he not make personal solitary supplication to God; why deem it necessary to bring his three friends into the prayer circle? It could not be lack of faith in God's willingness to listen to one voice, or his being more likely to grant the petition if made by four men simultaneously. Was it that Daniel realised a certain value in the practice of prayer that made the petitioner himself more receptive to the inflow of the Holy Spirit of God; that earnest and reverent prayer of itself tends to break down the barrier of materialism that always lies between us and God, and so makes our "receptiveness," so to speak, stronger and more vital? Did he, then, follow-out the implications of that principle, realise that the greater degree of solemnity and urgency induced by the fact of a number praying together, and the feeling of joint-participation, itself constituted a further factor bringing his own spirit still more in tune with the Divine Spirit? The clarity of the message he expected to receive from God must obviously depend upon the degree to which he himself was able to shake off the trammels of earthly-mindedness and enter into the "secret place of the Most High". That must surely have been helped in no small degree by the fact of corporate prayer in unison together, and so the co-operation of Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah was a definite factor in Daniel's attainment of a mind so opened to the Holy Spirit that he could clearly understand the details of the interpretation he was presently to repeat to king Nebuchadnezzar.

This is an important truth for us too. Some Christians quite sincerely "see nothing in

prayer meetings". Yet those who consistently conduct or attend such meetings almost invariably testify to real spiritual benefit received. It may well be that failure to engage in frequent corporate prayer in the understanding and expectation that each individual thus participating will thereby be brought into closer fellowship with God has resulted in a loss the magnitude of which cannot easily be appraised.

It was now Daniel's turn to dream. "Then was the secret revealed to Daniel in a night vision" (2.19). The details of the dream are not related, but it is evident that they were sufficiently explicit to give Daniel the knowledge he desired. But there was no immediate running off to the king with the answer, even though the threat of death was still hanging over his head. There was something much more important to be done first. He solemnly and reverently returned thanks to God. It is a wonderful prayer, this paean of praise whereby Daniel ascribed all might and power to the giver of the revelation. "He changeth times and seasons; he removeth kings and setteth up kings; and revealeth the deep and secret things." Only after he had thus acknowledged the source of his enlightenment did he proceed to the palace to impart the information for which the great man was eagerly waiting.

It is related of that great Christian statesman of a past century, Queen Victoria's Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. W. E. Gladstone, that whilst engaged in his private devotions on one occasion he received an imperious and urgent summons to the sovereign's presence. He continued in prayer as if nothing had occurred and waited on the Queen an hour later. Her Majesty was highly aggrieved at being kept waiting and demanded an explanation. "Madam, I was engaged in audience with the King of Kings" replied the old man, and the Queen, it is said, bowed her head in acknowledgment.

Such a story is hardly likely to be re-enacted in this generation, but good it is to take heed of these examples of godly men who placed God first in all their affairs even to the extent of risking the displeasure of some earthly potentate.

Thus it came about that a probably greatly relieved captain of the palace guard came bustling into the royal presence with the welcome news that he had ready a man who would comply with the king's conditions and give the interpretation of the dream. Arioch almost certainly would be feeling that this was

a most fortunate ending to the whole episode; the character of his royal master was so unpredictable that it was quite on the cards he himself might, later on, be blamed for the too literal execution of the command; possibly, too, the friends of the condemned men would find some way, eventually, of taking their revenge on the servant where they had small chance of doing so on the master. In the meantime he did his best to divert a little of the credit to himself; "I have found a man of the captives of Judah" he told the King "who can make known to the king the interpretation". He must himself have had confidence in Daniel's ability, to have risked his own reputation in so confident a statement. Good it is for any of us if the unbelievers among whom our daily lives are spent come to have confidence in the veracity of our words and soberness of our judgment even though they will not accept and share our beliefs. Quite evidently Arioch knew Daniel well enough implicitly to accept as true his statement that he could give the king the interpretation. "Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay" counsels the Apostle; this is an ideal we all do well to set before ourselves.

Now brought into the king's presence, Daniel hastened to disclaim any superior wisdom inherent in himself. "Art thou able to declare the dream, and make known the interpretation?" demanded the great man. The youth before him, in a speech which is a model of restraint and dignity, first reminded him that the soothsayers, the astrologers, the wise men of Babylon, with all the boasted powers of the gods behind them, had been quite unable to interpret the dream. Then with a modesty which must have sounded strange in that Babylonian court, he proceeded to disown any claim to superior wisdom of his own in the matter. But there is a God in heaven, he went on, and that God is directly interested in the affairs of this empire of Babylon, and wields overall control of its destinies, and in his inscrutable wisdom has now intervened to instruct thee, King Nebuchadnezzar, what shall befall this empire in the last days. It was a masterly approach; no wonder the king was interested; and the quiet ring of authority in the voice of this youngster could not but have impressed a man who himself knew what authority meant.

So Daniel told the dream, and as he recounted the details his listener knew that he was speaking the truth. This young man before him could only have obtained this knowledge from the God he worshipped.

The king had revealed to no one his dream and it could have come to Daniel from no other source than above. He settled himself more comfortably on his throne to hear the explanation.

That explanation is common knowledge to every Christian student of prophetic matters in these days; to the king it was completely new. The head of gold pictured he himself and his empire, ruling over the nations and supreme over all. The empire of Babylon was founded long before the days of Abraham and suffered many vicissitudes and disasters through intervening years, but it was Nebuchadnezzar who raised it to the zenith of power and extended the city of Babylon to its widest extent. We speak of Babylon as the first "universal" empire; the expression is true only in a limited sense in that Babylon exercised sovereignty only over the lands of the Middle East, the Bible lands. The far extent of the wider world was only dimly known to the Babylonians and no thought of suzerainty over the great civilisations that then existed in China, North-west India and Southern Arabia ever entered their heads. Trade with all those lands was transacted by Babylon but Nebuchadnezzar's armies never pursued their career of conquest to such places. Greece and Rome both flourished in the days of Nebuchadnezzar but neither were ever subject to him. The "head of gold" ruled over the peoples known to the Old Testament and that was all that was intended.

This empire must one day come to an end. How long it was to endure Daniel did not say and it is certain that he did not at that time know, but one day it would fall and be superseded by another empire, one symbolised by silver. We know that empire to be that of Persia; Daniel lived to see that part of the prophecy come to pass. He himself eventually served the kings of Persia. In point of fact the "head of gold" was destined to survive only twenty-three years after the death of Nebuchadnezzar himself. Cyrus the Persian in 538 B.C. captured Babylon and added it to the rapidly growing Persian empire. Then in 332 B.C. Alexander the Great of Greece in turn overthrew the power of Persia and the copper part of the image took the centre of the stage. Finally in 66 B.C. Greece fell before the might of the iron kingdom, Rome, and potential world domination left the Middle East and settled in Western Europe, there to remain until the "Time of the End".

Thus Daniel led up to the climax of the

dream, the coming of the Messianic kingdom upon earth. These four empires, all built by fallible men, were destined each to have its day and then pass away. The fifth kingdom, built not by man but by God, shall endure for ever. After it has broken down and ground to pieces every vestige of the earlier empires it will extend its sway until all peoples everywhere shall acknowledge its power and live contentedly under its jurisdiction. God had admittedly given the kingdoms of the world and their subjects into the hands of one great king after another but all this was only for a limited time. A day is to dawn when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever. There had been many earlier prophets to speak of the glories of "that day" when God turns to speak peace to the nations and effect the reconciliation to himself of "whosoever will"; when the graves open to yield up their dead and the whole human race be called to walk the "highway of holiness" to perfection of life. Daniel was the first to relate this blessed time to the earthly kingdoms of history, to give a sequence whereby the "watchers" and the students might place it in connection with history as it is known. Wherefore we in our day, beholding with our own eyes the progressive collapsing and inevitable end of the present development of the feet of iron and clay, the last vestiges of that political system which once was Rome, have this confidence and evidence that the days of the Kingdom are at hand and cannot be much longer delayed.

These words had the ring of truth, and an astute man like Nebuchadnezzar could not fail to realise the fact. We are told that he fell down and worshipped Daniel—probably much to the surprise of his assembled Court. Of course he did it in symbol of homage and reverence to the God whom Daniel represented. The king's conversion was sudden but whole-hearted, like most of his actions. "Your God is a God of gods and a lord of kings". In those few words he elevated Daniel's God, not to a position of absolute pre-eminence over all the gods of Babylon, as is often mistakenly supposed, but to a position of equality with them. "Your God is a God of gods"—that is, a God worthy to be a consort of gods. There is no evidence that Nebuchadnezzar had lost his faith in his own gods, only in the wise men who claimed to represent them. In fact, the extant inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar show without a doubt that he

was faithful to Marduk the god of Babylon for at least the greater portion of his life; but here he evidently acknowledged the power of Daniel's God and also the integrity of Daniel's credentials as a representative of that God. In token of that recognition he bestowed high honour upon the man who had interpreted his dream.

Daniel was made a chief ruler in affairs of

State; his three companions also were promoted to high office. Honour and wealth were at their command, the plaudits and flatteries of men, and every attraction the luxurious world of Babylon had to offer. The time had now come when the value of the earlier training and self-discipline to which these young men had been subjected was to be put to the test.

(To be continued)

PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luke 10. 30-37

"A certain man went down to Jericho, and fell among thieves . . ." (Luke 10. 30).

A simple story! The lawyer's verdict, given in response to Jesus' question, has been endorsed by countless voices throughout the age, so much so that the unknown benefactor has become the symbol of neighbourliness and disinterested kindness. Often is the phrase "good Samaritan" used by people who have no idea of its origin. Proof positive is this that deep down in every human heart there lies consciousness that the attitude taken by that traveller on the Jericho road represents the true duty of man.

Who is my neighbour? The story was given that the answer to that question might be thrown out in bold relief. It is the natural question of any man who wants to serve God in God's own way. It is a tacit admission that there is a "fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man" which ought to influence and guide all human relationships and actions. And this is a right feeling. The plans of God provide for a world in which all men are brothers and each willingly takes upon himself the responsibility of his brethren's welfare. The work of the Millennial Age is to lead men to this appreciation, and it will only be as a man comes willingly and intelligently into harmony with such attitude of mind that the old process of sin, working in his members, will be destroyed and he receive new, and everlasting, life. Speaking to the Athenians, St. Paul said of God "In him we live, and move, and have our being" and writing to the Christians at Rome he declared "no man liveth to himself". Both these principles have been rejected by men to-day, and the measure of that rejection, both in the affairs of nations and the lives of individuals, is revealed by the chaotic state into which the world has fallen. Not until men live *in* God and *for* each other will they find peace, security or happiness. The attainment of those blessings demands

the payment of a price, and that price is assessed in terms of service for one's fellow-men, and no one will find the rest for which his soul longs until he has come to that knowledge and paid that price.

Jesus was suddenly confronted with a "lawyer". We must not take the term to mean that this man was a kind of First Century practising solicitor or barrister, such as would be indicated by our present usage of the word "lawyer". It means that he held the position of a "Doctor of the Law", an ecclesiastical distinction which placed him upon a higher level even than that of a Rabbi, and implied that he was qualified to pronounce with authority on matters concerning the laws of God. We are apt also to draw the wrong inference from the statement that he stood up and "tempted" Jesus unless we remember that this word in the New Testament has the significance of "proving" or "testing". It is very clear that this man came forward with the express intention of putting the principles of Christ's teaching to the proof, or as we would say, applying the "acid test", of Mosaic Law, to these new and revolutionary tenets which were being advocated by the prophet of Nazareth.

The lawyer may or may not have been sincere in his interrogation; the narrative does not make that aspect of the matter very clear, but the fact that his further questions showed him to be a man amenable to reasonable argument may justify us in concluding that his attitude was that of an ordinarily honest and sincere man who had been brought up and indoctrinated in the elements of Mosaic law until that law had become the background of his mental processes. This new teaching, perhaps, intrigued and interested him; he was not at all sure how it would work out in practice but if it could be shown to be a logical development of the Mosaic code then he would be prepared to give it further con-

sideration.

And Jesus shattered this whole meticulous intellectualism by returning an answer that compelled the lawyer to admit ignorance of one of the principal features of that law with which he, with others, imagined himself to be expertly familiar. *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind"*, said Jesus, *"and thy neighbour as thyself"*. A most familiar passage and one that this Doctor of the Law must have expounded to others times without number. But under the keen gaze of those searching eyes he was compelled to admit his lack of real knowledge. His mind still bemused by the torturous arguments with which his training had made him familiar, he tried to steer the conversation into more familiar channels of debate, and *"willing to justify himself"*, anxious to hold the advantage in argument with this unlearned Nazarene, put the supplementary question in appropriate form for argument. *"Who is my neighbour?"* he asked.

Jesus answered that question by telling a story. To what extent the lawyer benefited by this unorthodox method of teaching truth we do not know; certain it is that many of the bystanders, men and women in humbler walks of life, must have gained enlightenment and inspiration thereby. *"Truth, embodied in a tale, may enter in at lowly doors"*, wrote Tennyson; the profound wisdom of that remark is well worthy of serious consideration by those whose privilege and responsibility it is to teach Divine truth.

A certain man went down to Jericho. On the lonely mountainous road which has only recently lost its dangers he was set upon by robbers who, from behind the rocky crags towering high above the winding track, descended silently upon him, robbed him of his possessions and clothes, beat him savagely into unconsciousness, and departed leaving him to die. Travellers were few and far between, and quite possibly before the next one came that way the vultures would have had their feast. But it was not so to be this time. By chance, said Jesus, while his listeners sat enthralled, there came a certain priest that way, who, when he saw him, passed by on the other side. The lawyer must have shifted uneasily at this. He was not himself a priest but his interests and theirs lay in the same direction and he was not certain just how far the implied rebuke was going to point to his own self. But he could not but listen as Jesus continued; and Jesus must have put much more detail into the story than

is preserved for us in the Gospel narrative. The priest would of course justify himself in his action. The man was probably dead, and he, a priest, must not defile himself by touching a dead body. His consecration to God required that he keep himself ceremonially clean for the Divine service. And perhaps this man had committed some crime for which this was God's retribution, and he must beware lest by relieving the man's distress he be found to fight against God. So he might have reasoned, as he hurried on his way, casting furtive glances at the beetling crags above him and trusting that the robbers were by now well away from the vicinity.

Not long, perhaps, after the figure of the priest had disappeared in the distance fresh footsteps sounded on the road. Another traveller appeared, a Levite, a man devoted to the service of God just as was the priest, but in matters which in everyday life did bring him into closer contact with ordinary people. He might quite possibly have been possessed of some degree of medical skill, for that was a not uncommon function of the Levites, and in any case his daily duties would have certainly given him many opportunities of relieving human suffering. At any rate, he did cross the road and look at the injured man. Here was clearly a case within his own province. The man was a son of Israel. he was afflicted and in distress, and the Levites' traditional duty was to succour and assist the people. His first impulse might have been to render first aid and do something to set the injured man on his journey again, but other and more selfish counsels came into his mind. The robbers might still be about and the longer he stayed in that place the greater was the risk of becoming another victim. He had a duty to his own people not to bring himself into a position where he might be rendered physically incapable of serving them on his return home; this man might be an Israelite, and in distress, but he was not of the Levite's own parish, and *"charity begins at home"*. After all, the man should have taken precautions against robbery if he intended travelling with possessions in such a notorious place; he should have waited until he could join a company of travellers. A Levite whose profession forbade him to accumulate property could hardly be expected to defend the rights of property in others and the man had really only got what he deserved. So he might have thought, unctuously, as he left the unconscious man, with a couple of backward glances, and went his way.

We can be quite sure that the world has

never known a better story-teller than Jesus of Nazareth. His listeners must have seen, quite plainly, that desolate road, the unfortunate traveller lying outstretched by the wayside, the pitiless heat of noonday pouring down on the sun-baked rocks, the still air hanging lifeless and heavy, high up in the blue sky, a pair of vultures hovering, waiting their time . . . and then, sharply, breaking the stillness, the "clip-clop" of a donkey picking its way among the stones of the road.

The vultures disappeared; the donkey and his rider came into sight. The newcomer betrayed, by the cast of his features, his non-Jewish blood. He was a Samaritan, a member of that mongrel race which had descended from the Assyrians and Babylonians with which Samaria had been colonised in the days of Sennacherib, the apostate Israelites, the Phoenicians and the Canaanites who had occupied the land during the time of the great captivities. As Jesus came to this part of his story, more than one of his listeners would turn and spit on the ground in disgust at the mention of the hated name; but they turned back to listen again.

The stranger took in the situation at a glance. Without hesitation he stopped his beast, alighted and went across to the injured man. With a dexterity that betrayed complete familiarity with this kind of thing, he bound up the man's wounds, set him upon his own beast, and, supporting him thus as he himself walked beside the donkey, took him to the *khan*, the wayside rest-house halfway between Jerusalem and Jericho. **There his interest might well have ended; the man would be safe, and would recover in a few days, and could reasonably be expected to arrange for his own welfare; but no, the Samaritan produced money from his own pocket—the "two pence" were two *denarii*, adequate for several days board and lodging—and gave assurance that he would be responsible for whatever further expenditure was necessary to restore the man to health. He was not one of the Lord's chosen people; he was not a member of the consecrated nation: he was a man of the world, a Samaritan!**

And this man, says Jesus, is the man who has kept the commandments and is worthy of eternal life. We miss the point of the story if we take it as merely a commendation of the man who does do good works. The lawyer wanted to know what he must do to gain eternal life; what was the commandment that really mattered; what obligation did this new teaching that Jesus brought propose to lay upon man. The story was the reply, and the

lawyer readily saw, as Jesus meant him to see, that the Samaritan was the one who had rightly interpreted every man's duty to his fellowmen and to his God. The men whom Jesus wanted for followers and disciples were to be as this Samaritan—prepared to demonstrate their essential harmony with God Who "so loved the world that He gave" by rendering such service as they are able to a world in distress, instead of, like the Priest and the Levite, making excuse to avert their heads and pass by on the other side. The Samaritan did not stay with the man; having done what he could, he proceeded upon his own business, but he had challenged, and overcome, the powers of evil in the world by working some positive good.

This is the issue before us, Christians of to-day. It is so easy to close our eyes to human distress and take refuge behind the knowledge that God has provided the Millennial Age to "wipe away tears from off all faces". We know quite certainly that in no event shall we be able to effect any substantial improvement in the world's affairs, and that time and energy spent in the endeavour is worse than wasted. The Scriptures are definite, and so, too, are the signs of the times, that this world is incapable of self-reformation and that its only hope lies in the coming—and the speedy coming—of that Kingdom whose interests we serve and to whose Ruler we are consecrated. But when we have admitted and said all this, there remains the fact, the solid, inescapable fact, that it was the Samaritan, and not the Priest, who was the true son of God. And we as Christians have to find the way, as the Samaritan found the way, of continuing the work our Lord did on earth, by "doing good to all men as we have opportunity", interweaving this with our supreme mission of undergoing training and preparation both by study and experience for our future commission of world conversion in the days of the Kingdom.

The Samaritan was able to render this good deed and still go about his business. We can do the same, and in the effort find that our sympathetic outlook upon human distress, our closer contact with the infirmities and failings and sorrows of suffering humanity, will of itself shape our characters surely and definitely into the likeness that God desires for us. It is not given to all to expound from the platform, to speak with ready tongue to those who as yet "know not God", to spread abroad the knowledge of the Divine Plan. It is possible for each of us to perform little deeds of kindness, unselfish acts, to be known as

one who, being a Christian, interprets that Christianity as did its Founder, in "going about doing good", and so bring glory to his Name more certainly than any amount of platform intellectualism can do.

The "Inn of the Good Samaritan" is still there, on that road between Jerusalem and Jericho. Travellers still stop there in passing. Scholars say that there is every reason for thinking that the present inn stands on the site of the one that existed in the time of our Lord, and must have been well known to the men and women who listened to his story. *The inn is still there*; is it a witness and a reminder? There is no sepulchre of Jesus

with marbled or crystal coffin containing his remains to which people may make pilgrimage, and before which they can adore. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem almost certainly is not the true site of the garden tomb. Jesus our Lord desires no empty homage of that nature. But the Inn of the Good Samaritan is still there, a building and a courtyard upon which men may gaze, and, gazing, remember the story of old that enshrined the whole teaching of Jesus regarding the duty of his disciples to their fellowmen. *"Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye did it unto me."*

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

I Believe that the world will never be completely converted to Christianity by any existing agency before the end comes. In spite of all that can be done by ministers, churches schools and missions, the wheat and the tares will grow together until the harvest. And when the end comes, it will find the earth in much the same state that it was when the flood came in the days of Noah (Matt. 13:24-30; 24. 37-39).

I Believe that the widespread unbelief, indifference, formalism and wickedness which are to be seen throughout Christendom are only what we ought to expect in God's Word. Troublous times, departures from the faith, evil men waxing worse and worse, love waxing cold, are things distinctly predicted. So far from making me doubt the truth of Christianity, they help to confirm my faith. Melancholy and sorrowful as the sight is, if I did not see it I should think the Bible was not true (Matt. 24.12; 1 Tim. 4.1; 2 Tim. 3.1, 13, 14).

It is not often that worldly success comes to a Christian without degrading his high standard of character. David was "a man after God's own heart", but that was when he was a shepherd, sincere in his simple faith. In the later years of his life, when great sins made possible only by his exalted position had left their mark on his character, God told him he was a "man of blood", and for that reason, despite his service of the past, he was unfit to build the Temple of God. With all David's fame and achievements he failed to accomplish the dearest object of his life, and it was the corrupting influences of riches and power

I Believe that the grand purpose of the present dispensation is to gather out of the world an elect people, and not to convert all mankind. It does not surprise me at all to hear that the heathen are not all converted when missionaries preach, and that believers are a little flock in any congregation in my own land. It is precisely the state of things which I expect to find. . . . This is a dispensation of election, and *not* of universal conversion (Acts 15.14; Matt. 24.13).

I Believe that the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is the great event which will wind up the present dispensation, and for which we ought *daily* to long and pray. "Thy Kingdom come," "Come, Lord Jesus," should be our daily prayer. We look backward if we have faith, to Christ dying on the cross, to His resurrection from the dead, and we ought to look forward no less, if we have hope, to Christ coming again (John 14.3; 2 Tim. 4.8; 2 Peter 3.12).

Dr. J.C. Ryle. 1816-1910. Bishop of Liverpool.

upon an originally noble character that caused his failure.

* * *

For the production of one single ear of corn we should need the same sun, the same sky, the same earth, and the same conditions as is needed for all the harvests of the world. If only one soul were to be redeemed, the same propitiation would be needed as is demanded by the entire population of a lost world. The sacrifice of Christ removes from the mind of God every hindrance of the pardon, the restoration, and the justification of every sinner.

WHEN THE CLOUD TARRIED LONG

Reflections
on Num. 9:19

The tribes of Israel, journeying from Egypt to the promised land, provide a fitting picture of the Church on her pilgrimage to her heavenly home. Throughout their journey the Israelites were tent-dwellers, and their meeting place with God was a tent. This arrangement, necessitated by their journeyings, gave way to a permanent disposition when they reached their goal.

The Apostle Peter uses this picture of a tent-dweller to portray his condition as a pilgrim when, in 2 Pet. 1:13-14 he writes "Yea, I think it meet as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me". The word translated "tabernacle" means simply "a tent" and Moffatt puts it "so long as I am in this tent I deem it proper. . . . since I know that my tent must be folded up very soon". The Apostle Paul also uses this picture when in 2 Cor. 5:1-4 he writes, "I know that if this earthly tent of mine is taken down I get a home from God, made by no human hands eternal in the heavens. I do sigh within this tent of mine with heavy anxiety, not that I want to be stripped—no, but be under cover of the other, to have my mortal element absorbed by life". (Moffatt.) We, living in the overlapping of the ages, and viewing from Pisgah's mountain the home we hope soon to reach, can surely echo these sentiments.

This longing, however, was tempered with a contentment which we, in these last days, do well to emulate. The Apostle Paul tells us that he had LEARNED, in whatsoever state he found himself, to be content. We would suggest that, to the Apostle Paul, this was a lesson not easily learned. Fiery, impetuous and fanatical as he was, he would not take kindly to anything savouring of passive acquiescence, yet the fact remains that he DID learn to be content.

This contentment should not, however, be confused with satisfaction, for although the two words are used synonymously there is an important difference. At the time when the Authorised Version was written, the word "content" was limited to earthly or mundane things, whereas satisfaction was raised to a much higher level. To be content meant to

have the desires limited by present enjoyment, having a quiet mind, accepting one's surroundings. Secular writings demonstrated the value of this quality, for Thomas Decker wrote

"Art thou poor, yet hast thou golden slumbers,

Oh, sweet content.

Art thou rich, yet is thy mind perplexed

Oh, punishment."

Shakespeare, who wrote during the same literary period, puts it,

"Poor and content is rich, and rich enough."

Two hundred years later Shelley wrote,

"Alas I have not hope or health,

Nor peace within or calm around,

Nor that CONTENT, SURPASSING

WEALTH

The stage in meditation found,

And walked with inward glory crowned."

The difference between contentment and satisfaction is seen in the words of Thackeray "which of us is happy in this world, which of us has his desire, or, having it is satisfied"; and is concisely summed up in these words of Mackintosh, "It is right to be content with what we have, never with what we are". It is somewhat unusual to quote from secular writings, but our sole purpose is to emphasise the subtle difference between contentment and satisfaction.

Let us consider "what we have", noting first what the children of Israel had on their pilgrimage. They had dwelling places which provided simple yet adequate shelter, yet which could be easily moved. They were provided with food sufficient for their needs, but above all they had a place wherein their leader could meet their God—the tabernacle, or "tent of meeting". This too was a portable structure which could be taken down and transported when they were on the move. This "tent of meeting" contained, among other things, the Ark of the Covenant, or "ark of the presence" and the Shekinah glory, representing God's presence in their midst, shone from between the cherubim. This representation of God's presence penetrated, as it were, the fabric of the tent and was manifested as a cloud of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night. This sign of the Presence moved from above the tent as an indi-

cation that they were to move on, and came to rest when they were to remain encamped.

We as travellers to a heavenly realm have all these things in antitype. These bodies of ours, weak and frail though they may be, are adequate as temporary coverings, but if at any time they seem woefully insufficient to stand up to the storms and tempests of life, we can and should strike our tents and move them into the shadow of the Rock of ages, where our feeble frames can borrow strength, as it were, from that great crag which was cleft that we might find a refuge. We, too, have a "tent of meeting" with its "Ark of the Presence"—a sanctuary into which we may, nay must, withdraw, that we may have fellowship with those of like precious faith, and hold communion with our Father and Lord. The benefits and blessings (and the responsibilities) provided by this temporary tent of meeting are too many and varied to be discussed here and are well known to us all, but we should like to consider briefly that cloud that sometimes "tarried long". (Num. 9. 19.)

When it moved it indicated that it was God's will that they (the Israelites) should continue on their pilgrimage, and when it tarried long it just as effectively indicated that it was God's will that they should be content to remain and await God's time. How often do we feel, as pilgrims and strangers, that it is time we moved on, and just as often do we allow earthborn clouds to obscure that pillar of fire, which assures us not only of God's abiding presence but also of His infallible guidance. Nevertheless that abiding cloud continues to hover over all who are making their way to a heavenly reward, and will indicate to each one of us how and when we are to move nearer to that desired haven. This picture can only be applied very loosely, for whereas in the type the children of Israel moved on in a body and entered Canaan as a nation, in the antitype each individual member down the Age has been led by that pillar of cloud to the gates of the New Jerusalem, there to await the call to enter in. It may well be that at this late hour the cloud that has tarried long will soon rise from about the "tent of meeting" and lead the remaining members of the Church into eternal fellowship with the Lord and all the saints—who knows! Our attitude should surely be that of the Apostle Paul as he "longed to be under cover of his home from God". He said "*I am prepared for this change by God, Who has given me the Spirit as its pledge and instalment. Come what may, then, I am confident; I know that while I reside in the body*

I am away from the Lord, and in this confidence I shall get away from the body and reside with the Lord. Hence also I am eager to satisfy him, whether in body or away from it". (2 Cor. 5. 5-10 Moffatt.) The Apostle was "eager to satisfy Him" and here indeed is the crux of the matter.

We have very briefly considered "what we have" with which we should be content, and as tent-dwellers we should indeed be content to wait with patience until the cloud that has tarried long lifts and bids us enter in, but as was suggested earlier we must never be content with what we are.

If we would be "satisfied" with a heavenly home, we must first satisfy Him Who is to be Judge of all. It is a sobering thought that "what we shall be" depends entirely upon "what we are". This may seem a sweeping statement but it is based upon the Apostle's words in 2 Cor. 5. 10. Rotherham's translation reads "For we all must needs be made manifest before the Judgment seat of Christ, that each may GET BACK the things done by means of the body, according to the things practised, good or corrupt". Moffatt's translation reads "For we all have to appear, without disguise, before the tribunal of Christ, each to be reputed (paid back) for what he has done with his body, good or ill". The term "body" in this text is synonymous with the term "tent" as used by both Peter and Paul, so whilst we have to be content with this body of ours, we must never be content with what we are doing with it. As we sojourn here below we have to mingle with all sorts and conditions; with neighbours, tradesmen, colleagues or workmates, as well as being privileged to meet from time to time with those of like precious faith, and we do find that every contact we make, every book we read, every meeting we attend, in fact that every experience which comes our way, leaves some impression upon these "tents" of ours. These impressions may be erased or retained according to the standards of behaviour which govern our conduct. They may be shallow or deep according to the intensity of the experience, so some are much more difficult to erase than others; but even as we can only keep our physical senses keen and alert by keeping our bodies clean, so we must keep our minds clean that our perceptive faculties may remain unimpaired. In this connection our Lord's words in Mark 7. 15 are very much to the point "*Nothing outside a man can defile him, it is what comes out defiles him*". So while we remain here as tent-dwellers, wait-

ing for the cloud that tarries to lift and guide us to our heavenly home, our lives should be a blending of quiet contentment and sanctified activity, our attitude should be one of acquiescence to the revealed will of God. At the same time we should seek that growth in holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.

Even as contentment is limited to earthly and mundane matters, and satisfaction raised to a higher level of living, so, if we are content with our lot now, shall we be satisfied with our heavenly reward. Satisfaction is not a mere acceptance of what is there, but a fulfilled desire for something else. With what shall we be satisfied? *"I shall be satisfied when I can break the fetters of flesh and be free. When the arms of my Father encircle his child, O, I shall be satisfied then."* The height of all spiritual aspiration is reached in the words of the Psalmist, *"I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness"*. Rotherham translates this *"In righteousness shall I behold thy face, shall be satisfied when awakened by a vision of thee"*. Leeser puts it *"As for me, in righteousness shall I behold thy face, I shall be satisfied when I awake with contemplating thy likeness"*. Would you wish to be awakened by a vision of the Lord? Would you be satisfied to be awakened contemplating his likeness? If so you must first satisfy Him. We are all waiting for, longing for, praying for this glorious change. So, whilst thus waiting for this the greatest of all blessings, let us be content but not complacent, let us work as well as watch, let us fight and not faint, let us be content with what we have, but let us stretch every nerve, pressing on to attain, by God's abounding grace, the victory which belongs to all overcomers, so that *"at the bidding of the upgoings of the cloud from off the tent"* we may be ready to move forward and enter into the Heavenly Canaan.

As pointed out at the beginning, the temporary dwelling of the wilderness gave way to more permanent dwellings when Israel set-

tled in the promised land; likewise when each member of the Church reaches the end of the way, their tent will be folded up, but what will take its place?

Jesus said, *"In my Father's house are many mansions"*, and even as the tent, which is the meanest of dwellings, is a fit picture of our earthly body, so the mansion, which may be considered the ideal dwelling, is a fitting picture of our *"home from heaven"*. Now we dwell in a tent, but when the cloud that has tarried long ascends finally into heaven, we shall be admitted into heavenly mansions. Shall we be satisfied with these celestial dwelling-places? Shall we not forget the tarrying of the cloud when, lost in wonder, we view with rapture our eternal home? Now we see as through a dim window, then we shall see face to face. Now, we are limited, frustrated by the frailty of our earthly tents. Now we are hampered by the imperfections of our finite minds. Now we become tired, faint and weary—then we shall enjoy unfailing and eternal energy—then, untrammelled by inherent weakness, we shall be gloriously endowed with inherent life. Now we must needs spend our days in earth's defiling atmosphere, now we must rub shoulders with evil and degraded men—then we shall spend eternity in the pure atmosphere of heaven in the presence of our God, our beloved Lord, and all the heavenly hosts. So we might continue, endeavouring to grasp the wonder, the beauty, the grandeur of our heavenly abode, but alas, these finite minds of ours cannot begin to comprehend the superlative dwelling places which await all who successfully pass the Judgment seat of Christ.

So, whilst we wait with patience for the final upgoing of the fiery cloud, let us, whilst there is yet time, seek to attain that perfect character-likeness to our Lord which will enable us to take our place in the sanctified assembly which will be ushered into heaven, there to dwell through all eternity in one of our Father's many mansions.

We all love the sunshine, but the Arabs have a proverb that *"all sunshine makes a desert"*; and it is a matter of common observation that the graces of Christian living are more often apparent in the cases of those who have passed through great tribulation. God desires to get as rich crops as possible from the soil of our natures. There are certain plants of the Christian life, such as meekness,

gentleness, kindness, humility, which cannot come to perfection if the sun of prosperity always shines. F. B. Meyer

* * *

He that is much in prayer shall grow rich in grace. He shall thrive and increase most that is busiest in this, which is our traffic with Heaven, and fetches the most precious commodities thence.

GOD OF ALL SPACE

2. Extra-terrestrial life and the Atonement

*Impact of space science
upon Christian belief*

The possibility of there being intelligent creatures in other parts of the universe is now generally accepted by scientists and the idea is familiar to nearly everyone through the twin mediums of serious literature and "space fiction". On the basis of the popular scientific view that life arose on this earth, not by creative act of God, but by the chemical action of lightning and ultra-violet light on basic earthly substances, converting them into amino acids which eventually developed into living cells, it is unreasonable to think that life must not have appeared similarly on many other planets, and this is the prevalent view today. If, however, it is held, with the Genesis account, that life appeared by direct creative act of God—irrespective of the physical forces employed—this reasoning does not necessarily hold good; the principles of Divine working "*first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear*" (Mark 4. 28) conceivably allow for a sequence of creation of life so that one particular planet is the first thus concerned. Since men cannot at present reach any other likely planet it is not possible dogmatically either to deny or affirm that extra-terrestrial life exists. From the purely scientific point of view it might be considered almost certain; from the Christian point of view its probability must also depend upon our knowledge of the revealed purpose of God, not for this earth and the human race only, but for His whole creation. But even so, the very existence of the wider universe presupposes that God has created it to be, at least eventually, the home of superabundant life. A telling point in this connection has been made by Hebwynd, who says, in "*The Living Universe*", "*It was once thought that the earth was divinely created and that life here was divinely inspired. Whether this is the case or not, it is still the height of conceit to suppose that a Deity would create life upon one insignificant planet and leave all the hosts of others barren and sterile. Such a view is, in fact, highly irreligious. It has always been said by the Church that all possible use, in the best way, must be made of existing materials. The planets are existing materials; to neglect them would be wasteful.*"

The question is of more than academic interest to thoughtful Christians for the central principle of the Christian faith is directly

involved; "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*" (1 Tim. 1. 15). If men of this world are not the only men, so runs the argument, then what of the others? Does Christ come again and again, repeatedly into the unsearchable future, dying time and again for the sins of successive races of sinful beings? And if not, why must He needs have come to us? Or is it conceivable that such other races as may exist have never sinned and therefore not needed a Saviour? In which case why could we on earth not have enjoyed the same happy state and never known the misery and pain which is associated with man's present not altogether satisfactory existence? Is the eternal destiny of such other creatures to be similar to that which is promised the sons of men? Are they also made in the image and likeness of God as was Adam and is Satan the god of those worlds in the sense that he is now the "*god of this world*" (2 Cor. 4. 4)? It is easy to shrug off such questions by saying that our personal relationship to Christ is the really important matter and the relation of possible other forms of life to our understanding of God's plans and principles is of no moment to us, but one must reflect that in the past the Christian faith has suffered through not keeping pace with the march of human knowledge; unless a reasoned and reasonable reply to such questions can be given, history is likely to repeat itself.

An enquiry of this nature and into such a subject cannot be expected to yield a comprehensive and detailed exposition of the Divine intentions respecting possible other created spheres of life; our ignorance of the nature and characteristics of such possible life must necessarily inhibit our understanding of the exposition if we had it, and in any case the Bible, which is the only guide-book to the things of God, is primarily concerned with man, his present life and his destiny. It only drops casual hints as to possibilities which lie outside the terrestrial sphere. But just as astronomers and physicists have found that the laws of Nature which hold good on earth are equally true throughout the universe, so we may be sure that the principles of Divine law, Divine government, Divine purpose, are equally valid in all God's creation. Those principles can be applied and should be applied to whatever may appear to be the

implication of such discoveries in space as have been made or may yet be made. The laws of God are as true at the extremities of the universe as they are upon earth.

The story of the creation of man as related in the Bible enshrines certain of these fundamentals. Whether the narrative of the Garden of Eden is considered a literal or a metaphorical account makes no difference to the underlying principle. Man first appeared upon earth, fresh from the hand of God, perfect and sinless. Admirably and completely adapted to his environment, he was commissioned to exploit, administer and maintain his home, and live his life in loyalty to, and reverence for, God. The implication is that whilst he remained in this happy state he would not be subject to death; the natural processes of waste and repair, of output and intake of energy, would balance, and the human organism continue indefinitely. The man, as a vehicle of Divinely-given life, would continue living, in harmony with his environment, as an orderly element in God's overall creative scheme. Whether this involved an everlasting attachment to this terrestrial earth or a later transfer to some other sphere of Divine creation does not affect that fact. Nevertheless it was intimated to man that failure to discharge his commission or retain his loyalty to God, any digression into disloyalty and rebellion and repudiation of his place in God's purpose, would of itself involve death—the loss of this newly-conferred life. Man did thus apostasise, and according to the Bible that apostasy, continued, has resulted in the presence of sin, evil and death, so evident a fact in the world. But this has not frustrated the Divine purpose for man. In "the fulness of time" Christ came from God to challenge the world's sin by allowing Himself to be put to death by evil men. Having then risen in his Divine glory and power, He comes again to abolish sin and evil and win men—those who can be won—back to God in a loyalty and love which, by reason of these very experiences, will not again be repudiated. This latter part of the programme has not yet materialised; it depends upon the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom which itself waits for the final ruin of this present world-order consequent upon mismanagement by incapable, selfish and evil men. The philosophy of the Atonement cannot be expounded in full in this treatise; only the bare facts can be stated, but from these it should readily be seen that there is an allotted span of time, a historical period, during which this planet earth is the scene of

the birth and development of a race of terrestrial creatures, passing through a direct and personal experience of the effects of sin from which all who so choose are ultimately recovered and rendered fitted for their future intended place in the Divine purpose. The extent of their further development, achievement and progress after that goal is attained does not at present appear, but one fixed principle emerges. Sin and evil will not again sully their lives, and life will be unending; this is eloquently expressed in the colourful vision of the New Jerusalem "*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*" (Rev. 21. 4).

Now this relates only to this earth and the human race. It has nothing to do with the affairs of any possible extra-terrestrial peoples whether in past, present or future time. It becomes a logical question whether such other animate creations, if they do now or will yet exist, must pass through the same sequence of a fall into sin and recovery therefrom before being admitted in their turn into the exalted fellowship of the sons of God. If earthly man at the beginning, pronounced in his perfection by his Creator as "very good", involved himself in the tragic history of sin and death which is familiar to all men, is it not to be expected that other creations, or at least some of them, would have behaved similarly? It is this kind of reasoning which has led some to conclude that in some mysterious fashion the actual experience of sin and subjection to evil is an essential factor in the development of any intelligent creature to the Divine ideal, so that God deliberately subjects all to its power that He might eventually save all; this logically leads to the belief that God is the instigator of evil. That might be good philosophy but it is bad theology, for it makes God responsible for man's bondage to sin which the Bible ascribes to the Devil, and it implies that evil must subsist to all eternity; both ideas are foreign to Bible teaching and must be objectionable to any thoughtful Christian, so that obviously there is another view of the matter which has to be sought.

The principle upon which that other view is founded is the clear teaching of Scripture that a time is coming when "*at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Phil. 2. 10-11). The Lord Christ is "*ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things*" (Eph.

4. 10); this means that after bringing the practice of evil to an end He does in a manner completely inexplicable to us fill the entire creation with His presence and power. There is no opposing voice, no alien soul. All are one in him, and He in them. Through Christ, we are told in the Epistle to the Colossians (1. 20) God will reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross. This kind of language expressly forbids any idea of repeated atonement for sins, of Christ dying as it were a second time and a third time and so on for successive sinful creations. "*This he did once*" says the writer to the Hebrews, indicating in his argument that it was once for all—Christ does not offer himself again (Heb. 7. 27). And since the history of the human race proves that no sinful creature is able to save himself, and only by the intervention and work of Christ can he be saved, it necessarily follows, so far as our reasoning on the basis of Scriptural revelation permits, that the influence and practice of evil is confined to this earth and its affairs and the time-span displayed in the Bible, from creation in Genesis to the consummation in Revelation.

Relevant to this it might be objected that the Bible itself indicates there has been sin amongst the angels, that there are "fallen angels" who, like fallen men, stand in need of reconciliation or judgment. Whilst this thesis is not universally accepted by all theologians or students of the Bible it is certainly true that the New Testament alludes several times to the "angels that sinned" (1 Pet. 1. 19-20, 2 Pet. 2. 4, and Jude 6), who now await judgment (1 Cor. 6. 3, Mark 1. 24, Luke 4. 34, Matt. 8. 28). All these references hark back to the historical event narrated in the sixth chapter of Genesis, where the implication is that in the days before the Flood certain angels from the celestial world "*forsook their own proper world*" as Peter puts it, took upon themselves human form and lived upon earth as human beings in a state of rebellion against God, in consequence of which they were banished from the celestial world and placed under some condition of restraint rather obscurely described as "*enduring chains of darkness*" "*until the judgment of the great day*". The details of this subject and the true nature of this irruption of celestial beings into the terrestrial sphere are not relevant here; what is relevant is the fact that upon the Scriptural showing of the matter the sin of these celestials was enacted while they masqueraded as human beings on this earth and

there is no suggestion that the sphere defiled by sin and evil, so to speak, extended beyond the earth and into heaven. St. Paul makes it plain in his doctrinal teaching that both fallen men and fallen angels enter into judgment together at one and the same time, and have the opportunity of reconciliation with God and restoration to the sinless state by one and the same redemptive act of Christ. (Col. 1. 20).

Now if this reasoning be well founded and in harmony with the Scripture—which is the only written authority on the subject of sin anyway—then, presumptuous as the idea may seem, it would follow that the two worlds of intelligent life of which we do know, one affected wholly and the other in part by sin, do constitute the first living creatures from the Creator's hand. There are Biblical indications such as Job 38. 7 which tend to show that the celestial world already existed when the earth came into being but so far as the story of evil is concerned they run in parallel, and that story is worked out for both worlds on the stage of this earth. The nature of the celestial world is discussed presently; it is not to be looked for in the terrestrial universe and none of those six hundred millions of inhabitable planets can be the home of the angels. Unless, despite all that has been said above, it is conceivable that other man-like creations have escaped the descent into sin which is pictured for us in the early chapters of Genesis, and have retained their pristine perfection before God, then those planets must still be empty, awaiting the life-giving power of the Divine Spirit "in due time".

One apparently practical objection to this view that may be urged is the fact that the creation has existed for untold ages past. How is it, the questioner may ask, that having prepared the scene for life, God waited so long before creating life? Here we enter strange and untrodden ground, for no one knows how long the universe has existed nor just how it came into existence. On the basis of known physical laws and the results of astronomical observations sundry abstruse mathematical calculations have led to estimates of the age of the universe ranging from ten to twenty thousand million years. Our sun and this earth are thought to be only some five thousand million years old so that the universe had been running quite a time before our solar system came into existence. Compared with man's normal life-span of under a hundred years these enormous figures are difficult to comprehend and in fact

mean very little. Our appreciation of time is bound up with our earthly lives and actions, the events that happen to us, and our biological mechanism. If our bodily operations, breathing, heart-beats, thoughts, were all reduced to one-tenth their present rate, natural forces such as the fall of rain-drops and the speed of wind all reduced to one-tenth also, then what we accomplish now in twenty years would then take two hundred but we would not be conscious of any difference. It must be that time to the Almighty does not mean the same thing as it does to human beings on earth; this fact must have been in the mind of Peter when, talking about the certainty of God's purposes despite His apparent tardiness in achieving them he said that one day and a thousand years are alike to God (2 Pet. 3. 8). The vast scale upon which He works dwarfs such small spans of time into insignificance although to man a thousand years is not at all the same thing as one day. We are already well accustomed to the fact that the period man has been on this earth is infinitesimal compared with the age of the earth; on the same basis it need not be considered illogical for the universe to have existed so long before the first signs of life appeared. Although the spirit or power of life comes from God himself, it is manifested in this universe in fleshly bodies, which so far as man is concerned are made from the chemical elements of the universe, princi-

pally from carbon, oxygen and hydrogen. If present understanding is correct, all the carbon and oxygen in creation has been synthesised in the stars from hydrogen, which is the basic material substance, and dispersed throughout space. It would be quite in keeping with the orderly progress of creation for God first to set in motion the forces of Nature and allow time for these elements to be manufactured, as it were, before proceeding to introduce life, which depends upon them, just as in the first two chapters of Genesis we have the orderly development of this planet into a suitable home for man before God uttered those significant words "*Let us make man . . .*".

Therefore, unless evil is not the disruptive and disorderly force in creation that we think it is, unless the prophet was mistaken when he said of God "*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil*" (Hab. 1. 13), we are bound to believe that the end of evil amongst men means the end of evil for all time and in consequence the end of sin. That would seem to imply that we are first in this widely spread universe and that in some wonderful fashion at present quite incomprehensible to us the history and experience of sin and evil upon earth will become the means of ensuring the development of future creations to maturity without any repetition of the dreadful scenes which for these many thousands of years past have marred the lives of men upon earth.

(To be Continued)

THE RULE OF THE IRON ROD

A scripture very familiar to the Bible reader who looks for the coming reign of Christ is that one in the Second Psalm "*Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel*" and even the most gentle of disciples has felt a thrill run through his being as he pictures a day in which all opposition to the Kingdom of righteousness is relentlessly crushed. Many have solaced themselves in present distress by anticipation of a coming day in which the tables will be turned on those who set themselves against the Lord's Anointed, and the proud and mighty of this world are compelled to lick the dust at the feet of earth's rightful Sovereign.

A number of Scriptures, mostly in the Books of Psalms and Revelation are habitually cited to buttress this idea of an all-powerful Dictator ruthlessly crushing all opposition and setting up his rule of absolute

righteousness and justice by the exercise of brute force. The end is considered to justify the means, and the Scriptural assurance that as a result of the Millennial reign all humanity will come into heart harmony with the Divine law of selflessness and love is held to stamp the means employed with the hallmark of Divine approval.

But the whole tenor of Christ's teaching discountenances the use of coercion or force. He himself resolutely refused to employ any other agency but love. Even although He faced death, the death for which He had come into the world, He refused to call upon the twelve legions of angels to come to his aid, and trod the winepress alone. When in surprise and mystification Pilate queried "*Thou art a King then?*" Jesus uttered those memorable words which have resounded down the ages, "*My kingdom is not of this world (kosmos)*" ELSE WOULD MY SERVANTS FIGHT".

Not for him the standards of kingship by which this world measures kings. And it was in the passive and yet overpowering force of love that the early Church went forth conquering—and conquered.

But if the teaching of Christ at his First Advent definitely repudiated the use of force as a means of accomplishing the work of his Kingdom, how shall statements of so definite a nature as Psalm 2. 9 and Revelation 2. 27 be understood? Certain it is that as students of the Divine Word we can neither afford to ignore them nor to wrest them to mean the opposite of their plain implication. We can only approach them, armed first with a clear knowledge of the principles upon which Christ will deal with man in the future Age and then look at these Scriptures in the light of their local meaning—the significance they had for the Israelites who lived in the day in which they were uttered—and so deduce that prophetic indication which is there given in the guise of a familiar reference to some everyday incident or custom.

It is generally agreed that the work of the Millennial Age is portrayed in miniature and in principle by the life of Jesus Christ, by his words, actions, miracles, and so on. It is equally definite that He preached the overcoming of hate by love, of greed by selflessness, of force by persuasion, of self-centredness by service for others. This then is the law of the Kingdom, and however the rule of the iron rod is to be understood it must in no sense do violation to the principles which underlie the teaching of Jesus. In a very real sense it must represent fairly and accurately the law of the Kingdom of God on earth.

What then is this rod of iron?

The figure, like so many in the Psalms, is a pastoral one. The shepherds of David's day—as both before and after, in the unchanging East—went about their occupation provided with two implements, the pastoral staff and the iron club. The iron club was the shepherd's weapon of defence, not only for himself, but also for his sheep; for the Palestinian shepherd followed his calling under very different circumstances to those associated in our Western minds with the care of the flock. The pastures were often found in mountainous and desolate places, and whilst roving bands of robbers threatened danger to the shepherd, wild beasts such as hyenas, jackals, bears, leopards and lions were liable to attack the flock, and the safety of the defenceless sheep depended entirely upon the watchfulness and strength of the shepherd.

A number of Scriptures attest the familiarity of Israel with the fact of wild beasts in their midst—as for example, 1 Sam. 17. 34-36, 1 Kings 13. 24, Jer. 5. 6; and to realise this aspect of the shepherd's work is to understand more clearly the import of our Lord's own words in John 10. 11-17 "*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep. He that is a hireling, and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, beholdeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth, and the wolf snatcheth them and scattereth them*".

The rod of iron (Hebrew—"Shebet") was the shepherd's iron club, his weapon of defence and his means of defending the sheep. But since in the ordinary course of events the shepherd's care for his sheep transcended all thought for himself, the iron club became in a very special sense associated with the protection of his flock from every kind of danger. This is borne out by the Scripture in a very remarkable manner. The quotation in Rev. 2. 27 "He shall rule them with a rod of iron" employs a Greek word (*poimaino*) which has the significance of "shepherding" in the sense of "feeding"; and the phrase would be more correctly translated "He shall shepherd them with the shepherd's club". In addition to its use for defence against robbers and wild beasts, the club was used for beating a way through jungle or undergrowth in the search for fresh pastures, and so its association with feeding as well as defence became obvious.

The same word is translated "feed" in John 21. 16 ("Feed my sheep") 1 Pet. 5. 2 ("Feed the flock of God") Rev. 7. 17 ("The Lamb which is in the midst of them shall feed them") and in several other instances. In the Old Testament the same allusion occurs in Micah 7. 14 "Feed thy people with thy rod", where "rod" again is translated from "shebet".

In the same connection also is the word of the Lord to the Israelites of Ezekiel's day "I will cause you to pass under the rod (*shebet*) and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant" (Ezek. 20. 37). "He will smite the earth" says Isaiah "with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked". (Isa. 11. 4.) This "iron rod" is in very truth a means of sustenance and defence to those who are the "children of the Kingdom" and who stand in need of that which the Kingdom is designed to provide.

But what is the significance of that parallel expression in Psalm 2. 9 "He shall break them

in pieces like a potter's vessel" and its companion text in Rev. 2. 27 "As the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers". Another Eastern custom of every day is alluded to here. A common occupation in the East was the making of "homrah", broken pottery reduced to a very fine powder by constant grinding with heavy stones, and used in the manufacture of cement. The common use of earthenware vessels of all kinds rendered an abundant supply of broken pottery continually available, and with painstaking care the makers of "homrah" squatted upon the ground with a little pile of potsherds between their feet and rolled the heavy boulder to and fro until the fragments were reduced to the finest of dust. Not until then was the "homrah" ready for the next stage in the making of cement for use in lining water cisterns and aqueducts, and for many other purposes.

Here then is afforded an eloquent picture of the disintegrating forces which break down and scatter not only the kingdoms of this world but all that is lifted up in defiance against Christ. The vivid picture drawn by Daniel when he expounded to King Nebuchadnezzar his dream of the great image is on the same line—the image broken to the ground and pulverised to dust by the "Stone" Kingdom—(Dan. 2. 34-35).

This disintegration is not of individuals, but of institutions, governments and organisations of man. "Everything that can be shaken will be shaken" says the writer to the Hebrews (12. 27) and every student is thoroughly familiar with the many lines of Scriptural reasoning which indicate that at the time when the reign of Christ begins it is the institutions of man which crash to destruction that every individual member of the human race may be given the opportunity of walking up the "Highway of Holiness" to perfection of life.

With this destruction of every man-made institution the individuals comprising them are set free to be built into that new and universal organisation which is the New Jerusa-

lem come down from heaven to earth—just as the broken potsherds were ground into dust in order that that same dust might be welded together in a new and indestructible cement that should endure forever. The broken potsherds, having outlived their usefulness and like a "garment, waxing old, ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8. 13) are converted into new and imperishable structure which shall serve the needs of man for all time. Could there be in all the range of Scripture allegory a more perfect picture of that "Stone" Kingdom, which "shall break in pieces and devour all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever".

Thus the entire picture is one of the beneficent reign of Christ under which evil will be restrained and the "flock" defended from those wild beasts of iniquity and sin which would otherwise still lie in wait and dog their footsteps; and the willing ones led by the "green pastures and still waters" of the Twenty-third Psalm, where they may in perfect confidence and security "obtain joy and salvation" whilst "sorrow and sighing will flee away" (Isa. 35. 10). In the meantime the enlightening influences of this day will have played their part in bringing about that "time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation" (Dan. 12. 1; Matt. 24. 21) in the course of which all the broken potsherds of human government will be reduced to the dust—and upon their ruins will arise the fair edifice of that "city" which hath foundations, "whose builder and maker is God" for which Abraham looked so many long years ago (Heb. 11. 10). The "iron rod" is a guarantee of Divine protection and sustenance to all mankind. The "breaking as a potter's vessel" predicts the final collapse of the power of man and the reconstruction work of the Millennial Age—founded upon love, peace, persuasion to good things, that the words of Isaiah so many centuries ago may at last come into a rich fulfilment—

"And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."

"Ye shall be my witnesses . . ." was the promise given by our Lord to those who were with Him before his Ascension. So often, these words are interpreted to mean that the Apostles would become preachers of the Word, but such interpretation is only part of the whole meaning of witness. Instead of confining the idea of "witness" to the evidence given in a court of law, we should remember that we use the word in other senses, as, for instance, when we speak of a

spectator as a witness. Probably the best sense of the word, however, as far as Christianity is concerned, is that implied by the Psalmist when he says, of the moon, that it is "a faithful witness in heaven". That celestial body witnesses to the sun by reflecting the light of the sun. The Christian's duty, therefore, is to reflect his Lord, and to be the faithful witness of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world.

"BLESS YE THE LORD"

*A discourse on
true worship*

Alone of all creatures on the earth man is gifted with the faculty of veneration. Grouped along with this faculty are others—conscientiousness, hope, spirituality, and benevolence—from the exercise of which spring the qualities of reverence and respect, and in co-ordination with the intellect enables man to understand and appreciate his relationship to the Higher Powers. Though linked at many points to the lower orders of creation, he yet enjoys a place apart in the realm of mental and moral values. On these higher planes he shares mutual kinship with the angelic world, in which thought and conduct is regulated and conditioned by righteousness, truth and purity. Not only do these faculties enable him to understand moral values, they also predispose him to show respect toward such values, to accept them as a rule of life, and yield reverence to the Higher Power, which, in its government and control, can superimpose these values upon its domain.

In this appreciation of moral values lies man's likeness to God. Even now, after thousands of years of decay and degradation, they who respond most readily to the claims of such values are esteemed to be the most like God. Many noble minds can render respect to God, by reviewing Nature's laws and ordinances. Here, Paul says, they can find the evidence of His eternal power and Deity. (Rom. 1. 20). But Scripture brings to view another field beyond the range of reason and creation, a field of revelation and providential oversight. Within this further field God claims from men a reverential response as His unchallenged right. Herein, it is His undoubted prerogative to command silence in his holy Presence as when, by inspiration, the Psalmist says, "*Be still and know that I am God*" (Psa. 46. 10), or again, through Habakkuk, "*The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him*". When breaking through into the range of man's consciousness, He can command the beholder to stand reverently before his heavenly majesty. Even his deputies, charged with his omnipotent commission, can command the same respect "*Put off thy shoe from thy foot,*" was the imperative command to Joshua from the heavenly visitor, "*for the place whereon thou standest is holy*" (Josh. 5. 13-15).

For the example *par excellence* of this

reverential respect we must betake ourselves to God's picture gallery, the place of ceremonial worship within the Holy Place of the Tabernacle. Without, on the Brassen Altar, the tokens of the people's worship were consumed by fire, but within that Holy Place an exclusive act of reverential devotion for the priestly house was undertaken by a white-robed priest. There, the hour of incense being come, the Priest appointed brought his censer filled with fire, and depositing it upon the golden surface of the Altar of the Presence, crumbled small the finely powdered incense in his hands, and let it gently fall upon the glowing flame, from whence, in rising wreaths of scented smoke, a cloud of fragrance ascended up into the Presence of the Holiest of all. Day by day this procedure was carried through, an act of ceremonial observance oft repeated! In this simple act the illustration of devotion lies enshrined. Here, more than in any other sphere of Israelitish worship or experience, man drew nearer to God, and pledged him more in service than in any other place.

In the Holy Place this item of its furnishings stood nearer to the inner sanctum than any other article within its walls. The writer to the Hebrews places the Altar as though it actually stood in the Most Holy. Undoubtedly its location was in the Holy Place, and had that writer been describing only the fixation of the furnishings he would most likely have located it there. But its relationship to the specific service for which it was used undoubtedly connects it to the furnishings of the Most Holy. Thus, for this act of devotion, the Incense Altar was coupled with the Ark, the Mercy-Seat and the Cherubim within the Most Holy. When God instructed Moses concerning the service of the Priests, He had said "*thou . . . shalt anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them that they may minister unto Me in the Priest's office*" (Ex. 28. 41). The other items of furniture in the Holy Place were intended for the Priest's own needs; the Candlestick for his illumination, the Table for his sustenance. Only the Altar was installed and fixed with a Godward intent; only by this could the Priest perform his ministry towards his God. That this service at the Altar was the most distinctive and important of the Priestly duties may be deduced from a comparison

of two episodes in the experiences of Israel's kings. The first relates to David, who, as a fugitive, arrived with his little company, famished and weary, at Nob, to ask for bread. Other supplies being unavailable, neither Ahimelech the High Priest, nor David, as God's King-elect, entertained the least scruple at their partaking of the Presence Bread, though as Jesus said, it was lawful only for Priests to eat. No dire consequences followed this irregular act, nor was the least displeasure of Heaven indicated against the course pursued. (1 Sam. 21. 1-6). The other episode is that of King Uzziah, who, flushed with pride in an hour of victory presumptuously forced his way into the Holy Place intending to burn incense there. Thereupon Azariah the High Priest withstood him to the face, reminding him that "*It pertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron that are consecrated to burn incense; go out of the Sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed, neither shall it be for thine honour from the Lord God*" (2 Chron. 26. 17-18). Hereupon Uzziah became exceeding wroth against the priests; then, as he proposed in utter disregard of their reproof and warning to continue with his presumptuous act, the anger of the Lord fell heavily upon him. Then and there, in the presence of the priests, and still within the sacred precincts of the Holy Place, the terrible scourge of leprosy smote him—a visitation so unmistakably from the Lord that he hastened himself to go out of the Holy Place, to bear the stigma for the rest of his days.

That the presentation of incense was an act of service watched over by the Lord with intense care is demonstrated, too, by the tragic end befalling Nadab and Abihu. So superlatively important was this phase of Priestly ministration that no man, even though of Aaronic line, could be permitted to trifle with his duties carelessly or presumptuously. (Lev. 10. 1-7). In further proof of Heaven's estimation of this Altar-service reference may be made to Ezek. 44. 10-16. This Scripture indicates that God reserves to himself the right to withdraw the privilege of service in the Holy Place, with its special ministry "unto Me", from any former consecrated priest guilty of participating with the people in idolatry. Only such as had faithfully kept the charge of his Sanctuary could be allowed "to come near to Me to minister unto me".

Now it is fully conceded that all these things were typical, "shadows" of "good things to come", imposed upon and observed

by Israel until a time of reformation. Even so, every shadow pre-supposes its corresponding reality, to which, in some sense, it bears resemblance. Thus Heaven itself is the counterpart of the Most Holy; our Heavenly Place and standing in Christ, of the Holy Place; a better Priesthood with Jesus as its great High Priest, of the Aaronic House; and our "better sacrifice", of the blood of bulls and goats. Imagine then the situation in the Holy Place, the hour of incense being come. Here at the Altar stands the Priest, silent and alone. Here on the Altar stands the brazier filled with glowing coals. Carefully he begins to crush and drop the finely powdered incense into the living flame, from which arises clouds of fragrant smoke which fill the Holy where he stands, and penetrate also into the holier Sanctuary beyond. In this he has performed the most distinctive and important service to which he and his companions were called. And this solemn service was repeated every day save one! Just fire, and incense and fragrant smoke—a white robed priest, and God.

What did the everlasting God, the God of Israel, think of all this ceremonial particularity? Why must it be done "just so"? Why must that fragrant incense be reserved for him alone? Had He not caused that white-robed ministrant to know that in the strict observance of all this meticulous ceremonialism he was ministering to his God; that truly, really and actually it was a service "unto Me"? Was it really true that the fragrant smoke was a pleasant odour unto Him? Most surely He had taught that son of Aaron to believe it so—but why? Behind that son of Aaron, but on a higher plane, stands the Head of a better Priesthood, of which Jesus is the High Priest! Can it be that something of that special privilege was intended to be carried up from that lowlier to that higher plane, and thus to cause the spiritually-minded son of God to know that something in his private approach to these holy things would be as fragrant and acceptable to Almighty God as that incense-smoke had been to Israel's God? Can it also be that in these prayerful worshipful approaches there is again, on this higher plane, a ministry "unto Me"? Does the New Testament have any word to say of "odours of sweet smell" unto God? Does the New Testament have any word to say about "drawing near" to the highest and the holiest things, on the higher plane? Has it any word to say about a reverential "*boldness to enter the Holy Place*", there to stand before a Throne of

Grace? While the right of entry to the Holy Place was a *privilege common to all the Priesthood* at any time, yet, when the hour of incense was come the Priest appointed must approach alone, and remain alone at the Altar till the presentation was complete. We see an instance of this in the case of Zacharias, into whose presence came the Angel Gabriel to announce the birth of a son. (Luke 1. 8-11.) At such a time one dominating thought must have possessed the priestly mind. While face to face with God he must relegate all other claims pertaining to the Camp to the subconscious stratum of his mind. His time and service must now be devoted exclusively to God. Woe betide him if at such a time the sorrows of the people should take first place! A rebellious and stiff-necked people may be dwelling in the Camp, but what of that? Here at this Altar he must constrain himself to quietness and attentiveness to the higher claims of his God!

Is there anything like this in the Christian's way of life? Is there a rebellious world surrounding him on every hand, pressing, by its groans, its needs upon his sensitive and compassionate heart? Even so, he cannot give primary attention to that—his first response must be to the claims of God. It must be God first—other things will be righted in due time. The need and value of the private approach to the Holiest is beyond appraisal. What would we not give to have more detail of the solitary hours of our Lord away there on the mountain top? What would He have to say to fill the long night hours with prayer so frequently? If we take our cue from the few snatches of submissive and thanksgiving prayer put on record for us by his hearers we can be sure his hours of isolation were filled with prayers of the utmost devotion. If that intercessory prayer in the Upper Room be our guide, what sincere devotion, coupled with filial boldness was ever the keynote of his life. "*Holy Father*"—"Righteous Father" were the terms which sprang spontaneously from his lips. Perhaps some day, when angelic tongues are unloosed, we may come to know and understand how Jesus dropped his incense into the consuming fires and how his attestations to full devotion to his Father's Will rose up to God as incense sweet.

What then is true devotion to God? Is it to be found in the isolation of the monastic cell, or the Cathedral's cloistered chambers? Is it to be found in entire separation from the company of men? By no means. Jesus lived no monastic or separated life away from men,

yet, in the minds of men He was separated unto God. Perhaps the old-time Quaker came near to understanding this, when, seated along with men, he could yet commune with God, without ceremony or words. "Retire thou to the Light that is within thee" was his guiding thought. Does devotion not express itself in singing hymns, in making public prayer, in the delivery of expositions or exhortations, by lecture or address? No, not necessarily so! Devotion must abound ere yet the hymn is sung, the prayer framed, or the address constructed! Each and all may be the expression of a devoted life, exactly as mental effort or muscular movement may be the expression of a life-power within our bodies, but the life-power and these are not the same thing. True devotion, veneration, reverence, is the sequel to a life lived unto God, a life that takes a delight in ministering unto him, a life that brings its choicest things to be absorbed, as incense, in the accepting fire of his love.

Devotion of this kind does not express itself, first and foremost in activities towards the Camp—it knows that the world's day is yet to come. Instead devotion of this deeper kind pays its main attention to the claims of God and to the needs of the deeper hidden life within—to the life that is "hid with Christ in God"! Its motto first and foremost is "God first"—it says "I delight to do Thy Will, O my God"; its purpose is "this one thing I do"; its realisation is "I am crucified with Christ, yet I live, and yet it is no longer I that live, but Christ who liveth in me".

Is then devotion of this kind a practicable possibility in this present day? Ought this experience to be a characteristic of the Fellowship? All who appreciate the calling of the Lord must say, "Yes, surely, it ought so to be". It could be and would be, if each one brought a *spiritually-charged heart* to the gathering. In this case the spirit of the whole depends upon the spirit of its individual parts.

The great desideratum is that it should be realised in the life of the individual; for as Paul reminds us, our bodies, individually, are as temples of the Lord our God. We each carry within us the structure of the Tabernacle brought down to a fine focus. We have our point of contact with the Camp—our wider work-a-day world; our contact with the "Court"—with those of religious mind; our contacts with the Holy Place—with those who walk with spiritual illumination and feed on the more deeply spiritual food; and that

deeper inner Sanctum of the soul in which we feel the promise of the Saviour come true. *"We will come unto him and make our abode with him"* (John 14. 23). Hence every true child of God should be a copy of the Tabernacle in miniature, in the very heart of which dwells the token of a *Shekinah* Presence, and in which is located also, as it were, an In-

cense Altar, to which as opportunity serves, he inwardly retires, there to crumble and present the loving fragrance of an obedient life. In the words of the old Quaker dictum, it is well to *"retire to that which is within thee and there commune with him that dwelleth in thy soul"*.

A DARK SAYING OF JESUS

"And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matt. 13. 10, 11).

This passage is not to be taken as implying that Jesus deliberately veiled his message in obscure sayings, "parables" in order to keep his Truth from those to whom it was "not given" to understand. Such a thing would be out of accord with the object of his mission. He came to bring the message of life to all men and to turn them from the way of darkness to that of light. The idea that God arbitrarily selects some individuals to receive His Truth and just as arbitrarily withholds it from all others is against the revealed principles of His dealings with man and, too, against all common sense. He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should turn from their wickedness, and live". It follows that

whosoever in this Age turns toward the Father by the exercise of faith in Jesus will be received and encouraged to the full extent to which he is prepared to go. But not many have that initial turning of the heart to God which alone enables them to see enough of His ways to bring them to Him. That is what Jesus meant by this saying. It was "not given" to the people in general to understand the message of the kingdom; they just did not have, in their hearts, that which is necessary to enable the taking of the first step. And because of that fact Jesus spoke to them in parables, stories they could understand, if by that means he could awaken in their hearts some glimmering of understanding which in turn might lead them to God. The parables were because of their blinded condition, a means whereby perchance their eyes could be opened, not a device by which their blindness was to be made permanent.

BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT

"By one Spirit we are all baptised into one body . . . and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12. 13).

The best manuscripts have it "and have all been made to drink one Spirit". The Diaglott renders "and all one Spirit were made to drink". But what does it mean to "drink" the Spirit? The thought is that of being, as it were, saturated with the Spirit in every fibre of one's being, in much the same way as a plant, being watered, takes up the water into every part, into stem and leaf and flowers. In fact the same word (*potizo*) here rendered "drink" is rendered "watered" in "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3. 6). Again in 1 Cor. 3. 2 it is rendered "fed"—"I have fed you with milk and not with meat". Having received of

the Holy Spirit to the extent of our ability, we have become, as the Apostle exhorts us in Eph. 5. 18 "filled with the Spirit". The thought of drinking in the Spirit must have been in Paul's mind when he exhorted "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be ye filled with the Spirit". With this thought in mind it would seem that the best translations of this expression "all made to drink into one Spirit" are those of Moffatt and the Twentieth Century, both of which have it "we have all been imbued with one Spirit". It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we have all been baptised into one body, and now, being one body, we all, individually, are filled, "saturated" with that Spirit, and so all have become in our bodies temples of the living God.



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

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

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Thought for the Month

"A people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense on altars of brick . . . which say 'Stand by thyself, come not nigh to me, for I am holier than thou'. These are a stench in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day" (Isa. 65. 3-5).

Not only in the days of Isaiah was that spirit manifested. We have it to-day, with ourselves, in the professedly Christian church, all too often a smug self-righteousness which is the very negation of all for which Christ stood. There were Pharisees two thousand years ago who *"trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others"*. They have their spiritual descendants today; if the Lord Jesus was right when He told those of his own time that they were of their father the Devil, we should logically come to the same conclusion now. That might come as a shock to some who labour under the delusion that they and they alone have the monopoly of Divine Truth. Better that kind of shock than the one that would inevitably come if they should stand and hear the Saviour say *"I never knew you . . . workers of iniquity"*. *"There is a generation"* said the Wise Man in Proverbs *"O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up"*. Complacent in the oversight of the little religious clubs they control, secure in the knowledge of their own assured salvation, contemptuous of believers whose understanding of the Divine mysteries differs anyway from their own, and resolved to allow no breath of air from outside to disturb the serenity of their sacred enclosure! But nothing can hinder the development of Divine Truth as it becomes known to successive generations, and nothing can restrain the strivings of the human spirit after a more

accurate understanding of the ways of God. The very impulse so to strive was at the first built in human nature by God.

Sacrificing in gardens; burning incense on altars of brick! It is a terrible condemnation, and so easily earned. It is tempting to apply the terms to certain church buildings or particular Christian groups. But the Most High is not talking about our denominational affiliations when He talks like this, nor yet our preference for one or another kind of worship, whether rich in ceremonial or Puritan in simplicity. He is talking about those who use their position in the church to build a wall around their flocks to separate them from others of Christ's brethren, to compel them to gather around a man-made altar instead of the table of the Lord. Such, He says, are as the acrid smoke of a fire burning all day long and getting into the nostrils — an ever-present irritant and vexation. And that is a very different thing from the incense which ascends to God from his faithful as a sweet-smelling savour. We all do well to remember that.

Gone from us

—:—
 Bro. W. T. Davies (*Merthyr Tydfil*)
 Bro. L. Evans (*London*)
 Bro. H. Kipps (*London*)
 Bro. J. H. Murray (*London*)
 Bro. A. A. Palmer (*London*)
 —:—

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

DANIEL IN BABYLON

4. Master of the Magicians

*The story of a
great man's faith*

Something like twenty years elapsed between the respective events of the second and third chapters of Daniel, the king's dream of the image and the casting of Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah into the fiery furnace, twenty years of which the Book of Daniel says not a word, but a period crowded with important happenings and incidents in the story of Israel. During that time Judah became finally free from the dominion of Egypt and subject to Babylon, Jehoiakim king of Judah died and after the short three months' reign of Jehochin was replaced by Zedekiah. The king of Babylon besieged and captured Jerusalem, laid the land desolate and took the bulk of the people captive, thus completing the "carrying away into Babylon" which marked the end of the Jewish monarchy. Ezekiel the priestly prophet commenced his ministry amongst the exiles and saw the first of those glorious visions which culminated many years later in his wonderful foreview of the Millennial Temple that is yet to be. Obadiah and Habakkuk both gave voice to their prophecies in Judea. Jeremiah continued his work and was finally taken into Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem, and died there. Cyrus the Persian, before whom the might of Babylon was eventually to crumble away, was born. All these things happened during this twenty years which lie between Chap. 2, and Chap. 3, and Daniel does not so much as mention any one of them.

He was about twenty-one years of age when he stood before King Nebuchadnezzar and interpreted the dream of the image. At the time of the burning fiery furnace incident he was probably just entering his forties. During the interim he steadily advanced in favour with the king and in power, honour and influence. According to Chap. 2. 48, in consequence of his interpreting the king's dream, *"the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of*

Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon." Later on, in chap. 4. 9, Daniel is referred to by the title "Master of the Magicians." These expressions indicate that the Jewish youth had become, next to the king himself, the most important and influential person in the land. Such sudden accession to a position of power from a humble origin may appear strange and improbable to our Western minds but it was by no means an uncommon thing in the court of an Eastern King. Joseph was summarily exalted by the Pharaoh of Egypt in just the same way; Haman was deposed and Mordcai raised to take his place by Ahasuerus of Persia, as related in the Book of Esther. Classical historians record plenty of similar instances in ancient times, and there is no reason to question the integrity of the story on this account.

The titles used make it clear that Daniel had been elevated to the position of what we would call Prime Minister of the land, and in addition constituted titular head of all the Babylonian priest-hoods and learned men. It is as though he combined the offices of Prime Minister, Archbishop of Canterbury, and President of the Royal Society all in his own person. At twenty-one years of age it was a situation calling for a most unusual degree of wisdom and discretion. The sequel to the story shows that Daniel possessed both in ample measure.

This is an aspect of the Babylonian captivity which is not always appreciated. It is customary to think of the hapless Jews going to servitude and slavery in a strange land, at the mercy of ruthless captors and bereft of the consolations of their own religion. *"By the waters of Babylon we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered thee, O Zion."* *"How can we sing the songs of Zion in a strange land?"* That may well have been the heart attitude of those to whom Jerusalem and Judea and the worship which could only be offered in the hallowed land meant

more than anything else in the world. But it is not likely that the captive Jews were badly treated. The story before us shows that God, although He had fulfilled His word and removed them from their own land in punishment for their apostasy, nevertheless marvellously provided for their wellbeing in the land of their captivity. Daniel was virtual ruler over all domestic concerns in the whole realm, and he had as his lieutenants other three of their own countrymen. Surely this quartette, able to decree more or less as they pleased, saw to it that their own people were at least fairly treated compared with the rest of the population. The term "province" in chap. 2. 48 means "realm" or "empire"; the "whole province of Babylon" denotes the entire realm over which King Nebuchadnezzar had control, and the fact that during the major part of his reign he personally led his armies in the field and was necessarily absent from his capital city for long periods makes it fairly certain that Daniel was to administer on his behalf and watch for his interests in his absence.

The first use that Daniel made of his new appointment was to urge upon the king the advisability of some delegation of authority. The import of verse 49 is that his three friends, now known as Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, were put in charge of the detailed administration of day-by-day matters, "set over the affairs of the province of Babylon," whilst Daniel himself remained in daily attendance on the king himself for the discussion of important matters. "Daniel sat in the gate of the king."

So for a span—probably for a large part of Nebuchadnezzar's reign—the empire was ruled by a "cabinet" of which at least the four leading members were Jews. It was during these forty years that the empire expanded to its greatest extent and its wealth and magnificence reached their peak. Secular historians ascribe the honours for this to King Nebuchadnezzar, on the strength of his many inscriptions, in which he takes all the credit to himself. One wonders how much of this prosperity was in fact due to the wise

and just administration of the four Jews who must of necessity have borne a large share of the responsibility for what was achieved.

That fact poses a question. What were these men doing, helping to build up a system which God had already condemned and against which the prophet Jeremiah, still away in the homeland of Judea, was pouring forth his most passionate denunciations? What kind of service to God was this which resulted in the establishment, more firmly than ever before, of an utterly idolatrous and corrupt system which God intended to destroy? Was it, that like Jonah at Nineveh, God gave Babylon a last chance to repent? True enough it is that Babylon became a means in the Lord's hand for the chastisement of Israel but Babylonians as well as Israelites were the creation of God's hands and even with that debased nation it must have been true that God *"hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth; wherefore turn you from your evil ways, and live ye."* Just as Nineveh had forty years grace by the preaching of Jonah—and by reason of her repentance earned a remission of the threatened overthrow for something like two hundred and fifty years, for Jonah preached about B.C. 850 and Nineveh was not overthrown until B.C. 612—so in Daniel's day Babylon had forty years' opportunity to profit by the righteous administration of men of God, and mend its ways. There is a cryptic word in Jeremiah's prophecy which can only be understood if something like this was indeed the case. *"We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go every man into his own country: for her judgment reacheth unto heaven."* (Jer. 51. 9) It is a historical fact that during Nebuchadnezzar's reign, when according to the Bible Daniel and his friends administered affairs of state, Babylon prospered and ruled the nations unchallenged. It is also a historical fact that directly Nebuchadnezzar was dead, and they were ousted from their positions, the decline and fall of Babylon set in. A succession of five kings over a period of only twenty three years, the Persian enemy

hammering at the gates; then the dramatic fall of Babylon so eloquently portrayed by Jeremiah fifty years before and Isaiah nearly two centuries before. These are facts of history which cannot be disputed, and the logical conclusion is that Daniel and his friends were in the positions they occupied by the will and providence of God. Having been thus appointed they did right in exercising to the fullest extent, in harmony with the principles of Divine law, the earthly powers with which they had been entrusted. The fact that they served a pagan king and ruled an idolatrous people made no difference to that. They let their personal light shine, they did not at any time compromise their own principles or beliefs, and they did with their might what their hands found to do.

In all that there may well be a lesson for us to-day. All too often the argument is advanced that because of the inherent corruption of the world around us, Christians should withdraw from all participation in its affairs, especially in regard to the occupation of positions of influence or authority. It does not always follow; it may be that the inscrutable decrees of God require that we or at least some amongst us, take up some such position and administer it as did Daniel in his time, and Joseph before him "*Ye are the salt of the earth*" said Jesus, but He surely never intended us to assume the salt was not to be used. We can only be the salt of the earth if we are fulfilling, in society, the function which salt fulfils in food. "*In the world, but not of it*" says the Apostle. Some Christians are neither of the world nor in it, and that fact is not likely to stand them in good stead when the time comes for our Lord to determine who, by intimate acquaintance and experience with the needs and failings of fallen humanity are to be appointed to the work of leading men back to God.

"As "chief of the governors of the wise men" (ch. 2. 48) and "master of the magicians" (ch. 4. 9) Daniel became the official head of the entire Babylonian priestly system, which itself controlled every branch of knowledge and learning practised in the land. He

was supreme High Priest of the nation. Religious worship, education, the compilation and care of the national records, were all under his control. The temples, the schools, the libraries, all were his responsibility. All this, too, whilst he was still in his twenties. It was in the third year of Jehoiakim that he was taken to Babylon at probably about eighteen or nineteen years of age. He received three years' training before appearing before the king early in the sixth year. Nebuchadnezzar's father died at the time of the Battle of Carchemish, which was in Jehoiakim's fourth year, and this was the commencement of Nebuchadnezzar's sole reign (Jer. 25. 1). That must have been towards the end of Jehoiakim's fourth year so that Nebuchadnezzar's "second year" (Dan. 2. 1) in which he dreamed of the image, would extend nearly to the end of Jehoiakim's sixth year. Hence there is time for Daniel's three years training to have been completed and several more months to elapse before he again stood before the king and interpreted the dream. There is no need to imagine, as some do, that "second year" in Dan. 2. 1 is an error and casts doubts upon the accuracy of Daniel's account. (Some commentators on this account suggest that ch. 2. 1 is a copyists error for "twelfth year" but there is no evidence whatever for this.) The incidents of Daniel's life and all the events connected therewith can only be made to fit together on the basis that, as the Book of Daniel indicates, he attained his eminent position before the king thus early in life.

Daniel was now Supreme Pontiff—official Babylonian title "Rab-Mag"—of all the religious systems of Babylon. This is the title which was afterwards taken over by the Popes of Rome and Latinised into "Pontifex Maximus". As such he controlled the magicians, sorcerers, soothsayers, astrologers, wise men and Chaldeans, in addition to the priests of the various and many gods of Babylon. Each of these orders had distinct and separate functions; thanks to modern research and the discovery of abundant written records it is possible to-day to form a tolerably correct

picture of what these men were and what they professed to accomplish.

The "magicians" (*kheartumin*) were men whose office was to repulse and exorcise demons and evil spirits by means of spells and incantations. They carried wands of office and were popularly supposed to have the power of working miracles. If the crops failed, a man's cattle died, or a whirlwind blew a house down, the magician was called in to exorcise the demon who was thus venting his spite against the unfortunate family concerned.

Closely allied to these were the sorcerers (*kashaphim*) who were utterers of magic words having the mystic power of persuading the gods to grant favours to their devotees. The man who desired some natural advantage, such as the gift of children, or the removal of an offending neighbour, sought the services of the sorcerer, who would know just what secret magical words to utter to constrain the appropriate god to perform the required service.

The "soothsayers" (*gazrim*) of Dan. 2. 27 were diviners who professed ability to pronounce upon the probable outcome of any human circumstance by the aid of laws which they alone understood. If a new venture was to be undertaken or the king proposed to launch a new war, the soothsayer was consulted in much the same way as some people go to fortune-tellers to-day. The selected dignitary had several means of arriving at his conclusions, a favourite one being the inspection of the liver of an animal sacrificed for the purpose. (An example of one of these soothsayer's "stock-in-trade" is now in the British Museum. It is a baked clay model of a sheep's liver marked out in fifty squares. In each square is inscribed the portent for that particular spot.) In the divining ceremony, the liver from the sacrificed animal was examined and if any spot was diseased or showed some abnormality the portent for that particular spot was pronounced as an omen for the venture or project under review. Reference to this form of soothsaying in Daniel's own time is made in Ezek. 21. 21, where we are told

that the king of Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar) uncertain which of two ways to take, "looked in the liver".

Next come avowed occultists, the "astrologers" ("*assaphim*") of Dan. 1. 20. The term is a mis-translation. These men held communion with evil spirits with the object of gaining information not obtainable in any other way. Their methods and practices were the same as those of spiritists in every age.

The "wise men" ("*khakamin*") of Dan. 2. 18 and elsewhere were really the medical fraternity. Disease and sickness was popularly considered to be the work of demons and hence magical practices to drive out the evil spirit responsible was a large part of a physician's stock-in-trade. Prayers and incantations to the gods also came in for attention. Nevertheless true medical knowledge was not altogether lacking, and the medical works which have survived show that a very fair understanding of many diseases was the rule; the names of over five hundred medicinal drugs have been identified in the Babylonian pharmacopeia. Their more intimate contact with the common people brought them into more immediate touch with many everyday problems and hence, as is often the case with medical men today—or at least was the case before the advent of the Welfare State with its nationalised "Health Service"—the local medical man was considered an important and knowledgeable member of the community whose standing and authority in any matter of civic or social interest was undisputed.

Chaldeans ("*kasdim*") was the name originally given to the primitive people of the land and in any other part of the Bible preserves this sense. In the Book of Daniel, however it is limited to a certain class of men within the nation; men who formed a kind of quasi-secret society which preserved the lore and traditions of the past, and exercised power and influence behind the scenes—a kind of "Hidden Hand". This caste of Chaldeans was the senior of all the orders of society which have just been described.

On the purely religious side Daniel must have had a bewildering array of gods and

goddesses, each with their temples and priests, with which to contend. First of all came the Babylonian Trinity, Ea, god of the sea and supreme god; Anu, god of heaven; Bel or Marduk (one is the Semitic and one the Sumerian name for the same god) god of the earth. Marduk was the son of Ea, was known as the "Wisdom of Ea", and was supposed to have created the earth and man upon it—a notable anticipation of the later Scriptural presentation of the Son of God Who is also the Word or Wisdom of God and by Whom all things were made. The chief goddess was Ishtar, Queen of Heaven (Ash-taroth to the Syrians and Venus in classical mythology). Another important deity was Sin the Moon-god, patron deity of Ur, Abraham's birthplace, and incidentally the source of the name Mount Sinai and the Wilderness of Sin through which Israel travelled at the time of the Exodus. Both mountain and wilderness were named in honour of the Moon-god.

Then came a number of lesser gods, seven messenger-gods or "archangels", an indeterminate number of "Watchers", three hundred spirits of the heavens, three hundred spirits of the earth, then angels and demons, good and evil, innumerable. One can imagine Daniel at times in earnest conversation with King Nebuchadnezzar, telling him of the hollowness and falsity of all this mass of superstition and corruption, and endeavouring to turn his mind to the glory of the one incorruptible God, in whom all men live, and move, and have their being. (Acts 17. 28.)

Why did Daniel accept such a position, when every instinct of his being must have risen in protest at the sights he would inevitably witness and the ceremonies he must needs allow The answer is simple. God had called him to this position, and he was able to discern enough of God's purpose to know that God is all-wise and that some definite reason lay behind that call.

The very fact of his high position was sufficient to release him from any necessity to condone or attend the idolatrous ceremonies. There were many faiths in Babylon—one for every god—but Daniel, as chief, was above

them all. Who can doubt that, in all the majesty and dignity of his exalted position, he prayed with his windows open towards Jerusalem daily, as is recorded of him at a later time in his life (Dan. 6. 10). Who can doubt that he assembled for worship with his fellow-countrymen of like faith in some plain, dignified building where God was worshipped in spirit and in truth. The known character of Daniel is sufficient guarantee to us that his official position only served to show up the more prominently to all men the faith that was in him and to give glory to the God he served.

Nebuchadnezzar had already admitted Daniel's God to a place among the gods of Babylon. Moreover, he later on publicly proclaimed Him as being the greatest and most powerful of all gods (Dan. 3. 29 and 4. 35). Hence Daniel could with perfect propriety profess the worship of the God of heaven just as other notables might select Bel, or Nebo, or Nergal, as their own deity. The officials of the court, and the common people too, would not be likely to quarrel with the personal views of a man so high in favour with the king as was Daniel; and neither would the priests of the various temples, while the king lived. They would of course bide their time until a king more favourable to the native priesthood should ascend the throne.

It might have been, then, for twenty years or more, that the lad, now grown to middle age, administered his charge with loyalty both to his God and to his king. Beholding, as he did, every day, the sensuousness and idolatry of the God-dishonouring system in which his life was being spent, he must often have cried out in his heart "*How long, O Lord, how long?*"

But the ways of God require slow ages for their full accomplishment, and it must needs be that for many weary years more the mystery of iniquity would and still continues to work, until in God's own time comes the day when "*the law of the Lord shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem*" and the Lord as it were arousing Himself at long last, shall "*take away the veil that is spread over all nations.*"

(To be continued)

THE GRANDSON OF MOSES

*The Story of
the first apostasy*

The name of Moses stands out in Israel's history as that of the man who welded twelve unorganised tribes into a nation, brought that nation into covenant relationship with God, and throughout a long life stood firmly in his allegiance to the God of Israel and carried the nation with him in that allegiance. Israel never forgot him. Fourteen hundred years later, in the days of Christ, the words and commands of Moses were still regarded as law. No greater man had ever lived or would ever live, said every pious man of Israel. *"There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face"* (Deut. 34. 10) was the comment of the ancient chronicler who closed the story of Moses' life. He was a mighty man and a stalwart for the righteousness of God. *"Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day"* was his final exhortation to the nation just before his death *"which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life; and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land"* (Deut. 32. 46-47). All the greater tragedy, therefore, that Moses' own grandson and his descendants for six centuries were apostates from the worship of God, serving an idol altar throughout the entire time of Israel's occupancy of the land.

Moses had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, both born to him before the Exodus, during the period of his exile in Midian. One son at least was still a child at the time of the Exodus and they both entered the Promised Land. Neither of them appear to have inherited the outstanding characteristics of their celebrated father and they seem to have been undistinguished members of the Levites, an office theirs by right of descent from Moses, and probably served as such in some community in Israel. They are not mentioned in the historical narratives and it is evident that no particular honour was paid them in respect of their relationship to the great

deliverer of the nation. In the early days we read of stalwart men who rose up to defend and lead the people struggling to consolidate their hold on the land—Joshua, Caleb, Othniel, Ehud, but not Gershom or Eliezer. The mantle of Moses did not fall on his sons; it passed to others.

Four centuries later, in the days of David, there is a brief reminder of these two. David, forbidden of God to build the Temple, was nevertheless commanded to erect an altar to the Lord in Jerusalem and this he did on the summit of Mount Moriah where Solomon's Temple afterwards stood. (1 Chron: 22:18-26). To this "house of the Lord" as David termed it, he gathered all the sacred treasures, spoils of war dedicated to the Lord and so on, and placed them under the supervision of Shebuel, descendant of Gershom, and Shelomith, descendant of Eliezer. A few scattered allusions in 1 Chron. 23. 14-17; 24. 20; 26. 24-25 tell us this much and preserve a few names and that is all. These two were evidently men of God and honoured with a share in the sacred duties.

The darker side of the picture is displayed in the story of one other member of the family, Jonathan the son of Gershom and therefore grandson of Moses. This Jonathan, born in the land in the very early days of the settlement, occupied a very minor office as a Levite attached to the tribe of Judah in Bethlehem (Judges chap. 18). Apparently discontented with his lot, he made his way northward into the territory of the tribe of Ephraim, seeking to better himself, as we might say. There he encountered an Ephraimite named Micah, who, himself infected with the prevalent idolatry of Canaan, had made himself idols, graven images, and set them up in his house. He invited Jonathan to enter his service as a kind of domestic priest, to attend upon idols and conduct religious observances on behalf of the family. The terms: board and lodging, necessary officiating robes, and ten silver shekels per year, which since ordinary

labourer's wages at the time ranged between thirty and fifty shekels a year was not a very princely sum for a grandson of Moses the conqueror. But he accepted it and entered upon his duties as apostate priest to an idolator. The depths of ignorance into which Israelites like Micah had fallen is well illustrated by his comment upon the situation. *"Now know I that Jehovah will do me good, seeing that I have a Levite to my priest"....*

His complacency was rudely disturbed. A roving party of men from the tribe of Dan, migrating northward to seek more suitable territory for themselves, came upon Micah's house and found the idol installation complete with priest. Heedless of any rights Micah may have had in the matter, they took forcible possession of the idols and made a proposition to Jonathan. *"Is it better for thee"* they suggested *"to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?"*. Jonathan saw the point and accepted the offer with alacrity; he journeyed with them to the north, where they found a fertile country, inhabited only by a peaceful and defenceless people whom they unceremoniously slaughtered and established themselves in their place.

So it was that Jonathan the grandson of Moses became the first High Priest of the first organised system of idolatry to be established in Israel. There in the town of Dan, centre of the northern territory of the tribe of Dan, most northerly point of the land of Israel and not far from modern Damascus, he administered the ceremonies of a pagan faith, he and his sons after him, seven hundred years until the Assyrians came and took Israel away into captivity. During all that time these sons of Moses stood for all that their illustrious forebear had so consistently and sternly condemned.

The story is told in the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of Judges. It must have taken place during the first century in the land. At the same time that Jonathan was leaving Bethlehem for a life of infamy in the north, Ruth the Moabitess was coming into Bethlehem to yield her life in devotion to

Israel's God, joining in association with Boaz the God-fearing Israelite to forge another link in the line which led to Christ, the greater Prophet of whom Moses spake. The line of Jonathan ended in captivity and ruin and is now lost in obscurity; that of Ruth and Boaz is immortalised by the event which happened later at Bethlehem when the angels sang *"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men"*.

The story was set down faithfully in the Book of Judges but in later manuscripts the transcribers, reluctant to perpetuate the association of their great Lawgiver's name with that of his apostate grandson, added the letter n to the name in Judges 18. 30 thus making it Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, instead of Moses. This is the A.V. rendering; in the Hebrew text the n is above the line, indicating that the original reading is Moses. Most modern translations, including RSV and NEB, render it Moses.

Four centuries later Jeroboam, the first king of the Ten Tribes, installed two golden calves as objects of worship, one at Bethel and the other at Dan (1 Kings 12. 25-33). At Bethel he created an order of non-Levite priests; of Dan nothing is said and it is obvious on the strength of Judges 18. 30-31 that the sons of Jonathan continued to serve that sanctuary with the golden calf added to the original idols. Jehu, another two centuries on, destroyed Baal worship out of Israel but left the golden calves and their worship untouched (2 Kings 10. 29) and this for a definite reason. These golden calves, like their prototype at the time of Sinai, were visible emblems of the God of Israel. Oft-times in the O.T. God was likened to the wild ox on account of its strength and irresistible power. Heedless of the commandment against making graven images of God and bowing down and worshipping such images, these golden calves, which were likenesses of the wild ox, were set up in the sight of Israel so that they could worship God in the same way as other nations worshipped their gods, before a visible object made according to their own ideas. Hence Jehu, whose object was to des-

troy idol worship and preserve the worship of Jehovah, in his ignorance left the golden calves intact, and the result was that Bethel and Dan remained centres of idolatry throughout the whole of Israel's national existence, ending only with the great Captivities which cured Israel of that particular sin for all time.

In much of their idolatry the Israelites believed they were worshipping the true God, the one whom Moses had revealed to them, when all the time they were worshipping false conceptions of God. In the final analysis all idolatry comes down to that. Christians, Jews and Moslems worship and serve the same God, but under so widely differing views of his character and attributes that there can be little or no reconciliation. Christians, in their various outlooks, see God sometimes like Moloch, demanding human sacrifice by fire for his appeasement, sometimes like Baal, the impersonal force of Nature to which man is subject, sometimes like Ashtaroth, permitting every self indulgence and gratification of animal passions without thought of higher things, sometimes like the Hebrew wild ox,

merciless to his enemies and a fierce partisan to his own people. All these false gods are found amongst us today, even within communities of Christians; so many have failed to realise the depths of meaning in Jesus' words to the woman at the well "*they that worship God must worship him in spirit and in truth*". Not for nothing was Israel forbidden to make graven images of God; we in our own minds are apt to set up such graven images and, like Jonathan the grandson of Moses, worship them under the impression that we are worshipping the God of our fathers when in reality we are doing nothing of the sort. The Apostle John was aware of that when he said "*Little children, keep yourselves from idols*" (1 John 3. 21). Only in constant heed to the words of Jesus and realisation of our union through him with the Father, he tells us, can we really know God. "*We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true. This is the true God, and eternal life.*"

Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) was a famous German astronomer and a devout Christian. His discoveries in relation to the solar system earned him opposition and persecution from the Church and some of his writings were banned and suppressed. He used to say that one day men would build ships to sail the ocean of space, words that are coming true in this present day. His scientific achievements were great but perhaps his finest epitaph is the prayer he composed and which he made peculiarly his own:

"Dear Lord, Who has guided us to the light of thy glory by the light of Nature, thanks be to Thee. Behold, I have completed the work to which Thou hast called me, and I rejoice in Thy creation, whose wonders Thou hast given me to reveal unto men. Amen".

* * *

"Some small trifle of daily routine; a crossing of personal preference in very little things, accumulation of duties, unexpected interruption, unwelcome distraction. Yester-

day these things merely fretted you and, internally at least, 'upset' you. To-day, on the contrary, you take them up, stretch your hands out upon them, and let them be occasions of new disgrace and deeper death for that old self-spirit. You carry them to their Calvary in thankful submission. And tomorrow you will do the same."

Bishop of Durham

* * *

The motto of Spurgeon's College shows a hand holding a cross. "Teneo et teneor": "I both hold and am held". It is fine to hold the cross; it is far finer to be held by it. Jude's word "keep" (v. 21) is a necessary injunction, but Peter's word "kept" reveals the grace which makes the other possible.

We hold the cross, but we are held by the cross. We keep ourselves in the love of God, but we are kept by the power of God. *1 Pet. 1:5*

* * *

He who has no vision of Eternity will never get a true hold of Time. *T. Carlyle*

GOD OF ALL SPACE

3. The Glory of the Celestial

INVISIBLE UNIVERSE

*Impact of space science
upon Christian belief*

This visible universe is not the only sphere of life. The experiences and the convictions of many testify that there is a world of living intelligence above and beyond the physical, not perceptible by any of the five human senses but a real world nevertheless. Sometimes it is called the spiritual world and its citizens spiritual beings because it lies beyond the bounds of man's senses, and sometimes the celestial world because it lies beyond the bounds of man's geography. Our own universe is an atomic structure built up from ninety-two elements, ranging from hydrogen the lightest to uranium the heaviest—discounting a few heavier man-made ones—which, by chemical combination with each other, form all known substances, and powered by radiated energy vibrating at rates between a hundred thousand times a second and many many millions, technically called the "electro-magnetic spectrum". Everything in this universe obeys the laws set by this atomic structure and this energy range; what may lie outside of these, we do not know and as men will never know since all our knowledge is derived from observational instruments which themselves are constructed from these atoms and can respond only to these energy vibrations. Our information regarding the celestial world comes to us through the Bible, the revelation of God, creator of both this world and that, supplemented a little in our own day by the reasoning of men whose deepening knowledge of the physical world is enabling them vaguely to see what possibilities may conceivably lie beyond it. The decline of Christian belief characteristic of the past century or more has led to a very general scepticism as to the existence of a "spiritual" world and of "spiritual" beings; the leaders of scientific thought and research have for a number of generations ignored any claims for the reality of anything that could not be demonstrated physically either by the natural senses or some man-made observing

or measuring instrument. But now some of these scientists are not so sure; they are beginning to perceive the possibility that there can be and might well be some kind of world and some kind of life outside the scope of our physical universe and in so doing they concede the case to the Bible. In this, as in so many matters nowadays, the progress of scientific discovery is demonstrating the intrinsic harmony of science with Divine revelation. At a conference of high level United States physicists in 1967, during a discussion on the problems of detecting life in space, it was said that we may no longer insist that life can only be manifested in material bodies such as ours, bodies of micro-cellular structure; there is no certainty that an entirely different form of life structure is not possible. At a rather earlier date another atomic physicist, appearing in a B.B.C. feature, referred to the possible existence of other universes dependent on other forces not capable of interaction with our own, so that they might conceivably exist, so to speak, on a different wave-length and be quite imperceptible to us although present in reality all the time. Firsoff, in *"Life beyond the earth"* suggests that there is "no reason why longer or shorter wavelengths" (than those of the electro-magnetic spectrum which govern all the phenomena of our universe) "could not form the basis of sensory perception . . . we cannot be sure that there are no other forms of vibrant energy that could be so used . . . these may not be obstructed by living tissues, and so the organs of perception or emission may be in the brain". All this is to say that modern scientific thought no longer denies the possibility of a world which is a real world but beyond our powers to perceive, inhabited by living intelligences who themselves cannot be perceived by man but can make their presence known, and communicate directly, to the human brain. This is the Biblical position; that world and those beings are given, by the

Apostle Paul, the name "celestial".

The inhabitants of the celestial world are popularly termed "angels" and are depicted in religious pictures and sculpture as white-robed human beings, furnished with wings for the purpose of travel from the realms above. (This particular art form was developed long before men knew that the earth's atmosphere extends only a few miles up and that wings are useless in space.) The term "angel" is the Greek word carried over into English; in both the Old and New Testaments the respective Hebrew and Greek words mean, simply and solely, a messenger. This is derived from the fact that whenever the Bible tells of a celestial being visiting the earth, he comes, naturally, as a messenger, with a commission to fulfil. But in thus coming he must of necessity make himself apparent to men. One of the powers characteristic of celestial beings is evidently that of metamorphosing or "materialising" into a human form which they can create for the time being from the elements of the earth around, a question of manipulating so much carbon, oxygen, hydrogen and so on to attain the desired end. The alchemists of the Middle Ages spent a lot of time trying to transmute the elements—turning lead into gold was their chief aim—without success; nowadays it is becoming a commonplace, such as, for instance, the conversion of natural gas into protein cattle food. There is nothing too wonderful today in thinking of a visitant to this earth thus clothing himself temporarily with an earthly body in order to render himself visible and audible. In the majority of instances such visitants appeared as ordinary men, as in the case of the three who visited Abraham (Gen. 18), those who appeared to Joshua (Josh. 5), Gideon (Jud. 6), Manoah (Jud. 13), and so on. Sometimes the appearance was in the form of a transcendently glorious being, but still human, as to Daniel (Dan. 10) but only when the importance of the occasion made it appropriate. New Testament manifestations to Zacharias, Mary, Peter and Paul were of the same general nature. Our Lord, after his resurrection and until his ascension, having

been raised in the glory of his celestial nature, appeared to his disciples in various human forms assumed for the occasion—a gardener to Mary, a stranger on the way to Emmaus, and so on. One has to picture the celestial being as completely independent of the physical characteristics of our universe, able to come and go at will and adapt himself to whatever local conditions exist.

This leads to the reflection that the celestials must possess powers of mobility, to use a human expression, of a totally different nature from those of man. It has already been remarked that man's hopes of travelling to the distant stars are tempered with the reflection that such journeys must inevitably take thousands or millions of years. The nature of celestial life imposes no such limitations. The angel sent to Daniel in response to his impassioned prayer upon behalf of Israel (Dan. 9) appeared to him at about three o'clock in the afternoon of the day on which the prophet began his supplication. Even allowing for six hours' praying, if the angel was subject to human limitations of movement from one place to another and even travelled at the speed of light—and Prof. Einstein gives reasons why, in his view, nothing can possibly travel faster than light—he could not have been farther away than the outermost planet of the solar system, Pluto, when he started. No one is going to suggest that Heaven is situated on the dark and cold chaos which is Pluto. There is, too, an interesting little reflection on those three men who visited Abraham. Two of them left the patriarch at not earlier than three in the afternoon to walk to Sodom, forty miles distant over rugged and trackless mountainous terrain. They arrived there before five! It is clear that once out of Abraham's sight those two angels abandoned human form, and adopted their own natural methods of transit before appearing again as men at the gates of Sodom two hours later. It would appear that a characteristic of the celestial nature is the power of what we would call instantaneous translation from one place to another irrespective of distance.

All this might lead to the conclusion that celestial beings are disembodied intelligences, like powerful minds without bodies, having no real world of their own, but just existing in space. In warning against this, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that just as earthly, terrestrial creatures possess bodies, organisms, by means of which the mind can make contact with its environment and know itself for what it is, so with the celestial. *"There are celestial bodies, and there are terrestrial bodies, but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another . . . there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body . . . as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly"* (1 Cor. 15). Celestial beings are real beings with bodies suited to their environment and powers, and they exist in a real environment or world. Just as men can live only by absorbing energy from food, air and sunlight wherewith to power their thoughts and actions, so in some similar way celestial beings, whose lives are sustained by God just as surely as are those of men, must absorb and give out energy, which has its source ultimately in God, in living their lives and carrying out their activities. Likewise must the celestial world be a real world constituting an environment in which those beings are "at home" and which provides all things needful both for continued life and continued activity.

This latter is an important consideration. The idea that the "other world" or the "future life" is a place or state in which nothing is ever done and nothing new ever happens is ethically unsound and theologically incorrect. One might have some sympathy with the legendary charwoman, who, after a life time of hard work, had her tombstone bear the words "Gone to do nothing for ever and ever" but an eternity of idleness is likely to be more frustrating than comforting. Twenty years ago J. W. Dunne, in one of his books, pointed out that if a man was placed in a world in which everything was done for him and he was never required to take any decision or make any effort so that the mind had nothing to do and

the brain responded automatically to every changing situation, then in time that man would become an unconscious automaton; he would cease to think and cease to be a human being. In more recent years British and Canadian Universities have conducted experiments, in the interest of astronaut research, to discover what happens when a man is deprived of all external sense impressions by being enclosed in a cubicle without light or sound or anything to do. It was found that thinking became difficult after a few hours and no subject could tolerate more than a few days of the condition. Similar experiments in the United States led to the conclusion that unless the mind is stimulated by outward impressions and changing phenomena, growth and development ceases; if continued long enough the condition would lead to unconsciousness and death. It follows that an essential factor in continuing life is change and activity and this must be as true in the celestial sphere as in the terrestrial. It is not surprising therefore that we find casual allusion in the Scriptures to this aspect of the celestial world. *"Bless the Lord, O you his angels"* says David *"you mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word. Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers that do his will"* (Psa. 103. 20-21). Here is a vivid picture of powerful beings dedicated to the service of God and living their lives in devoted activity according to his will. The nature of their occupations and achievements are of necessity unknown to us and in any case would be largely incomprehensible; man's only contact has been the occasional visit of solitary messengers for brief periods in past times. One can imagine a remote island inhabited only by primitive natives to whom a very occasional white man comes on a brief visit and goes away again; how much of the multifarious activities and the achievements of white civilisation on earth could those natives be expected thus to glean. All we can say is that the scope and the grandeur of life in that celestial world and the variety of its accomplishments must be infinitely greater than anything that a man could imag-

ine. This much at least is indicated by the inspired words of the eighth Psalm, wherein man is described as created a little lower than the angels even though constituted the custodian and administrator of all other living things on earth. It is apparent also from Job 38. 7 that at the time of terrestrial creation the celestial world already existed and its citizens "shouted for joy" at what was to them a new departure in Divine creative activity.

That the celestials, although of vastly superior intellectual powers to humans, are subject to limitations in knowledge is inferred from Scriptures indicating that they are not cognisant of all that God purposes to do (Mark 13. 32, 1 Pet. 1. 12). That they evince an intense interest in the work of God amongst men can be concluded from the statements that there is joy among the angels in heaven over one sinner that repenteth (Luke 15. 10) and some indication in Matt. 18. 10 that one of their duties, or the duty of some of them, is the protective oversight of Christ's disciples here on earth. There may be more in the old idea of "guardian angels" than this present-day matter-of-fact world is prepared to concede. It might be justifiable to think that in the new earth of the future, when evil is banished and man reconciled to God, there will be closer and much more frequent contact between the two worlds than is the case or is even possible at this present time.

There is no sin in that world—its citizens are altogether and in every respect conformed to the Divine ideal, fully developed and occupying their ordained place in creation. As such that world forms a model for this and one day this earth and its society will be like that. The "Lord's Prayer" is one authority for that expectation; *"thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"*. Two twin principles expounded by Christ—love for God and love for neighbour—must there exercise universal sway, and in the power of so dynamic and orderly a righteous society it can be expected that united and co-operative effort and achievement carries life ever onward into widening realms of unimaginable splendour.

This is the Christian Heaven. The hope which the New Testament holds out to all faithful dedicated disciples of Christ is that following the close of terrestrial life they will experience a resurrection to enduring life in that world. The Apostle Paul speaks of those who *"sleep in Jesus"* and are awakened by instantaneous translation to the celestial sphere at the Second Advent of Christ when He comes to establish his Millennial Kingdom upon earth (1 Thess. 4. 14-17. 1 Cor. 15. 51-52). The future life of the Church in eternal association with Christ involves a great deal of Apostolic teaching which is not relevant to the present subject; it may well be, though, that our Lord's declaration in Jno. 14. 2-3 to the effect that despite the "many mansions" in his Father's house He must needs go away to prepare a place for his followers is a hint that the world in which the Church finds its ultimate home is one created on a still higher level of sentient life, beyond even the angelic celestial. Such may be necessary in order to fulfil in transcendent measure the promise that He will present us "faultless before the presence of his Father with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). This also is one of the many unrevealed aspects of the future which will one day be made plain.

Beyond the lengthening vistas of all such possible celestial spheres, above the highest and most glorious of all created forms of life, is God, the Author and sustainer of all creation, the source of all life, of all energy, of all that is. In that incomprehensible Presence is enshrined the supreme mystery, a mystery which, perhaps, none of His creatures will ever fathom. Without beginning, without end, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, "even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God". All that we are, all that we shall be, is of Him.

(To be concluded)

Prosperity too often has the same effect on a Christian that a calm sea has on a Dutch mariner; who frequently, it is said, in those circumstances ties up the rudder, gets drunk, and goes to sleep. *Bishop Horne*

THE AUTHORITY OF DIVINE TRUTH

Divine truth comes to us with all the authority of its Divine Author. With a gentle dignity consistent with its noble character, it urges its claims upon the reason, judgment and the conscience of men, and then leaves them free moral agents, to accept or reject with the same moral force of inherent worth, imbued with the spirit of the authoritative message they bear—the spirit of holiness and truth.

Thus our Lord Jesus, the Messenger of the Divine Covenant, was *"holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners"*; the prophets were holy men who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit and the apostles were holy men chosen of God and charged with the Divine testimony. So also all those called of God to preach the good tidings have this anointing of the Holy Spirit of God (Isa. 61. 1-3; Luke 5. 16-21) as their necessary preparation for this service; without this anointing they are but as *"sounding brass and tinkling cymbals"*, having no commission from God to declare his Truth. Only those who have the anointing of the Spirit of Truth have any commission from God to preach the truth to others. Divine truth, flowing from the fountain of truth, God Himself, Who is all light, and in Whom is no darkness at all (1 John 1. 5), coming to us through the appointed channel of God's Word and declared by his faithful followers imbued with his Spirit, comes with a moral and logical power proving its authority and enforcing it with an emphasis which carries warning with it and which plainly says, *"Take heed how ye hear"*. (Luke 8. 18).

The messages of Divine truth conveyed to us through our Lord Jesus and his holy apostles and prophets, and from time to time, as meat in due season, called to our attention by such members of the anointed body as God hath set in the Church to be pastors, teachers and even by the feeble members of the body, are not therefore subjects for mere idle consideration and human speculation

and dispute; they are not common themes for reckless handling with irreverent hands—they are the eternal principles of truth and righteousness. They are the oracles of God and the principles of his holy law. They come with a quiet insistence, demanding our candid, serious, careful consideration of their claims upon us in view of the fact of a coming time in which these principles of truth and righteousness shall surely triumph and prove a savour of life unto life or of death unto death to men, according as they are obedient or disobedient to their authority.

It was to establish these principles of judgment and to acquaint men with them, as well as to redeem them from the sentence of the first judgment of the race in Eden, that Jesus came into this world (John 5. 24, 20. 30. 31). Yet this judgment, while it begins in a measure with every man as soon as he begins to comprehend the Divine testimony, is not, in the case of the world in general, to reach its final decision until the time appointed for the world's judgment, the Millennial Age; for at his First Advent Jesus said, *"I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my words hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken in the last day"*, the day of final reckoning, the Millennial or judgment day (John 12. 46-48).

In view of these considerations what folly it is for any man to ignore or reject the authority of Divine truth! How grateful to God we should be for his goodness in making known to us the principles of his law, the testimonies of his Word, by which we are to be judged. And how anxious we should be that our understanding of those principles of judgment should be clear and free from bias of human prejudice which might blind our eyes to truths of such solemn import. As the Psalmist says, *"The judgments of the Lord"* (expressed by his holy apostles and prophets) *"are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold;*

sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned; and in keeping of them there is great reward" (Psa. 19. 9-11).

Our Lord's words were called out by the contrast presented in the conduct of the Pharisees and of the blind man to whom sight had been given. The miracle gave unmistakable evidence of Divine power manifested through Christ, and was a testimony to the truth of his claim to the Messiahship. The Pharisees, perceiving the logical deduction from the admission of the fact and unwilling to admit the authority of a teacher greater than themselves, rejected even this undeniable testimony, and cast the man out of the synagogue because he confessed the truth.

In this miracle our Lord clearly taught the great truth that God was with him, and that He was indeed all that He claimed to be—the fulfilment of the Law and the prophets, the long promised Messiah. These Pharisees, though feeling the force of this testimony, nevertheless harboured so much envy and hatred in their hearts that it blinded them to the truth. But not so was it with the young man upon whose sightless eyes the miracle had been wrought. Envy, hatred, the spirit of rivalry, were absent from his mind, and wonder and gratitude prompted him to reason out the logical deductions from this marvelous fact. In this, one observes the steps of obedient and increasing faith and the results so blessed and so different from those to which the course of the Pharisees led. The act of hopeful obedience, in following the simple directions to go and wash his clay-anointed eyes in the pool of Siloam, was rewarded by immediate sight, although the man had been born blind. This blessing, gratefully realised, increased faith; the testimony of obedient, grateful faith, in the face of opposition, brought persecution; persecution, accepted in preference to the approval of men, brought the clearer revelation of the One who was the hope of Israel and the world. And not only so, but this realisation that Jesus was indeed the very Christ promised of God,

expected for so many long years, came to the formerly blind man with the additional element of joy that he had been specially favoured and blessed by him.

Here we see in strong contrast the spirit of obedience on the part of the young man who received sight, and the spirit of disobedience and rebellion on the part of the Pharisees. In the one case the authority of truth was despised and its light rejected, the darkness being preferred "*because their deeds were evil*"; while in the other its authority was received and appreciated and from its blessed testimony was drawn the lessons of faith, obedience, gratitude, humility, fortitude and loving reverence. Thus, the same truth which blinded one enlightened and blessed the other. And so truth is always, as Paul tells us, a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. It is only those who receive the truth into "*good and honest hearts*" who are rewarded with its blessed fruitage (2 Cor. 2. 14-16).

Let every man, therefore, take heed how he hears the testimony of God; let him not receive it into a heart filled with selfishness or a spirit of vain glory or pride or irreverence or ingratitude; so that it may not have the blinding effect that it had upon the Pharisees, but with a pure heart, a good and honest heart, "*receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save*" (James 1. 21-22).

It is well for us that we conduct ourselves with the prudence and sincerity so befitting so solemn and momentous a time, and come to the consideration of the Divine testimony with that reverence and humility which ensures the enlightening and guards against the blinding effects. Well indeed would it be for all to consider that "*the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good;*" that "*God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil;*" and that "*there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known.*" (Prov. 15. 3. Eccl. 12. 14. Luke 12. 2-3).

ARMAGEDDON

A consideration of
Rev. 16.16

The word has a chilling sound. In the popular mind it conjures up visions of war and tumult, destruction and slaughter, a holocaust of fire and death, the end of all things. It is one of the few Biblical words which survive in everyday language. Any great political crisis or threat or world-wide war is almost invariably referred to as "Armageddon".

A certain amount of uninformed Bible exposition has contributed to this habit. The colourful symbols of the Book of Revelation are often interpreted in a far more literal manner than is justified; and the "scare tactics" employed by a few Christian groups, ^{who are} more obsessed with retributive vengeance upon sinners, ^{with} than the Divine desire and plan to save them from their sin, has tended to over-emphasise the destructive element in this very real event in human history, and to minimise the constructive factor. Both are included; unless that fact is understood, the full significance of the Scriptural presentation of Armageddon will not be appreciated.

The word occurs only once in Scripture—Rev. 16. 16—and it is veiled in a certain obscurity, which is very understandable when one considers the circumstances under which the ^{Book} relevant passage was written. It dealt with the ultimate, but certain, overthrow of the powers of evil of this world, and their supersession by the Kingdom of God—inflammatory material indeed at a time when the then ruling world power, the Roman Empire, had decided the Christian society was a danger to the State and must be eliminated. Therefore this Book of Revelation was written in terms of Old Testament history and prophecy in such fashion that whereas to the uninitiated it would seem to be merely a farrago of nonsense, to Christians conversant with the Old Testament the allusions would be understood and the meaning decipherable.

The general theme of the Book of Revelation is the conflict between good and evil which began, so far as the book is con-

cerned, with the birth of Christ at Bethlehem and is concluded at the end of the Millennial Age when all evil is eliminated and mankind, fully reconciled to God in Christ, has achieved its destiny. In this picture the disciples of Christ of this Age, the Church, are shown as waging a good warfare against the hosts of evil, and enduring martyrdom for their faith, emerging triumphant on the "other side". The powers of evil, and all in the world who support those powers, move inevitably into a harvest of their own sowing in which all they have built through the centuries, comes crashing down in total disruption, because it has been built on evil principles, and evil is inherently unstable and cannot endure. They have sown dragons' teeth and reap accordingly. And this is the time that the Lord Christ, with his resurrected martyr-disciples, returns to take his great power and reign over the earth—an event which marks the transition from the present Gospel Age to the future Millennial Age. This event, combining both the downfall of the "kingdoms of this world" and the establishment of the Kingdom of God, is Armageddon.

Both these factors are included in this passage in Revelation but it will be helpful to take a look at the background first. For several chapters back the Revelator has been tracing the conflict between good and evil from the birth of Jesus through the Age until in chapter 14 he sees a representation of the great event which closes this Age, and challenges the institutional powers of evil to mortal combat. That event is the Second Advent of Christ, and the Revelator ^{states} casts it in the guise of Daniel's vision, where Daniel sees the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, to witness the overthrow and destruction of great wild beasts representing earth's empires, and to set up his own kingdom which shall never pass away (Dan.7). Now John in this 14th chapter also sees this Son of Man coming

on a cloud, but he adds some additional detail. There are two harvests to be reaped, one the *"harvest of the earth"*, of wheat, for He wields a golden sickle for the purpose, and the other the vintage, of the *"vine of the earth"*, which is to be cast into the *"winepress of the wrath of God"*. The interpretation is not difficult. The wheat harvest is the Lord's gathering of his Church at his coming, as also pictured in the parable of the wheatfield in Matt. 13. Following this translation of these faithful and watchful believers to heavenly conditions comes the overthrow of evil pictured by the vintage, in which the *"vine of the earth"* is reaped and cast into the winepress. This goes back to Isa. 63 where the conquering Lord is pictured as treading the winepress in his irresistible progress toward the establishment of his Kingdom.

This general outline of chapter 14 is amplified in chaps. 15-19 by the insertion of detailed news of certain aspects of the process. In chapter 15 the *"sanctuary of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven"* is opened, and seven angels bearing *"the seven last plagues"* come forth. The *"tabernacle of the testimony"* is, of course, the Mosaic tabernacle in the wilderness at the time of the Exodus, the ritual centre of the Levitical ceremonial law. The sanctuary or *"Most Holy"* of that structure was normally closed to mortal sight, only the High Priest being permitted to enter, but there were occasions when the supernatural Shekinah light which illuminated its interior, the *"glory of the Lord"*, blazed out in the sight of all Israel in demonstration of Divine judgment against some blatant wickedness. One such occasion was at the rebellion of Korah and his followers (Num. 16) when the plague decimated Israel in consequence. This is the allusion here. The end of the Age has come, the Lord comes both to take his Church to himself and to destroy evil and set up his kingdom, and all this at the time in human history when the apostasy and unbelief and rebellion of man has involved them in inevitable world disaster and ruin, aptly described here in Revelation as the *"seven last plagues"*. These *"plagues"* are not

heaven-sent; they are the logical and certain consequence of man's own course and actions, but they are pictured as emanating from the Divine sanctuary because they are Heaven's laws that have been transgressed and Heaven pronounces the judgment. The same principle is exemplified at an earlier time in history when Israel went into captivity to Babylon on account of the joint sin of princes, priests and people, and the Lord said *"their own way have I recompensed upon their heads"* (Ezek. 22. 31).

So this 16th chapter, which contains the reference to Armageddon, is devoted to a description of the coming of these plagues upon the world at the end of the Age. The first, the infliction of foul disease upon the supporters of the evil powers, an allusion probably to the leprosy which struck Miriam, Gehazi, Uzziah, in each case following sacrilege or rebellion, might fitly picture the unbelief, irreligion and general rejection of God which has characterised this *"end-of-the-Age"* period and to which so many of earth's present ills are directly due. Very few will dispute that we now live in a sick society. The next three are the time-honoured symbols of pestilence, war, and famine. Our Lord said that these three plagues would afflict the world in redoubled measure at the *"Time-of-the-End"* and here the Revelator sees the sea become blood so that all life dies, a fit symbol of pestilence; the rivers and streams run blood, a symbol of universal warfare; the sun's heat increased to scorch the earth and men upon it, a picture of famine. All these plagues are with us today—famine, pollution and war are in the forefront of the great problems which face the world's leaders.

All this leads logically to the fifth plague, the undermining of the controlling centre of the powers of evil. This means, in effect, the approach to imminent collapse of the present world order. Jesus foresaw the same thing when He uttered the historic words *"upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity . . . men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming upon the earth"* (Luke 21. 15-16). It is to be

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especially noted that these plagues are pictured as coming upon evil institutions and evil men, not upon the good-living and the upright. It is the evil in the world, and not the world itself, that is to be destroyed. So it is "his kingdom", the kingdom of the beast, that is full of darkness and his followers who blaspheme God because of the plagues. And this paves the way for the sixth plague, one feature of which is Armageddon.

"And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up that the way of the kings of the East might be prepared" (Rev. 16. 12). This allusion goes back to the sixth century B.C. when the great city Babylon was taken by Darius and Cyrus the Median and Persian monarchs from the east, by the expedient of turning aside the waters of the Euphrates which flowed through the city, and marching in through the dried-up river bed. The story is recounted by Herodotus but Jeremiah foretold it half a century before it happened. (Jer. 51. 36). And Cyrus the Persian was foreseen by Isaiah as a symbol of the conquering Christ who would come with his forces at the time of the end to destroy the greater Babylon and establish a kingdom of righteousness (~~Isa. 41. 21~~). Ezekiel saw the glory of God advancing from the east in the same fashion (Ezek. 43. 2). Here then is shown in symbol the coming of Christ and his Church, the "kings of the sunrising", to assume the overlordship of earth. "They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 20. 4). This is the advance of the host of Heaven and the challenge is quickly taken up by the forces of earth; at this crucial moment John sees demonic spirits acting as the voice of the combined evil powers—the Devil and his agents on earth—gathering all who will join them "to the battle of that great day of God Almighty . . . and they gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" (Rev. 16. 14-16). (The A.V. renders "he gathered them" but "they" is correct in the Greek text.) The demonic spirits do the gathering and the net result is that described in the 19th chapter: "I saw the

beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army". This is the final confrontation between the King of Kings and his heavenly followers on the one hand and every earthly power and institution that supports or perpetrates evil on the other and the outcome is that these evil powers are destroyed.

Armageddon is the Greek form of the Hebrew "Har-megiddo—the mountain or peak of Megiddo. A Canaanite town of this name existed when Israel invaded the land and throughout Israel's occupancy of the land. The valley of Esdraelon, in which Megiddo was situated, was the scene of many battles between Egyptians, Hittites and Assyrians although Israel was rarely involved except in the case of King Josiah, who met his death there. The most likely basis of the allusion probably resides in the O.T. story of Barak's defeat of the Canaanites at this spot soon after Israel's entry into the land. Sisera the commander of the Canaanite hosts had held Israel in bondage for twenty years when Barak mustered a force of ten thousand men and charged down from Mount Tabor into the valley and put the Canaanites to undisciplined flight. The pursuit was continued until the last remnants of the hated enemy, overtaken not far from Megiddo, were put to the sword: ". . . all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; there was not a man left" (Jud. 4. 16). The magnitude of the victory was such that a hymn of praise to God was composed and the credit given to the powers of heaven. "Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel . . . they fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera . . . So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord" (Jud. 5. 2-31). John the Revelator, looking for a fit simile to this last great conflict in which once again the powers of heaven engage in conflict with earth and gain the victory, could very reasonably have found it in this story of Barak's victory over Sisera so that when he pictured the opposing armies of the end time gathered into a place called Megiddo every one of his readers familiar with Old Testament history

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Rev. 17:12-14

knew exactly what he meant, that once more the "*stars in their courses*" were fighting from heaven to put to flight the hosts of darkness.

The result of this conflict is the subject of the seventh and last plague; thunder, lightning, hail, earthquake, greater than men had ever previously experienced, and the utter ruin of "*the great city*". Symbols like these were used by many of the Hebrew prophets when speaking of the last days. A vivid description is afforded by Isaiah's vision in chapter 34 of that book. The sword of the Lord is unleashed against all idolatry and all ungodliness and the land is likened in its resultant desolation to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah—it has become a waste howling wilderness inhabited only by predatory wild beasts and unclean birds. But not forever; the following chapter, Isa. 35, tells of the succeeding renovation: "*the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad . . . and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose . . . they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God*" (Isa. 35. 1-2). As with all the prophetic pictures of the End Time,

judgment and blessing are associated and the one is always followed by the other. So it is with Armageddon. The overthrow of evil is followed by the "*new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness*" of Peter's epistle (2 Pet. 3. 13) and in the Revelation visions this forms the theme of chapters 20-22, following directly upon the detailed description of the closing events of this Age which occupies 17-19.

Armageddon is not all darkness. There is light at its end. It is not all judgment; there is blessing also. Judgment on evil, yes, judgment that is inevitable because evil carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Blessing to follow, because that is the Divine plan; blessing even upon those who have been the servants of evil if so be that they turn from their evil ways, and join with those who will, in that blessed day, shout in joyous acclamation as did Isaiah of old, "*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*".

THE THREE-FOLD CHOICE

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1.27).

There is a very manifest tendency in these days of extremes to lay the emphasis upon that aspect of the Christian calling for which one has a preference and to ignore that which does not suit one's own taste. There are, it may be, three types of those who "profess and call themselves Christians"; we might define them the Professional, the Pious and the Practising. They have their distinguishing characteristics which separate them the one from the other, and each a varying degree of usefulness in the Lord's cause, but

which of the three is the more likely to learn the lessons of life and be fitted for the future work of the Church?

The Professional Christian places his church or sect foremost, upholding it and its institutions and its traditions, right or wrong. He is not usually conspicuous for his knowledge of the Scriptures or his appreciation of the call of discipleship, but he is well-informed on affairs of the day, details of current events, and those things which have to do with church activities, social interests, youth welfare, and so on. The Church is, to him, a convenient background for table tennis parties and social events, and the presiding minister

a useful contact to give "tone" to whatever is being done. If he ever had studied the Bible to satisfy himself as to the basis of his faith it was a long time ago and he is more concerned now with keeping the church attendance up to normal and its finances in a sound condition. He has never heard—or never heeded—the call to consecration, and the phrase "a covenant by sacrifice" means nothing to him. He knows a lot about this world but very little about the next. That does not worry him, for all his interests and ideas are wrapped up with the things of this world, and the hidden Christ is only a historical figure, the long-since-dead founder of the institution which he himself to-day actively supports. Of the coming of Jesus to establish an earthly Kingdom he may have heard, but if so he has given so fantastic an idea no credence. If such an event did happen he would of course quickly accommodate himself to the new situation and say, importantly, to his new leader, "*Lord, Lord, in thy name I have done many wonderful works . . .*".

The Pious Christian is of different stamp. His Christianity is a very intimate and personal thing, a means by which he may attain his own salvation but not an instrument whereby to influence his fellows, the "world", outside. He holds tenaciously to the Scriptural truth that God has appointed a day in the which He will deal with the world of men, and is not disturbed therefore if little or none of the light he possesses reaches them now. As often as not he lays considerable emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge and the desirability of Scriptural research for its own sake, and is therefore a keen student of the Scriptures, and an expert in matters of prophetic interpretation. He is intensely—and sincerely—devotional, attaching supreme importance to personal Christian experience, to the inward sense of the indwelling Holy Spirit and the consciousness and confidence of salvation. He has heard the call to consecration and counts himself a footstep follower of the Lord Jesus; but his solicitude for his own spiritual welfare and perhaps that of his im-

mediate fellow-believers excludes in great degree thought for the interests, spiritual or material, of humanity in general. Scorning and despising "the flesh", and this life and world and all that is in it, he looks only to the next life and next world, waiting with some impatience for the day when he can meet his Lord and say "*Lord, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets . . .*".

Apart from both these is the Practising Christian, the one who has made his faith a personal thing and goes on from that to make his Christianity effective in the world. He is separated from men by his consecration but associated with the world for his service, service to fellow-men which is also service to God. He is a light in the world, showing outwardly an illumination which is all-pervading within. He holds forth the bread of life, bread which he himself has received from the One Who gives living bread from heaven. His service is according to his ability and opportunity, but it is always a service that conveys to other men something of the good that he himself has received, and shows them something of the life that he himself lives in Christ. To him Christianity is a way of life, and every aspect of life has to be shaped and controlled by the faith for which he stands. He has learned to effect the proper division between outward works and inward piety, between service for this world and preparation for the next, and in so doing he is becoming well fitted for appointment to the exalted position of joint-heir with Christ, a Priest and King, for the world-wide work of the next Age. It was of such that the Saviour declared they were to be in the world but not of the world. The Professional Christian is *IN* the world and *OF* the world: the Pious Christian is *NOT IN* the world and *NOT OF* the world: neither of these is the injunction left us by our Lord. "*IN* the world but *NOT OF* the world" is his ideal, and the only position that can earn his commendation at the end; "*Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy lord*".

THE PARABLE OF DIVES AND LAZARUS

Luke 16. 19-31

"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon" said Jesus. The listening Pharisees derided him when they heard that saying; they had, in their own opinion, long since learned how to make the best of both worlds. It is likely that the complacent smiles were quickly swept off their arrogant faces when Jesus proceeded to relate the story of Dives and Lazarus.

The account is preserved only in the 16th chapter of Luke's Gospel. There was a certain rich man, said Jesus, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate.

So far the story ran true to everyday experience. Beggars squatting at the outer portals of rich men's houses were a familiar enough sight in the days of Jesus. They existed on such bounty as the householder chose to give them, supplemented by the charity of passers-by. This particular beggar was like so many of them, a pitiable wreck of a man, clothed in rags, disease-ridden, his only companions the carrion dogs which were always prowling about the city and like him existing on such scraps of food as came their way. The Pharisees in the group listened to these opening words with barely concealed indifference; the situation was one with which they were thoroughly familiar and which they considered a normal feature of society. No reason existed for trying to change it or mitigate its evils. So they listened with only detached interest.

But the next words brought them up with a jolt. The beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom; the rich man also died, but he was not carried into Abraham's bosom. He was buried and found himself in Hades.

Eyebrows contracted and lips were pursed at this. There is a story in the Babylonian Talmud, a story with which those Pharisees were certainly familiar, of somewhat similar character, but in that story the Pharisee is taken into the joys of the presence of God and

the publican is condemned to the torment of thirst. It is fairly evident that Jesus, who also must have been familiar with the same old legend, deliberately based this parable upon that story but reversed the respective fates of the two characters. Knowing that, it is easy to see that this parable is intended to show up the utter unworthiness of the Pharisees and the nation they represented, their ultimate loss of all the good things they enjoyed as the "chosen nation", and the reception into Divine favour of those previously outside the pale.

The Jewish background of the story is very noticeable. There is no mention of God the Father nor of Christ the Son; no reference to Heaven the home of the faithful in Christ, the earthly Messianic Kingdom which is to be the "desire of all nations", or the Atonement, by means of which salvation comes to man. Instead, we have Abraham, Moses and the prophets, angels, "Abraham's bosom", and Hades, all essentially matters of Jewish interest. The Hades of the parable is not the Old Testament Hades (*Sheol*—the grave) but the Hades of Rabbinic speculation, modelled after Greek thought rather than Hebrew. There is no reason therefore for thinking that the parable has anything to do with the future life or with the respective destinies of righteous and wicked after death. There is nothing said about the moral standing of the two characters. Lazarus is not said to be righteous nor Dives wicked. (The name "Dives", often applied to the rich man but not appearing in the A.V., is the Latin for "rich man" and comes from the early Latin Bibles in Britain). And even if Lazarus is conceded to be righteous there is no justification for assuming that the expression "Abraham's bosom" is synonymous with Heaven.

The rich man pictured the Pharisees and, by extension, the whole of the unbelieving Jewish nation. For more than a thousand years they had been the chosen people of

God *"to be a light to the Gentiles, to declare his salvation to the ends of the earth"*. By virtue of the Covenant made at Sinai they were guaranteed all possible material blessings, "blessed in basket and in store", safety from their enemies, and the privilege of being God's Royal Priesthood to administer his blessings to all men. They, and they alone, were to be the true children of Abraham through whom the promised blessing to all families of the earth should come. In symbolic language, they were clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. In that position the Pharisees boasted themselves. *"We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man"*. That order of things came to an end when Jesus declared *"Your house is left unto you desolate"* and when, having rejected and crucified the Lord of glory, the favoured position of Israel came to an utter and disastrous end in the overthrow of the nation directly after the Crucifixion, and its dispersal among all nations. Truly *"the rich man died and was buried"*.

Lazarus, on the contrary, enjoyed an improvement of status. His life of misery came to an end and he found himself transported into *"Abraham's bosom"*. The allusion has two explanatory instances in the Gospels. To lie in the bosom of a superior or a friend was a mark of great favour; the custom of reclining at meals with each person's head in the bosom of his neighbour implied that the one next to the host was to be envied. At the Last Supper it is John who is found to be *"leaning on Jesus' bosom"* (Jno. 13. 23). Jesus himself, in his close relationship with the Father, is said to be *"the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father"* (Jno. 1. 18). So with Lazarus; he is translated, not to Heaven, but to a position of close relationship with Abraham. That fact makes it fairly obvious that Jesus is alluding to the truth He uttered in such plain terms when on another occasion He said to these same Pharisees, again as representing their nation, *"the kingdom of God is taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"* (Matt. 21. 43). Lazarus, then, is in-

tended to picture the despised and outcast Gentiles who at last enter into the high calling of God, as they did do under the preaching of the Apostles, becoming spiritual children of Abraham (Gal. 3. 7-8). The eleventh chapter of Romans makes it clear that the fruitless olive branches were broken off and wild olive branches (i.e. the Gentiles) were grafted in. Lazarus in Abraham's bosom pictures the Christian Church of all nations and peoples classed as children of Abraham and hence, as Galatians declares, *"heirs according to the promise"*.

In the meantime the rich man is in Hades, *"in torments"*. This used to be a *"key"* text to urge the reality of the *"everlasting fires"*, but critical study soon shows that this position cannot reasonably be maintained. The word rendered *"hell"* here is *"hades"*, the death state, not *"gehenna"*, which is final doom. Hades is a temporary condition, for the time will come that Death and Hades are to be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20. 13-14), i.e. be themselves destroyed or brought to an end. Another and a most important consideration is that the sojourn of Dives in Hades begins to have a remedial effect; the one who in his lifetime gave evidence of inherent selfishness and lack of consideration for others in that Lazarus only got the crumbs which fell from his table is now displaying concern for the fate of his brothers. *"I have five brethren; that (Lazarus) may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment."* He still calls Abraham *"Father"* and the latter still calls him *"Son"* (vs 25) which does not look as if the rich man's case is hopeless. The word rendered *"torment"* in vs 23 and 28 *"in hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments"* is from *"basanos"* which properly denotes a touchstone or stone (basonite), used for testing gold. Genuine gold, rubbed on this particular kind of stone, left a characteristic mark, hence the word at first indicated a trial or test of genuineness. Since judicial trials in ancient times almost always employed torture to extract confessions, the word when used judicially came to mean *"torture"*, hence the translation *"torment"* in this instance.

That it need not carry this meaning is shown by other occurrences of the word in the New Testament, such as:

Matt. 8. 6. "Sick of the palsy, grievously *tormented*".

Matt. 4. 24. "Sick persons. . .divers diseases and *torments*".

Mark 6. 48. "He saw them *toiling* in rowing".

Matt. 14. 24. "Midst of the sea, *tossed* with waves."

The rich man, then, during his sojourn in Hades, is undergoing a severe, harrowing trial which nevertheless must come to an end sometime because Hades itself is but a temporary condition. That is an apt symbol of Israel's "Hades" experience during the period between the First and Second Advents. Scattered among all nations, deprived of citizenship and country of her own, she has been the victim of oppression and cruelty in every land. But God has declared that He will eventually restore Israel to a destined place in his purposes where she shall fulfil her original destiny to convey Divine blessing to men. "*Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee . . . and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.*" (Isa. 60. 1-3).

The word "tormented" in vss 24 and 25 is from "*odunomai*" which signifies anguish, pain or distress of any kind, as in:

Luke 2. 48. "Thy father and I have sought thee *sorrowing*."

Acts 20. 38. "*Sorrowing* most of all."

Rom. 9. 2. "Continual *sorrow* in my heart."

1 Tim. 6. 10. "Pierced through with many *sorrows*."

So the rich man in his distress beheld Lazarus enjoying the felicity of communion with Abraham and cried out for some small moiety of relief. "*Send Lazarus that he may . . . cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.*" And Abraham had to tell him that what he asked was impossible. "*Between us and you there is a great gulf* (Gr. *Chasma*) *fixed*" a chasm which effectually precluded any passage from the one side to the other.

It was not that Abraham *would* not relieve; it was that he *could* not.

What is the gulf? The immutable purpose of God! When the Most High decrees judgment, none can set it aside. From the day that the unreasoning crowd cried "His blood be upon us and upon our children" (Matt. 27. 25) the Jewish nation entered into a condition from which they cannot and will not be delivered until in the outworking of the Divine Plan the "fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11. 25). When, at the end of this Age, the Christian Church is complete and joined to her Lord in Heaven, and the "residue of men" (Acts 15. 17) are ready to "seek after the Lord", then will God "*build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down*" (Acts 15. 16) and manifest a restored and purified Israel nation in the midst of the earth to play its own destined part in the evangelising of the world.

The parable does not go that far, for there is still one lesson, the most solemn lesson of all, to be taught, and Jesus would fain leave the Pharisees with that word. The rich man was concerned about his brethren; he wanted one from the dead to go to them that in the wonder of that happening they might find conviction. "*They have Moses and the prophets*" said Abraham "*Let them hear them*". True enough; Israel always had Moses and the prophets, and Christ said that if they had rightly heard Moses and the prophets they would have believed him, for in those writings lay the evidence of his Messiahship. The rich man dissented; even though his brethren rejected Moses and the prophets—and he did not dispute the fact of their having done so—yet a visitation from the dead would convince them. That gave the opportunity for one of the most telling phrases which ever fell from the lips of Jesus. "*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rise from the dead*" (vs 31). The whole history of Israel, from the First Advent until now, is evidence of the truth of that word. Jesus rose from the dead; they still did not believe!

The parable ends with the rich man still in

Hades. But Abraham called him "Son" and he called Abraham "Father"; and Hades will one day pass away. So there is a bright gleam

behind the dark horizon of the picture. There is still hope.

A NOTE ON MATTHEW 12.40

"For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12. 40).

On the surface it seems a simple statement relating to our Lord's lying in the grave, between his death and his resurrection. The somewhat unusual expression "the heart of the earth", does provoke the question as to whether some other and less obvious meaning is intended.

This is the only one of the some hundred and fifty instances of "*kardia*" in the New Testament where the word does not refer to the human heart. In English usage "the heart of the earth" implies a considerable depth below the surface; a body interred in a cave tomb only just below ground level hardly merits the term and it is this which usually gives rise to the query. But what did the term really mean on the lips of Jesus?

The Old Testament speaks of the "heart of the (Red) sea" (Exod. 15. 8) and the "heart of Egypt" (Isa. 19. 1) where the obvious meaning of the term is "midst". The Hebrew for "heart" is *leb* or *lebah*, appearing some 450 times in reference to the human heart, but also translated in the A.V. fourteen times "midst" where this is the obvious meaning. Thus we have "midst of heaven" (Deut. 4. 11) "midst of the sea" (Psa. 46. 2. Prov. 30. 19 Ezek. 27. 4) and Absalom caught by his hair "in the midst of the oak" (2 Sam. 18. 4). More relevant to the point at issue is Jonah 2. 3 "thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas". Perhaps this is the source from which Jesus took his allusion. Both in the Hebrew Bible and in the Septuagint Greek, which latter was in general use in Jesus' day, this reference to Jonah's immure-

ment in the "midst" of the seas uses the word "heart". Jesus normally spoke in Aramaic, which was the contemporary form of Hebrew, but whichever language He used, it could well be that He was thinking of Jonah's expression "the heart of the seas" and repeated it for his own case except that it then became "the heart of the earth". Nothing more than a preview of his own death and burial precedent to his resurrection would appear to have been in His mind.

The "three days and three nights" has also provoked much discussion and not a little controversy. The accepted Christian tradition as well as customary reading of the New Testament allow for parts only of three days including two nights, from three o'clock on Friday to dawn on Sunday. Various reconstructions have been worked out to extend this period to a full seventy-two hours but these of necessity come up against two apparently unassailable facts; one, that 14 Nisan of A.D. 33, the year of the Crucifixion, ended on Friday 3rd April at 6.0 p.m.; two, the fixed conviction of the Early Church was that the Resurrection took place on Sunday morning. Much more can be said on both sides of the question than will be attempted here, but it is possible that the expression "three days and three nights" in the Greek New Testament is analogous to the Old Testament Hebrew "evening-mornings", metaphorically indicating any period extending over parts of the stated number of days. We use a similar colloquialism today in saying, for example "I shall be away for three days" although in fact we leave at midday on Wednesday and arrive back at 3.0 p.m. Friday. Nothing more than this may be intended by the New Testament narrative.

As long as the devil can keep us terrified of thinking, he will always limit the work of God in our souls.

Every day is crowded with minutes, and every minute with seconds, and every second with opportunities to develop fruitage.

GROWING IN GRACE

*An Exhortation
to progress*

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.—2 Pet. 3. 17, 18.

There is a touching tenderness in the epistles of the aged Apostle Peter to the household of faith, showing that, while he realised that the time of his departure was drawing nigh (2 Pet. 1. 14; John 21. 18, 19), his solicitude for the growth and development of the church was increasing. Accordingly, he writes two general epistles, not so much to advance new truth, as to call to remembrance truths already learned and fully received (2 Pet. 1. 12-15), and to counsel all to faithfulness and to growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In the preceding verses he has been calling to mind some of these truths, and he recognises the fact that those addressed are already established in them, but, in view of his knowledge that false teachers would arise to pervert the truth, he counsels special watchfulness against being led away from their present steadfastness by the error of the wicked. That this counsel of the Apostle has a special fitness to the church in the last days, our days, and was evidently so designed by the Spirit of God, is clear from verse 3—"There shall come in the last days scoffers".

Observe the manner in which the Apostle would have us guard against being led away by the "error of the wicked." Is it by a careful investigation of all the claims which every new false prophet that arises may intrude upon our attention, thus giving heed to every seducing spirit (1 Tim. 4. 1)? No: that would be quite contrary to the teaching of "our beloved brother Paul", to whom Peter so affectionately refers, and whom he so fully endorses; for Paul had given no uncertain counsel on this subject; saying "Shun profane and

vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness", and "I entreat you, brethren, to mark those who are making factions and laying snares contrary to the teaching which you have learned, and turn away from them; for they that are such are not in subjection to our anointed Lord, but to their own appetite" (for honour and praise among men, as great teachers—1 Tim. 1. 6, 7); "and by kind and complimentary words they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting . . . I wish you to be wise with respect to that which is good, and harmless with respect to that which is evil"—2 Tim. 2. 16, 17. Rom. 16. 17-19.

Peter felt the force of Paul's wise and earnest counsel, and with emphasis re-echoed the same sentiments. To give heed to such seducing doctrines, contrary to the doctrines which we have already received from the Lord and the apostles, argues a lack of faith in those doctrines. Such a one is not *established* in the faith. And indeed there are those—and such is the general sentiment among the teachers of false doctrine—who think that it is not either necessary or advisable to be established in the faith. To be established is to be a bigot, is the idea they advance. And so it is, if one is so unfair in mind as to accept and tenaciously hold that which he has never proved either by sound logic or Bible authority. But he is not an unreasoning bigot who, in simple faith, on the authority of God, accepts the Word of God. And such, and only such, as do so are established in truth. The difference between the strong and the steadfast Christians and a bigot is that the one is established in the truth, while the other is established in error. The former knows the truth, and the truth has made him free from all doubts and misgivings, and from all desire to delve into the muddy pool of human speculations. To all such Paul says, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught (by us the apostles), abounding there-

in with thanksgiving."—But, *"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."*—(Col. 2. 6-8.)

With these sentiments of "our beloved brother Paul", Peter's counsel is in fullest harmony, his advice being, not to waste valuable time in investigating "the errors of the wicked"; but on the contrary, to endeavour the more earnestly to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ", Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The more thorough our knowledge of the Lord and the more intimate our acquaintance with him, the more secure we are in our own steadfastness.

But what is it to grow in grace? It is to grow in favour with the Lord through an intimate personal acquaintance and fellowship of spirit with him. It implies, first, a knowledge and recognition on our part of our redemption through his precious blood and a personal faith in and dependence upon all the promises of the Father made to us through him, and then an intimate communion with him in our daily life of prayer, and of observation of his will and obedience to it. If such be our constant attitude of mind and heart, there must be a constant ripening of the fruits of the Spirit, rendering us more and more pleasing and acceptable to our Lord. A sense of the Divine acceptance and favour is given to us from day to day in increasing measure, in fulfilment of that blessed promise of our Lord. *"If a man love me he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come into him and make our abode with him."*— (John 14. 23.)

This, as nearly as words can express it, is what it is to grow in grace; but the full and blessed understanding of it is best appreciated by those who from day to day walk with God in faith and obedience and love.

To grow thus in grace and not in knowledge is impossible; for the very object of such communion is to build us up in a more perfect knowledge and acquaintance with the Lord—to bring us into closer fellowship with

the Divine Plan, and to give us the privilege of being "workers together with him" in executing that plan. If, therefore, we love and obey the Lord and desire to grow in his favour his written Word is our daily meditation and study! Thus we grow in knowledge: not, however, by finding out each year that what we learned last year was false, but by adding to what we learned last year, by putting on more and more of the armour of God until we realise its glorious completeness in the full discernment of the Divine plan of the ages. We are then ready to do valiant service for the cause of truth in withstanding the encroachment of error (Eph. 6. 10-13), being established, strengthened and settled in the faith. Here is abundant opportunity to grow in knowledge; for while they will see nothing new or different in outline or design, they will be continually charmed and cheered with newly discovered lines of harmony and beauty in the Divine drawings of the wonderful plan of the ages. As pupils we may ever study the master workmanship of the Divine Architect.

Our beloved brother Peter, zealous for our growth in knowledge, endeavours to inspire us thereto, by calling our attention to the wonderful events and the close proximity of the day of the Lord; saying—

"The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" in the strife and friction caused by increasing knowledge combined with selfishness. This will not be a literal fire, but, as described by the prophets, the fire of Divine jealousy—(Zeph. 1. 18; 3. 8. 2 Pet. 3. 10). Already the noise and tumult, which shall thus eventuate in world-wide anarchy, are distinctly heard in every nation; for the day of the Lord has indeed begun, and the heat of human passion is growing more and more intense daily, and the great time of trouble is very near.

... "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for the coming of the day of God,

wherein the heavens shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Let us indeed lay to heart this solemn question, for we stand in the very presence of the Judge of all the earth. These words, while addressed to God's people eighteen centuries ago, and serving a purpose for good all along down this Gospel age, are especially meant by the Spirit for us, who are living in this very day of God.

"Nevertheless, we (we who have come into covenant relationship with the Lord—we, unlike the rest of the world, know of the Divine

plan and), according to his promise, look for new heavens (the kingdom of God—to be established in power and great glory) and a new earth (a new organisation of society under the rulership of Christ and his glorified Bride, the Church) wherein dwelleth righteousness." Blessed assurance! how favoured are we above all people who have not this knowledge!

...*"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."* (2 Pet. 3. 11-14).

THE MOCKING OF ISAAC

A familiar but often misunderstood incident in the Book of Genesis is the occasion of Isaac's weaning feast when his older half-brother Ishmael was accused of "*mocking*" him and in consequence, with his mother Hagar, was expelled from the family home, creating a division which has persisted among their respective descendants to this day. It is unfortunate that the word "*mocking*" was chosen by the A.V. translators in Gen. 21. 9 for it gives an incorrect idea of Ishmael's action at the time.

The word is *tsachaq* and it occurs about a dozen times in the Pentateuch but nowhere else except once in the Book of Judges. It has the meaning of sporting, jesting, or playing with a companion or companions, of joining in play-acting, levity or dancing, when in the intensive form of the verb, and of laughter in other cases. Thus it is used of Sarah and Abraham's semi-unbelieving laughter upon hearing the intimation that Isaac was to be born to them, as though the matter was not to be taken seriously. In the intensive form the word is used of Lot telling his sons-in-law of the coming destruction of Sodom "He seemed as one that *mocked* (Gen. 19. 14); of Samson "*making sport* for his captors (Jud. 16. 25); and of the people of Israel at Sinai who, in their worship of the Golden calf, "*sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play*" (Exod. 32. 6). In a more personal sense the word appears in Gen. 26. 8 where "Isaac

was *sporting* with Rebecca his wife"; i.e. he was indulging in such light-hearted familiarity with her that it was obvious to the watching Abimelech that the couple were man and wife; and in a similar sense in Gen. 39. 1 where Potiphar's wife accused Joseph unjustly of the same thing "The Hebrew servant . . . came in unto me to *mock* me".

It is in this sense that Ishmael's "*mocking*" should be understood, the light-hearted "*playing about*" of a teenage lad with his five year old brother. It was this friendly association and familiarity which angered Sarah and led to her demand that Ishmael, as the son of the slave-woman, should be sent away, "*for*", she said, "*the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac*" (Rom. 19. 14). The woman's jealousy shines out through the words. She had already said, at Isaac's birth, "*God hath made me to laugh, so that all who hear shall laugh with me*" (Gen. 21. 6) where "*laugh*" is the same word, "*tsachaq*" as is used for Ishmael's "*mocking*". Sarah laughed in exultation of the fulfilment of the promise when her son was born; Ishmael laughed and played in healthy boyish exuberance with that son, and "*mocking*", with its present English significance, is no more fitting in that context than it would have been if used in the text relating to Isaac and his wife Rebecca in the later day.



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

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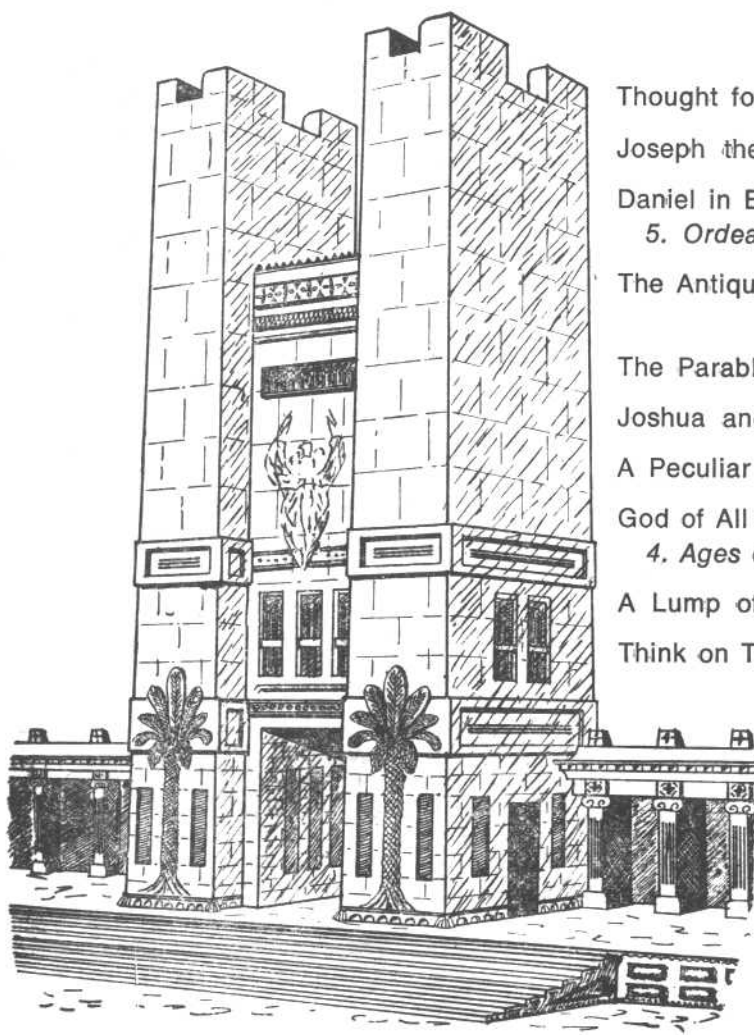
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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Thought for the Month

"Go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people. Cast up the highway; gather out the stones: lift up a standard for the people" (Isa. 62. 10).

Isaiah's vision showed him the gateway of the new Age, the Messianic, swinging open to reveal that fair land which lay beyond, and in his ecstasy he cried out to his own people to enter quickly and prepare the way for the millions of mankind that were to follow. Preparation had to be made and the newcomers encouraged. Isaiah knew that his own people Israel were destined to play an important part in that preparation and encouragement when the time should come. What he did not know was that nearly three millenniums were to measure out their spans and a new people, the Christian Church of this present Age, also be present on the scene when at length the shouting millions would surge through that gateway. Not only purified Israel, but also the glorified Church, are to gather out the stones and lift up the standard.

We are accustomed to blame First Advent Israel for "knowing not the time of their visitation" and failing to measure up to their responsibility and duty when their Age was giving place to the Age of the Gospel. Are we so quick to realise that we in our turn, when this Gospel Age is giving place to the Messianic, have the same responsibility and duty? The gateway is swinging open; before long it will be time to call men to enter. What are we doing in the meantime to gather out the stones and lift up the standard? There are many in the Christian world to-day who look upon the apathy and unbelief of the

masses and cry out for revival, but the basis for revival is all too often seen as little more than a profession of belief in the Lord Christ and conversion to a more moral life thereafter. One tends to forget that true revival is powered by the dynamic energy of the Holy Spirit, and that in the context of this end-of-the-age period in which we live the Holy Spirit is to be "poured out upon all flesh" — when the gates of the Messianic era are opened and the work of world conversion really becomes effective. Our mission now, and one that we can neglect only to our own loss, is to do what we can, while those gates are in the act of opening, to gather out the stones of ignorance and misunderstanding concerning the Faith, and lift up the standard of the Divine Plan for man's salvation that some at least may hear, and heed, and believe, and be ready. After all, the commission to preach the Gospel to the whole creation has not yet been revoked. And the popular idea of Christianity is a travesty of the real thing.

Convention at West Wickham Sat./Sun., Oct. 9-10 at Justin Hall. Details Bro. J. F. Bignell, 28 Croft Avenue, West Wickham, Kent.

New leaflet

The article in this issue "The Antiquity of the Books of Moses" is available in 4 pp leaflet form upon request.

Gone from us

Bro. E. Bullard (London)
Bro. H. Muchall (Manchester)
Sis. A. Stacey (Birmingham)

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

JOSEPH THE CARPENTER

Tantalising in its brevity is that which the Gospels have to say about Joseph, the reputed father of Jesus. Responsible for the care and nurture of our Lord from birth to manhood, practically nothing concerning him has survived on record. The little that is said is confined to Jesus' infancy and boyhood, and the later life and the death of Joseph are veiled in obscurity. It is almost as if the writers of the four Gospels realised that the human family into which Jesus was born was nothing more than a means to an end, the avenue by which, coming from God, He entered the world of men. That purpose achieved, the affairs of the family were of no relevance to the object of the Gospel story and were allowed to lapse into oblivion. Just a few brief glimpses of his character are vouchsafed, almost like asides in the narrative, and it is worth while putting these together to form some kind of picture of the man to whose paternal care Jesus must have owed a great deal. He appears as a man of quiet faith and implicit trust in God and there is not much doubt that he was a chosen vessel just as much as was Mary for the great purpose which so soon overspread their young lives.

Popular impression, aided by religious art, usually has it that Joseph was a very old man at the time of his marriage to Mary but this impression is definitely and certainly wrong. It had its origin in certain apocryphal Christian books of the Fourth Century, notably the "*Gospel of pseudo-Matthew*", the "*Gospel of the Nativity of Mary*" and the "*History of Joseph the Carpenter*". These works, examples of the "Christian fiction" of the period, were written to support a growing spirit of asceticism in the Church by which Mary was presented as eternally virgin and unconnected with man. To this end these and similar legends asserted that Mary had lived in the Temple under the care of the priests until twelve or fourteen years of age, and the priests then secured a Divine indication that

this very old man Joseph, a widower of ninety, should marry and care for Mary and her child Jesus in complete celibacy. The four brothers and two sisters of Jesus mentioned in the Gospels were held to have been the children of Joseph by a former and now deceased wife. These books are of no historical value and it is not difficult when reading them to detect various errors which reveal that the writers were not so accurately informed on the history of the First Century as we are today, and certainly not thoroughly familiar with the Gospels. All that is definitely known about Joseph is drawn from the Gospels.

Mary must have been very young at the time, probably no more than eighteen. This is implied by the fact that she seems to have died at Ephesus in the care of John after A.D.65 or so, by which time she would be between eighty and ninety. Joseph might have been as much as thirty, but hardly any older; his betrothal to Mary seems to have been a perfectly ordinary affair and no reason exists for thinking they were other than a normal young couple pledging themselves and their lives to each other. Despite all that the apocryphal books above-mentioned say to the contrary, the New Testament is quite explicit that, after the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary had four sons and at least two daughters. This is another evidence that their father was relatively young at marriage, as is also the story of the flight into Egypt. A senile old man would hardly be physically capable of a successful two hundred mile flight from the wrath of King Herod; neither is it feasible that he could still work at his trade as the Gospels make plain he did. That he was a poor man is evident from the fact that when Mary presented herself at the Temple, as required by the ceremonial law, to be pronounced ritually clean after the birth of her first-born, the offering she brought was not the usual lamb, but two young pigeons, the concession made to the poor (Luke 2. 24,

Lev. 12. 8).

Despite his poverty, Joseph, like Mary his wife, was of royal lineage, descended from David the famous king of Israel. Their pedigrees merged together in Zerubbabel, the representative of the kingly line at the Return from Babylon, but Zerubbabel was the son of a "Levirate marriage" and although legally he was counted as the grandson of Jehoiachin the king, his blood descent was not from the kings of Judah through Solomon, but from Nathan, another son of David. Legally and officially, though, Joseph was of the royal line through Solomon and Jehoiachin on this account and this is the genealogy of Joseph given by Matthew; literally both were of David through Nathan and Neri and this is the genealogy of Mary given by Luke. It would appear that Joseph's line was senior to that of Mary from the time of Zerubbabel's grandsons so that the royal rights of Jesus came to him through Joseph. This is why the angel addressed Joseph in Matt. 1. 20 as "thou son of David" and Luke referred to him as "Joseph, of the house of David" (Luke 1. 27).

The first sidelight on Joseph's character is revealed when he discovers that his affianced wife is to become a mother. Jewish custom of the time required an espousal period of twelve months preceding the actual marriage, but the espousal was an equally binding contract. Matt. 1. 18 shows that it was during this period that Joseph made the discovery. His first impulse was to have the contract of marriage annulled on the ground of unfaithfulness, but quietly and privately to avoid public scandal out of consideration for his intended wife. Mary must have told him the truth of the matter as it is related by St. Luke (Luke 1. 26-36), that an angel had visited her and told her that she was to become the mother of the Messiah by an act of God without human aid or intervention. Whether Joseph believed her is another matter. Many Jewish women hoped they would be chosen to be the mother of the Messiah but no one ever expected Him to be born in any other than the customary manner; the Divine promise

that He would be the lawful heir of David's throne demanded that in some valid way He must derive his descent from David. It is stated that Joseph was a righteous man; he was evidently devout and well grounded in the Faith and he was not going to take a decision until he had given the matter careful thought (Matt. 1. 20). He might not have been altogether surprised therefore when the angel of the Lord appeared to him also and confirmed Mary's story, telling him to name the coming child Jesus (Saviour or deliverer) "for he shall save his people from their sins". Joseph hesitated no longer; the decisiveness which seems to have been an element of his character came to the top, and apparently without further delay he completed the marriage formalities - which included the wedding feast - and with his newly-married wife settled down to await the coming event.

All this of course pre-supposes the truth of what is called by theologians "the doctrine of the Virgin birth". All kinds of objections to this are raised nowadays, and there is increasing disbelief that Jesus of Nazareth entered this world in any other than the usual manner. The only authority on the subject of Jesus' birth, however, is the New Testament and that is perfectly clear on the matter. And so was Joseph; much more so than many in later times who take leave to know better than those who were there. Joseph is presented in the narrative as knowing that the coming child was not his; he accepted the heavenly assurance that no human father was involved and that here was an instance of the operation of the Holy Spirit. He knew that such things could be so, because God was all-powerful, and he was content as well as believing. It is noteworthy that in the Gospel narratives of the life of Jesus on only three occasions is Joseph referred to as the father of Jesus, twice by the villagers and once by Mary (Jno. 6. 42, Luke 4. 22, Luke 2. 48) where the apparent earthly relationship would make it the natural thing to say. Jesus never acknowledged Joseph as his father; He did use the ex-

pression "my Father" in reference to God some hundred times. Mary is described as the mother of Jesus some twenty-three times. The phrase "Joseph and his mother" occurs twice. This quite evident exclusion of Joseph from the intrinsic fatherhood of Jesus is all the more noteworthy when it is realised that Jesus' legal right to the throne of David, a fundamental factor in his Messiahship, came to him through Joseph; had these narratives been fictional or in any way "dressed up" to prove Jesus the Messiah the writers would surely have made Joseph his natural father.

There was probably very little time for philosophical reflections, however, for Joseph had his living to earn and the responsibilities of married life. Whether he was a carpenter in timber or a metal worker or blacksmith—the Greek *tekton* means any of these although it is most often used for a carpenter in timber—is immaterial; he probably did all such work for the village and his living, although modest, was secure. But within a few weeks of settling down he was uprooted; by reason of a decree of Augustus Cæsar, the current Emperor, there was to be a general census of the people, and the effect of this upon Joseph and his wife was that they must appear before the enrolment officials in the recognised family district of their fathers. That district was Bethlehem, the birthplace of David their ancestor and of his fathers back to Boaz and Salmon of the time Israel settled the land. So Joseph and Mary set out on the eighty mile journey and almost immediately upon their arrival Jesus was born.

The details of that event are well known. The first visitors to the child were the shepherds from nearby, keeping watch over their flocks by night just as David his illustrious ancestor had done a thousand years previously. Joseph was there but in the background; he is mentioned, but only just mentioned. This was true humility; he, as the surviving member of David's line, could surely expect some acknowledgement of seniority, at least until the child should have attained its majority. But no; Joseph knew

that here he was standing face to face with the workings of God, that the child thus placed in his paternal care was not only David's son but also David's Lord (Matt. 22. 42-46). He was content to play the part allotted to him and discharge the duty assigned to him. In him resided the spirit of true consecration; "*I come . . . to do thy will, O God*".

The shepherds went their way and a month later the child was taken to the Temple and formally dedicated to the service of God. Again Joseph played a passive part. He was there, but that is all we know about it. He, together with Mary, "*wondered*" at the glowing words of Simeon the aged prophet foretelling the future glories to come by means of the child; "*light to lighten the nations, and the glory of thy people Israel*" (Luke 2. 32). A great honour for a humble village carpenter, Joseph must have thought as they made their way out of the Temple courts and home to Nazareth (Luke 2. 39). But he was not even then to be left in peace to ply his craft. Before long King Herod had heard of the wondrous event and was sending his soldiers to find and slay this one who in his ignorance he feared as a threat to his own position. The child was a year old by now; the family's presence at Bethlehem shows that the time was one of the periodic feasts at which pious folk like Joseph and Mary would "go up to Jerusalem" for the occasion, and since their ancestral home was Bethlehem it is understandable that there they would lodge. Instructed by the angel, Joseph took his wife and child out of the town and made his way two hundred miles to Egypt where they would be beyond the King's jurisdiction; "*and was there until the death of Herod*" (Matt. 2. 15). Herod died early in the following year so the stay in Egypt was less than six months, during which time no doubt Joseph supported the family by his trade; then the voice of the angel came again, telling of the king's death and instructing him to return to the land of Israel. It seems that his intention was to settle in Bethlehem; he probably felt that the future mission of Jesus would demand close prox-

imity to the capital city Jerusalem and he was prepared to subordinate his own life's plans and wishes to what appeared to be the Divine will, but he found that Herod's son Archelaus was now reigning and he was nearly as much a menace as the old king. Again, it seems, he sought Divine guidance, and following the response he sought went on into Galilee and settled in his old home town of Nazareth, outside Archelaus' jurisdiction. So, for a few years at least, he found peace and quietness in which to nurture his wife's firstborn son.

Only one recorded incident breaks the silence of the next thirty years. Every year Joseph and Mary travelled to Jerusalem—in common with many others—to observe the Feast of the Passover. In Jesus' twelfth year, as they set out to return to Nazareth, somehow they lost him. A day out on the journey they discovered that He was not with the company and they returned to Jerusalem to find him. After three days search He was discovered in the Temple courts, listening to and questioning the venerable Doctors of the Law, the theologians of the day. Said Mary to him, probably reproachfully, *"thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing"* but already the active mind of the lad was reaching out towards his life's mission. *"Do you not understand"* He told them gently *"that I must be in my Father's courts?"* But they did not understand; *"they understood not the saying which he spake unto them"* (Luke 2:50). They were already beginning to lose him, as was ordained. He remained a dutiful son; *"he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart"*. It is not said that Joseph did likewise. It might well be that from this point Joseph became increasingly unable to realise the nature of Jesus' mission and destiny. His mother did. Joseph was called to be a physical protector and provider for the period Jesus needed material protection and provision and when the lad attained man's estate Joseph's work was done. Quietly and unobtrusively he served as he was bidden while

the need existed, and when the service was finished and no longer any need he slips silently out of the picture and is seen no more. But in the records of Heaven the consecrated life and selfless devotion of Joseph, the village carpenter of Nazareth, is surely inscribed in letters of gold for ever.

We hear no more of Joseph. We know from the Gospels that he and Mary had four sons—James, Joses, Jude, Simon—and at least two daughters, all younger than Jesus, so that they must have had a reasonably long married life together. His death is not recorded; from the fact that Jesus commended his mother to the care of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee and Salome, at the Crucifixion, it would appear that he died before that event. The casual remarks of the villagers in Luke 4:22 and Jno. 6:42 *"Is not this Joseph's son?"* and *"Is not this the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?"* would seem to infer that he was alive at those times, approximately summer of A.D. 30 and spring of A.D.31 respectively. Matt. 13:55 might imply the same conclusion as to the autumn of A.D.30. There are some indications that Mary and the family at least made their home in Capernaum during the early part of our Lord's ministry. He himself never went back to Nazareth after the villagers' rejection of him at the beginning—and Jesus did visit Capernaum some ten times during the first two years, but never after the summer of A.D.31. Soon after that time comes his first recorded visit to the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary at Bethany which seems to have been the nearest approach to a home He possessed towards the end. From all of this it might be inferred that Joseph died, perhaps at Capernaum, about the middle of A.D.31, nearly two years before the Crucifixion, at which time he might well have been sixty years of age, a not uncommon life span in those days. The rest of the family would have been young men and women, some already married, but from Jno. 7:5 it is known that none of them were in sympathy with Jesus so that after Joseph's death Mary might have attached herself to the other

women, her sister Mary the wife of Cleophas, Mary of Magdala, Salome and Joanna, who were disciples of Jesus, instead of making her home with any of her own children. That would explain why Jesus, on the Cross, placed her in John's care although she had children living. Later on, after the Resurrection, James and Jude became converts; possibly one or more of the others did also. At any rate Acts 1. 14 makes it clear that at the first complete assembly of believers after the Ascension both Mary and either some or else all of his brothers were present. Among the arguments for the truth of the Resurrection that are advanced it is not often remarked that Jesus' brothers, who had formerly disbelieved, became believers in the light of the things that had happened; where they had failed to be convinced by his life they were convinced by his death and resurrection.

Joseph, his life's work done, passed quietly and silently from the scene. It may seem a hard and somewhat callous way in which to treat a faithful servant of God who had discharged his commission faithfully throughout life but it is not really so, and Joseph was not the only one. Moses, the greatest man in Israel's history, died alone and unseen amid the fastnesses of Mount Nebo "*and no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day*"; Samuel, whose wise administration and sterling worth converted an undisciplined rabble of warring tribes

into a God-fearing nation, died an old man, bereft of power and authority, in a country village surrounded only by a few student lads; Elijah, who challenged and overthrew idolatry in Israel, went out alone into the wilderness beyond Jordan and was caught away by a whirlwind and never seen again; Daniel, who for more than seventy years held up the banner of the faith in idolatrous Babylon and kept alive the national hope of eventual deliverance, saw the fulfilment of the promise and the triumphant departure of the people of Judah, but was too old to share in the deliverance himself, and he died unrecorded in Babylon. God attaches no importance to the earthly body and the earthly life once His purpose with the individual is achieved. The body goes to the dust; that which is preserved in the strong hands of God comes forth to a new life in a new environment, resplendent in a glory which is enhanced by the merit of the former life's work well done.

So, among that noble company of old time stalwarts of faith who are to take a leading part in the conversion of all the world in the Age yet to come, not the least in high honour will be that gentle and courageous man of faith who had more than any other man to do with the nurture and care of the Son of God come to earth, the man who was called, in his own village and by his own neighbours, just simply, Joseph the carpenter.

Truth gains more even by the errors of one who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself, than by the true opinions of those who only hold them because they do not suffer themselves to think.

— J. S. Mill

* * *

"Seeing that we are all ordained to be citizens of the one Everlasting City, let us begin to enter into that way here already by mutual love."—*Old Elizabethan prayer.*

* * *

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

Full surrender is not passivity; it is the deliberate, volitional act of the regenerated Christian giving the Lord Jesus Christ the place of Lordship. This Lordship becomes meaningful by *the diligent study of God's Word*; by *earnest importunate prayer*; by the exercise of wholehearted *faith*, and by unquestioning and absolute *obedience*. For such there is Divine help, and that help is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself—for He is our victory.

(*Forest Gate Bible Monthly*)

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

DANIEL IN BABYLON

5. Ordeal by Fire

*The story of a
great man's faith*

The story of the three Hebrews who were cast alive into a fiery furnace on account of their refusal to fall down before a pagan idol is one of the classics of Biblical literature. The miracle is so apparently marvellous that men have not hesitated to put the story down as a figurative presentation of Israel's faithfulness to the one true God in all the afflictions suffered at the hands of her Greek and Roman oppressors. But the story in Daniel is older by far than the empires of Greece and Rome. It bears within itself the evidence of its own authenticity. This thing really did happen. These men really were cast into a burning fiery furnace, and did come out unscathed.

The third chapter of Daniel records the story. It does not give any indication as to when it happened. It is probable, however, that this was after Nebuchadnezzar had ended his wars with Egypt and turned to the city-building and other peaceful pursuits which occupied the last twenty years of his reign. In that case it would be after the dream of the great image which had been the means of Daniel's advancement, but before the king's madness. It must have been after Daniel had been elevated to the position of Chief of the Magicians, for only so could he have been exempt himself from the obligation to do homage to the Image.

A great many stirring things had happened since the previous event, the dream of the image, recorded by Daniel. Between chapters 2 and 3 lie some twenty momentous years. About five years after the dream came the death of Jehoiakim and the carrying away of many Israelites into Babylon, as described in 2 Kings 24, Jer. 22. 18 and Jer 36. It was at this time that Ezekiel, a young man of twenty-five, was taken there and lived among the Jewish captives at Tel-Abib. Jehoiachin began his three month's reign and because of disloyalty to the king of Babylon was taken to that city and imprisoned until the death of

Nebuchadnezzar. Eleven years later came the final catastrophe. Zedekiah, also disloyal to his suzerain, who all this time had, as the "head of gold", held the Divine commission of rulership over the nations, saw the Babylonian armies lay siege to Jerusalem for the last time. This was the final taking into captivity; the city was taken and the Temple demolished. The Book of Lamentations was written to commemorate this disaster in Israel's history. Obadiah and Habakkuk prophesied at this time, both in Judea. Jeremiah was in Judea also, and in disgrace with king Zedekiah and his court for his continued insistence that God required them to submit to the Babylonian conqueror. Jeremiah's loyalty to God brought him recognition from an unexpected quarter. According to Jer. 39. 11, when the city was at last captured, "*Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave charge concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard, saying, Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do to him even as he shall say to thee*". Jeremiah eventually went to Egypt and died there (so far as is known. The thesis advanced by some to the effect that he afterwards made his way to Ireland and ended his days in the Emerald Isles rests upon arguments which have no place in this treatise). One wonders if Nebuchadnezzar's concern for Jeremiah was inspired in the first place by Daniel, who, away in Babylon, must have remembered his old friend and teacher and used his influence with the king to ensure his safety.

This third chapter is written in a style quite unlike that of the rest of the book. There is a fulsomeness and exaggeration in the use of the words, a grandiloquent and somewhat monotonous repetition of phrases, which is not at all characteristic of the reverent, straightforward literary style of Daniel. This story reads for all the world like the native Babylonian literature of which so many examples are still in existence. It

might be that here we have the Babylonian official record of the happening, originally written in cuneiform characters on a clay tablet, and copied from the official archives by Daniel for incorporation in his book. There is a strong argument here against the assertion of those critics who brand the book as a kind of "historical fiction" written several centuries after Nebuchadnezzar's time.

We do not know the precise nature of this image of gold which the king set up in the plain of Dura. It has been suggested that it was a replica of the metallic image seen previously in the dream which Daniel interpreted. That is improbable—had it been so, the king would have been much more likely to have constructed it of the four metals he saw in that dream, gold, silver, bronze and iron. There is greater reason for thinking that it was an image of Nebuchadnezzar's favourite deity Bel. The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus says that there was a golden image of Bel forty feet high in the Temple at Babylon, and Herodotus also mentions a similar image. Such images were usually hollow, for the ancients were expert at casting hollow statues in metal. The sixty cubits height of the Biblical image is equivalent to an English measure of fifty-five feet, all objects of gold being measured by a special cubit of a little under eleven inches, and since the width is given as six cubits, or five feet six, and the height of a human figure of that width could not exceed about twenty-five feet, it would seem that the figure was placed upon a lofty pedestal so that it could be seen at a distance, and Daniel records the full height.

It is thought that the Plain of Dura was on the south side of the city, alongside the river. Such a site for this colossal statue would render it a prominent object to be seen by seamen and travellers as they came up the river from the sea, creating an impression something like that now afforded by the sight of the statue of Liberty at the entrance to New York Harbour. In this fashion Bel, the patron deity of Babylon, would be honoured in the eyes of all men in front of his own city. The proclamation to "all peoples, nat-

ions and languages" to fall down and worship at the sound of the music must be understood, of course, as applying only to the vast concourse of people attending the ceremony. Since Babylon always held numbers of people from other nations, gathered there in connection with their trading enterprises, the proclamation was literally true.

The sun blazed down from the clear sky upon a vast crowd embracing members of almost every known nationality on earth. Native Babylonians, city dwellers and country labourers, rubbed shoulders with captives from other lands, Jews and Syrians and Elamites, free-roving sons of the desert, Arabs and Sabeans, traders and merchants from Phoenicia and India; an assemblage of black and brown, yellow and white skins, the whole making a colourful mass of humanity. Near the image stood governmental officials and the various orders of priesthoods, amongst the former being the three Hebrew men who, according to Dan. 2. 49, had been appointed to positions of authority in the realm of Babylon. In all that vast concourse there were two, and two only, who were not expected to bow down when the signal was given. One was Nebuchadnezzar, the Head of the State, and the other was Daniel, the Chief of all the priesthoods and wise men. According to the Babylon mythology, these two men between them represented the heavenly powers, and would not be called upon to participate in an act of obeisance which was incumbent upon all others.

The dedication ceremony proceeded; the herald cried his announcement and, doubtless after a long succession of prayers and incantations in which the priests of all the leading gods had their part, the climax of the ritual was reached. Music rose upon the air and the whole vast concourse, taking its cue from the officials near the image, prostrated in adoration. It must have been a peculiarly gratifying moment for the king, for Nebuchadnezzar is known to have been especially interested in the introduction of public congregational worship amongst his subjects—a thing unknown in previous times.

Three remained standing—three men, who although high in rank in the national government, would neither serve that country's gods nor worship the image the king had set up. It is evident that their defection had passed *unnoticed by the king—three men in that vast assembly could easily have gone unperceived—but others were on the watch.* Some of the Chaldeans, men of the priestly caste, jealous of these three Jews' position and resentful of their scorn of the Chaldean gods, saw their opportunity and quickly acquainted the king with the facts. It is noteworthy that they added a crime which was not included in the herald's announcement. *"They serve not thy gods . . ."* It is here that we perceive evidence of the king's growing pride and arrogance, which later was to plunge him into such terrible humiliation. He would brook no opposition to his demands, and, we read, *"the form of his visage was changed"* against these three who had dared to flout his will.

It is not necessary to assume that the dedication ceremony was broken off whilst the *three men were being dealt with.* Probably the complaint itself was made when the ceremony was over and the crowds were beginning to disperse. The complainants could hardly have left their places to accost the king at a time when he was the central figure in an important religious ritual. We can imagine, therefore, the subsequent scenes being enacted within a smaller circle composed of Court officials, priests and the military guards.

The option was brutal. The three Hebrews could either bow down and worship at the sound of the music, or be cast alive into the furnace: *"And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"* (vs. 15). The passionate and ungovernable nature of the king is well displayed in these few verses. By contrast the calm declaration of the *threatened men is inspiring.* *"We are not careful* (i.e. we are not possessed by anxiety) *to answer thee over this matter."* If God wills to deliver us, He will do so; and if He wills not to deliver, we are his servants. We will not worship.

So they were bound in all their official robes and insignia of office and cast immediately into the burning fiery furnace; and the heat thereof was so great that the men who cast them in themselves died from the flames and heat to which they had perforce exposed themselves.

The furnace was probably one that was normally used for the smelting of iron or copper from crude ore, differing very little from a modern blast furnace. The extraction and working of metal goes back very far in the history of man, the Bible telling us that it was practised by the ante-diluvians, for Tubal-cain, of the race of Cain, in the eighth generation from Adam was the first man to work in copper and iron (Gen. 4. 22). The blast furnace, in which metallic ore is smelted by intense heat in order to extract the pure metal, is a very old invention and relics of such furnaces dating back two, three or four thousand years have been found in Mesopotamia and India, and were evidently in use in Egypt, for they are depicted on certain tomb wall paintings there. Reference to Egyptian blast furnaces is made in three places in the Old Testament (Deut. 4. 20, 1 Kings 8. 51, Jer. 11. 4). They were built of thick brick walls faced with clay treated so as to withstand the intense heat, with an opening at the top through which the flames and heat escaped, and another opening at the bottom closed by a door, through which the molten metal ran out into prepared moulds, and the clinker and refuse could be periodically removed. Huge bellows worked by a number of men provided a forced air draught to maintain the high temperature. The fuel used was charcoal, or more probably coal, for timber was not plentiful in the Euphrates plains, whilst coal was, and is still, easily worked from surface seams in the northern mountains.

An indication of the extent to which such furnaces were then in use is afforded by the fact that when Khorsabad, a suburb of Nineveh, was excavated during the nineteenth century, a stock of one hundred and fifty tons of iron ingots ready for working up into

articles of commerce was discovered. They had lain there since the destruction of Nineveh in Nebuchadnezzar's own day. There is in existence also a clay tablet invoice from an unknown Babylonian blacksmith of several centuries before Abraham, setting out his account for the forging of certain bronze weapons.

The accuracy of the narrative is very striking here. The furnace was heated to seven times its usual heat. One can picture the bellows men straining at their levers and blowing up the white-hot mass to a temperature far exceeding the usual. From the top of the furnace, probably fifteen or twenty feet above the ground, the flames streamed out with a deafening blast. The Scripture says "they fell down bound into the midst of the furnace". They were carried up to the platform around the top and thrown into the yawning opening, falling down to the bed of burning fuel beneath. But, say our translators rather quaintly, "*because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men*" who cast them in. Either they were overcome by the excessive heat at the furnace mouth, and fell in after their victims and were destroyed, or, what is perhaps more likely, the flames streaming out ignited their clothing and they were burned to death before help could be brought.

The lower door had evidently been opened and the king had stationed himself at a respectful distance in order to observe the execution of his sentence. What he did see gravely disturbed him and he rose up from his seat in some agitation. He had expected to watch three bound bodies fall into the fire from above and be quickly consumed. He saw, instead, four men, loose, walking in the midst of the fire—and, said he in a hushed tone to his courtiers, who evidently were not placed so that they too could see into the furnace, "*the form of the fourth is like to a son of the gods*".

It is a pity that our translators rebelled at this piece of unadulterated paganism and rendered this phrase "the Son of God", using

capital letters into the bargain, so that the English reader instinctively thinks of our Lord Jesus Christ, and pictures His presence with the three Hebrews in the fire. Nebuchadnezzar knew nothing of Jesus Christ—and, at that time, very little of the true God. The Hebrew phrase is "a son of the gods" and by this term the king meant one of those guardian spirits in Babylonian mythology who were thought to be the especial messengers of the gods in their dealings with men. No wonder that he was awe-stricken. The very action by which he had sought to demonstrate his personal loyalty to the gods had been reproved by them, and a special messenger sent to preserve alive the three men he had condemned to a cruel death. That was the interpretation king Nebuchadnezzar must have placed upon this amazing happening. And in a swift revulsion of feeling he called to the three men to come forth from the furnace. So they came forth, climbing out through the open door as though no furnace raged within, and stepped up to where the king stood, without so much as the hair of their heads singed, or the smell of fire upon them (vs. 27).

How the story must have run like wildfire through the Jewish communities in Babylon and at Tel-Abib, fifty miles to the south, where the prophet Ezekiel was conducting his own mission. What a wave of renewed confidence must have swept over the exiles as this great manifestation of the power of their God was added to the signs and wonders which had gone before. The king's decree must have followed very quickly, proclaiming penalties upon any who spoke against the Most High God, the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, for, said the decree somewhat wonderingly "*there is no other God that can deliver after this sort*" (vs. 29).

Some twenty years after this stirring happening, Ezekiel, by the river of Chebar fifty miles away, saw that glorious vision of the Millennial Kingdom so wonderfully symbolised in the description of the great Temple with its river and trees of life (Ezek. chaps.

40-48). There is something very fitting in this contrast between the massive image, symbolic of the pomp and majesty of this world and its false gods, with all men bowed down before it in abject homage, and the saintly prophet of God, quietly sitting upon his mountain, viewing the calm beauty of that coming kingdom which shall never pass away or be destroyed. The image of Bel has long since crumbled into dust and been forgotten and no man now knows what it was like, but the glowing words of the prophet live on, and before our mental vision there stands out plainly the vista of that fair city whose name shall be "The Lord is there" (Ezek. 38. 45). *"So shall all thine enemies perish, O Lord, but the name of the righteous shall endure for ever."*

There is a New Testament parallel to this story. It is enshrined in the imagery of the Book of Revelation, where the seer tells of the whole world united in the worship of another image, the "Image of the Beast". All who do not worship the image, he hears, are to be put to death. The only ones to refrain from such worship are the "servants of God", who have been "sealed in their foreheads". In the outcome, as in the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, there is intervention from Heaven. A Rider upon a white horse comes forth and gives battle to all the powers of evil, and the Image, now branded a False Prophet in the eyes of all men (compare Rev. 13. 14-18 with Rev. 19. 20) is cast into the fiery lake and destroyed. There are various detailed interpretations of all this symbolism but the main tenor of the vision is commonly agreed. In the end of the Age there will arise to challenge the incoming Kingdom of God a final and supreme system of power to which nearly all the world will ignorantly give support, the only exceptions being those who have been "sealed" with an intelligent understanding of the Divine Plan, particularly as regards the significance of these events, and who are earnest and devoted disciples of the Master. These will pass through fiery experiences and may suffer loss and even death but even so will emerge spiritually unscathed.

And in the next scene they are shown as riding forth behind their Leader and Captain to establish upon the ruins of that system of which the image has been the head a new one based upon love and righteousness, speaking peace to the people and ruling the nations with a shepherding rod. The final defeat of the enemies of righteousness at the end of this Age is shown here, and we can as readily accept the assurance of Divine intervention in the world's extremity at this time as the fact of Divine intervention on that momentous day in the time of King Nebuchadnezzar.

"At that time" says Daniel (12. 1) *"shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation . . . and at that time thy people shall be delivered."* Daniel's reference is to Israel's expected King-Messiah, standing up for the overthrow of all evil and the restoration of Daniel's people, and finds its fulfilment in the long promised Second Advent of Jesus Christ, in the midst of a great time of trouble "such as was not since there was a nation". Jesus used the same expression when talking about his Second Coming. There may be some very definite prophetic truth, therefore, in the sight which met the startled eyes of the Babylonian king. There may—nay, will—come a time in the final phase of this great distress which is now upon all nations when the great men of the world, the kings, politicians, financiers, industrialists, confident that they have given the death blow to the forces which are heralding the New Order of Christ's Kingdom, will say *"Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?"* And the multitudes *submissive as ever*, will reply *"True, O King"*. Then will those kings and politicians and financiers and industrialists tremble exceedingly as they look into that fiery furnace of the world's trouble and they will say *"Lo, we see four men, loose, . . . and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God"*.

And at that breathless moment in the world's history the kingdoms of this world will

pass under the sovereignty "of our Lord, and of his Christ", and men will know without any

possibility of dispute that the Son of God has returned in the glory of his Kingdom.

(To be continued)

THE ANTIQUITY OF THE BOOKS OF MOSES

The first five books of the Old Testament—Genesis to Deuteronomy—are known collectively as the Pentateuch, and the belief of Jews and Christians that in their present form they are the work of Moses was not challenged until two centuries ago when the emergence of "Textual Criticism" gave opportunity to men with rationalising tendencies to find reasons for asserting that most of the Old Testament was written neither by the reputed authors nor at the period indicated. From this it was an easy step to suggest that much of Old Testament narrative and history is in fact nothing more than "written up" legend and folk-lore having little or no basis in fact: this process, continued into the present, has created in the popular mind a totally false impression of the Old Testament and taken away a great deal of its value. The fact that the discoveries of archæologists in this present century have nullified many of the Critics' conclusions and assertions, and in not a few cases made their confident 19th century pronouncements look rather silly, has not yet filtered through to popular writers, teachers and broadcasters, with the result that the 19th century picture of the Old Testament is still the one that gets the publicity. It is unfortunately true that youthful Christians are liable to be impressed by this shew of scholarship and tend to accept the presentation without knowing how utterly out-of-date it really is; a brief review of the present position will not be out of place and may be helpful.

It was in the year 1670 that Baruch Spinoza, a Dutch-Jewish philosopher of pantheist leanings originated and published the theory that writing was unknown prior to the 8th century B.C. (roughly the time of Isaiah) and that the early books of the Old Testament could not have been written by Moses and were in fact composed by Ezra after the Exile.

Spinoza was followed by Jean Astruc, a French theologian, who in 1753 published a book in which he separated passages in Genesis where the name for "God" is "Jehovah" from those in which it is "Elohim". He suggested that Moses, in compiling Genesis, had two sets of documents or "sources" before him, and these he called the "Jehovistic" and "Elohistic" respectively. These are termed today, in "scholarly" circles, the J. and E. sources. A few years later, Johann Eichhorn, a German historian, produced his *"Introduction to the Old and New Testaments and Apocrypha"* (1787) in which he endorsed Spinoza's views and invented the term "Higher Criticism". The seed sown by these three men flowered and bore fruit a few decades later, and the theologians who accepted and developed these views became known as "Higher Critics".

The first such of considerable note was Abraham Kuenen, a Dutch theologian, with the reputation of a devout and reverent scholar, Professor of Old Testament theology at Leyden University from 1853 onward. Kuenen did more than any man of his time to establish the "science" of the Higher Criticism. In this he was supported by Edouard Reuss and Julius Wellhausen, both German theologians, the latter being the only one of all these to live into the 20th century. By then the thesis that the Old Testament was first put into writing in the 8th century B.C. was almost universally accepted by "advanced" scholars. It is true that until 1888 there were no known specimens of writing or alphabetical inscriptions agreed to be earlier than the Moabite Stone and the Siloam inscription, both of the 8th century B.C., and no one in 1888 dreamed that before another half century had passed the world's museums would be replete with written documents and tablets going back to twenty-five centuries before

Christ, a thousand years before the time of Moses.

The main principles upon which the case for the late writing of the Old Testament is built up are five in number, to wit:—

1. That writing was unknown and had not been invented before the time of the Hebrew prophets, about 700-800 B.C.
2. That the religious thought of nations, without exception, started with polytheism in the earliest times and progressed to monotheism, the worship of one God, in later times, and not the other way round, as Genesis has it.
3. That the code of laws credited to Moses is too advanced for so early a date and must have been devised in the time of the kings of Israel and Moses' name attached.
4. That the Levitical ritual is too sophisticated for a people just out of Egypt and must have been the product of a priestly class after the Babylonian captivity.
5. That the historical events in Babylonia and Egypt recorded in Genesis are unhistorical and never occurred, and are merely a later compilation of old traditions and folk-lore and that many of the kings and notable persons referred to never existed.

The cold hard facts of archæological discovery since 1880 have exploded all these assumptions—for assumptions they were—and demolished the theories regarding the Old Testament built up so painstakingly, and sincerely, by the critics of the 19th century. A few only of the established facts must suffice at this moment.

Firstly, the argument for the late invention of writing was nullified in 1888 by the discovery in Egypt of the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, a large store of official correspondence between Egypt and Canaan, inscribed in cuneiform on clay tablets, written at the time of the Exodus. This took the art of writing back to 1400 B.C. at one bound. In 1905 the famous Egyptologist, Prof. Flinders Petrie, shewed that the Serabit inscriptions in Sinai, previously thought to date from early A.D. times, were in fact of the period of the 12th Egyptian

dynasty, about the time of Abraham. In 1907 Winckler found the lost records of the Hittite empire in modern Turkey, deciphered in 1919 and found to date at about 1800 B.C. 1932 saw the discovery of records of the Canaanite people, at Ras Shamra near Sidon; date, 1400 B.C. Eclipsing all these are the thousands of tablets found in the ancient cities of Babylon, Assyria and Sumeria, going back at least to 2300 B.C. in cuneiform script, and for several centuries before that in a kind of picture writing. The celebrated Sumerian epic, the "*Enuma Elish*", sometimes called the "Babylonian story of creation" contains astronomical allusions which shew that it was originally composed when the sun was in the constellation Aries, and that was between 2000 and 2500 B.C. One Sumerian tablet refers to the "*writings of the ages that were before the Flood*". As far back as any history of man can be traced the art of writing was known. Schultz, in his "*Old Testament Theology*" had said in 1891 "*Of the legendary character of the pre-Mosaic narratives, the time of which they treat is sufficient proof. It was a time prior to all knowledge of writing*". Similar statements had been made by all the leading critics. The later discoveries have shewn how mistaken and void of value were their conclusions in this field.

But the clever ones never give up. The British scientific journal "*Nature*", a mouthpiece for the "modern scholarship", commenting in its issue of 12 September 1942 on the impact of the Ras Shamra discoveries, said unctuously "*It would now seem that many of the patriarchal stories of the Old Testament were not mere oral traditions collected by authors of the time of Solomon and later, but were part of a written heritage derived from the Canaanite Bronze Age*". Anything is better than allowing Moses the credit—but the grudging admission was at least a concession to obvious fact.

Secondly, the idea that polytheism preceded monotheism has been effectually refuted now that so much is known about early civilisations. Prof. Stephen Langdon, one of

the leading Assyriologists of this century, said *"The history of the oldest religion of man is a rapid decline from monotheism to extreme polytheism . . . It is in a very true sense the history of the fall of man"*. It has been observed that, of the many Babylonian and Sumerian epic poems which have survived, the farther back they go in time the nearer they are to monotheistic thought. In fact, many of the "gods many and lords many", to use St. Paul's phrase, revered by the ancients, have been found to be deified men, historical characters elevated to divinity after their death. A notable example is the great Babylonian god Marduk or Bel, who is known now to have been a pre-dynastic hero who lived about five hundred years before the rise of the Sumerian city-states, and is mentioned in Genesis under the name of Nimrod. Dr. Frankfort, who excavated Eshunna in 1930, found evidence that in the third millennium B.C. the gods worshipped under different names were regarded as varying manifestations or aspects of the one God; this is how polytheism must have developed.

Thirdly, the idea that the Mosaic Laws were too advanced for human thought in the time of Moses has had to be abandoned since the discovery in 1902 of the Laws of Hammurabi of Babylon, belonging to about 1800 B.C., and those of Urakagina of Lagash which go back to 2200 B.C. Although neither of these codes rise to the level exhibited by the Laws of Moses they do represent evidence that man's capacity for wise and just law-making was well developed in those distant times and shew that the Mosaic authorship of the later laws is perfectly credible; this apart from the fact that, as claimed by Exodus, Moses received the fundamental principles of his laws from God Himself.

Fourthly, the Levitical ritual of the Pentateuch has since 1932 possessed a companion ritual of very much the same style, and of about the same date, although framed to suit the worship of the pagan gods of Phoenicia, in some of the tablets discovered at Ras Shamra in that year. While here again there is no connection between the two rituals, the

fact that these tablets do exist disposes of the argument that men were not sufficiently developed at that time to devise such rituals.

Fifthly, the assertion that the historical events related in Genesis lacked external confirmation and never really occurred is now disposed of by the vast accumulation of knowledge regarding the ancient civilisations which now exists. Not one statement of fact in Genesis has been disproved; a great many records of people and events for which the Bible was the only authority for thousands of years have now been established indisputably true by means of contemporary written tablets and documents. The quiet comment of Prof. A. H. Sayce (died 1933) a noted archæologist, is relative and pungent. *"It is not the Biblical writer, but the modern author, who is now proved to have been unacquainted with the contemporaneous history of the time."*

In thus establishing the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch the origin of the documents now composing Genesis have still to be explored; the whole of the events therein narrated occurred long before Moses' lifetime. With regard to the other four books, Exodus to Deuteronomy, the position is different; they have to do entirely with matters with which Moses was personally connected. There can be no doubt that these four books were composed and completed in written form during the Exodus itself, probably in the main during the thirty-eight years that Israel was stationary at Kadesh, the final chapters of Deuteronomy with their account of the death of Moses being added by Joshua or Eleazar. Dr. A. S. Yahuda, a leading modern authority on the ancient Egyptian and Hebrew languages, pointed out in 1933 that these four books were written in an Egyptianised form of Hebrew which demanded that the writer thought as much in Egyptian as he did in Hebrew. That writer, of course, was Moses, brought up in the court of Pharaoh and *"learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians"*.

In the case of Genesis it has been well established by experts in the ancient languages that the last fourteen chapters of Gen-

esis, which detail the story of Joseph in Egypt, contain a goodly number of Egyptian words, and the first eleven chapters, from *creation to the death of Terah, a great number of Akkadian and Sumerian words and names.* (The Akkadians were descendants of Shem and Sumerians descendants of Ham; both races dwelt together in the plains of the Tigris and Euphrates from whence Abraham came). In the first case it is evident that the *history of Joseph's life in Egypt and the death there of Jacob* was recorded by Joseph or his fellows and these documents, written on papyrus and quite likely in Egyptian, came into Moses' possession. The records of the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and the twelve sons of Jacob in Canaan, which might well have been either on goatskins, parchment or clay tablets, all of which were in use in Canaan, would also have been preserved in the archives of one of the heads of the tribes—probably Judah—and so likewise have come to Moses. In the case of the first eleven chapters internal evidences point to their having been compiled, in the form in which they came to Moses, during the period twenty to twenty-three centuries before Christ, and therefore considerably earlier than the time of Abraham. *Among these evidences are the facts that all the geographical names are those in current use at that period and some of them had passed out of use or been replaced by other names by Abraham's day; the proper names are derived from Akkadian or Sumerian originals and in many cases incorporate the names of their gods; many words of Akkadian or Sumerian origin appear in the text. Thus the primeval home of the first man was Edinu in Sumerian lore (Eden in Hebrew) until about 2200 B.C. when the*

legends changed the name to Dilmun, which lingered as the name of an island—no longer existing—in the Gulf, into historical times. Similarly the land which Gen. 4 names as the home of Cain in his exile was the eastern shore of the Gulf, known as Nadu (Heb: Nod) until about 2000 B.C. when it became known as Manda (still surviving in the name of its principal river, the Mand). Instances such as these shew that Genesis chapters 2 to 4 at least were composed by a dweller on the Euphrates not later than about 2300 B.C.; certain grammatical errors in dealing with some Sumerian words tend to indicate that the compiler was more familiar with the Semitic Akkadian language than the Hamitic Sumerian, and this strengthens the supposition that he was one of the ancestors of Abraham, perhaps Eber. He must, even at this early date, have compiled his narrative from pre-existing records, and almost certainly had two separate accounts of previous times before him, one Semitic and one Hamitic, which he combined into a continuous story.

So the sacred book of the Christian and Jewish faiths had its origin, not in folk-lore and legends of ancient times collected and edited by some priestly dignitary in the 8th B.C. century, but in the painstaking work of men of God who lived in the dawn of history, setting down their stories in archaic forms of writing which had to be translated and copied time and again in new and different characters, even before Abraham saw them. It has been abundantly demonstrated in this our day that the stories of the Old Testament are factually true, the work of men who knew the facts and lived within measurable time of the events they recorded.

We cannot be yoked in with Christ unless we have His spirit. Two that are yoked together must be of one mind: and that which makes the yoke set lightly upon us is the fixedness of purpose which does not chafe under it or try to get away from it, but which delights to bear it in view of the end to be gained.

The best preacher is the heart; the best teacher is time; the best book is the world; the best friend is God. *Talmud*

* * *

Prayer is the gold key that opens heaven. The tree of the promise will not drop its fruit, unless shaken by the hand of prayer.

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

Matt. 13.33

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." (Matt. 13. 33.)

Despite its brevity, this parable enshrines one of the deepest of the truths concerning the Kingdom which Jesus Christ came to preach and to establish. We are inclined to place so much stress upon the preparation of the "people for God's Name" to be His instruments in the future Age of world conversion that we are liable to overlook another very essential work of preparation which also must make progress during this Gospel Age, and it is this aspect of the Kingdom of Heaven which is made prominent in the parable of the leaven. The Gospel Age has been set apart in the Divine Plan not only for calling and preparing the "Ministry of Reconciliation" which is to effect the work of writing Divine law in the hearts of men during the Messianic Age, but also to allow the leaven of Christian teaching to permeate society and prepare mankind for the demands that will be made upon it during that Age.

Note first the aptness of the allusion. The leaven is added to the meal and is necessary if the meal is to become good, wholesome bread. It does not of itself, however, convert the meal into bread. The fiery experiences of the baking process alone can do that, but the permeation of the mass by the leaven is essential before the baking may be commenced. There is a slow, invisible, nevertheless effective leavening of the dough which, when completed, allows the heat of the oven to do its beneficent work. So it is with the Kingdom, said Jesus. There is a preliminary stage in which the "raw material", so to speak, of that Kingdom is being acted upon by an influence similar to that of leaven upon meal, and results in the whole of that "raw material" being made ready for the experiences which will effect for it its ultimate destiny.

But is not leaven employed in the Scriptures as a symbol of sin? It is so employed when in Matt. 16. 6 Jesus warned his disciples to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees". In this warning He used the same characteristic of leaven to describe the insidious subtlety of those who were like dead men's sepulchres, fair on the outside but inside full of dead men's bones. Again, Paul in 1 Cor. 5. 7, referring to a scandalous affair in the Corinthian church, urged that church to expel a certain openly profligate offender in the words "Purge out therefore the old leaven that ye may be . . . unleavened". Note that in this passage the picture is that of the sinner himself, remaining within the fellowship of the church, being the leaven which will permeate the entire church with its influence, in this case a baneful influence. The individual's expulsion from the community was commended in the words "Purge out therefore the old leaven".

The children of Israel at the Exodus were to purge their houses of leaven and to eat unleavened bread seven days. The idea here was evidently to symbolise their utter separation from all that was of Egypt and a new purity consequent upon their adoption into the family of God and their redemption when the destroying angel passed over the land. Although at this feast, the feast of the Passover, leaven was forbidden, it should be noticed that at the feast of Pentecost, seven weeks later, leaven had to be associated with the offerings. (See Lev. 7. 13; 23. 17.)

One may conclude, then, that leaven is used in allusion to its power of permeation, in symbol of both good and evil influences. In the case of the parable there should be no room for doubt. The Kingdom of Heaven is like this leaven, said Jesus; this is a feature of the Kingdom I am preaching, the Kingdom which I am commencing now and which will one day be worldwide.

What is the nature of this leavening work?

It is not intended to convert the nations. That work is to be carried out during the Messianic Age. It is at the most a work of preparation, of laying the foundations of that greater work which shall once and for all abolish sin in all its aspects and bring in everlasting righteousness.

Is there Scriptural evidence that such a work of preparation is to proceed during this Age? By all means there is. "Go ye into all the world," said Jesus, "and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16. 15-16). "This gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness" (Matt. 24. 14). And more personal to each of us "They may by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2. 12). This last Scripture gives the clue. There is a work to be done by the Church in the flesh, during this Age, which is not to be productive of immediate results, but will have its fruitage in the coming Age. Whilst the chief and foremost business of every Christian is the playing of his or her part in the calling and preparation of those who are fellow-workers in the body of Christ, there is also this secondary work amongst men in general which is likened to the influence of leaven—its results not immediately discernible, but none the less vitally necessary to the final work of the future.

Jesus himself gave further instructions on this matter. "Ye are the salt of the earth" He said (Matt. 5. 13). Salt is a preservative. It must be intimately mingled with that which is to be preserved and it must retain its freshness to be efficacious. If the salt lose its savour, it is henceforth fit for nothing. We are the salt of the earth! It is very unfortunate that the expression has passed into an everyday proverb which implies that the "salt" of the earth are the "choice ones" of the earth, whereas Jesus meant nothing of the kind. His meaning is that by virtue of an intimate mingling with the people of the earth, his disciples by their conduct and teachings would be a preservative and wholesome influence in the world, maintaining a witness and an example of Kingdom standards, which

however unheeded at the time, would yet serve to save the world from utter depravity and make it ready in some small way for the coming Day and its standards. Noah and Lot were such preservative influences in their own days, preachers of righteousness in a world of unrighteousness.

"Ye are the light of the world," said Jesus (Matt. 5. 14). Something of a rather different nature from salt! We are to be an enlightening influence, a light that cannot be ignored even although men persist in shading their eyes from its brilliancy. The light of the world in a literal sense is of course the sun. Did Jesus mean that our Christian life and witness should be as obvious a fact as the existence of the sun itself, so that, whether men hear or whether they forbear, they cannot deny the fact that there have been prophets among them? (Ezek. 2. 5.)

But Jesus has not finished with his disciples yet. A still more tremendous thought comes from his lips. "A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid" (Matt. 5. 14). We then are to be as a city set on an hill—impossible for us *not* to be in the public eye. To what extent do we approach to any attempt at fulfilling this ideal? The idea of a city is that of an ordered and regulated way of life; to be set on an hill adds the thought of a Divinely set and ordained way of life. Men, looking upon the Christian community upon earth, are to see it as a city set upon an hill—a compact community proclaiming and living by standards which have been given by Heaven and which are to be manifested to all men. Men may not acknowledge the authority of that city; they may avoid it in their travels and build their roads to swerve round the hill instead of going up and into the city; but they must always be conscious that the city is there, standing by a system of authority and rulership which one day it will have power to extend over the whole world.

So then, they who by virtue of their position as footstep followers of the Lord Jesus Christ have become as leaven in this world have the duty and privilege of working silently, unobtrusively, until the leavening process

is complete and the world stands ready to be introduced to the reign of Christ in power. For two thousand years they will have been manifest to men as the salt of the earth, as the light of the world, as a city on an hill, and then at length, their work of witness completed, they will come forth in glory and power to fulfil their historic mission of world conversion. It is then that the fruit of the leavening work will be manifest. *"Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it*

after many days". (Eccl. 11. 1). It is upon the basis of this "witness" that the greater invitation to the fountain of life will be based and the grand work commence. It is because men will have already heard and known—and seen—something of Kingdom standards that some of them will break out, as the prophet declares they will break out, into the rapturous words *"Lo, this is our God: we have waited for him, and he will save us"* (Isa. 25. 9).

JOSHUA AND THE COMPUTER

During the past twelve months or so there has been a gay little story going the rounds of sundry Christian periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic concerning a NASA computer at a USA space research station which suddenly and most unexpectedly came up with proof that a day really was missed in Joshua's time when, as the Book of Joshua has it, *"the sun stood still"*. The Chief Engineer of an American engineering concern, a consultant in the U.S. space programme, is supposed to have described how a computer at Green Belt, Maryland, was put in operation to determine the positions of the sun, moon and planets at all times up to a thousand years hence so that precautions could be taken to prevent orbiting earth satellites *"bumping into them"* (!). Whilst thus engaged it came to a halt and indicated that there was *"a day missing in elapsed time"*, which was determined as being 23 hours 40 minutes at the time of Joshua and 40 minutes in that of Hezekiah. This was supposed to "prove" the truth of the Bible.

Several copies of the story—with variations of detail—from different journals reached the BSM office but a quick examination soon showed that the story was an obvious fiction. It took half an hour to verify that the engineering company named did not exist. The most distant earth satellites are not more than 23000 miles away whilst the moon and the sun are a quarter million and 92 million miles distant respectively, so the danger of *"bumping into them"* would appear to be remote. A number of other allusions in the

story suggested measurable ignorance of space science on the one hand and the Old Testament on the other. It was clear that the article need not be taken seriously and it was not deemed worthy of mention in this journal. Since, however, after twelve months it seems still to be in active circulation this brief note has been compiled for the record.

So far as we can trace, the story seems first to have been broadcast from a Texas radio station, reported in some local newspapers, then picked up and repeated from one Christian journal to another.

A few months ago the publishers of the Christadelphian journal, *"The Testimony"*, conducted their own investigation, with usual Christadelphian thoroughness. An enquiry to NASA, the U.S. Government Space Authority, elicited the information that they knew nothing of the "space consultant" responsible for the story and that none of their staff or scientists had been engaged on any such operation as was reported. The author himself, when finally found, was described as disavowing the article as published and that anyway he could not remember where he had obtained the information upon which he had based it.

There the matter rests. It seems a pity to spoil a good story, but the interests of Truth are paramount, and in fact a good deal of harm can be done to the Faith by the injudicious reciting of alleged "proofs" which can fairly easily be discredited by anyone having knowledge of related facts. And the historic veracity of the Old Testament remains intact;

the stories of Joshua's "long day" and the return of the shadow on Hezekiah's sundial are both true history. Some remarkable things did occur on these two occasions and no computer is needed to satisfy us of that.

* * *

An article on "When the sun stood still"

appeared in the BSM for Oct. 1965 and one on "The Sundial of Ahaz" in that for Nov. 1969, in both cases examining the texts closely and outlining in full what seems really to have happened. Copies of these articles are available, on loan only, on request.

A PECULIAR PEOPLE

*Some thoughts on
1 Pet. 2.9*

In his letter to the scattered strangers Peter describes them as "a peculiar people". This word "peculiar" has quite a different meaning now from that of the time when the Authorised Version was written. Today, people (or things) are a bit peculiar if their behaviour is odd or off-beat. Modern translations refer to these people as "marked out for His own" or "belonging especially to God", and this is a simple but adequate description. However, the question arises, who are these people and what is their function?

Students differ as to the identity of these scattered strangers. Some argue that they are Christian Jews. Others that statements in the letter indicate that they are Gentiles (or Greeks), but this is quite irrelevant for it is quite clear that, since the death and resurrection of the Redeemer, ALL, Jew and Greek alike are ONE in Christ Jesus (Rom. 10. 12; Gal. 3. 28; Col. 3. 11). However, it is of interest to note that the titles applied to these people in 1 Pet. 2. 9 are the old titles applied to Israel in earlier promises (Exodus 19. 5. 6; Deut. 14. 2). And Peter tells the scattered strangers that "all the old titles of God's people now belong to you". According to one authority the peculiar people are the Jews and (in the wider sense) God's elect. The fact that God has visited the Gentiles to take out a people for His name seems to have led some to believe that these peculiar people are exclusively Gentiles, but we must remember that before Peter saw the vision of the sheet let down and Paul was called to be the Apostle to the Gentiles the call was exclusively to the Jews.

As we have already noted, Jew and Greek

are now all one in Christ Jesus; however in his treatise on the failure of Israel in Romans 9 to 11, Paul makes it quite clear that "*once they are made, God does not withdraw his gifts or his calling*" (Rom. 11. 29 *Phill.*). He further suggests that the original call is only held in abeyance until the full number of the Gentiles has been called in (Rom. 11. 25-28). This raises the question, how can the two calls be implemented?

In seeking an answer to the question let us consider two of the titles applied both to Israel and the Church of this age, namely "royal priesthood" and "holy nation". Accepting the fact that the priesthood represented and served the people, let us establish the cause of their failure. Without being in any sense morbid we must note that their failure was in many cases uncleanness, as a result of their association with women (our reference to this particular sin will be explained later). The sin of Eli's two sons is described in 1 Sam. 2. 22-25. The plague that destroyed 24,000 and the reason for it is described in Numbers 25. 1-9, and there are other passages condemning the priesthood for similar failures.

History shows us that in spite of all the instructions of the Mosaic law they were not made either a holy nation or a royal priesthood. The induction of the Priesthood and its development along the Aaronic and Levitical lines is of great interest, but it is of no immediate importance to our theme, for as the writer to the Hebrews shows, this priesthood failed completely, also that the new High Priest is not of the Aaronic order, but is a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.

This expression is also of great interest

but we must be brief.

We note first that he is to be a "High" priest. Whilst this office of High Priest existed from the time of Aaron, no priest in pre-exilic times occupied the unique position which the High Priest came to occupy after the return from exile. At first the priestly duties included the instruction of the people, sanitary and medical care for their welfare and the services of the house of God, but had no hint of rulership. In the passage of time the priestly function became closely linked with kingship, notably in the time of David and Solomon. The highest point of High Priestly authority was reached in the time of the Hasmoneans, when the High Priest added the regal to his priestly title. (The Prince mentioned in Ezekiel's vision of the New Temple seems to be identified here.) The merging of the Priesthood and Rulership is foreseen at the time of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem after the captivity. It would appear that Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the High Priest were in joint authority during the rebuilding of the Temple, but the crowning of the priest as recorded in Zech 6. 9-13 seems to weld the two offices together in a remarkable way. The fact that in the Authorised Version there are TWO crowns makes a clear understanding difficult; some students think that it was Zerubbabel that was crowned, not Joshua. It is also suggested that a double crown is described and that both were symbolically crowned; it is also suggested that a poetic rendering of the passage (verse 9) would describe Zerubbabel as building the Temple and ruling on HIS throne, and Joshua, bearing his glorious office of High Priest, being a priest upon HIS throne. Whatever the correct interpretation may be, it is the final phrase that really concerns us here, "HE SHALL BE A PRIEST UPON HIS THRONE". This may be as obscure as the Melchizedek priesthood, but it does in a truly remarkable way bring the two offices together more clearly than the rather vague references to the latter in Psa. 110. 4 and Heb. 5. 6 & 7. Let us now return to the peculiar people of 1 Peter 2. In Revelation

chapters one and five they are referred to as priests and kings. However, modern translators refer to them rather as a realm of priests, a royal house to serve as priests, etc. (the difficulty of identification caused by the "US" in the A.V. of Rev. 5. 10 is resolved by replacing it by "THEM" and this is generally accepted by students). They are described as a royal house to *SERVE* as priests (N.E.B.) and this helps us considerably in understanding how the roles of Priest and King are to be combined. Broadly speaking the rulers of this world can be divided into two classes, the despots or absolute rulers, and those who rule by serving. In spite of the "iron rod" of Rev. 2. 27 etc., we would suggest that *service* will be the keynote of the rule of the new Royal House.

Before considering this rule we must note how these peculiar people are made a royal house. According to Titus 2. 14 they are to be redeemed from all iniquity, and *PURIFIED* unto Christ a peculiar people. We note also that Israel were (and are) to be so purified in the sense that they are described as a holy nation.

In references to both natural and Spiritual Israel there is also the thought of dedication or devotion. This combination of purity and dedication is seen in the description of those who stand on Mount Sion with the Lamb (Rev. 14. 11). They are redeemed from the earth and "*were not DEFILED WITH WOMEN, FOR THEY ARE VIRGINS*". (This is, of course, symbolic but they are seen in contrast with the type discussed earlier who *were* so defiled). They also follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth (dedication means devotion). In these few words we have a comprehensive description of those who will become God's peculiar people of the future. They are described in Rev. 20. 7 taking part in the First Resurrection, to be *PRIESTS* of God and of Christ and to *REIGN* with him for a thousand years. In Rev. 3. 21 they are described as the victorious who will be seated with Christ *IN* his throne. On the other hand they are those described in Rev. 7. 9-17. They stand *BEFORE* the throne clothed

in white robes, BUT, and this is most significant, they have come up out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes (*having become defiled*). They stand BEFORE the throne, and SERVE God day and night IN HIS TEMPLE.

This distinct difference between two sets of SERVING priests is seen in Ezekiel's vision of the Temple of the future which is yet to be fulfilled. They are described in Ezekiel 44. The LEVITICAL priests are to be given the duties of guarding the gates, slaughtering the sacrificial animals and serving in the outer courts, BUT, as they are those who went astray far from God when Israel went astray after their idols, they are to bear their iniquity, yet they shall be ministers in the sanctuary, BUT THEY SHALL NOT COME NEAR unto God to do the office of a priest nor come near to any holy thing. On the other hand the Zadokite priests, who went not astray, are to be in charge of the sanctuary to COME NEAR to minister before God and to offer sacrifices at HIS table. The development of the Zadokite and Levitical priests, and their descent from Eleazar and Ithamar respectively is a very interesting study, but is beyond the scope of this article. So we must be brief and note only the difference in levels of service.

These levels of service, seen in both Ezekiel and Revelation, portray the difference in levels of service for those who are, in the fulness of time, to become God's peculiar people, but the need for this is obvious when we realise that the rule of the next age is to be a spiritual one, yet is to be exercised over the material world. It is, of course, a matter of conjecture how this world government will be organised, but as we look around and see man's complete failure to rule, it is obvious that something radically different must and will be established. Men's efforts to set up a

form of world government have failed because they lacked both power and any unifying factor.

The Apostle Paul speaks of the hidden purpose of God, which is that the universe, ALL IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH, might be brought into a unity in Christ (Eph. 1. 9 N.E.B.). It is in this work of unifying that the peculiar people will take a vital part, and unification postulates the existence of peace.

In Haggai 2. 7 we read that the desire of all nations shall come. In the minds of many this statement is somehow linked with the statement in the latter part of verse 9 to indicate that the desire of all nations is peace. It may be true that the desire of all nations IS peace, but that is not what is meant in verse 7. More critical translations make it quite clear that what is meant is that the treasures of all nations are brought hither, i.e. to the new Temple (*Moffatt*). The Amplified version notes that "shall come" is plural, and points out that it refers to the most desired treasures that ALL nations will bring as gifts, and gives as a parallel the gifts of the Magi brought to the Babe at Bethlehem. This is in line with the prophecy of Rev. 22. 24 & 26 and indicates the need for the priestly services as seen in Ezekiel's vision of the new Temple.

In the type the people brought animals or birds as sacrifices, but in the New Jerusalem the nations will bring all their desirable and precious things. Looking into the misty future we catch a glimpse of the service which the priesthood of kingly lineage will render as they serve God IN His throne, assisted by the priests who will render acceptable service BEFORE the throne. Under the righteous rule of these peculiar people, united with their glorified Head, all in heaven and on earth will be brought into a unity in Christ, according to the hidden purpose of God.

Envy, hatred, jealousy, animosity, bitterness, and all manner of uncharitableness, are the mental deficiencies of a disordered mind (Gal. 5. 19-21). Love, generosity, kindness, goodwill, forbearance, are the mental

vitamins necessary to bring about a proper mental balance, and spiritual adjustment, scripturally termed "The spirit of a sound mind" (Eph. 4. 23, 5. 9-11; 2 Tim. 1. 7; Gal. 5. 22-23).

GOD OF ALL SPACE

4. Ages of Eternity

*Impact of space science
upon Christian belief*

What of the far-distant future, when the human race is fully at one with God, evil has vanished without trace, and death is a thing of the past. The Bible goes no farther than the close of the Millennium, with which is associated the disappearance of evil and the entry of reconciled men into everlasting life. Jesus alluded to that time in the words *"come ye blessed of my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Matt. 25. 34). This, says Paul, is when Christ, at the close of his Millennial work with mankind *"shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, the Father, that God may be all in all"* (1 Cor. 15. 24). Of the state of humanity after that moment there is barely a hint, only that *"the dwelling of God is with men . . . and there shall be no more death . . . for the former things are passed away . . . behold, I make all things new"* (Rev. 21. 3-5). *"Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind"* (Isa. 65. 17). *"In the coming ages"* says Paul, God will *"show the immeasurable riches of his grace"* (Eph. 2. 7). The unassailable principle which the Bible enunciates with clear and definite voice is that life goes on; life is endless.

The idea of eternity is difficult to grasp and even today there are varying definitions of what is meant by the word. "Eternal" and "everlasting" in the Bible are usually rendered from the Greek *aiōnian* and the Hebrew *olam*, both of which imply duration or continuity in time as well as permanence of quality or state. This idea of duration, of continued progress in time, is increasingly being abandoned in modern thought and the thesis advanced that eternity is equivalent to timelessness, a condition of no-time, an eternal "now" in which the past, present and future exist simultaneously. It is almost as if some types of mind shrink from the prospect of perpetual conscious existence subject to sequential change and continuing experience, rather

preferring a kind of Nirvana in which the mind ceases to concern itself with external activity and sinks into the embrace of a universal Consciousness having no purpose or object beyond the serene contemplation of an unchanging environment. This is not the Bible view; God is a God of action and activity, of ceaseless creativity and continuing achievement, and all His creatures are intended ultimately to take their places in an orderly system of created things of infinite variety and continuous development. And this implies duration and a consciousness of duration.

It is debatable whether intelligent life can continue on any other basis. Edmund Parsons, writing on the metaphysical problems of Time (*"Time Devoured"* 1964) has said that *"all consciousness is consciousness of change, with duration as relative to it"*. Dr. Eiseley (*"The Firmament of Time"* 1961) says that life, unlike matter, has a definite origin at a point in time and continues travelling in a unique fashion in the time dimension. This treatise has already referred to current investigations which show that intelligent consciousness can only subsist when it is continually aware of, in contact with, and affected by, the varying characteristics of a changing environment. Life in eternity must be thought of as continued progress through new experiences and into new fields of knowledge, without end. Thus space, time, life and progress are all infinite and there can be no end or boundary to any of them, just as there can be no end or limit to the creative power and activity of God.

Coming back from these rather exalted heights to the position of the redeemed and perfected human race at the end of the Messianic reign, the fact has to be faced that this planet earth, admirably adapted as it is for continued human life, is limited in size. The original Divine commission at man's creation is *"be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and*

subdue it" (Gen. 1. 29) has been measurably accomplished already, although the present fashionable forebodings about the earth's inability to support more than the three thousand millions it has at the moment are wide of the mark and quite inaccurate. Under the present social system, controlled by greed and characterised by ignorance, it may well be so. but under the beneficent and wise administration of the Messianic Age the position will be very different. It has been reliably calculated that if full use was made of the available land surface and of usable solar energy reaching the earth sufficient food could be produced for fifty times the present population, although the planet would be uncomfortably crowded long before that number was reached. But even so, if life is to go on into the unlimited future it is clear that man must either migrate from the earth or stop procreating.

The second alternative is sometimes thought to be unnatural, but is this really so? The same thing happens in everyday life. In the traditional life span of seventy years the procreative period of a married pair does not exceed some twenty-five years; the family is complete and the process ceases. It might well be that in a communal or racial sense God has ordained things the same way. If, at a certain point in history, the original commission and power to "increase and fill the earth" will have achieved its purpose, and the power so to do comes to an end, the analogy with the individual family is exact. In such case the human race could be regarded as a unit of Divine creation, complete within itself and properly settled in this home in space which has been created for it.

The alternative—successive migrations to other homes in space—if considered from the purely physical standpoint, bristles with difficulties. Asimov, in "*Planets for Man*" (1965) says that, assuming the necessary technical problems could be solved in the next hundred years, it would be necessary from the year A.D. 2100 onwards to send into space 900,000 persons every day in order to keep the population of this earth within max-

imum limits. How such a number would survive, either on the journey or upon arrival at destination, is not stated. In any case no space-ship has been designed or even imagined which could make such a journey. There are high hopes of reaching our neighbour planet Mars in the next few years but this is as far as serious thinking goes. The colossal amount of materials which would have to be taken from the earth's resources to transport and support such emigrants on such a scale on their way to a planet outside the solar system, even if such were possible, would exhaust the earth's total supply in a very short time, and leave the situation worse than before.

The problem, though, is not really a physical one. If it should transpire in the purpose of God that men from this earth are to commence a new life at some other spot in the far recesses of the Universe then it can be expected that Divine power will call into action forces unknown to man and outside the range of his powers to do what he cannot do of himself. The idea of instantaneous transfer to another life and another world is a familiar one in ordinary Christian theology. Scripture teaching is plain that at his Coming the Lord Christ takes to himself his faithful; the Apostle Paul describes this as a "change" from earthly to heavenly conditions (1 Cor. 15. 15-50), as being "caught away to meet the Lord" (1 Thess. 4. 16-17) where the word used means literally "to be snatched away". If such an instantaneous transfer is to be the experience of certain specific individuals, the Christian Church at one time in earth's history, and we know that this is the case, then no reason exists to doubt the feasibility of the same thing in a different sphere and to a different end at another time if such should be the Divine Will.

One apparently insurmountable objection to the idea that the earth will be the home of humanity to all eternity is the popular scientific view that the sun must one day cool down and in consequence all life be extinguished upon earth. A very complete process for the formation and eventual disintegration

of stars has been worked out on the basis of observations and calculations from which it is believed in authoritative quarters that the sun has only about five thousand million years of useful life left to it. Having used up most of its hydrogen it will, in consequence of its reduced weight, enlarge in size and destroy the earth by its corresponding temporarily enhanced heat; it will then slowly cool and the solar system become a frozen and lifeless waste. If all this is true then there is obviously no eternal home for man upon earth. But no one can be sure that it is true. After all, no man has actually observed such processes taking place, for the time scale of the stars is too vast. In fact, observations of the past one hundred and fifty years, from which the stellar processes of twenty thousand million years have been deduced, are on the same time-scale as if a man, knowing nothing of Nature, should take a movie film of the plant life in his garden for just one quarter of a second and on the basis of that brief record form a complete theory of the growth of plants from seed-sowing to flower and fruitage during a complete year.

The theory of a dying sun is not universally held. One school of investigators believes that in its journey through space the sun sweeps up hydrogen to replace that which is consumed and converted to heat, as though the fire is being stoked up as fast as it burns. It has been discovered in quite recent years that the vast stretches of "empty space" between the stars are not empty at all; they are full of free atoms, mainly of hydrogen, and because space is so big and the stars in it so relatively small the material composing the stars is only about one ten-thousandth part of all the substance there is in the universe. The remaining 99.99 per cent is distributed loose throughout all space. The sun with its planets is travelling through space at a speed of 60,000 miles per hour so that it must inevitably collect a lot of that material in its course. Even the earth, much smaller, is known to be picking up a thousand tons of matter from outer space every day, in its course round the sun. And if someone sug-

gests that, even so, in the infinity of eternity even this vast store of matter must be used up and where is the next lot coming from, science is already well on the track of the answer. A few generations ago it was almost universally believed that the entire universe was getting colder as the heat from the sun and stars was dissipated into space and that nothing could ever recover that lost heat. That belief was based on the so-called "mechanical" view of the universe which regarded it as a vast machine powered by heat; when the heat was all gone the universe would come to a stop, cold and still. The principle which gave rise to that theory was the then fairly new science of thermodynamics, treating of the relation and interaction between heat and energy, a science which dictates the design and capability of every kind of power generating device and every machine which needs power to drive it—since all power comes primarily from heat, through the agency of coal, oil, sunshine and so on. The chief apostle of this science was Nicolas Carnot (1796-1832) who was a good engineer but made no claim to being a theologian; he defined his thesis in terms now known as the "second law of thermodynamics" but he was talking about steam-engines and not about stars. Nevertheless it became fashionable to say that the universe cannot go on forever because of the second law of thermodynamics. But the universe does not consist fundamentally of steam-engines; it consists fundamentally of stars, and today different counsels prevail. The nature of the processes going on inside the stars is better understood, and there seems to exist a very real possibility that the energy generated by the annihilation of matter in stars is, at a later stage and elsewhere in the universe, re-constituted into matter which can be transformed again into energy. Scientists are beginning to perceive the rudimentary principles of a driving force which maintains the universe in ceaseless action and reaction the effect of which is to continue eternally the chemical interchanges between matter and energy upon which all life depends.

That driving force is God. He is the source of the energy which powers all creation, which under certain conditions and at one time appears as matter and under other conditions and at another time is manifested as active energy again. He is the source and sustainer of all life, which makes use of that matter and that energy to function in its appointed manner. The universe is not a dying creation but an eternal one because it is sustained by the eternal Creator, *"in whose hand is the soul of every living thing and the breath of all mankind"* (Job 12: 10). With that fact firmly established it matters nothing whether mankind is to find his eternal home on this earth or experience a later change of habitat from an old home due for dissolution to a new one newly blossoming into flower. The power of the Most High is adequate for the transfer, and since, to the redeemed, Heaven is where God is, and God is everywhere, the geographical location, so to speak, of the "new heavens and new earth" which is the inheritance of perfected mankind is surely a minor issue. The Biblical pictures and foreviews of that consummation

are expressed in terms of this earth as we know it but that is the only possible manner in which the glories of the future can be described to men who have never known anything else but this earth. No matter where man may find himself in the eternal future it will always be a true picture; man's outward physical perfection, adjusted and adapted to a perfect outward environment, allied with his inward mental and moral attunement to his Creator and his God, will ensure his absolute happiness and content in whatever place it pleases God that he should dwell.

So man approaches, not the end, but a new beginning. Perhaps that is, after all, the mystery of creation, a succession of endings that are also beginnings. Life goes on, reaching always forward, ever finding something new and something greater and grander on the way. There may, after all, be a more profound truth than has ever been suspected enshrined in those words which God utters when the world of human insufficiency gives place to the Divine rule of the future; *"the former things are passed away; behold, I make all things new"*.

THE END

THAT LUMP OF SUGAR

A short note on page 134 of the Nov./Dec. issue, tracing a likeness between Christian growth and the difference between a lump of sugar and a diamond, has led a correspondent to point out that sugar is not, as stated, "pure carbon", like the diamond. It is, of course, a carbo-hydrate, a combination of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen. The analogy drawn in the paragraph is not unduly affected; it was not so much the purity of the two elements that was stressed as the relative softness of the one and the hardness of the other, picturing the immaturity and weakness of the "babe in Christ" compared with the spiritual strength and tenacity of the mature Christian. Nevertheless the slip should not have occurred; the item was taken from an old Christian periodical and not checked as it should have been.

It would seem, however, that the subject can be pursued a little further with profit.

There is one school of thought amongst geologists which stresses evidences that many mineral substances, including the diamond, may have originated from organic (vegetable) residues by means of great heat and pressure, in the same way as coal and amber. Branfield, in *"Continuous Creation"* (1950) gives the basis for this conclusion and says *"perhaps the most curious thing in this world of wonderfully strange things is the diamond—a vegetable gum transformed"*. Now if this be indeed a fact, then the analogy is very apt. Out of the dead and dying plants of the earth, born of the earth and destined to survive only a few years and then follow their predecessors into oblivion, to be crushed and ground under pressure, fused and metamorphosed by heat, is produced at length a glistening crystalline diamond, the most valuable of all jewels. This is how the Christian is so worked upon by the Master that at last he becomes firm and handsome,

fitted for the Master's use. The plant is essentially transient and perishable; "*all flesh is grass . . . the grass withereth, the flower fadeth*" (Isa. 40. 6-7) but by means of

the stressful and fiery experiences of life it can be transformed into one of those diamonds which "*shall be mine, saith the Lord, when I make up my jewels*" (Mal. 3. 17).

THINK ON THESE THINGS

An Exhortation

The Apostle Paul in Phil. 4. 8 gives very good advice to the Christian believer. He tells us (see, for example, *Rotherham* and *Diaglott* translations of this verse) to think on the things which are true, dignified, righteous, pure, lovely, of good report. This does not mean just reading about these things, as we would read a newspaper or a novel, to keep abreast with the world's happenings, or to have an hour's entertainment. The Greek word '*legizomai*' rendered 'think' is defined by Greek lexicons as follows: 'To think upon, ponder' (*Bagster*); 'Think upon, consider' (*Robinson*); 'Consider, weigh' (*Souter, Abbott; Smith* is similar). The *Diaglott* therefore very aptly translates '*Attentively consider these things*'. These things to which the Apostle is referring are worthy of our deepest and careful consideration. They are not things which are to afford us momentary consideration, and then to pass from the mind. They are to be considered, pondered over, weighed up. They are to be stored in our mind, our memory, to be reflected upon. By this process they will become part and parcel of ourselves. We think this is what the Wise Man is referring to when he said—'*As he (a man—or woman as well) thinketh in his heart, so is he*'. In this way our characters are formed—developed, for good or bad—for right or wrong. No wonder that the Apostle admonishes us to set our mind upon the heavenly things—for it is by the renewing of our mind (through heavenly knowledge—Col. 3. 10) that we are transformed into the Divine likeness. (Col. 3. 2 RV; Rom. 12. 2 with 2 Cor. 3. 18.)

In thinking of those things which are true, dignified, righteous, pure, lovely, our minds naturally and truly turn to our Lord Jesus, our great pattern and example. In him we truly find these things personified. Can we think

of another character which so sets forth and exhibits to us the things that are true, dignified, righteous, pure, lovely. The Apostles were indeed noble examples, for us, but they were also, as we are told in Acts 14. 15, men of like passions as ourselves, and in that way fall short, as they themselves have acknowledged, of the glorious example and standard set before us in our beloved Lord. It is for this reason that the Master alone can speak to us and say 'Follow Me!' No one else can speak to us in this way. The Apostles never exhorted us to follow them. They did indeed say—see RV of 1 Cor. 11. 1—'imitate us as we imitate Christ', that is, follow our example—do as we do, follow the Master. So we have such good advice as '*Attentively regard Jesus*' (Heb. 3. 1 *Diaglott*). '*Looking away to . . . Jesus. Consider him attentively*' (Heb. 12. 2, 3 *Diaglott*). Looking away to Jesus suggests to us, (as some have pointed out) that we are looking away from all others, and looking unto him. '*They saw no one, save Jesus only.*' This was of course very appropriate in the letter to the Hebrews, where the writer is drawing attention to the contrast between the old arrangement and the new. They were to look away from Moses, Aaron, and the other leaders of the past, and to realise that God's great Messenger now speaking to them was the Son '*This is my beloved Son . . . hear ye him*'.

The word 'consider' in Heb 12. 3 ('consider him') is the Greek word '*analogizomai*' which *Bagster's Analy. Greek lexicon* defines as meaning 'consider attentively' and *Robinson* as 'consider attentively—reflect upon'. This calls for deep and reverent meditation. The word consider in Heb. 3. 1 is '*kata-noeoo*' which is defined by *Bagster* as meaning 'Observe, mark, contemplate'. *Robinson* gives the further definition of 'To mind accurately'

while Abbott-Smith says 'consider carefully' and Souter 'Take in a fact about'. This draws to our attention the importance of careful and accurate information concerning this great One who we are exhorted to observe or contemplate. This brings us into line with the requirements of Phil. 4. 8. There are many things which we may read about in a newspaper or a novel which may be neither true, or lovely; they may not be dignified, they may not be just. It is of course necessary for us to be acquainted with the things happening in the world, that we may note the things foretold in our Father's word of Truth, and where we are on the stream of time. But we do not, or should not, let our minds be filled with these things, that they become part and parcel of us. The things with which we are to fill our minds and be transformed are the things which are true, dignified, righteous, pure, lovely, and of good report.

In thinking of our Lord as the exemplification of these things, let us see that we are conforming our pattern to the ideal. A thing may be true, and yet may not be pure, and it will therefore fall short of our ideal. It will therefore not be one of those things with which we should fill our minds. A thing may be lovely, but it may not be true. It, no less than the first mentioned, must also be discarded. The things which we learn about our Lord, must not only be pure, and lovely, but they must also be true, otherwise they are not the '*katanoëeo*' knowledge which we have seen mentioned in Heb. 3. 1. We should note that first in the list of those things which we are to think upon and lay to heart, as some translations give Phil 4. 8, are those things which are true. They may be pure, they may be lovely, but if they are not true, they are not giving us an accurate knowledge of our beloved Lord and Master. They are not the things which we should think over and lay to heart.

Nothing is sweeter than Love, nothing more courageous, nothing higher, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in heaven and earth; because Love is born of God, and

All Christians must agree that the only accurate source of information concerning our Master is that given us in the New Testament, the pictures which the writers of the New Testament have drawn for us of him, what he said and did. The nearer we get to the thoughts of the original in which the manuscripts of the New Testament were written the better opportunity we have for getting a fuller and more accurate knowledge of the Son of God. In addition to the New Testament writings, there have, of course, been many good books written to help us understand more fully and with accuracy the things which are true, and pure, and lovely, as portrayed in Jesus of Nazareth. Good men have concentrated their studies upon the New Testament, often in its original language, that they may seek to draw therefrom and faithfully portray the portrait and character of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Complete knowledge in all things is not given to any one at the present time, and it must be frankly acknowledged that while much that is true and good has been set forth by such writers, they are not entirely free from errors. But as such they have indeed been on the right track, in seeking to ascertain from, and set forth, the New Testament teaching concerning the Man Christ Jesus.

The only safe guide to a careful and accurate knowledge of the Son of God is that afforded us by the New Testament itself, with, to a certain degree, the assistance of those books and helps which merely act as pointers and guides to enable us to understand what is therein written. Let us make sure that the things with which we are indeed filling our minds, especially in connection with the Son of God, are not only pure and lovely and of good report, but are true as well. Knowledge of essential things built on any other foundation than TRUTH itself is a waste of time, and can be a delusion and a snare.

cannot rest but in God, above all created beings. He that loveth, flieth, runneth, and rejoiceth; he is free and is not bound.

Thomas à Kempis



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

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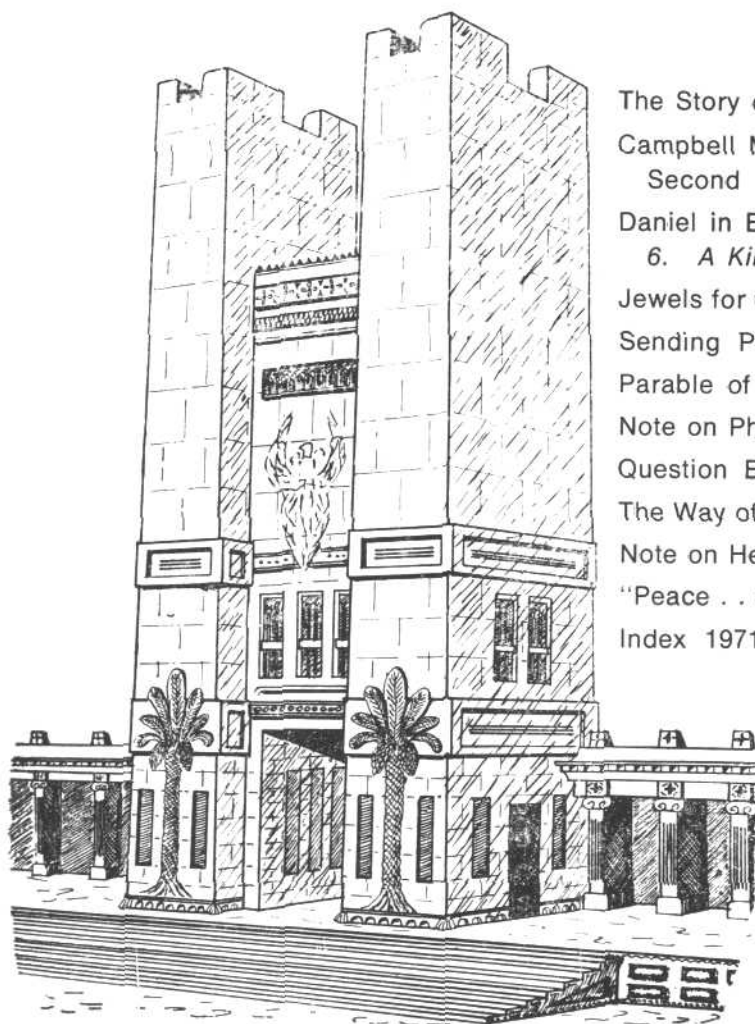
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Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.

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An apology is due for the late despatch of the Sep.-Oct. issue, consequent upon the carriers having temporarily lost the entire consignment between printer and distributor.

Gone from us

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

THE STORY OF THE SHEPHERDS

A reflection on events of the first Christmas

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them" (Luke 2. 8-9).

Favoured men, the first to gaze upon the Lord's Christ! The wise men from the East came with their gifts, but the shepherds were there first with their homage, and for ever afterwards those Judean shepherds glorified and praised God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it had been told unto them.

It would seem that the Wise Men came much later, probably a year or more. The shepherds heard the wonderful news the same day that it happened; the angel had said "unto you is born *this day* in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord". Perhaps even whilst he was speaking Mary was experiencing the never-to-be-forgotten wonder of taking her child into her arms for the first time. When the wise men ascended the steps of Herod's palace their question was "Where is He that *is born* King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the East and are come to worship him" (Matt. 2. 2). Then there had to be a conference of chief priests and scribes to agree upon an answer to Herod's question that would afford the monarch the information he wanted without giving offence to his royal dignity. Even after the reply had been given, and doubtless further discussions, which have not been recorded, held between king and priests, the wise men were called again into the royal presence and in receiving instructions to go to Bethlehem, were admonished to bring Herod word again. The king's command to slay all the infants of two years old and under is an indication of the time that elapsed before the visit of the Wise Men.

Long prior to all this, Mary remained at Bethlehem forty days, the days of her purification according to the Law of Moses (Luke

2. 12), and then Joseph took her, and her child, to the Temple in Jerusalem to present him before the Lord. There was no fear of Herod as yet. There, in the Temple court, the aged Simeon took the child into his arms and praised God that, according to his word, he had set his eyes upon the One who was to be a light to lighten the nations, and the glory of his people Israel. Likewise Anna, coming in at that moment, gave thanks also, and spake of him to all who looked for deliverance in Jerusalem. Herod's palace was only just across the valley from the Temple, but the proud king knew nothing of all this; evidently even then, forty days after the birth of Jesus there was no question of the Wise men's arrival.

What a striking contrast there is in the manner of this revelation to the Wise Men and that to the shepherds! Those were guided by a star, but these were visited by an angel! The nature of that star which led the three travellers from the East has never been satisfactorily determined. All kinds of theories have been hazarded, but no one really knows. One thing is certain; the star was of this material creation, one of the worlds of light that God set in space in the dim faraway, ages before this world was, one of the "things that are made". The shepherds received greater honour, a personal visit from a special messenger of the Most High, a heavenly angel speaking with them and thrilling their hearts with the gladsome news. Once again God had reserved his choicest favour for the meek and lowly of heart.

Was it Gabriel, the archangel, who visited the shepherds that night? We cannot say for certain, but it is almost a foregone conclusion that he was the one sent. That expression "the angel of the Lord" in Luke 2. 9 seems to imply that the visitor was of exceptional rank in the heavenly realm, and the thought is supported by the coming of a "multitude" of angels to join him after he, alone, had deliv-

ered the message. He seems to have been a leader amongst them. There is no reason to think that the shepherds looked up and beheld angels flying in the heavens above their heads in the manner suggested by so many mediæval paintings and representations of this event. It is almost certain that they made themselves manifest in the fashion already so familiar to the people of Old Testament times, as men, standing upon the earth, glorious in shining raiment, assuredly, and quite certainly manifesting in their countenances evidence of their heavenly origin. The shepherds must have lifted up their eyes and seen the hillsides around them crowded with the serried ranks of those resplendent beings, the radiance of their concourse turning night into day, the music of their voices rising and falling upon the still air like that of a vast choir, as they sang of glory to God in the highest, and peace upon earth to men. Then the radiance began to fade, the outline of those beautiful forms become misty and shadowy, the hills and rocks and trees slowly to show up again, and the darkness settle upon the scene as the golden voices died away and were still. The angels had gone away into heaven; but those shepherds knew that what they had seen had been no fantasy; it was solid fact, and so with one accord they rose up to go without delay into Bethlehem to see for themselves this thing that had come to pass.

Why were these particular men singled out for this honour? Did God arbitrarily pick out a group of shepherds who just happened to be in the vicinity in order to vouchsafe to someone this marvellous revelation? Surely not! These men were the first human beings to greet earth's rightful king! They were privileged to extend earth's welcome to the One who had come from above. On behalf of the entire human race whom Jesus had come to save, they made obeisance. We are so accustomed to the words of John "he came unto his own, and his own received him not" that we forget that *the first men to see Jesus in the flesh did receive him*, and talked about him for the rest of their lives. The conclusion

is that these men were men of God, waiting in hope and faith and expectancy for the promised Messiah, and—who knows?—probably of that band which "looked for deliverance in Jerusalem" (Luke 2. 38). What more appropriate than that the Most High should apprise the "Watchers" of that day of the fact that the One for whom they looked had come at last?

"*And this shall be a sign unto thee*"—a wonder. Surely it was a wonder to men trained to expect Messiah as a great military leader and powerful King, overawing and destroying all the enemies of Israel and restoring the kingdom's former glories! "*Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*" But their faith did not stagger; there is nothing in any part of the account to suggest that they even questioned the apparent strangeness of this Messianic Advent, so different from all that they had been taught and led to expect. They came, they saw, and they worshipped, and went away to spread the glad news that the King had come.

Thirty years were to roll by before anything more was known of this strange happening. It is unlikely that many of the shepherds ever heard again of the babe whom they had been thus led to visit and adore. They were rural Judeans, and probably never left the vicinity of Bethlehem for the rest of their lives. The babe was taken away by his parents within a few weeks. Thirty years is a long time; it may be that some of the younger ones among them, grown into old age, began to hear of the prophet who had arisen in Galilee, and of his baptism in Jordan, and connected the tidings with the scene they had witnessed a generation previously. At first they must have talked about their amazing experience often as they lay around their camp fires at night or drove their flocks together through the day, but as the years went by perhaps some, at least, of them, began to wonder a little . . .

The next Passover, or perhaps the Feast of Tabernacles, and Joseph with his wife was back at Bethlehem in readiness to keep the

Feast at Jerusalem. The Wise Men had come, and presented their gifts, and departed. Herod was alerted. The sojourn at Bethlehem was ended; Joseph, warned of God in a dream, made preparations for a hurried flight into Egypt. Herod's soldiers would very shortly be on the scene, searching for the young child. Perhaps the shepherds had visited the Holy Family again. They would hardly have been likely to make no further attempt to offer worship to the Saviour of the world, their Messiah. Perhaps, seeing him like that, and believing, they glimpsed something of the truth which the disciples of Jesus thirty years later found it so very difficult to accept, the necessity of a Coming in humiliation before there could be a Coming in power. They may have learned some things from Mary, and Mary in turn may have learned much from them, for we are told that she "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart".

So one day Bethlehem was left behind, and the young husband and wife, bearing their precious treasure with them, set out for Egypt and safety. Herod could not pursue them there, for Egypt lay outside his sphere of jurisdiction. And when, apparently only a few months later, Herod died and they returned, they passed by Bethlehem and settled sixty miles to the north, in Galilee, there to remain until the day of Jesus' showing to Israel.

Luke says nothing of the flight into Egypt; only Matthew records that. From Luke's account it would seem as if they went straight from Bethlehem to Nazareth. Why did he omit the part of the history relating to the flight? The obvious difference in the two narratives has given occasion for the assertion that one or the other account is unreliable, or even both, and that the historical value of both Gospels must be discounted accordingly. As with the majority of such statements, investigation usually reveals that the apparently contradictory stories can be reasonably well harmonised.

It is thought that Luke drew the materials for his Gospel largely from Mary the mother of Jesus. It is quite possible for Luke to have

known her. Who knows but that the girl-wife, horrified and grieved at the massacre of the Innocents and the anguish of their mothers, and knowing that this calamity had come upon them because of her own child, had put the evil memory far from her, and in after days either did not tell the details to Luke or would not have them included in the gospel which he was preparing? Matthew, of course, would have had it from Jesus Himself, and it may be that the overruling power of the Holy Spirit thus respected Mary's reticence whilst taking care that the account should be preserved in one of the Gospels. It is not wise to be dogmatic, but the explanation may lie along this line. It may be noted also in passing that the true date of Jesus' birth was early October and not Dec. 25, but this is irrelevant to what is being said here as to the human factors in the situation.

So passed the first Christmas, a season fraught with great joy and great sorrow. None of the principal characters in the drama knew of the tremendous consequences that were to arise from the happenings of those few weeks. None of them knew how many more Christmas seasons were to come and go before the song of the angels could become an accomplished fact. To-day, peace on earth and goodwill among men seems farther off than ever. But it will come.

Perhaps, as we enter into another Christmas season we may take time to think awhile of those simple Judean shepherds, who, one dark night, saw a great light, and in the power and inspiration of that light became changed men. They came to see and to worship; they returned glorifying and praising God for the things that they had learned and witnessed. We come to the Lord Jesus in like manner, but we see more than a babe in a manger. We see the King, resplendent in his power, taking to himself the sceptre of authority, bringing this evil world order to an end that He might set up in its place his own everlasting Kingdom of peace. To the age-old angels' song there is added a new stanza: *"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of*

Glory shall come in". Like those simple Judeans of old, we must needs return glorifying and praising God for the evidence of the coming Kingdom that we have seen and telling of that Kingdom with such zeal, such certitude, such forthrightness, that, like the people of Bethlehem and the country round about at the time of that first Christmas, *"all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them"*. The people of to-day sadly need such a message; the time is at

hand, the angelic vision has appeared to us; our eyes have seen the King in his beauty. What else can we do but go on in the power and wonder of that peerless vision, talking to each other about it, telling our neighbours and friends the tremendous story, looking in faith for the fulfilment of the promise, waiting, watching, hoping, praying, until the angels come again, this time to raise the strains of a song that never shall die away so long as the earth endures.

DR. CAMPBELL MORGAN ON THE SECOND ADVENT

If you take away from me the doctrine of the Second Advent of Christ which is to be a crisis in human history as definite as the first coming, I am the most pessimistic of men. If you tell me that the work of the missionary is to convert the world by preaching, I am hopeless indeed.

But when I realise that the work of missions is to evangelise the world by preaching of the Gospel for a witness, and that beyond the Advent there will be a new age in which human history will be perfected, then I wait with patience for the crisis which is to come, and serve, as God helps me in order to hasten that coming, the coming of our Lord Himself.

May God deliver us from taking so great, so stupendous and sublime and far-reaching a vision of the wisdom which transcends our finite theory, in order to formulate a doctrine that God has chosen a few people to be saved and left the rest to be damned forever. That is an unwarranted deduction.

The plan of the Church existed in the mind of God from eternity. He predestinated the Church that it should be conformed to the image of His Son. Paul peered into the deep things, the infinite mysteries, until somewhere back in the past ages he saw in the mind of God the Son of His love, the arch-type of all perfection, and he declared that He pre-

destinated men and women that they should be conformed to that likeness. The Church then is not an experiment in human history. It is part of the plan of God. It is the conception, the plan of God from eternity.

Finally, the Church is eternal in yet another sense. The consummation is eternal, for the Church is to serve the purpose of God in the coming ages. Through the Church, in its union with Jesus Christ, there will be revealed in the ages to come "the exceeding riches of His Grace" and there will be unveiled before the angels the "manifold wisdom of God".

This is the first note of the central preaching of the letter to Ephesians. The Church of God is eternal. Its conception in the past eternity was the plan of God. Its construction in time is the power of God. Its consummation in the coming ages will be for the fulfilment of the purposes of God. Are we of this Church? If we are then we were in the heart and mind and plan of God in the ages gone; we are to fulfil the purpose of God in the ages to come, and the plan of the past and the purpose of the future are linked by the power of the present; for plan, power and purpose are alike eternal.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan

Divine truth is never found except in the Divinely appointed channels: and those channels are the Lord and the apostles and prophets. To continue in the doctrine set forth

in their inspired writings, to study, meditate upon them, and faithfully to conform our characters to them, is what is implied in continuing in the Word of the Lord.

DANIEL IN BABYLON

6. A King's Madness

*The story of a
great man's faith*

King Nebuchadnezzar was now at the zenith of his glory. The "head of gold" had become the conqueror of the nations. He had seen three successive Pharaohs of Egypt, the rival nation, pass into death—two of them struck down by his own hand. Pharaoh-Necho died at the time of Jerusalem's downfall in Zedekiah's day. His successor, Psamatik II (not mentioned by name in the Bible) was slain when the Babylonians invaded Egypt in Nebuchadnezzar's twenty-third year (Jer. 52. 30 and 43. 1-13). Pharaoh-Hophra had just perished, also at the hands of the victorious king, and his successor, Amasis, held the throne of the Pharaohs only as a tributary to Babylon. Egypt had become, as Ezekiel said it would become (Ezek. 29. 14) a "base kingdom"—and in actual fact it never regained its former greatness. The proud city of Tyre, after a siege of thirteen years, had been forced to capitulate. The Assyrians were no more, and their mighty city of Nineveh was a mass of broken down ruins. The Ten Tribes were scattered in the wilds of Armenia, spreading slowly outwards, and the remnants of Judah dwelt to the south of Babylon. The Holy Land lay a desolate waste.

For seven or eight years now the great king, having measurably pacified his widely spread empire, had been devoting himself to the erection and adornment of the wonderful buildings for which both he and the city became famous. Temples and palaces, roads and canals, parks and gardens, all grew quickly under the inspiration of his fiery enthusiasm. It is to be feared that the cost in terms of human suffering was great, for all these huge works were executed by hordes of labourers little better than slaves. Every street corner and public square boasted statues and sculptures executed in stone or bronze; the temples and public buildings were adorned with richly painted representations of historic events in Babylonian history and mythology; the libraries were replete with

books dealing with every conceivable subject—inscribed clay tablets which have proved to be the most imperishable of all written records. The king's own passion for recording all his actions and his feelings toward his gods, taken together with the vivid intimate pictures given us by Daniel, make Nebuchadnezzar better known to us than any other king of antiquity.

Picture him now, a little above sixty years of age, in his own domestic circle, with the Median wife whom the historian says he dearly loved, and their family. Avil-Marduk (who succeeded him as king—the Evil-Merodach of Jer. 52. 31), Nitocris, the mother of Belshazzar (Dan. 5. 10) and another daughter whose name is not recorded. Daniel on his frequent visits to the great palace beside the river must often have talked with the queen and her children, and as he talked he would notice with growing apprehension the changing disposition of the king—feverish exultation and pride in his achievements, forgetfulness of the great miracles wrought by the God of Heaven Whom he had once been so ready to acknowledge, his increasing devotion to the service of Bel, the deity of Babylon. The incident of the fiery furnace was some ten years in the past; the dream of the great image more than thirty years; and the visible evidence of his work, crowned by the mighty temple which his own enthusiasm had done so much to complete, was steadily driving the nobler impulses from his mind. Daniel knew what the inevitable end must be, and without doubt he talked to his sovereign upon many occasions with warnings of the inevitable fall that follows great pride.

Megalomania, they call it nowadays. In Nebuchadnezzar's case the disordered condition of his mind brought on a fearful malady of the brain in which he imagined himself to be a wild beast. Yet the blow did not fall until in the providence of God a marked opportunity for repentance was given.

It must have been in the very year that his last enemy, Pharaoh-Hophra of Egypt, had been overthrown and slain, that the strange and terrible dream came to the king. The account is to be found in Dan. 4. It is related by the king himself, and bears every mark of having been written under the king's direction in recognition of the lesson he had been taught. He was at rest in his house, and flourishing in his palace—fitting description of his cessation from active warfare and devotion to the adornment of his city. He saw in his dream a great tree, the greatest that the earth had ever seen, and it gave shelter to all the birds and beasts of the earth. There came a "watcher" down from heaven. In Babylonian mythology there were seven "watchers" who were the messengers of the gods, corresponding somewhat to the seven archangels of Jewish traditionary thought. The watcher decreed the cutting down of the tree and the scattering of its fruit, and the binding of the forlorn stump with a covering of bronze, fixed with iron clamping rings, to protect it from further damage, until seven times should pass over it, and the living should know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.

In the days of Babylon dreams were considered to have great significance, and it would be a comparatively frequent occurrence for the interpreters to be called before the king to explain the visions he had seen during the previous night. Once the dream was related, an explanation could easily be given in such words that, whatever the outcome, the interpreters would be tolerably sure to preserve their reputation. It is therefore a little surprising to find that in this instance the wise men declined to interpret the dream. A possible reason for this refusal is hinted at in verse 7 of chapter 4, which contains a significant statement by the king. He says, not that they *could* not, but that they *did* not, make known to him the interpretation. It is true that in verse 18, when repeating the matter to Daniel, he says that they were not *able* to make it known, but the impression one has

is that this very shrewd judge of men had formed the opinion that the interpreters could have hazarded an interpretation if they wanted to but abstained from doing so for reasons of their own and pleaded ignorance as excuse.

Nebuchadnezzar was probably right in his surmise. The change in his disposition was becoming manifest, and others beside Daniel would be perceiving the impending disaster. Daniel was still chief of the wise men; it might well be that these officials, shirking the duty themselves, left it to their chief to tell the king the truth.

So in the ordinary way, his subordinates having retired, Daniel came in before the king to hear the dream. One can sense the king's relief of mind, in verses 8 and 9, confident that Daniel could and would give him the truth of the matter. The king's own religious views were still warm towards the gods of Babylon and he still credited Daniel with possessing the "spirit of the holy gods". Daniel, when he heard the details of the dream, was silent and dejected for a long time. It could not have been that he had not foreseen this; he must have known the meaning of the dream as soon it was related; what oppressed Daniel was his realisation that the blow had fallen. The decree had gone forth, and all the glory of a man whom he respected and admired was to be humbled to the dust.

It is in the 19th verse that we have evidence of something almost approaching affection in Nebuchadnezzar's feeling for Daniel. Observing his faithful Minister's distress, he exclaimed "*Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee*". He was prepared to forego the explanation in order to save his friend distress of mind. This is a very different aspect of the man from that displayed when as a ruthless autocrat he ordered three men to be cast into the burning fiery furnace, and signed an order for the execution of the wise men of Babylon on a momentary impulse. Even in the midst of that haughtiness and pride which was rapidly driving him to madness, this proud monarch cherished feelings of respect and concern for

Daniel. How profound must the influence have been which the latter's integrity and loyalty had exerted upon the heart of this pagan king through the years!

The words gave Daniel his opening. Gently, but firmly, he told the king the import of the dream, and added his own earnest counsel "*Wherefore, O king, let my reason be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity*". Perhaps he had in mind the story of Nineveh of nearly three centuries before, how that they repented at the preaching of the prophet Jonah, and how God repented of the evil which He thought to do, and did it not. Long and earnestly must Daniel have pleaded with the great man, recalling those days in his early life when he had acknowledged the power of the God of heaven, and seen His hand outstretched to save Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego from the fiery furnace. Daniel would have recalled the king's dream of the great image, and reminded him how that dream had been fulfilled in his rapid conquest of the then known world. But it was all quite evidently of no avail; the sequel shows us that the king remained unrepentant. And so the blow fell.

"*All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he was walking upon (see margin) the great palace.*" It would seem from the use of that word "upon" that this scene took place in the park which has become known as the "Hanging Gardens of Babylon", one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. Because Nebuchadnezzar's queen missed the forests and mountains of her native Media, the king had caused to be built within the palace precincts a miniature stretch of wooded hills. Three successive tiers of brick arches, built like three great viaducts piled one on top of another, were erected and covered with earth, so disposed as to make hills and valleys. Upon this foundation the park was laid out, with grass, shrubs and trees, pathways and terraces, and artificial streams which were supplied from the River Euphrates far below

by means of some kind of water-raising device. Reared up high above the roof of the palace, commanding a magnificent view of the city, this park with its tree-clad hills appeared from a distance to be suspended between heaven and earth, from which fact it has become known as the "Hanging Gardens". There was no more likely place than this in which the king might be walking when the dread calamity came upon him.

"*And as he walked, he spake, saying 'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the Kingdom by the might of my power and for the honour of my majesty?'*" (vs. 20.)

The words were spoken, and they could not be recalled. Retribution, swift and sure, came out from the outraged holiness of God. "*While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; the kingdom is departed from thee . . . The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar; and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagle's feathers, and his nails like bird's claws.*"

Vivid, life-like words—the testimony of an eye-witness! Who wrote them? Who walked with that magnificent man in those beautiful gardens, looked down with him upon the glorious buildings stretching far below for miles towards the horizon, followed with the eye the silver ribbon of the river as it entered the city precincts, skirted the palace, passed through the dock basin with its ships from Arabia and India, and beyond the massive ramparts to lose itself in the distant fields? Who gazed with him upon the scintillating golden sanctuary at the summit of the great Tower, set like another sun against the blue heavens, six hundred feet above the city; and then, horror-stricken, saw the light suddenly go out of those piercing eyes, the fine, intelligent face reshape its lineaments to the form of an imbecile, the upstanding figure drop down upon hands and knees, the commanding voice at which kings and warriors had

trembled begin to utter strange sounds, grotesquely imitating the beasts of the forest? Who was it sought in vain to restrain those strong hands as they tore the princely raiment to shreds and began grubbing at the roots and herbs of the soil; and then, failing, ran in frantic haste to summon assistance?

It might have been Daniel. It might have been Queen Amytis. There is a familiarity about the usage of the king's name in verse 33 which seems more fitting coming from the queen than from Daniel. It might well be that this most interesting document enshrines the testimony of three people, and that verses 28 to 33 are from the hand of the Babylonian queen.

In any case Daniel would be very quickly on the spot. There was very little that could be done. The physicians would doubtless be trying their cures and the magicians busy attempting to exorcise the demon that had taken possession of the king's person. The sorcerers would be feverishly uttering and muttering their incantations to the same end. Daniel would not interfere. The king's family and his ministers would expect the customary treatment to be given. All was of no avail. Finally the soothsayers would come forward and pronounce the verdict of the omens they had examined; and probably, being wise after the event, would hazard the opinion that the gods had afflicted the king in consequence of some great offence, perhaps insufficient attention to the service of the gods, or even—if Daniel happened to be out of ear-shot—in displeasure at the king's interest in a foreign god and a foreign Chief Minister. It is hardly likely that the native priesthood would let slip such a golden opportunity of impressing upon the king's family the significance of this act of the great god Bel!

Nebuchadnezzar continued in this state for seven years. It is true that secular historians do not make any reference to this happening. Berosus, the Babylonian historian who was a priest in the Temple of Bel at Babylon some two and a half centuries later, and who had access to all the records when writing his history, does refer vaguely to some strange

mystery connected with the end of Nebuchadnezzar's life. One or two other cryptic allusions are met with in the works of other writers, but nothing that can reasonably be said to confirm the Bible account. Nor is this surprising. Nebuchadnezzar was himself a member of the secret caste, the Chaldeans. The whole episode, if generally known, was likely to bring the fraternity into disrepute. Even although the priests may have exploited it within the king's family circle to warn the youthful Avil-Marduk against his father's predilection for the Hebrew's God, they would be anxious to suppress the general circulation of the story, and since the historical records of the nation were in the charge of the priests, it is tolerably certain that they took good care to keep private anything of a derogatory nature.

The story as we have it in Daniel 4 bears all the evidences of truth. There is the king's own account of the dream which predicted the disaster, vs. 1-18, to which is added the testimony of his Minister as to their subsequent conversation. Next to this comes the account of the actual happenings, by an eyewitness (28-33) probably Queen Amytis, and finally the king's own acknowledgement of the justice of the infliction and of the omnipotence of God (34-37). It is highly probable that we have here an official document, prepared by the king after his recovery, and intended to place on record for all time his consciousness of his great sin and the mercy of God.

So far as history goes, the last eight or nine years of this king's life are blank. There is nothing recorded concerning him. It would seem that he did not live long after his recovery, probably no more than a year. During his affliction he would be well guarded from harm—in all probability those same Hanging Gardens which he had built in the day of his pride became the place of his wanderings. There he could roam at will, dwelling with the animals and birds with which it had been stocked, drinking at its streams, sleeping at night in its arbours or on its grassy slopes, free to indulge his disordered fancy but in no

danger from wild beast or human enemy. And then, one morning, as the rays of the rising sun lightened the sky and the birds gave their voice in chorus, that unkempt figure crawled forth from its lair with eyes a little less wild; perhaps with face turned up to heaven in mute entreaty; and in a little while "I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes to heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever" (vs. 34). "At the same time my reason returned unto me, and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me" (vs. 36).

So long as the king lived, even although imbecile, no move could be made to replace him. The queen probably governed as regent, with the aid of Daniel as Chief Minister. Berosus plainly states that in fact she did do so, assisted by her counsellors. The affliction was looked upon as from the gods and their will must not be interfered with. The kingdom must needs wait, either for the king's recovery or his death. Upon the return of his reason, therefore, he was quickly re-established in his accustomed place, restored to the circle of his family, presiding once again over affairs of state, wielding once more the majestic power of the "head of gold".

But this time there was a difference. The last verse of chapter 4 shows us an utterly

humbled and chastened man. The words are majestic and striking. "*Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment, and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.*"

They are his last recorded words. The Scriptures tell us no more about King Nebuchadnezzar. They leave him where we would fain have him left, in humble submission to the One eternal God, a better man for the experience.

Was this conversion a lasting one? We do not know. It is worthy of note, however, that these words of his are not only the last the Scriptures records; they are also the last words of his in any records so far discovered. The extensive and voluminous inscriptions written by the king or at his instigation concerning himself and his works stop short about ten years or so before his death. At that time he is still a devoted adherent of the gods of Babylon and a faithful servant of Bel. But this word in Daniel 4, coming from the pen of the king himself, is by ten years the latest personal testimony history can offer. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary we may perhaps be justified in concluding that at the very end of his life Nebuchadnezzar came to see something of the glory of the One true God, the emptiness and vanity of the idols of Babylon, closing an eventful life with more of true peace than perhaps he had ever known.

(To be continued)

The safe position in Christian thinking is to remember that there are deeper depths than we can fathom, higher heights than we can know; it keeps us reverent, keeps us from hardening off into a confined, cabined experience of our own. *(Oswald Chambers)*

"O Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference"

Prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr

The prayer of another sailor, Sir Francis Drake, could well be ours: "*O Lord God, when Thou givest to Thy servants to endeavour any great matter, grant us to know that it is not the beginning but the continuing of the same, until it is thoroughly finished, which yieldeth the true glory.*" So we go back to normal with *stronger resolutions.*

Unless you think, you will be untouched, unbroken by the truths you utter.

JEWELS FOR THE LORD OF HOSTS

"They shall be mine saith the Lord of Hosts in the day that I make up my jewels."

(Mal. 3. 14)

Jewels are unfailing objects of fascination. Their varied colours, their scintillating brightness, their rarity and value arouse in most people an ardent desire for possession. One tiny diamond is dear to its proud owner, while an ornament of genuine gems puts its owner among the elite. Rubies, amethysts, sapphires, emeralds, diamonds, garnets and beryls, with their dark greens, their rich reds and deep purples, their soft yellows, their flashing facets of crystal beauty, form a rich and enviable treasure trove. The crowns of Kings, the robes of Emperors and the swords of conquerors have had first claim on these treasures from the coffers of the earth. Rich women have adorned themselves in their glittering array. For their brilliance they have bartered their honour and for their worth men have risked their lives.

Between them and common clay there is no resemblance, yet they are only forms of the same substances modified and crystallised, fashioned out of the same earth elements by the diversified wisdom and excellency of creative design and workmanship. The gem sparkles, small and infinitely radiant beside the handful of brown earth. There would appear to be no relationship between the two, yet the action of time, chemistry and skill, stored, one to adorn a high priest's breastplate and kneaded the other into a crumbling surface that seed time and harvest should produce for millions their daily bread.

The adorable, varied, coveted beauty of the sparkling jewels, shaped, polished and set for the adornment and pomp of kings and courts are, in the eyes of God who gave them, a fitting picture of rare people whom He calls His jewels. As men have searched the earth for diamonds, emeralds and rubies, for every sort of precious stone, so the Almighty has

searched among the human race His power produced, for good women more precious than rubies, and good men, whose incorruptible principles of faith and honesty are more bright and enduring than the many faceted diamond.

Jewels for a king's crown, a diadem of beauty, a collection of the earth's choicest human gems, gathered through the centuries, as various and different as the twelve glowing stones which flashed on the breastplate of the High Priest of Israel, yet each one a stone of the first water. Men and women, born and bred in the earth, made and sustained by her elements, yet transformed by the alchemy of Divine influence into glowing, everlasting beauty.

With the eye of an expert, the God who is no respecter of persons has sought His gems in every clime, in every race, in every age. Like a connoisseur He protects and cares for His treasures, delighting in their beauty, setting the highest possible value upon them, awaiting the day when He can show them to the world. To an astonished and chastened world they will be His best rebuke, for the generations in their blindness, in their strange obsessions and their perverted preoccupations have both overlooked and often despised and rejected the good who are God's choice.

The world will then turn about, reversing its standard of values, seeing with wide open eyes things, events and people from the Divine standpoint. They will look on that beautiful assembly of the saints, sorry for the part they have played in the cutting and grinding of these gems of God's gathering, but delighted that they were found, perfected and chosen from among sons and daughters of men.

*"Like the stars of the morning,
His bright crown adorning
They shall shine in their beauty,
Bright gems for His crown."*

SENDING PORTIONS

A Christmas
Message

With the recurring seasons come the festive days of Christmas when an attempt is made by many to recapture the spirit of goodwill expressed in the message of the Saviour's birth. Something that often lies dormant in the heart of man is called forth, as in a moment of generosity he seeks to express his feelings in a small gift. Too often the exchange of such tokens masks a commercial or other base motive. But behind the Christmas shopping and merriment lies a long history which goes back farther than the First Advent and even farther than the advent of mankind upon earth.

The thought of "recurring seasons" brings to mind a host of memories concerning the blessings of Nature. Each breath we draw, each morsel we eat, is a token of love, planned by a wise and benevolent Creator when this planet was being prepared as a home for the human race. Too many of these gifts are taken for granted by most men without a moment's reflection upon the greatness and goodness of a loving God. The minute care and wonderful forethought which provided us with eyes and ears, hands and feet, are lost upon a busy world too absorbed in its own important and clever enterprises. *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."* (Jas. 1. 17.) This is a principle of the natural world as well as the spiritual life. Yet apart from the "household of faith" this fact is ignored and unacknowledged.

In the natural family a tiny child for the first few months of its life has no recognition of those who provide and sustain its life. With the dawning intellect comes the first signs of appreciation of the love which surrounds it. In early years the child is still oblivious, for the most part, of the forethought and self-sacrifice of its parents and it is only conscious of all being well so long as necessities and comforts are to hand for the taking. As the

child develops towards maturity it begins to respond and reciprocate the love that is showered upon it. How rewarding for a mother to hear the baby's voice say "thank you" and for a father to accept a simple gift from a child's own hand! Just as wonderful are such moments for the Heavenly Father as He watches the first responses in his growing child. After we have learned to be thankful for his bounty and care, we begin to desire to give something to him in emulation of His love. Our giving does not amount to much compared with his vast treasure house yet to his sensitive heart there is a thrill of joy at our humble efforts to imitate him.

The next step in learning to be generous is a willingness to give to all, regardless of their relationship to us, but especially to the poor. This is also a godly characteristic and one enjoined upon Israel in their law by Moses (Deut. 15. 11). The spirit of the gift was just as important as the gift itself, and there was to be no feeling of it being given grudgingly. Here and there in the history of Israel we catch a glimpse of this principle being revived, along with other reforms. Celebration of great occasions included the "sending of portions" to each other. So it was in the days of the Jewish Queen of Persia, Esther, when the Hebrews throughout the Empire were saved from annihilation. (Esth. 9. 19.) Later, at the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the restoration of the Law of God, under Nehemiah, the festivities were marked by the sending of portions for whom nothing was prepared. (Neh. 8. 10.) Obviously it is a Scriptural truth that in one's own enjoyment thought should be given to others, who perhaps are not so well able to enjoy the festivities as ourselves.

"God so loved the world that he gave . . ." and of all the many, many gifts which He bestowed upon mankind, none is so great, so wonderful, so full of Divine love as the gift of his beloved Son. Sacrifice therefore

characterises Divine giving, and as imitators of our Heavenly Father, we must be prepared to give till it hurts. She . . . *"hath cast in more than they all"* was the Master's appraisal of the widow's mite. Self denial had prompted her gift to the treasury and it thereby meant more to God than the well advertised large donations of the wealthy.

So Christmas comes once more, to remind us of God's great gift. And we, to celebrate the occasion, will send presents to our friends and relatives in token of our love for them and recognition of God's love toward us. Perhaps we shall be able to spare some generosity for those "for whom nothing is prepared" like God's people of old. The Welfare State and National Insurance schemes have not dispensed with the need or opportunity for true almsgiving. In any case, we can copy the example of Peter and John, who having *no silver and gold to distribute to the poor, "gave such as they had"*.

If we once more sit down to a festive meal and talk together around the family hearth, let us spare a thought for those in this and

other lands who will not fare so well as ourselves during the festive season. It is Winter in the northern hemisphere and many will be cold and hungry. Many more throughout the wide world will know nothing of the "Babe that was born in Bethlehem" who became the Saviour of mankind. If we forget those who lack material comforts or who are ignorant of the Gospel we shall have forgotten the very spirit of Christmas, which began in a stable, was nurtured in a peasant home and became a message of peace and hope and joy unto all the world.

May the spirit of giving, the joy of making others happy, the peace of the angelic messengers who sang in the skies above Bethlehem, bring to our hearts a warmth and pleasure which will extend beyond the Holydays which mark the end of the old year. For us it should continue on into the New Year, enriching and ennobling the life. As we celebrate the festival which commemorates his coming to live among us, may we have that spirit which will eventually fit us to live with him.

THE WIDOW AND HER MITES

Many of the secret fidelities of life have power to outlive in usefulness the products of ambitious desires and deeds. All the rich gifts of the Temple are now forgotten. We do not know what princes were there. We do not know what rabbi was syllabled with admiration among his fellows on that day. We do not know what eminent man of wealth that had travelled from afar was pointed out—yea, was courted and caressed—on account of his munificence. The only person who has come down to us is the one who was the least conspicuous, and the least known. The gentle light of that example shines still. *Ten thousand there were of greater mark, but only she lives.* And all the ages have not buried her. All illustrious history has not set aside that simple, unconscious act. All the events of revolutions and upturnings that have happened since have made no change in her renown. There is the temple, there is

the gorgeous procession, there is the quiet Christ over against her, there is the pleased eye, there is the benign lip, there are those words of regard and sympathy, and they will sound like strains of music which cannot be lost out of life. How little she thought what she was doing! How little she thought she was enriching the world! Two mites—one-tenth of a penny—she threw into the chest; and she has made the world richer than all the tributes which were paid that year in Jerusalem, by her unconscious humility, and by her simple generosity and benevolence.

Henry Ward Beecher

Sow kindly acts and thou shalt reap their fruition. Inaction in a deed of mercy becomes an action in deadly sin.

* * *

Difficulties are the stones out of which all God's houses are built.

THE PARABLE OF THE POUNDS

Luke 19.12-27

Matt. 25.14-30

It was immediately following his visit to the house of Zaccheus that Jesus told the story of the nobleman who travelled to a far country leaving his servants to trade for him during his absence. Luke relates the narrative in his 19th chapter, vss. 12-27. The parable was given for a purpose; it was because Jesus knew that his earthly mission approached its close, the people were looking for an immediate establishment of the Messianic kingdom, and He would prepare them for the realisation that a time of waiting and preparation must interpose between his First Advent and the promised Kingdom which is to be set up at his Second Advent. Those who would sincerely be his servants must discharge with faithfulness and loyalty a commission with which He would entrust them.

There is a considerable degree of similarity between this parable and that related in Matt. 25. 14-30, known as the Parable of the Talents. They both appear at the same time in Jesus' ministry. The one in Luke's account was spoken in the house of Zaccheus not many days before Jesus' death; the setting of the Matthew account is not so easy to determine and the fact that four parables having to do with the Second Coming—those of the faithful and evil servants, the wise and foolish virgins, the talents, and the sheep and goats—all occur together suggests the possibility that Matthew grouped them for that reason without regard to the time of their utterance. In such case the two parables may be versions of the same incident; at any rate the teaching and application is identical.

The purpose of the parable is stated. It was given *"because he was nigh unto Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear."* (19. 11.) These men gathered at Zaccheus' house were not unbelievers. They may, most of them, have been a bit dubious as to the Messianic authority of the quiet young man in whose honour the feast was being held, but of one

thing they were sure; if indeed he was the promised One that should come, then certainly the kingdom of God predicted by the prophets, a kingdom in which Israel would exercise authority over all nations, was at hand and would appear in their own time. That would be the acid test of his claims. And there seems to be no doubt of a prevalent impression that this coming Passover was to be decisive; something in the attitude and sayings of Jesus had convinced many apart from his disciples that this time would be the climax of all that He had been doing and saying for the past three and a half years. Jesus alone knew that the long-awaited kingdom was not to appear then, at least not in the way they expected. Hence this parable, to prepare their minds for the fact that another phase of the Divine Plan must be initiated and run its course before their hopes could be fulfilled.

"A nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return" (19. 12). It may be true, as scholars have suggested, that Jesus took as the background of his story the journey of certain rulers of his own time to Rome to be formally invested with the dignity of a tributary kingship, and since such occurrences were common in that day the allusion would be clear enough to Jesus' hearers. What was not so clear was the underlying intimation that even Israel's King Messiah must go away to receive his kingdom from higher hands before returning in glory and power to exercise authority. It was all in the 7th chapter of Daniel, had they been sufficiently careful to read aright. *"I saw in the night visions, and one like the Son of Man . . . came to the Ancient of days . . . brought near before him, and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away"* (Dan. 7. 13-14). The writer to the Hebrews shows that Jesus

must first suffer and die as a sacrificing priest after the order of Aaron, ascend on high and enter into the presence of God, then be invested with the authority and power of the kingdom, that he might appear unto men the second time as a kingly priest after the order of Melchisedec, for their salvation (Heb. chaps. 3-4-5, 7-8-9). The Jews of our Lord's day had no idea that the call of the Christian Church was to follow the ending of their own period of Divine dealings and that not until that Church is complete and ready, together with finally purified Israel, for its work of world conversion, can the Second Coming and the Kingdom of God upon earth become reality.

So the nobleman went away, but before doing so, entrusted his own servants with money with which to trade on his behalf during his absence. There is a difference drawn here between his servants and his citizens. The latter had rejected him as their prospective king and had even sent a message of protest to the distant authority conferring the kingdom. One wonders how many of the Lord's hearers at the feast identified the rebellious citizens with Israel of their own day, and the servants with those who in after years would be the real custodians of their Lord's interests. The parable takes no further notice of the rebellious citizens; it is concerned, not with Israel but the Christian Church between the two Advents. So each servant received a pound wherewith to make profit for his lord.

The "pound" of the parable is the "mina" which on the basis of the relative costs of living between the First Advent and to-day was worth the equivalent of one hundred and fifty pounds or four hundred dollars. The corresponding parable in Matthew gives the servants five, two and one talents respectively and on the same basis the talent, if of silver, had a buying power of two thousand pounds in present-day English money. The precise values and minor differences of detail are not important; the principle illustrated is that each of Jesus' disciples in this Age is awarded opportunities of some kind or other whereby he may advance the cause of the Kingdom.

Those opportunities or abilities may be of an outwardly spectacular nature such as the flair for public speaking or writing, of a more unobtrusive kind such as talent for organising or administration, or the very worth-while gift of a sympathetic and unselfish nature which leads to all manner of services to others in the direction of consolation, encouragement, incitement to faith, and a constant waiting on God in prayer on behalf of others or in the interests of his work. All these things are given to us in their variety that we might use them to the honour and glory of God and in the advancement of his interests in the out-working of his purposes.

The sequel comes, of course, at the Second Advent, when the King returns in all glory and power to take his rightful place as mankind's king and rule "*with judgment and with justice henceforth even for ever*" (Isa. 9. 7). "*We must all appear before the tribunal of Christ*" says Paul "*that every one may receive the things done in the body*" (2 Cor. 5. 10). It is not always noticed that Paul is not speaking of mankind in general in that verse but solely of Christian disciples, the Church, who in the whole of the 5th chapter of 2nd Corinthians are shown as in process of preparation for a "ministry of reconciliation" the members of which are ambassadors for Christ to all who do not believe. This tribunal of Christ is the same thing as the cross-examination of the parable when the returned master takes stock of his servants' success in trading.

There was one servant who was slothful and indifferent. He took the money but did nothing with it, and when called upon for his account returned the money unused. That man had, as we would say, "a chip on his shoulder". He resented the idea of making profit for another man, even though that other man be his lawful employer and provide the money wherewith to make the profit. In his surliness he libelled his master, accusing him of being hard and harsh, claiming the benefits of work he had not himself done. "You gave me one pound; I give you back one pound. We are quits, and you have your

rights." And in his self-justification he quite failed to see that in hoarding unused the opportunity his lord had given him he had prevented someone else from making use of it. If he had no intention of using his lord's money himself he could at least have deposited it with the money-changers in the Temple, the "Stock Exchange" of the time. They would anyway have turned the money to profitable use for the period of deposit and the lord would eventually have received back his capital plus accrued interest. That points a very vital moral. Our own personal failure to rise up to our privileges and opportunities in our Lord's service may have repercussions outside ourselves; the service or work of others may be hindered or thwarted thereby. In this, as in so many things, it is true that *"none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself"* (Rom. 14. 7).

Those who had traded were commended. In one parable they, having been faithful in few things, were made rulers over many things. In the other they were made rulers over cities commensurate with the degree of profit each one had made. If this teaches any-

thing respecting conditions in the spiritual world to which the Church will eventually attain, it must be that there is variety in that world as there is in this and that there will be "differences of administrations" (1 Cor. 12) according to the spheres of activity for which each one is best qualified. The predominant truth inherent in the parable is that the future life is not static; it is not just an endless existence in a state of beatitude and contemplation of God. There is work to be done; activities to be undertaken; for all we know heights to be scaled and objects to be achieved. Perhaps creation itself is endless, and long after the work of God through Christ and the Church in the reconciliation of all of mankind who will heed the call to repent is complete, and every creature on earth is bowing the knee to the Name of Christ, those servants who have faithfully traded with their "talents" or their "pounds" now will be serving just as faithfully and just as zealously, upon an immensely enhanced scale, in spheres that we cannot even begin to visualise, in those "ten cities" and "five cities" to which they will have been appointed by their lord.

A NOTE ON PHIL. 2.5-7

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant" (Phil. 2. 5-7).

The expression in verse 6 *"thought it not robbery to be equal with God"* is a rather crude and meaningless translation. It is better rendered in the R.S.V. *"did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped"* or as Rotherham has it *"Not a thing to be seized accounted the being equal with God"*. Even so, the Apostle's meaning is not easily grasped until the text is set against the background of the subject. The entire passage constituting the first part of Phil. 2 is primarily an exhortation to humility and selflessness. The example of Jesus is held up as one to follow. Jesus, who, though in the likeness of God, emptied himself of that glory (this is the

meaning of the phrase 'made himself of no reputation') and took upon himself the likeness of man, for the suffering of death.

That part of the passage is probably easy enough to follow. Not so easy to understand is the statement that in this same connection the Son, prior to his taking human form, "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" or seized. The Greek here definitely implies the idea of seizing or attaining "equality with God" by force. The oneness always subsisting between the Father and the Son is clearly defined for us in the New Testament but it would be an utterly incongruous and improper thing to conceive that relationship as being attained or maintained by force. The meaning of St. Paul's words must be sought in another sphere.

The Apostle made this allusion in the interests of teaching humility and loyalty to God.

Did he have in mind the contrary course of the Arch-enemy of God and man, Satan? It has often been suggested that the prophetic denunciation of the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14 is a veiled allusion to the sin and consequent doom of Satan. If so, the language there used forms a fine contrast to the attitude assumed by the Beloved Son in taking human form in conformity to the Father's Will. Isa. 14. 12-14 reads, in part "*How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning . . . for thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High*". Here then is one who *did* "count equality with God a thing to be grasped". Is it possible that back in the dim past this one of God's created celestial beings raised the standard of revolt in the ambitious attempt to reign co-equally with God, and thereby precipitated the era of evil in which we find ourselves? If so, how full of meaning are St. Paul's words where here in Philippians he directs our attention to One Who, despite His essential Oneness with the Father, was prepared to lay aside that glory and descend to the depths of human form and environment, for the salvation of man, in contrast to the one who aspired to ascend by force to the heights of Divine kingship.

After all, that is what Jesus meant when in simple words He told his disciples "He that would be great among you, let him be your servant". "*I am among you*" He said "*as one that serveth*." And again in contrast to the rebellion and disobedience of the enemy Satan, we have to realise that in some wonderful manner not easy for us to comprehend the element of obedience is involved in this coming to earth of the Son. Phil. 2. 8 declares that "being found in fashion as a man, he . . . became *obedient* unto death". That aspect is amplified in Heb. 10. 5-7 "*When he cometh into the world, he saith . . . Lo, I come . . . to do thy will, O God*." In the days of his flesh He said to the Pharisees on one occasion "*I do always those things that please him*" (the Father—John 8. 29). The contrast therefore

is between disobedience with soaring ambition on the one hand, and obedience with selfless humility on the other, and this latter is the example which St. Paul sets before us to emulate.

There is a further consideration to bear in mind in all this. The "form of a servant" in which the Lord Jesus Christ was manifested to men during his First Advent was only for one specific purpose—the suffering of death. "*My flesh*" he said to the Jews "*I will give for the life of the world*." (Jno. 6. 51.) Before He appeared among men in the form of man He was the brightness of God's glory and the express image of his person (Heb. 1. 3), dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, in eternal communion with the King of Kings whom no man hath seen nor can see. (1 Tim. 6. 16.) After his resurrection He ascended again into that glory and "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" as Heb. 1. 3 goes on to say. This was the prayer of Jesus whilst in the days of his flesh. "*Glorify thou me*," He prayed "*with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was*." (Jno. 17. 5.) That glory is one which is not of this world and owes nothing to the material things of this world. Neither can it be perceived or comprehended by the natural human senses which are designed only to perceive the things of this world. That is why the Apostle John in 1 Jno. 3. 2 tells us "*it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*". He will appear to us, we shall see him, in his celestial glory, only when we have been "changed" to be like him, when earthly life is ended. Glorious as was the time of his laying hold of humanity for the salvation of the human race and for the eternal purpose of God, it is but a break in the spiritual glory of the Son of God, and at his Second Advent, the one that is to be characterised not by humiliation and death, but by power and life, He comes in the fulness of celestial glory, which will have to be perceived by other than the natural senses.

? QUESTION BOX ?

A QUESTION

ABOUT THE SABBATH

Q. How did the first day of the week become the day of rest for Christians, when Jewish precedent, and the Mosaic Law, which is the Biblical injunction on the subject, required it to be the seventh day, i.e. Saturday?

* * *

A. The seventh day was laid down, by the law given to Moses, to be a day of complete cessation of labour, for man and beast. There was no mandate to make it particularly a day of worship, as is the Christian Sunday; worship for Israel was regulated by another set of ordinances. Beside the weekly "sabbath"—which means a cessation, being still, resting—there was a seventh year sabbath in which no work was to be done on the land, and the fields allowed to lie fallow; similarly a fiftieth year of jubilee subject to the same restriction. All of this was part of the Law Covenant under which Moses pledged Israel to God as a separated and holy nation, and God undertook their support during these "sabbath" years. The Law Covenant is not applicable to Christians or to anyone since the First Advent, for Christ made an end of it, "nailing it to his cross" as Paul said to the Colossians. The ethical principles of the Ten Commandments are certainly binding upon Christians, in even higher degree than Israel of old, as Jesus explained on more than one occasion, but the ceremonial and ritual provisions are not, and the sabbath was part of the ceremonial law. The principle of the sabbath, however, the practice of periodic laying aside the interests and occupations of daily life that worship and praise might be given to God for his goodness and provision, is obviously as appropriate for Christians as for Jews, the difference being that whereas to Israel under the Law Covenant the observance was a ceremonial matter to be fulfilled according to the letter, to the Christian it is an act of worship offered spontane-

ously and not of obligation. Any day of the week is appropriate for such an offering and in fact even more than one day in the week if the heart so prompts. It has been truly said that to the Christian every day is a sabbath.

It is evident that the Apostolic Church recognised this fact and quite naturally adopted the first day of the week, the day of the Resurrection, for their weekly gathering together for worship and fellowship. To what extent the social customs of the times permitted this to be a day of rest is not now accurately known. The Greeks and Romans had no weekly day of general cessation of labour as did the Jews and many of the Gentile Christians were slaves anyway. There is no doubt, however, from the evidence of early Church writers as well as the New Testament that the Christians did gather on the first day of the week to celebrate the resurrection of their Lord, to pray and worship and receive the ministry of the Word and hold their "love feasts". Only gradually did changing social conditions permit anything like the Jewish "day of rest" to become a feature of the Greek and Roman communities. It was not until the Fourth Century that Constantine the Christian Emperor of Rome legalised the weekly day of rest, on the first day of the week, throughout the Empire, and so Sunday became a day given over to worship and religious exercises unhindered by the claims of daily labour. In this way the Christian Sunday became the equivalent of the Jewish Saturday.

There would seem therefore to be no ground for insisting that Christians must observe the seventh day as the Sabbath merely because that was the day imposed upon Israel by their Law Covenant. Christians are not under that Covenant and they are free to set aside for rest and worship whichever day they feel appropriate. There is nothing to forbid the adoption of Saturday for the purpose if that should seem desirable and

proper to some. But the Western nations have grown and developed out of the Roman empire and spread their culture and customs over much of the world during the past thousand years and in consequence Sunday is firmly established as the normal weekly holiday (holy-day); because this institution is of such inestimable value to all Christians in facilitating worship and evangelism we do well to uphold and retain it. There are plenty of forces in the earth to-day seeking to undermine the day and make it as any other day of the week. That would be bad, not only spiritually, but physically; not only for Christians, but for all men, and we do right to resist those forces with whatever powers we have. It was on the first day of the week, when the risen Lord left the garden tomb and "*rose in the power of an endless life*" that the Christian faith began and Judaism ended. It is that, above all things, that we celebrate when we come together on the first day of the week.

A NOTE ON THE GOLDEN GATE

Q. The Golden Gate at Jerusalem is not mentioned in the Bible; did it exist in earlier times under another name?

* * *

A. The present Golden Gate stands on the site of the East Gate which faced eastward from the Temple in the direction of the Mount of Olives. The East Gate is mentioned as such in Ezek. 43. 4 and 44. 1-3, and is probably referred to in Jer. 39. 3 where it is called the "middle gate". Excavations a century ago revealed traces of a wide terrace in front of the gate and what were probably gardens sloping down to the river Kedron in the valley below. The gate gave access directly to the Temple courts and it is likely that when Jesus rode into Jerusalem just before his death it was through this gate that He entered. Tradition has it that the "Beautiful Gate" of Acts 3. 2, where Peter healed the lame man, was this gate and it has been suggested that the present name "Golden Gate" is due to a

misunderstanding in the Latin versions whereby the Greek *horaia* (beautiful) was rendered by the Latin *aurea* (golden) on account of the similarity of the words. The Talmud calls it the Gate of Shushan (the capital of Cyrus of Persia in the sixth century B.C.) which could suggest that the returned exiles under Zerubbabel named this gate thus in honour of their benefactor.

The original gate has disappeared with the exception of two huge stones which are built into the modern edifice. The present structure dates from about the 4th or 5th Century and was blocked up by the Turks in A.D. 1540, with the exception of a small opening just large enough for a man to pass through. A Moslem tradition declares that if and when it is opened a Christian prince will ride through to capture the Holy City; needless to say, that tradition did not envisage the present Israeli possession of the city and its environs. Of greater moment is the prophetic vision of Ezekiel in which he saw the Lord in his glory come from the east and enter the rebuilt Temple by this gate that He might remain with Israel for ever, and the gate thereupon being shut that it might not be used again, for the Lord was henceforth never to leave them; this is a symbolic picture of Israel's final conversion at the end of the Age. The regathered nation is reconciled to God, and the Lord appears, to overthrow all evil powers and establish his long-promised Messianic kingdom under which Israel enters upon her ordained destiny "*to be a light to the nations, to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth*".

Never forget that the Almighty is a great deal bigger than our experience of Him; that the Lord Jesus Christ is a great deal bigger than our experience of Him. People won't go through the labour of thinking, consequently snares get hold of them, and remember, thinking is a tremendous labour. We have to labour to 'bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ'.

(Oswald Chambers)

THE WAY OF AN EAGLE IN THE AIR

"There be three things that are too wonderful for me, yea, four that I know not; the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid"
(Prov. 30. 18-19)

This is one of the wise sayings of Agur the son of Jakeh. We know nothing else of Agur; he is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible; but there is some ground for thinking that he lived in the Arab lands at some time between Abraham and the Exodus, his words being preserved in Israel and added to the Book of Proverbs when King Solomon compiled that book.

What a strange little statement it is! Four everyday sights in the world, two connected with the lower creation, one in the air and one on the earth; two connected with man, one in the sea and one on the land. Four everyday sights, common enough, so common as probably not to excite any remark at all on the part of ninety-nine out of a hundred witnesses—but Agur the son of Jakeh was the hundredth, a serious, reflective man, and as he watched, he confessed that in each of these four sights there resided a mystery, a something that went beyond his understanding, a something that stirred his emotions to their depths and left him with a feeling of quiet awe.

The eagle (or, more accurately, the vulture) winging its swift flight through the higher levels of the air, building its nest on high in the inaccessible crags of the highest rocks, sweeping down at terrific speed upon the prey its keen sight had espied from far, cleansing the earth from the defiling presence of dead carcasses: Agur gazed upon the spectacle with wonder. The serpent, slithering out from its den to sun itself upon the warm rock, its brilliantly coloured scaly skin scintillating and glistening in the sunlight as it twisted and darted after its prey: Agur must have stood enthralled as he watched it shed that

skin and emerge clothed in an even more brilliant and showy one. He beheld the birds and small animals stand petrified with fear, held spellbound by the serpent's malignant eyes, until it advanced upon them to their doom. The serpent, perhaps mused Agur, brings death to the earth—but the eagle cleanses death from the earth!

Then he lifted up his eyes, and away on the heaving billows of the great sea beheld a vessel, making its way with difficulty and labour through the mounting waves that threatened to submerge it. "The way of a ship in the *heart* of the sea" indicates that he had in mind a boat caught in a storm, tossing and straining in the trough of the waves, helpless in the grip of the elements. However could it get safe to land, Agur must have wondered; yet in the fulness of time the storm would abate and the crew arrive safely home with their cargo. "*He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then they are glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.*" (Psa. 107. 29-30.) And in coming to the fourth subject of wonder there is no need to think other than that Agur conned over what Paul himself called a great mystery, the love of a man for the woman who is to be his wife. Perhaps the son of Jakeh caught some echo of those far-off days when the Lord God brought the woman unto the man, and she became his wife. (Gen. 2. 22.) In the impulse which drives a man to seek and win the woman of his choice Agur found mystery beyond his ability to solve.

But why are these homely allusions in the text of the Scripture? What is there here of instruction or furnishing unto good works for the Christian? Agur may have spoken and perhaps written down these words in all sincerity and others may have recorded and preserved them to later generations, but why should they have been taken hold of by the Holy Spirit and granted that immortality which is the lot of every word "written in the Book"?

In short, what is there here for us?

We may take it that Agur ben Jakeh had no idea of any deep significance in his words. He spoke as he felt and said exactly what he meant. He intended the application of no other than a strictly literal meaning to his sayings. But the fact that the Holy Spirit enshrined these words in a setting which presents them for the consideration of every succeeding generation of truth-seekers does indicate that some deeper purpose is in fact intended to be served.

A great deal of Bible teaching is pictorial imagery. Everyday scenes and incidents are described, not for the merit or interest of the particular scene or incident itself, but because in the description of the scene or the relating of the incident parallel thoughts of spiritual things are suggested, and the mind is led to be exercised in the "things of the Spirit". An analogy between the natural illustration and some important spiritual truth is discernible, and although the illustration is at best but an illustration, it has served a valuable purpose in turning the mind more definitely and habitually to the spiritual truths in which that mind has already been instructed, and familiarises it with the "things of the Spirit". The discerning of a likeness between the natural things of this world and what may be termed their spiritual counterparts brings more reality into our spiritual understanding and accustoms us to look at all things in life from the standpoint of the Spirit rather than the standpoint of the world.

The four "mysteries" of Agur ben Jakeh may be taken as illustrative of the four great mysteries in the Plan of Salvation—the power of Evil, the Redemption from evil, the call of the Church, and the hope for the World. And even if such an application be held to be no more than the use of the text to provide an illustration—well, it is by illustrations often that the deepest of truths are conveyed to our immature minds.

"The way of an eagle in the air." That downward swoop of the swift-pinioned bird to the earth reminds one of the well-known hymn *"He saw men plunged in deep distress, and*

flew to their relief". The eagle makes its nest in the highest parts of the mountains from whence it can survey the world around. Wisdom, says the 8th chapter of Proverbs, stands at the head of the ways, the chief of the high places of earth. (Prov. 8. 2.) The personified "Wisdom" of Prov. 8 is thought to describe the Son of God, our Redeemer, prior to his coming to earth for our salvation. From that high place He surveyed the world, seeing death and corruption, and came down to the world to abolish death and cleanse the earth from the defiling influence of sin. The 'eagles' of the Bible were in reality great blessings to the land, for, being what is known as "carrion birds", they disposed of animal carcasses which otherwise would quickly putrify in that tropical heat and pollute the land, spreading disease and further death. It is from this standpoint that we must use the illustration. Our Lord, coming to those who were dead in trespasses and sins, "as the way of an eagle in the air", descends to earth, takes to himself the burden of death and sin, and leaves the earth clean and free from defilement, corruption and death. *"O death, I will be thy destruction."* He transmutes death and decay into life and immortality. Surely to us, as to Agur ben Jakeh, this "way of an eagle in the air" is too wonderful for our human understanding. *"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him."* (Deut 32. 11.) The protecting power of God the Father is shown in this picture of the eagle and its care for its young.

"The way of a serpent upon a rock." From the very commencement of the sacred history the serpent has been the symbol of Satan and of sin. The seed of the woman is one day to bruise the serpent's head and righteousness will then be supreme for ever, but in the meantime evil reigns, and that fact is a great mystery not only to the natural man who knows not the things of the Spirit of God, but also in large measure to those to whom have been revealed much of the Divine counsels and the Divine Plan. The way of evil through

world history is like the way of a serpent upon a rock, tortuous and sinuous, a stealthiness of progress, first in this direction and then in that, seeking out opportunities for entrance into the good and pure and holy, that it might befoul with its corrupting influence. "*Your adversary the devil . . . goeth about, seeking whom he may devour*" (1 Pet. 5. 8). "*From whence comest thou?*" asks the Most High of the Adversary in the story of Job. "*From going to and fro in the earth and from walking up and down it*" answers the Adversary glibly (Job 1. 7). That has ever been the way of Satan, like the way of a serpent upon a rock; and why such a thing has been permitted for so long has been a matter of wonder to men just as the natural case was to Agur ben Jakeh. But evil and the Spirit of evil is earthbound, as is the serpent. Jesus saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven and although he appears to men as an angel of light it is but an earthbound glory; it reflects no radiance to heaven. The serpent cannot follow the eagle into the air; it must forever twist and writhe upon the rock, its sinister beauty dazzling to mortal sight but having nothing in common with the graceful denizens of the air. It emerges from its hole; it suns itself upon the rock and fascinates by its fatal beauty even while it repels; it hypnotises its victims by its baleful stare and strikes death to them before ever they are aware; but its latter end is that it perishes in the dust and is no more. In the new earth which is to be, the nobler animals are to live in peace and concord one with another, but "*dust shall be the serpent's meat*" (Isa. 65. 25)—a metaphorical allusion to everlasting death—for "*they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain*".

"*The way of a ship in the heart of the sea.*" The ancient peoples looked upon a sea voyage as a hazardous undertaking—as indeed it usually was in those far-off days. The frail ship, with its load of human lives, so utterly at the mercy of the elements, so dependent upon the saving power of God when storm or other danger threatened, very easily became to them a symbol of the uncertainty and diffi-

culty of human life. That symbol is a more than usually apt one. The world of mankind, pursuing its normal course, very generally heedless of God whilst times are calm, becomes transformed into a frightened world when danger and disaster threatens, as it does to-day. And like the mariners in Jonah's ship, men then begin to call upon God for salvation. But, through calm and storm, through fair weather and foul weather, alternating between unbelief and faith, indifference and supplication, the world of man, like a ship in the heart of the sea, goes on its way, forging onward to an unknown land, in imminent danger from the towering waves and yet after each burst of the element's fury is seen to be still afloat, battered and shaken perhaps, but still limping on its way toward the unseen land of promise. That was the wonder to Agur ben Jakeh, that the ship survived at all, that it could still be seen in the far distance until at length, the conflicts and tumults over, it was lost in the calm glory of the far horizon. A fitting symbol, surely, of the way of mankind during this time of sin and death! Not because of their own righteousness, but because of His great mercies, does God save them and bring them at the end into His "*afterward of peace*". Zechariah, his spiritual vision quickened to perceive the details of that final ending to the ship's voyage, said "*at even time it shall be light*". The way of the ship in the sea, with all the vicissitudes it experiences, is a great wonder, but it ends in the light of the far horizon, the light of the "*land of far distances*". (Isa. 33. 17 *margin*).

"*The way of a man with a maid.*" There are several words for "man" in the Old Testament, each having its especial significance. There is *adam*, meaning "red earth"; "*ish*" man as an individual, an ordinary being; "*enosh*", man as a mortal, dying creature; "*ben*", man as related to his surroundings (as "*a man of the city*") but in this passage the word is the supreme one of them all, "*geber*", a "*mighty man*", a man indeed, a man head and shoulders above his fellows. That takes us at once to the glorious description in the Song of Solomon. "*My beloved is . . . the*

chiefest among ten thousand, the one altogether lovely". The last and greatest mystery of the four wonders must surely be the mystery of Christ and his Church. "*Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear. Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house. So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty, for he is thy lord; and worship thou him.*" (Psa. 45. 10-11.) That is the "way of a man with a maid", the coming of the Lord from heaven to seek and win his Bride, that He might take her away and present her faultless before the presence of his Father with exceeding joy. We have heard that call and responded to it; we trust that we are of those who "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth"; we talk together, as did Paul to the Ephesians, of the love of Christ for his Church, but, like Agur ben Jakeh of old, we still stand in wonderment before this great mystery. We look forward to the "marriage of

the Lamb" when the Bride has been made ready; we hear in anticipation the words that are one day to be uttered by the Bride to all the world, "Come—take of the fountain of the water of life freely" (Rev. 22. 17) but still we do not approach to the depths of understanding that must one day be ours when, in the splendour of that marriage feast, and in the overwhelming glory of the Father's presence we look back upon the long story of sin and redemption and perceive the evidences of Divine love and wisdom in every step of the way. Then, perhaps as never before, we shall understand why, long ages ago, a man of God was inspired to look upon the world he knew and speak of four things too wonderful for him to understand: *the way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a snip in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid!*

NOTE ON HEB. 10.5

Q. *How is it that Heb. 10. 5 quotes Psa. 40. 6 by saying "sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me" when the Psalm says "sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened"?*

A. The writer to the Hebrews quoted from the Greek version in common use in his day, the Septuagint. The translators of the Septuagint, realising that the expression "mine ears hast thou opened" (*karah*, literally "pierced") would be meaningless to Greek readers unfamiliar with the laws of Moses, substituted "a body thou hast prepared me" as conveying the idea of devotion to a master's service equally well. The original allusion is to the Mosaic law of Exod. 21. 2-6 and Deut. 15. 12-17, where it is ordained that a Hebrew servant who had the right to freedom, but because of his love for his master and his master's family refused to depart from his service, should have his ear pinned to the doorpost with an awl in ceremonial figure that he was forever a member of the household, and would then

become a servant of the house for the remainder of his life. His master was in duty bound to retain him, by the servant's own free wish and desire. The Psalm speaks prophetically of our Lord Jesus, who voluntarily and freely "took upon himself the form of a servant" (Phil. 1. 2-7), and submitted himself entirely to his Father's will for the redemption of the human race. So the writer to the Hebrews makes use of this prophecy and says "Wherefore, when he cometh into the world," he said, "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but—a body hast thou prepared me" or in other words, a means has been provided by God whereby his Son can serve him in the Plan of salvation, and that the Son has willingly accepted that means, saying "Lo, I come, to do thy will, O God".

That which robs death of its sting, robs life of its bitterness.

* * *

There would be many good Samaritans if it were not for the two pence and the oil.

"PEACE . . . LIKE A RIVER"

*A discourse based
on Psa. 46.4*

Among the many blessings which are ours through faith in the sacrifice and resurrection of our Lord, there is one, bequeathed to us by Jesus, which is especially precious to us in these days when all around us is turmoil and strife.

Jesus was speaking to his disciples of his necessary departure to prepare a place for them, and was preparing them for the persecution which would come upon them in a little while. They became troubled and alarmed, and sensing their distress, He promised them that He would send them the Holy Spirit, and then bequeathed to them that precious gift which had been such a source of blessing to him in his hours of trial. He said: "*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you*". His OWN peace, which was nothing less than the peace of God, which, as Paul truly says, transcends all our powers of thought! Much has already been written concerning this peace, but no apology is made for yet another consideration of this subject, for God's peace is such that our finite minds can never ascend to its fullest heights, nor fathom its deepest depths. God dwells in perfect peace because of his ability to see the end from the beginning and because of his power to accomplish that which He designs to perform. If we would have his peace we must have, primarily, perfect faith in him, in his word, and in his ability to bring order out of chaos which we see around us today. Further, having accepted the sacrifice of Jesus, and being justified by faith, we must go on to that condition of heart and mind in which the peace of God will "garrison" our hearts and minds (see Phil. 4. 4-7). The Apostle Peter urges us to "*Seek peace and ensue it*", or, as Moffatt puts it: "Let us make peace our aim". Why need to seek it, if it is a gift? Because it is not a natural element of this passing evil world, neither is it for the indolent and lazy ones! God is a rewarder of them that dili-

gently seek him, and if we would have this peace in its fulness, we must seek to know the factors upon which it depends, and apply them to our lives.

Peter's desire for those who had "*obtained like precious faith*" to his own was that grace should be multiplied unto them "*through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*" (2 Pet. 1. 2). This "knowledge" of God implies much more than merely knowing "about" him. It implies intimate acquaintance or personal knowledge. Rotherham's translation of Job 22. 21 conveys the thought: "*Shew thyself to be one with him, I pray thee, and prosper*". We may have an intellectual appreciation of God and his attributes, but it is only as we develop a heart reliance upon him and his word, resulting from an experience of that sonship which is ours through vital union with Christ, that we can find the real peace which came to Jesus whilst He was bearing the greatest burden that a man was ever called upon to bear. It may be our portion to bear heavy losses, to fight stern battles, or to keep long and lonely vigils, but even as Jesus by communion with his Father found peace in every circumstance, so, we by learning to commune more and more with our Father, through Jesus, can find peace, perfect peace in every experience. To have this peace multiplied unto us, as Peter desires, is indeed a blessing beyond the power of human comprehension. but the figure used in the prophecy concerning natural Israel in Isa. 48. 18 may bring some fresh thought to bear upon this wonderful subject. This verse also brings to our attention yet another factor upon which this peace depends. It reads: "*Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments; then had thy peace been as a river*". This peace of Israel depended upon their obedience to the Divine Will as expressed in God's laws, but they failed to fulfil the conditions, and thus lost the accompanying blessing; nevertheless, it

is prophesied of her (Isa. 66. 12) "*I will extend to her peace like a river*". In the meantime, the Church, as spiritual Israel, can rightly claim this blessing, if the conditions are fulfilled; as the Psalmist says: "*Great peace have they which love thy law*". Therefore, if we have perfect faith in God and his word, if we accept the righteousness which comes by faith in the blood of Christ, and, offering our all to him in sacrifice, learn to know and do his will, we can and should have peace—like a river.

A river is usually symbolic of plenty, constancy or perpetuity, and thus truly pictures the peace which comes from God. A river begins as a tiny stream in the hills, then, making its way through many scenes, is joined by numerous tributaries, which cause it to become wider and deeper, until it is finally lost in the sea. The changes which it may experience and the ever widening and deepening of its course as it wends its way ever onward to the sea, does indeed graphically illustrate the peace of God as it comes to his obedient children.

Cast the mind back to the time when we had no personal knowledge of God. Then we had no real peace. But, with our introduction to the new life which is the portion of all who "diligently seek", we entered into a wonderfully new experience, full of glorious possibilities. First, we learned something of the love of God (John 3. 16) and of his justice (Rom. 3. 26), and our river of peace began as a tiny stream (Rom. 5. 1). It soon increased as we learned something of his wisdom and power, and as time went on our knowledge of him and his plan increased, and each aspect of truth became as it were tributaries uniting to swell our river of peace (Psalm 46. 4). Thus, for a while our river wended its way, as it were, through pleasant scenes. The sun shone on its sparkling waters, the grassy slopes which lined its banks were refreshingly green, and the graceful willows at its edge afforded pleasant shelter. The distant lowing of the cattle and the singing of the birds completed a picture of perfect

peace.

In the natural picture, as the river becomes wider and deeper, men build upon its banks, and it becomes lined with warehouses, factories and squalid dwellings. The singing of the birds or the quietness of the wilderness gives way to the noise and clangour of commerce, and the sparkling stream becomes a murky and sluggish river; for, although it continues on its way ever onward to the sea, its flow is retarded by all the commercial activity upon its banks.

So, in our Christian experience, whether in the workshop, office, factory or shop, or about the duties of the house, whatever our vocation may be, contact with the world and its activities tends to slow down our river of peace, and dull its sparkling waters. Nevertheless, it is the same river, and is ever flowing towards its outlet, the sea; and as it slows down it must widen and deepen, as it should do as our heart reliance upon God is developed in the turmoil of life. Our river of peace might well be like the mountain streams which rush headlong down the rocks, to be lost in the upland lakes—pretty, but of little use; or it might continue its flow untouched by commerce and worldly activity, and flow unimpeded to the sea. Then it would be like the lives of those who shut themselves up in monasteries, convents, and like institutions. Their lives may have a serenity and beauty of a sort, but our Lord's prayer for his own was not that they should be taken out of the world, but that they should be kept from the evil thereof. So, if our river passes through the squalor and turmoil, the smoke and the ceaseless activity of the world, let us remember how Jesus, in his perfection, moved amongst such greed and hypocrisy, such depravity and degradation as must have deeply affected his sensitive nature. Then above all the distractions of life we shall hear him saying: "*These things I have spoken unto you, that you might have peace*".

As the natural river flows through the industrial area it becomes liable to pollution, and steps are taken to prevent this by laws

which require every stream which flows into it to conform to a certain standard of purity. So in the Christian life our pure river is liable to become tainted with impurities, and thus our peace disturbed. So we need to be vigilant, especially in these last days, when, as foretold, many false prophets have arisen, and see that every so-called truth is scrutinised to see if it conforms to the standards set up in the Word of God. As the river nears the sea it is affected by the wind, which whips it up into angry waves. Nevertheless, those who work beneath the surface find that all is calm and quiet below. So in the Christian experience the winds of affliction may blow upon us, and our river may become ruffled, but this is only on the surface; deep down in our hearts the peace of God remains. The tides also affect the river, so that for a while its flow is held up, thus causing the river to widen and deepen. The tide of adversity may hold up the flow of our river temporarily, but this should only cause it to widen and deepen for, even as the tides are provided to cleanse the river, so the adversity should, if we are rightly exercised thereby, cleanse and purify us and make us ready to meet the God of peace. Sometimes the adverse wind and the tide coincide in the natural picture and floods result, with corresponding disaster. We may experience the tides of affliction and the winds of adversity together; this causes a crisis in our life which may seem to us to be a catastrophe, but the tide of affliction must ebb and the winds of adversity must abate, and soon our river flows on more swiftly to the sea, and we are strengthened and purified as a result of the apparent catastrophe.

Sometimes, however, when the "surges rise and rest delays to come", we may lose our hold on this peace. In such circumstances let us recall that our Lord's river flowed through scenes and circumstances much more intense than any experience we have to endure. The winds of adversity and the tides of affliction were permitted to exert their full force upon him, and we see the extent to which they bore down upon him as He cried out in Gethsemane. In such weariness of

mind he sought his Father's face, and as a result of sweet communion with him, He went out of Gethsemane the very personification of peace.

Surrounded by the howling mob, standing before the murderous High Priest and Elders, and facing the quaking Pilate, He remained calm and composed, and that peace which came from God remained with him until He died.

So He lived and died, but He arose, and now lives that we might have the same peace, even as we follow him through Gethsemane and Golgotha to the reward which He has already gained.

This peace, then, will be our portion in ever increasing measure until our river is lost in the sea.

When and where will this be? Surely it will be when "*this mortal shall put on immortality*," and we enter into our eternal destiny.

Here and now, wonderful though it is, our peace is like a river, comparatively narrow, affected by the frailty of human nature and its circumstances of life, but then, when that which is perfect is come, it will open out into a boundless sea, and we shall dwell in God's perfect peace throughout all eternity.

But this is not all. The rapidly increasing river, springing from beneath the altar in the Sanctuary, will flow out into the desert, bringing life to all who have been submerged in sin and death. (Ezekiel 47.) Thus cleansed and made whole, being freed from all that disturbs or alarms, the whole world, united under one Head, will find peace at last.

How easy it is to close eyes, ears and heart to this "electric" Gospel. How much better to be like Michael Faraday, who, when asked by a fellow-scientist on his death-bed, "What are your speculations now?" replied, "Speculations!" I have none. I know whom I have believed. I am not thinking of speculations; I am resting my soul upon certainties".

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